

Tony Timpone's Elegies: The Joy of Sets, Part One

Written by Tony Timpone
Tuesday, 10 August 2010 16:49



FANGORIA #296 just exploded on newsstands and mailboxes everywhere, and that September issue boasts my first Fango cover story in seven years—a set-visit article on the upcoming RESIDENT EVIL: AFTERLIFE. In my 25 years as a masthead fixture, I've only penned three other cover stories: Fango #51's HOUSE (January 1986), #58's THE FLY (September 1986) and #227's KILL BILL VOL. 1 (October 2003). (If I'm missing any, let me know and I'll send you a gift.)

Unless you're workaholic Fango chief Chris Alexander, who has managed the feat of squeezing an extra two hours out of every 24-hour day, editors are usually too busy to write articles for the magazines they edit. In the beginning, I thought I could manage that Herculean task, too, while serving as managing editor under David McDonnell. For issue #51, I wrote four major features and a few reviews. When I took over as EIC with #63—coupled with editing a bunch of tie-in mags (BLOODY BEST, GOREZONE, etc.) *and* contributing to STARLOG—writing articles no longer proved practical or feasible.

What pulled me out of “retirement” for Fango #296, however, was the opportunity to journey to the set of the new RESIDENT EVIL movie, with the promise that Fango would be granted unlimited access, see some major zombie mischief take place and interview a robe-wearing Milla Jovovich in her trailer. Unlike the good old days when Fango was the only game in town, on most genre set-visit junkets today, we get herded with packs of amateur Internet journalists who don't know the first thing about professional set etiquette, grammar/English basics or genre history. When it comes to filing copy, everyone recounts the same boring stuff they witnessed and lifts the identical reporting from each other. Zzzzzzz.



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"C'mon, Tony, please come," implored a RESIDENT EVIL exec. "We want you—as Fango's top guy—to come to Toronto. It would be like if *Vanity Fair* editor Greydon Carter stopped what he was doing to write a piece himself." Well, flattery will get you everywhere, so last December, I flew to Toronto and immersed myself in the AFTERLIFE. I came home with so much stuff that after filing my magazine article with our new Fango editor, I spun off all the leftovers into a 12-part series of one-on-one RESIDENT EVIL interviews for Fangoria.com (see the latest weekly installment [here](#)), which will keep you enthralled (I hope) until the film's September release.



The last time I traveled to a set in Toronto was 24 years ago, for David Cronenberg's THE FLY in 1985, and I came home with a similar wealth of material. Besides that aforementioned Fango cover (one of my all-time faves), I wound up filing nine (!) articles from two wintry days with Cronenberg and co. at the old Toronto International Studios in Kleinburg, Ontario. There were no silly "set embargoes" in place, and quirky publicist Prudence Emery let me wander around the location and check out such wonders as the gimbal set that rotated 360 degrees and allowed the film's metamorphosing human-fly hybrid to climb walls and ceilings. I also eyed much of the film's final act being shot, including amazing scenes of Oscar-winning FX artist Chris Walas' Brundlefly doin' its thing. In between setups, Cronenberg and I would dash off to his office, where our lengthy Q&A session would start and stop over the course of the day. I was pretty green back then and in awe of the Canadian wunderkind; at one point, the auteur even chided me over a "naive" question I asked in regards to the film's casting process.

I interviewed just about everyone during my FLY-by. Jeff Goldblum's publicist, however, refused to let the star talk with a "sci-fi magazine"! I did get to quiz his co-star/then-girlfriend Geena Davis while she relaxed in her dressing room (like Jovovich, dressed in a robe). Friendly but shy and talking with a kind of lisp, Davis did not strike me as a future Oscar-winner (for 1988's THE ACCIDENTAL TOURIST), though she did give me enough good answers to warrant a STARLOG cover spread (issue #110). During our chat, a possessive Goldblum would pop his head into the cramped quarters to check on his lovely lady.

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THE FLY wasn't the first movie set I was ever on—at least, not on purpose. In the early 1980s, my buddies Vinny and Joe and I were strolling through the West Village and stumbled onto the street location where a sci-fi/horror/comedy called EAT AND RUN was being filmed. The movie, then known as MANGIA, concerned a corpulent alien (R.L. "Pat" Ryan of STREET TRASH), who lands in the Big Apple and makes New Yorkers his favorite meal. As we observed the lensing and bored lead Ron Silver (of THE ARRIVAL) sitting on the sidelines, an assistant director asked my pals and me to play extras in the scene. The trio from Queens wound up on the cutting room floor, sadly, while EAT AND RUN eventually found a distributor in New World Pictures, who opened the humorless (and now obscure) film in a few scant theaters in 1986 before dumping it on video.

While still in college, I notched my first official set assignment while freelancing for *SF* *Movieland*. A car chase for the movie F/X was shooting on the West Side Highway in lower Manhattan, and I got to view helmer Robert Mandel directing heroic FX man Bryan Brown as he eluded the bad guys (among them, future LAW & ORDER star Jerry Orbach). For a car chase, none of the vehicles were traveling particularly fast, and the technical stuff of setting up the stunts and keeping real NYC traffic at bay, wetting down the street, etc., did prove that what you see on screen is a hell of a lot more exciting than watching the actual scenes happening live in front of you.

TO BE CONTINUED

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