Written by Tony Timpone
Monday, 01 November 2010 10:07

Aussie actor Ryan Kwanten is in a pretty good place these days. He stars on the hit HBO vampire series TRUE BLOOD, which begins shooting its fourth season in December, and this Friday, his toplining vehicle RED HILL opens in U.S. theaters (NY, LA and TX to start). The 33-year-old actor also took a lead role in WRONG TURN 2 director Joe Lynch's upcoming FX extravaganza KNIGHTS OF BADASSDOM, and believe it or not, will play Charles Manson (!) in a new movie based on the infamous 1969 California murder spree. In NYC to promote his violent modern-day Western RED HILL, which lensed in Australia under tyro director Patrick Hughes, the Sydney-raised/LA-living Kwanten sat down with Fango to talk about his career. In RED HILL, Kwanten plays a young cop who voluntarily transfers to a quite town and a “cushy job.” But on his first day of a work, a horribly scarred, seemingly indestructible murderer (Tommy Lewis) escapes from jail and heads back to Red Hill to bloodily settle some old scores.

FANGORIA: Tell us about the character you play in RED HILL and what attracted you to the role.

KWANTEN: I play Shane Cooper, a nod to past movie Westerns like SHANE and those starring Gary Cooper, a combination of the two. So immediately when I read that character's name, I thought, “OK, this is gonna be a guy who's set up to be the hero.” You know, an iconic John Wayne, Clint Eastwood-style hero. Yet Shane forgets his gun on his first day, so this wasn't the sort of Eastwood style that I'm used to seeing. And then his day starts to get progressively worse, and what made it interesting to me were his fallibilities, that he was not just this impenetrable force. You felt almost like you wanted to help him up every time he got knocked down. But RED HILL was almost like the prequel, before John Wayne and Clint Eastwood started out in THE SEARCHERS and HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER, it's kind of what drove them to where they are. It's almost like the backstory to those brutal guys.

FANG: Was it tough squeezing in the work with your TRUE BLOOD commitment?

KWANTEN: Not really. I try to do two or three movies every break, and the cool thing about the TRUE BLOOD schedule is that it's six, seven months on and then six months off. So in those

six months off I usually work harder than I do when I'm on the show, with either a lead or a second lead in films. It's exhausting, but happily exhausting.

FANG: How did Patrick Hughes fare as a first time writer/director?

KWANTEN: The evidence is all on the screen. The guy is Australia's answer to Robert Rodriguez. That's a big call, and I really feel I can, in 10 year's time, look back and say I was very proud to be part of Patrick Hughes' first film. Much like the Coen brothers, where actors might look back and say, “I was there when they made BLOOD SIMPLE,” or “I was there when Rodriguez did EL MARIACHI.”

FANG: The movie's quite an accomplishment for a first time filmmaker.

KWANTEN: Huge. What's great about it is that it was shot for such a small budget that you wouldn't know. It was shot on 35, which really captures the grandeur of the Western and all that landscape, and it really juxtaposed the beauty of those surroundings with the brutality of the story.

FANG: For a modern day Western, the film has a lot of horror film tropes, for instance the unstoppable killer, the full moon, the isolated town, plus the character of Jimmy is almost like Michael Myers from the HALLOWEEN movies.

KWANTEN: Oh, yeah!

FANG: Was that something that Patrick conveyed, that he wanted to pay tribute to the horror genre as well as the Western?

KWANTEN: The definite meat of the genre and the story is the Western, but there are a lot of horror elements, like the supernatural and the panther. Those characters, like Jimmy or Mike Myers, are both characters who say more without saying anything. It's something in their eyes, the way that they walk, the way they hold themselves, that makes them more of a badass than any monologue that you could give them. You're more scared of those characters because you just don't know what they're thinking.

FANG: What is the deal with the black panther? It's kind of a crazy touch.

KWANTEN: [Laughs] Well, it was fun too, because when Patrick sent the script, there were shots from the location scouts that he'd done. And he had this picture of him on all fours on top of the mountaintop, and it said underneath, “This is me being the panther,” and I thought, “Well that's pretty ridiculous…” But what ended up happening was, two days on set before we were going to use it, we got word from Brazil that the panther had actually killed its wrangler. So we didn't use that panther. We had to secure a panther from LA, but it happened after the shoot, so while we were shooting, Patrick actually had to play the panther from my side of the camera. So I'm trying to act as if there's a panther crawling behind camera, meanwhile it's Patrick crawling on all fours. It was my finest bit of acting [Laughs].

FANG: It was refreshing that they didn't use a CGI panther, that it was the real deal.

KWANTEN: Yeah, yeah. You know, you sacrifice to a certain level, but there were certain elements like that which added to the overall production quality that [Patrick] didn't sacrifice.

FANGORIA