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# Elijah Wood Makes Room in His Head for a Madman

By [DANIEL SCHEFFLER](#)

With summer cinema awash in one comic-book hero after the other (the latest a rather damaged Superman), it's easy to forget that the past decade has also seen a full-blooded revival of the horror genre, a trend with more than just gore on its mind. Few, however, might have foreseen Elijah Wood, favorite son of Tolkien's Shire, at the center of one of its better entries.



La Petite Reine

Elijah Wood in Franck Khalfoun's 'Maniac.'

But here is Mr. Wood gashing at the screen in "Maniac," an update of William Lustig's B-movie slasher story from 1980, opening in the city on Friday. The film, seemingly impelled by the so-called New French Extremism, which has infused horror stories with deeper examinations of human anxiety, follows Frank Zito, a disturbed loner who takes over his family's mannequin business after his mother's death and gradually succumbs to his violent impulses.

Directed by Frenchman Franck Khalfoun ("P2"), "Maniac" takes a novel visual stab at the genre, depicting only the killer's point of view—the big-eyed Frank seen solely in reflections and photographs.

Mr. Wood plays another loner with perception problems in "Wilfred," the FX comedy series set to begin its third season on Friday. Rather than terrorizing women, though, Ryan copes by befriending his neighbor's dog, which appears to him in the form of a surly Australian guy (Jason Gann) in a tattered canine suit.

The 32-year-old actor sat down with The Wall Street Journal this week to chat about "Maniac."

### **What compelled you to get involved with "Maniac"?**

I'm a fan of genre film and so I heard from a producer friend that they would be working on a remake of the original movie and shooting mostly as POV [point of view], which intrigued me. And I do also love horror cult films, so I was immediately interested.

### **William Lustig's 1980 version of "Maniac" was quite dark—literally. Was it hard to effect that look three decades later?**

The original was very gritty, a more realistic approach. It was in that post-'70s grunge, so it very much relied on the director and the dirtiness and squalor of New York at the time. The city was much darker and wilder then. We used Los Angeles for our "Maniac" and, dare I say it, the film is more beautiful. It's definitely graceful.

### **The film is shot solely from your character's perspective. How did that affect the creative process for you?**

The approach allows for the audience to feel like they are the character. We used handheld cameras mostly and it allowed for it to be very composed and beautiful this way. This was a very technical filming process and that allowed me to make more informed decisions with the character. But I believe you cannot truly be creative if you're not slightly uncomfortable—there is nothing exciting about a comfort zone.

**This is a character who stalks and kills women. What emotional challenges came with that?**

As an actor, the challenge is to portray the character to be believable and to do that honestly. I mean, my character, Frank, is evil, but I wanted to play it without cliché and truly bring that darkness alive. The film was much more of a discovery than I expected. I have never made anything so brutal, so it was hard for me to know how disturbing it was at first, as I was so involved.

**How did you go about creating the character?**

I think I created the role in stages. There was all the time behind the camera, with so many of the reflection scenes being done separately and then added in—although some came with shooting. But where it really came to life was with the voice-over process. It gave the film a sense of presence and promoted a sort of inner dialogue. I didn't really push for the sympathetic nature of the character. I wanted to make him human; he is damaged, but still human. The violence is part of the context in the film.

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