

ASHES UNDER THE SAND

a film by Richard LePow



When a routine “clean up” goes wrong, three low-level criminals hide from the inevitable at a cabin in the woods, but tensions in the group reach a boiling point as their pursuers close in and old wounds reopen.





SYNOPSIS

World-weary and saving up for a new life, Ray leads a South Brooklyn “cleaning crew”, getting their hands dirty so their criminal higher-ups don’t have to. But when Frank, a local mob boss, forces the crew to clean a scene for his sadistic brother, the job crosses a line. Joey and Carly Boy—Ray’s closest friends and partners—refuse. Frank’s Brother gives them an ultimatum: clean or die. They choose, instead, a third option: kill him and disappear.

Using his nest egg and connections within the seedy underworld that raised him, Ray buys them time at a remote woodland property run by Tech, a recluse hiding his own dark secret. Amidst their serene backdrop, Joey and Carly Boy grow anxious over their loved ones back home, and Ray can no longer disassociate from his past sins. Tensions boil over, and loyalties unravel as the consequences of their line of work begin to slip through the cracks.

Meanwhile, violence and chaos erupt back home as Frank creates a trail of blood in his search for answers. Eventually, the crew will learn how far he is willing to go for revenge, and Ray must ask himself how far he’s willing to go for redemption.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I wrote Ashes Under The Sand after working the graveyard shift for three years and directed the proof-of-concept short film during the wave of massive layoffs despite CEOs making record profits. Like so many others, I know how it feels to be overworked, underpaid, and overlooked at the workplace. When the world came to a grinding halt in 2020, many people made major career changes or took advantage of reduced housing prices, but the essential workers bore the brunt of the burden. We banged pots and pans as they delivered our food and packages and tended to our loved ones in the hospital.

Ashes Under The Sand is a tense neo-noir that shows how unchecked, growth-at-all-costs capitalism crushes everyday people and what happens when they finally stand up to those who benefit from the system. It follows the overlooked workforce, without whom the criminal underworld would collapse, and the people keeping their hands clean at the top would cease

to exist. The script pays homage to the crime films that inspired it, where audiences root for protagonists who exist in a grey area, quiet tension is undercut by brute force, and characters barely recognize themselves when it's all over.

Pull back the curtain on these themes even further, and you'll find a story exploring the dramatic and tragic end of lifelong friendships. Moving on from friends isn't easy, but it's a part of life. At some point, we start to build our own lives or go down different paths, and not everyone is coming along for the ride. Caring for parents, moving away, or starting a family often takes precedence. Sometimes, we just grow apart for no particular reason. When we move forward, what do we leave behind?

SETTING



SOUTH BROOKLYN

New York City gets over 60 million visitors a year. Most of them are coming for the glitz and the glam, the food, and the fashion. Some may even live to see their name in lights—but they'll never know about the grit and the grime that lies beneath the layer of broken dreams.

Head down to where the train can't take you, away from the high-rises and button-downs, and you'll find kids playing handball while their parents keep their heads down at dead-end jobs. The ones who never get the credit they deserve from their counterparts in the high-rises.

Success is nice, sure, but survival is a skill. This is South Brooklyn. If you were born here then chances are you're gonna die here.





UPSTATE NEW YORK

Where the city people come for a sigh of relief. To take a break from the 9 to 5 grind. Full of nature, boutique diners, and somewhere you can actually see the stars at night, things move a little slower here.

On paper, it's a pretty peaceful place. The perfect setting to lay low until things cool down. Plenty of New Yorkers come upstate to unwind and forget about the troubles waiting for them back home, but what happens when those troubles catch up to you?

Dig a little deeper, past the facade of sprawling greenery and roadside shops, and Upstate may be more like South Brooklyn than The Crew realizes.





CHARACTERS



RAY

Calm, cool, and collected, Ray is the leader of The Crew. When the phone rings, Ray answers. When The Crew is on the scene, Ray delegates, and when shit hits the fan, his friends look to him for the next move. Born and raised in South Brooklyn, Ray longs to be anywhere but here. He squirrels away cash after each job, but for what, he doesn't know.

He's been cleaning for as long as he can remember, and longer than he'd like. And while he may tell you he yearns for something more, his actions say otherwise. Maybe he cares too much for his friends, or maybe it's because even if he were free from this life, he wouldn't know what to do with that newfound freedom.





