

Derek Mears: “HANSEL,” “HATCHET” and More

Written by Michael Gingold
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By the end of 2013, Derek Mears will longer be known principally as the guy who took on the legendary mask of Jason Voorhees in the FRIDAY THE 13TH reboot. His turn inside a remarkable creature suit as Edward the Troll is being cited as one of the best things in the just-released HANSEL & GRETEL: WITCH HUNTERS, and later this year he tussles with fellow Jason Kane Hodder in HATCHET III. He discusses those roles and more in this exclusive Fango interview.

FANGORIA: Edward the Troll has impressed not just audiences, but your HANSEL & GRETEL co-stars whom we’ve spoken to.

DEREK MEARS: Oh man, Spectral Motion and Mike Elizalde, who created the troll, knocked it out of the ballpark. They did an amazing job. I’m such a fan of old-school practical effects, and I’m thrilled they decided to do Edward practically effects rather than go with CGI.



FANG: How did you go about creating the character with your full face and body covered?

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MEARS: I would say my career amounts to half appearing with my own face and half wearing masks, and I always say that if people can't see your face, you approach it the same way you would a regular acting role. The fantastic part about this was that it was a team effort creating Edward, coming up with the character and talking about the subtext with the guys who ran the animatronics. I always compare it to being a giant Voltron robot: One person controls one part, one person controls another part, and you all communicate and work together. Those guys did a fantastic job, with the witches and the other characters too—the detail in the makeup, giving each part such a personality. It's funny; taking myself out of the film, I'm the target demographic. I'm such a fanboy for a project like this, and thrilled with how it turned out.

FANG: How much of Edward's personality did you bring yourself, and how much of it was in the script and guided by writer/director Tommy Wirkola?

MEARS: I had a couple of different ideas to bring him to life that I bounced off of Tommy, and I added a little of my own stuff, and it all came together.

FANG: Were these the most elaborate animatronics you've worked with on a film?

MEARS: For sure. Edward was the most difficult yet most rewarding suit I've ever worn. In my whole career, I've never seen anything so articulate in the face and movements. I'm excited to see how it's being received by the viewing audience. What I'm hoping for...what I've seen in the past is that Hollywood likes to follow trends, and if something becomes successful, they go, "Oh, we wanna do more of that." So if going back and doing a retro practical-effects character like this could start a trend, and there are fewer CG characters, I'd love that. They have a soul to them. So I'm crossing my fingers that that will happen, because as a fan, that's what I want to see more of. I mean, don't get me wrong—I like CGI as well, but there's a point where the two can be married together, and they can complement each other rather than going with completely CG characters. You can tell there's an actual character there, and that energy can come through even through the face is blocked.

FANG: How was it executing the action choreography while wearing the suit?

MEARS: That was really difficult. They always say that pain is temporary and film lasts forever, and that was my mindset, because I was locked inside, and it was very difficult to see. Picture

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being on a treadmill and running sprints with a plastic bag tied over your head, trying to breathe clean air instead of your own carbon dioxide. And the weight was tremendous; I was trying to be in the moment as an actor while also keeping the suit alive, making it as believable and lifelike as possible.

FANG: What about performing opposite Gemma Arterton as Gretel?

MEARS: Oh man, she was a sweetheart. Gemma is such a class act and a talented person, not to mention a solid human being. There's a trend that happens sometimes if you do a lot of roles like this; people are like, "Oh, you're just the guy in the mask." And I'm lucky that in my career, that's not happening anymore; people say, "You're a professional actor." And when I started working on HANSEL & GRETEL, they were like, "We know you're a professional actor, but we also need someone who can survive in a suit." And when I was talking to Gemma about our scenes, we were on the same page. I needed a mic system inside the helmet so we could communicate and have the scene happen organically, so if we wound up doing improv or something, we could flow with it and have that raw, creative moment, rather than someone offscreen reading the dialogue and adding it as ADR later on.

FANG: Were you familiar with DEAD SNOW before you worked with Wirkola on this film?

MEARS: [*Laughs*] For sure; I'm such a horror nerd myself. It's such a great story: I think about three months before I shot HANSEL AND GRETEL, I watched DEAD SNOW for the first time at my house, and I was like, "Oh my God! This is hilarious." I love how it's an incredibly violent horror film and there's comedy, but it's not sold as a comedy. I thought, "Man, I'd really like to work with this Tommy guy someday; he seems really, really cool." And not three months later, I was in Berlin with him. A lot of the actors were Tommy's friends who were in DEAD SNOW; he hired them to play characters in HANSEL AND GRETEL, and we all hung out at pubs in Berlin, and they were the coolest guys in the world! I was like, "This is so surreal." Picture watching a movie on Netflix and going, "I'm gonna enter this world and these people are gonna be my friends, and we're gonna hang out together." It was very, very surreal.

