

## Review: Hauntingly effective ‘Falcon Lake’ quietly pairs coming-of-age tale with ghost story



Joseph Engel and Sara Montpetit in the movie “Falcon Lake.” (Yellow Veil Pictures)

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JUNE 2, 2023 8:48 AM PT

A hauntingly effective take on the venerable cabin-in-the-woods genre inspired by Bastien Vivès’ graphic novel, “A Sister,” [Charlotte Le Bon’s](#) assured first feature cloaks its themes of adolescent anxiety and yearning under a pervasive melancholy.

What starts off as a routine summer trip to the country for 13-year-old Bastien (Joseph Engel) and his family, who travel from Paris to the rural Quebec cottage of an old friend of his mom’s, gradually changes course with the introduction of their host’s 16-year-old daughter, Chloé (Sara Montpetit).

While Chloe comes off as a typical moody teen who's drawn to macabre subjects (there's a prominently placed poster of [Hitchcock's "Psycho"](#) on her bedroom wall) as she and Bastien begin to spend time together, a relationship takes root despite their age difference.

There may be only a few years between them, but in terms of where they are on the spectrum of physical and emotional development — baby-faced Bastien's barely out of boyhood, Chloé's on the cusp of adulthood — that gap is considerable.

Initially, wine-swigging, cigarette-smoking Chloé appears to be enjoying her role in Bastien's corruptibility but subsequently becomes drawn to his innocence, eventually allowing her own vulnerability to be exposed as she confesses her deepest fears about not belonging and being alone.

For his part, affable, sweet-natured Bastien's coming of age is allowed to blossom organically, despite the added tension of having to share a bedroom with the object of his budding desire.

At first, writer-director Le Bon playfully teases the audience with hints of supernatural occurrences surrounding the lake, but the early flirtation, like that between the two young leads, soon drifts into decidedly murkier waters.

Relocating the original backdrop from France's seaside Brittany to the Laurentides, located northwest of Montréal, Le Bon and cinematographer Kristof Brandl, shooting in grittier 16mm film, take full advantage of the natural elements at hand, including the clouds and mist, the restless waves and imposing dead trees.

Echoing those visuals is a soundscape of chirping cicadas and falling rain, paired with an insistent, droning score by composer Shida Shahabi, heightening the increasing heaviness in the atmosphere.

Even before those darker undertones take relentless hold, there's an unfaltering, genuine honesty to both the handling of the material and the tender, believable performances of her actors, whose actual ages qualify them as bona fide teens, unlike those often cast in mainstream productions.

By the time the film's parallel genres finally intersect in a quiet gasp of a closing sequence, "Falcon Lake," which had its 2022 premiere at Cannes' prestigious Directors Fortnight, has already announced itself as a work of surprising, commanding depth.