

Interview: Emmy-Nominated Noah Wyle Looks to the ‘Falling Skies’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 16, 2011 - 10:57am

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CHICAGO – Noah Wyle stars in the upcoming TNT series “Falling Skies,” a family drama dressed up like an alien-invasion series and premiering Sunday, June 19th, 2011. The ambitious program, which you’re surely aware of if you watched even one of the Chicago Bulls games in which it was heavily advertised, features the former “ER” star as a reluctant leader and family man trying survive after the alien apocalypse. The five-time Emmy nominee sat down with us in Chicago to discuss the program, what drew it to him, the marketing of it, and even the future of the “Librarian” series.

HollywoodChicago.com: The first thing I noticed about the show was the filth. You see a lot of polished performers, especially in the era of HD. How do you maintain the physical sense of desperation — the grime, dirt, etc. — when you’re going back to your trailer after every scene? How do you keep the realism intact?

Noah Wyle: That’s kind of a peeve of mine. Back when “ER” first started — “Don’t cover up the circles under our eyes. Let us go a couple of days without shaving. Don’t over-makeup the girls. The last thing these people want to do is look attractive when they go to work.” I feel like that establishes a baseline of credibility that the audience picks up on in a very subtle way. It was particularly true here. There can’t be any vanity in the post-apocalypse AT ALL. As soon as you see one person who looks clean, everything is going to fall apart. There were even notes from the studio — “Noah’s looking a little TOO dirty. TOO sweaty.”

HollywoodChicago.com: Is it difficult to maintain the realism? Do you do exercises at all or is it all internal?

Wyle: It’s both. It’s internal for me but it’s a young ensemble. There were three things that interested me in this character — One was his sense of leadership. Another was his loss/grief. And then his notion of fatherhood. The leadership was the tricky one for me since I’ve been very comfortable working in ensembles for a long time. Even though I became the big head on the poster at the end of “ER,” it was sort of inherited. This was right from the jump. For the first time in my career, I was one of the oldest cast members. I never wanted to be a hall monitor. I didn’t have to do any of that. But there are certain technical aspects in which you have to get everyone on the same page in terms of the stakes that you are playing so there’s a continuity line in the performances. I felt for the first time that I could impart some advice and wisdom. And that carried through to the aesthetic of the show.



Noah Wyle

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: It's interesting that leadership on-set made you nervous because your character is certainly a reluctant leader as well.

Wyle: Yeah. That was the fit. That was the catharsis. He doesn't want to accept power and responsibility. How do you do that when your tendency is just to protect you and yours?

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Falling Skies
Photo credit: TNT

HollywoodChicago.com: We all ask ourselves how we would respond in that kind of situation. I like that element of the show.

Wyle: It's a great arc.

HollywoodChicago.com: And fathers and sons. How do you develop that part of the show? The believability of the family?

Wyle: The fatherhood angle was significant because he's got three sons. The eldest wants to establish himself as a man, a warrior, much sooner than he should. The middle son is missing. The youngest son — it's this really interesting ethical dilemma: Which is the kinder choice — shield and protect to maintain what innocence you can or arm them and train them to survive?

HollywoodChicago.com: I think those questions are relatable to raising children now as well.

Wyle: Oh yeah. And there are many areas of society where kids are growing up at a much faster rate.

HollywoodChicago.com: The show, clearly, to me, is more about people than aliens.

Wyle: It's a family drama at its nucleus. A character drama in the context of science fiction.

HollywoodChicago.com: Is that what attracted you to it?

Wyle: Pretty much. I like the genre but I like it best when it's used for metaphorical storytelling, when it is really a drama with that as the canvas. When it becomes the sole point, then it interests me less. I knew with the pedigree of Mr. Spielberg's involvement that the aliens and spaceships would look great and that my responsibility would be that beat-by-beat, line-by-line, character-by-character, we were playing it as realistically as possible. "Where would I fit in? What would I do?"

HollywoodChicago.com: It doesn't feel like a lot on TV right now. There's almost always an easy pitch for shows nowadays — "An ER Knockoff," "A Friends Knockoff" — but this has a unique quality that I liked. Was that intentional? To do something not like anything else on TV?

Wyle: It's certainly a huge departure for TNT. They're taking a big bold step to attract that demographic not on the network. It's unlikely people will be like "What a great episode of "The Closer," now I can't wait to watch "Falling Skies""

HollywoodChicago.com: If it's quality drama...

