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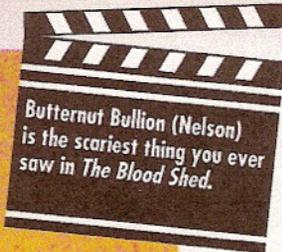
30 DAYS OF NIGHT

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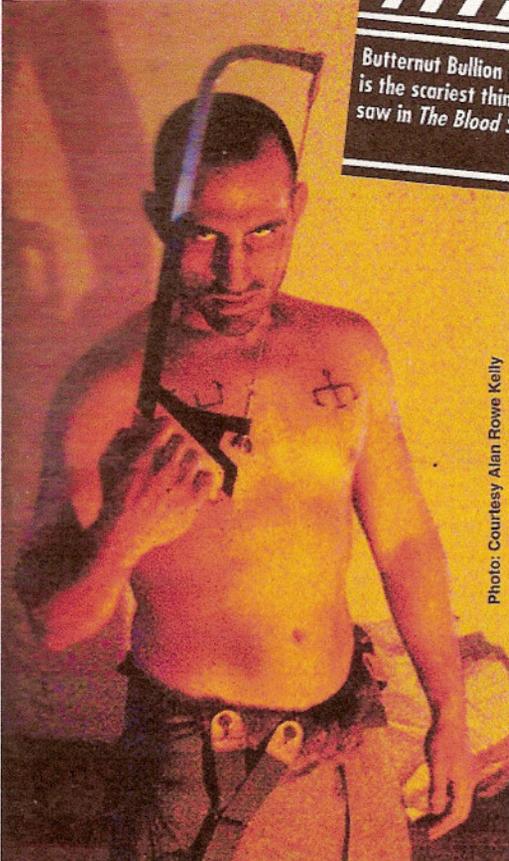


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Butternut Bullion (Nelson)
is the scariest thing you ever
saw in *The Blood Shed*.

Photo: Courtesy Alan Rowe Kelly



It's a beautiful, warm Saturday in Queens, New York—clear blue skies overhead, sunshine pouring down and people bustling on the streets. But inside a low, unassuming brick high school deep in the heart of the borough, something more nefarious is going on. The long corridors are sheathed in plastic that billows ominously in the small, unexplained breezes wafting occasionally through the halls. One long passage leads to a darkened chamber where more sheets dangle from the ceiling, forming a curtain around the central part of the room like a giant oxygen tent.

A glimpse inside reveals a ring of figures surrounding a hospital gurney. Some of them are dressed in hospital outfits, their blue tunics spattered with blood. Off to one side, a young man casually relaxes on a table, his wrists slashed open and his bare chest also lathered in red. Near him, a blood-covered baby doll lies forlornly on a Styrofoam plate, waiting for its big scene.

A woman is stretched out on the gurney, the figures surrounding her animatedly discussing exactly what is about to happen in the room: a shot in which the woman, played by actress Zoe Daelman Chlanda, will die giving birth to her son. Overseeing it all, Panasonic DVX 100 hi-def video camera seemingly always in hand, is the compact form of Bart Mastronardi, writer, director and cinematographer of his first feature, a psychological horror tale called *Vindication*.

As cast and crew swirl around him, preparing for the shot, Mastronardi consults with editor Stolis Hadjicharalambous, who seems to be everywhere at once, and the

towering, unmistakable figure of Alan Rowe Kelly, a New Jersey-based actor and filmmaker who has combined forces with the Queens-centered group led by Mastronardi and Hadjicharalambous. They trade ideas and debate angles as effortlessly as old friends who have been working together for decades, even though their affiliation is less than three years old. The trio, along with absent fourth cohort Joshua Nelson, are the nexus of a moviemaking collective that is creating its own underground horror industry in the New York/New Jersey area.

Kelly, who started out doing makeup in the fashion industry, directed his first feature, the cult favorite *I'll Bury You Tomorrow*, in 2003. The independently financed grindhouse-style picture about necrophilia and murder earned acclaim on the indie festival circuit. Mastronardi, head of the school's English department and film club, has worked extensively in theater and studied cinematography for years, toiling on several shorts (including an early version of *Vindication*) and commercial gigs before making his feature debut as DP on Kelly's second movie, the backwoods cannibal family epic *The Blood Shed*. Hadjicharalambous was Mastronardi's student, with the two collaborating through the school film club on a number of shorts. Now studying at New York's School of Visual Arts, Hadjicharalambous has also ambitiously delved into directing his own first feature, *Crossed*, while acting as editor on both Mastronardi and Kelly's projects.

