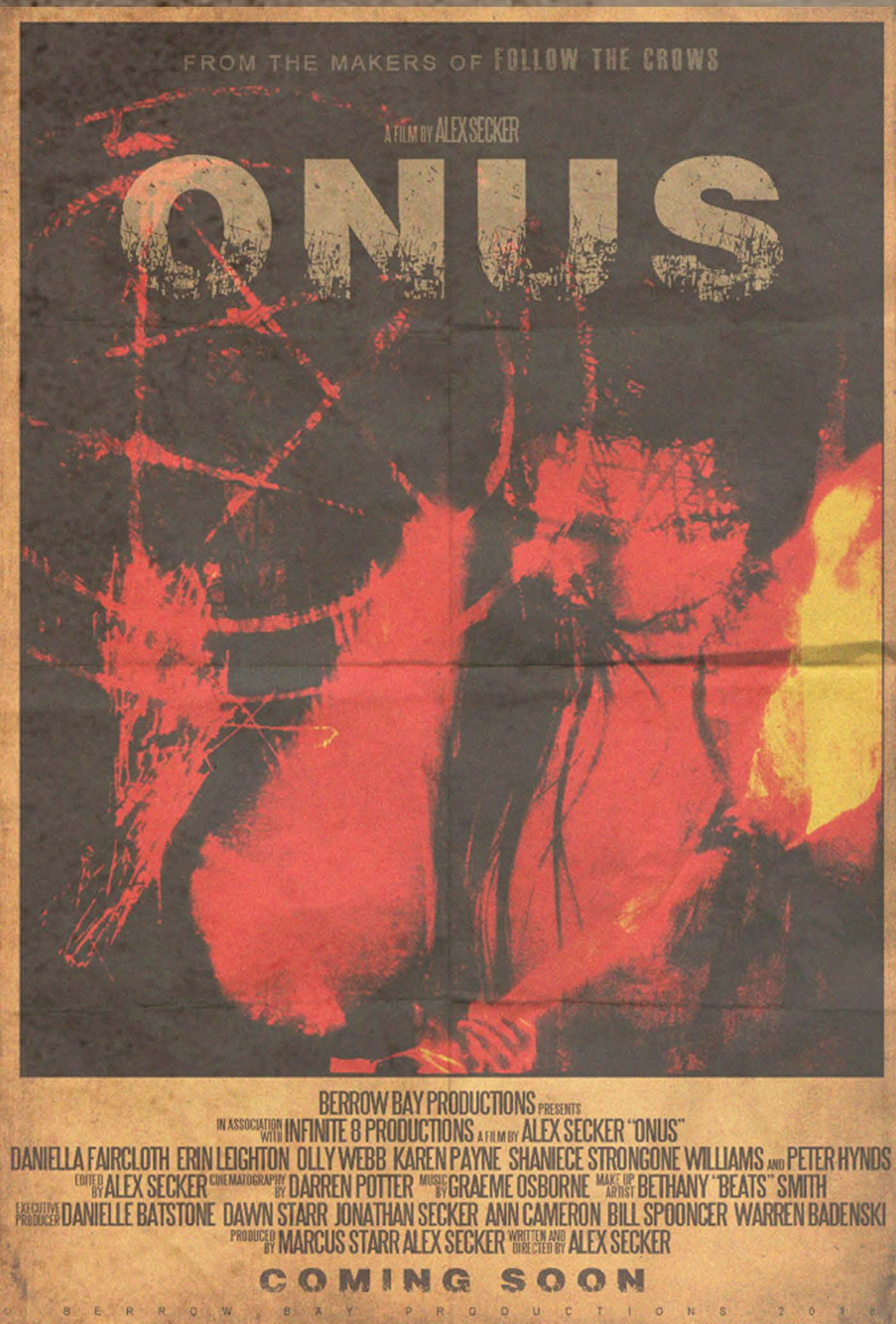


directors treatment for

ONUS





INTRODUCTION

Horror sells. If there is one thing you can count on it's that horror fans will show up for new and original horror work.

Folk horror has been a staple of British cinema since its inception, most well known in the form of the three folk horror "classics": *The Wicker Man*, *Blood on Satan's Claw* and *Witchfinder General*.

The folk horror subgenre has been seeing a slight resurgence in recent years thanks to the work of Ben Wheatley (*Kill List*, *A Field In England*) and Robert Eggers (*The VVitch*).

But while these movies are great horrors in their own right, none of them truly capture the unsettling, frightening and downright scary nature of those 1970s classics.

That's where **ONUS** comes in.

At its bloody heart *Onus* is a folk horror tale, drawing on the rich history and culture of England to create a modern day companion to the aforementioned trio and, much like those older films, uses imagery and subtext to tell a contemporary story about isolation, madness and terror...



