

REPLAY



THE DARING GUILD CAMERA TEAM BEHIND DAREDEVIL

BY PAULINE ROGERS - SCREEN PULLS COURTESY OF MARVEL TELEVISION / NETFLIX

In Season One, Episode Two of the Netflix superhero series *Daredevil*, the story of Matt Murdock, a blind man who is an attorney by day and a vigilante for justice by night, a hallway fight scene was conceived and executed in a single shot, establishing the style of fight choreography and cinematography for this hit action show.

"This year, however," relates *Daredevil* cinematographer Martin Ahlgren, "the show runners wanted to do something similar but take it in a slightly different direction."

Literally, another direction: as in top to bottom.

The scene depicts *Daredevil* (Charlie Cox) fighting his way down from the top floor of a building against a crew of *Dogs of Hell* bikers, hell-bent on revenge after Frank Castle, aka The Punisher, has blown up their motorcycles. With an empty gun duct-taped to his wrist and a chain attached to his other arm, *Daredevil* is aiming to make it out alive, while at the same time trying to get to Frank,

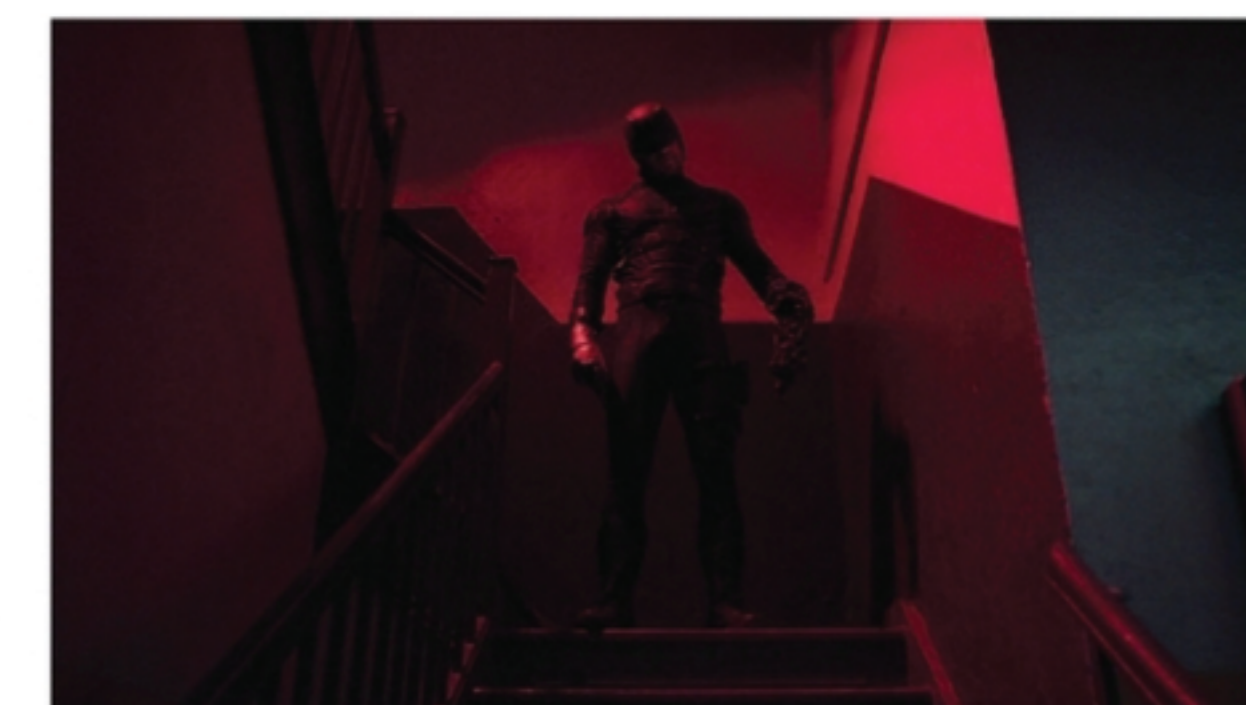
who is unconscious but traveling downward in the freight elevator.

The shot is broken down into three parts: the fight in the hallway, the fight leading down the stairwell to the ground floor, and the fight at ground level. Everything was shot in a single practical location in Long Island City, Queens.

Director Marc Jobst's initial idea was to do the first two parts in one shot.