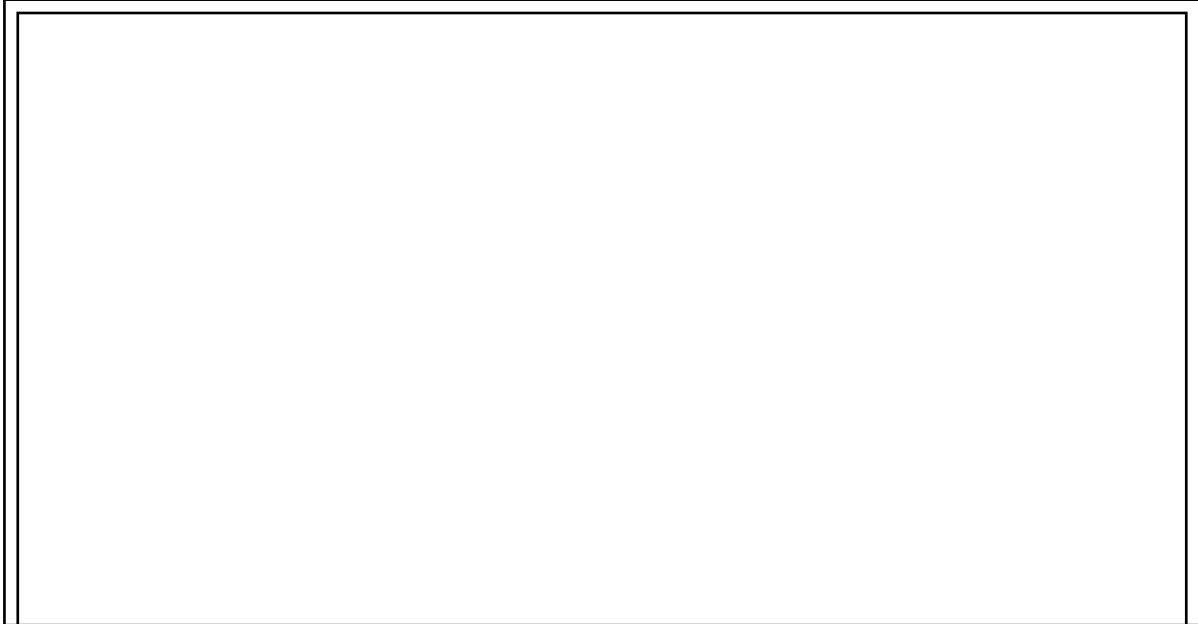
Wyle: It's walking a very fine line — knowing who their audience is and what they like to watch which is character drama and, at the same time, trying to attract eyeballs that aren't there already through a new genre. It kind of pre-dates a lot of the newer ones. We shot the pilot two years ago. It was before "The Event" and "The Walking Dead." It was that — trying to walk the line between keeping an audience and attracting an audience.



Noah Wyle
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: Do you worry about the number of shows that have been hurt by being as serial as this one, like “The Event”? Sometimes if people don’t feel like they can just jump in, they don’t bother...

Wyle: It’s tricky. But TNT reruns a lot. The way that they quantify ratings is different too.





Falling Skies
Photo credit: TNT

HollywoodChicago.com: TNT has a lot of confidence in the project.

Wyle: There's a tipping point a bit to over-confidence. At first it may seem cool and then you're like, "OK, can I watch a basketball game without seeing Noah Wyle?!?! I almost don't want to watch it now."

HollywoodChicago.com: It was pretty constant. But in today's market can you be over-saturated when there are so many choices?

Wyle: The Playoffs were a great launching platform. And I think the idea was to go in and not dominate a national conversation. I'm traveling the world to promote it and the idea of being a big fish in a local pond even if just on the news for a day is a much better strategy than trying to compete with...people say that the '50s or '90s were the golden era of television, but if you look at the amount of quality shows — "Breaking Bad," "Treme," "The Killing," "Mad Men"...

HollywoodChicago.com: It's right now. It's certainly not right now in film or music. It's right now in TV.

