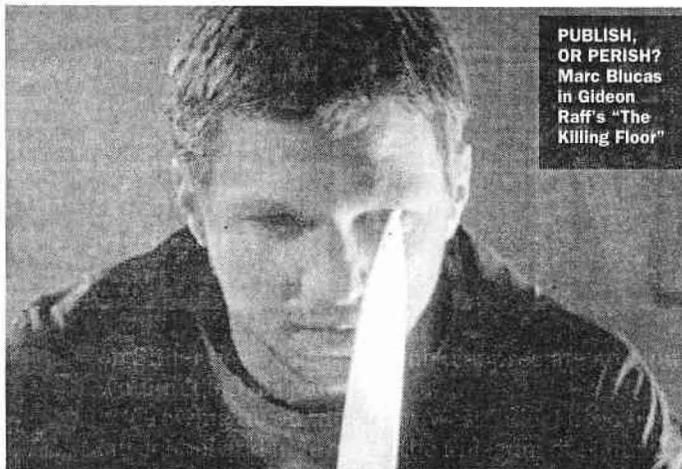


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PUBLISH, OR PERISH? Marc Blucas in Gideon Raff's "The Killing Floor"

EVERYTHING CONNECTS

A young filmmaker proves that hard works pays off BY MICHAEL GILTZ

Director Gideon Raff has been a best-selling author in his home country of Israel, a columnist for that country's largest newspaper and a paratrooper in the military. But the most important job he ever got was as an intern.

That's how it works in Hollywood. "You have to start from the bottom," says Raff, 33, whose first feature, "The Killing Floor," is touring the festival circuit and is already sold in 20 countries. "You've got to work hard and impress the right people."

Clearly, Raff did, even though he insists jokingly he's "the worst schmoozer ever." Studying at the American Film Institute in L.A., Raff was able to impress Avi Arad, the former Marvel executive who's been a force behind top comic-book film franchises like "X-Men" and "Spider-Man." Arad loved Raff's short film "The Babysitter" — starring "7th Heaven" regular Jeremy LeLliott — and kept Raff on his radar.

Then Raff took that crucial internship at the film production company New Regency. That company got involved in the massive blockbuster "Mr. and Mrs. Smith" and before he knew it, Raff was an assistant to director Doug Liman ("Swingers," "Go," "The Bourne Identity") and running interference for "Smith" stars Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie as the media swarmed around word of their burgeoning relationship.

"What they do is they send you out with a flashlight and you point at the paparazzi's cameras to block their view," explains Raff, who says you can't appreciate the intensity of the media glare until you see it up close. "At a certain point, it became crazy because of the rumors."

Raff got to film Pitt for a video for the

Make-A-Wish foundation, and Liman — knowing he was a writer and aspiring filmmaker — kept asking to see what Raff was working on. The result? "The Killing Floor," Raff's first feature, has two major blue-chip executive producers in Liman and Arad.

A Hitchcock-flavored thriller about a publishing executive who specializes in horror writers, "The Killing Floor" finds the cocky, conceited hero (Marc Blucas of "The Alamo" and TV's "Buffy The Vampire Slayer") suddenly targeted by someone just as diabolical as the villains he's been bringing to life for years.

"It's right on the border between a psychological thriller and a horror film," says Raff. "There's a little gore. The movies I like the most are ... scary, but there's a human story being told."

Shot on location in New York in 25 days, Raff got no sleep during production but says the most nerve-racking moment was when his major Hollywood producer, Liman, visited the set. Raff speaks admiringly of top Israeli filmmakers like Amos Gitai and Eytan Fox, but for a kid whose first movie memory is of a James Bond movie, nothing beats Hollywood.

"I want to make Israeli films, I do," says Raff, who was born and raised in Jerusalem and lived for a while in Tel Aviv before coming to the U.S. "But my interests and sensibilities are definitely Hollywood. I wanted to be here for my studies and the first years of my career. I feel very privileged to be here." ♦

Raff parlayed an internship into a directing gig.