SOMETIMES WE ALL HAVE TO MAKE SACRIFICES

A young woman meets her partner's wealthy family for the first time only to discover that fitting in is the least of her worries.

When her partner's father falls ill trainee Nurse Anna reluctantly agrees to accompany her back home as support. However, upon arrival Anna becomes increasingly nervous as she discovers Isobel (her partner) has woefully understated the family's wealth. Concerned she will make a fool of herself Anna plans to make it through the week with polite conversation and by keeping her head down. This proves harder than anticipated when Anna begins to realise there may be more to the Redferne family than mere snobbery, and she grows increasingly suspicious of the fact that David (the father) is kept locked away in his room. As she begins to secretly investigate the family's secrets she learns that her presence at the house may have more to do with ritual sacrifice than it does support.

STYLE MEETS HORROR

While it may not be known for it's moments of horror no film captures the mood and unease bubbling under the surface of family life better than Francis Ford Coppola's critically acclaimed *The Godfather*.

Shot using moody shadows, warm and atmospheric lighting and a sharp intensity by the critically acclaimed cinematographer Gordon Willis, *The Godfather* will be our key reference point for the lighting and colour of *Onus*, drawing us until the dark and brooding world of the Redferne family.

We want to bring that eerie and dark, yet classy feel to our film and to the Redferne family. As the bulk of the movie takes place inside Redferne manor the use of oranges and yellows will help sell the sinister and somewhat uncomfortable nature of early scenes while still building toward the more horrific scene later on.

The use of shadows will also create an element of uncertainty when we shoot the film as audiences will never be sure what is lurking within them. The colours themselves also call to mind the warmth of fire, which means that the more ritualistic scenes will take this style to the extreme, being it mostly by firelight and surrounded by darkness.





THE RITUAL

We all know what a ritual sacrifice is supposed to look like: fire, darkness, occult symbols and creepy masked cultists, so we say “if it ain’t broke why fix it”?

However, just because we’re treading on known ground doesn’t mean there isn’t room for exploration. We want to show our ritual as horrific and terrifying. It’s the moment where we deliver on the promise of the premise, and it needs to stand out as one of the most frightening and memorable moments of the film.

The movie has been building and building to this scene and we plan to deliver the goods! It’s going to be just what the audience want (and a couple of things they’re not expecting). Our heroine is tied to a chair in the centre of an ancient occult symbol made out of candles, and the masked cultists perform their ritual, reading aloud in latin, forcing her to drink blood and preparing her for the eventual human sacrifice.

The scene will play like a kind of nightmare.

By combining ancient imagery with modern aesthetic we’ll be able to create a unique and yet familiar ritual sequence that will both terrify casual audiences and hardened horror fans.



