

“GHOST RIDER”: In the Right “SPIRIT,” Part Two

Written by Michael Gingold
Friday, 17 February 2012 10:30



Continuing our chat with Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, directors of GHOST RIDER: SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE, which began [here](#), the duo talk 3D, ratings and more...

FANG: A lot of directors who have done 3D action movies have said that the process restricts how much they can move the camera and how fast they can edit, and that’s obviously a signature of your style. How much did you have to pull back?

TAYLOR: We heard all the rules coming in. We were told what you can and can’t do in 3D.



NEVELDINE: “No lens flares. No moving the camera this way.”

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TAYLOR: “No quick cuts.” So we just threw out the rule book and did whatever we wanted to do. The truth is, there really are no rules, or if there’s a reason behind the rule, there’s a way to get around it.

NEVELDINE: There are certainly more rules if you acquire in 3D, and you have two camera bodies, two lens systems... We didn’t do that. We decided to shoot the way we shoot and then find the best post-conversion process available. And we literally did it frame by frame to make sure that this thing was gonna look right, and not feel like some cheap version of 3D conversion that would piss people off and make them sick. Now, if this was CRANK 3, we’d want to piss people off and make them sick [*laughs*]. But for this movie, we wanted to do it right, and we’re really happy with the result.

FANG: Well, now I have to ask—is there a CRANK 3D in our future?

NEVELDINE: Absolutely.

TAYLOR: CRANK is destined to be a trilogy. It’s gonna happen.

FANG: Do you have any plans of where you’re going to take it?

TAYLOR: Outer space, I think [*laughs*].

NEVELDINE: There are ideas. We’re narrowing it down. We can’t tell you any more than that, though. We’ll get in trouble.

TAYLOR: Our idea of Chev Chelios getting Osama Bin Laden kind of got shot down. That one doesn’t work anymore.

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FANG: And that’s a shame. Now, the CRANK films were done on relatively modest budgets, and GHOST RIDER: SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE was obviously a lot bigger. Was it fun having a lot more toys to play with?

NEVELDINE: We did have some more toys, but at the same time, it really wasn’t that much bigger, because on CRANK: HIGH VOLTAGE we shot for around \$20 million, but it was in LA with our crew. This movie, I don’t know what the exact budget was—it definitely wasn’t the \$75 million they say on IMDb—we were over in Romania with only one American crewmember we’d worked with before, so everyone else was new, and there were so many challenges and struggles and battles we had to go through to get this movie done. So it felt like we were back shooting the first CRANK guerrilla-style, punk rock filmmaking. It was completely crazy.

TAYLOR: It was so funny, talk about other toys to play with—you should’ve seen the toys we were playing with over there [*laughs*]. We were working with gear that looked like it was from Cuba in the ’60s or something. I mean, there was nothing there. It was really a difficult process making this movie, and in many ways it was more punk-rock and guerrilla than even CRANK: HIGH VOLTAGE, just because of where we shot it and what we had to work with.

FANG: I’m thinking, though, of scenes like the one with the giant excavator, which is an amazing piece of machinery.

TAYLOR: That’s real. The whole thing really existed.

NEVELDINE: It’s a strip miner. It cuts up mountains.



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TAYLOR: We found it up there; it was this old, rusted relic, sitting in the middle of nowhere waiting for us to discover it. It looked like something only the Ghost Rider could create. And it still worked! You'd fire it up and the goddamn thing started turning.

NEVELDINE: It's 100 feet tall, 700 feet long...

TAYLOR: Obviously we lit it on fire in post and did some things with CGI to enhance it. But that was just an opportunity that wasn't in the script. There was a whole different setpiece, and then we saw that thing and were like, “Ah, that's it. We'll use it.”

FANG: Were you fans of the GHOST RIDER comics before you came on board the movie?

TAYLOR: The Ghost Rider's been around for 30-40 years or so, and there have been so many different comics and so many different takes that there was not really one singular vision of the Ghost Rider that inspired us. But he's certainly a cool character.

NEVELDINE: I didn't know about him before the movie. I'd never heard of the GHOST RIDER comic. But I dove in after we got the job and read 100 comics, and realized they're all completely different—different styles, different looks... I remember there was one where the Ghost Rider was in a tight blue spandex-looking thing [*laughs*].

TAYLOR: What's really funny is, you read the first ones, right?

NEVELDINE: Yeah.

TAYLOR: For the first 10 or 20 issues, he's not even a demon, he's not even scary. Basically, he talks like Johnny Blaze, and starts bellowing out this Shakespearean-sounding dialogue to try to scare the bad guys, but the bad guys aren't really scared of him and they chase him

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around, and he spends most of the time just running away from cops and being a total fail [*laughs*]. He's lame. And I was like, “Really?!”

