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A NEW FRIGHT NIGHT FALLS

Director Craig Gillespie and actor Colin Farrell have an updated vampire moving next door.

By SAMUEL ZIMMERMAN

I was very reluctant," admits director Craig Gillespie. Shortly thereafter, actor Colin Farrell unsurprisingly echoes, "I really didn't want to like it." Sitting across from each other, the two are, at the moment, a microcosm of a whole community of fandom that, however used they are to the contemporary Hollywood climate of endless remakes, still balked at the idea of a new version of the beloved *Fright Night*.

Soon enough, though, the director and

the Vampire Slayer scribe filled in that basic outline with all of the necessary 2011 aspects, and transformed the horror host—rather ingeniously—into a Vegas illusionist. Of course, Roddy McDowall's original Peter Vincent was washed up and cowardly, but lovably so; today, if you want to talk theatrics and dark entertainment as a front, can you think of anyone more full-of-shit than a Criss Angel type?

"Having this magician on the Vegas strip who's kind of jaded with himself and

"There's a particular omnipotence to [Jerry]... To not be held back, to not be contained by human emotion, was liberating."

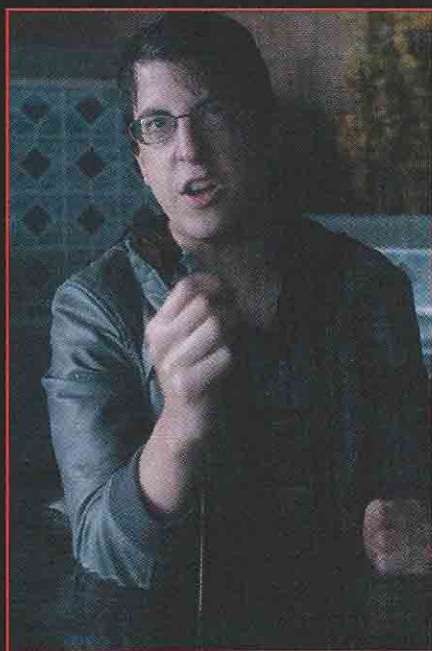
—Colin Farrell, actor

actor became the enemy. After signing on, the two men took on the task of convincing every FANGORIA reader and horror fan in general that the new *Fright Night* (opening August 12 from Disney's Touchstone Pictures) is a worthy retread—and it's difficult for this writer to say they don't do a good job. "I knew the structure of the story from loving the original," Farrell continues, "so I had an understanding of where it was going and how it ended. And yet, I was still—not only through self-interest but just through enjoying the script as a reader—compelled. It was a really quick read. [Marti Noxon, the screenwriter] did a great job making it relevant to today's world."

And it seems Noxon has done just that. Updating Tom Holland's 1985 classic about a suburban boy, the vampire next door and the horror host he recruits to help him slay the bloodsucker, the *Buffy*

with his life and success is a really smart way of making it relevant," Farrell says. "She really brought it up to speed. Some of the old things remain intact and are unchanged: the depression of high school, the journey from boy to man, your first love—all that stuff is timeless. So it's the accoutrements that have changed and the dressing that has changed, but the core stays the same."

Set in a community on the outskirts of Sin City, the new *Fright Night* casts *Star Trek*'s Anton Yelchin as the brand new Charlie Brewster, *28 Weeks Later*'s Imogen Poots as his girlfriend Amy, *Superbad* phenomenon Christopher Mintz-Plasse tackling Evil Ed, former *Dr. Who* David Tennant as the revamped Vincent and Farrell as a much more carnal Jerry Dandrige. Also on board is *The Sixth Sense*'s Toni Collette in the seemingly much-expanded role of Charlie's mom. While a good number of *Fright Night*'s participants



Who better to play the new Evil Ed than a guy who's been *Superbad* (Christopher Mintz-Plasse)?

have dabbled in genre before, what the remake did—and the reason it may work—was afford Gillespie (whose credits include *Lars and the Real Girl* and Showtime's *United States of Tara*) and Farrell their first foray into horror, allowing them to play endlessly with how they wanted to tackle both the overarching concept of the vampire and, more specifically, the new Jerry.