"It's an amazing team of people," says Kelly about his colleagues and the larger group of production and acting personnel they've gathered around them, many of whom share credits on all three directors' efforts. "We're developing a real old-style Roger Corman house of horrors, in a way. We have the best stable of independent actors in the metropolitan area, and we're doing original work; we're not copying anybody's style. No remakes—we're doing our own thing, and it's getting out there."

Nonetheless, Kelly notes many influences on *Blood Shed*, an ultra-gory, ultra-campy take on the "hillbilly horror" subgenre which Heretic Films releases on special-edition DVD October 30. "It's a homage to the early films of John Waters and Tobe Hooper, plus those great indie classics like *Mother's Day* and *American Gothic*, *The Bad Seed* and a horrible, lumpy little girl who used to live next door to some friends of mine!" he laughs. "*The Blood Shed* tells the tale of the notorious Bullion clan—your average inbred cannibal family living in the deep woods past your own back yard—and how they deal with the day-to-day annoyances of encroaching suburbia. Murder, mayhem and deviant behavior ensue under their 'house rules!'"

Kelly also stars in the movie as the developmentally arrested, Raggedy-Ann-dress-wearing Beefsteena Bullion. He heads a cast including Nelson, *Flesh for the Beast* director Terry M. West, *Mike (The Tenement)*

By DON KAYE

NIGHTS OF THE

A quartet of never-say-die indie auteurs are making the New York area a scarier place to be.

Photo and Digital Imaging: Robert Norman

Lane Susan Adriensen and Robert Norman, plus several *Tomorrow* veterans and a certain Fango managing editor in a cameo as one of the Bullions' captives.

Kelly had been slogging along more or less by himself, finishing *I'll Bury You Tomorrow* over a four-year period that proved to be hugely stressful on him both physically and mentally. "I paid my dues in spades on that movie," says Kelly about the project he calls his "training ground." "It depleted me, I nearly had a heart attack and it proved to me that there had to be a way of doing this where my health wasn't at stake. But, you know, it did get finished and is still getting reviewed four years later. It just won't die!"

The movie did introduce Kelly to actors Chlanda and Jerry Murdock, both of whom are in *The Blood Shed* as well as *Vindication*, and composer Tom Burns, who also scored the former flick. But a chance encounter at a semimonthly NYC-area gathering of people interested in horror filmmaking, called Mingle Mangle (hosted by actress Adriensen), brought Kelly and Mastronardi together. "We just started talking, I liked him immediately and we kept in touch for a good year on and off," Kelly recalls. "He sent me his reel, and it was funny because he wasn't going to put the original *Vindication* short on it. But Stolis convinced him to add it. So I was looking through the reel and seeing commercials he had shot and it all looked nice, but I wasn't seeing anything that was really Bart. But when I saw *Vindication*, I thought, 'Now I've found my cinematographer.' That was the piece that sold me."

Mastronardi says that the partnership just blossomed from there. "Alan introduced me to Zoe and Jerry, and we all worked together on *The Blood Shed* and *A Far Cry from Home* [a 40-minute short written and directed by Kelly for an upcoming anthology called *Hung by a Thread*]. We became very good friends in the process. Then I had my own troupe of guys who came along with me, like Stolis, Dominick Sivilli [sound], Henry Boriello [makeup] and others, and we just all came together, and the end result is *Vindication*. Now Stolis has been doing his

own movie, *Crossed*, and we're all working on that together too. We're utilizing our resources, which any independent filmmaker has to do."

Before meeting Kelly, Mastronardi had been busy on his short films with the help of some of his students, primarily Hadjicharalambous, who was first bitten by the cinema bug in the after-school film club Mastronardi founded. "That was just Bart, six kids and a VCR, and we'd sit and watch and analyze movies," says the 20-year-old Queens native. "I was always into movies since I was a kid—I can't play sports to save my life—so I thought it was a great opportunity for something to do after school. But that club is how I really fell in love with movies even more, because I started to look at them differently and uncover how they were made, which in turn made me want to make them myself. So Bart and I just kept going back and forth working on each other's pieces."

Meanwhile, the New York-based Nelson started out as an actor, doing off-Broadway theater while also making stops in a short-lived NBC sitcom called *Roomies* and a couple of ABC soaps. His passion for horror films led him to a role in the indie NYC vampire flick *Strange Things Happen at Sundown*, before he turned to writing and producing in addition to acting. His first genre effort was *Aunt Rose* (see Fango #252), which he followed up by teaming with actress/co-producer Melissa Bacelar on the "cannibal hooker" gorefest *Eat Your Heart Out* and the more recent *Pink Eye*. Kelly acts in both, while Nelson appears in *The Blood Shed* and *A Far Cry from Home*.

