

*The Drink Tank Presents*  
**The Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel**  
*Another of Christopher J Garcia's Favorite Places*



***There's Just One Hotel for Me!***

I've been to many, many hotels around the US. There are some that I look fondly on, such as the Park Plaza in Boston. There are ones where I have great stories, like The Millennium Broadway where I shared an elevator with Suge Knight and a bodyguard who made no secret that he was packing a very large piece. There are ones where I've had a lot of fun, like the Excalibur in Vegas and the DoubleTree in San Jose. There's only one where all of these things are true. That place is right on Hollywood Blvd. in the heart of the City of Dreams. The Hollywood Roosevelt is the place that I believe was built

for me and me alone. To me, the place is a physical anthology of stories; some mine, some come from other people, some lies, and most of the others are exaggerations, but they all form a place that is beyond any other hotel in the world.

The Hollywood Roosevelt was built in the twenties with some serious Hollywood cash. The plan was pretty smart: build a place in Southern California where New York film types could come and stay in the

style of a classy East Coast hotel. There was some big time coach change behind the opening of the hotel. Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, quite possibly the greatest Hollywood couple of all-time, Charlie Chaplin (and whatever under-aged girl he was with at the moment), Louis B.



Fairbanks, Pickford & Chaplin at the Opening

**Issue Thirty Four**

Mayer all had a hand, and the great Hollywood developer Charles Toberman was the head of the project. This group of all stars had put in on what would be Hollywood's Largest Hotel, even though the Alexandria Hotel in Downtown LA was better known and hosted dozens of stars from around the World. The grand opening was a huge piece of business. Supposedly, there were more cameras at the openign than had been at any single event up to that point. Every Newsreel company (at that point there were probably 15) had a camera there, as did all the studios whose stars were showing up, as well as a large number of cameramen who worked freelance (early version of Paparazzi, really). The stars that showed up read like a who's who of my all-time favourites. Harold Lloyd (right), Will Rogers (who was said to be Two and Three-Quarters Sheets to the Wind by the time he arrived), Pickford, Fairbanks, Chaplin, Mayer, Clara Bow (The IT Girl, who stories say was also one of the first to sleep her way to the top), Gloria Swanson, Greta Garbo, and many more. This was a huge Hollywood event and one which made every society columnist's big list of great events.

At the time, the hotel was a marvel. It was easily the most glamorous in Hollywood, with only the Alexandria to rival it at all.



Everyone came to the hotel, with almost all of the major stars staying there at one time or another, and if you go looking into the true Hollywood of the day, like the folks of Hollywood Babylon did, you inevitably come across the Roosevelt. Clara Bow is said to have had many of her trysts in the Roosevelt, which is no surprise. There are tales that the folks at the Roosevelt front desk knew better than to disturb Ramon Navaro when he would as for a room so he could 'conference' with an associate. Errol Flynn mixed up his

bathtub gin in the back of the barbershop on the first floor. There are hundreds of sordid stories about the hotel being used for all sorts of things. Oddly, it wasn't much of a gangster location, unlike most hotels of its kind that existed on the East Coast.

The old days weren't all sex, booze and hot jazz. Shirley Temple got her first tap dancing lesson from Bill Bojangles Robinson on the tile steps of the Roosevelt's North side. Many of the most important Hollywood producers and directors honeymooned at the Roosevelt, mostly so they could keep working and have the wife still feel like they were on vacation. Chaplin often entertained friends at the Roosevelt, especially in the pool area where he would drop his physical comedy genius on the world. The defining moment in the early history of the hotel had to be May 16th, 1929 in the Blossom Room. That was the date of the first Academy Award presentation.

One of the lesser-known Hollywood Roosevelt stories is the fight that took place between John Belushi and a fan who kept asking him to do bits from SNL. As I've heard it from a guy who was there, Belushi slapped him hard, but the guy laughed!

The awards were much different that year than they would be almost any other year. All of the award winners had been announced three months ahead of time, with the exception of a couple of special awards. They covered the period from August 1st, 1927 to August 1st, 1928 and were originally called The Merit Awards. They seemed to have a lot of trouble with choosing just one film for some things.

