



MIDSOMMAR

MIDSOMMAR tells the story of an unstable American woman's gradual initiation into the Swedish-pagan cult of Hårga, whose beautiful and nightmarish nine-day celebration offers spiritual salvation to her, but doom to her friends.

MIDSOMMAR is an esoteric and occult symbiosis between nature and man.

MIDSOMMAR is a modern work of folk horror, written and directed by Ari Aster, based on an original concept by Patrik Andersson and Martin Karlqvist.

MIDSOMMAR is a feature film produced by B-Reel Feature Films.

SYNOPSIS

Our story begins with a PROLOGUE of intense focus and mounting panic (here the film's intimate and claustrophobic style is established). **DANI ARDOR**, our unstable hero, is worried that her detached boyfriend **CHRISTIAN** is planning to break up with her. Her anxiety over this coincides with an alarming email from her suicidal, bipolar sister (who lives with their parents). On this fateful night, Dani will receive the news that her sister has killed herself, along with Dani's parents. Dani is now an orphan. As for Christian: he was planning on leaving Dani, but his conscience will now force him to remain (however superficially) in the relationship. He is trapped; Dani is clinging; they are living now in a mutual, desperate lie.

SEVERAL MONTHS LATER, Christian and his friends/colleagues - **MARK**, **JOSH** and **PELLE** - are planning a summer trip to Sweden. They are anthropology PhD's and Pelle, a Swedish exchange student, has invited them to experience the midsummer solstice at his childhood home in Hälsingland - a small, tight-knit farming community known simply as **HÅRGA**. Christian feels obliged to invite Dani along, despite his own reluctance (and the implied protestations of his friends). She accepts, despite her feeling that Christian's "invitation" is unenthusiastic to the point of being false.

Our group of American tourists arrives at the outskirts of Hårga, where a group of local teens and twenty-somethings (all dressed like Swedish "nature-children") have gathered to take psychedelics and celebrate the start of the extended midsummer festivities. Our group (including a reluctant Dani) takes mushrooms. The trip begins nicely enough, and our characters' surroundings visibly change (swelling and deflating) to visually dramatize their subjective states, but it's not long before Dani's hallucinations take a dark turn. Christian's affected smiles and forced kisses, all of which she's accepted until now (in a spirit of complacent denial), have suddenly become intolerable, clownish, *demonic*. She goes off into nature, which also takes on a malign character. Dani becomes gripped by the certainty that every person is alone in life - horribly, hopelessly alone. Her disconnection from Christian is made palpable by the brutal clarity of the psychedelics. When we finally come down from this trip, the film's visuals have returned to normalcy, but the TONE never quite recovers. The film has adopted the oppressive mood of a patiently mounting **bad trip**. The dread established since the film's beginning will now take on a more nightmarish property.

