



▶ Julie Benz

ENTERS THE FRAY ON *PUNISHER: WAR ZONE*



alone contains enough eye gouges, gunshot wounds and decapitations by shotgun to fill five movies of its genre.

Best known for her role as Rita on CBS/Showtime's hit serial-killer series *Dexter*, Benz is no stranger to graphic material. In 2008, she also starred in the fourth and fifth instalments of the *Rambo* and *Saw* franchises respectively, both of which were heavily criticized for their graphic and excessive depictions of violence. "I guess I attract the violence," says Benz. "I'm not sure what that says about my personality. I'm just attracted to dangerous men, really, is what it comes down to." She adds, "I think people love seeing me covered in blood."

Benz went brunette for her role as Angela Donatelli in the new *Punisher* film. The actress is careful not to give away any details about her character or the movie's plot for fear of being "hunted down" by the studio. All she'll say is that Donatelli is the wife of an undercover cop and that she has a young daughter to protect.

"It's brutal," Julie Benz warns us about her upcoming film, *Punisher: War Zone*. "Expect an amazing amount of violence." *Punisher* is the latest comic-book film franchise to receive a reboot in recent years. In the film, Ray Stevenson from the HBO series *Rome* plays Frank Castle, a.k.a. the Punisher, a cop turned vigilante after the murder of his family. The character has twice been adapted to the big screen, first in a low-budget 1989 version starring Dolph Lundgren and more recently in a big-budget version starring Thomas Jane that did little business in 2004. Benz promises that this new take finally gets the Punisher right by sticking closer to the dark and violent source material. The film is hyper-violent – its trailer

"Angela's like a mama bear – she's very protective of her daughter," says Benz. "She's a stronger, tougher woman than I've played. And I'm a bit tougher than a lot of the characters I've played recently, so it was nice to tap into what is my normal kind of energy."

Given the multiple attempts at adapting the comic book to the big screen, how is her co-star Ray Stevenson any different from previous Punishers? "He is brilliant in the film. He brings a lot of weight and pathos to the role of Frank Castle. He is also nice, like gentlemanly nice. You don't come across that very often."

In the movie, the Punisher wages a one-man war on organized crime. The main villain is Jigsaw, a vicious criminal seeking vengeance against Castle for disfiguring his face. Dominic West (*The Wire*) dons some gruesomely twisted makeup to play the role. "His makeup looks horrible!" says Benz. "I mean, they took one of the best-looking men in Hollywood and made him look disgusting."

Punisher: War Zone has been the subject of much industry and fanboy gossip since its production was announced in August 2007. Most recently, rumours circulated that its director, Lexi Alexander, had been fired during post-production. Fuel was added to that fire when she didn't participate in the film's press conference at this year's Comic-Con, considered to be the Sundance of blockbuster films. "I don't know any of that!" says Benz when asked about the rumours. The actress, who did take part in the panel, adds: "People misconstrue things. Rumours start because one person says one thing and someone takes it for the truth, and the next thing you know, it's blown up into something else."

Benz says she's proud of the movie they have made. "It's visually stimulating, psychologically stimulating and extremely action-packed." She then quickly adds, "And for those that don't think they want to see an action movie, the men in the film are gorgeous. The eye candy alone is worth it."

**PUNISHER
OPENS**
DECEMBER 5