

## Shock Talk With the “MONSTER MAN”

Written by Tony Nunes

Wednesday, 14 March 2012 11:28

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As Syfy’s hit makeup competition show FACE OFF sees its season finale tonight at 10/9c, the network’s newest genre reality show, MONSTER MAN, premieres directly afterward at 11/10c. MONSTER MAN follows FX artist Cleve Hall as he works with his two daughters and ex-wife at SOTA F/X in Hollywood; at a time when practical FX work has sadly become a rarity in the horror and sci-fi genres, Hall and family are artisans of shock and gore.

Goth-make-up-wearing Hall drives around LA in a hearse, delivering the massive monsters he creates with care and precision. In the premiere episode, “Seeing Double,” he and his team deliver a conjoined-twin effect to FRIDAY THE 13TH director Sean Cunningham and a massive two-headed shark to The Asylum. MONSTER MAN (which will air new episodes after tonight Wednesdays at 10/9c) is one part FACE OFF and one part THE OSBOURNES, full of great insight into what it takes to create detailed practical illusions in today’s CGI-driven landscape. Fango sat down to talk with Hall and get the lowdown on this behind-the-scenes/family drama.



**FANGORIA:** For those unfamiliar with the work of Cleve Hall, give us your history in the film

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biz. Where might people have seen your work specifically?

**CLEVE HALL:** Anyone who is a fan of '80s independent horror will have seen my work—and my face—in numerous “classics”: ROLLERBLADE WARRIORS, TWISTED NIGHTMARE, NIGHTMARE SISTERS, TROLL, and TERRORVISION, plus more mainstream work such as playing Godzilla in PEE-WEE’S BIG ADVENTURE. My first FX work was in the 1981 classic NIGHTMARE, which gained notoriety for wrongly crediting Tom Savini. Recently, I was nominated for an Emmy for creating the characters for the kids’ show YO GABBA GABBA.

**FANG:** What inspired you to get involved in horror and special FX?

**HALL:** When I was little, my mom loved monster movies and I hated babysitters, so she took me to see every new monster film that came out. I saw MOTHRA and GORGO when I was only a couple of years old, but they made an impression. Then, in '64, I saw GODZILLA VS. THE THING, and that was it.

**FANG:** How did the MONSTER MAN series come about?

**HALL:** An amazing case of being in the right place at the right time and driving the right car. I was out at a Goth club when around midnight, I got a call from Roy Knyrim of SOTA F/X. He said a reality show about animal attacks needed a 10-foot sperm whale hump to go in the water and hit a boat, and that it was going to shoot at 7:30 a.m. at Fantasy II’s water tank. I said yes, I could do it, then hung out till the club closed at 2:30 and went to the shop. I finished around 7 a.m., and God, I couldn’t fit the piece in my hearse. So I tied it on top and drove it to set. When the producers saw me, makeup-smearing and spattered in latex, pull up in the hearse with a whale on top, they thought it was so crazy they told me they wanted to make a reality show about me. I thought, “Yeah, right!” Then they did! This was Gurney Productions, and they are awesome. We shot a pilot, Syfy picked it up and now we premiere this week. Crazy!

**FANG:** Tell us about your shop. Give a tour through words: what’s on your shelves, hanging on the walls, what tools and materials are strewn about?

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**HALL:** It's several rooms in a kind of maze adjoining a large shop area, conference room, green room, kitchen and offices. My office is behind a revolving shelf. On our walls are monster heads and posters from films we worked on. On our shelves are chemicals with labels so faded you can't read them, so mixing them up is always an adventure, and a thick layer of dust from whatever sanding or plastering is going on. We have saws, grinders, air compressors and lots of noisy tools.

