

QLH-S3E6: A Dark Song

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SPEAKERS

Jessi Chartier, Jen Myers

J Jessi Chartier 00:04

Welcome to Quiet Little Horrors. Here we talk about the films that creep under your skin and take up residence in the dark. Let's talk about A Dark Song.

J Jen Myers 00:21

We talk about movies. So we're going to talk about parts of movies that may be spoilers. If that doesn't bother you, you can keep on listening. Or you can hit the pause button and go watch the films that we're talking about before you continue here. Consider yourself warned.

J Jessi Chartier 00:38

A grieving mother and a damaged a cultist risked their lives and souls to perform a dangerous ritual that will grant them what they want. Oh, Jen, I love this movie.

J Jen Myers 00:51

I think this was one that when we started, I think this has been on our list since we started this podcast. Like, kind of just like, Okay, we're gonna have to talk about that at some point. And not I don't say that in uh, oh, God, we have to because I also really liked this movie. But yeah, I feel like this was one of the modern psychological horror classics.

J Jessi Chartier 01:13

Yes, yes, I agree. I think that they did. They just did a great job. So for those of you who are listening in the story, line is pretty straightforward. A grieving mother, a mother loser has lost her child. And she's hired this occultist to come out and perform a ritual that will hopefully allow

her some kind of miracle. And you as we go through it, we discover that the intended miracles that some divine entity will appear, and they will be able to ask a favor of it, each of them will be able to ask a favor. And the relationship between the occultist whose name is Joseph Solomon, and the woman Sophia, is really wrought with. It's almost like they're, like enemies that are working towards the same goal. So Solomon wants to see his his favor is he says something like I want to be invisible, because he's just seeing too much. And he just doesn't want to deal with people anymore. And so Sofia's intent in favor of this, whatever she's going to ask the Divine entity is that it changes throughout the movie. So it starts with, and she's kind of constantly lying about what she's actually trying to do. But you eventually learned that she basically wants revenge on the people that killed her son. And we're not given a ton of detail. What we do know about how her son died is that she was late to pick him up from daycare. And someone stole him and killed him. And her story is that they were a bunch of teenagers that took him and did some like black magic or occult stuff with him as like the centerpiece and sacrificed him or something. Either way, she wants revenge. That's like her goal here. And there's a great line by Solomon that says, I don't need you to be virtuous, I just need you to be driven. And it's because she's the conduit that will allow this divine entity to up here and grant them what they want. And the ritual is supposed to take, it could take months. And Solomon is very upfront, he's like, it may not work the first time, we may have to do it two or three times, and it may not work at all. And when she asks him, How many times have you done this? He says, I've done it three times, once it worked twice, it didn't. So it's pretty intense. Though Sophia rents a house for a year. She's giving him like \$70,000 to do this thing like she is determined. And that's kind of how the setup is. So let's talk about some of the pieces. Jen, where do you want to start?

J Jen Myers 04:16

Oh, it's kind of hard to even figure out where to start with all of this. But I mean, honestly, let's start with the characters because I feel like that comes naturally from the setup that that you just described, like you described a little bit about him. But for me, the thing that I think is important to talk about is that these characters are very, they're kind of grim. I mean, clearly is just what you outlined there, especially Sophia is not coming in with like very happy backgrounds and storylines or motivations. But like Solomon in particular is kind of an unlikable character. He's very abrasive. He does some questionable things throughout the course of the movie. Um, and even Sophia is like, yes, she's a grieving mother, but she's not looking for necessarily, or at least, you know, at the beginning, she's not looking for relief from her her grief or release from it, she is very specifically looking to visit harm on other people. So I think that's one of the thing that interests me about these characters is that we're not presented with completely sympathetic, heroic characters. In fact, I think a lot of ways we're almost presented with the opposite. But yeah, we're like, in the middle of their drama, which I found kind of interesting.

