

REEL SUSPECTS

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THE STRANGE ONES



A film by
CHRISTOPHER RADCLIFF & LAUREN WOLKSTEIN
115 min, USA, 2017
Color, HD & DCP
English

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SYNOPSIS

Following a family tragedy, Nick (Alex Pettyfer) and his apparent younger brother Sam (James Freedson-Jackson) are travelling through a desolate and remote American landscape, to an unknown destination. On the surface all seems normal, but what appears to be a simple vacation soon gives way to a dark and complex web of secrets. As relationships, identities, and realities shift in unexpected ways...

ABOUT THE DIRECTORS

Christopher Radcliff and Lauren Wolkstein are NYC-based filmmakers best known for their award-winning short films, including *The Strange Ones*, *Jonathan's Chest*, *Social Butterfly*, and *Cigarette Candy* which have screened at hundreds of film festivals worldwide including Sundance, SXSW, Rotterdam, Clermont-Ferrand, AFI Fest, and more. Their first feature film, *The Strange Ones* (an adaptation of their short film of the same name) premiered at SXSW 2017.





ABOUT THE PRODUCERS

ERIC SCHULTZ

Eric is an Indie Spirit and Gotham Award-nominated producer and founder of Relic Pictures. He has served as producer or executive producer on ten films in the last three years, which included executive producing three films that won awards at the 2016 Tribeca Film Festival.

In 2015, Eric produced *James White*, which won Best of NEXT at Sundance and was released by The Film Arcade to critical acclaim in Fall 2015. *James White* was nominated for two Gotham Awards and three Indie Spirit Awards. In 2016, Eric produced *Katie Says Goodbye*, which was selected to IFP's Narrative Lab and premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival. Later that year, Eric was named one of *Variety's* 10 Producers to Watch.

MICHAEL PRALL

Michael works as an independent producer on both film and commercial projects of all kinds. He has traveled extensively throughout the world for commercials and branded content. He is producing the upcoming feature films *Love After Love* and *The Strange Ones* and produced the indie-spirit award nominated film *The Mend*.

Michael has collaborated with Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders on political action campaigns, and in 2012, produced a series of short films for Al Gore's organization, The Climate Reality Project, which was awarded a Cannes Silver Lion for Film and Branded Content.

DANIELA TAPLIN LUNDBERG

Daniela Taplin Lundberg is founder of the recently launched Stay Gold Features, a New-York based finance and production company. She has produced over 25 features including the recent Sundance hit, *PATTI CAKE\$*, Cary Fukunaga's African child soldier film *BEASTS OF NO NATION*, Michael Showalter's *HELLO, MY NAME IS DORIS* starring Sally Field, and Lisa Cholodenko's *THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT*. Lundberg is a member of AMPAS and YPO and sits on the board of the Signature Theater in New York City.

SÉBASTIEN AUBERT (CEO, Adastra Films)

Sébastien has founded Adastra Films in 2008 at the age of 24. He has produced the feature film "Brides" (awarded at the Berlinale 2014), "The Strange Ones" (official competition SXSW 2017) and 15 short films, including 4 selections at Sundance and an innovative interactive project. In 2014 Sebastien receives the Young Producer award by France Televisions. During the 68th Cannes Film Festival, SCREEN puts him on the list of the "future leaders in film production". In 2015 Sebastien is among the "top 100 emerging CEOs of France" by a French business magazine.

SHANI GEVA

Shani Geva is the VP of Production and Development at Archer Gray, an independent film and TV production company based in NYC. She joined Archer Gray with President of Production Anne Carey, with whom she has had the privilege of supporting award-winning filmmakers such as Marielle



Heller, Nicole Holofcener and Mike Mills. She most recently produced the upcoming feature *The Strange Ones*, based on the award-winning short, directed by Lauren Wolkstein and Christopher Radcliff. Previously, Shani was a Creative Executive at Epoch Films, and an Executive at This is That, the iconic NY based independent film production company founded by producers Anne Carey, Ted Hope and Anthony Bregman. Since joining Archer Gray, Shani has been involved in the development and production of films such as *The Diary of A Teenage Girl*, *Mr. Holmes*, and *20th Century Women*.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

There is a line late in the film where two teenage characters are engaged in an awkward conversation that consists more of silence than words. "It's crazy to think," the girl says, "that you like, never really know a person. You know?"

The idea of "not knowing" is at the core of *The Strange Ones*. As filmmakers, we are most interested in stories that leave a strong impression but somehow stop short of surrendering a tidy explanation, and in characters that have secrets that may or may not ever be fully revealed. There is something more satisfying in this for us - as if the truth, by virtue of remaining unseen, can expand upon speculation and become something larger, more profound, and more fascinating than a straightforward answer. Perhaps we find also that this is a more accurate reflection of real life - so often we believe we understand something or someone in their entirety, only to find out that we have only really glimpsed the surface; and that beneath lies a world of complexity that we might never fully know. In that regard, *The Strange Ones* is a story that presents a rather simple surface, as well as a more complicated and mysterious hidden dimension.

