

## HAF 08 In the Next Life



**COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:** Cambodia

**GENRE | FORMAT | LANGUAGE | RUNNING TIME:** Drama, Suspense, Science Fiction | Digital Format | Khmer | 90 mins

**DIRECTOR:**

Jake WACHTEL

**PRODUCER:**

Valerie STEINBERG

**HAF GOALS:**

Funds, Co-producers

**BUDGET:**

US\$ 500,000

**SECURED BUDGET:**

US\$ 200,000

**DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY**

First Feature Director

## ONE-SENTENCE SYNOPSIS

In the near future, a girl detective living in the slums of Phnom Penh investigates her friend's past life visions, and uncovers a sinister conspiracy involving literal, scientific reincarnation.

## SYNOPSIS

Srey Leak is a whip-smart, 13-year-old orphan living in the slums of Phnom Penh. She trusts no one and looks out only for herself. But she loves solving mysteries, so she agrees to help Leng Heng, a boy in her class who is beset by past-life visions of being fabulously wealthy. Together they search for Spectacles, a woman from the visions whom they hypothesize to be a kru khmer, a practitioner of traditional Cambodian magic.

As they untangle the mystery, Srey Leak slowly warms to Leng Heng's kindness and begins to appreciate the community they call home. But their world is turned upside down when they find Spectacles, who presides not over a temple, but over a laboratory.

There, they learn that Leng Heng has been the subject of an experimental procedure for scientific reincarnation; Spectacles has implanted the memories of Vattanak, a visionary Khmer businessman, into Leng Heng's head. As the activation procedure begins, Srey Leak discovers that in the process of becoming Vattanak, Leng Heng's own consciousness will be displaced. The two children must decide what they stand for, and how far they are willing to go to fight for it.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

*In the Next Life* emerged directly from experiences and insights I gained spending a year teaching filmmaking to slum youth in Phnom Penh, through an organization called Filmmakers Without Borders. The film explores issues of development/ westernization and displacement of poor communities through the symbolic lens of science-based reincarnation.

Most onscreen depictions of slum life, from *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) to *Queen of Katwe* (2016), often parade a litany of the most heinous sufferings imaginable (we might call it "poverty porn"), while encouraging us to root for the protagonist to escape their plight (and by extension, their community). But a year of spending time with my film students in their community demonstrated how this sensational, pity-inducing portrait is deeply inaccurate. These communities encompass wisdoms and joys that are completely unaccounted for by urban development.

My goals are to portray with humanity, complexity, empathy, and normalcy the lives of those living in slum conditions; and to investigate how this world is treated/ viewed by development and "progress." I am from Silicon Valley, so I am no stranger to well-intentioned but incredibly myopic evangelizers of progress. I hope to engage audiences with this vital social issue through a wildly entertaining Buddhist sci-fi thriller.

## DIRECTOR

### Jake WACHTEL

Jake Wachtel graduated from Stanford University (Psychology and Film Studies) and has specialized for the past five years in making short documentaries for nonprofits and social impact ventures. His work has been featured on NYTimes.com, Wired, NPR, and MSNBC. In 2015, he moved to Cambodia to teach a year-long class in filmmaking to children living in slum communities through the organization Filmmakers Without Borders. His Phnom Penh-set short film, *The Foreigner Here* (2015), premiered at the Cambodia International Film Festival alongside works of a new wave of young Cambodian directors. He now calls Phnom Penh his second home.

## PRODUCER

### Valerie STEINBERG

Originally from Los Angeles, Valerie Steinberg attended Yale University where she earned her Bachelor's degree in Philosophy and Chinese. Among her film producing credits are *Hair Wolf* (dir. Mariama Diallo, 2018), world premiere at Sundance Film Festival; *Fry Day* (dir. Laura Moss, 2017), world premiere at SXSW Film Festival; and *Collective: Unconscious* (segment: "Everybody Dies!") (dir. Frances Bodomo, 2016), world premiere at SXSW Film Festival. She is the Consulting Producer of Ash Mayfair's Vietnamese period film *The Third Wife* (2018), which took part in HAF 2016, HAF Work-in-Progress Lab 2017, and HAF Goes to Cannes 2017.

## PRODUCTION COMPANY

### Valerie Steinberg Productions

Valerie Steinberg Productions is a New York-based film production company. Valerie Steinberg is the Consulting Producer of Ash Mayfair's Vietnamese feature film, *The Third Wife* (2018), which won the HAF Award (non-Hong Kong project) and the White Light Post-Production Award at HAF 2016, and took part in HAF Work-in-Progress Lab 2017 and HAF Goes to Cannes 2017. Additional credits include *Hair Wolf* (2018, Sundance world premiere), *Fry Day* (2017, an Academy Award qualifying short that won awards at SXSW, Tribeca, Melbourne, Palm Springs, among other festivals), *Sketch* (2017), *The Poet and the Professor* (2017) and *Everybody Dies!* (2016).