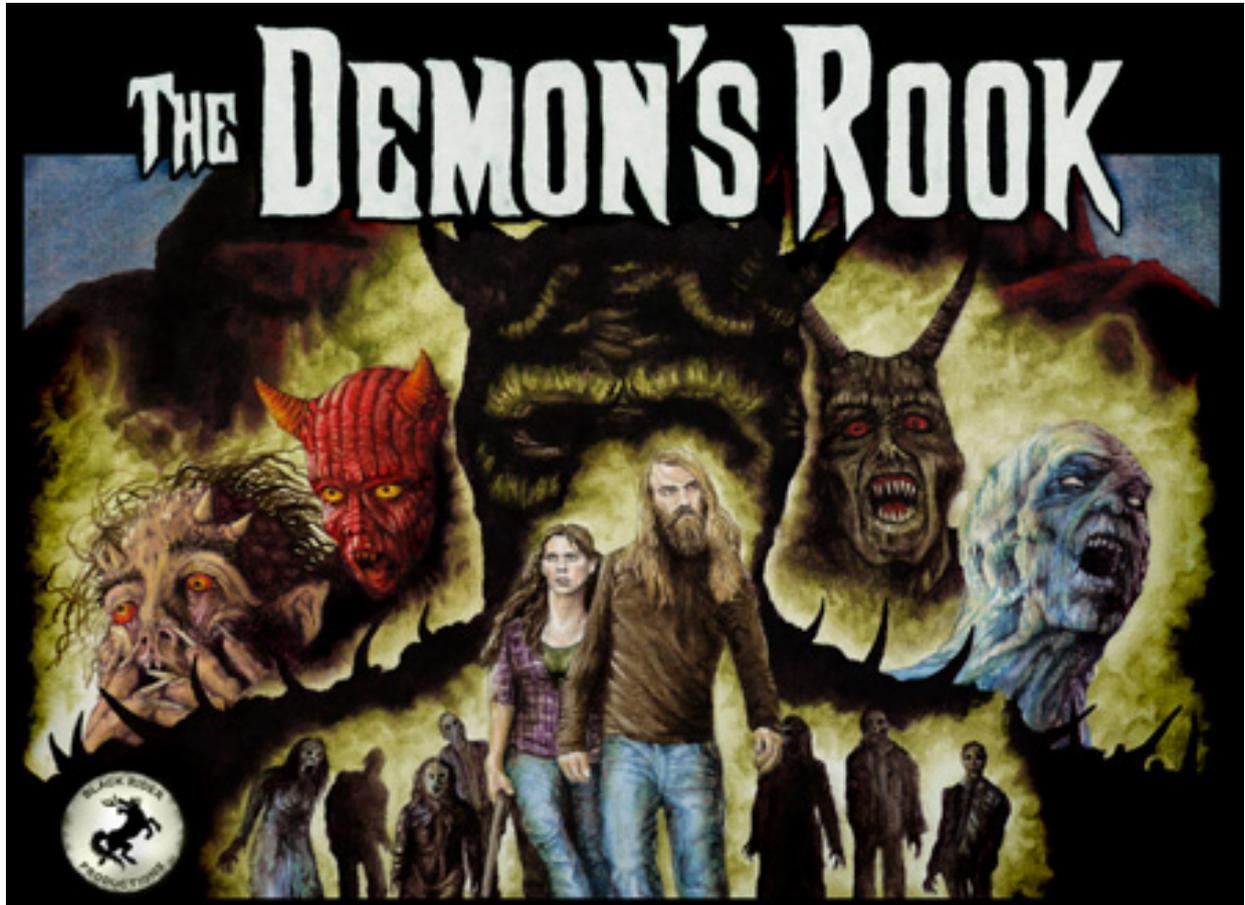


AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES SIZEMORE

WRITER, DIRECTOR, FX ARTIST AND STAR OF 'THE DEMONS ROOK'



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Recently, while browsing the crowdfunding site Indiegogo, we came across the trailer for an independent American horror fantasy film called *The Demon's Rook*. What caught our interest was its visual style and theatricality that is so much an homage to the 70's and 80's fantasy and horror films that we love. If the trailer is anything to go by, *The Demon's Rook* looks like it's going to be a whole lot of fun! The following interview is with James Sizemore who wrote, directed, created the FX and starred in *The Demon's Rook*. It took him over two years of hard work and dedication to make and in 2013 it will be starting to hit the screens of film festivals.