BE AFRAID

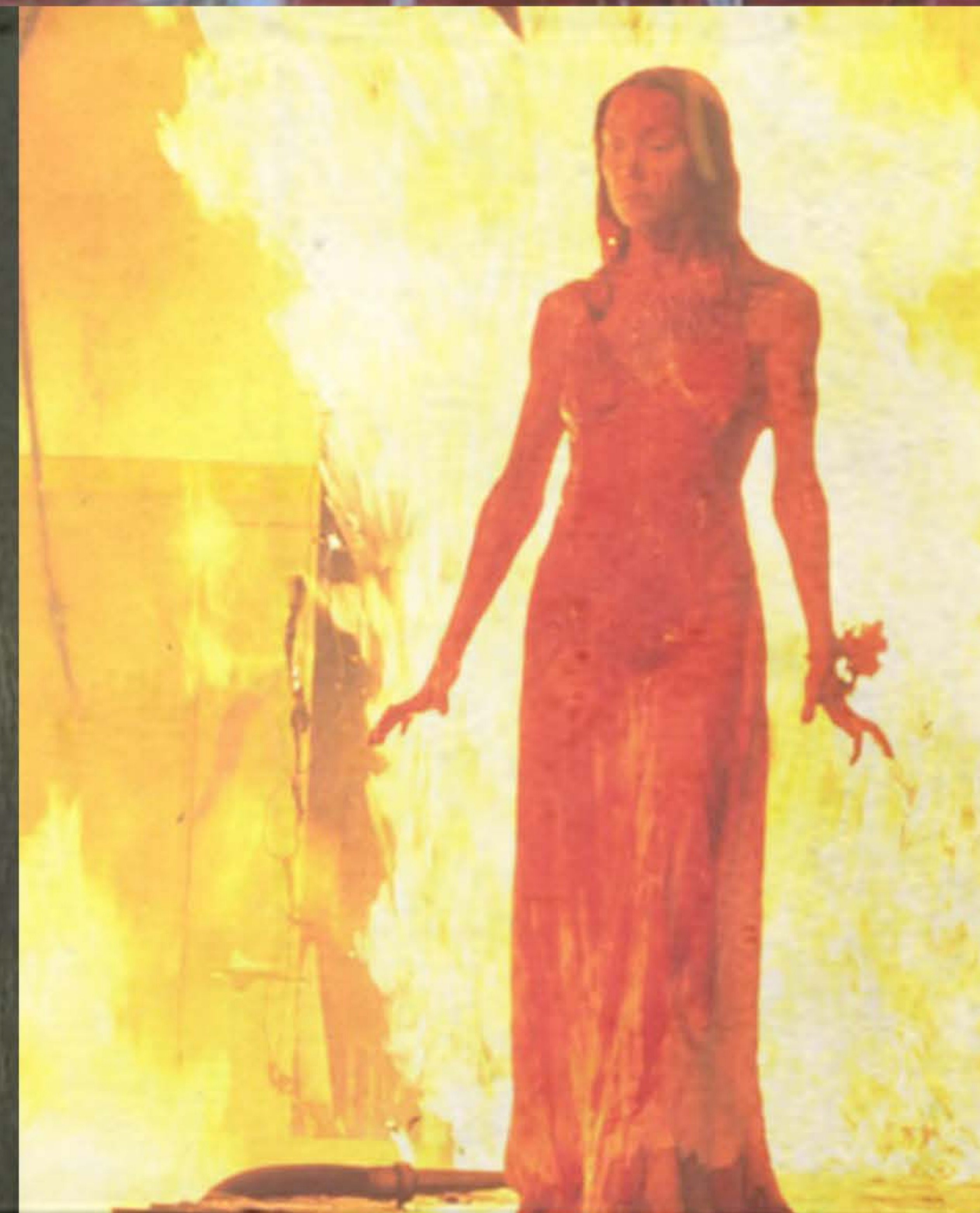
BE VERY AFRIAD

It's not all ritual sacrifice. Onus also deals with themes of insanity and madness as the heroine slowly begins to descend further into the world of the Redfernes.

As Anna begins to investigate the truth about her presence in the house she finds herself succumbing to strange and unusual visions - whether they are really happening or simply a figment of her imagination is a question the film will answer, but to create the strange "dreams" we have taken inspiration from some famous sources.

This is where Onus builds most of it's tension and mystery and so by taking influence from classic horror films remembered for their striking and shocking imagery the film will be able to create a unique space for itself.

Much like the ritualistic scenes these are the moments where horror fans will get their money's worth. By drawing on the imagery, designs and ideas of classic horror films such as Hellraiser, The Evil Dead and Carrie, Onus will stand apart from other films in the folk horror genre as a visually impressive movie.



CAST OF CHARACTERS



Daniella Faircloth is
ANNA DEENE

Anna is the heroine. She is brought to the Redferne House under the pretence of showing support for her partner, Isobel who's seemingly falls ill.

Growing up in a working class family, Anna is a trainee Nurse who has dedicated herself to helping others. She believes in doing the right thing above all else, even when the right thing is not easy.



Erin Leighton is
ISOBEL REDFERNE

Isobel is Anna's partner. While she at first appears to be supportive of Anna and happy to be introducing her to her family it soon becomes apparant all is not as it seems.

The Redferne's are a wealthy family and while this means Isobel has some snobbish traits she is down to Earth and seemingly pleasent. Of course, as the film progresses, the mask begins to slip and she reveals her true colours.



Karen Payne is
ELIZABETH REDFERNE

Elizabeth is the matriarch of the Redferne family. She leads the family while David (the father) is ill. She is a proud and confident woman who always puts family first.

While at first she appear to be warm and welcoming to Anna, as the plot progresses we learn she has a more sinister side, and is willing to do anything to ensure that the Redferne legacy continues.



Alex Pitcher is
VINCENT REDFERNE

Vincent is the eldest Redferne child. He is arrogant, condescending and he likes to show off his wealth. He is proud of his heritage and looks down on those with less.

Returning home from his luxury apartment in London to complete the family circle, Vincent begrudgingly accepts his presence is vital, although he makes it no secret, if the family are to succeed.

CAST OF CHARACTERS



Peter Hynds is

DAVID REDFERNE

David is the patriarch of the Redferne family. His mysterious illness is what sets the entire plot in motion, and he remains locked away for a big portion of the film.

In health he was a confident and successful businessman, however his illness has reduced him to a shell, bedridden and deteriorating he is willing to risk all to return himself and his family to their former glory.