JOEY

Friends with Ray and Carly Boy for as long as he can remember, Joey takes direction well but always makes sure to have some fun on the job when he can. The work isn't pretty, but it pays pretty well.

Sure, Joey is loyal to his best friends, but he'll do anything for his girlfriend, Sandra. Once these high school sweethearts save up enough money, they're out of there—packing up and living the quiet life that doesn't exist in South Brooklyn. Sandra knows what Joey does for a living, and Joey knows she knows. Friends mean a lot to a guy like Joey, but love and a bright future with the woman he loves matter even more.

CARLY BOY

The youngest of The Crew, Carly Boy only wants three things out of life: to take care of his dementia-stricken mother, see the Mets win a World Series, and answer the phone when someone calls with a job. Too bad those last two are never gonna happen.

Ray and Joey took him under their wing as a kid when they saw him getting picked on at school, and ever since then, the kid has kept things light for them with his sense of humor and naiveté, even if he gets on their nerves sometimes. Everybody needs someone like him around, though.

Carly Boy lives very much in the now, lacking the maturity to think about his future the way his friends do. In such a dark world, this kid is the one flickering light.





TECH

A former hitman, Tech is one of the lucky few to have made it out, but it wasn't easy, and he paid a high price. Tech had a wife and a bright future ahead of him, but all of that came crashing down when he told his boss he was out. This isn't the type of job that accepts letters of resignation, and management doesn't like hearing "no." Hell came down on all sides, and Tech was the last man standing. But it's lonely being the last man.

He managed to retreat to an off-the-grid location in upstate New York and traded his guns for a garden and bullets for biennials. Turning over a new leaf isn't easy, and the arrival of The Crew is a harsh reminder that old habits die hard.

FRANK

A mid-level neighborhood boss, Frank is known in the organization for his depravity. He'll hold onto whatever power he has by any means necessary, and whenever he feels it slipping through his grasp, one quick act of brutality usually does the trick.

When Frank takes notice of Ray and his friends, he keeps them on retainer. In short, he feels he owns them, and he'll do whatever he has to to keep track of his property.





FRANK'S BROTHER

Known for having a few loose screws, Frank's Brother is fresh out of the joint and ready to get in on the action. That doesn't always mean earning money, though. His violent tendencies have gotten him both in and out of trouble over the years, and working as a contract killer is the perfect line of work.

Having been gone for so long, it's only a matter of time before he goes too far too soon and crosses paths with someone who doesn't appreciate the way he works.



WRITER/DIRECTOR

RICHARD LEPOW

Richard LePow is a writer and director living in Brooklyn. He began his film career at the award-winning Firelight Films in 2016 as a production assistant, helping create over a dozen short documentaries for permanent display at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. He worked as a script coordinator at Left/Right before venturing out as a freelance writer in 2020, and wrote the short film *Overexposed*, which won the Audience Award at the 48 Hour Film Festival in 2022. After reaching 111% of their crowdfunding goal in 2024, Richard wrote and directed the proof-of-concept short film *Ashes Under the Sand*, which premiered at the Big Apple Film Festival in 2025.

Growing up playing handball in the empty concrete lots of Mill Basin, he was surrounded by people like Ray, Joey, and Carly Boy—forever destined to live at home, work thankless jobs, and wear two hoodies at once in the dead of winter. Richard is looking forward to shining a light on his old neighborhood, which has managed to fly under the radar in an ever-changing city.



PRODUCER

JONATHAN ARGUDO

Jonathan Argudo is a New York City-based producer and partner at Dangerworks, a film and television production company. He produced the second season of the Webby-nominated Facebook Watch series *Apocalypse Now This*. Jonathan has also produced short documentaries, commercials, and branded content for Condé Nast, City Harvest, and NYC.gov.

In 2014, his short film *Suicide* was selected for the New York International Film Festival, and in 2022, his short film *Overexposed* took home the Audience Award at the 48 Hour Film Festival. After reaching 111% of their crowdfunding goal in 2024, Jonathan produced the proof-of-concept short film *Ashes Under the Sand*, which premiered at the Big Apple Film Festival in 2025.

Jonathan is also the producer and co-host of the *Wrap Drinks* podcast, where film and TV professionals share the good, the bad, and the weird of working in the industry.



THANK YOU

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