J Jessi Chartier 05:35

I did, too. And I like how each of them are there for different reasons. You know, they, they all have their broken people who are doing this very interesting. Ritual, I mean, the, the ritual itself is just, it's multiple, she has to rent a whole house so that there are multiple rooms for different things. It they have to purify, she has to purify herself for like a year. Like, it's just it's crazy pants. But it's so interesting, because I want to I don't know if this was intentional, but I love

the fact that their names, both of their names have a reference to some kind of idea of round wisdom, like Sophia is Sophie or sophus is wisdom in Greek. And then Solomon is an old biblical name, who is he was known for his wisdom and peace. But then eventually, God turned against him because of his idolatry. So it's like, which perfectly wraps up Solomon in a nutshell, like a Solomon's character. Clearly, at one point entirely, he was driven to understand and have the understanding around the architecture and the knowledge of the world. And he says, as such in the movie where he says, because it's because there's a great dialogue between Sofia and Solomon, because she's like, Oh, so it's about power. And he's like, No, it's about knowledge. It's about just understanding the architecture,

J Jen Myers 07:05

Which arguably, is still kind of about power. But you know,

J Jessi Chartier 07:08

what, exactly, exactly, exactly. So but it's, it's just, it's really, he's an interesting character, because he's clearly broken. But he's also totally aware of himself. Like he's like, I'm going through detox because I, I abused alcohol. So I need to be clear, so clean, so I'm just going to detox for a day or two. And she's like, what? And he's like, it's fine.

J Jen Myers 07:28

He's so casual about that. It is kind of like, like, I it is funny how Sofia's reaction is like, you can almost see her being like, Okay, this is the dude that I'm paying all this money for an interesting, you know, months of my life to do this arcane ritual. And he's this.

J Jessi Chartier 07:45

Yep, exactly, exactly. And so yeah, you're right. Neither one of them are very sympathetic characters. And, you know, he's clearly emotionally abusive to her. And it's just, it's a really interesting dynamic. Neither one of them are doing this for pure reasons. But yet they're trying to make it work. And they are both driven, but Solomon is probably the most honest between the two. Like, that's all so he Yeah, he initially was like, Yeah, I'm not gonna do this. And she's like, I'll pay you more money. I'll give you \$80,000. And he's like, You don't understand. It's not about the money. He's like, this is like, I'm not going to do it for this reason. Because she originally says, oh, it's about love. And he's like, Well, that's BS. I'm not going to do this for he's like, because that's not enough of a drive to, to do what's necessary. And I just, I really appreciated that about his character. He was awful at the same time. But so was she, you know, in her own way.

J Jen Myers 08:49

No, it's It's true. And so it they, they're abrasive in different ways. I think he's more I don't know, outwardly abrasive, I guess. But and you're right, there is something even though he is like that there is an honesty to what he does. Whereas Sofia is clearly like throughout the

like that there is an honesty to what he does. whereas Sonia is clearly like throughout the movie, the almost being put through these different trials to strip away the layers of kind of the defenses and the lies that she's built up because she's she goes, she clearly goes through so many saying this is it, and then it's not this and then it's actually this and this is actually what happened, not this other you know, it happens at several points throughout the movie. And you can see that like this process is one that is teaching her how to be more honest, even when the truth isn't, you know, very savory, I guess.

J Jessi Chartier 09:43

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Which I find kind of interesting, because at the end, she's the one that ends up redeemed, and he is not. Yes, even though he was the one that was probably the most honest with himself, but Apparently that wasn't enough. Well,

J Jen Myers 10:03

Yeah, and that's the thing, maybe this leads into how we're kind of, we wanted to talk also about the kind of the well, not the ritual itself. And again, details about how to do this or anything, but you know, the fact of the ritual, and in the process of the ritual, because I think that it intersects with the process of grief, and honesty and some of these other things we talked about. I thought it was really interesting that this ritual specifically takes so long, like, it's a really small thing. But I really usually when we see any sort of like magic rituals or things like this in movies, it's like, we'll meet at midnight, and it's a matter of a few minutes, you know, I can't remember ever seeing anything in a movie, or it's like, yeah, this is gonna take literally months, and then we might have to do it again. And, you know, we have to prepare a year ahead of time and things like this. And, to me that really spoke to how, you know, beyond just like the rituals, like the fact that it takes all this time and focus and preparation. And again, time. It's interesting, because that's what grief takes to recover from to or, you know, move through the process of grief. So I thought it was interesting how the facts of their ritual seems to mirror a lot of the emotional processes of going through some of these things that we've been talking about.

J Jessi Chartier 11:21

Agreed. Totally agree. And I like how it was, you know, on my notes, I wrote how grief is like, it's not a predictable process. And sometimes it doesn't work. There's no real clear handbook, there's only ideas or excuse me, there's only ideas or ways that you can try and move through it. But it's not. It's not straightforward, like, Okay, so the first month, I'm just going to sit and be angry. And then I'm going to sit and do the next step. And then I'm gonna sit and do the next step. It's not, it's just not that straightforward. And it's incredibly emotionally and physically violent, like some of the rituals, or the she has to go without sleep for like six days, and then have to be drenched in cold water. Like, it's just, it's, it's impressive the amount of work that goes into this particular ritual that I may never pay off. It's just, it's just such a great metaphor for what the process of grief is, and also must look like, especially for a parent. You know, because it's so violent, it's just, well, it's not, I don't know, if I would classify it as violent, but it's just brutal. It's brutal, physically, emotionally, spiritually, it's just brutal.

