Written by Michael Gingold
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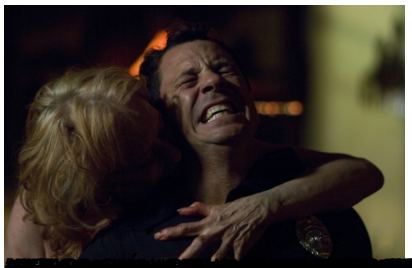
The Dowdle Brothers’ DEVIL debuted on DVD and Blu-ray this Tuesday, and so following up on our Fresh from the Archives THE POUGHKEEPSIE TAPES review , here’s another Michael Gingold review of another John Erick & Drew Dowdle film, QUARANTINE—their 2008 remake of Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza’s [REC].

QUARANTINE is a mostly effective movie whose achievements are nonetheless hard to quantify. Specifically, it’s difficult to judge the achievements of its makers, because they’re such a direct echo of someone else’s work. Shot for shot, if not line for line, QUARANTINE is almost entirely a replay of [REC], last year’s genuinely terrifying vérité shocker by Spain’s Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza that sent a two-person TV crew into an apartment house of horrors, with the entire story told from their camera’s vantage point. Directed by John Erick Dowdle, who scripted with his brother Drew following the festival success of their as yet unreleased, similarly reality-themed THE POUGHKEEPSIE TAPES, the English-language redux adopts the same visual tack and follows the same path into an identical setting (an LA residential building with remarkably Spanish-looking interior architecture), making just a handful of tweaks along the way.

Some of those are to the dialogue, particularly during the early sequences in which television reporter Angela Vidal (Jennifer Carpenter) and her largely unseen cameraman Scott (Steve Harris, whose soothing yet authoritative voice makes him perfectly cast in the role) hang around a firehouse late one night, waiting for something exciting to happen. There is, perhaps inevitably, a raunchier tone to the goings-on here, as one of the smoke-eaters (Johnathon Schaech) makes some crude come-ons and a guy in the shower room tries to show Angela his hose. Before 15 minutes have elapsed, a call comes in, and Angela and Scott hitch a ride to the four-story (plus attic, which will become significant by the climax) dwelling where a woman has been heard shrieking behind one of the closed doors. As the TV camera watches, the firemen and a couple of cops on the scene bang down her door—and unleash a plague of madness that transforms those who catch it into slavering killers, while a remarkably fast-acting government seals off the building to keep it from spreading, trapping the residents, along with LA’s bravest and finest plus Angela and Scott, inside.



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