"For me, there's a technique you have in thrillers and horrors that's a lot of fun to do in terms of the pacing and the camerawork," says Gillespie. "The camera is much more present in that sense. It tends to be invisible in comedy, but [here] it's really one of the characters, and it was a lot of fun to go down that road."



There's more peril for Charley (Anton Yelchin) and his mom (Toni Collette) in 2011 than there was in 1985.

That road became surprisingly inspiring for Farrell, who originally had doubts as to the excitement of portraying Jerry's supernatural inclinations. "Initially, I was like, 'No fear, no emotion? That's boring.' But it became something else," he explains. "Particularly because Jerry is probably the most unemotional character I've played—and while I felt like I was

completely immersed in whatever I was doing at a particular time—I was more aware of the strings and the manipulation of certain moments and scenes than I would usually be. So it was like the ‘third eye’ was very present, and the work didn’t come home with me. It wasn’t as heavy as it would seem.

“It was just a lot of fun,” he continues. “There’s a thing in drama school, mask work, that’s a really powerful kind of tool. It can free you up to not only think all sorts of thoughts, but if you walk around society and cover your face and just have your eyes, there’s an instant feeling of power you get; it’s bizarre. It was something akin to that, that I kind of felt as Jerry. I mean, talk about being on top of the evolutionary scale. There’s a particular omnipotence to him as a character, and to feel that in the scene was a blast. To not be held back, to not be contained by human emotion, was liberating.”

What should be liberating for fans is the relief that Farrell and Gillespie were fairly traditional in approaching the well-worn creatures of the night, especially the *In Bruges* star’s instincts to throw romanticism out the window. “The vampire, in psychological terms, is somebody who feeds off other people’s emotions and doesn’t have enough of an internal life themselves,” he says. “They take what they need and then they go off, and the person’s usually drained, spent, bloodless, emotionless. Jerry does that very much.

“It was, even for me, shocking on the set when we set up these characters and said, ‘All right, bring in the blood.’ ”
—Craig Gillespie, director

He is the modern psychological reference of a vampire as well as the old and initial notion of the vampire, which was a sexual predator and someone who killed and needed to feed and didn’t have these romantic longings to meet their counterpart in life. We’d talk about how much Jerry literally feeds off fear, how it’s orgasmic to him. To get his ‘fangs up,’ he has to literally take his time, smell it, listen to her breath, catch the heartbeat, to get salivated, to get motivated, to get the teeth going; there’s a whole process he has to go through, foreplay. It was fun.”

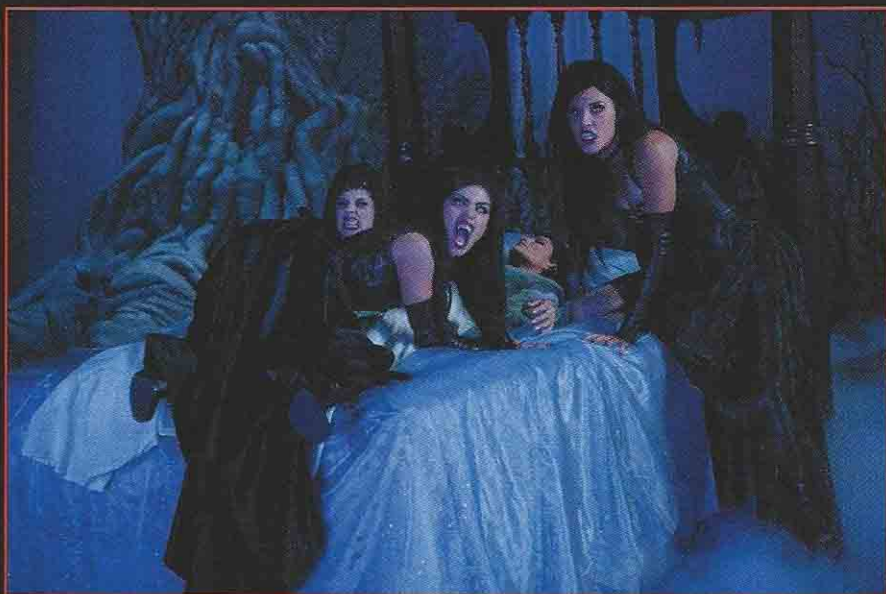
“It was fun with those layers,” Gillespie adds, “and then the other part was approaching it from a certain point of reality, which is that sexual predator/serial killer aspect. How he functions in society by sneaking around, and how he deals with existing and not being found out in terms of changes, and how he practically goes about living in this world and doing what he does. I liked keeping that reality to it. Then I actually went back to the more classic mythology, and some of that is in the original, which is obviously that he can’t go out in the sunlight—that’s a