J Jen Myers 12:51

Yeah. And in a way, like, like you were saying, there is no actual ritual to go through a process like this. But I like the idea of having a ritual, because arguably, she wouldn't have got through the process without the brutality of this ritual. So it kind of, to me kind of calls to the kind of deep psychological need why humans have rituals in the first place. Not because it always works perfectly like a recipe, but because it can stand in for the phases that we need to kind of naturally move through. And if we can't manage to do it ourselves, or don't have, you know, support to do through it and go through it in a more natural way. It provides this framework for us to do that. And, you know, I don't recommend doing a arcane months long ritual that requires 1000s and 1000s of dollars and violence and partnerships with a unsavory abrasive magician, but you know, it does, it does seem like that you could see how going through this, these brutal processes, like it does get her in the end, not necessarily where she wanted to go, but where she needed to be

J Jessi Chartier 14:12

Where she needed to be. That's exactly right. That's exactly right. Well, let's talk. Let's talk a little bit about the end game because I think that that is worth kind of pulling apart a little bit. So the at the beginning, Solomon asks, Sophia, are you Protestant or Catholic? So this ritual is based in Christian beliefs by the way we should state that and so she says I'm Catholic, and he said, Okay, great, and so that apparently changes the ritual that but the the deity that apparently this this divine thing entity that appears at the end is supposed to be her guardian angel. And she if apparently an old foreclosure if you see your guardian angel or if you invoke your guardian angel and they appear you can ask a favor, which is why how all this works. So like the red Today is all around like invoking the guardian angel. And so she shifts a little bit. She's like, I want to Why don't you remember what the first thing she says that she wants from The Guardian Angel, but you eventually learned that she wants revenge. She wants them to the people who killed her son to die a horrible death. And then what happens towards the end, so Solomon ends up dying, and getting dragged to hell, which I thought was a really nice touch by the way of how she just watches that happens from the stairs, like that was just like, great. And she ends up the ritual opens up doors for everything, it's a very vulnerable place, which we'll circle back to in a minute. And so these, these, what we believe are demons have basically dragged her down into what we think is hell, but it's probably the basement of the house and is starting to torture her cuts off a finger, etc. And she ends up saying, I'm sorry, initially to the demons, which I think is like really interesting. And she tries to get away, and she just apologizes. And she says, I'm sorry. And that is apparently what was needed at the final end, to trigger the, the guardian angel for comment, like evoking. And this also really focuses around she said, at one point in time, she's like, I don't do forgiveness, right. And here, she's giving forgiveness herself almost where she says, I'm sorry. And the so once the bright light shows up, of course, the demons are like, ah, divine entity can't handle it. And so she runs upstairs, and she meets her guardian angel, which was really well done. By the way. I thought that was really cool.

J Jen Myers 16:54

Yeah. It was, like beautiful and scary at the same time, like, in the way that I feel like traditionally, it's supposed to be, you know, it's not a, you know, a friendly, feathery Angel. This is a I don't know even what the word is, but you know,

J Jessi Chartier 17:11
truly awesome. Like,

J Jen Myers 17:12
that's exactly the word. Yeah.

J Jessi Chartier 17:15
Yeah, it's just he, he or she very agnostic, but it's like, or androgynous I should say, but clearly ready for battle, clearly could squash you at any point in time, very judging, but also very hopeful. Like, there's just there was just such beauty around that. And so she asks for the power to forgive. So she asked for at the very end. And it was like, you can tell that her favor is granted because she survives, and she gets out. And you can see her with a sense of relief. Like at the end, especially with the red car passing. I don't know if he caught that at the end, but there's a red car that passes her. And she's just like, snapped back into reality. And you can see here just like, Yeah, I have this immediate sense of relief. And red is a symbol for death. And so like the idea that death has passerby, and like, I just like, it was just such a really cool closing of the whole situation. And it was just, but again, I go back, I'm like, Well, how come Solomon didn't get that? Was it because he, he was so stuck in this hole like, and because it was based on Christian beliefs? It's like, oh, was he dammed? Because he wanted knowledge, you know, the tree of knowledge. And like, was that? Was it all based on that? Like, why wasn't he given anything? Like I said