Shaniece Williams is

LUCY BACIA

Lucy acts as the Redferne's personal help. She has recently taken over the role from her sick mother, and is willing to turn a blind eye to the Redferne's current activities.

She is quiet and introverted, unwilling to interfere or take action when the Redferne's begin their plan. She hopes that her apathy and lack of involvement in the situation will lead to her continued employment.

PRODUCER'S STATEMENT *(Marcus Starr)*

Onus is the second feature film that I have worked on alongside writer/director Alex Secker. The first, independent thriller *Follow The Crows*, received a wealth of excellent feedback and rave reviews from audiences and critics. It proved that as a team a quality feature film that stuns an audience with its style, narrative and storytelling can be realised within the extremely tight parameters of low-budeget film-making.

I was pleased to work alongside Alex, who understood the need for restrictions and did an excellent job of working within them, and together we found ways to maintain quality without lessening the emotional and visual impact of the film, nor audience enjoyment. The assembled team for *Onus* feature many of those we worked with on *Follow The Crows* and I have no doubt that, coupled with Alex's extremely unique and exciting vision, they are bursting with the necessary skills, passion and experience to deliver another excellent film. All are ready to make *Onus* the best film that the script deserves.

When I read the script I knew I wanted to be a part of it instantly. I know what it can deliver. I want to give the audience an experience that leaves them fully satisfied and I saw in *Onus* a story worth telling, and a film that can deliver on audience expectations. By making our first feature as a low-budget independent film I achieved something many others have failed to. *Onus* steps up the challenge. It demands I up my game, set a new benchmark and create something special.

It's the sort of horror film that is screaming to be made.

The script doesn't rely on obvious tropes. It isn't reliant on gore and jump scares, and yet it's horrifying none the less. It's a fresh take on a well worn genre that I am extremely proud to put my name to. *Onus* takes the horror genre back to where it should be; intelligent, creepy and scary on many, many levels. The writer/director, Alex Secker, has a great knowledge, love and passion for film in general and yet horror emits from him like there is a dark beacon of malevolence above his head. The slick script allows the audience peel back the veneer of British respectability to see the dark, brooding secrets propping up those who have power.

Together we will deliver a film I know horror fans will love, but general audiences will engage with as well. Every frame will have thought, meaning, love and care chiselled into it. No meandering to nonsense, no gruesomeness for the sake of a three second thrill, just tension that builds and builds and builds.

Will it ever drop? Yes. But only when *Onus* wants it to. And then Alex will take you into the dark heart of the film. Other horrors serve up the same old plate to pick at, Alex and I will provide a banquet to feast upon. Audiences will be left talking about it long after the final credits have rolled. It will leave them (as with our first feature) desperately wanting more. Desperately wanting to see the next intelligent offering and well-crafted script.

Together with our cast and crew we are ready to deliver a film that delivers in every way it can.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT *(Alex Secker)*

I've always loved telling stories. From a very early age I used to write short stories and my favourite type of story has always been horror. I love scaring people, I love making people think and I love provoking a reaction, and horror is the only genre you can really do that with.. The progression into making films was a natural one for me, my Dad worked for the Sony Centre and would bring camera equipment home. Together we would take my short stories and turn them into short films. Obviously these were terrible, but I'd been bitten by the bug.

Since entering the world of work I have worked to make films, beginning with freelance work as a camera operator and creating my own short films. I've since gone on to have several shorts entered into national film festivals. More recently I have written and directed my first feature film, an independent thriller called *Follow the Crows*, and my first stage play, a psychological horror called *The Door*, which won the People's Choice Award at the 2017 Swinge Festival.

Onus began as an obsession with the three 1970s "folk horror" classics; *The Wicker Man*, *Blood on Satan's Claw* and *Witchfinder General*. I've always been a horror fan (especially body horror, such as *Alien*, *The Thing* and *Videodrome*), but these films stuck out to me. They were about the sinister and terrifying things that lurk just beneath the surface of British society, they captured a mood and an atmosphere that I'd never encountered before and yet, as a child growing up in Wiltshire, felt all too terrifyingly real.

I've always believed that horror has a way of tapping into our most primal selves unlike any other genre and that a good horror film can make people think just as much as they can terrify. The folk horror classics are as much about the world and the country in the 70s as they are about occult rituals, and I see *Onus* to 2018 what *The Wicker Man* was to 1973. Not only a scary, brutal and exciting horror movie, but a thoughtful exploration of the human psyche.

Of course all this doesn't mean we can't have fun! Part of what I, like many horror fans, have always loved about horror is the blood. Ideally buckets of it. With *Onus* I intend to blend my favourite subgenres (body horror and folk horror) together to create a new and terrifying experience. It seems absurd to me that it hasn't been done before. British folk horror combined with elements of the body horror of the 80s, the cracks in British society breaking away to reveal a darker and more horrific underbelly. Clive Barker (*Hellraiser*) does Hammer Horror! *The Devil Rides Out* but made by David Cronenberg (*The Fly*).

