

TALES FROM THE SUMMIT: THE BIRTH OF OUTPOST

By Joe Lo Truglio

DYLAN BAKER, SUFFERING FOR HIS ART (AND FOR THE AUTHOR, RIGHT).

HELLO, FRIENDS. I MADE A HORROR MOVIE ON A MOUNTAIN, AND I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU ABOUT IT.

It was a lifetime in the making. *Jaws* had me drawing bloody limbs in crayon at five. Later, Cronenberg's *Brood* creatures stalked my dreams. FANGORIA bit me in the neck at 11 (*Halloween III* issue!), and I haven't shed its spell since. That was my life in 1982 (like many here). It's a sweet thrill to tell kindred souls about my first movie, in the greatest monster magazine ever. I goof off for a living, but now, with *Outpost* — my lifelong leap into the best genre in the world — I hope to weird out. I also hope to explain why now's a good time to get weird.

How do I describe *Outpost*? What can you expect from this movie?

During the four years it took to make, I gave soundbites: "It's a female *Shining*." "It's my *Repulsion*." But really, it's not like them at all. There are whiffs of both, to be sure, and traces of Kaufman's *Body Snatcher* paranoia. We've got *Jacob's Ladder*-esque imagery, and a creepy citadel à la *Amityville Horror* (flies, too!). Our composer, Steph Copeland, doles out Herrmann and Carpenter, Goldsmith and Goblin. At heart, *Outpost* is a fever dream made by a horror fan.

It's a vibe, in other words, a deep dive into a damaged mind. A story about a woman named Kate who tries to recover from a violent assault by taking a job as a fire lookout. She thinks the isolation and peace and quiet will do her good. Guess what, it doesn't. Her nerves are still taking punches. Our hero starts to lose her grip on what's real, and who to trust. To the dismay of her boss (Ato Essandoh), it begins to disrupt her ability to protect the town and his job. But Kate finds solace in a local hiker (Becky Ann Baker) and the friendship triggers a renewal unlike anything she's ever felt. The suspense of this movie lies in us watching Kate trying to help herself in all the wrong ways, like most of us do all the time. But her luck's been

bad from the get-go. Can you love a world you're convinced hates you? How long before you hate it back?

I like horror movies about people slipping into madness. What if an act of violence crashes your nervous system? What if you think you can fix it alone, but find out too late you can't? And what if, while all that was happening, you were trapped in the middle of nowhere? *Outpost* is what can go horribly wrong when you roll the dice on self-care.

Summer of '94. I'm driving cross country with some buddies. One of us falls asleep behind the wheel, veers off the road. My body's violent tossing wakes me up. For years after, when I was asleep in a vehicle, if we hit a bump, turbulence even, I'd convulse awake in sheer terror. Heart racing. For *years*. That doesn't happen anymore, but it got me thinking: What if the event was more brutal? What if the aftershocks didn't stop? I became obsessed with the idea of being at the mercy of a nightmare. Your daily life hijacked. The monster is the *moment*. By the way, welcome to PTSD (some prefer PTSI), which millions of people suffer from. The threat is ever-present. When you drive, when you pee, when you buy milk.

