

# Rebel High: Harry Jakobs' comic-book flick

The third-floor corridors and classrooms at the old Baron Bying High School in Montreal (the one made famous by Mordecai Richler's novels) look like a rebellious vandal's dream: filthy, trashed, mounded with debris, banked by stained, corroded, bent and tortured lockers leaning against decrepit walls.

"We did all this," claims affable producer Harry Jakobs, proudly surveying the wreckage, "even the cracks in the windows."

This is the setting for **Rebel High**, a low-budget feature Jakobs is producing, and which he describes as a black comedy and defiantly states is "... not a B movie at all." He feels high-school students everywhere will relate to this comic-book tale of a group of outcast kids who only know one 'home' - their tag-end school, and try to protect it from a group of unfeeling profiteering developers who have more lucrative ideas for the property. True to the genre, the capitalists are in league with crooked government inspectors. The kids must not only fight the bureaucrats, but also another group of kids, even tougher, who want control of the school.

Budgeted at \$2.5 million, with principal photography finished in December, the second unit work was being shot this April. Michel Wachniuc, AD and second unit director, is a gentle, bearish Montrealer who recently completed direction of a \$700,000 feature, **Dream Line**, for Claude Castravelli. Wachniuc is calm and competent on the set, patiently picking up shots with cinematographer Roger Racine and production manger Lorne Orleans.

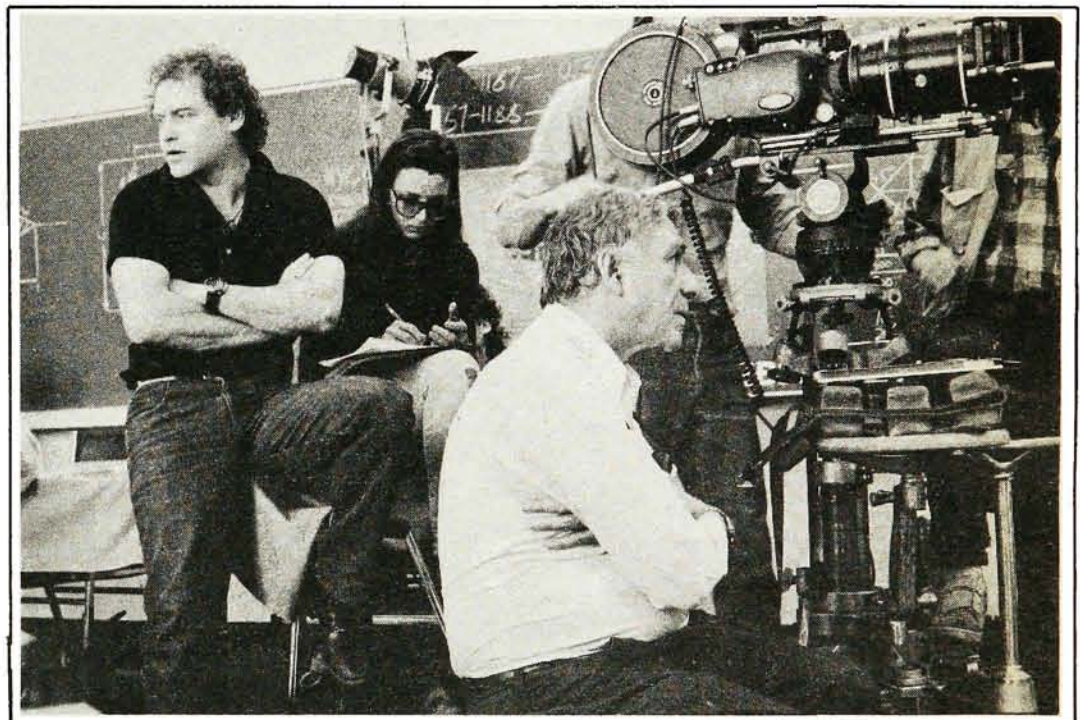
There are about 75 in the non-union crew and cast milling about in the old school today. Lunch looks good: croissants, salad, pasta. A few crew play a little rugby with a sand-ball in the graffiti-littered halls: 'The Force Rules,' 'Vandalism Costs Lives,' 'Fail Now and Avoid The June Rush,' 'Born to Die at Rebel High.'

"We're using carefully selected unknowns in the cast," Jakobs explains, unnecessarily. Hefty Aquila Pierre André La Rocque, for instance, is only 20, but he's been around. He was in **Fun Park** (w.t. of **Breaking All the Rules**) for Filmline International, a week on pay-TV as Baby Face ("I was very embarrassed - grateful to the editor for every cut"), **Meatballs III** (now called **Summer Job**) for two days, and **The Frankenstein Factor** ("All you get to see is the back of my head being crushed in an auto"). He's also done theatre, close to 30 plays. He's been acting since he was 10. And as well he plays keyboard with a rock band, Bacchus. Here he's a beefy gang leader, very tough.



• Problem-solving **Rebel High**-style

photos: Sarah Butterfield



• **Rebel High** creator Harry Jakobs, left, with d.o.p. Roger Racine

Wayne Fleming portrays Relic, the vice-principal of this war zone called a school. He's an old hand at stand-up comedy, whose film credits include **Loose Screws**, six parts in **Birdies**, and two in **Meatballs III**. He invites me to catch his act at the Comedy Nest. His right-hand man in the film is Schleppe, played by Ralph Millman, another Montreal old-timer. Millman says he thinks the kids will love **Rebel High**: "Maybe it will be a cult film." He's played in Danielle Suissa's **The Morning Man**, in **Shalinsky** an Atlantis production, and in **Joshua Then and Now**. In acrylic checked trousers, horn-rimmed glasses and a British WW I helmet, he looks perfect in the school setting. He's a retired school teacher himself, long active in Yiddish theatre in Montreal. "I'm getting lots of calls now," he says. "Very busy."

As for the producer of this enterprise, Harry Jakobs, a chunky blonde, curly-haired fellow in his thirties with an engaging grin, he looks as if he is enjoying all this enormously. But Jakobs means business. He tells me he has a degree in

clinical psychology, was schooled in a N.Y. yeshiva, and taught in Montreal Cegeps. He says he first got involved in film production by raising money for other producers. When investors started to recoup their money, he decided to have them invest in a film of his own. He gives me some advice: "Never discuss the creative side with the investors," he cautions. He appreciated the tax-shelter years as "a boost to the industry," adding "They gave me an opportunity to develop."

Harry says the key to success is "to master the art of financing." He has other projects underway. He tells me **My Lovely Bank**, a \$400,000 comedy pilot of two half-hours is in negotiation now for a pick-up both here and in the U.S. He wrote, produced, directed. And a three-part mini-series, a pilot for a teenage soap-opera called **The Time of Your Life**, is in post-production. Shot in late 1984, it was delayed when his parents died last summer, he explains, but will be ready for release on the CBC in 1986-87. And **Rebel High**, after 12 weeks, is almost in the can. Jakobs co-

wrote it with Evan Keliher, from Keliher's novel **New Africa High** about a Detroit school.

The bells continue to ring at 8 minutes to the hour, though the hall clock is permanently stopped at 10 to two. It's nearly four o'clock and Wachniuc is calling for another take. He wants Ralph Millman to shake his head with a 'what the hell is going on' expression. "All I need," he says, "is a four-second head turn."

One of the older actors gazes at Jakobs as he ambles down the corridor like an ex-guerilla fighter, an air of quiet menace in his deliberately relaxed gait. "If I were directing him" the actor says. "the first thing I'd do is get rid of that affected walk."

**Nathalie Edwards •**

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