And that's my vision for this film: a dark, brooding, unsettling horror that slowly but surely gives way to the terrifying evil that has been bubbling beneath the surface, delivering on several levels. A folk horror like no other, that audiences will find frightening, exciting and, most importantly, memorable. One that not only keeps them up at night, but stays with them for days after. A new classic for the modern age.

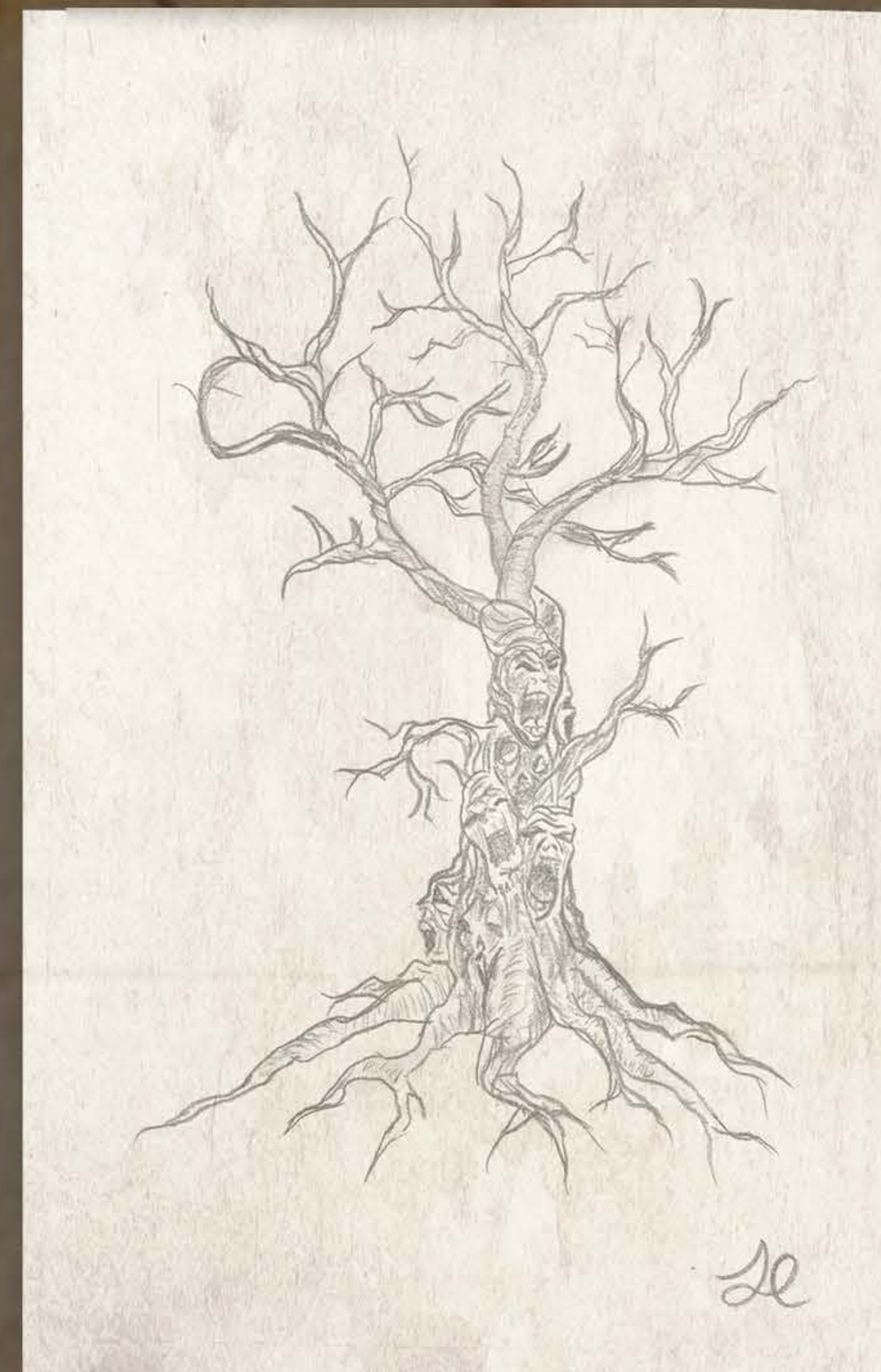
The folk horror genre may be having a resurgence, but *Onus* is going to blow it wide open.