While inspired by true crimes involving such elements as kidnapping and murder, this film is also a highly subjective vision of a teenage boy's ruinous introduction to the adult world and all that it encompasses. Ideas of sex, violence, love, hate, truth and lies, right and wrong all become twisted and intertwined in the view of Sam, the young character at the center of the film. He is someone who we find incredibly tragic and sympathetic - a child who is stumbling through very intense experiences, besieged with questions of identity, riddled with guilt, constantly searching for answers but finding only deeper and more fathomless questions all around him.

Shaping the film's narrative in a way that speaks to this was one of the biggest challenges that we faced. Perhaps it is ambitious, but our goal has been to craft the film so that every scene, every shot, and every line of dialog would comprise both a surface level dimension, as well as a hidden and secret one that is only glimpsed at key moments. And by starting the story in the middle of our two characters' journey, the viewer is invited to understand them through how these characters deal with what is in front of them at the present moment. It's intriguing to us as filmmakers to depict a relationship and characters in this way - allowing them to appear normal at first, but to become more and more puzzling the closer you look. In doing so, our ultimate goal is to reflect that aspect of reality that is so resonant to us - where impressions are amorphous, emotions are strongly felt, and questions are more intriguing than answers.



PRESS REVIEW

LOS ANGELES TIMES

'The Strange Ones' is an odyssey and a mystery'

by Katie Walsh, Jan 4th, 2018

"The Strange Ones" is a mysterious puzzle box of a film, anchored by a quietly mesmerizing performance by James Freedson-Jackson as a young boy on the road with an older companion. A bearded and bulked-up Alex Pettyfer is nearly unrecognizable as his traveling buddy, whom we're never sure is a protector or a threat.

Co-writers/directors Christopher Radcliff and Lauren Wolkstein slowly parcel out and then scramble information about the two. Are they brothers on a camping trip? Runaways? Fugitives? With his placid face and clear, blue-eyed stare, the young boy seems an innocent caught up with a dangerous man. It's not until much later that we begin to wonder about his faculties with the truth, and even his understanding of reality.

The film, which largely takes place in woods and farms and roadside motels, is beautifully shot by Todd Banhazl, with rich texture and filtered natural light that belies its digital provenance.

The first half of the film is eerie and controlled, while the second half tends toward narrative abstraction, timeline hops, dream sequences and moments of fantasy, erring on the side of confusing. But it's an artful, boundary-pushing debut from Radcliff and Wolkstein, with breakthrough performances from Freedson-Jackson, and Pettyfer, perhaps signaling a new direction in his career.



FILM SCHOOL REJECTS

'THE STRANGE ONES' REVIEW: A MASTERFUL AND UNFORGETTABLE TALE OF INNOCENCE LOST

By Fernando Andrés, Jan 4th , 2018

Lauren Wolskein and Christopher Radcliff's haunting tone poem goes places few films dare to go.

Perhaps no film at SXSW this year will leave audiences in a darker mental place than The Strange Ones, an expansion of the acclaimed 2011 short of the same name. The striking directorial debut of both Lauren Wolkstein and Christopher Radcliff, previously known for their incredible short films, continues their pattern of taking severe trauma and deconstructing it in deeply complex and cinematic ways. With the subject matter of films like Mysterious Skin and the subdued, nature-heavy craft of recent works like Krisha, the film rises above most indie features of its kind that tackle child abuse and accomplishes something far more sophisticated and sinister.

The film's titular "strange ones" are young Sam (played to perfection by James Freedson-Jackson, a star in the making who recently won the fest's Jury Award for Breakthrough Performance) and the older, rugged Nick (Alex Pettyfer, in a frightening and dangerously sensual performance). The two are introduced to us as brothers on a road trip, but things are most definitely not what they seem. Nearly every detail and moment in the first hour of the film hold crucial importance, whether it's a lingering close-up on Sam's bare back as he swims, or Sam feeding Nick a sandwich. By the time Sam delivers an eerie monologue to the owner of a motel where they are staying ("You don't know who he is," he warns her of Nick), viewers will know that this film's subject matter and the places it will go with it will be anything but easy.

Without giving too much away, the film is almost split in two in its structure, focusing first on the brothers' roadtrip and then the aftermath and deeper implications of its events. While this may suggest a weak tone shift for many, it's a brave and intelligent way to look at the film's themes, and both halves contain haunting and effective moments that give us a thorough look at the psyche of its characters. Both halves of the film depend largely on the chemistry between Freedson-Jackson and Pettyfer, and the gamble pays off: they're electric together, the danger and unsettling nature of their relationship slowly revealing itself both through their scenes together and Wolkstein and Radcliff's masterful usage of close-ups and inserts.

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Shot beautifully by Todd Banhazl and amplified by a gorgeous, moody score from the always-great Brian McOmber, The Strange Ones is able to elevate its performances and story with the masterful craft behind it. Indeed, the film is above all a tone poem, an elusive and ever-subtle evocation of the ugly and complicated emotions that develop between a pair as damaged and, well, strange as Sam and Nick. As the film elaborates on the horrifying truth behind their connection, it never goes for the easy way out; it is much bolder and braver than most films of its kind in how it approaches it. As with all great films, it takes an angle that we may have never thought of before, and one we may not soon forget.





