

Brendan Fraser has a weird way of building a career

by Joey_Berlin

Brendan Fraser has a weird way of building a career. He started off making a lot of deliberately dumb comedies like "Encino Man," "Airheads" and "George of the Jungle." But then he proved that he is capable of so much more with a strong performance opposite Ian McKellen in the Oscar winner "Gods and Monsters."

BRENDAN FRASER - Brendan Fraser plays a guy called Pleasure in the unconventional ensemble drama, 'The Air I Breathe.' CNS Photo courtesy of ThinkFilm. Fraser demonstrates his first-rate acting ability once again, playing a guy called Pleasure in the unconventional ensemble drama "The Air I Breathe." Pleasure is a misnamed man. He is actually a sad sack working as an enforcer for a loan shark played by Andy Garcia. And Pleasure can also see supernatural visions of the future.

"The Air I Breathe," a clever tale interweaving multiple story lines, co-stars Sarah Michelle Gellar, Forest Whitaker, Julie Delpy and Kevin Bacon and is the theatrical debut of music video director Jieho Lee. Although he is best known for starring in "The Mummy" movies, the 39-year-old Fraser is no stranger to ensemble dramas, having already appeared in the Best Picture-winner "Crash."

And for fans of his more swashbuckling fare, there will be a third "Mummy" adventure in theaters this summer.

Q: If you had the ability to see into the future like your character in "The Air I Breathe," would that be fun for you?

A: No, I don't think it would be. I would not want to know those sorts of things. But I will trust intuition and I will trust my gut more. I think we've all had that experience where the hair stands up on the back of your neck and you think, "Hmm, this is not helpful." Or, "I think I'll make a right instead of a left this time." Or, perhaps it might not be a bad idea to change my mind. But insofar as having quasi-supernatural visions or premonitions, I don't think it's something that would really interest me, thank you.

Q: Your character has a key line in the film, about how there is no coincidence. How do you feel about that idea?

A: Well Pleasure says, "Some people believe that there are no coincidences. I am not one of those people." It is a point that the filmmaker is putting forth, that things happen for reasons, and we need to accept them. And I think that's a counterpoint to your earlier question, which is, if you could have a prescient ability, would you want it? Well I can assure you that Pleasure does not want that prescient ability that he does have. He's in, needless to say, quite a nefarious world. He's grown apathetic, he's tired and sad. This guy is chain-smoking because he's trying to kill himself slowly because he can't feel pleasure. It just doesn't work for him.

Q: Audiences have never seen you play such an emotionally shuttered character before. Did it take any special focus on your part to be that way?

A: Jieho, I think, was reticent to hire me in this film. No, I take that back. I know he was reticent to hire me. I don't know if it's because he had the desire to have an actor play this with that sense of stoicism that was absolutely required.

Q: Sarah Michelle Gellar said that she recommended hiring you, because she had just seen you at a Christmas party. So if you don't believe in coincidence, you at least have synchronicity working for you.

A: I think she probably went, "Jieho, come here." And then she took his arm and twisted it behind his back, being Sarah. Not really.

Q: Have you seen that a lot before, actors helping you or other actors out?

A: I am grateful for her support and for her strong recommendation and the influence that she lent. Having been given the opportunity to play this role marks a departure for me in a way that I never was asked to before. And the reserve that it required in order to be the best it could be meant that Jieho had to stay on top of me and remind me, "Don't smile."

Q: You co-star in your upcoming film "Inkheart" with some of the biggest actors in the U.K. at the moment. Are you the only Yank in it? Now why are you smiling?

A: I'm a Hoosier and a "hoser," just for the record - born in Indiana, raised in Canada and all over. The answer, though, is I am very proud to be a part of that cast. It was great! Good fun. Helen Mirren won her Oscar while we were there. Paul Bettany is one of the funniest guys I know. Jim Broadbent, come on! When he did "Like a Virgin" in "Moulin Rouge," that's going down in cinema history. He's just one of the most courageous comic actors. And this is just me speculating but I think he thinks he's one of the least-funny people he knows. But he's a delight, so well-read.

Q: How did you become involved with "Inkheart?"

A: That film came together in an epic sort of way. Cornelia Funke, a prize-winning children's book author and illustrator, sought me out to tell me that she had written a book called "Inkheart" and she was thanking me for giving her inspiration to write this book. It was about a man who had such a voice that when he read aloud from a book, elements would come into our world and things would disappear into the world of the book. I was astonished and flattered and I didn't know what to believe about it. We had a meeting in Hamburg (Germany), so I went and saw Cornelia and her family. It was her daughter and her son, who didn't believe I was real. He poked me with a stick.

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