

Credits roll after 24 hours

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BY JOHN MONAGHAN

FREE PRESS SPECIAL WRITER

Early Sunday evening, eight local filmmakers watched their short "The Coffee Culprit" have its world premiere in New York. The twist was that the filmmakers only began work on it the day before.

While many of us were raking leaves and washing storm windows last weekend, the group, which calls itself Circle of Confusion, was competing in the second and final round of a filmmaking competition called NYC Midnight Movie Making Madness. Only 24 teams from around the world were asked to compete in the second annual event, with \$10,000 awarded to the winning entry.

The winners won't be announced until later this week, but the group conceived, shot, edited and scored a 6 1/2-minute film, then delivered it via the Internet to New York an hour before the 12 a.m. Sunday deadline. All eight of them stayed up the full 24 hours to do it.

"The shoot went really well," says team member David Rumble, a Warren-based freelance filmmaker. "The movie is funny and well-produced, and most importantly, it's done."

Circle of Confusion is made up of filmmakers who hold jobs with local advertising agencies, and others who are freelancers. Most are Oakland County residents in their late 20s and early 30s.



FABRIZIO COSTANTINI

Gaffer Wayne Murphy of Brighton, director Drew Titran of Ferndale and assistant director David Rumble.

In the first stage of the competition in August, they were given two weeks to complete a movie with the following elements: It had to be science fiction and be set in a future where people's minds are monitored. Their resulting "The Brain Scanners" was a '50s sci-fi spoof with a "Twilight Zone" twist. Their win dropped the playing field from 280 (including other metro Detroit groups) to the final 24.

For the second round, guidelines regarding genre and content were supposed to come as early as 11 p.m. Friday. Adrenaline pumped among the eight as a phone call arrived shortly after midnight. The genre was mystery and the plot had to include an unwanted gift. The finished product could be no longer than 10 minutes.

"From then until 5:15, we kicked around countless ideas," Rumble says. "We discussed, argued, we did laps around the parking lot, and finally decided to roll with 'The Coffee Culprit.' "

The movie finds an office worker (Darius Thomas) given a coffee mug by his boss (Alex Safi), and the mystery is supplied by some hard-to-come-by java.

More than 35 volunteers worked as actors and technicians on the film, which was shot in the studios of GTN, a sprawling Oak Park production facility. "We had thought about filming outside, we even had a city bus for a few hours," says Rumble, "but thought we'd have more control if we did it all here."

Principal photography wrapped by mid-afternoon, leaving time for editing, sound effects and completion of John Garsteck's original score. The crew shot on Hi-8 digital video, but used 35mm lenses for professional effect.

Though Rumble says the shoot went like clockwork, the team faced complications. Member Michael Moreland arrived on Friday night fresh from the hospital emergency room, where he'd been diagnosed with strep throat. Director Drew Titran missed his plane to New York and had to take a later flight.

Things didn't truly go awry, however, until the Sunday screening when the projection bulb started to go dim. "Several films in the second half were so dark," grumbles Rumble. "Our lead actor is black, and you couldn't even see his facial expressions. As a result, nobody was even laughing."

The awards ceremony was supposed to happen after the screening, but the judges, heeding filmmakers complaints, postponed their final decision until later in the week after

all entries could be judged fresh. This left Circle of Confusion and other filmmakers deflated.

"Our film was definitely among the five or six best," Rumble says. "But it all depends, especially when so many weren't projected properly. If people weren't so tired at this point, they'd probably be even more upset than they already are."

Circle of Confusion plans to post both of its films on the Internet soon. And even if the group doesn't win the contest, the members say the experience was a good one. "The bottom line, is we're really proud of what we've created," Rumble says.