

Q&A

# TWINS SPEAK STRANGER THINGS RETURNS

COEN. WACHOWSKI. DUPLASS. There are a lot of famous siblings making movies and TV together, but right now there's only one name in the identical-twins category: Duffer. That would be Matt and Ross, the 33-year-old North Carolina natives who pitched Netflix the eight-hour Spielberg movie otherwise known as *Stranger Things*. One year and 18 Emmy nominations later, the writer-directors are heading into season two of the pulp-culture sleeper hit with more on their minds than finding an '80s-shaped stone they haven't yet overturned. "We're trying to introduce concepts and ideas that can sustain us for at least a few more seasons," says Matt. (He's the one with longer hair.) There's still plenty of Reagan-era nostalgia on deck, from *Ghostbusters* to *Dragon's Lair*, but the cast is deeper—and the Upside Down upside-downier than ever. "We're dealing with another dimension," Matt says, "so anything is possible." Anything, it turns out, but delaying puberty in your teenage stars. —PETER RUBIN



**The internet loves *Stranger Things*—and it has suggestions. How do you shut out that chatter when it's time to write?**

**MATT:** I'm so tired of talking about Barb! [Laughs.]

**ROSS:** I don't go on Reddit, because I know that'll be quicksand and I won't be able to get out. Thankfully, Netflix had green-lit a writer's room before we officially got renewed, so most of the beats of season two were figured out ahead of time.

**Those kids are growing fast. Did you have to work around that?**

**ROSS:** Sometimes I forget until I look back at season one—they were so little and adorable. Like Gaten Matarazzo, who plays Dustin, looked like a little muppet. But now, and even more so into season three, these are full-on teenagers.

**MATT:** The scary thing is you're shooting for half a year—and season two takes place over the course of, like, a week, so you can't have someone have some major growth spurt. You'll hear changes in their voice, but you can't do much about puberty. Except maybe shift the pitch.

**You've said you want the show to run four or five seasons. Where does that leave us?**

**MATT:** It's getting dangerously close to where Winona Ryder's character will be able to watch herself!

**ROSS:** *Lucas* came out in 1986.

**MATT:** We do have her watching a Michael Keaton movie this year, so I'm happy about that.

**It seems impossible for shows to sneak up on people nowadays—yet *Stranger Things* did just that. Did you have any anxiety going in that it was going to sink?**

**MATT:** There's so much content out there, even good shows get lost. Netflix isn't spending movie-level marketing money—they want people to find this stuff through word of mouth.

**ROSS:** It's even worse now. I'm glad we came out last summer, because now there's something new every week.

**How does Netflix's all-at-once release model affect the way the storyline unfolds?**

**MATT:** We've written for network television, where you have to worry about hitting these ad breaks, you have to worry about 42 minutes and 10 seconds exactly.

**ROSS:** With episode five in the first season, when Nancy goes in the tree, I remember being like, it's not satisfying to have her saved at the end, the way a net-

work show would. We were joking about leaving her there—but then suddenly that cliffhanger felt right to us.

**There are a lot of writing partnerships in entertainment. There aren't a lot of twins.**

**MATT:** We've been making movies since the fourth grade, so it feels pretty natural. Our taste is so identical that we can just share a look and communicate quite a lot.

**ROSS:** Up through college, we saw every movie together. We have the same life, many of the same life experiences, so we're—  
**MATT:** —as synced up as you can possibly be. That doesn't mean we don't have major disagreements.

**ROSS:** Because someone is wrong about something occasionally.

**Does that mind meld have its limits in the creative process?**

**MATT:** The writing for us is the hardest, but also the most important. You want to get to the next part of it, to production, but it doesn't matter how beautifully made it is if something's wrong with the story arc.

**ROSS:** That's the best thing about having someone else—it's like a constant bullshit filter.



**WRITER-DIRECTORS:** Matt and Ross Duffer **AGE:** 33 **HOMETOWN:** Durham, North Carolina **BEST KNOWN FOR:** TV series *Stranger Things* **LESS KNOWN FOR:** 2015 horror flick *Hidden* **BINGE-WATCH RECOMMENDATIONS:** *Friday Night Lights*, *The Last Airbender*, *Freaks and Geeks*, *Big Little Lies*, *Rick and Morty* **'80s REFERENCES IN SEASON TWO:** *Ghostbusters*, *Gremlins*, *Escape From New York*, *Temple of Doom*, *Poltergeist* **SCARIEST HORROR CREATION OF ALL TIME:** "Pinhead. *Hellraiser* scared us." **FAVORITE FOOD TO STRESS-EAT ON SET:** Bojangles' fried chicken biscuits

**MATT:** It helps you catch issues before you start spending a ton of money making it. There was one sequence in season two where I felt we messed it up in the writing stage, and we went back and redid it. But you really need to not do that. [Laughs.]

**So how do you top season one?**

**MATT:** Before this, we had never really done anything that anybody seemed to care about. So it's like, OK, we can do something that people like, and that gives you confidence. But then it also gives you a little bit of ammunition to push for things.

**ROSS:** Not that we're more difficult, but we push harder for the things that we want.

**MATT:** We're a big pain in the ass.

**What kinds of things are you pushing for?**

**MATT:** It's been much easier this year, but just getting profanity into the show was a big argument.

**ROSS:** When Netflix saw the first two episodes, they realized this is fine, it's not going to turn off families—

**MATT:** —but first, we actually gave in and took out all of the bad language, and the kids got really upset. Then I wrote Netflix saying I've got this army of 11- and 12-year-olds and they're pissed off that we cut all the language. At least let us shoot alternate takes. That was, like, the day before we started shooting. And then Netflix said OK.

**ROSS:** They're much more foulmouthed in season two than in season one, but in real life it's far worse. I'm like, I cannot believe that came out of your mouth.