

The Devil's advocates

Director/writer/lead **Chris Stapp**, producer/writer/lead **Matt Heath**, and producer **Karl Zohrab** talk about some of the on-screen and behind-the-scenes action from *The Devil Dared Me To*, the first film from development company **Headstrong's** slate.



The plot: (1) Young orphan Randy Cambell attempts to follow in his stuntman father's footsteps but his first stunt – attempting to jump the Cook Strait on a Cruiser bicycle – goes horribly wrong. (2) His safety-obsessed farming uncle and aunt are furious that Randy has disobeyed them by trying a stunt (and broken his arm in the process), (3) and burn his father's stunt gear as punishment. Randy, however, salvages his father's helmet and...

"This is me actually stunt doubling for our kid actor," says Stapp. "We built an oversized Cruiser and helmet, so I'd look slightly more child-like. I ride the bike down the hill with some fireworks going off on the back, hit a rock just before I get to the ramp, which I face-plant into. The scene was shot at Manukau Heads, which is doubling for the top of the South Island."

"Our American Gothic shot," says Stapp. "It's out at Henderson Valley – a good little location that, we got a lot filmed out there." "Yeah, we had some fantastic locations," agrees Zohrab. "They do cost money, but not that much compared to what they add to the production value of the movie. During the 34 day shoot, we had about 25 locations."

Zach Baker plays Randy as a kid. "He turned up to the audition with a tape of him jumping a mountain bike over his driveway, so we were pretty sold right away. And he's an absolutely excellent little actor, and a good dude to work with," notes Stapp. "All that stuff about not working with children? Bullshit." "He was probably the hardest working person on the set," agrees Heath.



(4) ... runs away to a stunt show featuring Dick Johansonson, who's performing a daredevil feat involving jumping 13 people lying on mattresses. (5) Randy volunteers to be one of the human hurdles, meeting the comely young Tragedy Jones in the process – an enduring romance is born. The stunt, however, goes horribly wrong. (6) Dick takes Randy under his wing and on the stunt circuit, which is populated by more than a few grotesques.

The character of Dick Johansonson (Heath) – pictured here just prior to yet another stunt disaster – has changed in its transition from his various TV incarnations to the big screen. "Dick was a happy-go-lucky incompetent," says Heath, "but for the purposes of the film, Dick is an evil, ego-obsessed, maniacal fuckwit – a complete dick in other words."

"Tragedy Jones is played by Floyd Alexander. We couldn't believe what a good actor she was," says Heath. "You'd be talking to her between scenes and have to remind yourself that she wasn't 25-years-old. She made Zach seem pretty young in comparison." "As it turns out," says Stapp, "we could have cast them from their names – I mean, Floyd and Zach are awesome movie star names."

"We actually hired the guy who plays this foulmouthed mechanic with one arm – Andrew Beattie – to be our prosthetic artist and then he decided he wanted to be an actor," says Stapp, "which turned out really well." "A lot of characters in the movie have horrific injuries," adds Heath, "which they deal with by acting as though nothing's happened."



(7) During the passing years, some characters pay the ultimate price in their quest for thrills and spills, (8) while others suffer profound physical humiliations. (9) Apparently disillusioned by the terrible toll his death-defying lifestyle has taken, Randy (now played by Chris Stapp) retreats back to the farm of his childhood, but eventually emerges with a tricked-out rocket car and a determination to finally succeed at the first stunt he ever attempted, all those years ago...

Distinguished actor Stuart Devenie plays the mourning father in this scene. "When I rang him about it, he asked me to describe the scene," recalls Zohrab. "Well, you're at the hospital with your dying daughter, so obviously you're very sad." "What's happened to her?" "Oh, she's been in an accident." "Is she badly injured?" Well, er, yes.' "So what kind of injuries?" "Um, she's basically just a torso..." "Oh, so it's a comedy?"

"This is Dick Johansonson in a scene with some amorous acquaintances in prison," says Heath. "I'm actually in the scene in the movie but wasn't included in the still, which is very disappointing given I'd really worked out for it" says Zohrab. "In fact, all the extras in our prison scenes were crew members," says Stapp, "which, as you can see from the photo, proved to be a good bit of casting."

"The rocket car was built by a friend of ours, Jody Hooker, who did a lot of the film's prop construction," says Stapp. "He did an amazing job – I basically made some sketches, gave them to him, and a couple of weeks later he'd taken it off the page and made it into reality." "Of course, it would never really work – there's no fuel intake, for instance," says Heath. "At the moment," adds Stapp, "the car's called 'The Spirit of Russell Crowe'."