

# The Night Outside

South Africa

Written by Elan Gamaker | Produced by Bridget Pickering

93 mins | Supernatural Thriller

## Artistic Statement

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Growing up in 1980s South Africa, a period of social upheaval and violence, I lived in my grandparents' large, dilapidated home. The house was gothic and creepy, with creaky wood paneling, platoons of rodents in the roof and a nightly succession of ghoulish noises that kept me frozen, sleepless, in bed. But the real horror of the place, I was later to realize, was something abstract. And it was something particularly suburban.

From apartheid to military service to the threat of terrorism, South Africans were trained in fear. Fear – even as paranoia – was the state's weapon against those it oppressed but also against those for whom it ostensibly fought.

*The Night Outside* is about this fear, and how feeling threatened can be subjective or objective, imagined or real. The moments of horror that take place during the protagonist's ordeal are set up to express the themes of the film: personal responsibility, how violence breeds violence, and how fear can be contagious.

As a supernatural thriller, it is the first of its kind in South African cinema. Yet my approach comes from a long tradition of films in the genre. Evoking exploitation genres such as the films of the 1970s and 1980s that dealt with similar themes, the film will feature a camp, highly stylized, even operatic approach, in the style of directors such as Dario Argento (*Profondo Rosso*) and Andrzej Zulawski (*Possession*) and, more recently that of Guillermo del Toro (*The Devil's Backbone*).

The reason for this is to create a film with a political message, but one carried by a style accessible to audiences and still providing entertainment. Both local and international audiences expect South African cinema to produce dry political works. While we must remain conscious of the fact that our cinema is necessarily political, the best way, I feel, to combine the need for meaningful ideas and the demand for entertainment, comes in presenting a story that takes place in a very real space (1980s South Africa) but does so with necessarily unreal elements.

As such, the main visual reference of *The Night Outside* is the suburb. I am fascinated with and in many ways shaped by suburbia and its visual absurdities: I describe the film's color palette as "boardroom beige with a splash of blood", and have photographers such as William Egglestone and Gregory Crewdson as visual reference. Their representation of vernacular life in heightened style is what I hope to achieve. By using the suburb as its backdrop, the film suggests that this will be the country's future, and as such acts as an allegory for the way South Africans live now. Two decades after freedom, true liberation has not come to the national psyche.

My final aim will be to strike the right balance between accurate representation of a period – an obligation of the South African filmmaker when dealing with an important and tragic part of their history – and stylized, thoughtful entertainment.