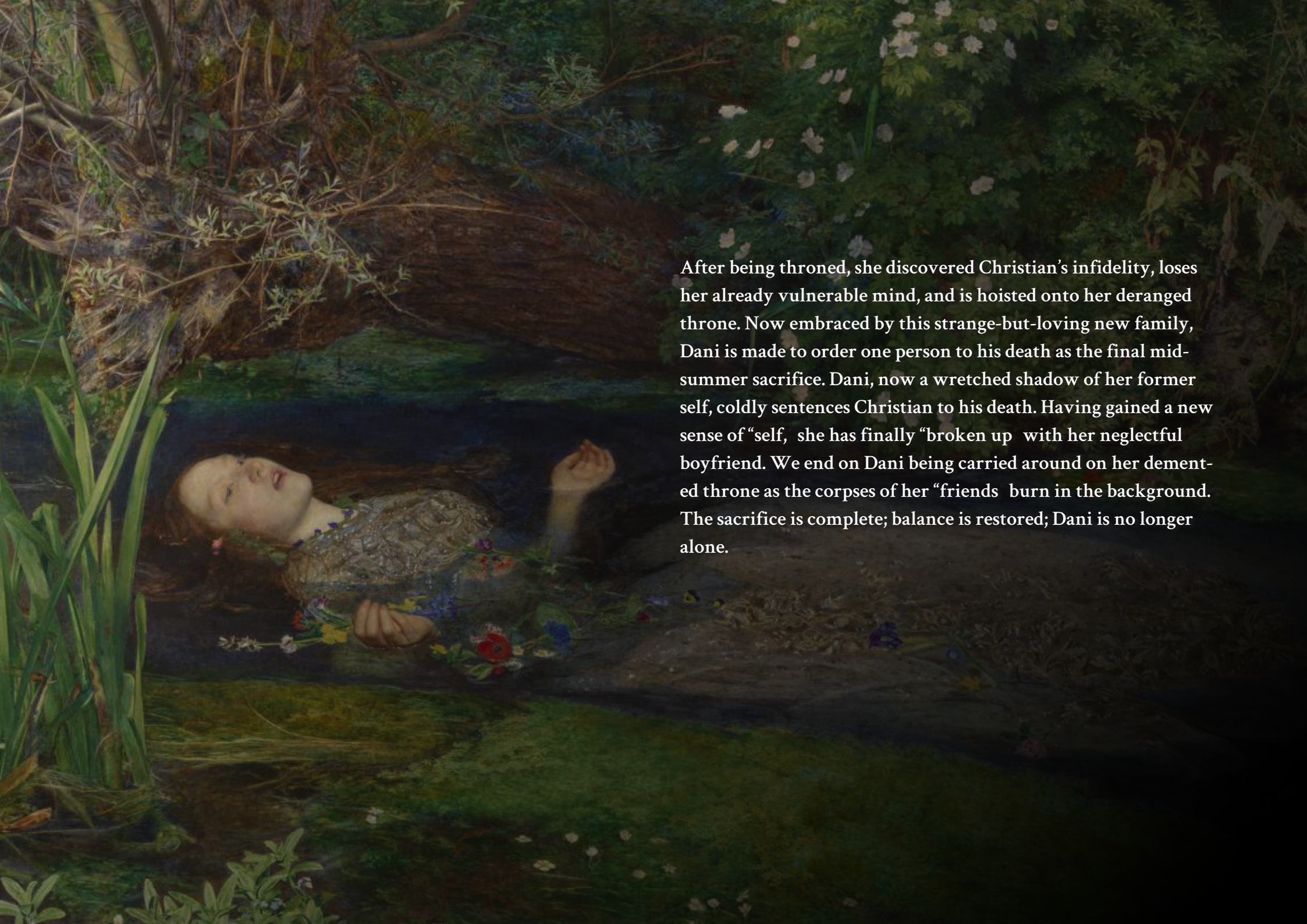
The next day, after recovering from the psychedelics, the group is led deeper into the woods until they arrive at a clearing that leads to the magnificent and timeless village of the Hårgas. They are an incestuous, extended family of Swedish farm people - much like the Amish, but more hippie-ish and far less moralistic. In fact, it becomes clear that these people are practicing an old and very specific brand of nature worship (drawing liberally from pagan and Viking mythology), and today is the first day of their momentous nine-day feast - soon to be revealed as a **nine-day sacrificial feast**, where they will be making increasingly generous offerings to the various gods of nature (water, crops, *the sun*). *This sacred feast takes place only once every 90 years.*

As our group of budding anthropologists is guided through the landscape of the Hårgas and introduced to their various rites and rituals, something dawns on Christian and his secret rival (and academic superior) Josh... This would be a perfect subject for their thesis! Thus begins a increasingly bitter feud over who will be the one to capitalize off of this rare, fateful exposure to the Hårga and their bizarre traditions. As the customs become more alarming, Josh and Christian only become more excited by the prospect of being the first to document them. And Dani... well, she knows that something is wrong, but her desperate priority remains that of holding on to Christian, the only person she has in this world. (This makes Christian's growing indifference to Dani even more maddening - and heartbreaking.)

It is also established that while Christian and Josh see opportunity here, Dani is actually harmonizing unnaturally well with this community, whose values lie in reciprocity and empathy. (They have a unique language of Affects, which is informed strictly by looks, gestures and abstractly communicated feelings. Dani, meanwhile, has been established as empathic to a *fault*.)

It's not long before our gang is introduced to a few singularly disturbing rituals... First, an Ättestupan (ritual suicide) performed by two elderly men. They both launch themselves off a cliff, which is an ancient custom to be observed by every Hårgan who reaches the age of 72 (the official end of the Hårgan life-cycle). Then there is the sacrifice of nine different animals to the god of the sun (they are bled out on a hill, and their blood trickles down to fill out a carved runic pattern of great spiritual significance). After this, it is not long before we begin to suspect the next phase of the festivities... **human sacrifice.**

