

FILM

DARK CHILD

CONRAD W. HALL MAKES HIS D.P. DEBUT ON DAVID FINCHER'S *PANIC ROOM*. NOT A BAD START.

BY DAVID BOURGEOIS



"I should have shot a bunch of stuff, gotten an agent, and promoted myself when I was 32. That's essentially what I did after *Fight Club*. Nobody moved me up: I moved myself up."

After 20 years of working in the film industry in various technical roles, 43-year-old cinematographer Conrad W. Hall recently

landed the coveted job of director of photography on director David Fincher's latest project, *Panic Room*. Out this month, the film is a noirish, claustrophobic, cat-and-mouse thriller starring Jodie Foster, which takes place almost entirely in a Manhattan brownstone. Hall, who was camera operator on Fincher's *Fight Club* in 1999, was

responsible for making the director's latest project a dark canvas of butterscotch and moody grays.

It's ironic that Hall had to work his way up the ladder, since he's the son of Oscar-winning cinematographer Conrad L. Hall, known for films like *Cool Hand Luke*. One of the elder Hall's most masterful pieces of work is the

scene in 1967's *In Cold Blood*, where a young Robert Blake sits in prison looking out through his cell bars, and torrential rain casts tear-like shadows on his face. As Hall's father told an interviewer in *Visions of Light*, a 1992 documentary, the infamous prison lighting was mostly accidental.

"Being the son of a famous cinematographer set an unnaturally high bar for me," Hall says. "But I've been more influenced by my father philosophically than technically. His style is all about being spontaneous, not coming in prepared. 'More than anything,' my father told me, 'Just please don't play it safe!'"

"I told my dad, you're going to be proud of me for this one," he adds, "because everyone's going to need a flashlight just to see the movie."