

“FACE OFF”: Conor McCullagh Speaks! Part One

Written by Sean Abley

Wednesday, 01 June 2011 13:58



And the winner was...Conor McCullagh! Fango caught up with the Florida-based FX artist the day after his big win on Syfy's makeup competition series FACE OFF.

FANGORIA: I've asked this of the other artists who had shops already and viable careers before going on the show—why go on the show?

CONOR McCULLAGH: I think there's two really good reasons for going on the show. First of all, I really wanted to win \$100,000. And second—I don't really know how to articulate this—I've been in the business a long time. However, I spent so much of that time when I was in LA working for other people as a shop hand or an assistant, that I never really felt like I had a real venue to show what I was capable of doing. And this seemed like that opportunity.



FANG: In the scope of everything you did on FACE OFF, what was your favorite challenge?

McCULLAGH: The one I ended up having the most fun with, and I'm sure this is the probably the most common answer, I'd have to say the zombie challenge.

FANG: It's funny, because I asked Tom Devlin and Anthony Pepe what is it about zombies that makes FX artists go crazy, because every artist I've interviewed or worked with loves doing zombies.

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McCULLAGH: It's a good question, and I don't know if I have a good answer for it. Up until last year zombies were one of those things that had kind of evaded me my entire career. I'd never done a zombie film until I got on set to do a couple episodes of WALKING DEAD last summer. So for me it was actually kind of like doing something new.

FANG: What was your least favorite challenge on the show?

McCULLAGH: I suppose it was the body painting, for a couple reasons. First of all, the most obvious reason—I was in the bottom that episode, and it was a scary feeling that I might be sent home so quickly into the show. Aside from that, I was a little out of my comfort zone in that challenge. Even with the backdrop I had, and even though my scene of going with the statue worked for that Bourbon Street backdrop, the photograph itself just wasn't going to work like I wanted. I wanted my statue to look like it was elevated above street level. Any time you see monument pieces, it's elevated, it's on a big block of marble looking down on pedestrians. So the fact the he looked like he was just standing in the middle of the road really didn't help sell the whole image at all. And of course I was criticized for my makeup on top.

FANG: It's only been 12 hours since winning [at the time of this interview], so it's hard to tell. But besides the money, what do you expect the net gain of winning FACE OFF will be?

McCULLAGH: I honestly have no expectations. I know there aren't a bunch of producers and effects companies sitting in front of the TV waiting to decide who their next effects artist is going to be. So as far where do I go from here—I need to network. It's up to me to find out what's out there and who might be interested in doing business with me now. If Syfy comes knocking at my door again for something that isn't FACE OFF related, or maybe I can have something to do with future seasons of FACE OFF, I don't know, but it certainly can't hurt.

FANG: Can you imagine yourself working on one of the Syfy opuses like SHARKTOPUS?

McCULLAGH: I have definitely expressed interest in doing more work with Syfy in the future. Whether or not that happens remains to be seen. But I am definitely on board. I really think it could really be good for both myself and Syfy to continue to promote the fact that their season

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one champion is involved in other avenues with Syfy. If it happens, great. I'm all for it.

FANG: Are you going to remain based in Florida?

McCULLAGH: I'm in Florida, but I've really been floating for a few years. I left Los Angeles six years ago. To make ends meet, being on the East Coast, I've been required to travel on a semi-regular basis. It has worked for me to be in Florida for a while now, but I go where the work is, bottom line.



FANG: Did you leave LA for work reasons?

McCULLAGH: I left Los Angeles because I was a little burnt out [*laughs*]. I had left a company that I had been with for four years. At the time, this was back in 2004, I was a little burnt out with the company that I had been working with, and I had a lot of issues in my personal life I was dealing with, and I thought that I needed to get out of Los Angeles. The cost of living and the quality of life—I actually felt like I could do better. I actually bought a house in North Carolina and did that for a few years.

FANG: And what brought you down to Florida?

McCULLAGH: Work brought me to Florida. I'd been bouncing back and forth between Orlando and Atlanta for the last year. There was so much work in Atlanta I kept going up there. After season one of VAMPIRE DIARIES I was working on BIG MOMMA'S HOUSE 3, and I got the call to come and teach at Joe Blasco. And I love Orlando so I thought, great, I'll give it a shot.

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FANG: There was a moment in the Conor/Megan Areford storyline where at one point you said, and I'm paraphrasing, that you were there for the work, not the rest of the drama. And just from watching the show, I think you were probably the most uncomfortable with the reality aspect of the show. Is that a fair assessment?

McCULLAGH: Yeah, I think it's fair to say. I certainly understood what I was getting into, or at least I thought I understood what I was getting into, when I came on board to the show. But the bottom line was—reality show aside, I was there, the main purpose for me being there, was to be in a competition.

FANG: I'll ask because I've asked the other parties involved—do you care to speak to the whole thing between you and Megan? Is there something more? Is there a crush? Is she someone you want to have a relationship with? Maybe it was blown out of proportion on the show?

McCULLAGH: That's a fair question. I would say that—there's so many different aspects of that question that I can get into. But the bottom line is Megan and I became friends on the show. There was only a handful of competitors in the cast that I really felt like I could take at face value, and Megan was one of those people. We were friends, and she was my confidant on the show. We were comrades. And we're still friends now [*laughs*]. It's kind of funny, though. I'll add to that. What I found interesting is that there's no footage of the evenings I stayed up late talking to Gage [Hubbard]. I guess that's not interesting enough for television. But there isn't any mention of the other personal dynamics—how well I got along with Tate [Steinsiek] and Gage and Marcel [Banks]. These are people who are really good, decent people.

FANG: I guess they could have created a storyline of a romance between you and Gage. That would have been interesting.

McCULLAGH: [*Laughs*] I believe he's taken.

FANG: Now, on the other end of that—Tom Devlin told me in his interview that he feels that you are not a fan of him or his work.

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McCULLAGH: Tom and I obviously had our disagreements during the show. It was actually interesting watching episode one because Tom and I definitely weren't agreeing on anything, however I didn't actually feel like we were fighting. I was really determined not to turn our disagreements into a fight. It was simply a matter of we both had a different vision in mind, and we both wanted to win the challenge. So we did what we had to, and we won. Which was great. It was a little unfortunate that Tom felt like I was trying to run the show myself. He's entitled to feel that way. I am used to being supervisor and I am used to calling the shots and knowing what has to be done to accomplish something. That's OK. I'm not bitter about any of it.

What they didn't show in episode five, in the gender swap challenge, after Jo [Holland] got eliminated...I said to Tom maybe we should all stop the bickering because the judges obviously don't enjoy it, and are responding directly to it. At that point, the fighting was over. Tom and I shook hands. I believe Tom and Megan buried the hatchet at that point as well. And all of a sudden there was just levity.

The saddest part of the zombie challenge was both Tom and Anthony get booted right as it all of a sudden feels we're like a cohesive group and people are getting along great. It was a little unfortunate.

TO BE CONTINUED