

IN THE MIDST OF A FREAK ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHE,
A NEARLY BLIND JAPANESE WOMAN MUST SET ASIDE HER SUICIDAL PLANS
AND CONNECT WITH HER OWN HEART OF DARKNESS IN ORDER TO SURVIVE
ONE MIND-BENDING NIGHT OF TERROR IN THE CANADIAN ARCTIC.

ŌRORA



ATTACHMENTS:

1. Budget Top Sheet
2. Script (Working Draft)
3. Key Creative Team CV's
4. TTW sheets

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SYNOPSIS

On the vast icy expanse of Great Slave Lake, just outside of Yellowknife a couple of ice fishermen chirp each other drunkenly about the details of a story. Two men square off, ready to settle the score when suddenly a black mass crashes violently into the ice near them. Suddenly a raven smashes into one of the fishermen, caving in his entire face. The dead man's eyes stare straight up to the sky as ravens divebomb all around them, a passenger plane descends slowly overhead.

Suddenly woken up by the thud of a raven glancing off her window, Mari Mori, a successful Japanese psychiatrist, peers out in an attempt to see Great Slave Lake below as her plane starts its descent into Yellowknife. Mari seems to have everything in life, except the desire to live. Listening, day in and day out, to the problems of her narcissistic clientele has choked her spirit. Her hometown, Osaka, is one of the most densely populated cities in the world, and Mari can't stand people anymore. Tonight, she's on the last leg of her one-way trip to The Aurora Capital of the World.



Mari was diagnosed with a severe form of retinitis pigmentosa. Doctors gave her 6 months of sight left. That was 5 months ago. Yesterday, she emptied several bags of cat food onto the marble floor of her executive apartment and left a single note, "Please find a loving home for my sweet Coco". Mari has two goals for coming to Yellowknife before losing her vision: See the majestic Aurora Borealis with her own eyes, and then, commit suicide-by-wilderness, surrounded by nothing but quiet.

There's another reason she and many others are coming to Yellowknife though. There is a predicted reversal of the sun's magnetic field which is expected to create a large coronal mass ejection (CME), the process that triggers the Aurora. But what no one could know is that due to climate change, it will be the biggest CME in recorded history.

After being taken an hour outside of Yellowknife to Aurora World with fifty other Asian tourists, they are treated to an Indigenous storytelling session with an elder, Jerry, who informs them that for many nations, the Aurora is actually something to avoid, that it can steal children, it can be evil. They all laugh and head outside as the light show starts. Suddenly the sky erupts in intense, volcanic explosions of lights that strobe in a frenzied pattern. This pattern fries the occipital lobe and creates so much pressure that people's eyes blow out of their heads. These eyeless victims then start attacking each other's throats because the quietest of sounds are now amplified to head-splitting volume.

Mari is saved mid-attack by Jerry who pulls her into the only functioning vehicle to have survived the electromagnetic pulse explosion; a 1950's bombardier. Together, along with a German couple who were in the midst of trying to conceive under the Aurora, they start to make their way back to Yellowknife via the frozen ice road.