"This wasn't possible," explains Ahlgren, "because the hallway and stairwell didn't connect. And some of the stunts required us to use Chris Brewster, the stunt double for Charlie Cox. In other instances it needed to be Charlie, because we see his face."

"And because we were working on location this time, there were some limitations and challenges to deal with to fit both camera and stunt rigs around the action," Ahlgren adds. "This was part of why we decided to break up the sequence into several shots."



"For the stairway, which was done in four shots, "the Freefly MōVI was handed from one person to another to maneuver around in the tight vertical space." (DP Martin Ahlgren)

Fight coordinator Phil Silvera (*Deadpool*), who choreographed the original one-shot hallway fight in Season One, choreographed this new hallway sequence. Silvera staged the scene (with the stunt actors and doubles) as four individual flowing shots that connected in pans and crosses, thereby staying as close as possible to Season One's single-shot feeling. B-camera operator Rod Calarco used a Steadicam to maneuver around the action in the narrow hallway during these shots.

The stairway descent was captured with a Freefly MōVI using lightweight Ultra Primes. (The show is shot in 4K on the RED DRAGON with Master Primes.) "We used it to navigate the tighter space and to be able to travel vertically," explains A-camera operator Petr Hlinomaz. "The rig was carried by a grip but was operated remotely, making it possible to hand the camera off while still maintaining control of the framing."

"When the crew first entered the stairwell, the camera was carried for a few steps but was also attached to a pulley rig," explains Ahlgren. "As the camera followed the action into the stairs, the rig started descending down a level on the pulley. One level down, another grip caught the Freefly MōVI and continued the move. The stairway scene was made up of about four shots as well, with the Freefly MōVI being handed from one person to another to maneuver around in the tight vertical space."

At the ground level, the team went handheld, with a few Freefly MōVI shots mixed in as it went into more conventional coverage for that part of the fight.

Jobst saw the going-down-the-stairs as a Dante's Inferno type of descent into hell. "To stay true to the image, Martin devised a strategy of increasing stutter to the image as we went deeper," explains A-camera first assistant Bob Becchio. "Since we did have cuts, we could alter the shutter angle in between shots."

The plan was to shoot the hallway scene with a 180-degree shutter, and when the team entered the stairwell, they would adjust that to 90 degrees. When they went deeper down the stairs it would become 45 degrees, and as the team got to the bottom, it would become 22 degrees. "That meant that I would have to light the stairwell to a light level that would accommodate that shutter speed, since a 22-degree shutter angle is equivalent to shooting about 200 frames per second," explains gaffer Ken Dodd.

Because they were looking 360 degrees and up and down,

Production Designer Scott Murphy created wall-mounted cage lights that could accommodate halogen 2K bulbs that were bright enough. "When we started shooting the sequence and did a take at 45 degrees, Marc was getting concerned that the effect was too strong and distracting," says Ahlgren. "We decided to back off from the increasingly narrow shutter and instead most of the sequence was shot with a 90-degree angle."

The team did keep another aspect of this increasing "inferno" by pulsing lights as they got lower, and adding a (mostly unmotivated) flashing red emergency light to increase the sense of chaos and danger. "Maybe the bikers running up the stairs have set this off and also broken some lights on the way," adds Ahlgren. "But it was not so much about reality as it was creating a feeling of increasing hell."

According to Ahlgren, the complicated sequence was actually shot by three DP's. When Ahlgren had to leave for a tech scout for the next episode, A-camera operator Petr Hlinomaz covered for him and shot the fight upstairs in the hallway. After principal photography was done, second-unit DP Jim McMillan finished by filling in remaining coverage in the stairwell and at ground level.

"When you shoot every episode as I did on *Daredevil*," Ahlgren confides, "you depend on having great crew members around you not only to match what you're establishing but also to work creatively with the directors so that there is continuity when you're gone. Petr and Jim are responsible for big portions of the show."

One bonus for *Daredevil*'s crew: almost everything was done in camera: there are very few visual effects, beyond cleaning up wires and crash pads. "I think we shot green screen maybe a total of four times in the entire season," Ahlgren recalls.

Stunts and fighting style separate *Daredevil* from the plethora of superhero films and TV shows on the market, because the fights are grounded in reality. Murdock's more like a skilled athlete than a super-human.

"We can feel him laboring in his fights - being out of breath, tired, in pain," Ahlgren concludes. "That realism was one of the things that attracted me to the show, and is what our talented crew keeps in mind as they use their creativity to put it on the screen." 🎬