Irish actor Colin Farrell brings new accents to the role of suburban bloodsucker Jerry Dandrige.

major one—he has to be invited into a house; the power of the cross only works with religion.”

just has him bent over and says, ‘I am more powerful than you.’ Every day he has to hide. So even though I say human emotion has been taken from the character’s life, there were certain things I found too powerful to not linger on in some small way, and one of them was boredom, and frustration. I think he’s bored at this stage. Pride doth come before the fall. His sense of power has just gotten out of control. That’s why he makes very unwise decisions to act in certain ways: burning the house, chasing them down the freeway. I had to go, ‘Wait, cops are going to come in.’ But he can disappear in a heartbeat. Like that. He’s in Mexico in about 20

“[Craig] certainly explored that aspect of sunlight very well,” Farrell notes. “Imagine not being able to be in the sun. How much does he hate it? This one thing



In Peter Vincent’s world of illusion, vampirism is all an act—at first.

minutes of flight. He's under the bridge in Austin with all the bats. The possibility of existence that we're talking about falls so out of the realm of human contemplation; it's trying, really, to explain the notion of God. Wait, did I just say I was God?"

Out of his head on set, the star became completely wrapped up in his character's habits. "I was confused. I came down to shoot one day and it was really bright, and I was like, 'What's the f**king story here, guys? I'm a vampire. I'm not going to make it through the scene!'"

"That was a dusk scene," Gillespie notes. "You know, where you can see the glow on the horizon, and he actu-



Vincent is certainly easier to track down this time.



With an eye—and teeth—for the ladies, Jerry puts the bite in *Fright Night*.

ally takes a moment to check the sky out in a prelude of what's to come."

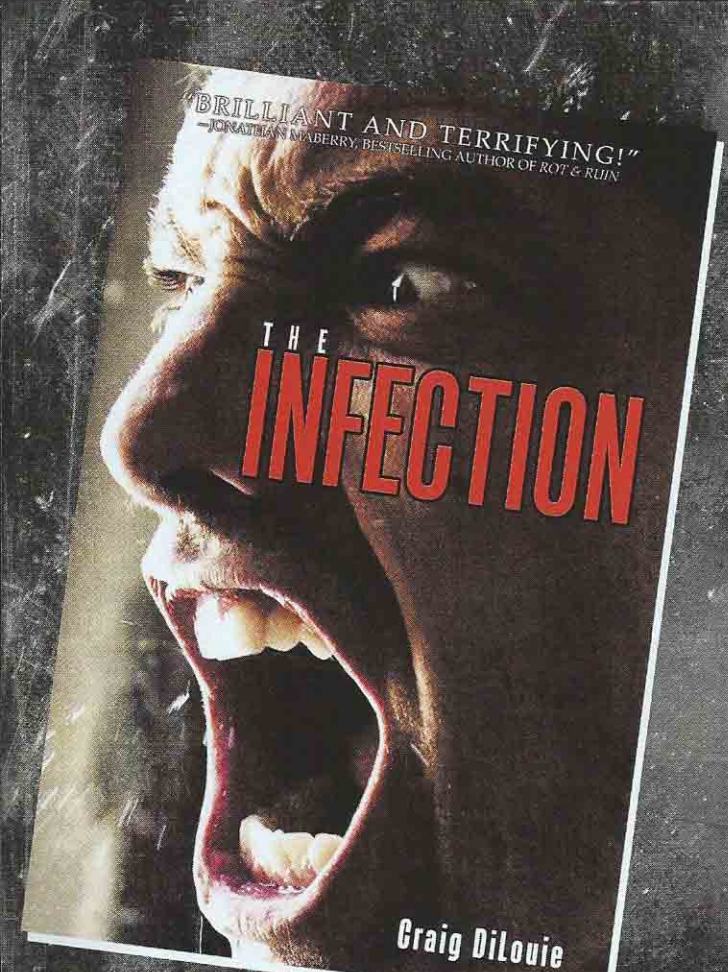
"I realized the sun had set and it was only the direct rays [that could hurt Jerry]," says Farrell. "I don't know what the story with *Twilight* is—they're cool in the sun—but I'm used to seeing vampires in a world of darkness. That's it. At night, they travel. It was lovely to be able to be out in the day with people. It felt like the middle of the afternoon, on the lawn, doing regular activities."