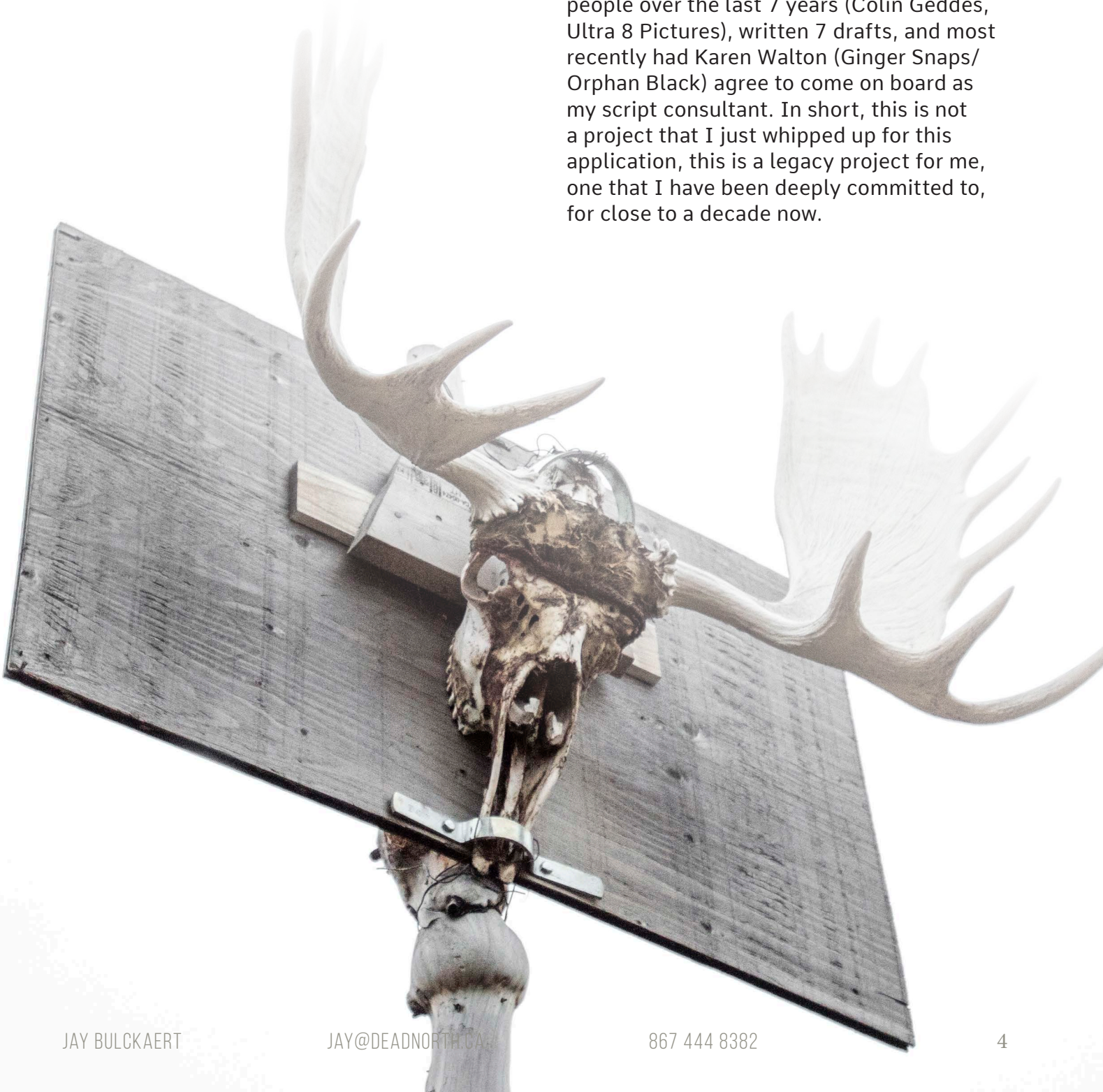
During this journey into an arctic wasteland, it becomes apparent that Mari is the only one who can do things because her dying eyes are impervious to the Aurora that is constantly in the sky. One quick side glance by anyone else and they are doomed. First goes the German man in a very tense scene where he has to fill the gas tank amidst a crowd of eyeless victims on the ice road. Later his girlfriend is killed in an extremely tense scene in a fishing shack. Mari and Jerry then have to survive a polar bear attack in that shack as animals too have been impacted by the lights. Jerry manages to kill the bear with a massive cast-iron frying pan but he is mortally wounded in the fray.

It is now up to Mari, nearly blind and terrified to help them survive several more frenetic trials and find a way back to Yellowknife with a dying elder, and a baby they saved from its eyeless father. Throughout the night, Mari has to live through brutal ordeal after ordeal which distracts her entirely from her plans at self-destruction and helps her understand something new about herself. That danger makes her feel alive. As dawn breaks, Mari makes the decision to end her life through an act of selflessness that will distract the raging crowds away from a destroyed and suffering Yellowknife. As the Aurora fades, Mari is faced with her final decision.