As we enter our terrifying final act, some visitors go missing, Dani falls deeper and deeper into panic (over the romantic discord between her and Christian, and over the sinister goings on), and our gang is picked off one by one. Soon, Josh and Mark have disappeared, Christian has been seduced into a mating ritual with a teen Hårgan girl (for whom he has had eyes since the beginning), and it is finally revealed that Dani is being groomed for the coveted role of **May Queen.**



After being throned, she discovered Christian's infidelity, loses her already vulnerable mind, and is hoisted onto her deranged throne. Now embraced by this strange-but-loving new family, Dani is made to order one person to his death as the final mid-summer sacrifice. Dani, now a wretched shadow of her former self, coldly sentences Christian to his death. Having gained a new sense of "self, she has finally "broken up with her neglectful boyfriend. We end on Dani being carried around on her demented throne as the corpses of her "friends burn in the background. The sacrifice is complete; balance is restored; Dani is no longer alone.

FOLK HORROR

Aiming to be far more than simply another entry in the now-tepid “American kids terrorized in a foreign country” genre (e.g., *Hostel*), *Midsommar* is an ambitious, deeply existential piece of folk gothic whose escalating horror is informed always by its characters.

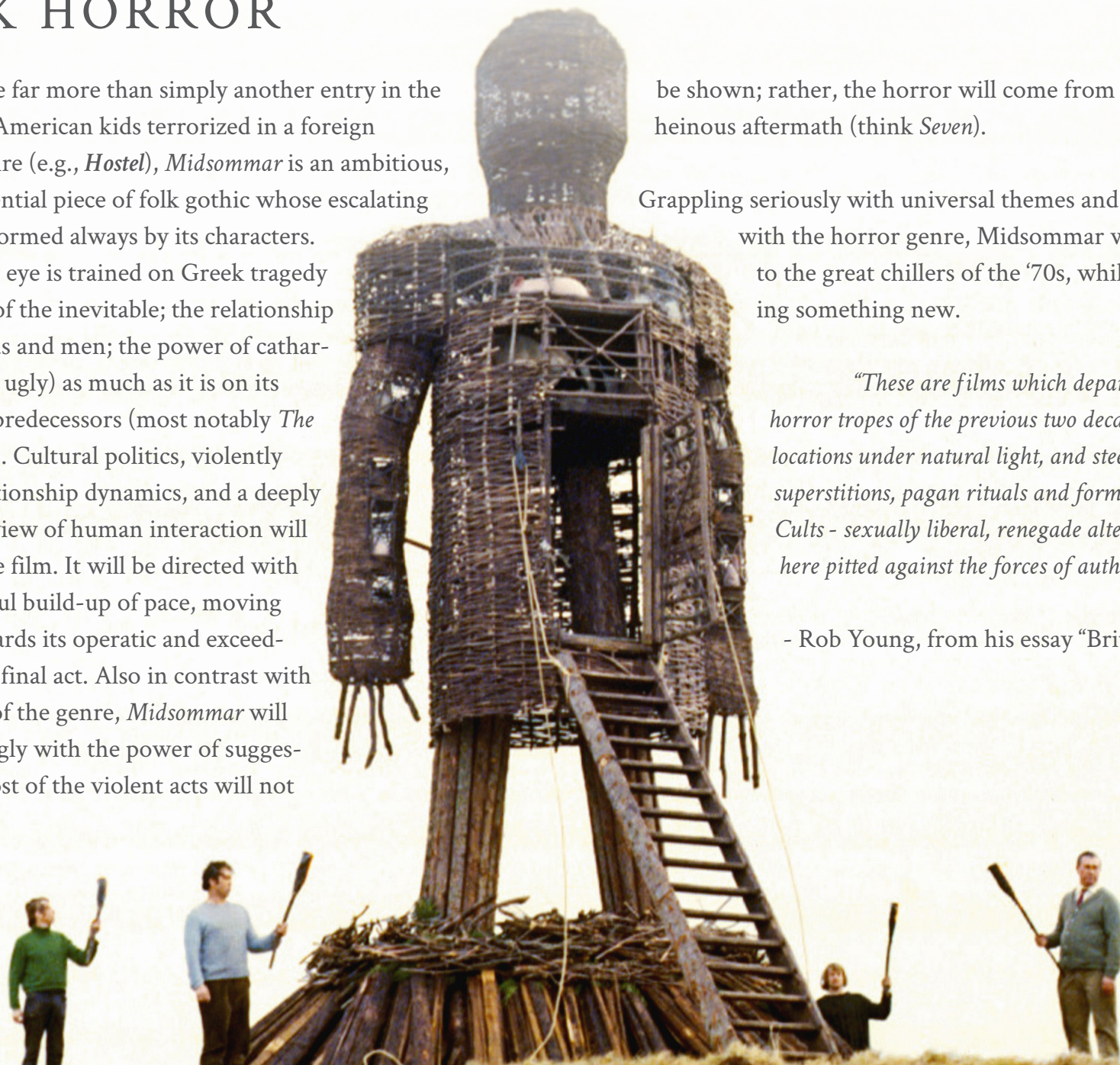
Midsommar's eye is trained on Greek tragedy (the horror of the inevitable; the relationship between gods and men; the power of catharsis, however ugly) as much as it is on its folk horror predecessors (most notably *The Wicker Man*). Cultural politics, violently shifting relationship dynamics, and a deeply pessimistic view of human interaction will permeate the film. It will be directed with a slow, careful build-up of pace, moving steadily towards its operatic and exceedingly hellish final act. Also in contrast with lesser films of the genre, *Midsommar* will toy menacingly with the power of suggestion, and most of the violent acts will not

