

An Interview with Cary Hill, Director of *Scream Park*

by [Mike Haberfelner](#)
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Scream Park is the story of an amusement park closing down for the last time... and its owner's desperate (and bloody) ploy to sell tickets. By murdering off his young employees in the most gruesome of ways, he hopes to create a new attraction to the park.



With *Scream Park* being essentially a throwback to slasher movies from the 1980's - what do you find so appealing about them, and some of your genre favourites?

My wife and I are big fans. I think there's a draw because they're so primal: it's fear of the unknown and fear of death. The fear of being chased by a mad man (or man-thing) and not being able to get away; it's very much like the common nightmare. The slasher movie takes this all in, all while being fun and essentially a ride. I think in the early days of the slasher it was about invoking those emotions and the thrill of it. To draw an appropriate parallel, it's like riding an old roller coaster. There's a rush of adrenaline, fueled by the fear the thing could come apart or go off the rails at any point. By the time the slasher became cliché, watching them became a different sort of entertainment: it became about watching obnoxious characters act stupid and get killed gruesomely.

As far as favorites go, *Halloween* is the king. It's perfect. By comparison, I really enjoy *Friday the 13th 3D*, which is broken film in terms of plot, pacing, and various thematic elements but is still a blast to watch. So I enjoy the well-constructed classics as well as *Slumber Party Massacre II*... which has started to grow on me as of late.

What were your inspirations when writing *Scream Park* - and since so much of your film depends on the location, what came first, finding the right location or writing the right script?



Scream Park actually formed as a script first. Doing a slasher film in an amusement park became a mission once I realized it hadn't been done. It seemed too good of a set up -- familiar or cliché yet original. I loved the idea of having a motive for the murders (greed) in an attempt to create something similar to the Sharon Tate house. So I had a script I liked that I thought I could produce... but no amusement park.

Related to that, what can you tell us about your location, how did you find it, and what were the advantages and challenges of filming at an amusement park at night?

The bulk of the film was shot at Conneaut Lake Amusement Park in northwestern Pennsylvania. It sits right along a lake shore and the lake dictates the weather on and around it.

Through the course of late April and early May we experienced everything from snow to downpour to sticky heat - all in a few weeks. Night was a huge challenge, first and foremost because you have to reverse your waking schedule. Easier said than done, particularly on a film, and I was up for 20 hours the first few days. There's also the technical side of it - you're working in the dark and every scene needs to be lit meticulously because you need to capture just enough detail to see what's going on but not to lose the illusion of night all while being consistent from scene to scene. So, all of that, plus stumbling around an amusement park full of rusty nails and broken glass in pitch black.



Conneaut Lake Park was the location of another film recently - **The Road** with Viggo Mortenson. I approached the park with a proposal and was initially turned down. The park's board was reluctant to bring another film in because of some misgivings had by a Hollywood film. I assured them we were much smaller - and local - and we would take care of the park while we were there. So, we negotiated. The deal turned out well: we got to use the park for several weeks and they got publicity and free night security for having this group of people with bright lights in the park from dusk until dawn. Both the board and the folks renovating the park were extremely helpful and shooting there was a great experience.

How would you describe your directorial approach to your subject at hand?

Going in, I knew how I wanted the movie to *feel*. It wasn't designed to take place in the 80s and it's not self-referential, but I wanted a subconscious "whiff" of 80s slasher films. The only way I saw of doing this was to concentrate on the mood of the film. The film builds slowly in the first act. We get the park, we meet the kids, we see how they interact with each other. At the same time, we drop in POV shots and get shadows or body parts of the killers in the shot à la **Halloween**. So while we set up the environment, there's always the feeling like something bad is going on here. So my approach was almost like building the film. Film is very visceral and emotion-driven, yet I found on this project it was put together logically and methodical. From there, I worked with the actors and gave them guidance - and then let them fill that emotional part on their own.

No good slasher without a decent amount of violence and gore. So what can you tell us about the gore effects in Scream Park, and was there ever a line you refused to cross regarding violence (for other than budgetary reasons)?

F/X are tough. We had a number of set backs on set so you're constantly finding ways to improvise, work around, or imply them. This, of course, does not even include budgetary constraints. The whole crew was willing to jump in and help with F/X. Some of the insert shots were actually done in my editor Scott Lewis's basement and inserted in post-production.



Personally, in making a horror film, think you should be prepared to pretty much cross any line. But if you look at the 80s slasher films - any **Friday the 13th** or **Slumber Party Massacre**, they're actually not that gory. Usually it's just a lot of blood. So I didn't want to go too far into gore because you'd lose that 80s-ness to it. That being said, there was a great, gory death in the script we had to change because Conneaut Lake Park did not have the particular ride required to do it. We'll save that for the sequel...



Doug Bradley

Scream Park features Nivek Ogre of Skinny Puppy and genre icon Doug Bradley in prominent roles - so how did you get them in the first place, and what was it like working with them?

Doug I met at a horror convention in Dallas, Texas called *Texas Nightmare*. I had been tipped off he was moving to Pittsburgh (where I live and the film was going to be based out of) so I mentioned this casually and asked if he'd be interested in a day's work. He read the script, jumped on board and we got the pleasure of working together. He was great to work with and I hope to reunite in the future - he is professional while informal and it's a style I prefer to work with.

