

RUN FOR THE HILLS RUN RED

By ROBERT GALLUZZO

Ofentimes, while chatting with people on set during a film shoot, you'll hear the entire cast and crew unanimously say how they've practically become "family" now, having been thrust into this hectic work environment, forced to create a natural bond amongst themselves and inevitably making life-long friendships for having endured such a difficult yet fun filming experience together. And in most cases, those people tend to drift apart after the completion of the movie, despite saying that they won't. With *The Hills Run Red*, however, it seems that what might be considered a clichéd statement totally rings true. After all, if it didn't, then this unique roundtable interview, exclusively arranged on FANGORIA's behalf, would not have come together so quickly and easily almost a full year after the completion of the shoot. A few phone calls are made, and before

It must be a horror film if a stripper like Alexa (Sophie Monk) uses a big blade to remove her outfit.



we know it, Fango is sitting out on a balcony at the home of screen-

writer (and sometime Fango columnist) David J. Schow, overlooking the famous Hollywood sign, with director Dave (*The Dead Hate the Living!*) Parker, producer Robert (*Free Enterprise*) Burnett and actors Janet Montgomery (also visible this fall in *Wrong Turn 3*; see page 10), Sophie Monk and Tad (*Lost Boys: The Tribe*) Hilgenbrink, reunited for the first time since they wrapped the picture in Sofia, Bulgaria last summer.

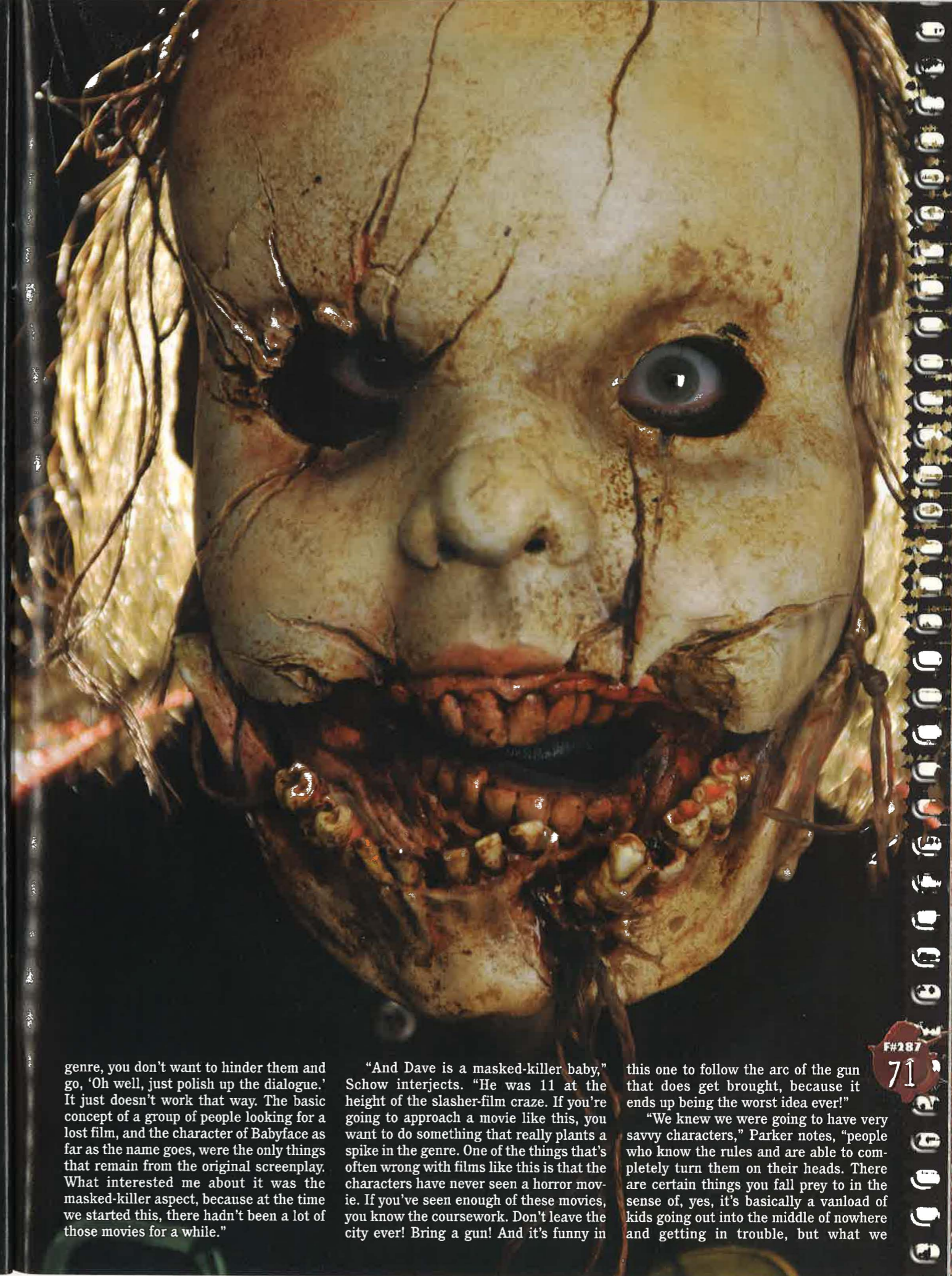
The premise of the movie is simple: Hilgenbrink plays Tyler, a lifelong horror devotee and aspiring documentary filmmaker who is obsessed with the long-lost Wilson Wyler Concannon film *The Hills Run Red*. It's said to be one of the scariest movies ever unspooled for audiences, and Tyler enlists the help of his girlfriend Serina (Montgomery) and best friend Lalo (Alex Wyndham of *Red Mist*) to hunt the film down. Recruiting Concannon's estranged daughter Alexa (Sophie Monk), Tyler has her act as their tour guide through all the original shooting locations of Concannon's supposed masterpiece. While wandering in the woods, they soon