be shown; rather, the horror will come from vivid glimpses of their heinous aftermath (think *Seven*).

Grappling seriously with universal themes and engaging critically with the horror genre, *Midsommar* will pay loving homage to the great chillers of the '70s, while determinedly pursuing something new.

“These are films which departed from the generic horror tropes of the previous two decades, filmed in outdoor locations under natural light, and steeped in real or imagined superstitions, pagan rituals and forms of communal hysteria. Cults - sexually liberal, renegade alternative communes - are here pitted against the forces of authority.”

- Rob Young, from his essay “British Folk Gothic”







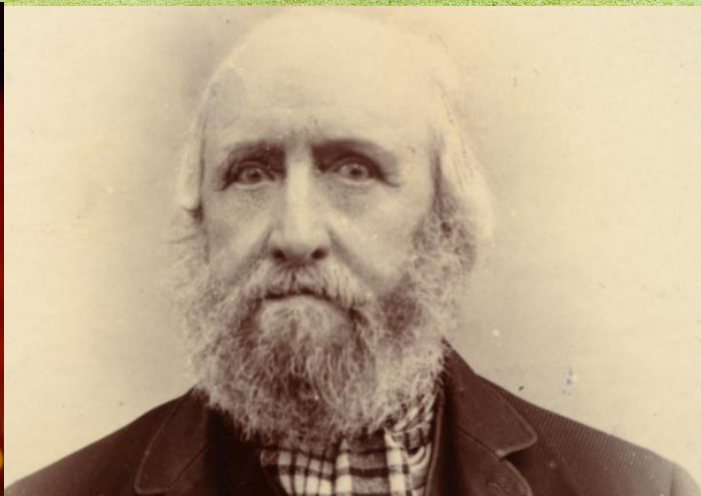
HÅRGA

In spirit as well as practice, this is truly a Swedish-American coproduction. A film about American transplants in an esoteric corner of northern Sweden, it is written and will be directed by an American who is also foreign to Scandinavia. Serving as a nightmare parody of Swedish hospitality, the Hårgas are an exceedingly polite, tight-knit community of pagan nature worshippers. They believe in the ideals of balance, cooperation, reciprocity, and humanity co-existing in mutual respect with nature. They are primitive in many of their practices, most notably that of sacrificing animals and humans, but their traditions are also very moving and beautiful when viewed from a distance. (Our American protagonists will supply that distance for themselves, as they are anthropology PhD's, and they see this world through a clinical and increasingly opportunistic lens.)

The Hårgas are also distinctly *Swedish*, and although they have successfully isolated themselves (divorcing from society to build their own private eden), their mythology and their customs have retained an unmistakably Swedish flavor. In keeping with this, their **nine-day sacrificial feast** (a celebration that certainly wouldn't pass for "acceptable" in contemporary Swedish society) takes place during the midsummer solstice - universally acknowledged as the most magical time of the Swedish year.

The Americans are technically our "heroes," but it should come as no great shock if the audience gets caught between empathy for our American protagonists and for the members of this eccentric family of neopagans.







DANI, our girl in trouble

From the very beginning, an intense, claustrophobic **intimacy** is established. We hold on a hyper-attentive, fixedly operated CLOSE-UP of our heroine's face. Her eyes betray an obvious psychological instability. Something sick is dormant in her, just under the surface. We meet her as she is gripped by the dread of losing her increasingly distant boyfriend, but she is about to suffer a much graver blow.