J Jen Myers 18:41
earlier, I think that when he said his quest is not about power. I think that may be the one the limit of his his honesty and self knowledge, because I do think it was still about power. I maybe this is just my own personal opinion. But I genuinely feel a lot of people who say they're in a quest for knowledge. It is usually to use that knowledge as some sort of power over others, whether they realize it or not. Exactly, exactly. And that's what I read in him where, I don't know if he was he wasn't quite ready to be there. At the same point that she was, and also he has gone through this before, right? If and he said, have worked once. So he has gone through this whole thing, and he has not moved any closer to his own salvation. Like, you know, in his regular life. Like I said, he had to detox. He was still an alcoholic. He was, you know, still he didn't he wasn't making he hadn't made any changes. So what even though he Yes, he was doing this first? Well, we don't know actually, does he say in the beginning, he was doing it for somewhere else. What maybe he did the first ritual for himself or something?

J Jessi Chartier 19:56
Yeah, is that we don't know. We don't know. He does make a reference at one point in time that he's I've been showered with silver by gods, which makes me think that when it happened the

first time around, I mean, most people would ask for financial security. Yeah, like, maybe that's what he was asking for the first time. And this was like, no, no, I'm ready for power. And you're absolutely right. Because anytime someone says, I just want knowledge, what they really want is control. They not they just want predictability. They want control. They want to feel like they're, they're in charge of their life. Because, you know, life is unpredictable and hard. And humans have a really hard time with that. Right? So I agree with you in that he just he was asking for the wrong thing, because he wasn't at a place where he was ready.

J Jen Myers 20:40

Right? And maybe we were meant to understand that when he had gone through the ritual before, he assumed he got what he wanted. And it was probably the wrong thing. Yeah, and I don't it doesn't sound like he realized that or realize maybe he realized it was the wrong thing, but didn't quite realize why or what the right thing was. But Sophia, on the other hand, I really love this moment, at the close of the movie, and I didn't expect it. Because like I said before, this film is grim. Like, yeah, the tone is grim from the beginning, almost all the way through up to the very end where it's it's, I mean, we're talking about this because this is a horror movie. And even it's a slow burn horror movie, like the demons don't come until the end, but even tell them like it's, it's bleak and grim. We have like unsympathetic, often unpleasant people. And the main protagonist is a woman who is trying to get revenge on people who killed her son. Like like, you know, there's no sparkles are sunshine in this movie at all. It's unrelentingly grim and it gets grimmer and grimmer and grimmer. And then there's literal demons. And then you have this moment where she finally gets to where she was going to with, again, this angel we mentioned, who is not like a fluffy, friendly Angel. So there's still a little bit of a, it's beautiful, but there's still a little bit of a danger there. And just, she comes all of a sudden, you know, I feel like at least when I was watching this, like, I didn't know what she was gonna say until she opened her mouth and said it to the angel. And everything that she had said up to that point was always, you know, I want revenge. I want to make these people hurt. She's clearly in so much pain that she needs to visit on other people to the extent that she goes through all of this. And then when it actually comes to this moment, she's says, I want to be able to forgive. And it's a really, really surprising and lovely moment where it just clears everything.

J Jessi Chartier 22:47

Yes, at I don't think she would have gotten there without everything else before it. Exactly. You know, I think if the angel would have shown up the first time she would have asked for revenge,

J Jen Myers 22:57

which is kind of the whole thing, right? Like, how I was kind of talking earlier about how the ritual maybe mirrors the phases that people just kind of emotionally and psychologically have to go to this the whole going through the whole process? I don't, here's the thing. Was it actually a favor from the angel at all? Or was it the fact that she went through all this? And when she got to the point, to be perfectly fully honest about what she really wanted? She was honest about the fact that she wanted to forgive because she was a I don't think he granted her the power to do that. I think she had it.

J Jessi Chartier 23:31

You know, I think that that's probably possibly true. And I also think that I think that at the end, she came to just let go of what she wanted and accepted for what she needed. Right? I don't think she actually wanted to forgive. But I think that she knew that in order to move forward. This is what she needed. And that's a difference.

J Jen Myers 23:56

That is true. And it is well in remind me, what is her exact words? Does she say? She does she asked for the power to forgive? Does she say something? It's more it's and she doesn't just say like I want to forgive? She asked for the power or the ability to forgive if I'm not mistaken, which is a slightly different thing.

J Jessi Chartier 24:16

It is a slightly different thing. And I think she says power. I do think she says power.

