An artist never knows when inspiration will strike, and for rising makeup FX artist Toby Sells, the moment happened in front of a television set when he was 10 years old. “I was always into monster movies,” he recalls, “but when I saw PLANET OF THE APES on THE CBS FRIDAY NIGHT MOVIES, I was overwhelmed and in awe.”

After the film, there was a segment about how John Chambers did the primate makeup, and Sells was sold. “The next day, my dad took me to a hobby shop and we got oil-based clay, plaster of Paris and liquid rubber. A week or so later, I had made this really crappy gorilla mask.”

That experience led the aspiring monster maker to try his hand at a variety of homemade creature creations, from masks of the Creature from the Black Lagoon and Frankenstein Monster to fake heads and prosthetics. “Dick Smith put out a makeup kit from the Pressman Toy Company back in the late ’70s, and I picked up a couple of those. That was a milestone. There was this wonderful material called Flex Flesh, which turned out to be nothing more than Knox gelatin. It came with these Vacuform molds of noses and chins, and that really made me progress into the prosthetic side of things. I bought my first foam latex kit when I was 14. I was baking the foam and had to make a two-part mold. It was a lot more complicated than I thought, but I kept trying until I got it right.”

Fast-forward to 1983 and a FANGORIA Weekend of Horrors convention in Boston—an 18-hour drive from his home in East Tennessee. “I remember Tom Savini was the main guest, and all I cared about was meeting him,” Sells says. “I just knew in my gut that if I could figure out some way to talk to him, I could find a way into the industry.” Sells managed to get some face time with Savini, and after showing off a notebook of pictures and an animatronic hand puppet he had made, the greenhorn gorehound cut to the chase. “I asked him, ‘All right, what do I have to do?’ and he pulled out a note pad and pen and started writing on it. He handed it to me and said, ‘Here’s the keys to the kingdom, kid. The rest is up to you.’ It was Dick Smith’s phone number and address. It was like you could hear angels. That was really how it all started.”

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