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 tight 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 motorcycle shop. 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 Breister, 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.”

At the ground level, the team went handheld, with a few FlyFi 300s 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 shutter to the image as we went deeper,” explains A-camera first assistant Bob Becchio. “Since we had cuts, we could alter the shutter angle in between shots.

The plan was to shoot the hallway scene with a 280-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 tight 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, they had to get the camera as close to the ground as possible. That meant that in order to get the ground level shot, they had to work with a 280-degree shutter. The one special effect element they had to do was the shot where the men are entering the stairwell, Turning in a room the Punisher was in, he can be seen in silhouette, as a yellow light comes from his eyes.

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 wasn’t so much about reality as it was creating a feeling of increasing hell.”

According to Ahlgren, the complicated sequence was actually shot by three DPs. When Ahlgren had to leave for a tech scout for the next episode, A-camera operator Petre Himrnovoz 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. Petre and Jim are responsible for big portions of the show.

One bonus for Daredevil’s crew almost everything was done in one 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 fight scenes 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.”