This monster is born every day; we know that. The handsy uncle, the car

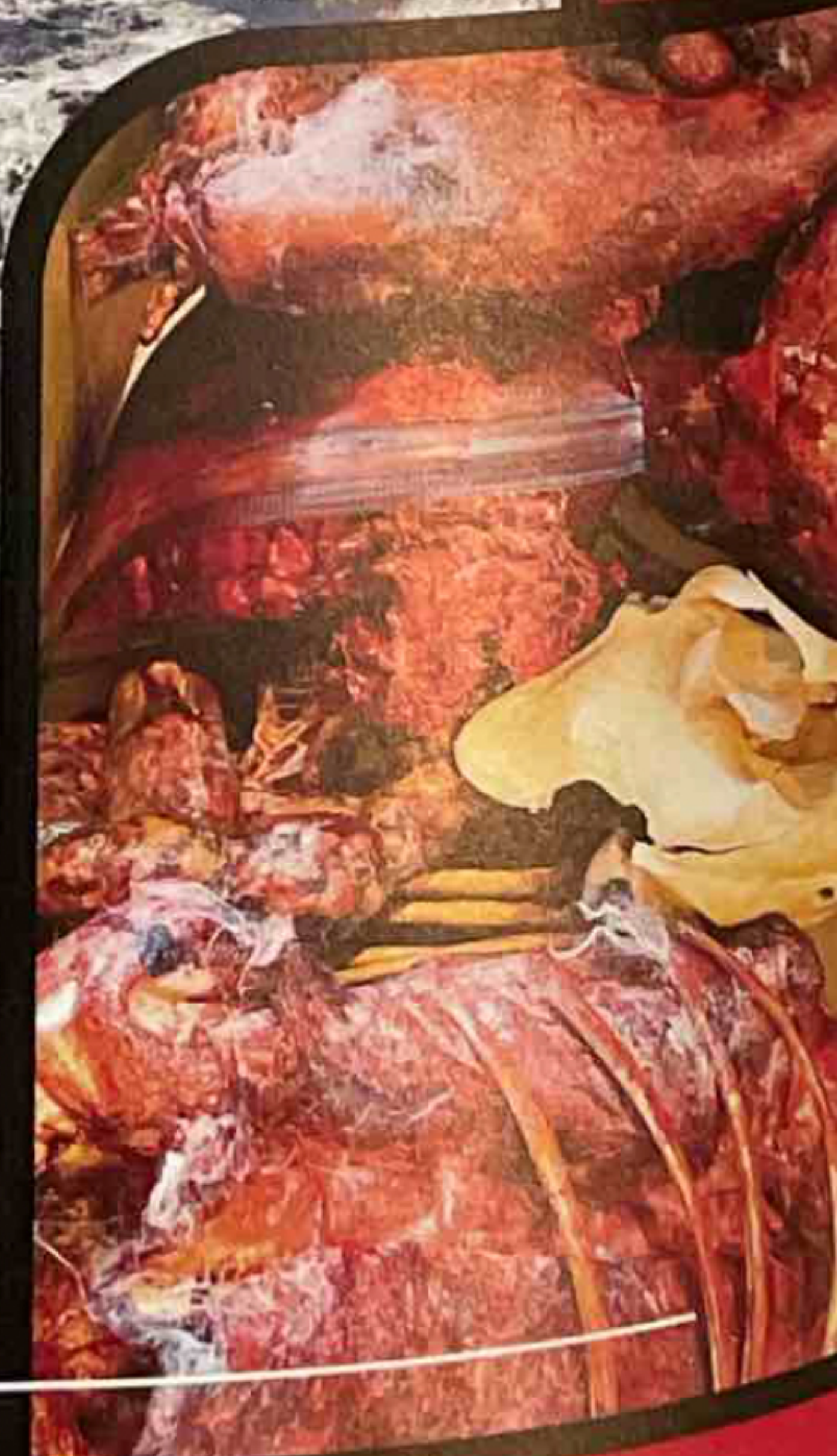
that runs the red, the F5 tornado in the middle of the night. These psychic beasts shock the body; the body keeps the score. Unchecked, these ordeals distort reality, make one perceive things that aren't there, and confirm agendas that don't exist. That kills people. If *Outpost* is a sub-genre, maybe it's *traumatic horror*.

DYLAN BAKER
LENDING A HAND.



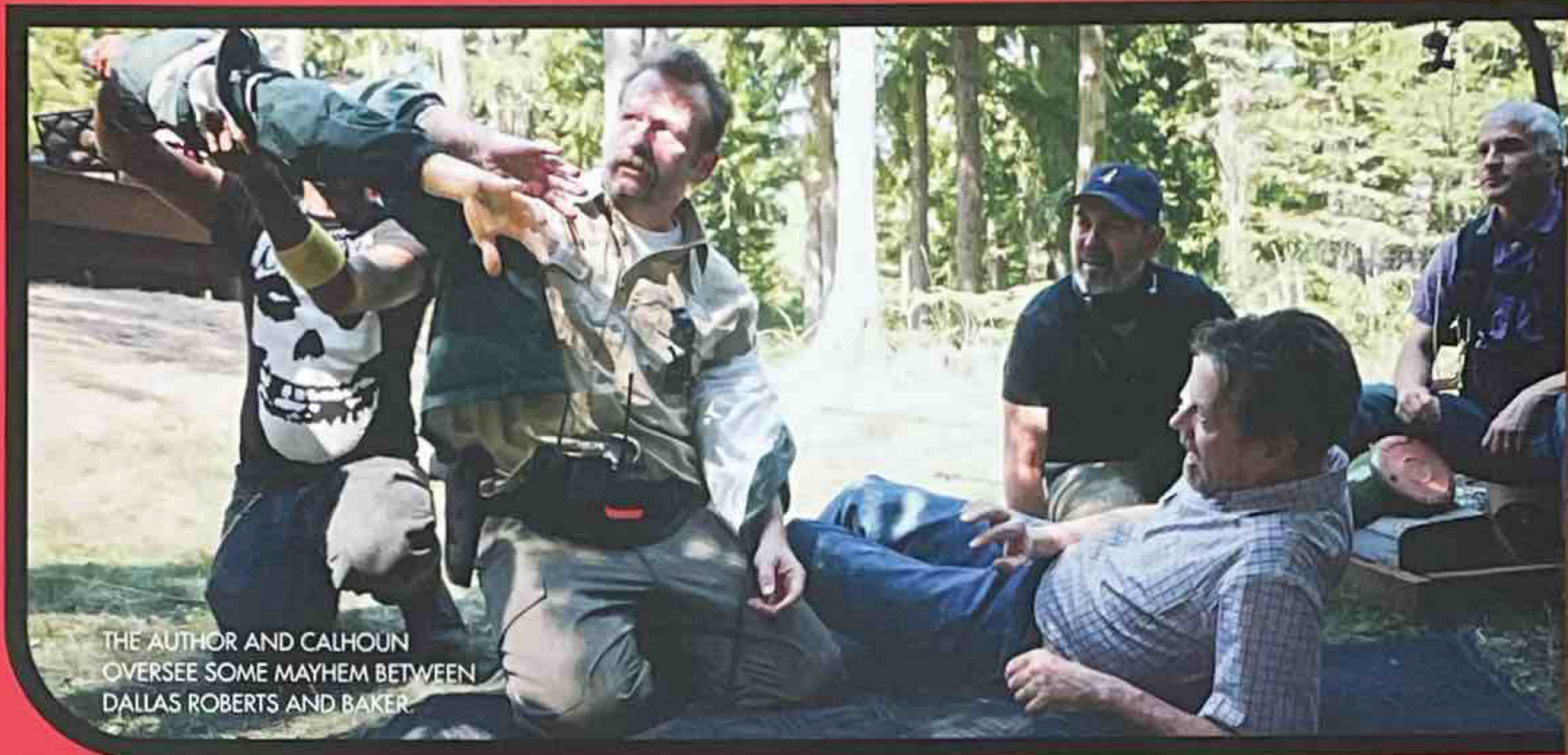
THE AUTHOR AND
KENNETH CALHOON
PREPPING AN
UNFORTUNATE
COYOTE (INTERIOR
SEEN BELOW)

