

DARKNESS AND VOICES

Evil is closer than you **think**

Peter Stead

The underestimation of the psychological factor is likely to take a bitter revenge.

- Carl Jung, The Undiscovered Self, 1953

When a troubled teenage girl undergoes an experimental hypnotherapy to treat her night terrors, something is unleashed which stalks her waking hours.

Psychological Horror Feature

£200K Budget

All indoor, single location

An ordinary house, present day

‘Actually, a house is not a bad metaphor for the mind - we have...a...basement where we dump things from our past. Sometimes this - 'basement' - bursts its seams. Something pops out at you.’

(Gustav)



SHORT SYNOPSIS

Before Tessa (16) is allowed to go to her first ever stay-out party, she is made to take part in an experimental hypnotherapy to cure her night terrors. These have become very bad of late, are depriving everyone of sleep, and no other form of therapy has helped.

The hypnotist, Gustav, a professor from the University where her step-father works, arrives and conducts the treatment. Tessa finds she 'loses time' at points, sees a pair of eyes looking back at her from inside her own eyelids, has a panic attack and passes out.

She wakes up to a voice calling her and follows it down to the basement. It's 'Lucy' and really she is emanating from her own head. Gustav reappears inside the flat, apparently concerned for her. She explains to Gustav about Lucy, but before he can help, she 'loses time' again.

She wakes up near her step-father, who she finds tied up, and Gustav, who tells her she – or Lucy – did this. When she catches Gustav out in a lie, however, he reveals his real purpose: the hypnotherapy was really part of a Government experiment to weaponise people with latent DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder) to assassinate their family members. Tessa is a guinea pig in this first trial.

Tessa then battles against both Gustav and Lucy's commands that she murder her whole family.

She finds she cannot get rid of Lucy, but she can channel her, something which has terrifying consequences for her family – especially when it is revealed that Gustav is also just a projection of her psyche.





DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER

Once termed split personality and multi-persona psychosis before its current incarnation, DID seems to, itself, have acquired, different, conflicting identities. And there are those who doubt its very existence.

Whatever the truth, most psychologists agree the human consciousness has extraordinary powers to dissociate and thus protect itself – including from stark reality.

HYPNOSIS

Like DID, there are those who doubt the very existence of mesmerisation or hypnosis. For others, it is all too real. Carl Jung famously gave it up, because of the amount of power it gave him over patients.

One branch, pioneered by Milton Erickson, introduced the use of the 'double-bind' and other manipulation techniques over traditional hypnotic induction.

Others then used this to form the basis of 'neuro-linguistic programming' – used in everything from corporate leadership seminars to, more sinisterly, 'pick up artist' techniques.

Derided by many as pseudoscience, it remains a controversial subject to this day.



