

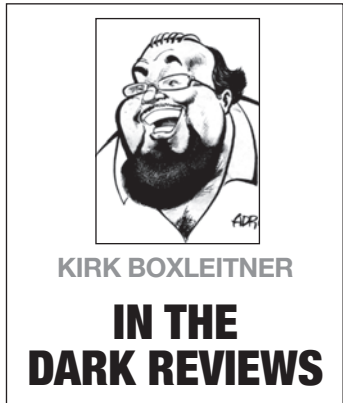
Getting Out

'Bigfoot' captures experience of aimless seekers

North Bend filmmaker Taylor Guterson's "Hunting Bigfoot" is edited and presented as a documentary, and while it's not, it nonetheless deserves praise for Guterson's fidelity to the accounts and personalities of the characters he's captured onscreen.

Guterson took to heart the adage that people should tell stories about what they know. "Hunting Bigfoot" makes pitch-perfect use of the environment of his hometown, and the traits of his acquaintances and neighbors in North Bend, to turn Sasquatch sightings into a lens through which to examine a cross-section of rural Washingtonians.

Most of the folks who appear in the film have tales to tell about their encounters with what they believe to be the legendary beast, and most of their characters are drawn from their real-life selves, in terms of their backstories and outlooks. Guterson doesn't want his films



to depict reality so much as recreate it, and the verisimilitude of "Hunting Bigfoot" is so earnest and effective that I continually had to check that it wasn't actually a documentary.

Our two lead Sasquatch-seekers, John Green and Bob Cockman, play barely fictionalized versions of themselves, and they're a study in contrasts in how one copes (or doesn't) with loss.

Green, an outwardly ragged expatriate Brit, has embraced the near-ascetic lifestyle of a hermit, in the wake of not only his claimed



John Green searches for signs of Sasquatch in Taylor Guterson's "Hunting Bigfoot." Courtesy photo

Bigfoot sighting, but also his wife's death from cancer in 2004 and his 2009 bankruptcy after the loss of the considerable fortune he made from selling novelty T-shirts in the 1980s.

Whenever Green ambles back into town, he stocks up

at the food bank, shacks up for a short while with his no-strings-attached girlfriend, and gets put through his paces by Cockman, a local gym owner who cares enough to ensure his friend stays fit enough to weather the wilderness.

Although Cockman is a reasonably successful and well-respected businessman in North Bend, and enough of a family man to help his adult daughter care for her kids, he spent enough of his

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<p>IN REP: NOVEMBER 5 - DECEMBER 4</p> <p>Until The Flood Pulitzer Prize finalist, celebrated performer, and playwright Dael Orlandersmith explores the social uprising in Ferguson, Missouri following the shooting of teenager Michael Brown. Pulling from her extensive interviews with Missouri residents, Orlandersmith crafts a stunning theatrical</p>	<p>IN REP: OCTOBER 29 - NOVEMBER 27</p> <p>Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill The time is 1959. The place is a seedy bar in Philadelphia. The audience is about to witness one of Billie Holiday's last performances, given four months before her death.</p>	<p>IN REP: OCTOBER 22 - NOVEMBER 20</p> <p>Tenderly A fresh, personal, and poignant picture of the woman whose unparalleled talent and unbridled personality made her a legend.</p> <p>For tickets and info, call our Box Office at (360) 786-0151 or email us at boxoffice@harlequinproductions.org Visit the Washington Center Box Office 512 Washington St. SE, Tues.-Sat. 12-5:30 p.m. One block away from the State Theater</p>

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Filmmaker loves local theaters 'exclusive experience'

By Kirk Boxleitner
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Taylor Guterson was born in Seattle and lived on Bainbridge Island and in Issaquah before settling in North Bend, but the lifelong Washingtonian has always been an outdoorsman, which inspired and aided his filmmaking as he shot "Hunting Bigfoot," which was screened at Shelton Cinemas on Nov. 12.

"I spend a lot of time in the woods, so showing off those areas was as much my motive as anything for making this film," Guterson said. "Initially, I had no interest in Bigfoot, but after moving to North Bend, I began hearing a number of stories about supposed sightings and encounters, and I wondered, why

Shelton Cinemas hosts a special encore presentation of the film at 4:30 p.m. Saturday

would so many people be willing to claim something that most other folks believe is not true?"

For Guterson, "Hunting Bigfoot" wasn't concerned with whether the creature was real. The focus was on the culture of folks who claim such contacts, exploring the nature of their characters through a semiconstructed narrative that he wanted to "feel 100% real" and emotionally authentic.

"A number of the interview segments are real," Guterson told the *Journal*. "As much as possible, I wanted to capture their tales, their

relationships and the actual circumstances of these people's lives, including where they live and work. Yes, I had frameworks where I inserted plot points, or recreated moments that had taken place, but I didn't want the interactions to feel like acting."

Guterson knew he wanted John Green, whom he'd cast in a small role in a previous film, as his lead.

"He's a true character," said Guterson, who said Green might not be a great actor, "but he's great at being himself," and "who you see onscreen is pretty much who he is. He's never

acting, so it never feels like a staged dramatic play."

Green and Ben Cockman, the second-most prominent onscreen presence in "Hunting Bigfoot," brought no shortage of their own stories to Guterson's production, including some cinematically outsized personalities.

In the film and in real life, Cockman is the owner of Mt Si Sports & Fitness in North Bend. Guterson knew him from around town, and the film captured a major transition in Cockman's life when he moved in with his adult daughter to help raise her children.

"As in the film, Ben is a guy who likes the ladies, but he's alone now, so there's a sadness to him," Guterson

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youth as a good-looking, girl-chasing guy who is now left with no long-term relationship prospects. He acknowledges the hollow space it's left in his heart.

Even as Green succumbs occasionally to lingering self-recriminations, reiterating suspicions that he could have done more for his wife, he remains mostly estranged from his grown children, and even when Cockman convenes an informal gathering of fellow Bigfoot believers, Green turns the same critical eye

toward them that he does on everything, dismissing their accounts as less-than-credible conjecture.

These are two old men who know full well that they're hurting from a lack of true emotional intimacy and companionship, but Cockman seems to believe, perhaps not wrongly, that ship has already sailed for him, whereas Green's persistently snarling communication problems with the rest of the world stem from his perfectionist inability to get over himself and get out of his own way.

What's most real about

all these people, both the believers and those who put up with them, is how half-assembled their lives are. Whatever progress any of them might have made toward self-repair has long since been put on hold, simply so they can keep treading water.

Guterson's characters are not the people they might have aspired to be, but are instead the people they wound up becoming, having settled for rough-hewn standards of "good enough," after all their other options were ruled out by the lives they led.

At one point or another,

we've all known people like this, and plenty of us have even been those people, whether temporarily or for more extended stretches.

If you're looking for "Hunting Bigfoot" to take a side on whether Sasquatch is real, even its fictional narrative refuses to weigh in decisively, other than to conclude that the most avid of Bigfoot buffs is searching for something out there that they're not getting from their daily lives among other people.

Not only do Guterson and his onscreen cast — I hesitate to call them "actors," given

how much they succeed at accomplishing Guterson's goal of not seeming overly rehearsed or staged — render this dynamic with a painful authenticity, but Guterson's cinematography alone is gorgeous enough to make anyone fall in love with the misty forests of Western Washington.

However frequently I found myself frustrated by the inflexible myopia of Green's onscreen character, I still wished him well by the end of "Hunting Bigfoot," and likely would have pitched in a can of soup for one of his campouts.

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