PREVIEW

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET: FREDDY STRIKES BACK

After a decades-long horror reign, dream killer Freddy Krueger gets a major makeover with a new big screen version of *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET*. Don't fall asleep, kids! BY GAYNOR FLYNN

When fans of the *Nightmare On Elm Street* franchise heard that there was to be a re-imagining of the 1984 slasher flick, they were understandably concerned. When word leaked out that Robert Englund – who had played disfigured psycho killer Freddy Krueger for over two decades – was to be replaced by another actor, namely Jackie Earle Haley (*Watchmen*, *Little Children*), the fans' expectations dropped considerably. Then came the most crushing news of all. Instead of hiring a horror aficionado to helm the film, the producers had given the job to some music video guy called Sam Bayer.

As you can imagine, it was a tough crowd at ComicCon last year. That's where the filmmakers decided to unveil exclusive footage of the film. Would the fans like it? Or would they boycott the film out of respect for Englund? (Englund, by the way, has said that he's "made peace" with the new film). Initial reactions gave the filmmakers cause for hope. "I'm sure that there's going to be a lot of people who love Robert and would forever prefer Robert," says Jackie Earle Haley. "I understand that, because he's been doing it for a couple of decades. It's hard to imagine someone else playing this character. I hope that I don't disappoint the fans."

The question on everyone's lips, however, was why go back and revisit it at all? "This had the best concept for a horror film," explains producer Andrew Form. "If you fall asleep, you die. We wanted to bring this franchise back to life and up to date."

"The fact that it's a reboot means that it's going all the way back, and basically paying homage to the first one, but making it fresh and new," adds Haley. Fans will want to be reassured that the film will live up to the expectations established by the franchise over the years... namely that there will be copious amounts of blood and excruciatingly imaginative deaths. "Listen, you're talking to the champions of blood right here," says director Sam Bayer. "There were times on set when I'd cover somebody in blood, and [producer] Brad Fuller would say, 'More blood...we need more blood!' I'm throwing in some hardcore violence. I tried not to be too much of a sissy, so there are exploding, horrific, bloody things happening."

Bayer feels that what let the earlier films down were the dream sequences. That's what he's promising will distinguish his film from those in the original series directed by, say, Wes Craven, Stephen Hopkins or Renny Harlin. "The dream sequences were the weaker elements of the older movies," says Bayer. "They felt like rock videos with a lot of smoke and mirrors. The ideas were interesting, but the execution was limited by budget and probably the time period in which the movies were made. So that was one of the most appealing aspects of the movie: to elevate the dream sequences."

While the producers refused to go into too much detail about the film, it was revealed that Haley has been signed to a three-picture deal. That's not the case with Bayer. This is a one-off as far as he's concerned. "We beg him to do a movie every day, but he's not going to do another *Nightmare*," says producer Brad Fuller. "It took Sam a long time to finally commit to doing the movie, and now that he's done, he wants to keep on challenging himself. Doing another one of these wouldn't be a big enough challenge for him."

"The ball should be passed," says Bayer. "This is a movie that exists by itself, and that's what I wanted to make. I'd also like to say that I do think Robert Englund did an amazing job, but I actually think that the Freddy Krueger that we've created is more terrifying because this is a more complex scenario. There's a little bit more going on."

***A Nightmare On Elm Street* is released on August 12.** ■

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