John Erick Dowdle and his brother Drew are laughing in unison at FANGORIA. This is happening not out of disrespect (“We’re big fans,” the brothers say. “We have the QUARANTINE cover framed in our office!”) but because your correspondent has just asked about the possibility of the duo switching gears at some point and shooting a romantic comedy. The Dowdles previously won notice for the harrowing Handycam realism of THE POUGHKEEPSIE TAPES, then translated the ferocious Spanish zombie film [REC] into QUARANTINE for English-speaking audiences. Now they have DEVIL in theaters, based on a story by executive producer M. Night Shyamalan.

After the hilarity subsides, John, the livelier of the pair and the director on their films, says, “I wouldn’t put it past us to do a romantic comedy one day. THE POUGHKEEPSIE TAPES…well, it’s not a comedy, but it was a romance in its own twisted way. But, yeah, if we did do a romantic comedy, it’d be wrong.”

Drew Dowdle, the more reserved sibling, executive producer on all their films and co-writer of QUARANTINE and POUGHKEEPSIE, adds dryly, “A romantic comedy where everybody dies.” “Really, we just love horror,” John continues. “We love thrillers. It’s what we grew up with, and it’s what we gravitate toward in our private time to watch. Something that a lot of people don’t get is that you’re allowed a much broader and deeper level of artistry in horror. You can do the craziest stuff, and it’s totally accepted by the audience—when really, how many different shots are there in a romantic comedy? A two-shot, single, single, dolly along as they walk…it’s all so boring. Horror gives you the chance to experiment with bizarre and twisted things that are totally acceptable within the genre, and we love the freedom it allows us.”

“As different as our films have been,” Drew continues, “one common thread we’ve tried to maintain has been to make them experiential for the audience. In POUGHKEEPSIE TAPES, we wanted to put people in the camera of a serial killer. With QUARANTINE, the experience there was obvious, and DEVIL was shot in a very subjective way as well. We tried to put the viewer inside an elevator with these five characters. The ‘experience’ movie is something the horror/thriller genre really lends itself to, and allows you freedoms you don’t really get in other genres.”

DEVIL, in which five strangers—one of whom is actually Satan, there to claim the rest—are trapped in that elevator, became the subject of much on-line discussion when Shyamalan’s proprietary portion of the title was suddenly removed. Gossip had it that the critical horsewhipping endured by Shyamalan’s THE LAST AIRBENDER, and jeers in theaters when the filmmaker’s name appeared in the trailer, were the culprits. Drew Dowdle and Shyamalan himself want to clear the air: “That was a snafu,” Drew says. “It was always going to be called DEVIL. When Universal announced its 2011 slate of films, when we were originally going to come out in February 2011, they listed the title as THE NIGHT CHRONICLES: DEVIL. The studio was in the process of changing the name back to DEVIL, and people picked that up and ran with it as if Universal was taking Night’s name off the movie, and that’s clearly not the case. Night’s name is still very prominent.”

“They wanted to make THE NIGHT CHRONICLES part of the title, but I felt that was not the way to go,” says Shyamalan, who plans to make two other films—including REINCARNATE, directed by THE LAST EXORCISM’s Daniel Stamm—under the banner in the same writer/producer capacity. “These should be individual movies. DEVIL and any further installments won’t have related characters or plotlines.”

Shyamalan, who calls the Dowdles “really sweet human beings,” then takes the opportunity to explain what prompted him to hand off his DEVIL idea and how much he enjoyed working in a supportive creative role. “DEVIL was [originally] for me to direct, 100 percent,” he reveals. “I had my little black journal that I wrote all my notes in, I had my ideas for casting and how I was going to shoot it. I was seriously thinking about doing it, but it was just a timing thing. I had multiple ideas, and decided to go with one of the others, and kept saying to myself, ‘Oh, I’ll do [DEVIL] next time.’ But life went on, and I ended up with a few of these ideas left over. I still wanted to tell the stories somehow, so I said, ‘Let’s get some great filmmakers to do them.’

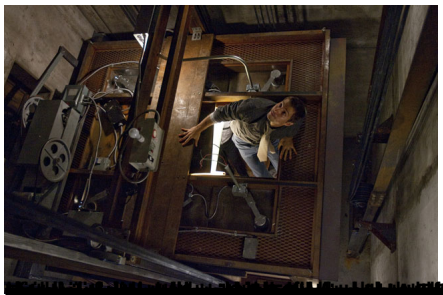
“Also, it came from a yearning to be a part of a community,” he continues. “Because I live in

Philadelphia, and most industry people are in Los Angeles or New York, I sometimes feel very isolated. You miss the fraternity of making movies. Up until now, my process of has been a quiet one: I’ll quietly write something and then go off and make it. On set, it’s fantastic because I have so many people to bounce ideas off of and share the process with, but a lot of it is very lonely and singular. I always dreamed of teaming up with someone and just making movies for the fun of it. This was a way I could be part of a community of people who I could learn from, share ideas and who would challenge me. So it became, ‘I can make these ideas now, and they don’t have to die in my drawer.’ And the Dowdles have become real friends; they come over to my house now, and we just hang out!”

Shyamalan then mentions that he’s “itching to get back to something dark and edgy” following his recent dalliances into family-targeted territory, and Fango asks about his upcoming secret project, which Bruce Willis and Bradley Cooper are reportedly set to star in—would this be a return to terrifying form, something that will appeal to Fango readers? Shyamalan chuckles and answers, “Definitely!”

Getting back to the Dowdles, the conversation turns to the expanding QUARANTINE universe. The sequel QUARANTINE 2: TERMINAL, set in an airport and unrelated to [REC] 2, recently wrapped shooting for Sony (see our first report here), and it appears there’s still some juice left in the first-person-fright subgenre. Are the Dowdles, who weren’t involved with QUARANTINE 2, tempted to return to the world of handheld horror? “We’re very happy with the work we did [on QUARANTINE]; it was such a fun film,” John says. “We love the property, but I feel like we’ve said what we have to say on that. I can’t see us revisiting it. We’d rather keep moving in a forward trajectory. From a filmmaking standpoint, we’ve done a lot of the POV type of stuff. That was enjoyable, and we learned a lot about blocking [
laughs
], but now we’re enjoying more of an old-school, traditional Hollywood approach, kind of a Hitchcockian style of filmmaking.”

“We’ve always thought of ourselves as self-generators,” Drew adds. “We’re really proud of QUARANTINE, and we’re big fans of the original [REC]. However, if we jumped straight from QUARANTINE into another remake, we’d run the risk of being known as ‘the remake guys.’ If we jumped into another POV-style movie, we’d risk being the POV guys. That was another big draw for us with DEVIL—not only that it was an original concept, but that we could get Tak Fujimoto [cinematographer of THE SIXTH SENSE and THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS, among many others] to shoot it. Night’s involvement was key in our ability to get Tak. So we were able to make something with a traditional narrative, and shot elegantly. We really expanded our style.”



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