DIRECTORS VISION

I have been working on Ōrora for almost 7 years now. I self-funded a short film version of the script (Helios) which you can view in this application and I've even written a version of the story into iambic-pentameter to explore the story further. I've had the script reviewed 5 times by various industry people over the last 7 years (Colin Geddes, Ultra 8 Pictures), written 7 drafts, and most recently had Karen Walton (Ginger Snaps/ Orphan Black) agree to come on board as my script consultant. In short, this is not a project that I just whipped up for this application, this is a legacy project for me, one that I have been deeply committed to, for close to a decade now.

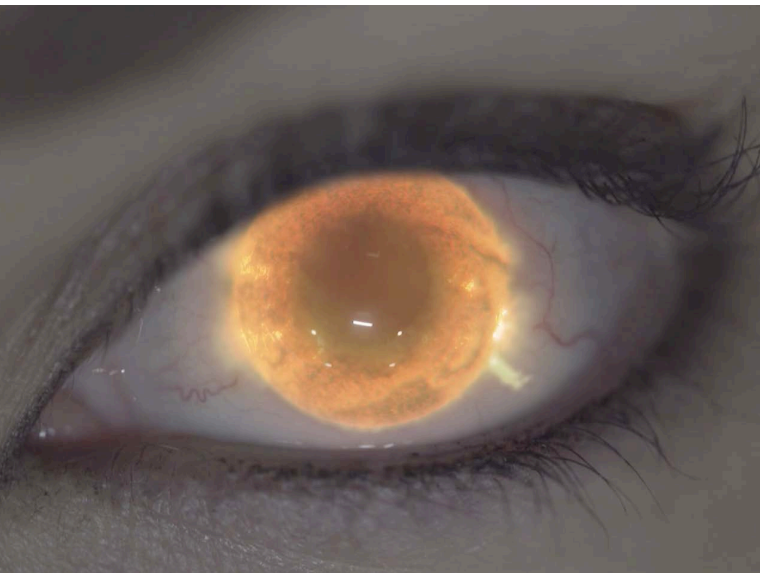


I have been suicidal throughout my life. I have gone through periods where I have been brought down by the crush of humanity and the sheer boredom of everyday life. Get up, eat, go to work, go to bed, rinse and repeat. Luckily, I have chosen to pursue things that push me in the right direction - towards the light - but they all revolve around risk or the outdoors (hunting, kickboxing, etc). I feel the most alive when I am out on the land and looking down the barrel of fear; of potentially life-threatening situations, whether it was surviving a wolf attack on a hunt or breaking down on my snowmobile in -35 and having to walk home. I have learned over the years to look towards fear and situations of true chaos as life-affirming. This is the lesson Mari has to learn to stay alive in the end. It is how I have stayed alive in the end.

What I also love about this story is that it is completely rooted in actual science and reality. Scientists predict there will be a devastating coronal mass ejection by 2021. The destruction of the occipital lobe can cause the auditory cortex to kick into hyperdrive and make sounds unbearable. As the sun dies, the CME's become more violent and it currently is in a polarity reversal. An elder up here actually killed a polar bear with a frying pan. There are certain strobe patterns that can cause psychotic breaks in some humans. A Japanese psychiatrist actually did come Yellowknife a few years ago to commit suicide by wilderness. Her remains were only found a year after she walked into the forest. Everything in this story has been minutely researched and written for plausibility because I find stories of this nature are much more unsettling. Truth is stranger than fiction.



I am also interested in taking something that is perceived to be beautiful and serene, the Aurora Borealis, and making it a ruthless, devastating and uncaring villain. There is something uniquely upsetting about not being able to trust nature all of a sudden, to be reminded of the overview effect, that we are hurtling through space and humans are completely beholden to what space throws at us. We are, at the end of the day, entirely powerless against nature and I think that the strange beauty of the Aurora is a really unique way to tackle this reality. Especially in the North and the Arctic in general where global warming is having an impact at a greater rate than anywhere else. Things are changing up here drastically year to year, the forests are burning up, strange ice conditions are causing deaths amongst seasoned hunters, animals are acting strange, the permafrost is melting and releasing ancient viruses. This is all real. Northerners are starting to suffer from environmental anxiety more than others because we see this stuff happening in front of our eyes every day.