They gave an award for "Unique and Artistic Picture." which went to F.W. Murnau's Sunrise:

A Tale of Two Humans. A great film, it never gets mentioned when they talk about the Best Pictures. That one that does get mentioned as being the winner of the first Best Picture was Wings, a silent film starring Clara Bow, Buddy Rogers and a young Gary Cooper. This technically won "Best Picture: Production". The judges also had some other issues, such as Best Actor. Everyone, and I mean everyone, thought that Chaplin deserved it. The judges decided that his work was too good to compete against any of the others in Hollywood, so they gave him a special award for the film The Circus. They



also gave The Jazz Singer an award for Outstanding Achievement in the fad of The Talking Picture. The award ceremony took about five minutes, and Emile Jennings, who won Best Actor for his two big roles that year, didn't attend because he had to go back to Europe.

The banquet was said to be fantastic, with Doug Fairbanks as the MC, and many in the later years said that they wished things could have been more like that first one. I can remember an interview with one of the oldest of the old timers, Janet Gaynor, in the early 1980s where she said "I never had a good time in the later years. That first one was wonderful."

A fantastic film that I think gets overlooked is Sunset, starring James Garner and Bruce Willis while he was still riding high on his whole Moonlighting thing. In it, he plays Tom Mix and Garner plays Wyatt Earp. The two were friends, though Earp was closer to William S. Hart than to Mix. In the film, set in and around the Roosevelt, the two go and solve a murder. It's a fun film and certainly worth a watch as Garner and Willis have great chemistry.

After the Academy Awards, the place became a location of legend, but was also headed for some toughish times. The US was only a few months away from the Stock Market Crash and a lot of money from the East Coast went away. Not that teh West Coasters didn't lose their shirts too, but they had more assets in the film industry and that was one of the few areas to flourish during the depression.

With the Depression running wild, the Roosevelt had a drop in customers from

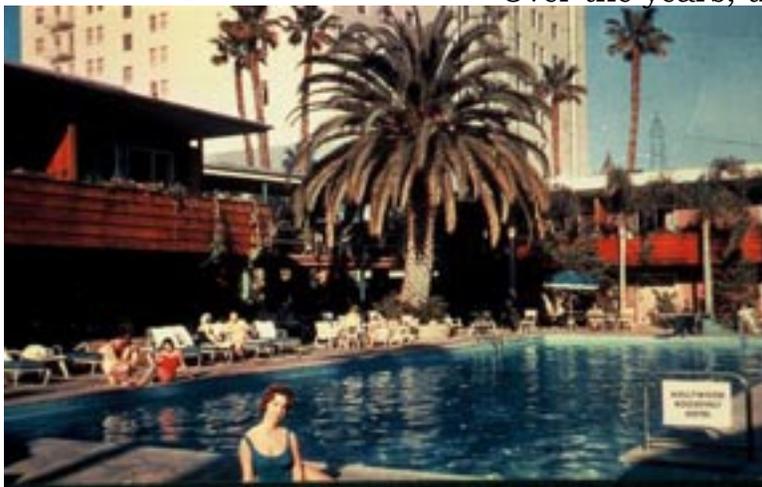
Though Mix and Earp knew each other, they certainly never did any of the stuff they were shown doing in Sunset. In addition, Earp was in his 70s when he was in Hollywood and Garner doesn't look it at all like Earp did at the time, Earp never drank alcohol and Earp was actually several months dead when the film was set!



our of the area and a rise in the number of stars who used it as a get-away and for illicit purposes. There are a lot of strange stories about affairs, drugs, drinking and so on, but they are mostly trumped up, misdirected and redivided.

There was a second Big Time for the Roosevelt. After WWII, with Hollywood recovering and getting back to a period of impressive films, the Roosevelt started to see action again, much of it centering around the famous pool.

The pool had been the place for patrons to enjoy a good swim. It wasn't unusual to see stars there enjoying themselves. In the 1940s and 50s, it became one of the places to go to star watch. Hollywood itself



loved to use the pool area. Marilyn Monroe's first commercial shoot was on the diving board at the Roosevelt. There were several series of bathing beauty shots done during the 1940s and 50s. Some actors set aside an hour or two a week to spend by the poolside so they could be seen and asked for autographs.