The Demon's Rook is the story of a young boy named Roscoe who finds a portal to another world where he is taught magic by an elder demon known as Dimwos. Dimwos raises the boy into manhood, revealing to him many secrets, all but one dark secret that the demon keeps from Roscoe. When Roscoe discovers what his master has been keeping from him all these years, he revolts against him, inadvertently unleashing three malevolent demons. Through desperation, Roscoe is forced to escape the demons' wrath by way of the portal leading back to our world. Unbeknownst to Roscoe, he leads the demons through the portal and once they have passed, a nightmarish foray of summoned monsters are unleashed in our world. One demon possesses the minds and will of all whom she crosses, another transforms a man into a murderous beast, and the other summons an army of the dead to do his bidding.



Q: *The Demon's Rook* is your first feature film, before making this you worked as a special effects artist and a painter, tell me about the journey that led you to the writing and making of this film?

It's true. Before this film, I primarily painted. My special makeup effects work before the film was minimal though. I had done a few small things here and there: latex build-ups, gore wounds from nose wax, simple stuff, but nothing quite on this scale. It wasn't until after I wrote the script for *The Demon's Rook* that I realized I was going to have to step it up a notch. So I read a couple of books on the subject, and I even bought a Neill Gorton instructional dvd on how to build silicone prosthetics. I studied the hell out of it, raised some money on Kickstarter for the FX materials, and dove in headfirst. There was a lot of trial and error during those first couple months. Nothing ever works out quite like they tell you in the books, but I eventually figured it out.

Q: Tell me a little about your writing process, did you start with a story, a visual idea, or concept? Do you write alone or is it a collaborative process?

With this particular project, I started by writing alone. I generally like to start with ideas. I began by roughing the demons out. After that, scenes involving the demons would just start playing in my head at random times. That's when I'd run for the notepad and write down the ideas. After getting enough scenes to start with, I sat down and organized them into a basic structure. From there, I filled in the spaces and pulled together a rough draft of the story. I passed it on to a couple of my black rider brothers for input. After getting some feedback, I went back at it and formed another draft. A long-time project collaborator and black rider brother of mine, Akom Tidwell, came in and helped me tighten it up. I've never been that good at dialogue, so he stepped in and helped rewrite a lot of it. He also just helped develop things a bit more. We never really stopped writing it. Sometimes either during or after shooting a scene, we'd realize that the script just didn't play out like we'd imagined. So we would sit down with the script again, make the appropriate changes together, and try the scene again. My co-producer and cinematographer would often sit in with us during those times and make good suggestions. *The Demon's Rook* has been a flexible endeavour from the start. You can't always get what you want when you're working without a budget. At one point, I realized that it wasn't even us making the decisions anymore. The beast took on a life of its own, writing itself at times. Don't ask me to explain it. I guess that's just what happens when you shoot a movie for two years primarily on the weekends.

Q: From the trailer and poster, the film appears to be inspired by 70's and 80's fantasy and horror films, what films have inspired you and how have you incorporated these inspirations into your own vision?

Like most directors I'm sure, I'm influenced by a lot of films, directors, artists, etc. Horror films like *Inferno*, *Black Sabbath*, *Creepshow*, *Cemetery Man*, *Evil Dead*, *The Funhouse*, *Scanners*, and *American Werewolf in London* to fantasy films like *Pan's Labyrinth*, *Dune*, *Dark Crystal* and even onto more arthouse flicks from directors like Jodorowsky, Kubrick, and Lynch. You can spot all these influences throughout, some more than others. For example, you might notice that my cursed "manbeast" monster takes a lot of inspiration from the monster in Hooper's *Funhouse*.

Q: As well as writing, producing and directing you also starred in the film, tell me a little about this process, how did you balance the directing and acting, was it difficult to focus on performing and keeping an eye on all the other elements of the production at the same time?

Yes, it was tough. Acting in the film was something I had to do. I didn't even really want to do it. But I knew it would



be nearly impossible to find an actor in my area to shoot with us for two years on the weekends, maintain a giant beard throughout that time, and all for no pay. Yeah, it was something I just had to tough out. The heavy makeup days in combination with my acting scenes were the most stressful for me. Spending anywhere from 5 to 10 hours doing creature makeup, then running out to location to film for another 10 hours or more, all the while jumping back and forth from directing, acting, and special effects with a super bare-bones crew at my side. It wasn't easy, but it had to be done. The film would not have happened otherwise.