GET OUT

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JORDAN PEELE



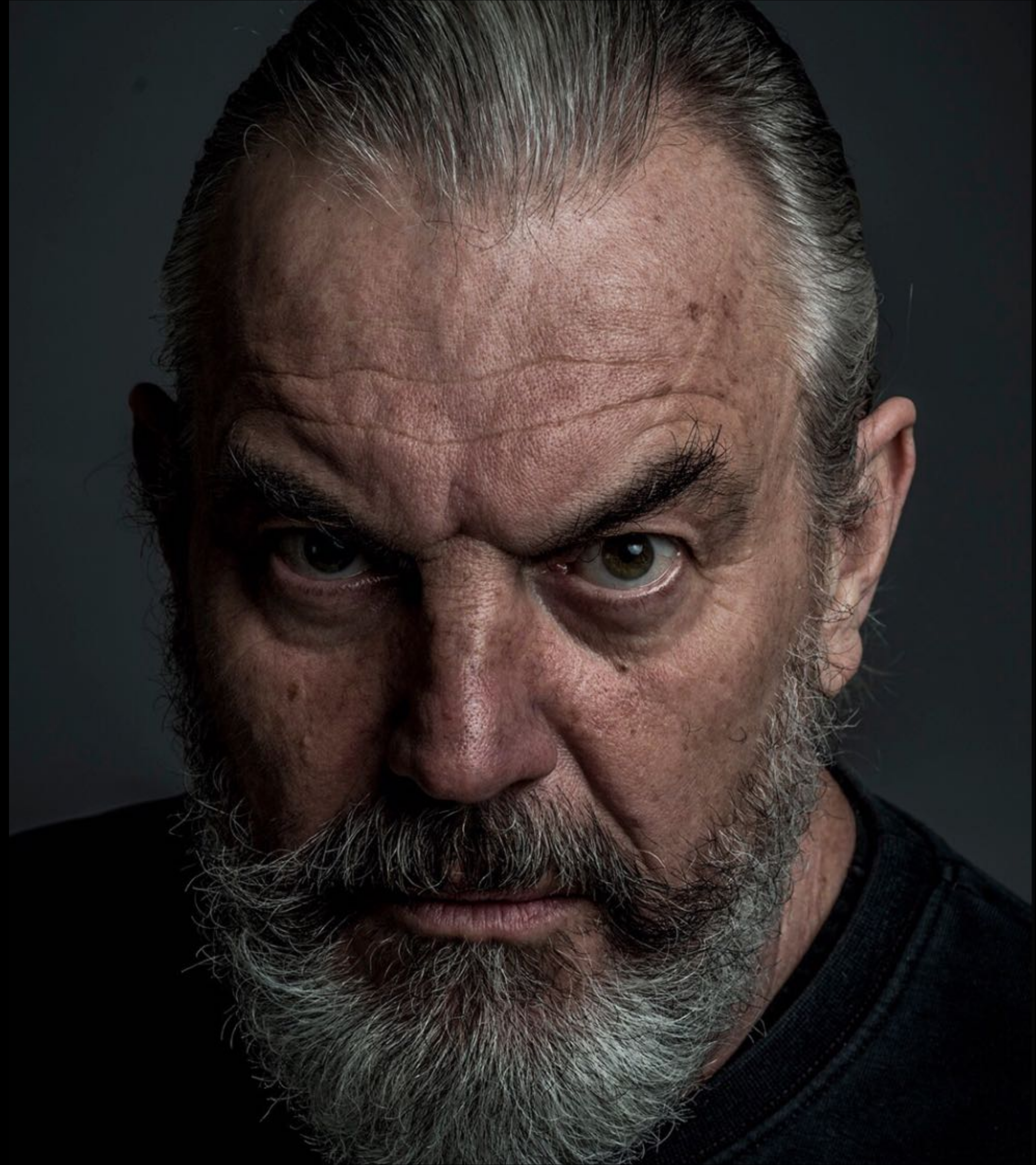


TESSA

Tessa's preternatural intelligence and perception has always forced her to take on the emotional baggage of her family more acutely than others might. Confronting her trauma is her only chance at freedom, but may cost her everything.

GUSTAV

Gustav is the Hannibal Lecter of hypnotists. A professor with a Rasputin-like magnetism and unrivalled expertise in the human psyche, his thirst for power through knowledge, means that he sees humans as nothing other than lab rats.





TESSA'S PARENTS

Alison is Tessa's tense mother and Eric is her equally uptight step-father. They both are haunted by their past - which Tessa threatens to expose.





TESSA'S CONFIDANTS

Tessa is close to her step-brother, who in turn, looks up to her, would do anything for her. Kate, her closest school friend, is always trying to coax her away from the unhealthy dynamics at home.







SCREENWRITER

Originally from a small village in Devon, Peter Stead moved to London to train as an actor at Central. His first passion, however, was writing and he started studying screenwriting in earnest on Raindance's MA programme. This led to his first short, *Bijltjesdag*, which was filmed in The Netherlands, and starred the late John Leddy. This won many awards, including at Kerry Film Festival.

Since then, he has written a genre-eclectic portfolio of scripts, which includes seven features and two pilots - one of which, *The Man*, was a quarter-finalist in the Finish Line Script Competition. Alongside this, he recently directed, produced and starred in the found footage horror short, *Believe*, which won festival awards at Romford and at Fortean. Its budget was £10.

His short story, *Camera Anima Mea* was recently published by Horrified Magazine and his short script *The Doorbell* will be produced in Germany in the summer.

WHY I WROTE THIS SCRIPT

The jumping off point was my own experience of the type of night terrors Tessa experiences. I was twelve and at first I did not know what they were. I was so terrified, I spent a week trying to stay awake. However, I realised that they coincided almost to the day with the five year anniversary of my mother's death. I also remembered, simply, that they only occurred at night and so, however different they seemed, they must be types of a dream. Soon after this, they began to dissipate.

One of the reasons I believe this episode was so scary was the way that the subject of sanity has always loomed large in my family. Both my parents suffered from severe mental health issues and indeed met in a 'halfway house' (a facility where they send patients they are transitioning for full release).

The evolution of this story coincided with the way that the language of mental health has expanded and become co-opted by the government and the corporate world, in order to manipulate us into becoming a lonely crowd of obedient supplicants. The character of Gustav is the personification of this.

I wrote about this because it scares me, but I also wanted to use it to say something about what I believe is happening in the world right now.





PSYCHOLOGICAL HORROR

As a sub genre, psychological horror has several key advantages over its bigger, more expensive cousins of supernatural and slasher stories.

By leveraging character and concept, it is easier for it to shake itself loose from the shackles of horror tropes and deliver something truly original. Even in the current boom time of horror, the potential of this sub-genre is only just becoming realised, through so called 'liminal' horrors such as *Skinamarink*.

The best case study, however, is *Silent House*. Based on the Uruguayan film *La Casa Muda* (filmed on a budget of \$5K), the American remake made \$16M in box office gross from \$2M production budget. If you assume a marketing budget of \$4M, (marketing is usually double the production budget) this is still an RoI of approximately 62.5%. This of course does not include DVD sales, etc. Even though it contains a weighty theme such as child abuse, it shows that audiences are keen to watch material like this when it is intelligently handled.

Given advancements since then in technology and the sparse production design, I believe we have an even greater opportunity to offer a real event in the genre using a cost effective approach.

This is true psychological horror – an exciting balance of the cerebral with the visceral, plus with huge multi-media potential.

*The XR Alliance Competition was presided over
by the futurist at Paramount*

SEMI-FINALIST
XR ALLIANCE
COMPETITION

“Darkness and Voices”
Peter Stead



MULTI-MEDIA SUCCESSES



*Yinka Awoṇi (I May Destroy You) playing Gustav
from an extract at the Southwark Playhouse*

Full synopsis and script available on request at

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