discover that *Hills* never actually stopped shooting—and that its killer, Babyface, is still out there.

The origins of this feature (hitting DVD September 29 from Warner Premiere) are not what you'd expect for a product of Joel Silver and Robert Zemeckis' Dark Castle company. In fact, *The Hills Run Red*'s history dates back almost three years. "Fever Dreams approached Rob and I," explains Parker. "They were an independent company [with credits including *Wicked Lake* and *Shadow: Dead Riot*] coming out to the West Coast looking for directors and producers to do their movies, because they had primarily made them on the East Coast."

"Dave really responded to *Hills Run Red*," Burnett continues. "So we asked if we could change the script [by John Dombrow and John Carchietta] a bit, and they said we could do anything we wanted. So we brought in David Schow, whom we'd known for years and were big fans of."

"We knew when we got Schow involved, we were going to do a page-one rewrite," says Parker. "Because when you have someone who's this talented in the



genre, you don't want to hinder them and go, 'Oh well, just polish up the dialogue.' It just doesn't work that way. The basic concept of a group of people looking for a lost film, and the character of Babyface as far as the name goes, were the only things that remain from the original screenplay. What interested me about it was the masked-killer aspect, because at the time we started this, there hadn't been a lot of those movies for a while."

"And Dave is a masked-killer baby," Schow interjects. "He was 11 at the height of the slasher-film craze. If you're going to approach a movie like this, you want to do something that really plants a spike in the genre. One of the things that's often wrong with films like this is that the characters have never seen a horror movie. If you've seen enough of these movies, you know the coursework. Don't leave the city ever! Bring a gun! And it's funny in

this one to follow the arc of the gun that does get brought, because it ends up being the worst idea ever!"

"We knew we were going to have very savvy characters," Parker notes, "people who know the rules and are able to completely turn them on their heads. There are certain things you fall prey to in the sense of, yes, it's basically a vanload of kids going out into the middle of nowhere and getting in trouble, but what we

When you set out to find the most horrifying movie ever,
be careful what you wish for...



Old screen technology meets new (note the greenscreen patch) in *The Hills Run Red*.

together, put this teaser together and shot it in a day."

"At the time, we had just finished the documentary for *Superman Returns*, and Bryan Singer was aware that we were working on this project," Burnett adds. "Dave and I had done all of Bryan's DVDs at that time. He came down to the teaser shoot and watched what Dave was doing, and was very impressed. When Bryan saw the finished version, he said, 'Why make it with *Fever Dreams*? Why not just take

**"IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO A MASKED KILLER, THE CHALLENGE NOW IS MAKING ONE THAT LOOKS TRULY DISTINCTIVE."
-DAVE PARKER, DIRECTOR**

it to Warners?' Bryan made a phone call to the president of Warner Premiere, which had just entered into a deal with Dark Castle to do 10 direct-to-DVD films, because they had made *Return to House on Haunted Hill* and that had done very well. Dave and I came in, showed the teaser and submitted the script; two weeks later, we got a call saying that they thought *The Hills Run Red* would be a perfect film to do with Dark Castle."