This film is meant to be frantic, relentless, brutal and yet beautiful. Something along the lines of Uncut Gems, The Quiet Place and the Revenant. I want the viewing experience to be relentless and anxiety-ridden right from the start. Once the Aurora kicks in, I want the audience to be holding their breath so that, in the same way Mari doesn't get a break from the terror, neither should we, until the very end. This would be achieved with long takes in the style of The Tribe or Climax. Not necessarily making it look like it is all one take (Climax) but creating scenes that the viewer can't escape or take pause from, with edits. I want the viewer to remain locked in and suffer through the scene just as much as the character will have to. I want people to walk out of the theatre completely exhausted and literally worried to look up in the sky. I also want it to be lyrical so that it has the feel of a myth or legend. A neo-gothic dark fairytale of sorts. The landscapes on display here will be unlike anything audiences have ever seen, especially portrayed in this way. There will be a haunting and raw beauty to the film overall due to the backdrop that is the Northwest Territories.

Although this will fall into the horror genre, it is not about gore and certainly not schlock. The violence is intended to be real, sudden and un-glamorous. I want to study the reality of how someone like Mari, nearly blind and with no outdoor/arctic experience could survive a night like this. This is not the story of how a woman suddenly kills all the bad guys and becomes everyone's hero. The heart of this story is about her struggle to survive herself in the end. The real villain in *Orora* is Mari herself and her desire to die. It's about accessing one's inner heart of darkness and forcing something good

out of connecting with that taboo part of your soul, realizing that you are not like the rest. Like myself and many others out there, Mari gravitates towards the darkness, but through this savage night, it is revealed to her that she has an extra gear she didn't know existed before...a taste for danger. Living through death and destruction is traumatic but it is also exciting and something that shockingly breathes life back into her. This film recognizes that life and our desire to keep living it, doesn't always revolve around things that are cut and dry. Not everyone wants kids, or jobs or a nice house. Sometimes people need to see chaos reign to feel alive... and it's that chaos that keeps some of us interested in staying alive.

Last, I want this to be one hell of a ride from the moment an unkindness of ravens fall from the sky and smash into the face of an ice fisherman to the final scenes where Mari rolls into a destroyed downtown Yellowknife in a 1950's bombardier. To date, the films that have been made here in the North have been gentle, relatively generic stories. Family-oriented fare with safe storylines. I say that with the utmost respect because I've played a huge role in almost all the major productions that have come here in the last decade. But life in the arctic is often not like how it is being portrayed. It is also brutal and raw. This environment here might be beautiful but it will kill you in a second if you're not careful and that is also a story that deserves to be told too because it is just as much the truth. I want to make a film that is a wild ride, an edge of your seat horror and visual feast that makes audiences squeal with delight but also challenges them to think about what lurks deep down in their own hearts.

I have never received funding federally or territorially for any personal film project in my entire career. It has been entirely self-funded to date. Myself and my business/producing partner Pablo Saravanja have dedicated the last 10 years of our careers and company to helping others make their productions. Productions such as Red Snow, The Sun At Midnight, Arctic Air, Ice Pilots NWT, Elijah and The Rock Creature, Dene a Journey and the list goes on. We created a wildly successful film festival called The Dead North Film Festival where we have mentored and executive produced over 220 genre short films by Northerners. Many of these films have played all over the world at prestigious film festivals. After nearly a decade of primarily helping others achieve their visions up here, and proving that we can deliver feature film projects (Red Snow, Sun At Midnight) at a very high level, we would like the opportunity to put this massive amount of proven experience and deep connections in the industry to work on our first feature film. A film like this has never been made in the Territories of Canada by Northerners who live here and we believe this would be a very bold film for Telefilm to support.