Alex Secker



THE BEAST

Concept Art for the Redferne's Deity



One of the key elements of Onus is the “deity” secretly worshipped by the Redferne family.

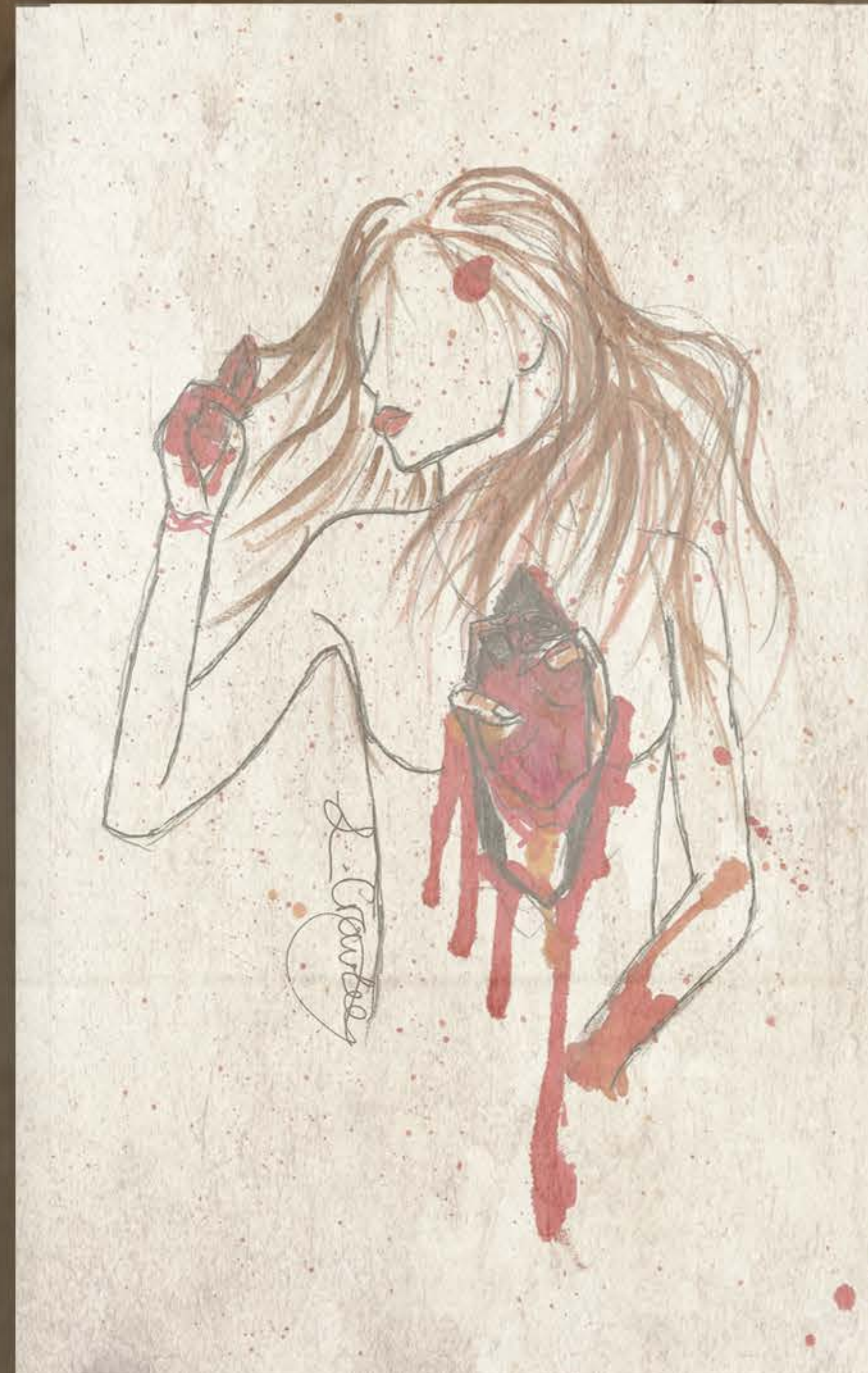
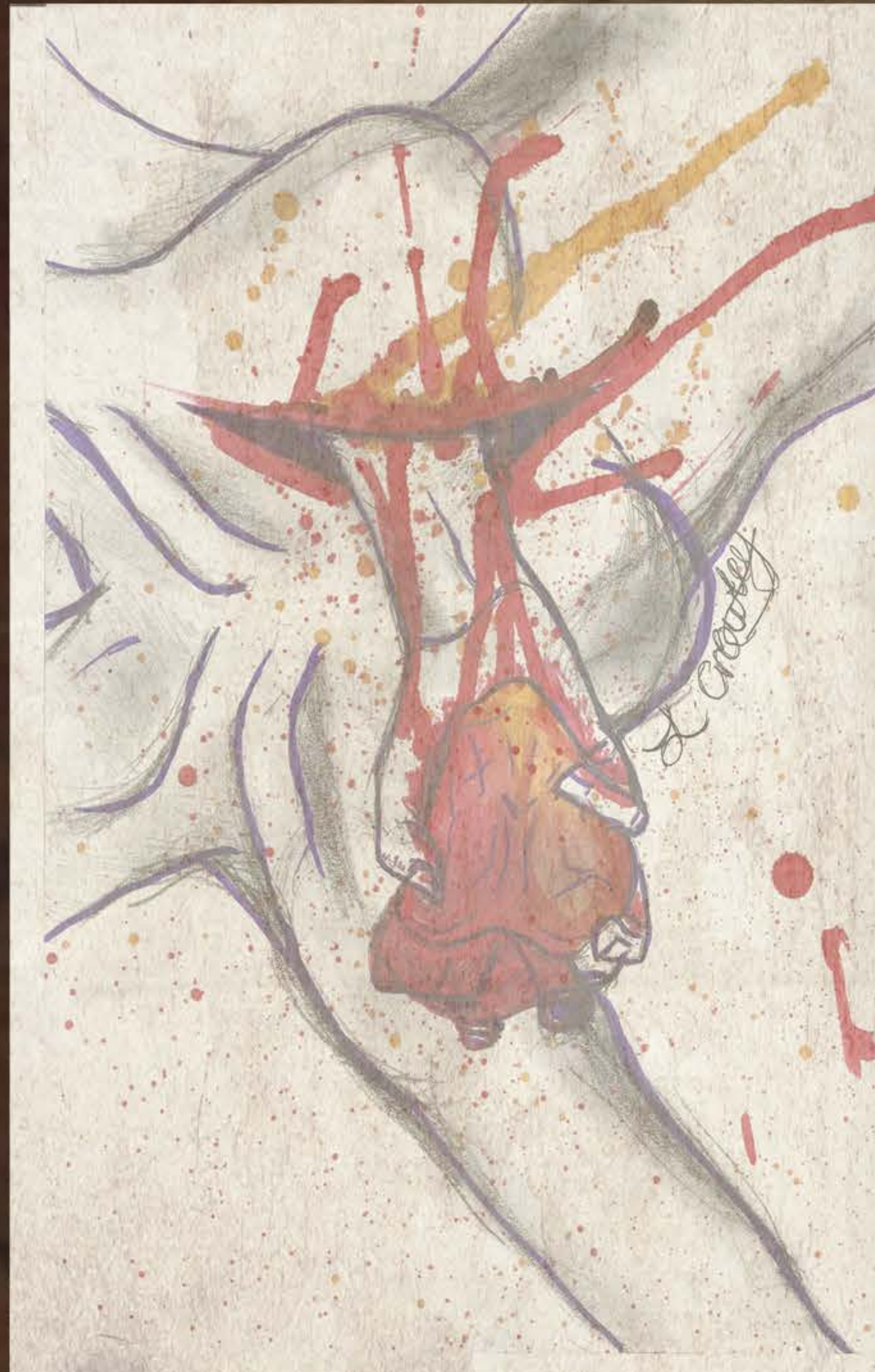
While only ever fleetingly glimpsed in the film we wanted to have a clear idea of just what this creature is and where it comes from. Knowing that we wanted to take influence from Paganism and folk horror, we chose to represent the deity as one with the countryside of Brittain. In this regard the creature appears as “tree-like” as these concept images we commissioned show.

