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Making its DVD and Blu-ray debut today from Magnolia Home Entertainment, COMPLIANCE is a psychological thriller that spins a fact-based story into a skin-crawlingly disturbing exploration of human behavior. It's a remarkable achievement for writer/director Craig Zobel, who discusses the movie with FANGORIA in this exclusive interview.

Inspired by a series of cases that took place across the U.S. in the 1990s and early 2000s, COMPLIANCE takes place at a suburban ChickWich restaurant, where supervisor Sandra (Ann Dowd) receives a phone call from a man (THE INNKEEPERS' Pat Healy) posing as a cop. Calling himself "Office Daniels," he informs Sandra that teenaged cashier Becky (Dreama Walker) has been accused of stealing by a customer, and asks if Sandra could please interrogate the girl…and then strip-search her when Becky insists she doesn't have the stolen money…and things get darker and more perverse from there (see review here). It's a story that has outraged audiences, and will have you questioning your own views on dealing with the law…

FANGORIA: Did you ever have any experiences with the authorities that influenced the writing of COMPLIANCE?

CRAIG ZOBEL (pictured right): That's a good question. I don't know how unique this is, but I don't have any particular affection for any experience I've had with police. I definitely thought about the fact that we sort of have this—not to be highfalutin—social contract where we're like,

"OK, these people are here to protect us," and you assume they're not going to do anything illegal, because that wouldn't fit. A better way to say it would be, I've certainly been pulled over by the police before, and one time it was because my taillight was out and I didn't know. I was like, "I'm not speeding!" I was incredibly defensive—that was my natural instinct in that situation, which was frustrating. I certainly knew I wasn't committing a crime at the time—why was I defensive [*laughs*]?

I believe we give power to the police automatically. And that's not a bad thing; they wouldn't be able to do their job unless we did that. But it certainly also means that there's some accountability, for us to believe they're not going to abuse the power. There's been a lot of activity in the lower courts about videotaping the police and what the rules are on that. It has become a big civil-liberties case. Police don't want you to videotape them, but it's become an issue that that should be allowed in order to make sure honest things happen. I definitely thought about that a lot.

FANG: How much do you consider COMPLIANCE a horror/thriller genre film, and how far did you steer it in that direction?

ZOBEL: My goal was that the movie should be like a study, as if I was an alien who came to this planet and saw this weird situation: "Why is this happening?" I tried to be incredibly objective about how it happened. But I found that in conceiving, shooting and editing the film, it became important that it not feel only like an intellectual exercise, but play on the unsettled feeling you get when you think about those cases. Those stories bothered me, and I felt it was a viable and important thing to root it in that feeling. And in that sense, I definitely leaned on the psychological-thriller elements. Certainly, my background of watching genre movies of various types popped up, and it was really enjoyable to exercise that muscle—to explore this intellectual idea, but also figure out how to move the camera and edit and use sound in order to get the audience to pay attention to certain things.

FANG: The movie seems to be especially inspired by one particular prank-call case in Kentucky. How much did you study that, and how much did you bring in elements of other incidents while you were writing?

ZOBEL: There are similarities to a bunch of different events. Like, [making Becky] run in place or do jumping jacks came up in multiple documented court cases. So I looked at a bunch of these and started to process in my mind what would've had to happen in order to get from point

A to point B, and for it to happen multiple times. For me, it's significant that it occurred so many times.

FANG: How did you go about casting the lead roles, which required very specific types of people?

ZOBEL: Obviously, having the screenplay be as clear as possible was the first step, and then it became a two-part thing. I knew I didn't want to use actors who would completely take you out of the story. It couldn't be people you wouldn't buy working in a fast-food restaurant. It was important to me that that work. Also, having actors with a similar fascination with the subject matter was important to me. So all of the casting involved questions like, "Are you curious about this?" or "What are your thoughts on these stories?" That was the first conversation we had.

Ultimately, it worked in the sense that you see these people processing things beat by beat, trying to rationalize how they can be in the situation they find themselves in, which required actors who were fascinated with that part of humanity.

FANG: The actress playing Becky was required to be put in some very uncomfortable situations. Was it difficult to find someone up to that task, and how did you work with Dreama Walker to get through those difficult moments?

ZOBEL: That's a good question. As far as finding the actress, it was just like, they didn't come into the room if they didn't know what the job was, you know what I mean? People weren't going to audition for the movie if they weren't comfortable with the subject matter. And it was important to me to feel that Dreama Walker was very involved in how we portrayed those events. We had a lot of discussions; everything was talked over before we got into those situations.

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