This month, we'll all see if our enthusiasm can match that of *Fright Night's* director and star—and just how the predatory description of Jerry will sync up with the onscreen terror. If what this scribe got to peek at in the trailer of legendary makeup FX artist Howard Berger is any indication, the answer is just fine. (Another answer is yes, Amy's famous vamp mouth is back.)

Gillespie is quick to reassure as well: "It is *quite* gory at times. It was my first experience in that realm, and in the first scene we did, it was, even for me, shocking on the set when we set up these characters and said, 'All right, bring in the blood.' I stepped out for a second and came back, like, 'Oh my God, is this too much?'"

Farrell quickly chimes in, "The next thing you know he's yelling to Howard, 'More blood!'"

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YOU'RE SO COOL BREWSTER!

Star William Ragsdale looks back at Tom Holland's original classic "Fright Night."

By W. BRICE McVICAR

William Ragsdale can't believe he's still doing interviews about *Fright Night* almost 30 years after the film's release. The fact that he is is a testimony to the film's ranking in the genre, and fans' love for what is easily one of the best vampire flicks to come out of the 1980s.

Ragsdale plays Charley Brewster, your typical horny teenage boy who suspects—rightly so—that his new neighbor, Jerry Dandrige (Chris Sarandon), is a blood-sucker. When Charley admits his suspicions to his girlfriend Amy (Amanda Bearse) and friend "Evil Ed" (Stephen Geoffreys), they naturally think he's gone off his rocker. The same thoughts are expressed by an aging TV horror host (a superb Roddy

McDowall), when Charley tries to enlist him to help kill the vampire. Though a meeting involving the group is intended to prove Charley wrong, things take an unexpected turn for the non-believers, leading to a Hammeresque showdown.

The film marked not only the first time screenwriter Tom (*Psycho II*) Holland stepped behind the camera, but also Ragsdale's first major feature. He'd had a very small role in the 1979 flick *Screams of a*

thought I should read for this role she was handling, because she felt I might be good for it, and it was *Fright Night*. I auditioned four or five times, and ended up getting it. Sort of a feather in the cap was that they called me on Halloween to tell me I had it, which I thought was a kind of omen."

Recalling Holland as "supportive and encouraging," Ragsdale says he knew it was the director's first film, but was too naive to know about Holland's back-

"Chris Sarandon was enjoying bringing something new to the vampire legend that hadn't really been done before."

Winter Night, but *Fright Night* was the one that gave him a career.

The part, Ragsdale recalls, found him more than he found it. "I was in San Francisco at the time, at an acting school," he says, "and they were looking for someone to play the role of Rusty in *Mash*. They were having problems, I guess, finding somebody, so the casting woman called some people she knew around the country; one of them was in San Francisco, and she called around to the people *she* knew, and one of the places she contacted was the acting school I was attending.

"So I went in and auditioned on tape, they sent it [to Los Angeles] and they were interested, so I went down and read for it. I got to meet Peter Bogdanovich, which was pretty cool for a kid, but I didn't get it.