In addition to the hotel itself, in the

1930s they opened CineGrill. CineGrill was another in a long line of LA supper clubs. The place opened with great fanfare in 1931 (or so the story goes) and it entertained the highest level of celeb. Earnest Hemingway was supposed to have enjoyed himself for a couple of delightful nights at the CineGrill. F. Scott Fitzgerald, on one of his trips to Hollywood while working on the Last Tycoon, enjoyed himself quite a bit. Sal Dali sat at a table and, legend has it, paid his tab with a sketch on the back of the check. Most of the big stars went there, and for a time it was known as the Bomb-Shelter. Why you ask, because there would often be post-premiere parties at the Roosevelt in one of the ballrooms following the screening at the Chinese Theatre across the street. If it was a hit, you'd go with everybody to the party and talk to the cameras and such. If not, you'd head for the CineGrill to get away from things for a while.

Over the years, the hotel and CineGrill

sorta headed downhill, so much so that I believe that CineGrill closed for a couple of years. In the 1980s, the hotel and the CineGrill received a glorious renovation. The lobby had been worked over over the years, including covering

up the fabulous columns and ceilings and much of the Spanish design. The restored Roosevelt looks much as it did in 1927, only with updated lobby furniture and far more mirrors.

CineGrill's update, which featured a move, with the original space being redesigned, was even more impressive. It was reworked and reopened as a nightclub where many of the most impressive lounge-y

if you happen to stop by the Roosevelt, be sure to go by the South Lobby entrance. There's a small bench with a statue of Charlie Chaplin on it. It's a classy reminder of one of the founders of the Hotel and lots of tourists take many photos of it when they visit.

type stars come. Susan Egan, the object of affection in my favourite TV show of 2000 Nikki, has performed there for several week stints. Cybil Sheppard did a two week stay which she called her Comeback, though she had just had her tv series cancelled a few weeks before, so it wasn't much of a comeback if you ask me.

It's been years since I've been to CineGrill. Even if I'm staying at the Roosevelt, I tend to eat at The Pig & Whistle



down Hollywood Blvd and my favourite entertainment sources in the area are of the Cinedome and Egyptian Theatre variety. I have friends who live down south who used to swear by the place for 8pm shows and then play poker all night. I am not one of those people, as I'd rather just play the cards.

It's historic and looks to be around a lot longer. While I'm not the big fan, I



certainly hope that everybody gets a chance to see it at least once.

Many stars have been identified with the Roosevelt over the years. The story goes that some even lived there for long periods of time. One of those who supposed did was Carole Lombard, supposedly for a year or two. David Niven arrived in Hollywood and was said to have roamed around the hotel's service quarters and even to have scammed his way to few free meals and rooms. Mary Martin started her singing career at the CineGrill, and would perform once in a while after she hit it big.

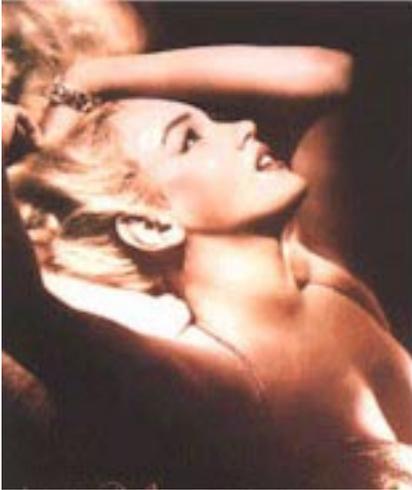
Three of the names that are most identified with the Roosevelt are Marilyn Monroe, Montgomery Clift, and Lew Ayres. Ayres was discovered at the Blossom Room when he asked an actress (who I've heard various names mentioned) to dance. Her agent saw him and quickly he was put into films. His big break was All Quiet on the Western Front in 1930. He would often stay at the hotel when he was working on movies, even though he lived in Hollywood. When he and Ginger Rogers were married, if they'd fight, he'd stay at the Roosevelt.

Monty Clift is one of those stars that I never understood. He was an attractive man, and he was a good actor, but I just never got him. Marlon Brando I get, but Clift? Nope. He used to stay at the Roosevelt while making films, and is best known for pacing the hallway trying to learn his lines for From Here To Eternity. It was also at the Roosevelt that he was supposed to have had many of his affairs and might have been where he met his last partner, Lorenzo James (I've seen a couple of different versions).