**FANG:** Who works with you there?

**HALL:** Well, Constance (Coco) Hall [his oldest daughter] is my main assistant. We pretty much are a team. My ex-wife Sonia is a very fast and dedicated worker who gets things done quickly, no matter what task I throw at her. My younger daughter Elora is amazing at detail, cutting foam from my patterns and also great at running teeth and stuff from molds. Johnny Saiko—pronounced “psycho”...his real name!—is an excellent mold maker and also skilled with spray coatings and fiberglass. Hill Vinot creates mechanics and works out physical FX, and is also shop foreman for SOTA F/X. Roy Knyrim owns SOTA and contracts my team to do projects, and Cindy Miller is his office manager.



**FANG:** How is it working with your family? Any take-home tensions?

**HALL:** The good part of working with family is you know what to expect. The bad part of working with family is you know what to expect. It's hard to take home tensions when you rarely go home.

**FANG:** What was it like having cameras follow you around while trying to stay creative and on

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deadline on projects? Did reality-show prodding sway the drama?

**HALL:** It sucked! Well, at first, until we got used to each other. I tend to stare at a sheet of foam for two hours and build things in my head. That does not make for good television. So someone would ask me to explain what I was doing, break my train of thought and get a snarky remark. The first three days of shooting, I didn't want to come out of my office, thinking, "There's no way I can do this!" Then I started to realign my work style to accommodate the cameras.

**FANG:** What projects will we see you working on this season on MONSTER MAN?

**HALL:** A bio-bug for director Tony Randel [HELLBOUND: HELLRAISER II], who is awesome! A megaspider for Mike Mendez. Work on FORBIDDEN ZONE for Rick Elfman and conjoined twins for Sean Cunningham, just to name a few.

**FANG:** You have a very distinct look; how do your physical identity and profession play into your personality? Are you dark and metal, or is there a side of Cleve Hall we might be surprised by?

**HALL:** I was very much into the LA music scene in the '80s; it was such a great decade! When the Goth scene started, called death rock at the time, I designed some of the earliest clubs and played with my band Exquisite Corpse, which had John Vulich of Optic Nerve FX on keyboards, Screaming Mad George on bass and Kevin Brennan's brother Sean on guitar. He now fronts London After Midnight, an awesome Goth band. We would have live, onstage disembowelments and plenty of blood. I never expected the Goth scene to last this long; it's awesome, like Halloween all the time!

But as for my "dark and metal" side? That's funny! The real Cleve is goofy, tears up at sappy movies and would rather be watching Mothra films or SAILOR MOON with my 4-year-old daughter Zoe Stardust, the next up-and-coming Hall in the monster business. That child is scared of nothing! She will walk through a shop full of monsters with the lights out and scare them!

**FANG:** What film/TV projects do you have lined up that you are most excited about?

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**HALL:** There has been so much work in fine-tuning the show that I haven't had time to take on other projects. I will be making several live appearances at conventions around the country, starting with Hauntcon in May in Monroeville, PA.

**FANG:** What do you think of FACE OFF? Any advice you'd give to those starting out in the business?

**HALL:** I love FACE OFF Coco and I made a guest appearance on the show, and [host] McKenzie Westmore is not only gorgeous, she's a total sweetheart! And my respect for [FACE OFF judge and FX legend] Ve Neill can't be measured; she is awesome. Ve and I used to live three blocks apart in the '80s, and both of us used to throw large effects parties, sometimes on the same nights. You had plastered FX guys staggering back and forth in North Hollywood at 2 a.m. In fact, my band Exquisite Corpse sort of started in Ve's garage during a jam session at a party she threw when Kevin Brennan introduced me to Sean, who had just arrived in town.

My advice to those starting out in the business is, unfortunately, have a backup plan. There just isn't as much practical effects work as there used to be since the advent of CGI. Hell, I'm not even qualified to work at McDonalds. This is all I've ever done and all I know how to do, or want to do.

**FANG:** What's next for the series? Any talk of a second season?

**HALL:** Well, if the ratings are as good as we hope, Syfy and NBC are really behind us and doing an amazing job promoting us. Stay tuned.