The creature is an ever looming threat in a film, and represents an old world slowly entering the contemporary setting of the film. It is frightening and somewhat surreal, and it is as old as the Earth itself.

An unstoppable and unknowable force of nature coming to claim what has been promised to it.

THE SACRIFICE

Concept Art for the Sacrifice

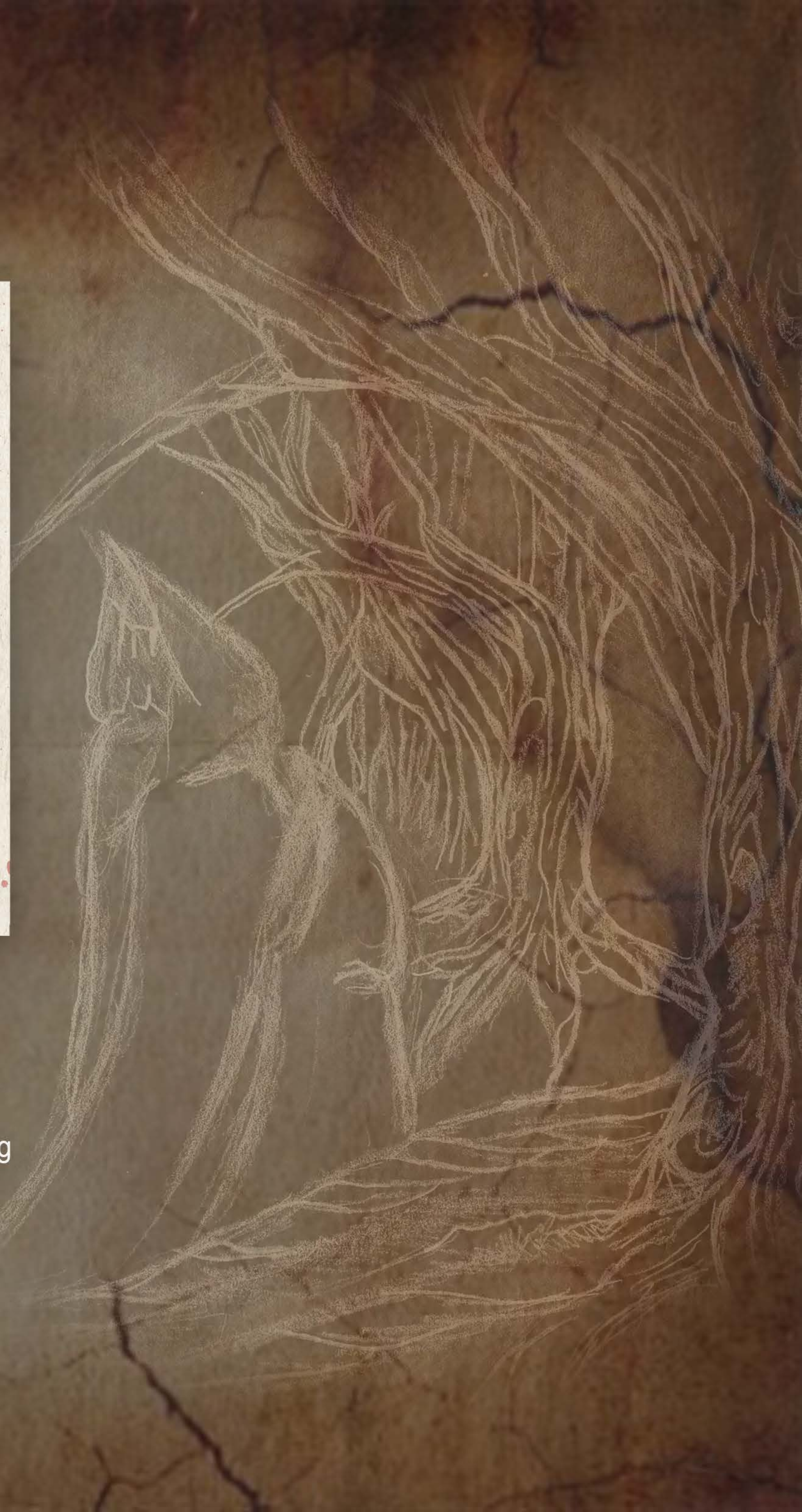


While Onus draws heavily on the designs and styles of folk horror for it's ritual moment, including the masks, we wanted something a little bit different for the final sacrifice at the end of the ritual.

Taking inspiration from the body-horror films of horror legends like Clive Barker, David Cronenberg and John Carpenter, we've conjured up what will be a striking, startling and all round terrifying image for audiences.

As the ritual reaches it's horrifying climax a hand bursts out from inside the poor soul who finds themselves at the centre of the Redferne's mortifying plot. In this hand is their still beating heart, and the victim has just enough time to see it there in front of them before they die.

It is a memorable, uncomfortable and spine-tingling conclusion to what is an already terrifying and frightening scene.





NEVER SLEEP AGAIN

Onus is a horror movie that is unashamedly a horror movie. It wears its influences proudly on its blood stained sleeve and aims to leave you shaken and unable to sleep.

Horror is a genre that is ever popular within the fanbase, but recently we have seen smart and intelligent horror gaining mainstream appeal with the likes of Jordan Peele's *Get Out* and the 2017 remake of Stephen King's *It*. Now is the time to see British horror show them how it's done with a clever, thoughtful and absolutely terrifying feature film, and Onus is that movie.

After completing production on our first film, *Follow The Crows*, we knew horror would be the genre we'd tackle next, and much like *Follow The Crows* we can make this guarantee: the film will get made, no matter what happens, but with the budget and funds to achieve what we set out to, the film will be not only professional but a success.

Now is the time, Onus is the film. You can be a part of this exciting project, or you can never sleep again wondering what could have been...