Ogre was the result of a shot in the dark - I sent the script to his agent with a very professional cover letter and then promptly moved on. I had my doubts but a week later I got an email back from the agent that said he was in. "Ogre wants to make this happen" was the response. So I was excited, but had no budget yet a solution created another problem. We exchanged emails for about six months and having him on board led to having a successful *Kickstarter* campaign where we raised enough funds to finish the film. In the end, it worked out and it was wonderful having him on set. You're not sure what an (industrial) rock star slash actor will bring to the table, but



Nivek Ogre

within minutes we were cracking jokes and he was so eager to be part of this that there were no egos or narcissism to be had. It really was a great experience. We try to stay in touch!

What can you tell us about the rest of your cast?

Going into the project, I knew most of the cast would be local. I knew I would have a large response to the casting call posted with the Pittsburgh Film Office (and I did), but I also knew it would be tough to find the particular actors I was looking for. Once I locked in Wendy and Steve, I knew I was on the right track to putting my cast together. Tom Savini was originally in talks to play Henry the security guard but we lost him to **Django Unchained**, but it turned out to be serendipity - Brian McDaniels as our park security guard worked out so perfectly. As it turns out, he was one of the more revered characters in the film and his death (spoiler!) always gets a response from somebody who is sad to see him leave the film. Alicia Marie Marcucci let us put her through hell and smiled the whole way through. Kyle Riordan did a fantastic job for his first time on a movie set and I hear he's getting approached for commercials now. Tyler Kale, Kailey Harris and Dean Jacobs were just as great being their archetypal characters and the whole group bonded really well. Ian Lemmon was made for the role as the silent killer and used his physicality perfectly, stalking about and being menacing. I gambled on using local actors, novices, and friends and I couldn't have gotten a better result, I think.



A few words about critical and audience reception of your movie, and when and where will the film be released onto the general public?

- I feel like I can always take away *something* from watching a film (even if it's what NOT to do). I'll give you two I've actually go back to: **Gummo** and **Bloodsucking Freaks**. **Starship Troopers** is a pretty awful film - but that may be because I love

Reception has been great. It's nerve-wracking to put your first feature film, with a very low budget, out into the world to let people see. I think my fears subsided when we screened the film on Halloween near the park where we filmed -- members of the audience asked to have the film run again! The first batch of reviews have the movie well-received and from reading them I believe we met our goal of capturing that feel of the 80s.

We're currently working with a couple of distributors out of Los Angeles to have the film put out in commercial channels. If picked up, it will hopefully be widely available. For now, we're booking theaters in the western Pennsylvania area and submitting to film festivals. We'll be showing at the *Dead in Dixon* in September and the *Eerie Horror Film Festival* in October with updates on others coming soon. I've also submitted to **Tugg.com**, which would allow us to screen the film on a per demand basis in theaters.

Let's go back to the beginnings of your career: What got you into filmmaking in the first place, and did you receive any formal training on the subject?

In a very Joseph Campbell sort of way, it's one of those callings. There is a love of cinema, including the actual mechanics of motion pictures, that runs very deep. It's a form of escapism, of modern myth making, and very cultural. I've always felt a draw to it and from early movie watching began to dissect how these things were being made. By junior high, friends and I were making our own movies in the backyard. It wasn't until college that I realized it was possible to pursue this academically and changed from writing to film. From there I took as many classes as I could fit into my schedule while interning at local production companies and Hollywood films that came to town (there weren't many in the early 2000s). One of the fondest memories I have from college was spending the night in an editing bay with super 8 footage actually splicing footage.

What can you tell us about your filmwork prior to *Scream Park*?

I did some various commercial work, promotional videos, and most recently a series of music videos for a Seattle-based band called *Attack With Care*. I've shot, edited, and produced work for others and been involved in numerous shorts and local films. **Scream Park** is the largest project yet.

Any future projects you'd like to talk about?

I'm currently contributing a short for a creature feature anthology currently titled **Cryptid**. It can be best described as a **Creepshow**-type film of interconnected stories. It's pretty exciting and it's a collaborative effort among a group of Pittsburgh-area filmmakers. I'm also back in the writing chair working on a sci-fi script.

Filmmakers who inspire you?

Filmmakers that are always able to buck the system or build their own career -- guys like John Sayles or Stanley Kubrick. Auteurs that could push boundaries -- both visually and production-wise -- without losing their autonomy. I also appreciate John Carpenter and his love of b-movies and Francois Truffaut. **Day For Night** is an amazing film.

Your favourite movies?

Such a hard question. I feel like my list of favorites is always changing but there's a few that are always on the top. In no specific order: **Aliens**, **Dr. Strangelove**, **The Thing**, **Halloween**, **The Prestige** and **The Battle of Algiers**. I realize this is quite a smattering of film genres...

... and of course, films you really deplore?

the book so much.

Your/your movie's website, Facebook, whatever else?

www.screamparkmovie.com

www.facebook.com/screamparkmovie

[@screamparkmovie](https://www.instagram.com/screamparkmovie)

Those are the big three. You can find everything **Scream Park**-related there!

Anything else you are dying to mention and I have merely forgotten to ask?

Just a big thank you for the interview and thanks for helping to spread the word! The second toughest thing for indie films (aside from budget) is getting them shown.

Thanks for the interview!

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