

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

# Here Comes Rocky: Frank Grillo on the First Day With Stallone and Why *Tulsa King* Season 4 Hits Harder

*The actor who plays Bill Bevilaqua opens up about Terence Winter's return, the stakes boiling over, and the Nick Nolte moment that turned him into a real actor at 39.*

Interview by Paul Salfen • AMFM Magazine



Frank Grillo as Bill Bevilaqua in *Tulsa King*. (Paramount+)

Frank Grillo still gets a little quiet when he talks about the first day he stepped onto a *Tulsa King* set with Sylvester Stallone. He had known Stallone. He had been to the house. He had done a movie Stallone wrote opposite Jason Statham. None of that prepared him for the moment in the casino when Dwight Manfredi, in full glory, started walking toward him.

“I got to tell you, I was like, I wish my parents were alive because my father loved him,” Grillo says. “And I’m like, this is fucking surreal. Here comes Rocky. And it was game on, man.”

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## THE STAKES ARE DIFFERENT NOW

Season Four of *Tulsa King* premieres October 16 on Paramount+, and Grillo can feel the difference. The political institutions have noticed. The corporate interests have noticed. The local gangsters who have had enough have noticed. Dwight and the people around him are no longer operating in the relative quiet of the early years.

“All the stakes by this point are so high,” he says. “It all comes to a boiling head at some point, and it just makes everything—the gravitas of the show is much stronger.”

Part of that shift is the return of Terence Winter as head writer and executive producer. Winter shaped the first two seasons, stepped away for Season Three, and is back. Grillo does not hedge when he talks about the difference.

“From season three to season four, you know, there was no Terence Winter in season three and season four Terence is back. And it’s like, oh man, you know I can’t wait to say this. It’s really a big difference. It really is a big difference. And when you have a guy like Stallone, you need a guy like Terence Winter.”

*“When you have a guy like Stallone, you need a guy like Terence Winter.”*

— FRANK GRILLO

The official logline for the season tracks with what Grillo is describing. Dwight is fighting to legitimize the empire he has built while corrupt politicians, dangerous new enemies, and a crushing personal loss hit from every direction. Every gain carries a harder truth about loyalty, leadership, and the cost of ambition. The street instincts he left behind in New York keep pulling him back in. Tulsa becomes the battleground. Dwight becomes the threat no one can afford to underestimate.

Grillo’s Bill Bevilacqua has been part of that pressure since Season Two. The Kansas City operator who arrived as a rival has stayed in the orbit, and Season Four brings him back into a story that has only gotten more expensive for everyone involved.

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## THE WORK, NOT THE PERFORMANCE

Grillo came to acting later than most. He was not a child actor. He came through the back door—soap opera work, then a string of pilots and short-lived shows. By the time he was 39 he was on the set of *Warrior* with Tom Hardy, Joel Edgerton, and Nick Nolte. He spent a lot of time around Nolte.

Nolte carried a Bible that belonged to the character. One day Grillo asked him about it. “Nick, what is that?” Nolte answered, “This, Mike, this is what I do. This is the work.”

“I went to work and I had thought I was working up until then,” Grillo says. “And he set me on a path. At 39 years old, he set me on a path that would turn me into what I consider today a really, you know, an educated, passionate actor. And it’s been great. I’ve cobbled a career together from that.”

*“This, Mike, this is what I do. This is the work.”*

— NICK NOLTE TO FRANK GRILLO, ON THE SET OF *WARRIOR*

That is the advice he gives now. Do the work. Love the work. Learn how to break a script down. Understand story, structure, and character. Getting on set is the end of the process, not the beginning. “That’s the putting it all together. That’s the fun part of it.”

He also tells younger actors the landscape is different. “You got to go make your own stuff. Go do your own. My son’s in film school right now. Go make your own movies. Write your own movies.”

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## THE HAIL MARY

Salfen's co-host that day was Drew Pearson, the Dallas Cowboys Hall of Famer who caught the original Hail Mary. Pearson had a standing question for guests: the moment you had to go for it and it worked. Grillo, a lifelong Cowboys fan, answered without hesitation.

