

Filming Locally: A 'Lovecraftian' Psychological Thriller

By Amberly Jane Campbell

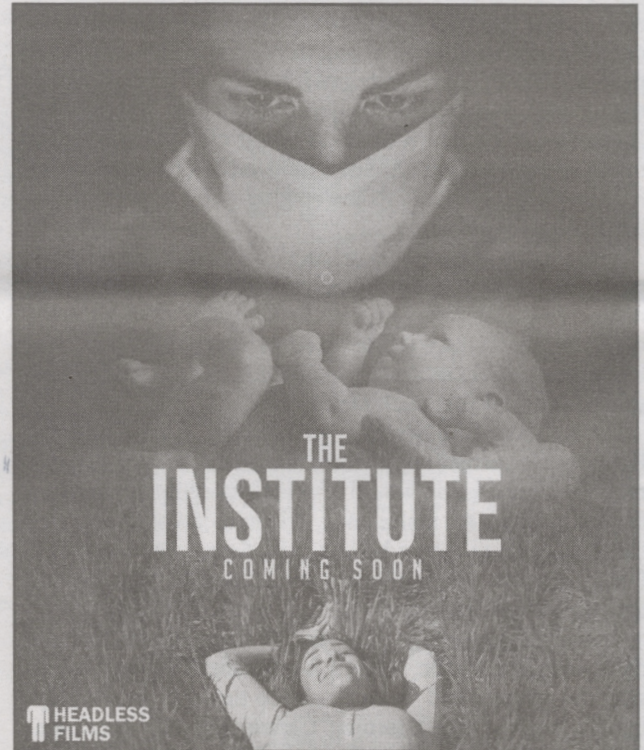
NAPANOCH – A “thinking-person’s” psychological thriller is being shot in our area, right now. The film is *The Institute*, and follows the story of Danny and Marie, a young couple who are desperate to have a child, but unable to conceive. They find a renowned reproductive scientist at his secluded estate... and from there, as you may imagine, things turn dark. There are experimental treatments with the eccentric Dr. Lands, twists and turns, a chase scene, and lots of questions about ethics and technology.

Filmed mostly in Napanoch, at Camp Sunshine Acres, and at his residence in Bloomingburg, the film has “Lovecraftian” influences, said writer, director and award-winning filmmaker Hamza Zaman. He said his main inspiration for writing the film was actually his home in Bloomingburg, which he bought a few years ago with his wife Chelsea Roth, who serves as head producer on set. “

The house is industrial and modern,” said Roth, “with interesting architecture.” Zaman said that with such a unique-looking abode, he would often ruminate: “What could be going on here?” And thus, the story was conceived (pun intended).

Roth and the team were ecstatic to find the camp in Napanoch, where the cast and crew are also lodging for the duration of the shoot. “We got so lucky finding this place,” she said. “They have gone above and beyond to help us — they are such great hosts.” Camp Sunshine Acres, a summer camp for kids from New York City, opened in 1917, and sits on 53 acres on Sportsman Road. The film crew is using the gym for a sound stage, and also filming on some of the trails around the property.

“The blessing was finding this space... The area has made the film.” Roth went on, praising Ellenville and all the helpful folk they’ve encountered while filming. “We went to the Reformed Church Thrift Store, in Ellenville, for some costumes and props. When we told them what we’re doing, they donated all the things we needed! Just another example of how Ellenville is a great place to film



This locally shot thriller is coming soon!

Courtesy image

and how supportive everyone is. They were like, ‘Hey, anything to help the community.’ It was extremely kind of them to do that.”

Rosendale resident Carl Welden, who serves as the production sound mixer, said he was excited about the project as well. “A production right in the region I live in is super appealing. I’m so glad they chose to shoot here in the Catskills.”

The Institute is also an exciting local production because of the talent and tech behind it. The CG artist

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and visual FX supervisor is Ethan Abramson. He's worked on other films with Hamza, and detailed what goes into creating a scene utilizing a "green screen," which allows filmmakers to easily replace the background of a scene. Often it is a combination of a lot of different kinds of effects. "You are creating and filling in the environment around real actors and real props, and with use of 3D models," he said. "This is the first time I've brought a virtual reality headset to a set. That's rare for an indie film."

In the age of COVID, they are also doing all they can to make sure everyone stays safe. A lot of the scenes were written for outdoor spaces. They employ masks, gloves and face shields; maintain distance; follow all the industry guidelines; and isolate actors and crew as much as possible. They also take everyone's temperatures every morning, and have had no issues. The crew has doubled up on roles, when possible, in order to use less crew members.

Roth praised the Hudson Valley Film Commission, saying they were so helpful with locations and talent. And the talent is stellar — Dr. Arthur



A scene from 'The Institute.'

Photo by Amberly Jane Campbell

Lands, played by Mark Lobene, is absolutely terrifying in real life. Danny is played by Ignacyo Matynia, and Marie is played by Victorya Brandart; neither is a stranger to upstate New York. "Everyone is having such a great time," said Roth.

The Institute is about midway through the shoot right now, and visiting the set it's obvious that the cast and crew are comfortable with each other — when there is good chemistry behind the scenes, it translates into a successful film. We can't wait!