PROMOTION AND DISTRIBUTION PLAN

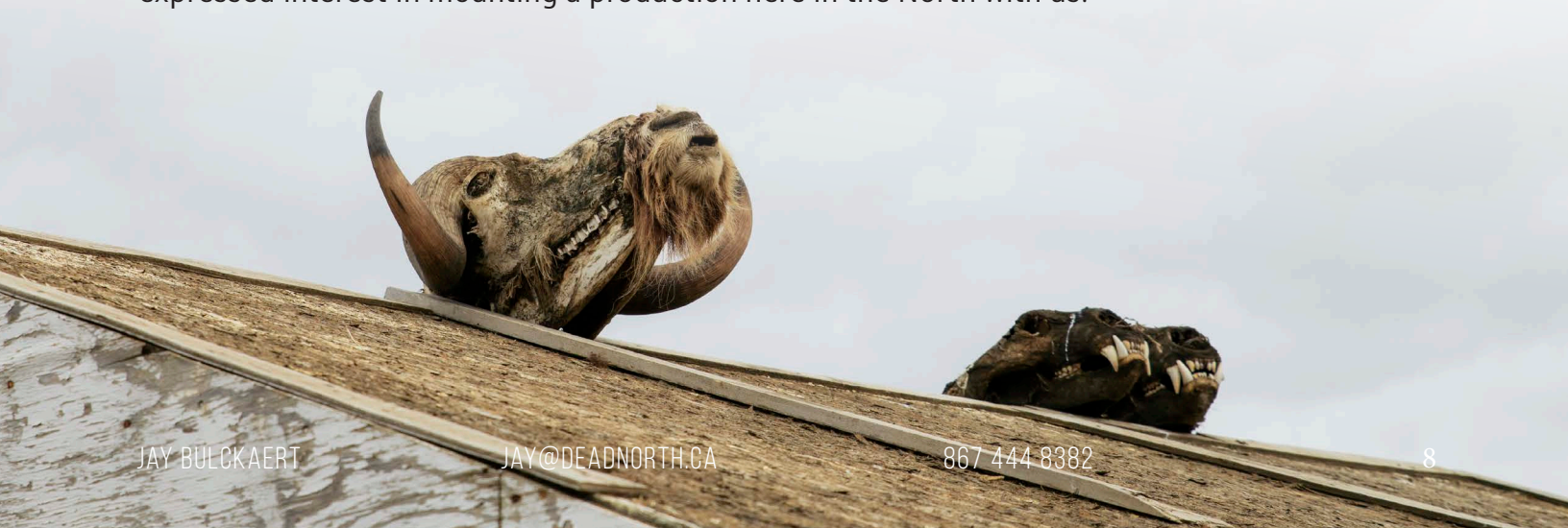
First, it's worth talking quickly about financing. For a film with a \$250,000.00 budget, we have already secured \$20,000 with a commitment from Dead North and Artless Collective each coming in for \$10K. The NWT Film Rebate program will come in for a 25% if all major expenditures happen in the North which it would in our case. This would qualify us for \$62,500.00. With Telefilms \$150,000.00, this would leave us with \$17,500 to raise which we plan to raise partially through a co-production deal with Outpost 31 and the Yukon Film Commission. Outpost 31 is already on board as co-producers, VFX and camera unit.

FRONTIÈRES (FANTASIA)

After a decade of building the Northern film industry and especially through 8 years of running the Dead North film festival, our connection to the Canadian/International genre film industry has strengthened. We currently have a dedicated relationship with Frontières (Fantasia) through Dead North where we are able to fast track projects into their pitch sessions at Frontières and this would be part of our financing and promotion/distribution plan. Having attended Frontières many times now, we know the type of project that is pitched there, primarily city-based fare and we know from the inside that they desperately are looking for more regional diversity, hence their Arctic Chills Program and their direct interest in Dead North. Orora will no doubt stand out due to its location and plotline. Frontières is where we would try to raise any gap funding needed but more importantly, find a viable distributor.

RAVEN BANNER AND XYZ FILMS

In attendance at Frontières there we will be looking at connecting with past Dead North judge, Andrew Hunt from Raven Banner as well as Todd Brown from XYZ Films, both of whom have expressed interest in mounting a production here in the North with us.



ULTRA 8 PICTURES/SHUDDER

Additionally, we have a dedicated connection to Colin Geddes who is one of the head curators for Shudder but also is the owner of Ultra 8 Pictures. Colin and his wife Kat have already consulted on Ōrora over the last year and would be keen to see it move forward as a feature. Not only would it be on the table for this film to stream on Shudder after its theatrical run but Ultra 8 pictures would also come on board to help further distribute this film.