He had just come off the soap and landed on Gary David Goldberg's *Battery Park*. The show lasted six episodes. Then nothing. Nine months of nothing. He was ready to call the whole thing a good run that was over.

A meeting came up with Christopher Nolan. Grillo almost didn't go. He was the last guy in the room. He read. He did not get the part. Nolan told him, "You're really, really great. I don't think you're right for this. I don't think this is going to work for you. But man, I can't wait to watch you do your thing."

"I left and I went, I can do this," Grillo says. "That not getting it, but getting that advice and that kind of set me off. And I was like, okay, I'm going to be great at this. And then I started to really work."

*"I left and I went, I can do this. That not getting it... set me off."*

— FRANK GRILLO, ON THE CHRISTOPHER NOLAN MEETING

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## TUNNEL VISION

Ask Grillo what keeps him on the right path and the answer is almost austere. He does not drink. He does not smoke. He trains every day. He eats the same thing once a day. He loves his kids. He believes in God. He stays focused on the internal so that good news and bad news do not knock him off center.

"It's living my life in a way that I know my mother and father would be proud of, and that my legacy is that and not anything else. And that keeps me childlike. It keeps me spirited, and it keeps me happy every day about getting up and talking to you or doing my thing and loving it."

He notes that he is not a religious guy in any formal sense, but there is usually a Bible next to him. "I don't know why it's there." He shrugs at the contradiction and keeps moving.

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## THE MEMORY THAT STAYS

When Salfen asks for the definitive *Tulsa King* memory, Grillo goes back to that first day in the casino. Stallone walking toward him. The surreal feeling that Rocky himself was crossing the floor. The wish that his parents could have seen it.

He hopes audiences notice the levity that still runs through the show even as the stakes rise. After five decades of iconic characters, Stallone has slipped into Dwight in a way that many people are calling his best work. Grillo thinks it has to do with vulnerability—an age and a place in life where Stallone is willing to show more of it. That quality comes through in Dwight. That is what people love.

Grillo still sounds a little amazed that he gets paid to be in the room. "I see Sly walk towards me. I go, I can't believe I'm getting paid to hang out with Stallone. I just can't. I mean, it's great, and he's the coolest."



*Sylvester Stallone as Dwight Manfredi in Tulsa King Season Four. (Paramount+)*

### FIND FRANK GRILLO

**Tulsa King** Season Four premieres Friday, October 16, 2026, exclusively on Paramount+.

Frank Grillo appears as Bill Bevilaqua. The series stars Sylvester Stallone, Martin Starr, Jay Will, Vincent Piazza, Annabella Sciorra, Chris Caldovino, McKenna Quigley Harrington, Mike “Cash Flo” Walden, James Russo, Kevin Pollak, Neal McDonough, Garrett Hedlund, Dana Delany, and Gretchen Mol.

Head Writer and Executive Producer: Terence Winter. Executive Produced by Taylor Sheridan, Sylvester Stallone, David C. Glasser, Ron Burkle, David Hutkin, Bob Yari, Thomas Kelly, and Keith Cox. Produced by Paramount Television Studios and 101 Studios.

Previous seasons streaming on Paramount+.

*Interview conducted by Paul Salfen for AMFM Magazine, October 2026.*

*Paul Salfen is Managing Editor of AMFM Magazine and a veteran interviewer of film, television, music, and sports figures. He is the author of Going For It!, a collection of Hail Mary moments from the artists and athletes he has spent two decades putting on the record.*

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### YOUTUBE DESCRIPTOR

Frank Grillo opens up about Tulsa King Season 4, the return of Terence Winter, his first day on set with Sylvester Stallone, the Nick Nolte lesson that changed his career at 39, and the Christopher Nolan Hail Mary that kept him going. Exclusive interview with Paul Salfen for AMFM Magazine. Tulsa King Season 4 premieres October 16 on Paramount+. #TulsaKing #FrankGrillo #SylvesterStallone #PaulSalfen #AMFMMagazine