They hired a redheaded guy [Eric Stoltz] to play Rusty—imagine that!—so I went down later after I got out of the school and called the casting woman. She

ground as both a screenwriter and an actor. That lack of knowledge, he says, may have been a good thing. "I was right off the boat; I really had no idea who he was, or his background," he says. "I didn't know enough about it, really, to be nervous. In the meetings, I felt really comfortable with him, so I knew it was going to be a lot of fun."

Ragsdale does admit he was intimidated to be sharing the screen with the legendary McDowall. Having appeared in dozens of films and TV series dating back to the 1930s, McDowall may have earned the right to be handled with respect and dignity, but Ragsdale says he never acted as if he was above any of his co-stars.

"There were a few moments where I was like, 'OK, just keep it together. Be cool, be cool,'" Ragsdale admits. "But he was just so generous, and not full of himself. He didn't have a handler or anything like that; he was just a regular guy, so it was very comfortable. He was also, at that point, a major tactician regarding what it took to make a movie. As a young actor, you don't know how to pace yourself and save something for the close-up and just give your all all the time, but he had a real mastery of knowing what the scene was and what it was going to take for a specific shot. It was easy for him."

That ease carried over onto the entire set, as Ragsdale can't recall any egos rearing their heads during the nearly three-month shoot. Rather, the entire cast was calm and able to focus on the task at hand. They were provided with two weeks of rehearsals on the very soundstages the film would be shot on, allowing everyone

Horror-movie fanatic Charley (William Ragsdale) never knew he'd literally live his favorite genre.

to discuss and work nuances out of the script. "You had a sense of the whole narrative, from beginning to end, really well," Ragsdale notes, "and we were able to talk about it and figure out subtleties—which you never get to do on film, or even TV, so that was a great, comforting buffer."

"Everyone was very giving and excited to be there," he continues. "Roddy was already a legend, and just having a ball. He knew that character so well, he knew the guys who had played [similar roles], and he was having a blast. Chris was such

so I was excited, and it really didn't matter to me what the reception was going to be. So that was definitely icing on the cake when it was so well-received."

However, there were hints that *Fright Night* was going to be something different from the average bloodsucker story. "I think in the modern vampire movie, you're often not sure who's the protagonist and who's the antagonist. This was a very clear clash of those forces, so it felt very defined and easy that way."

The movie found an even larger audi-



Onscreen and off, Roddy McDowall was a role model for Ragsdale.

an accomplished and smart actor; he was enjoying bringing something new to the vampire legend that hadn't really been done before, making him kind of hip and suave and irresistible. Everyone was having fun with the job they had to do."

Filming wrapped in late February 1985, and the movie opened that August; within a week, its box-office take surpassed its \$9-million budget. Its success and the launching pad it would serve as for Ragsdale came as a surprise to the young actor. "I had no idea it would turn out the way it did. It was like my first job,

ence on VHS, and prompted a poorly received sequel, *Fright Night Part 2*, directed by Tommy Lee Wallace, in 1989. "I had high hopes," Ragsdale says, "but Roddy and I were the only ones involved from the original, and it just didn't have the same... It's hard to recreate innocence, and I think they were trying to outsmart themselves a little bit by making it super-hip. It just didn't seem to gel as well, and I honestly don't know why, because everyone was obviously very good in that too."

The first *Fright Night*, however, remains a high-water mark in the genre.



Ragsdale says its fans are as much a part of the movie's success as he is, and it's their appreciation that keeps it relevant and alive. The actor has met a number of those devotees over the years during convention appearances. "It's remarkable to be around people who love something so much—the whole genre—and revel in it. You don't get that a lot, and it's a special event for them, and that's what's so much fun. It's great that they remember the work, but it's also great to be around people who are just in love with what they're experiencing."

"I was at a convention here [in Los Angeles] and there was this huge guy—he was like 6 and a half feet tall—dressed up as Jason," Ragsdale continues. "He had the bloody overalls and the hockey mask and a chainsaw dripping grue; he was an intimidating figure, and he asked to take a picture with me. He stood next to me, and I put my arm around him and he put his arm around me, and he was quivering. I thought, 'Nobody would believe this!'"



At the start, Charley is far from a fearless vampire hunter.



Fright Night's forces of good and evil were one big happy family behind the scenes.