

# The Children of the night

"Emil Topuzov, BAC, (Bulgarian Association of Cinematographers) is a consummate professional with enormous artistic ability and an eye for detail," states Director Joe Cardone. "I envisaged a very dark mysterious look similar to a Grimm's fairytale for *The Children* and he has created a dreamlike realm of reality; a rich, elegant look that's creepy, oppressive and perfect for the genre. The children look ghostlike and ethereal and his courageous lighting enhances their presence, as does the sweeping movement of the camera when they move about the landscape."

Set in the early 1900s and contemporary times, *The Children* tells the story of a group of small children who worked in an American charcoal mine in the early 20th century, but were buried alive after an accident. 100 years later, a widow inherits an isolated mansion in the mountains near the disused mine and moves in with her two daughters. It's not long before they experience encounters with the children who have turned into zombies.

"We spent almost three weeks on practical location with the director and my gaffer, Yavor Zakhariiev in pre-production and felt so well prepared that I could improvise on set," remarks Director of Photography Topuzov of his tenth film for Nu Image. "We worked four weeks of night shoots and each morning Joe spent long hours with me talking about how the night went and what to expect the next day. I haven't experienced such collaboration for many years. *The Children* has been a great experience and one of the best collaborations in my career. Joe is an American with European sensitivities in filmmaking, which is a unique combination."

We experimented with bleach by-pass and other techniques to create a visual separation between the two periods, ultimately shooting the historical sequences on Kodak VISION2 500T 5218 with a fairly limited lens set 25,35,50 and 85mm, practical lighting and with the restricted camera movements

of early filmmakers. "5218 gave me incredible latitudes", says Topuzov who used only modified kerosene lanterns supplemented with small lighting units such as Inkie's in the mine sequences. Since the budget did not extend to shooting the contemporary scenes with 5218, Topuzov used Kodak Vision 500T 5279. "The stock's reduced latitudes suited the modern part of the story very well. I exposed faces one to one-and-a-half stops under and the overcast Bulgarian skies helped me a lot."

Much of the shoot took place on winter nights in a Bulgarian mountain forest where Topuzov used Dinos with 1/2 green and 1/2 CTB on cherry pickers to back light huge areas of the woods filled with smoke. Thus we achieved a very cold greenish-grey look for the movie's night exteriors. Silhouetting the children against the backlit smoke in the distance, he applied an extremely soft wrapping side light from one eight and a couple of four-bank Kino Flos with layers of diffusion on them as the actors move close to the camera. "The very sharp Zeiss T1.9 Ultra Prime lenses



Above: (L to R) Sasho Kroumov, Ist AC, Joro Raikov, B Camera/Steadicam operator, Emil Topuzov (seated), Director Joe Cardone

ensured I didn't lose any resolution with the very soft lighting approach," he adds. "The weather was our big adversary, but it was also our ally because it helped create the mood and the uneasy atmosphere. Strong winds were our biggest challenge; they affected the cherry pickers operation and sometimes I had to put lights on the ground – on occasion I even buried them."

Nu Image chose to process the film at Kodak Cinelabs Romania after using the lab on *The Contract*. Topuzov, who normally processes in Sofia, admitted to initial concern. "I talked for several hours to Cornelia Popa, KCL's Manager; she's such a knowledgeable and energetic lady. I arranged to take stills on set, modify them on Photoshop and send them to the lab every morning or night so they could see what I wanted and I was fascinated with the results. The colourist, Claudiu Doaga and the whole staff at the lab did a very impressive job. They treated us with the same care and approach as if we were the biggest names working on the biggest title."

*The Children* is currently in post-production with Worldwide FX adding CG bats and zombie eye enhancements. ■