Of all the films that have made use of the Roosevelt, the Bridges Brothers vehicle The Fabulous Baker Boys has to be my favourite. Michelle Pfeiffer's singing was done at the CineGrill, and as one of the publicity stunts, they had her put on an actual performance in the place, which just so happened to be a weekend when many of those in fandom were in town for WesterCon, I think. I met a fan at LosCon 2001 and the topic of The Baker Boys came up and they told me the story. If only I were older and had been in LA.

Without a doubt, the star that I always associate with the Roosevelt is Marilyn Monroe. Many would argue that she's the most beautiful woman of the Twentieth Century, though I'm in the boat that it was Maureen O'Hara or the delightful Julie Newmar. She started her career with that shot on the Roosevelt



diving board and later was known to hang around the bungalows that surrounded the pool. She liked to linger in the back of CineGrill in one of the dark booths, smoking and enjoying the music. There

are many other reasons she'll always be identified with the hotel that I'll get into later.

My personal adventures at the Hollywood Roosevelt have been long and varied. As a kid, when my Uncle Wayne was going to UCLA, we stayed there a couple of times. I remember running up and down the hallway pretending to be Superman. I used to love the lobby, though I much prefer it since the Radison



bought it and restored it (before selling it to The Thompson Group). When I came of age, that is to say when I turned 18, I started to visit more and more frequently when friends and I would take trips down there. A group of us, all high schoolers at the time, drove down immediately after the bell rung one

warm February afternoon and made it there in time to get a room and have it trashed before the sun came up. The weekend was amazing and I don't think we left the hotel for much more than a couple of long walks down Sunset and Hollywood.

When my dear friend M and I went, we had a great time, playing poker in Beverly Hills, watching 2001 in Cinerama, buying books at a long-gone fantasy bookstore. It was all a blast (and one that I've written about in Claims Department 4, which I hope will come out sooner or later).

For a while, I identified my party life around the lobby of the Hollywood Roosevelt. I was briefly doing the LA thing and found myself in the lobby at least once a day, sometimes two or three times. I used to just write in the lobby on one of the very comfy couches, but I started talking to the various employees, getting to know a few of the Hotel Detectives who always wondered why I spent so much time at the hotel making notes. I turned 21 and the bar became my friend. I discovered the Manhattan while I was in Boston for school, and when I ordered one

at the small bar off the lobby, I knew that I would never find a Manhattan half as good anywhere else, though a few years later, I discovered one that approached it at the Hedley Club in the DeAnza Hotel in San Jose. I started bellying up to the bar and drinking one while writing and

chatting with the bartender. This was a great friendship to have because of one of the three dates I managed to get when I was down there.

I had been doing an afternoon of hanging around various Hollywood

I wrote a poem during one of my 2002 stays at the Roosevelt, inspired by a Lizzy McGuire Movie billboard that I saw out the window from the elevator lobby on my floor. It began like this: A BustyBeauty Sixteen Year Old takes a Michael Jackson *Thriller* pose on a bus stop billboard. She is ogled by passing elder men who don't mind mothballing chronology, as long as they believe the breasts underneath that tight shirt are too young to have scalpel scars. You can see why I don't write much poetry anymore.

bookstores and ran into a lovely young lady name of Katherine. We broke into a nice conversation about the works of TC Boyle and she said that she happened to have a free evening and I mentioned that I had planned to go and have a drink at my favourite hotel lounge and she asked if she could join. I said certainly, I mean she was a tall redhead with a figure to slow (if not out-right stop) traffic and she had good literary tastes. She looked like a an actress trying to make it.

I met her in front of the Roosevelt and she devilishly put her arm in mine as we walked in. The bartender, a guy named Barry who could sling gin with the best of them. He must have seen the two of us walking in because as soon as I arrived he walked over to the couch where we had taken a seat, set down a Manhattan and handed me a piece of paper. He put the drink on the table next to me.

“Ah, Mr. Garcia, there’ve been a couple of messages for you.” he said.

“Oh...well...tell them I’m with a friend.”

She was quite impressed and ordered a mimosa. We sat and chatted for an hour or two and then the phone in the small bar rang. Barry returned with another drink.

“Uh, Mr. Garcia, there’s a phone call for you. They say it’s urgent.”

I looked at Katherine and stood up.

“This should only take a minute.” I said.

As we walked over, Barry said in a whisper.

“She’s an actress, right?”

“She’s in LA isn’t she?”