Once they got the green light, Parker and Schow spent many sleepless nights refining their ideas and tweaking the shooting script. "Dave and I were doing all-nighters because we had a ticking clock, about a week before he had to leave for Bulgaria," Schow recalls. "He kept getting these calls at odd hours from the production guys in Bulgaria, asking, 'What about this?', 'What about that?' We were sitting in my office at around 5 a.m., and he got the call: 'You're leaving three days early,' and he was on the flight the next day with wet laundry. Fortunately, we had enough of it figured out before he had to jump on the plane."

With Parker en route to prep the locations in Sofia, casting sessions came together equally quickly back in the States. Among the first to become part of *The Hills Run Red's* diverse cast was Monk, a former Australian pop star whose primary experience had been in more humorous fare like *Date Movie* and *Spring Breakdown*. When we first see Alexa, she's a heroin-addicted junkie toiling in a strip club, which gave Monk a chance to play a part unlike any she had done before.

"All my stuff has been comedy; it's what I'm used to," she says. "So it was weird to get this, but I was lucky in that I just loved the challenge of it all.

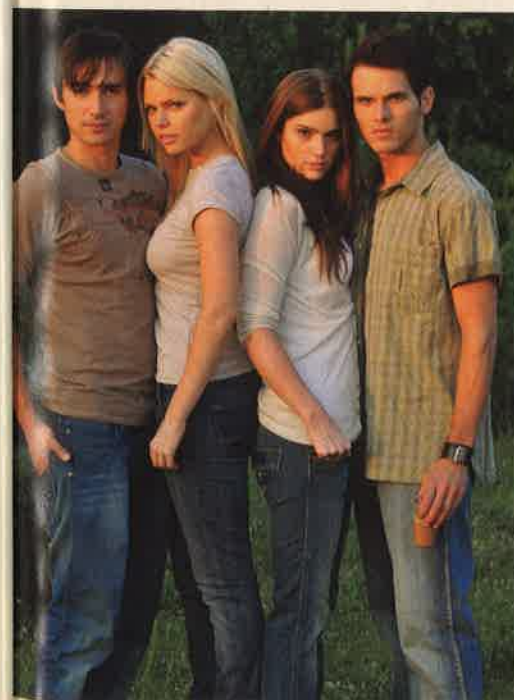
I'd been offered a lot of horror films, but this was so different. The story wasn't just scary, it was disturbing. And that frightens me more than 'boo' horror."

Newcomer Montgomery agrees with Monk. "The script interested me," she says, "because this was my first feature and I never watch horror movies; it's not something I've ever been into. I'm more into dramas and thrillers. But I was completely taken out of my comfort zone, and it was a challenge for everyone involved." "We had no clue what we were getting into," adds Hilgenbrink, also seen recently in *Amusement*. "I didn't meet Dave at an audition. I got the part, flew out the next day and met Dave a couple of days before we started shooting. It turned out that he was a great director and knew so much about horror movies, so we knew we were in good hands."

"Literally, we all met two days before we began filming, and then it was a 24-day shoot," Parker reveals. "It was one of those things where we just dove in. It was important to me that I had to bond with these people. And luckily, we all did."

