

FILM / Annie Nocenti

Poison matzohs

“Welcome to Moisheville, a Kosher Community”

So reads a sign in the beam of my flashlight as I head into the woods of Accord. A few zombies scurry about in the dark, in felt fedoras and black coats; twirls of flapping side curls (payos) framing ghoulis faces. A crossbow leans against a tree, and I ask a zombie what it's for. “Gotta shoot zombie heart with a double bacon cheeseburger,” he deadpans, as the glue loosens on his left payot. It drops to the dirt. “Dairy and meat,” he says, “double non-kosher and corporate to boot.”

A pretty zombie in a pert yellow suit, Melissa Leo, well-known actress and Stone Ridge resident, comes out of the shadows. She looks fetching, despite the greenish lump growing out of her cheek. She tells me about a previous scene, where she trying to kill someone: “All my Yiddish and Hebrew left me! I couldn't think of a thing to say but ‘Didja eat?’ Then I got bashed in the head.”

And so it goes on the set of the micro-budget short *Night of the Living Jews*, written and directed by Oliver Noble of Accord with Sam Allen-Falconi of Krumville as cinematographer and co-producer. The film involves a plot to poison matzohs, and a family terrorized by hordes of Hasidic zombies. But not to worry, one girl survives.

Sam's father Tim Allen, who, as an arborist, can normally be found up a tree somewhere, is tending to several smoldering fires. His son Sam is staring intently at the camera monitor. A smoke machine cranks, smoke billows, then thins, delicately weaving through leaves like so many snakes. “I'm liking this... there! That's the shot,” declares Sam. The kid's got the eye. “I learned to shoot in high school,” he says, “and from going on shoots with [cinematographer] Mark Benjamin and also with Roy.” Roy Gumpel, in the tradition of multi-tasking on low budget films, is co-producer, gaffer, creative consultant and set photographer. Oliver learned filmmaking during his high school independent studies.

Valerie Fanarjian is the whirlwind producer that quarterbacked these two Rondout high-schoolers' ideas into a full-fledged, albeit shoestring, production. She zooms around like a Tasmanian Devil, doing, well, everything. I ask if I can mention the SAG actors, since this is a non-SAG production. “Sure!” she says. “We're going for the Olympic record in All Known Law Breakage on this production!” And where did she acquire the skills to produce a film? “I worked for Philippe Petit [Shokan's famous funambulist], I run a sawmill [Boiceville Lumber]. Heck, I could run this country, since Bush is clearly on permanent vacation. Producing a film? *Pbsbb!*”

The phrase “it takes a village” describes the set, which is also Oliver's home. In fact, almost everyone involved lives in the surrounding communities. Krumville author Kim Wozencraft (*Rush*, *The Devil's Backbone*) and artist Steve Heller of Woodstock's Fabulous Furniture were a pair of flesh-eating zombies. Phillip Levine, a Woodstock poet, was also in the film. Tonight's shoot is the death scene of the head rabbi zombie, played by Laurent Rejto, co-director of the Woodstock Film Festival. His son Adam Blaustein also stars in the movie.

The woods are littered with props, including a severed pig head, unlit cigarette stuck in its grin. A zombie strolls by and quips, “No animals were abused in the making of this film.” An earlier shot used a live pig, then Fleisher's Meats donated the pig head. Local businesses such as Winchell's Corners and Bread Alone donated to the food table. Woodstock gallery owner and main zombie Bahram Faroughi loaned the camera. But for the most part, when I ask where they got financing, I get answers like, “It's a Jewish production, there is no money!”

Two guys are placing a plank on top of a pile of rocks, where Rebbe Zombie Laurent has his final battle. They have to lift the plank to levitate him. “No storyboards?” I ask. Nope. “No run-throughs, no rehearsals on this stunt?” Nope. Phil Dorling, from Woodstock, the art department and props guy, rigs a gun to an eggbeater. He demonstrates how churning the eggbeater makes a cool clackity-clack noise. What's it for? “I dunno,” says Phil. “It's just cool.” You gotta love the chutzpah. This is the pure

joy of ad-hoc creativity.

How did Oliver talk his parents into letting him take over the family home? “I'm their retirement plan,” he says with confidence. Henri Falconi, Assistant Everything on the production, adds, “It's kind of a ‘loonies take over the asylum’ production.” Inside, Oliver's dad Charles is making dinner for the zombies. A dozen of them sit around waiting to be fed, looking horrific and bored, including one sporting a tiny Hitler mustache.

Why did Charles let his kid take over the roost? “He promised me a cottage on his estate when he makes it big,” he quips. A glance in Oliver's bedroom reveals posters for *The Ring* and *The Exorcist*. The overheard comments in the kitchen-slash-wardrobe are priceless: “I get eaten tonight, d'you?” “I'm the only one who lives,” sighs Sierra DeCrosta. “I heard a goose-stepping zombie is coming. Hey, is there such a thing as zombie Torah-walk?” “I'm just gonna turn my shoe sideways and drag that leg,” says zombie Dash Stratton.

I ask cast and crew if they're worried about how the film's provocative title might be perceived. “Think of it as a Barbara Streisand Hebrew National Hotdog kinda thing,” says one zombie. Another adds, “It's a Jewish zombie noir comedy homage to *Night of the Living Dead*.”

“We're making a funny movie with no deep meaning,” says Charles Noble, “and we hope it's funny enough that it isn't hijacked by someone looking to find something offensive in it. The thought crossed my mind that this is potentially incendiary, but as long as it's funny, it'll be fine.”

Zombie movies have a tradition of tropes and riffs. If it's a *Beach Blanket Bingo Zombie* movie, the zombies will be in bikinis and slathered in ghoulis sunscreen. If it's *Speedway Zombie*, the zombies will



be dripping with car parts and slinging hubcaps. In *Night of the Living Jews*, the zombies have bekishes, tichels, payos, tsitses and yarmulkes, and are killed with cheese and bacon. No offense given, none taken. Consider the Broadway hit *The Producers*, and “Springtime for Hitler.”

I head outside just in time to watch the magnificently be-robed zombie Laurent as his side curls twirl (literally two guys spinning attached strings) so he can levitate like a perverse doppelganger to the Flying Nun. His Freddie Krueger claws clutch at his chest, his kutchma-slash-Viking helmet falls as he screams, with great thespian pizzazz, “I think I'm gonna plotz!” and crashes to the ground.++

MYTH:

You need 20% down to buy a home.

FACT:


0% can move you right in!

No down payment? No problem.

With MHV, we have mortgage products for almost every situation.

Some programs even offer financing up to 103% to help you cover additional closing costs.

To find out more and to see if you qualify, ask for Scott Jordan, who can explain our programs and get you started toward home ownership.



MHV

MID-HUDSON VALLEY FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

Serving everyone who lives, works, worships or attends school, and businesses & other legal entities, in Ulster, Dutchess & Orange. New members welcome!

800.451.8373 • www.MHVFCU.com

Member savings federally insured to \$100,000 by the NCUA, a US Government Agency. Equal Housing Lender.

Kingston • Saugerties • Red Hook • Highland • Poughkeepsie • Newburgh • Middletown