"Outpost" has me on all fours, bones cracking, fingertips splitting, face stretching into a snout. You won't recognize me here.





MAKEUP FX ARTIST KENNETH CALHOUN.



THE AUTHOR AND CALHOUN OVERSEE SOME MAYHEM BETWEEN DALLAS ROBERTS AND BAKER.

Kate suffers from PTSD, too, and escapes to the wilderness. Historically, a place dominated by men. The boyfriend-creature she runs from is both real and not real. But no matter. This is primal terror. Terror of being hunted. Not so long ago we were tiny little shrews fleeing everything else. "Run don't be food run don't be food run don't be food!" Kate has that predator in her head, all the time. She can't outrun it. *Outpost* is lizard brain horror.

This genre's a shapeshifter and a party crasher. It evolves constantly and shows up in places uninvited all the time. One of the billion things I love about it. It belongs to no one, but its DNA is in every single sucker out there. In that sense, I expect that the guy from *Superbad* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* will piss a lot of people off, because everyone will be waiting for the wink, and there is no wink. It never comes. *Outpost* has me on all fours, bones cracking, fingertips splitting, face stretching into a snout. You won't recognize me here.

We shot in July of 2021 (in Coolin, Idaho, and Spokane, Washington) on a 16-day schedule, with about 40 people, cast included. Half that time was spent at 6300 ft, at the summit of Sundance Mountain. Daily, it took us an hour up, an hour down. Hairpin switchbacks with sheer drop-offs kept the actors awake for the early calls. If this movie works at all, it's only because of them. My wife (and tortured hero Kate) Beth Dover gave me a lesson in grit. She's got a ton of it. My DP Frank Barrera, whom I've known since I was 17, and I agreed there was no reason to make this movie unless we shot in an actual tower. The reality of that choice spat in our face every day. Our first scout in 2019 had the whole tower in fog. We shot listed for over a year knowing we weren't even guaranteed a vista. Wind and bugs were regulars. Rogue gusts stole our tents. No cover sets if it rained. We fought reflections in 360-degree windows. Five-person weight limit at the top. Our gaffer had acrophobia. An actor, vertigo. Equipment got tied down nightly or

lost. Overall, it took us three years to get there. Before that, we lost a producer and two stunt coordinators. In summer 2020, COVID blew us up two weeks before rolling. I had to wait another year. Like Kate, I was at the end of my rope and convinced the world was against me. Would I ever be heard? It nearly broke me. But also like Kate, I just fought harder, screamed louder.

There's redemption and ruin in this tale, but *Outpost* is mostly a story about pain, and what happens if you run from it. How it always catches up. How it will control what you see, what you hear. It governs what's real. It commands what you do. If you don't face your demons, the demons will come to face you.

I don't have to sell you on the idea that the last two years have been a flat-out horror show. Yet we're pretending it's not, we're pretending we're fine. You can expect *Outpost* to show you why that's super fucking dangerous. But perhaps it also reveals that surrendering to the pain is the way out. Maybe if we face how weird, how WTF we all feel right now, we'll survive this madness. I think Kate is the perfect symbol of the frenzy riding just under the surface of things here in the early 2020s. This untethered feeling is rampant in *Outpost* and, weirdly, I think it'll help people connect to it. We're all twisting in the wind, with only each other to hang onto. Don't choose to be alone out there. Bad things will find you. Think of *Outpost* as a trembling, out-stretched hand.

It would be so lovely if you took it. 🗿



BECKY ANN BAKER'S ONSCREEN *OUTPOST* EXPERIENCE IS NOT A POSITIVE ONE.