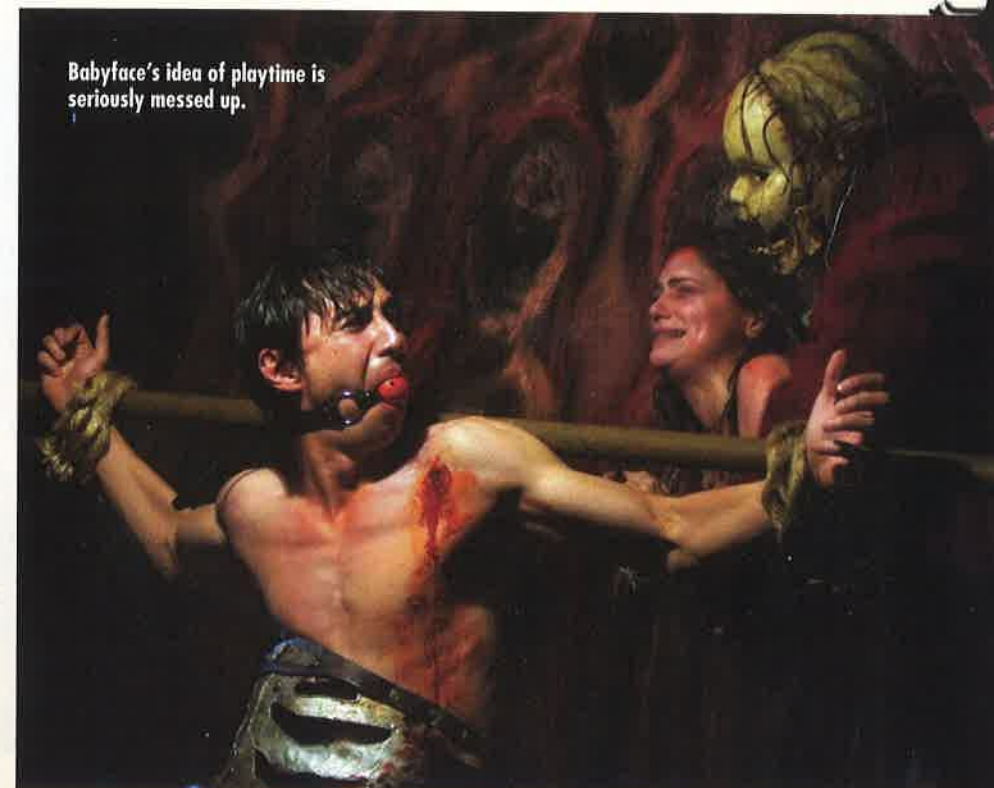
Notes Montgomery, "Because this was Dave and Robert's baby and they had worked so hard on it to make it happen, everyone was so passionate about it. That was the best part about working on this for me, even now; they're continually pushing for things themselves to get this movie the attention it deserves."

Part of Parker's enthusiasm had to do with upsetting viewer expectations. "The first half of the movie plays on the conventions of the slasher film," he explains. "It's all about the setup and bringing the audience into this world they're very familiar with, so when we do turn it, they're



A typically good-looking young cast (Alex Wyndham, Monk, Janet Montgomery and Hilgenbrink) headlines this determinedly atypical fright feature.

Photos: Copyright Warner Premiere



Babyface's idea of playtime is seriously messed up.

caught off guard and don't know where anything's going. A lot of the early stuff with Janet's character is her just kind of being the girlfriend. And then the interesting twist is that her character is f**king around on her boyfriend, and she's not innocent and has this underlying thing going on."

"It makes things more intriguing, because she isn't purely a nice gal," Montgomery adds.

Schow elaborates, "In most of these movies, you can count the characters, you see how they're listed in the credits and they sort of die in the inverse order of their billing. So if you're the fifth-billed, you're going to be the first of six to die. In this movie, the characters all have equal power. It's a quadrangle of equal parts."

Montgomery couldn't agree more. "It's a small cast, but it couldn't have worked without any of our roles. What's great about this film is that it embodies lots of really good '80s horror movies, all the best bits rolled into one."

One of the elements gaining the most attention from genre fans thus far has been *Hills'* killer himself, Babyface. It was a name that appeared in the initial script, but never with a description. Parker decided to take the moniker literally and hashed out several conceptual drawings with artist Michael Bloom. The end product was a villain sporting a rotted mask of a porcelain baby-doll head, held together by barbed wire in the back like the rubber band of an old Halloween mask, with tufts of hair poking out the back like vintage Jason Voorhees.

"Honestly," Burnett admits, "Babyface really was Dave's creation. In terms of directorial vision, Babyface came from him, because he's a fan of the masked-

killer genre and he was very specific, even back when we were doing the teaser."

As far as nailing the look, Parker points out, "That was a year-long process. It was me working with Mike Bloom, and once we got the Monster FX people and Jim

wanted and tried to do was make it so that the audience would never be able to second-guess what's going to happen next."

The idea of a group of documentarians on the hunt for a notorious lost film appealed to everyone on board, especially Schow, Parker and Burnett, all of whom have long histories of putting together supplemental material for DVD releases. "The model for the story, and the all-time greatest version of this idea, is a book by Theodore Roszak called *Flicker*," Schow says. "It's like, you just don't get better than that. It's the *Gone With the Wind* of this kind of story. We talked about [Tim Lucas' novel] *Throat Sprockets* and a book by Ramsey Campbell called *Ancient Images*, which is about the hunt for an old lost Karloff and Lugosi film."

But even as Schow was hard at work updating the script to incorporate the new story Parker wanted to tell, the director still had to prove himself as the worthy choice for the pro-

ject. "Fever Dreams wanted us to create a teaser trailer," Parker recalls. "Not so much a scene from the movie as much as something that would show the mood. Give them a taste, the flavor of what we were going for. It was really a test; I don't think they had a lot of confidence in me as a director or Rob as a producer. So we got



Tyler (Tad Hilgenbrink) should know that documentary trips within films never end well.