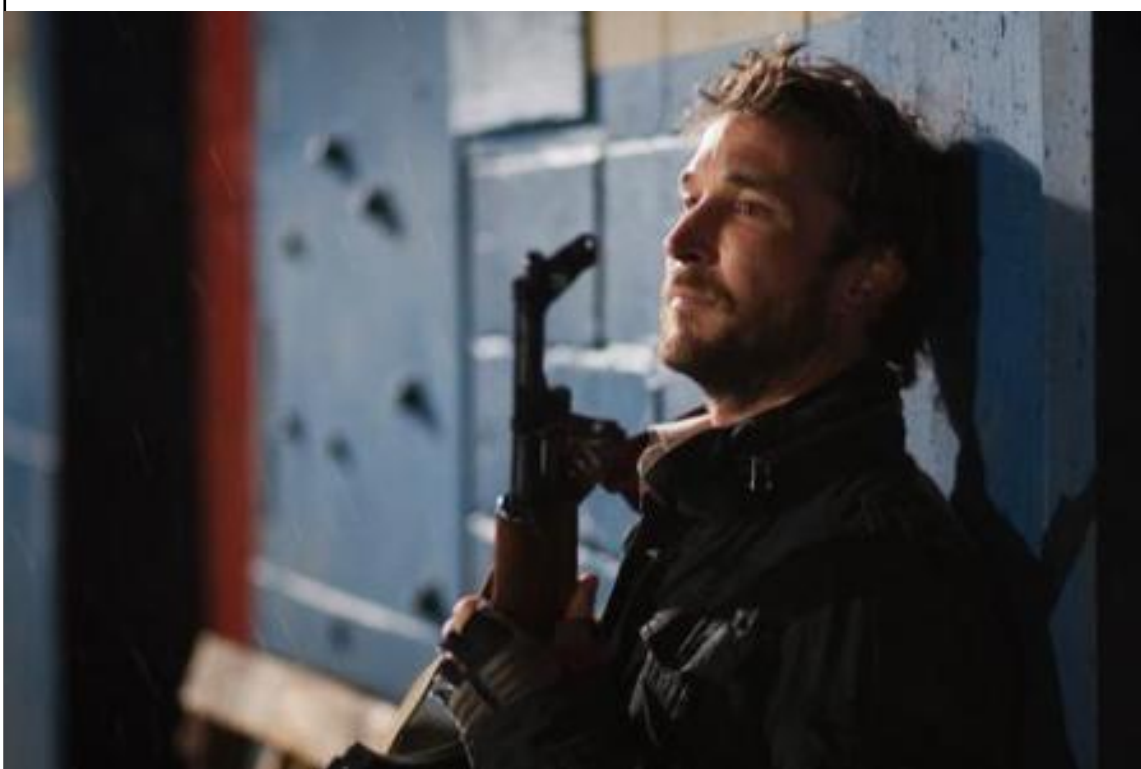
Wyle: I agree. There's so many choices for content on TV and there's been a real brain drain from movie studios. I was at FOX this morning looking at the posters for shows and 80% of them have reputable film actors.

HollywoodChicago.com: Oh yeah. The FALL schedule — Maria Bello, Patrick Wilson, Christina Ricci, all these people who started in film.

Wyle: All these people who gave me shit when I started on "ER." "What are you doing a TV show for? I thought you were an actor. You're selling your soul."

HollywoodChicago.com: How has TV changed since you started? Is it a new respectability?

Wyle: They pay less. They pay a lot less. The '90s...I hit the last gasp of huge, big-event network television paydays. It's tricky. When I saw that Netflix is getting into production and cutting out the middle man entirely...HBO has 22 million subscribers...the game is changing.



Falling Skies
Photo credit: TNT

HollywoodChicago.com: They haven't adjusted their metrics. I can watch TV on my iPhone and networks are still having people fill out blue books for ratings.

Wyle: It's crazy. And that's crap. I think they know. I remember after Janet Jackson had her wardrobe malfunction that there was a New York Times article in which they could quantify how many people rewound that film. If you know that, you should be able to...

HollywoodChicago.com: But no one's figured out how to make money on it...on rewinding.

Wyle: As an advertiser, I wouldn't know what to do. But, as an actor, being able to track residual payments for how many people are watching. It's got to be a lot easier.

HollywoodChicago.com: There are a lot of fans of the “Librarian” movies. Are you making more?

Wyle: I love making ‘em. That's the most fun I've had on a job. And we talk about it. I want to make more. Dean Devlin wants to make more. But TNT got out of the movie business. I'm hoping that “Falling Skies” does well and “Leverage” holds its numbers and maybe we can get back to it. It's cool. They fill a void. There's really nothing like those movies — something for the whole family.

HollywoodChicago.com: What's your airport question when people recognize you?

Wyle: Hmm...”What's George Clooney like?” Occasionally, I'll get asked for medical advice. Oddly enough, more and more people talk about “The Librarian” than “ER.” If they're under 30 then I get a lot of “Donnie Darko” questions.

Research your “Falling Skies” questions by catching the premiere on Sunday, June 19th, 2011 on TNT and stay tuned to HollywoodChicago.com for our full review of the series.



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