INDIE WIRE

INDIE WIRE

Terrence Malick Meets Andrei Tarkovsky in Atmospheric Thriller 'The Strange Ones' — SXSW 2017 Review

By Eric Kohn Mar 11th, 2017

The feature-length debut of co-directors Christopher Radcliff and Lauren Wolkstein is an eerie coming-of-age story co-starring Alex Pettyfer and James Freedson-Jackson.

For a good 45 minutes, "The Strange Ones" is a bracing, unpredictable movie, building its disquieting suspense around unknown relationships and invisible threats. Eventually, the feature-length debut of co-directors Christopher Radcliff and Lauren Wolkstein reveals all its cards, and the full picture of this brief tone poem doesn't match the level of engagement generated early on. But its atmospheric sophistication holds strong throughout, channeling a wonder for the natural world reminiscent of Terrence Malick with an air of existential dread straight out of Andrei Tarkovsky. The result is a strong indication of filmmakers in command of their material, and eager to keep viewers guessing throughout.

See More[The 2017 IndieWire SXSW Bible: Every Review, Interview and News Item Posted During the Festival](#)

The minimalist setup opens with a pair of siblings on the run. Buff hunter Nick (Alex Pettyfer) drives through a rural landscape with his apparent younger brother Sam (relative newcomer James Freedson-Jackson, one half of the young pair fleeing a devious Kevin Bacon in the 2015 comic thriller "Cop Car"). Fleeting cutaways hint at a dramatic, violent showdown with their now-deceased father, his house engulfed in flames — but the cause of the incident remains shrouded in mystery, as does the precise nature of their relationship. Initially reminiscent of Amy Seimet's similar pulpy two-hander "Sun Don't Shine," the general sense of unease and desperation as the pair head toward an unknown destination looms larger than the precise set of events that sent them there.

Eventually, they arrive deep in the woods, where Nick finds a cabin and assures Sam they can stay there indefinitely, hunting for food and forgetting about the trappings of civilization. Without spoiling too much, it comes as no great surprise that Nick's utopian plan falls apart rather quickly, and Sam's forced to sort through the grim situation on his own terms. As "The Strange Ones" continues to reveal more details about Sam's past, the movie morphs into a fascinating coming-of-age tale in which the adolescent struggles to figure out how to explain his alienated mindset.

While Pettyfer makes for a sturdy paternal figure, Freedson-Jackson is an especially potent force, deepening the drama with a sturdy performance built around his distant gaze. It's matched by cinematographer Todd Banhazl's dreamlike imagery, which uses a "Badlands" template of deep greens and browns to enhance the earthy quality of this contained world. As the tension thickens over the course of the first act, it can be all too easy to settle into this placid environment, only to get shaken by another dark turn.

"The Strange Ones" is an expansion of the pair's 2011 short, and at times strains from the pressure to keep the material engrossing at feature length. However, Sam's plight makes for a steadily engaging genre exercise rooted in the challenges its young protagonist internalizes for much of the running

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time. Like Lenny Abrahamson's "Room," the grim story has less to do with literal events than a child's limited understanding of them, and how it opens up once he's pressed to express his true feelings.

Creepy, slow-burn portraits of alienation and discordant relationships have been a recurring motif in these filmmakers' other shorts: Radcliff's "Jonathan's Chest" involves a teenager confronting the abrupt reappearance of a brother with a mysterious past, while Wolkstein's "Social Butterfly" finds a thieving interloper wandering through a house party and pretending to know its hosts. In "The Strange Ones," Sam maintains an outsider status everywhere he goes, whether confronting his old community or encountering new rural characters, and there's ample tension developed around whether he'll manage to find his place in this alien setting or face a darker fate.

That question never reaches a satisfactory conclusion, and the movie ends just when it manages to complicate his scenario. By retreating from the open-ended narrative to explain all the backstory and reach a tidy conclusion, "The Strange Ones" loses much of its intrigue and ends on an abrupt note. But the journey there is compelling enough to make it worth the investment, offering further confirmation of two directors keen on bucking expectations, and likely to keep it up as they continue to hone their talent. "The Strange Ones" isn't a giant step forward for the pair, but it's just enough to prove they have the chops to take one.

Grade: B+



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CREW

Written and directed by: CHRISTOPHER RADCLIFF and LAUREN WOLKSTEIN

Produced by: ERIC SCHULTZ, SÉBASTIEN AUBERT, SHANI GEVA, MICHAEL PRALL and DANIELA TAPLIN
LUNDBERG

Executive producers: ANNE CAREY, PAUL FINKEL, OZO JACULEWICZ, MYNETTE LOUIE and JASON
POTASH

Edited by: CHRISTOPHER RADCLIFF and LAUREN WOLKSTEIN

Director of photography: TODD BANHAZL

Production designer: JULEN BIGURI

Costume designer: DANICA PANTIC

Music by: ROB LOWRY

Sound designer: BRYN NEUENSCHWANDER

Casting: JESSICA DANIELS

CAST

ALEX PETTYFER

EMILY ALTHAUS

GENE JONES

OWEN CAMPBELL

TOBIAS CAMPBELL

MARIN IRELAND