... AVAILABLE NOW ...

THE CREEPER EFFECT
STAIRWAY TO DARKNESS
JASON GRIMM

CHECK OUT THE 4 CHAPTER PREVIEW AT
WWW.GRIMM-LIT.ORG

Kagel, who also sculpted on *The Thing* and did Jason for *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter*, it came together. There was a lot of work on that, because we knew—if you're going to do a masked killer, the challenge now is making one that looks truly distinctive."

Once production began, Parker was careful to hide Babyface from the other actors, so that the first time they got a peek at him was the first time the cameras rolled. "I didn't see him with the mask until we did our first scene together," Monk recalls, "and it was the scariest thing. I did the scene and then I thought, 'Good God, this guy is huge!'"

"We were covering his head with towels," Parker reveals, "and doing whatever we could just to not let the actors see him until their very first real moments with him."

"It was really well-done and much better than I would've expected," Montgomery says. "A guy in a babyface mask—you could easily wonder, 'How is this going to work?' As an actress, you want something to feed off of, you want to be afraid of him; otherwise, how do you act with that if it doesn't look scary to you? But when he was right there in your face, it was scary!"

Yet while his visage was terrifying even to the actors, the man behind the mask was a gentle giant. "It was awkward seeing Babyface for the first time," Hilgenbrink admits, "because the actor who played him, Raicho Vasilev, had a daughter and was a very nice guy who



Obviously, Babyface has been making this "movie" for a while now; otherwise, why would he be wearing that flannel shirt?

would be at craft services making himself an espresso, and then he would chase after you with an ax!"

Although Vasilev was Babyface in body and (disguised) face, you should pay extra attention any time you see his hands; that's actually Parker himself, doing what could be considered his Dario Argento homage. "Well," he laughs, "my hands are Babyface's hands because there was no one else to do those scenes, so I just did them myself."

Babyface aside, if there was any presence on set that intimidated the rest of the cast, it was Sadler, portraying the reclusive Concannon. "He was Dave's first choice, and it was also my dream to have Bill play this role," says Burnett—and

having him on set only encouraged the other actors to bring their A game, as Monk relates. "I pulled him aside and said, 'If you have any pointers or anything you feel can make me better, please tell me,'" she says. "And he coached me along the way. He was very polite; he'd say, 'I don't want to give you direction, but if you do this, this or this, it'll come across as this.' He talked me through quite a bit of it and taught me a lot in the scenes we had together. He was very, very open and inspiring, and sweet about it too."

"But also so intense," Hilgenbrink adds. "There was this one scene we had together; it's actually our first meeting. You know, as an actor, when you're going and going against another actor, you don't want to be the

one to back down. Bill kept bringing it, and it felt like a fight. Then when they'd yell 'Cut,' I was like, 'Whew, glad I didn't drop the ball that time.' I held my own."

"We had actors who were willing to go for it all, and were fearless," Parker interjects.

When it comes to the differences of

"ONE OF THE THINGS THAT'S OFTEN WRONG WITH FILMS LIKE THIS IS THAT THE CHARACTERS HAVE NEVER SEEN A HORROR MOVIE."
-DAVID J. SCHOW, SCREENWRITER