We establish our story with a hyper-nuanced concern for our character's fraught inner life. It is this inner life that is the tumultuous heart of our story. By the end, Dani will have finally lost her mind and we will have been present for every turn of the screw. By making Dani the **pivot** around which our story revolves, we have also provided our tale with a satisfying and simple arc. We begin on the fateful night that triggers Dani's existential dilemma, and we conclude on the day that her mind finally (and cathartically) breaks from the pressure - thus freeing her from the tortuous shackles of her punishing reality.



A PERVERSE WISH FULFILLMENT FANTASY

Dani loses her family at the beginning of our story. Unable to cope with the loss, she clings desperately to her boyfriend, Christian (the closest thing to family that she has left). Unfortunately, this boyfriend has fallen out of love with her, has become neglectful, and is now only in the relationship because he feels obligated to stay. As the gulf between Dani and Christian grows, Dani will be embraced by the sinister-but-inviting Hårga community. They will become a surrogate family for her.

Midsommar serves simultaneously as the chronicle of Dani's gradual and finally complete loss of her lover (her previously ordained surrogate family) and as the chronicle of her discovering a far more satisfying replacement - one that is *truly* able to cater to her needs (despite the fact that they are essentially a pagan nature cult given to human sacrifice).

STYLE

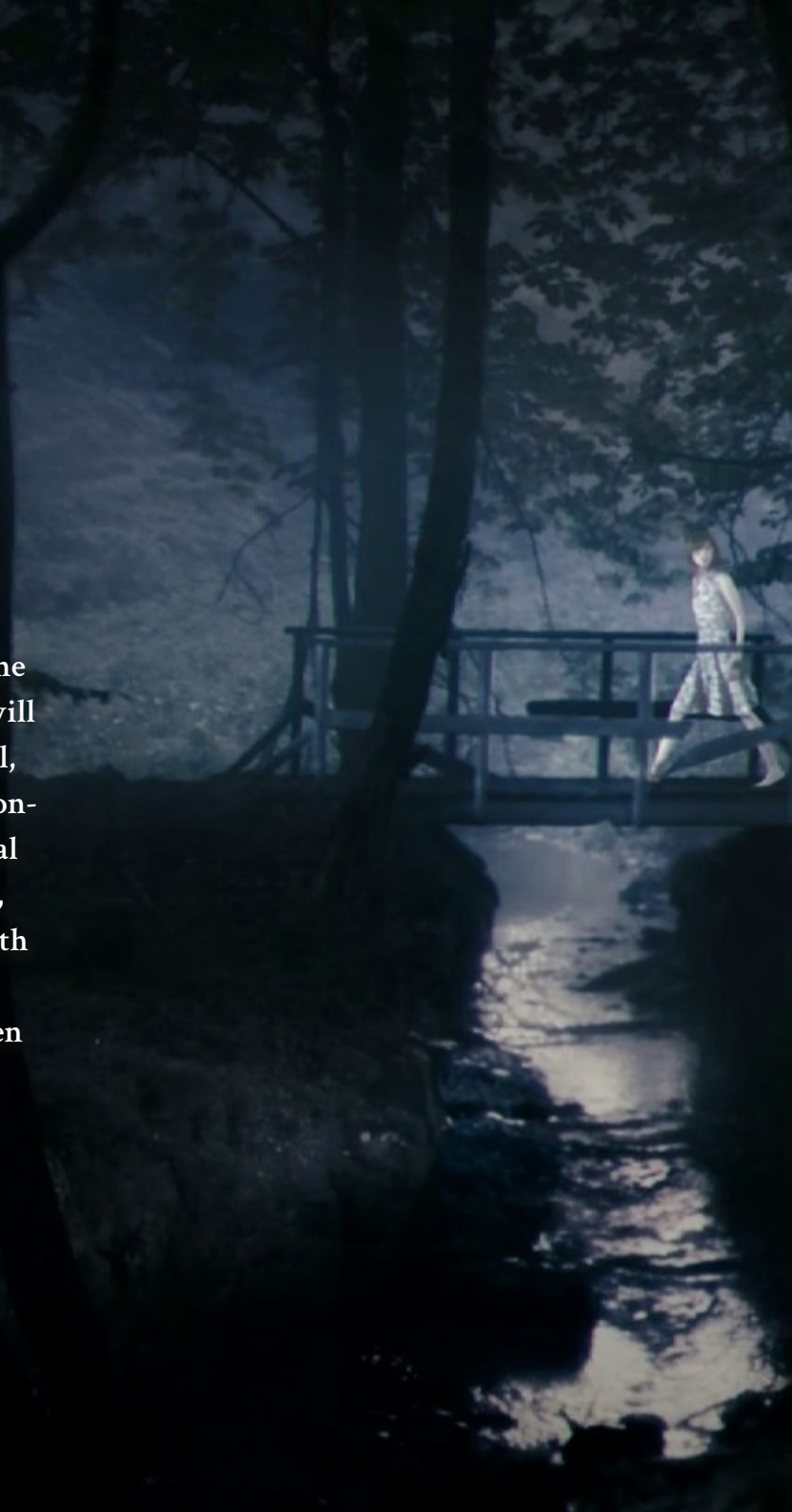
A strictly observed realism will ground the film, but its concern for aesthetics will be instantly apparent. Compositions will be extremely precise, the camera will move with grace, dynamism and purpose, and the tone will be determinedly forbidding.

