

THE PHOENIX

No man's land

A vivid portrayal of Maine coast life

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OUT TO SEA: Hildreth ruminates.

With broad, beautiful shots of Vinalhaven, Thomas Hildreth and Ian McCrudden's film *Islander* chronicles the life of an unfortunate Maine fisherman. As the film begins, it becomes apparent that "main-landahs" are encroaching on the lobstermen's turf. The film's hero, Eben Cole (Hildreth), takes it upon himself to defend his territory, but causes a terrible accident resulting in the death of a young man.

He is arrested and forced to plea guilty to manslaughter, he loses his boat, *Fancy Stuff*, and the respect of his wife Cheryl (Amy Jo Johnson), his daughter Sara (Emma Ford), and his father (Larry Pine). When he returns five years later, only his mother is there to greet him.

“You know, Eben, people don’t forget what you did. They still talk about it. You know the island chatter, folks and stories about what you were into,” she warns. He finds his house dilapidated, with the word “killer” graffitied on the door. For the rest of the movie he tries his best to get his life back.

“I was attracted to the movie because it’s about people. A good person who behaves badly for good reason, and has to deal with the consequences of his actions in the context of a community. I was sort of into that ‘no man is an island’ thought,” explains director and co-writer, Ian McCrudden. Hildreth came to McCrudden with the idea of writing a film that took place on Vinalhaven.

“I was inspired by this area that I spent time in as a child. I thought it would make a very dramatic backdrop for a story,” says Hildreth. The two had first met because they shared the same agent in Los Angeles. Then McCrudden cast Hildreth in a play he later adapted to film, *Mr. Smith Gets A Hustler*. Soon after, McCrudden and Hildreth began writing their script.

Islander premiered at the Los Angeles Film Festival, opened this year’s Maine International Film Festival, and has played at both the Williamstown and Montana film festivals. It is an especially important film for Mainers to see, not only because it is a movie that powerfully portrays lobstermen and the fishing community of Vinalhaven, but also as a Maine-made film that markets our state nationwide. (Recently, Governor John Baldacci launched an incentive program to bring moviemakers to Maine; similar programs have worked well elsewhere in New England.)

The cast is a diverse group of actors, some experienced thespians from LA and New York, and many green Maine locals. Falmouth-born Hildreth said of his lead role, “it’s almost like remembering a dream the next day. It’s so much layered in the subconscious after years of writing and sort of living with a character.”

McCrudden cast a number of non-actors (such as Ford, of Gorham, and Zack Batchelder of Aroostook County, as Wyatt, the son of Eben's love interest) because “they don’t act. If you cast the right kind of person, and they have the

feel, and there's honesty to them, you can communicate that they just need to simply live in the situation that you create." Like their Maine actors, Hildreth and McCrudden's genuineness comes off well. The people, the town, the story all seemed very real, in part because it is based on real stories from Maine fishermen. McCrudden didn't have to work too hard to keep the film authentic: "I didn't build a lot of sets, and I didn't create things. I went to the places and shot them there. I got the Coast Guard there, I shot in the diner, I shot in somebody's house."