“Good, just wanted to make sure I was doing the right thing.”

I got over to the bar and slid him three twenties.

“That’s two for the drinks and one for the boost.” I said.

He smiled.

“I’d’ve done it for ten.”

I went back and we chatted and she suggested a trip to a Coffee Bean on Sunset so we could take our over-priced, late night



LA coffee over to her place. It was a nice night after all.

My love affair with the Hollywood Roosevelt has also brought out my creative side, if I could be said to have such a thing. I started a novel there on July 19th, 1995. It was called Los Rudos, Los Rudos, Los Rudos! and was about a guy who falls in love with the only lesbian in his entire high school while an incredibly hot Goth Girl pined in full view of him, unnoticed. It turned out to be my senior thesis project at Emerson, or at least the 120 pages that I managed to write. I gave up on it and never finished it. It still waits for me on floppy disk, still hoping I’ll put fingers to keyboard and polish it off.

It wasn’t until I started writing in the lobby of the Roosevelt that I realised that I could possibly write screenplays. The first one I ever tackled, a comedy about a group of bank robbers who end up in prison and have to execute a robbery using unsuspecting outsiders took form on one of the comfy chairs. The script for 5 Suicides, the first feature film I’m likely to make, was conceived and first outlined on the couch where Katherine and I had the first 1/3 of our date. That same couch saw me come up with many other stories, including ones that I’m still working on nearly a decade later. The best of them is the LA movie that I call “The Hotel Bar” where a bartender who is dealing drugs has to find a way to move ten kilos in one night so that he can use the money to pay back his bookie who’s going to kill him.

I also took up poetry in the lobby. My

favourite of the poems I ever wrote came out of the hotel, largely written in the lobby.

Like all my favourite places, the Hollywood Roosevelt celebrates history. They've got pieces of Hollywood history all over the lobby, including an original Brown Derby menu and a few old cameras and things. They even have a mirror from Marilyn Monroe's old bungalow.

It's odd that I mentioned the Monroe mirror, because it's the focus of one of the spooks that haunt the Roosevelt. There are at least three spirits seen in the hotel, the most frequent, and also the one I doubt the most, is that of Marilyn herself. There was a mirror that hung in Marilyn's bungalow. Supposedly it was from her own home at one point and she brought it to the Roosevelt. For a while, it lived in one of the more swanky rooms of the hotel, but people kept complaining about strange things happening in the room, especially make-up bags being disturbed. Several also saw someone in the mirror that looked suspiciously like Marilyn. The management moved it out to the lobby's elevator waiting area. It's a lovely mirror, too.

The other ghost that has been frequently seen is that of Monty Clift. When he stayed there during the From Here to Eternity shoot, he paced the halls. Some say that he still paces at night, up on the 9th floor. I've met two different people who have seen him, one a bartender who was once a bellhop, the other a business

traveler who stays at the Roosevelt once a month. The bartender claimed that he was delivering a bag to a room that had been lost by the airline and arrived a few hours late. He took the bag up to the room and as he passed the T of the hall, he saw a guy pacing back and forth, looking like he was reading something. He figured that it was just some guy waiting for a friend or something. He headed over to the room and dropped off the bag. As he headed back, the guy was still pacing. He was a little concerned and took a few steps towards him when he vanished. He got the first elevator down and when he told the folks at the front desk, they said "Welcome to the Roosevelt."

There have been other reports of doors opening and closing on their own, especially in the older parts of the hotel. There are guests who have said that they were woken up by the sound of a porter knocking on their door and calling that he had a message for them. When they would go to open the door, there'd be no one there.

The Roosevelt is my favourite hotel, always has been, probably always will be. I still hope that if I ever learn how to put on a proper con that I can have it at the Roosevelt. It's the perfect size for a CorFlu, with a bar right there in the lobby, plenty of good food all over the place and more than enough function space. Maybe that's going a little far, but it sure sounds like a good time for all.



The Drink Tank issue 34 was written and produced by Christopher J. Garcia. The posting to eFanzines.com was done by Big Bad Bill Burns, master of the atom. Issue 35 will feature LoCs, regular articles and more from the mind of CJG. If you haven't already, let Chris know if you'd like to receive the SteamPunk issue (Late August) or Claims Department 4 (Should have been out a month ago, but the cover is still coming). Also, please remember to be kind and rewind.