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**BEST INTERNATIONAL FEATURE FILM  
OFFICIAL OSCAR ENTRY SERBIA**

# DARKLING

a film by **DUSAN MILIC**

Serbia, Denmark, Italy, Bulgaria, Greece / 2022 / 1h48  
Color / Sound: 5.1 / Image: 1.66 : 1 / Serbian, Italian, English

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## Synopsis

In the mountainous outback of Kosovo, in a household surrounded by a dense forest, lives MILICA with her mother and grandfather. When night falls the family barricades themselves in the house, frightened by the terror coming out of the woods. Is the horror experienced by the besieged household an echo of the recent war times, or just their imagination, as the KFOR officials would have them believe? There is no material evidence that something bad is happening, but with every forthcoming night, their fear rises.

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## Interview

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D A R K L I N G

### What inspired this story?

Some years ago, I read an article about a twelve-year-old girl from Kosovo, who wrote a letter to the then president of Serbia about the hard life of children living in Serbian enclaves. He was just about to give a speech in front of the General Assembly of the UN, and he decided to read the letter. That powerful and highly emotional writing of just a few paragraphs made a huge impact among the ministers. That ignited the idea in me to write a script based on it. I approached the girl and her mother and discovered that their story was much more complex than the one I thought I had. After a couple of years of research, I did multiple drafts that developed into a solid source for a good film based on a true story.

### For you, what is the essence of the film?

The fear. It is a theme. That is what the story is about. Fear is one of the two strongest emotions that can exist in humans. On the other side of the pole is love. The metaphor for their fear, as it's more visual, is the impenetrable darkness surrounding them. There is a line in the girl's letter that I used as a psychological logline: No one can protect you from fear. Especially if the enemy is invisible. They start to question their sanity, which just worsens the situation.

### You have two renowned European actors in Slavko Stimac and Danica Curcic. Why did you select them?

Slavko Stimac is a renowned actor from the former Yugoslavia. He started to act when he was just eleven. Some of his greatest appearances were in films by Emir Kusturica: *Underground* (Palm d'Or winner) and *Life is a Miracle*. He had a prominent role as a young man in Sam Peckinpah's masterpiece *Cross of Iron*. Up to now, he has more than 50 films and TV series in his filmography. His talent is immaculate. I wanted him from the moment I started to write the script. I wanted his innocence and helplessness, which I imagined for the role of the grandfather.

Danica Curcic is very well known, even on a broader scope. She is a Danish actress of Serbian origin. This was her first time being in a Serbian film, speaking her native language. While I was in the casting period, my producer Snezana van Houwelingen said to me that we might think about her. I loved the idea because she is a new face in Serbian cinema, and I am always willing to experiment with actors. She did great in the audition. It was an entirely new experience for me regarding how she brought out the character. Her career is amazing, and I think her work in *Darkling* is a masterclass.

### Then you have the amazing non-professional Miona Ilov. How did you find her? How many young girls did you audition? How did you know she was the one?

Yes, she was outstanding, I think. She was eleven at the time. My casting director Boban Dedeic and I went through all of Serbia to find her. Finally, we found her on the southern side of the country. We did casting with more than 120 different girls, and she was left alone at the



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end. She has some magical charisma in her eyes that are just so mesmerizing, glowing from the dark, that I never looked back after seeing her. There is no recipe or safety when you do a movie with non-professional actors. You have to believe your intuition. But her eyes somehow gave me the security to proceed with her to the set.

**Were there any particular films you were inspired or influenced by when making the film?**

*Straw Dogs* by Sam Peckinpah, whom I consider one of the greatest motion picture directors, was one of my referent films for this one. The form of *Assault on Precinct 13* was an influence as well. But I would say that films by Alfred Hitchcock were my guideline for this one the most.

**A lot of the film is non-verbal, with feelings and information communicated in physical action and visual style. Please talk about why you took this approach.**

I think that film is a visual experience. I tend to work on every story with no dialogue in the beginning. It is an element of sound for me, like all other sounds coming out from the picture. For me, that works on an unconscious level. Whenever I work on a script, I do the first couple of drafts without the dialogue. The only thing that I am interested in is the picture. Trying to add emotion and meaning through it. After that, I just add lines that need to be said and are necessary. I'm trying to be as rigorous as I can with the use of it. Especially for this film, I was really restrictive with the dialogue. I thought there was no need for it in a story where we experience the fear of the main protagonists. Their faces and emotions in critical moments, juxtaposed with the evil coming from outside, were essential and the only thing that mattered.

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## Director's filmography

- 2022.**      **DARKLING**  
scriptwriter / director
- 2016.**      **SUSPICIOUS MINDS (TV SHOW)**  
creator / director
- 2014.**      **TRAVELATOR**  
scriptwriter / director
- 2012-2014.**      **FOLK (TV SHOW)**  
creator / director
- 2008.**      **THE WORLD IS BIG AND SALVATION LURKS AROUND THE CORNER**  
scriptwriter
- 2007.**      **GUCHA: DISTANT TRUMPET**  
scriptwriter / director
- 2003.**      **STRAWBERRY IN THE SUPERMARKET**  
scriptwriter / director

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## Cast

Milica	<b>Miona Ilov</b>
Vukica	<b>Danica Curcic</b> <i>Silent Heart, The Chestnut Man</i>
Milutin	<b>Slavko Stimac</b> <i>Underground, Life is a Miracle</i>
Maurizio	<b>Flavio Parenti</b> <i>To Rome with Love, I Am Love</i>
Jim	<b>Darren Pettie</b> <i>The International, Mad Men</i>

## Supported by

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## Crew

Casting by	<b>Boban Dedeic</b> <i>Black Cat, White Cat, Time of the Gypsies</i>
Cinematography	<b>Kiril Prodanov</b> <i>The Expendables 2</i>
Music by	<b>Kristian Eidnes Andersen</b> <i>Nymphomaniac, Only God Forgives, Antichrist, Melancholia</i>
Editing	<b>Yannis Chalkiadakis</b> <i>Knifer, Wasted Youth</i>
Production Design	<b>Milenko Jeremic</b> <i>Black Cat, White Cat, Life is a Miracle</i>
Produced by	<b>Snezana van Houwelingen</b> <i>A Good Wife, Look, Stranger</i>
Co-producers	<b>Lene Borglum,</b> <b>Stefan Kitanov,</b> <b>Mira Staleva,</b> <b>Debora Desio,</b> <b>Irini Vougioukalou,</b> <b>Kontantina Stavrianou,</b> <b>Ivana Mikovic</b>