It will become clear to the attentive viewer that the film is quickly establishing stylistic/thematic motifs. The invasive close-up will be regularly employed; we begin on one of Dani, and we finish on one. These close-ups will have a bold, searching, hyper-attentive quality (think Bergman's *Persona*). The world of the Hårgas will be meticulously designed and realized with an obsessive and anthropological concern for detail. Traditional coverage will be forfeited in favor of painstakingly designed shots that are meticulously sequenced.



THE PSYCHEDELIC APPROACH

When our characters first take mushrooms, the movie will “trip” alongside them. The world as they see it (through their warped lens) will take shape around them. If a scene is filmed in wide, holding all of our characters in one shot, their objective surroundings will mutate to mimic their points of view. The trees will swell and deflate, the grass will crawl, skin will take on a subtly translucent quality, and the forest will become a psychedelic wonderland. When they come down from the trip, so will the film. But in our apocalyptic final act, when Dani and Christian hallucinate from the psychedelic properties of the yew tree, the film will once again adopt and dramatize their perspective - blurring the objective with the subjective. The movie will become a bad trip. By the last scene, after the psychedelic come-down, the surroundings will no longer be mutating, but the madness will have taken hold. Formal balance is restored, but everything has warped. Dani has gone crazy. The world has gone crazy.







A WARPED CHARACTER STUDY

We establish a closeness to our characters that will stand in glaring contrast to most contemporary horror films. These aren't broadly drawn "types. They aren't pawns for the film's agenda. These are people. Complicated people whom we will come to know intimately, and thus care deeply about. From the beginning, a cloud of doom hangs over these people. The film knows something wretched is coming, and we watch in mounting dread as the pieces come steadily together. When the horror finally arrives, it won't only disturb us on a visceral level; it will affect us emotionally. This isn't *only* a horror film (although it aims to be a great one); this is a tragedy.



THE FRAGILITY OF IDENTITY / LOSS OF THE SELF



THE SEDUCTION OF THE GROUP

A wide-angle shot of a grassy field with several large, dark, monolithic stones standing upright, reminiscent of Stonehenge. In the center, a group of approximately 15 nude women are arranged in a circle around a small fire burning in a circular stone pit. Some women are kneeling, while others are standing or in various poses. In the background, a woman in a long white dress stands near one of the large stones. The scene is set in a lush green landscape under a clear sky.



THE POISONOUS WOMB OF THE HIVE

A wide-angle shot of a large crowd of people gathered in an open, gravelly area. In the foreground, a group of men in dark suits and a woman in a white dress are looking towards a stone structure in the distance. To the left, a line of people in ornate, colorful, and patterned robes, possibly representing a religious or ceremonial group, stands in a row. The background shows a large, dense crowd of people, suggesting a significant public event or ceremony. The sky is overcast.



A WOMAN UNTANGLED



B-REEL MARKETING STRATEGY

BENCHMARK

– GAMES/INTERACTIVITY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WayLhiNc0bs>

– EXPANDED UNIVERSE

<http://www.b-reel.com/projects/digital/case/424/gravity/>

A dense, mossy forest with tall trees and thick undergrowth. The scene is filled with various shades of green, from deep forest greens to bright, sunlit areas. The trees are tall and thin, with moss growing on their trunks and branches. The ground is covered in a thick layer of ferns and other forest plants. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and ancient.

ARE YOU WORTHY?

Online hub with text games and Hårga mythical runic puzzle cards that leads the player and audience into the delicate existential situation where the question related to the Midsommar ceremonies is made - ARE YOU WORTHY?

MIDSOMMAR