NEVELDINE: I guess he didn't know how to use his power back then.

TAYLOR: So it's a character that maybe has never really been done to the satisfaction of fans, even in the comics. You always feel like there should've been more. So hopefully we got it right this time.

FANG: Did you feel any restrictions, given that this is a big Marvel franchise film and thus had to be PG-13?

TAYLOR: They told us it was PG-21.

NEVELDINE: We knew going in that it was PG-13, so we just pushed the balance as far as we could. You know, we dropped the F-bomb and some swear words, and the MPAA said, “Yeah, that's OK.” Overall, it seems fun enough and doesn't take itself too seriously, and even though we obliterate 250 guys in the movie, there's no blood, so therefore they gave us the PG-13.

TAYLOR: You can kill as many guys as you want by burning them. Fire's OK for some reason.

FANG: It's interesting; I was just watching the trailer, and there's a shot of a drop of blood falling that's red in the movie, but it's black in the trailer. It's interesting how they apparently think just the color can change the impact of the shot.

TAYLOR: That's right. As if we don't know what that is.

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NEVELDINE: Maybe the Ghost Rider was eating a Hershey Bar and melted it because his head is so hot.

TAYLOR: There’s a lot of voodoo involved in ratings, so it was different seas for us to navigate than we’re used to. But then, we’ve found that an R rating, once you get too used to it, can become kind of a crutch, because in a scene that seems flat, you can always throw some completely outrageous thing in there, you can drop 100 F-bombs or cut somebody’s head off or whatever.

NEVELDINE: Public sex scenes.

TAYLOR: Public sex scenes, yeah.

NEVELDINE: And you know, you’re guaranteed that it’s fun [*laughs*], but when they take that weapon away, you have to think of other ways. Though it was a challenge, we enjoyed it.

FANG: When you first embarked on the first CRANK, was the goal to be as crazy as you could, and push the envelope in every way possible?

TAYLOR: The first CRANK isn’t a movie so much as a cry for attention.

NEVELDINE: Yeah, it’s a big scream for attention, and we tried to pull out every camera trick we knew at that point to get the movie made. But that script was that script. We had the public sex scene, we had all that stuff in there... We had a hard time getting that movie set up for years, and we got lucky. Someone was dumb enough to give us the cash, and now we have enough fans who want more [*laughs*].

TAYLOR: We’re still screaming for attention, only now we have Nic Cage as an ally!

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NEVELDINE: He’s screaming for us.

FANG: Do you think you could get him into CRANK 3D?

NEVELDINE: Oh, I hope. It’d be fantastic. We’ll try.

TAYLOR: Nic Cage is awesome in 3D.

FANG: His performances are always kind of 3D.

NEVELDINE: Yeah, that’s right. That’s a good way to put it.

FANG: CRANK: HIGH VOLTAGE had a little bit more of a horror/fantasy flavor; you had the *ka iju* sequence and Lloyd Kaufman doing a cameo, things like that. Were you intentionally looking to put more fantastical elements into the second one?



NEVELDINE: We wink at billions of films we love, from Japanese cinema to B-films like Troma to Sam Raimi. We were somehow able to jam it all into that movie. Godzilla...I mean, why not [*laughs*]?

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NEVELDINE: After CRANK’s success on a tiny budget, they kinda said, “Hey, if you can make this kind of movie for that amount of money, just go do whatever you want, because we really don’t understand what you guys are doing anyway.” [*Laughs*]

TAYLOR: We’re convinced to this day that nobody read the script for CRANK: HIGH VOLTAGE before we went into production.

NEVELDINE: Well, we heard that the head of the studio did not read it, in fact. But God bless him for that. That’s actually a good executive.

FANG: And it’s great for us, because we got that unfiltered insanity on the screen. Do you think you ever might do a pure horror film or a pure monster movie?

NEVELDINE: Sure.

TAYLOR: Absolutely.

FANG: Any particular ideas that you might want to pursue?

NEVELDINE: Billions on that level, just in terms of strict horror, but...

TAYLOR: We’ll see.

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FANG: You're films clearly express a love of a wide spectrum, but is there any one particular film that especially inspires either one of you?

NEVELDINE: Too many. We get this question a lot.

TAYLOR: That's a hard one.

NEVELDINE: I mean, is it Kubrick, is it Raimi? It's all of 'em. You can see it in our films; it's such a blend of the love of all cinema, because they're kind of all in there, all those guys—and girls, 'cause I do love POINT BREAK.