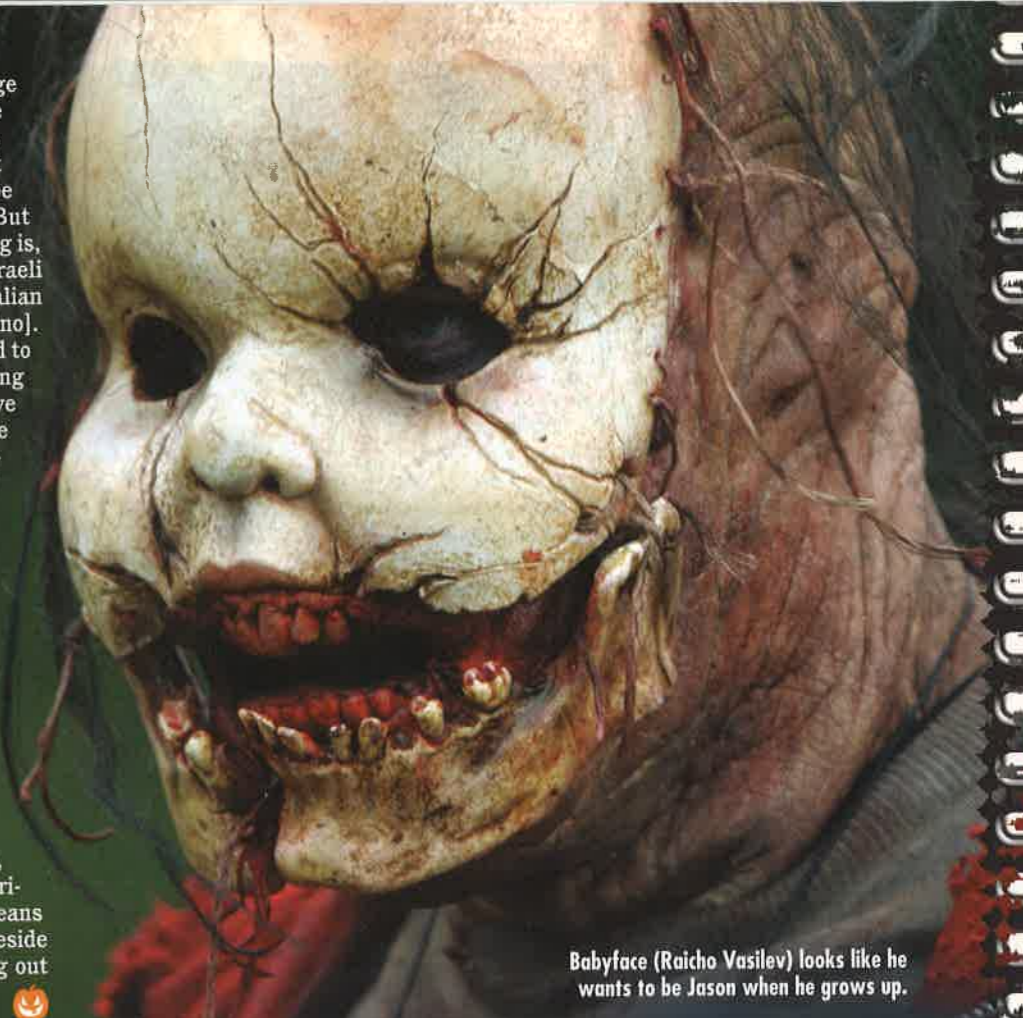
shooting a movie like *Hills Run Red* in Sofia as opposed to in LA, the unanimous comment cites the work ethic of the Bulgarian crew. "They were so nice and ready to make this the best thing they could do, and any of them could work in Hollywood in five seconds," says Hilgenbrink.

"I've done films there twice now," adds Montgomery, "and they really appreciate the fact that people come to Bulgaria to make movies. I'd say they're the hardest-working crews, because they realize how valuable it is and they want to please the director and the actors. And it shows in the movie, because it wouldn't be as good as it is if it weren't for that."

www.fangoria.com

Despite the occasional language barrier, Parker couldn't agree more with his actors. "There are always certain things you can tell people flat out, and then you realize you have to be a little more specific," he says. "But again, they tried so hard, and the thing is, we shot in Bulgaria but we had an Israeli DP [Ilan Rosenberg], we had an Italian production designer [Antonello Rubino]. It was really a multicultural crew, and to me it was about the adventure of being able to go over there and make it. I love the fact that we weren't in LA, where the cast could go home to their regular lives. They just had to live it. And it was great, because in many ways I look at it as my first movie. I learned so much doing it, and it was a great experience to be able to do it with this cast because we were all in it together. It became this unified thing, and we all were truly of one mind, experiencing this for the first time."

"Considering what our budget was, the movie looks much richer and bigger than what was spent," Parker continues. "I think the biggest compliment we've had is, 'Why is this movie not going theatrical?' To me that's huge, because it means we made a film that can stand right beside other genre features that are coming out theatrically."



Babyface (Raicho Vasilev) looks like he wants to be Jason when he grows up.

Learn from Famous Movie Makers!

They co-created the most famous horror flick of all time and produced hundreds of award winning TV spots, sales films, and documentaries. Now they're teaching all the secrets of the biz at DuBois Business College. Enroll now and learn firsthand from true pros: scripting, financing, shooting, and editing, even how to get your work into theaters and on TV. Learn it all from real guys, famous movie makers, John Russo and Russ Streiner.

DuBois
 Business College

1-800-692-6213
 www.dbcollege.com

DuBois, PA

John Russo
 Be sure to check out
 the Russo interview at:
 www.icohsoffright.com



Russ Streiner



Alexa winds up with her life literally in Babyface's hands.