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Cinematographer Steve Gainer, ASC, Gives *Punisher: War Zone* a True Comic Book Look



Ray Stevenson as Frank Castle/The Punisher in *Punisher: War Zone*, coming to theaters in December. Steve Gainer, ASC, studied the Marvel Comics Punisher series as inspiration for the color palette of the film. Left, the Punisher's lair is bathed in blue. Right, an example of the orange and yellow "Marvel New York" look.

Steve Gainer, ASC, is very proud of his work on the many indie features he's shot, but *Punisher: War Zone* has given him the opportunity to work on a bigger canvas. This action-packed "reboot" of Marvel Comics' *Punisher* series (not a sequel to the 2004 film *The Punisher*), with imagery designed to look just like the comic book source, was exactly the kind of work Gainer had been longing to do. "No one wants to believe that if you can shoot a movie with a million dollars that you can do the same thing with 40 times that," he observes, noting that Director Lexi Alexander and Producer Gale Anne Hurd were exceptions willing to push for him to make the leap.

The job was a particular treat for comic book fan Gainer because Alexander's take called for the visuals to go further than all previous comic book adaptations in terms of really looking as close as live action filmmaking could come to the graphic source material. "Our aim wasn't to make it look *kind of like* the comic book," Gainer explains. "It was to make it *look like* the comic book! That means the color of the light, the wardrobe, the cars, the

walls—everything is in the color scheme of the *Punisher* comic books. Andrew Neskoromny is a wonderful production designer and he did a great job within a budget that was a lot bigger than anything I'd worked on but was still limited for the scale of the film."

Shot mostly in Montreal (for New York) and almost entirely at night, Gainer's primary stock was Fujifilm ETERNA 500. He shot the very few day exteriors using Fujifilm ETERNA Vivid 160. "The Vivid is a beautiful stock," he notes, "but I needed so many lights to give the look we were going for to cover multiple city blocks that I can't imagine what I'd have needed for an ASA 160 stock."

The "Marvel New York" look, for example, makes use of exaggerated oranges and yellows to suggest street-lights, and then some deep blues. "The location inside the Punisher's den," he says, "is bathed in this beautiful, deep blue. Lighting in the film isn't so much 'motivated' in the sense of, 'Here's a lamp so that's where the light's coming from.' The comic book really doesn't look like that and so we felt free to use gels because they're cool and they're

inspired by the comic."

Another aspect of most comic book art, Gainer adds, "is that it can be night but you can see everything. There is generally no atmospheric perspective. Nothing falls off. My choice was to put metric tons of light into the area and that allowed me to have enormous depth of vision. On lower budget movies you go into a neighborhood at night and maybe one city block is lit and then everything drops off. In this movie, every time you see down the street, it's lit for six blocks or more."

Had the action been covered single-camera style, he might not have had to use quite as much light as he did. He could have opened up to maximum aperture for the wide shots and possibly only boosted light levels for close-ups on long lenses. But the 40-day schedule for a film with big action set pieces required multiple camera coverage—almost always three cameras rolled at once, often as many as six. "If I lit the scene," Gainer says, "to the stop I've usually worked at at night—a T2 or T2.8—that might be fine for the camera with the wide lens, but there were

usually cameras with a 200mm lens and that's just such a tight depth of field, especially for action where actors and stunt people just aren't going to hit the marks perfectly every time. They're going to be bouncing all over the place."

Instead, he worked frequently at a T5.6, which necessitated a lot of Condors carrying 20Ks, huge numbers of PAR cans and quite a lot of other lighting gear as well.

So did working on this kind of scale finally satisfy Gainer's desire to shoot higher-end productions? He offers a resounding, "No!"

"I had a taste of a forty-day schedule and a 30-person pre-rig crew," Gainer enthuses. "This only whetted my appetite!" ■ By JON SILBERG

Punisher: War Zone	
STOCK USED	ETERNA Vivid 160, ETERNA 500

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