FANG: Arterton mentioned during our [interview](#) that you went back and did a little extra shooting during the delay in release. Was it fun going back and putting the costume on again?

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MEARS: It was great reconnecting with everybody, and seeing Gemma and Tommy and everyone from Spectral Motion. I really enjoyed that. But the tough thing was, the suit was so incredibly hot; we shot [the rest of the movie] in Berlin during wintertime, but for the reshoots we were out in the desert somewhere near Ridgecrest, CA, and the heat was unbearable. I was getting delirious. It felt like I was in a cage fight—a championship match, the fifth round—and in the last minutes I was gasping for air, thinking, “No, no, no, it’s gonna be amazing. Do you want this? It’s what you’ve been training for! Keep going,” and just trying to keep my brain on straight.

FANG: What can you tell me about your part in HATCHET III?

MEARS: I play a SWAT team commander by the name of Hawes, who is a hardheaded, pompous, kind of douchey guy. He leads a team of officers into the swamps to track down Victor Crowley and put an end to him once and for all.



FANG: Was it a relief to be on a horror film where you weren’t burdened down with prosthetics?

MEARS: [Laughs] It was fun. I really don’t mind because I feel my job is to tell stories. I don’t want you to remember me, I want you to remember the character I play. That’s more important.

FANG: And we’ll get to see a battle of the Jasons in this movie.

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MEARS: That is true, that is true! I’ve been asked over and over again on different films, “Hey, do you wanna come do this? You and Kane will fight for the first time!” Kane and I have been friends for a long time, and BJ McDonnell, who directed HATCHET III, is a buddy of mine, and Adam Green is a super-good buddy of mine, and it seemed like the right time and the right project to actually pull the trigger on that. I try to interact with the fans as much as I can on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) and at conventions, and so many of them have expressed that they would like to see that, so I was like, “You know what? Let’s do it.” And I hope they dig what they see.

FANG: This is truly a clash of the titans—was there a feeling of responsibility or pressure about making this fight particularly special?

MEARS: Yeah, definitely. I don’t want to give anything away, but we tried to do something different. Kane’s such a big guy, I’m a big guy and people wanna see us throw down.

FANG: How was McDonnell as a first-time director?

MEARS: He was really, really good. He knew exactly what he wanted and was clear with the actors about what he was thinking, but he was also open to collaboration. If someone had an idea, he would listen to them and work with us as artists coming together. It was his transition from being a camera operator to being a director, and on some of the shots he’d say, “Give me the rig!” Seeing him get down and dirty, throw the rig on and grab the camera and dive into scenes because there was something he wanted to cover or thought would look cool—it was inspiring. It was kind of like being a soldier and going to war, in the trenches, and the general being there going, “Give me the weapon! I’m gonna go!” and having him firing alongside you, covered in mud and mosquito bites. I was like, “This is a guy I can believe in. I’ll follow this guy, I’ll give him blood, I’ll follow him till the end of the war.”

FANG: You also appear opposite two-time Michael Myers actor Tyler Mane in the upcoming COMPOUND FRACTURE ([review](#)).

MEARS: I’m very excited about that. Tyler has been a buddy of mine for years, since before

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we did the Jason and Michael thing. I was really proud of him, because he said, “You know, I want to do my own film production and make movies that I want to see.” So many people talk about it but never do it, but he told me about me it, and months later he was like, “We’re doing this.” I said, “Are you kidding me?” He asked, “Will you be the main bad guy to my good guy in COMPOUND FRACTURE?” He had some friends come play; [DRIVE ANGRY scripter] Todd Farmer has a cameo, Renae Geerlings, his wife, wrote it with Tyler and played a part in it, Daniel Roebuck and Leslie Easterbrook are in it. I’m super-proud of him, because they just did a distribution screening and got a ton of offers. I’m really happy with how it turned out.

FANG: So we get to see Jason vs. Michael in this one?

MEARS: You do. That seems to be my m.o. now; I go, “Anybody who’s ever played an iconic villain, I wanna fight you! Let’s throw down, let’s do this.”

FANG: How did that compare with your fight scene with Hodder in HATCHET III?

MEARS: I don’t know how to compare; they’re such different guys. Tyler would say, “Oh, you’re a big guy, Derek,” but I’m, like, 6-foot-5, 235, and Tyler’s 6-foot-8, 260, something like that. He’s a big dude! But he has so much experience physically that when we did that scene together, we were throwing down, breaking things around us, but he was so good on timing and very agile for his size. When you do fights, it’s almost like an aggressive combat dance; you have to be locked in with your partner and figure out the timing and rhythm, so it looks sloppy and violent but is measured out so no one gets hurt. I thought, “Man, that guy is beyond strong!” I would not wanna be on the wrong side of him in an bar brawl!