

Written by Tom Holland  
Friday, 07 October 2011 21:11

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*FANGORIA is honored to have legendary writer/director Tom Holland spill his guts on our site. Here's the first of an ongoing series of true tales penned for your pleasure.*

*Enjoy....*

I went to the premier of CHILLERAMA last week. I know all the filmmakers, like them a lot, and wanted to see their work. But what really piqued my interest is where they decided to have it: The Hollywood Forever Cemetery. I'd heard about it all my life, driven past it hundreds of times, worked off and on forever at Paramount, which backs up against it, but I had never been there.

Now I had the opportunity, because of an invite from the two Adams, Joe, and Tim. I shouldn't forget Mark Ward at Image. They sponsored it. So, I was off with my wife and my producer, Dennis DeFrehn, to go to the premier at the cemetery. It was held at dusk, of course.

We turned off Santa Monica into the cemetery. It was wonderful, everything you'd ever want a cemetery to be. It looked like a movie set from a silent movie in the 20's. Which isn't surprising. A number of silent movie stars and workers are buried there.

We parked alongside the graves, directed by very organized security guards, and headed toward the party in the mausoleum. Only in Hollywood and only in Hollywood Forever Cemetery. There were three food trucks on the way, high-end from the prices. There was a red carpet at the back side of the marble three-story building. CHILLERAMA was projected onto the stone side. There were chairs in front, and behind that a thick grassy lawn to spread a blanket

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and watch the show.

It was great, the party, the place, the people, the film. But now get the setting. The back is bounded by Paramount studios. So you have this row of huge sound stages looking over the stone wall. It's as if they're saying, "Hey, there's life over here." And what a life. They're making film/video, whatever they're calling it over there.

On this side, the side of dirt and gravestones, they're having a movie preview. Not only that, a horror/comedy movie preview. Enough to scare the ghosts, or at least make them laugh. This is all going on, surrounded by gravestones. Ones that stand up and have to be mowed around and kept up. That costs more money than having the markers flat in the ground. This must be a problem for Hollywood Forever, because the cemetery almost went broke in the late 90's, before it was "reinvented" in its current form. All of these social events, like the premier, must defray costs, which I'm all for, because the cemetery is great. (I don't think I ever thought I'd write that about any cemetery) You see, many of the people resting here in perpetuity are show business people. The founding fathers of those sound stages looking down from the Paramount side of the wall.

I'd heard about Hollywood Forever, so had my wife, and Dennis, but you don't really get the feel for it, until you stroll past the Fairbank's Garden, and stop to peruse Johnny Ramone's stone. It has his face on it, looking toward the heavens. Somewhere I read his ashes are inside. Okay, that's impressive, especially if you were into punk in the 70's, but after we did the party inside the mausoleum and the red carpet outside, on the way to outdoor theater screening on the marble wall, we passed the grave of Toto. That stopped me.

That was Dorothy's adorable dog in THE WIZARD OF OZ. That's when I realized I was caught in some kind of cross-current in time, between the Hollywood that was, there in that cemetery, which includes the guy who built the first studio, David Horsel, (1873-1933), the Hollywood that is, Paramount, which, BTW, just filed for a 20 year 700 million upgrade and expansion, and the Hollywood that's becoming: the guys behind Chillerama, especially Adam Green, who along with his friends, Adam Rivkin, Joe Lynch, and Tim Sullivan are behind so much of the new horror/comedy that's coming out.

I don't know what to take out of the evening. I was with some of my favorite living people, and some of my most admired dead ones. In fact, no offense to the living, but the dead were more interesting. John Houston is buried there. As is Victor Fleming; director of most of GONE WITH

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THE WIND and THE WIZARD OF OZ, both in the famous year of 1939. Not bad for 12 months work, huh? Maybe that's how Toto ended up in Hollywood Forever. Or maybe Fleming discovered the place when he was laying the animal to rest.

And I can't forget Rudolph Valentino. He rests there, too. For years the Woman in Black came on the anniversary of his death and placed a single red rose on his grave. It's an arresting image and a great fable. Undying love. Who wouldn't want to see that story? Come to think of it, they did. It was called Ghost.

Another thought occurred to me, standing in that particular cemetery, watching a movie called CHILLERAMA on a crypt wall, with the sound stages looking down. It was how perishable it all is. The cemetery was founded in 1899. Paramount bought the land and built the studio in 1920. In 1966 or thereabout, when Desilu was the biggest money producer at the studio and before Gulf and Western bought them, there was a rumor the studio tried to sell it's land to the cemetery. Also, the cemetery itself almost went bankrupt in the late 90's, and was saved because of its location and famous residents, which could be exploited in events like the one I was at that night.

Regardless, the place is fabulous. The evening was terrific. I thought to myself that if I had to end up someplace, and I do, Hollywood Forever might be it. You wouldn't be lonely. There are people partying every weekend. They're running movies all the time. You can keep an eye on what the studios are doing, and the company is simpatico.