



Contributed photo  
**'Hunger Ward' by Skye Fitzgerald was nominated for an Academy Award in the short documentary category.**

## Moviemaker

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human-caused war," Fitzgerald said. Fitzgerald said he shot the film over 30 days in January and February last year in Yemen, a west Asian nation with an ongoing war between Saudi Arabian-backed pro-government forces and the rebel Houthis movement.

Filming in a conflict zone was challenging, especially when the Saudi coalitions reject journalists and filmmakers in the country. He said his party was detained in Yemen for seven hours before being released.

"You have to fight very hard and in nuanced ways to get into the conflict zone," Fitzgerald said. "Once you're there you have to work in careful, delicate ways to keep yourself from danger."

Seeing children die was extremely difficult, he said, but the crew wanted to portray the war authentically — even if it was hard to watch.

"To me, it made the project even more important because it was so challenging," Fitzgerald said. "Just because something is hard, it doesn't mean that it's not worthwhile. In some ways, I believe it's more rewarding."

Without electricity in Monument, Fitzgerald said he did not have a chance to learn much about cinema and media until he went to college, and his family is helping others dream big through the annual Dream Schol-



Contributed photo  
**Skye Fitzgerald answers audience questions during a screening of his film '50 Feet From Syria' at Eastern Oregon University.**

arship awarded to a graduate of Monument High School who is pursuing higher education.

Despite fewer resources in the small town, he said there are benefits as well, such as the extra attention and interaction that comes with small class sizes.

Fitzgerald said, ultimately, success is not tied to where a person went to school or even innate talent: It's about will and a willingness to improve.

The 93rd Academy Awards ceremony will be aired from 5-8 p.m. Sunday, April 25, on ABC.

## Mutilations

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one of his herd had been discovered dead two days earlier with an odd cut down its spine.

Shannon, who lives on the ranch with his two sons, reported no predators or birds had touched the cow. There were no tracks, and no blood surrounding it. The cow's left cheek, tongue and three of its teats had been cut away cleanly. But the eyes, usually the first body part to be scavenged after death, were untouched. There were no bullet holes, and a scan of the cow by a metal detector turned up none.

The cow was about 200 yards from the road, near the edge of a field and some juniper trees. There were no vehi-

cle tracks near the dead animal, no footprints of any kind.

The mystery deepened a few days later. On March 4, Casey Thomas, manager of the GI Ranch on Lister Road in Paulina, reported that one of his herd of around 5,000 appeared to have suffered a strange death.

Crook County detective Javier Sanchez arrived to find a deceased Black Angus cow lying on its side. Hair had been removed near the stomach. All four teats were cut off and its left cheek, tongue and sex organs removed. Between the front legs an uneven patch of hair was missing and in the middle was a prick mark, Sanchez wrote in his report.

The next day, Crook County Sgt. Timothy Durham was dispatched to a report of a wolf kill at the McCormack Ranch on Southeast Bear Creek Road. But it was appar-

ent no wolf took down this cow.

Durham noted several straight incisions on the animal. The udder had been removed and a circular cut was made around the anus and the reproductive organs removed without puncturing the gut. The left cheek, left eye and tongue had been removed.

"Again, I noted straight, clean incisions where the cheek had been," Durham wrote in his case report.

Durham examined the carcass and found a puncture wound between the neck and shoulder. He found no bite marks.

"There were no apparent animal or human tracks immediately surrounding the carcass, and only minimal blood in the area," Durham wrote. "I know from personal experience that, if an animal is killed or scavenged by predators, there is typically a large bloody messy area surrounding the carcass."

On March 6, Casey Thomas called police back to report finding another dead cow bearing the same strange injuries. This one was more badly decomposed than the first, but its left cheek was also removed and a 2-inch patch had been cut into the hair on its neck.

Detectives took photos of the dead cows to Prineville veterinarian Taylor Karlin for her perspective. She agreed the deaths appeared unnatural, and her opinion was included in a search warrant request filed in the case to scan for cellphone activity near where the cows were found.

Charges in any of the cases could include trespassing and aggravated animal abuse. With the cattle valued at \$1,250 to



Contributed photo/Fee Stubblefield  
**Photos posted to Fee Stubblefield's Facebook page on Saturday, Sept. 12, show the mutilated cow he found near Dixie Ranch Road outside of Ukiah earlier that day.**

\$1,400 each, criminal mischief might also be charged.

As a vet with an interest in large animals, Karlin has performed many post-mortem examinations on deceased livestock. When, and if, another mutilated cow turns up in Crook County, Karlin has agreed to perform an appropriate necropsy so she can personally examine a fresh specimen.

"I wish I had an answer," she said. "We're kind of at a loss."

One possible explanation is these were, in fact, natural deaths.

Podcast host Dunning's long-running show Skeptoid devoted an episode to debunking cattle mutilation in 2015. Dunning, who read the 28-page search warrant request, called the recent Crook County case typical

of numerous accounts often attributed to aliens or satanic rituals.

"This is almost certainly the same kind of bird predation we've seen in so many similar cases," he wrote. "In my opinion, there is nothing here that suggests anything but normal and expected bird predation had occurred, and ... no justification for a search warrant to seek out an apocryphal human responsible for the wounds."

Dunning said he's learned there's actually a short window of time between when the animal dies and when its body is scavenged when it's obvious what killed the animal.

"Most particularly birds, and also some insects, will always go first for the exposed soft tissue: eyes, tongue, lips and mouth area, genitals. The animal is dead with zero blood

pressure so there is never significant bleeding from post-mortem wounds. The body is in the process of drying and decaying, so skin pulls tight from around the excised area, giving the impression of a perfect surgical cut."

Karlin is awaiting the results of liver and blood samples she's sent away for lab testing. Police have sent hair samples to the state crime lab on the chance they don't belong to the bovine.

Last year, the FBI in Oregon started receiving questions about cattle mutilations in Central and Eastern Oregon, according to Beth Anne Steele, spokesperson for the FBI Portland office. But despite sporadic media inquiries, the office does not have a current role in the cattle mutilation investigations, Steele wrote.

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