FILM FESTIVAL CIRCUIT

With a completion date of December 2021, we would be gearing up to send this film to several key festivals. Berlinale will be first due to their focus on Northern films and Indigenous content (Role of Jerry will be played by an Indigenous actor) followed by Fantasia. Again, since one of the main characters in the film is Indigenous, we also will be submitting to imagineNATIVE. Another major focus will be submitting to Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival in order to get Ōrora into the Asian market.

DEMOGRAPHIC

We believe this film will appeal to filmgoers who gravitate towards more challenging fare. Horror is a wildly bankable genre right now and it is nearly a 50/50 split between genders who watch this content. This is a female-driven horror and we believe it will appeal to the 18-35 female demographic, we also think it will appeal to men as well since the action will be visceral and non-stop. This film will appeal to the crowds who saw and loved The Quiet Place, Midsommar, The Lighthouse, Uncut Gems and The Revenant. All of those films are very different in genre but they were all highly praised and did very well in terms of revenue. And like those films, this will be an R-rated film which in today's market has proven to be an asset for revenue generation.

JAPANESE/ASIAN MARKET

Lastly, since part of this film is in Japanese, featuring an Asian female lead, we also think that the timing right now with the success of Parasite is a bonus. This film was always intended to have an Japanese lead, that's how it was written 7 years ago and part of that is due to the simple fact that Northern lights tourism in Yellowknife has always been dominated by Asian tourists. For a town with 18,000 residents, we get about 20,000 tourists visiting us for the Northern lights. Now we are seeing more Chinese and Korean tourists as well. With Parasite, there is a new interest in Asian cinema in North America, especially challenging Asian films. Having a Japanese lead actor allows us to aim not just for a Canadian market but for an Asian audience as well and one that has proven it is highly interested in all things Northern, especially the Aurora Borealis.

CREATIVE TEAM

Our team is comprised of the top technicians and creatives between NWT and Yukon who have been at the forefront of all the major film and television productions in the last 10 years. Our own self funded short film, Conibear screened at Clermont Ferrand in 2015. The Changeling, a self-funded film by Outpost 31 (Camera, VFX and co-producers on this project) played at Cannes in 2019. We want to create a film unlike anything that has come out of Canada and most certainly would be the first of it's kind to come out of the Northern territories of this country. This would also be a potential co-production between both territories which will enable us to leverage more funds between both film commissions. Please review our team below as well as the additional TTW forms for Jay and Pablo as well as the attached CVs.



YELLOWKNIFE CREATIVE TEAM

ARTLESS COLLECTIVE:
WWW.ARTLESSCOLLECTIVE.COM

JAY BULCKAERT

Writer/Director

https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3420161/?ref_=nv_sr_2

KAREN WALTON

Co-Writer. Executive Producer

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0910550/>

PABLO SARAVANJA

Director of Photography/Co-Producer

https://www.imdb.com/name/nm5472387/?ref_=nv_sr_1

ANDREW SILKE

Editor

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3886601/>

YELLOWKNIFE SCIENTIFIC TEAM

JESSA GAMBLE is a published author known for her research into circadian rhythms and their impact on human and animal behaviour.

<https://magazine.utoronto.ca/research-ideas/science/jessa-gamble-circadian-rhythm-chronobiology-seasonal-affective-disorder-polyphasic-sleep/>

DR YOHSUKE KAMIDE is an Aurora Borealis expert from Nagoya University Japan speaks in Yellowknife NWT on why Yellowknife is the best place to watch the Aurora Borealis.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SF8ArIj8Cc>

JAMES PUGSLEY is an Astronomy North volunteer and has been observing space weather data and auroral behaviour across the North since 2003.

<https://astronomynorth.com/about-the-forecaster/>

WHITEHORSE CO-PRODUCING TEAM

OUTPOST 31
WWW.OUTPOST31.CA

NEIL MACDONALD

Production Manager/A-Camera

https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2078065/?ref_=nv_sr_1

JAYDEN SOROKA

Visual Effects/Colorist

https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1996854/?ref_=nv_sr_1

DAVID HAMELIN

Sound

https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2547707/?ref_=nv_sr_1

VANCOUVER FX TEAM

MATT AEBIG

Makeup and Practical Effects

https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3207188/?ref_=nv_sr_1

ERIN PETERS

Makeup and Practical Effects

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm5276015/>



PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

Below is based on the scenario of a successful application being notified by early summer of 2020. We would deliver the final film within 21 months.