"I had just read a terrific review for *I'll Bury You Tomorrow* and remember thinking I really wanted to see it," says Nelson, interviewed a few weeks after Fango's day on the *Vindication* set, about how he met up with the ubiquitous Kelly. "A day later, literally, I saw a casting notice for actors for a new horror film, and what really caught my attention was that it said, 'Only true horror fans apply...and I'll know.' I thought that was so cool, so I sent in my photo and we have been great friends ever since. Alan's a great writer, director and actor with brilliant, sick, funny, twisted ideas. But he is also a genuinely wonderful person whom it has been my plea-

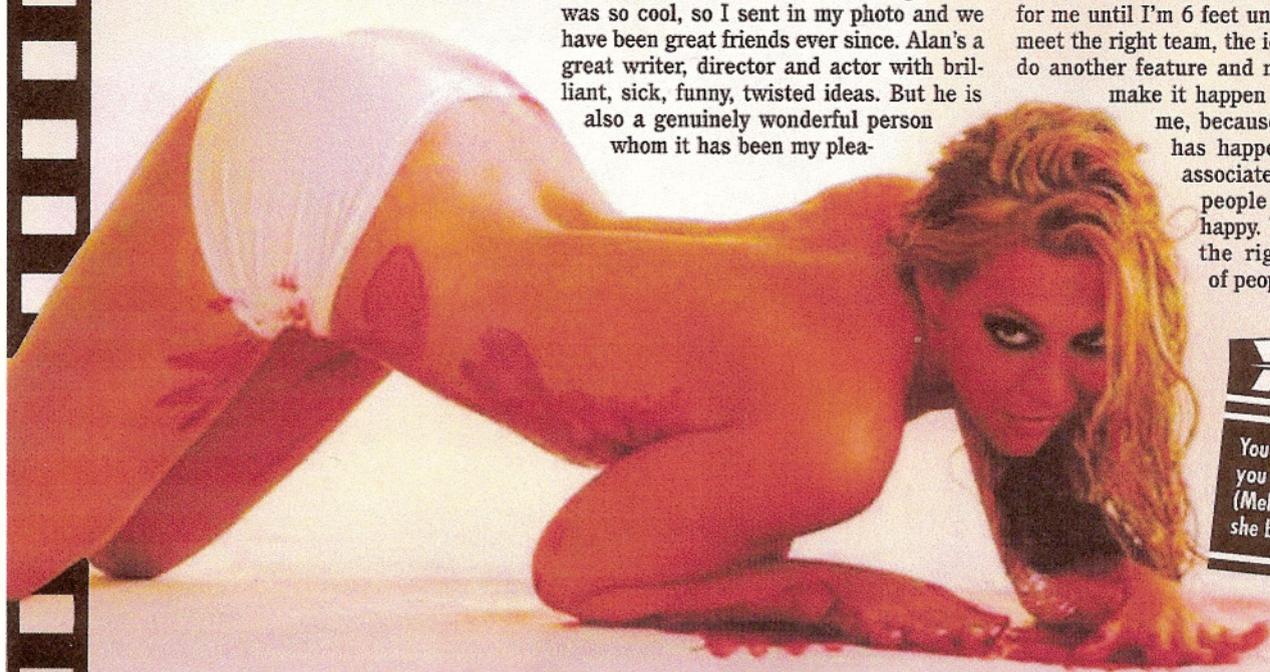


There's no point crying over spilled blood in *Pink Eye*.

sure to know and work with. I've also started putting Alan in all of my films... there are just so many bizarre roles that other actors couldn't fill like Alan can!"

Nelson adds that the cast and crew he got to join on *The Blood Shed* "make you want to be around them and be creative with them." Back on the Queens set, Kelly, Mastronardi and Hadjicharalambous all share similar sentiments about collaborating with each other and their stable of crewpeople and actors. "We have a great time and a lot of laughs, but we are really dead serious about it," Kelly says. "This is what we are going to be doing for the rest of our lives, no matter where our careers take us. This is it for me until I'm 6 feet under. So when you meet the right team, the idea of wanting to do another feature and not being able to make it happen is frightening to me, because I've seen what has happened on a lot of associates' shoots, where people are just not happy. We seem to have the right combination of people."

Photos: Courtesy Joshua Nelson



You'll *Eat Your Heart Out* if you hook up with Pandora (Melissa Bacelar)—unless she beats you to it.