J Jen Myers 24:21

And that is something that maybe could be great. Because she doesn't. We don't know that she necessarily forgives right then and there. And I think that's okay. It doesn't undermine the beauty of the moment at all. It doesn't undermine the release that she has from it. It just says that she has the power to do that now. And yes, maybe going back to what we were talking about with Solomon is that's a good kind of power. That's a worthwhile kind of power as opposed to like you said, control over other people or circumstances. And I think that's that's the key. That's That's why this ended up being a release for her.

J Jessi Chartier 24:59

Well then I feel like that is that, that sense of being able to let go after so much control through the ritual, right? So much control has to happen in the ritual throughout the ritual, etc. And that relief or that release of I give myself over, right like this surrendering to what is needed, not what is wanted, right is, is the linchpin to moving forward through grief. That's the true like I wrote down in my notes that are true purification is like letting go of recognizing, accepting and owning where you're at, but letting releasing your control over it to allow new stuff to come in. And I felt like that was absolutely powerful.

J Jen Myers 25:55

Yes, it's a really, we keep using that word. But you're right, it's a legitimately powerful moment in the film. And it really turns this whole film into something else. Like, for me, it completely transformed. Like, I didn't expect it, I didn't see it coming. I didn't. And it completely changed. What I was thinking about the film, like I liked it, but it just it's a complete, completely different thing. It's no longer this bleak, grim tale of revenge or horror. It's, you know, it transforms it

into something which not to not to rush us into comparisons to other movies. But it honestly reminded me a little bit of what I felt at the end of Relic. Yeah, which is a film that we discussed not too long ago, which I had, I felt like had a similar type of like, pretty, pretty grim storyline and talking about generational trauma and things like that. And that at the end, had, you know, a really lovely moment, emotional moment. That kind of dipped into surrealism and kind of I don't, I don't even know how to, I mean, we talked about it. So I'm not going to go into too many details, describe it there. But it transforms. What I was thinking and feeling about the story so far, and to something that was kind of this lovely acceptance in a way.

J Jessi Chartier 27:15

That is, I think you nailed it right on the head is just there was both those movies dealt so much with control. And what is that? What what do I want? What do I think is the right solution? What do I think is going to be the thing that is going to move us forward and heal us? And in both movies, at the very end, it is when you let go of that control? Can you really see and accept the reality for what it is and find the beauty within that and be able to move through life with that. And I think that that's one of the takeaways from both a dark song and relic is that life's beauty is not what you force it to be. It's finding what is needed or what is true and kind of going and accepting that and going with it. It's very dualistic, right.

J Jen Myers 28:14

It's very like the beauty is in the acceptance.


J Jessi Chartier 28:17

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. Oh, A Dark Song was so good. All right. Well, if people liked A Dark Song, what are some of the other stuff they should check out? This one was was tough for us to find some good comparable content.

J Jen Myers 28:37

Yeah. Yeah. So I mean, just as a matter of record, we mentioned it earlier, but I think Relic is an actual follow up to this. If you haven't seen that I would definitely recommend going and watching that. And we also have an earlier episode on that so you can listen to that as well. The other one that really that pops in my head on this theme is Don't Look Now. The Nicolas Roeg movie, it's got Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie in it. And that also revolves around a couple's grief over the death of their child and gets into some weird dark areas. So you know, on our basic theme, I think that follows. There's another one that from what I understand about the film fits in but I have not seen it and Jesse, you said you haven't either. And that's Lars von Trier's Antichrist. This came I've been meaning to see this. This came out at a time when I was still I've gone back and forth on Lars von Trier over the course of years on whether I really liked his film or really didn't like his work, and it's gone back and forth a few times. And I think Antichrist came out when I was on a down swing with my appreciation of his work, and then immediately went back up with Melancholia, and I feel like I have a better perspective now. So

I've been meaning to go back and watch this, but I have not yet. However, if you're really into this theme, and you're okay with Lars von Trier's um you know somewhat extreme work from what I understand Antichrist will fit right in

 Jessi Chartier 30:07

awesome and if you have something out there that you think would fit with us let us know that you can reach us at hello at quietlittlehorrors.com We are also on Instagram and Twitter Jen what are their handles are our handles for that.

 Jen Myers 30:21

So on Twitter we are at quiethorrors and on Instagram quietlittlehorrors

 Jessi Chartier 30:28

awesome and you can always check us out on the website at quietlittlehorrors.com Thanks everyone for listening. We will see you next time