2020	April-June	Writing/Revisions	Final and production drafts of script.	
	June/July	Notification of successful application. Financing	Apply to NWT Film commission for tax rebate. Apply to Yukon Film commission for co-production incentives. Submit project to Frontieres to pitch at Fantasia 2020 festival	
	August-October	All financing in place	\$250,000.00 budget in place	
2021	October - January	PRE-PRODUCTION	Phase 1	Casting. Locations scouted. Bombardier and sound stage secured. VFX tests for eye bursts. Practical effects in cold tested. Complete storyboard and pre-viz shoots to accomplish the film in several long takes.
	February		Phase 2	All locations, props and wardrobe secured.
	March		Phase 3	Full rehearsals with main cast. Build indoor sets for interior Bombardier and fishing shack scenes.
	April	Principle Photography	15 day shoot based in Yellowknife. 7 days are indoor soundstage shoots. (Bombardier and fishing shack scenes)	
	June/July	POST-PRODUCTION	Phase 1	Offline edit. Test Screenings.
	August		Phase 2	Picture lock
	September		Phase 3	VFX, colouring and final sound mix
December	Delivery	Delivery of Final film		

OUR PLAN TO SUCCEED

I know that Ōrora is ambitious and I know there's always a reticence to give Northerners a chance because of a perceived lack of experience or connection to the industry. That could not be further from the truth in my situation. I am sitting on top having successfully completed a \$2.5million production, Red Snow, as a line producer. That film is now winning awards right left and centre around the world (VIFF, AIFF, etc) Before that I was an associate producer and 1st AD on a \$250,000.00 production, Sun at Midnight, which was way more complicated than Ōrora. When that film was made (2015), we were all much less experienced than we are now and more to the point, we had to travel to a remote community that nearly derailed the film and budget. Combine that level of experience now with nearly 500 commercials, short films, documentaries and various film projects under my belt through my company Artless Collective, not to mention the mentoring of 220 Dead North films in the past decade, we are more than ready to tackle Ōrora. You can find the specific things we will use to our advantage on the next page.

- △ **This entire shoot will be completed within a 20km radius of our production studio in Yellowknife.** There will be no flying crew to remote communities or difficult locations to access. We've already scouted everything and made sure accessibility and proximity are on our side. The beauty of where we live is that in 10 minutes from my studio, we can be out on a frozen lake and have it look like it's at the end of the world.
- △ **We will be tight and lean as a crew.** We have worked with a dedicated NWT crew for years now. We have also worked with a dedicated Yukon crew (Outpost 31) for years as well. Between the two crews, 5 feature films and 4 television series have been successfully produced. We want to be a relatively small crew because in the outdoors in the cold as we have here, the more moving parts, the worse it is.
- △ **Half of this film will be shot indoors on a set which will make it extremely efficient and ensure we get our days.** It will help us overcome the challenges of shooting in -40 while still making it seem like the film was shot in those temperatures. We are the only production studio in the NWT that has a heated soundstage and a shop. We will be building the interior of the fishing shack scene upstairs on our soundstage and we will be rolling a Bombardier into our shop for all interiors of the Bombardier scenes. The fact that the characters need to cover the windows entirely so they don't see the Aurora is on purpose, it means we hardly have to do green screen as well. It's just smart.
- △ **I have had an initial conversation with Joe Buffalo (Hello Destroyer)** about playing the Indigenous elder. He's obviously younger but that role could be adapted to his age and he's expressed interest in coming aboard. He is originally from the NWT.



 **CLICK HERE TO SEE OUR PITCH VIDEO** 

<https://vimeo.com/396820295>

Password: Orora

**CLICK HERE TO VIEW HELIOS,
A 10 MINUTE VERSION OF WHAT ORORA WILL BE**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND CONSIDERATION OF ORORA.