Q: It's exciting and refreshing to see a film using physical FX and make-up FX, will you be using any CGI at all? Do you think there is a new trend for old school effects at the moment? If so, why do you think this is?

I have a huge soft spot for practical makeup and effects. Especially with a film of this nature, you just gotta go practical with it, even if it's campy at times, it's just way more visceral. I think it's possible we may see a rise in them once again, although with all the shitty CGI currently choking up the film industry, I have my doubts. Don't get me wrong, good CGI used sparingly and appropriately can really enhance a scene. I just think a lot of filmmakers today are lazily over-abusing it in order to relieve on-set frustrations that come from using practical effects. There is a small scene that we are actually currently addressing at the moment in which we'd like to use a little splash of visual effects to enhance it. I'd really like to get the effect hand-drawn over the picture, although it's getting harder and harder to find artists that can do that anymore. It saddens me deeply. A lot of artists today just don't know what to do without their computer and tablet. The world needs more painters, but that's another subject for another day.

Q: I first heard about your film when browsing the crowdfunding website Indiegogo, tell me a little about how you financed your film and your experiences with crowdfunding?

We started out by putting in a lot of our own money into it. We then raised 5k on Kickstarter. It helped us get started. I used the money to get enough effects work done to make some impressive teaser trailers. Those teasers drew some attention from some private investors, which gave enough money for us to finish all of the effects work for the film. It wasn't enough to pay ourselves, but we were able to make it all last through principal photography. The little bit of money we raised on Indiegogo just recently will help us with submission fees to film festivals. We were hoping for a little more so that our post work would go smoother, but you work with what you got, and we were lucky to get what we did.

Q: A couple of things in the trailer, such as the child painted with symbols, made me think of Alejandro Jodorowsky's *The Holy Mountain*, has this be an influence at all? And would you say there is a spiritual aspect to *The Demon's Rook*?

Oh yeah, as mentioned before, Jodorowsky holds some influence on me. I'd say there is definitely some sense of spir-



itualism thrown around here and there. I tried to hit on that with the demonic raising of Roscoe inside the “dark womb” scenes. In particular, I wanted the lead demon, Dimwos, to be very spiritual and shamanistic. Overall, I’d say there is a decent balance. Some scenes allude to spirituality more than others. Just depends on what characters we’re watching.

Q: Tell me what you can about the secret society The Black Riders of which you are a member?

I actually co-founded it with a couple of my friends. To be a member of the cult, you have to pass some tests and go through a strange initiation. Everyone has an ascribed moniker that we go by. Lord Loup’Rah Garomore was given to me by my elder brother Lord Lycanthropus Galleytrot. We mostly use our monikers when traveling to alternate dimensions to fight evil and spread the righteous word of Gaorok. I can only tell you so much about the society itself, being that it’s secret. But we do obviously celebrate the creation of righteous artwork through many mediums. We also believe strongly that our animal brethren do not deserve to be exploited by mankind for any reason. We can live happily and healthily without killing and devouring them, so why should we? As you might have guessed, we’re all vegan, and so it’s a requirement upon entering the group that you vow to remain one ‘til death. Our sacred emblem is tattooed on every member as a reminder of this. We also do a great deal of cryptozoological research within the society, and all of us have a huge soft spot for Sasquatch in particular. We also listen to a lot of doom metal. It’s good times.

Q: You have an interest in myth, this is also present in your painting which often depicts mythical creatures and scenarios, tell me a little about this interest?

Storytelling has always been a passion of mine, and myths are the best kinds of stories, in my opinion. There’s so much room for your imagination to take over. My Black Rider brethren and I have been working on constructing our own mythology for a while now. We’re always coming up with more crazy ideas to add to it. It’s just fun and exciting to dive into your own world like that.



Q: What are your plans for screenings and festivals? Anything planned in the UK?

The big ones we’re shooting for are Fantasia, Toronto After Dark, and Fantastic Fest. As for the UK, we’ve got our sights set on Leeds International at the moment. We’re keeping our fingers crossed for that one. We’ve got a bunch more in the U.S. that we plan on submitting to as well.

Find out more about **The Demon’s Rook** on their website: <http://www.demonsrook.com>

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