

Q&A: Rob Himebaugh on his Bigfoot short, "EAGLEWALK"

Written by Justin Beahm
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Writer/director Rob Himebaugh's thesis film *EAGLEWALK* has been stomping its way across North America in a momentum-gathering festival run, leaving a strong buzz in its wake. The film aims to revive the Sasquatch subgenre, taking an often playfully handled beastie and returning it to its sinister roots. This is what a Bigfoot movie should be. Frightening, taut, and fun.

I first encountered the 30 minute short film at the B-Movie Celebration in Indiana in the summer of 2012, and was incredibly impressed. Simply put, Himebaugh has managed to make Bigfoot scary, and he has accomplished the feat with a blend of nostalgia-drenched reverence for a summer camp setting, grounded characters that elevate the standard tropes, and a genuinely unsettling creature. *EAGLEWALK* is a brave and gorgeous movie that defies category and expertly walks the line between horror and the story of an emotional personal journey.

Himebaugh spent a few minutes chatting with FANGORIA about his award-winning short, his love for the cinematic work of Sean Cunningham and Tom Savini, and how the feature length version of *EAGLEWALK* is ready to roll, and ready to break even more new ground in a sadly neglected subgenre.

FANGORIA: When did you fall in love with the genre?

ROB HIMEBAUGH: *FRIDAY THE 13TH* is my favorite movie of all time. It is one I saw when I was about eight or nine years old, and I wore out my VHS of it after that. I was at my public library one day, and found Tom Savini's *GRANDE ILLUSIONS* book, which had the whole behind the scenes stories behind *FRIDAY THE 13TH*, *CREEPSHOW*, *DAWN OF THE DEAD*, and the rest. To my parent's chagrin, I became obsessed with horror movies.

FANG: What clicked for you with *FRIDAY THE 13TH*?

HIMEBAUGH: There is just something about the tone, the setting, the way people are

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dispatched. It really stuck with me over the years, and colored my taste in films ever since. The classic horror films that have stuck with me have a sense of place. There is a dread to the locations, the music, the coloring, the isolation of the characters. All of that works to elevate the horror. The slow burn beginning only adds to that and allows you to settle into the environment and get to know the characters.

The quality of the image on these old films has a lot to do with them feeling forbidden. Like they were something I shouldn't have been seeing. I grew up watching most of these on copied VHS.

FANG: Why Bigfoot?

HIMEBAUGH: Because I was so obsessed with FRIDAY THE 13TH, I became a camp counselor. I wanted to be at Camp Crystal Lake. I sought out the most rustic camp on the East Coast. Somewhere inside of me, I wanted to tell a story that took place in a summer camp. I was trying to come up with a story for a horror film, something with a killer in the woods, but I didn't want to get that close to FRIDAY THE 13TH. I wanted something that could exist in the woods, and Bigfoot was a logical alternative.

I had yet to see a good Bigfoot movie, so why not try to make Bigfoot scary again? Why not try to create this sense of place, in a location I am entranced by, with a creature people really haven't seen that much in movies in a horrific sense

FANG: How did you get things off the ground?

HIMEBAUGH: I started with the tagline, 'Bigfoot attacks summer camp,' and that was it. I started selling that idea to people, and it opened up all the doors I wanted to explore. I made the movie take place in the 80s, more or less successfully, and I wanted to play with all the stereotypes from that time, but put them on their heads. My intentions were to take the material and elevate and give people a movie monster that they've not necessarily seen before.

Alone in the woods, in dilapidated buildings, with this locomotive of a monster that can just

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break down the door? That is one of the scariest situations you could possibly be in.

As much as it is a horror film, it is a valentine to childhood and innocence lost. I think Elliot's arc and turn into darkness, as limited as it is in a short film, parallels the story of the camp and how it closed and has been abandoned. He and the camp are both experiencing rebirth.



FANG: Let's talk about the Bigfoot suit...

HIMEBAUGH: It is hard to make a man in a suit work. Our budget wasn't really big enough to create a suit that did all things I wanted, like move fast, and where it doesn't look like a cone head. It's tricky because we want to reinvent Bigfoot, but not reinvent him to the point where he is unrecognizable and becomes just some crazy wood-dwelling demon.

We auditioned body types. I had guys coming in and I'd play some music, and they would act for me, moving their body. We had short and stalky, really tall, and at a certain point you reach a crossroads. The classic Bigfoot look is a big guy with a lot of muscles with a lumbering quality. We wanted him to be as tall and broad shouldered as possible. I think being big, it would be unstoppable in a way that a smaller version wouldn't be.

When we were looking at the feet, we studied actual Bigfoot prints. My makeup artist made a mold that was the exact dimensions and shape of these footprints that you always see in magazines. His feet are actually Bigfoot's legendary footprints.

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Again, since we had a limited budget, we had to compromise on the vision, and our makeup artists did a great job with the money we had. You can design the suit as good as you want to, but the other half of it is how you shoot it. That is how you sell any monster.

I especially like the scenes in the shower where he is cloaked in darkness. Then there is the waterfront scene, which was shot in broad daylight and when the actor would move, you could see the top of their head wiggling and stuff. At that point we've played our horror and suspense card, and at this point it is no longer about the horror of the film. If the audience does see a man in a suit, that's okay, because at this point it isn't about Bigfoot anymore. It is about Elliot's retribution.

FANG: Student film projects can be a challenge. What was the shooting experience like?

HIMEBAUGH: I wanted to put every dollar on the screen, and to use as many bells and whistles as I could muster, on a very limited dollar. We shot for ten days, and most of the money went to locations and food. The actors were housed in the cabins.

When I read up on FRIDAY THE 13TH, I thought it was a romantic way to make a movie—living in the cabins, and unwinding in the cabins after a long day of work. There is no other way that I'd like to make a movie, other than sleeping in a cabin in the woods, and running around having fun with my best friends. I was insistent that we tried to duplicate that same process.

We cooked in the commissary, we ate all our meals in the dining hall, and on the off days we would go swimming. It was a blast. The experience was exactly what I wanted. It was great.

FANG: Which camp was it at?

HIMEBAUGH: We shot at two different camps in the Angels National Forest. We really wanted that high altitude, Pacific Northwest feel. Unfortunately, Southern California doesn't have a lot of that. We ended up shooting at a Boy Scout camp way up in the forest with all these old

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growth redwoods. For most of our interiors, we moved to what is now an abandoned YMCA camp, and that's where we shot our cabin, dining hall, and shower stuff. Then we shot for two days at a lake near Big Bear.

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FANG: How have festival audiences received EAGLEWALK?

HIMEBAUGH: This was actually a thesis film for me. I was met with silence at my school when I finished it because the faculty is not hot on genre films, so it was a tepid response. For three or four months afterward, I was really discouraged, thinking it wasn't going to do anything. Then, all of these festivals started getting back to us, and now we are doing our 14th festival; getting lots of really good response.

FANG: Is there a feature length version on the horizon?

HIMEBAUGH: There is absolutely a feature length version. This project is the project that I want to make. I don't have my sights on anything else. It is the same cast of characters, but a lot more happens, and there is a whole new third act where we realize all the forest rangers in the area are descendents of the Indians that tried to kill Bigfoot thousands of years ago, and have been hunting Bigfoot ever since. They are using the counselors as bait to draw out the creature. If we can shoot this script, it will be unlike anything anyone has seen before.