Editor’s note: To uncover the FX secrets of TRUE BLOOD, Fangoria.com engaged legendary FX artist Steve Johnson (GHOSTBUSTERS, SPECIES, THE ABYSS, etc.), who spoke with his friends at MastersFX, the studio he also serves as a consultant for.

During the first part (see here) of our conversation with the TRUE BLOOD makeup team, Todd Masters, Dan Rebert, Mark Vinniello and Andre Bustanoby shared some of the notable experiences from their first three seasons on the hit HBO supernatural drama. In Part 2, we sit down with the group on set to quiz them about various personal highlights to date…

STEVE JOHNSON: Here’s the big question: Todd, your favorite effect in all three seasons so far?

TODD MASTERS: It’s hard to say, because there are so many great effects in this show. The one I always think about first is when Lafayette’s stuck in the dungeon with a bunch of body parts from this dude we saw get ripped up earlier. There’s a severed leg that Lafayette pulls out, and I guess part of it is supposed to be made out of titanium, a hip replacement. On the day, Nelsan Ellis, who plays Lafayette and in real-life ISN’T at all like his character, really got into it; so much that he actually busted the device—on camera! He’s ripping it to pieces and starts putting it in his mouth, and it was like, “Jesus Christ, this was never the plan!” But it looked great, so that’s my favorite moment: watching Lafayette go nuts.

DAN REBERT: There’s a scene where Tara [Rutina Wesley] is imprisoned by Franklin [James Frain], who’s basically taken her hostage, and he asks her to feed on him. We had a little insert neck that she bit into, which looked pretty bloody and great, but there was a mistake—we had a little piece of latex, with thermal gel nernies in it that she was going to bite into, but there are actually two different types of thermal gel nernies. There’s a super-elastic type that can stretch across the room; and there’s some other stuff that doesn’t, which is weak and brittle, which is what I wanted because Tara is supposed to tear it away.

I packed the wrong nernies, and we had to shoot it with the thermal gel ones, so she was supposed to bite into the neck and rip it. And she’s stretching and she’s like four feet away, and the director, Michael Lehmann, and [show creator] Alan Ball are sitting in front of the monitor laughing their asses off, saying, “Break it away! Break it away!” [*Laughs*] And she’s like four feet away.

ANDRE BUSTANOBY: There were so many individual moments, whether it was somebody who really deserves to get killed or maimed or bitten, but I think Longshadow’s death, in the first season, it was really shocking in the first episode when the first vampire dies. It was so utterly bloody and I wouldn’t say gory per se, but—

MASTERS: That was a funny day too, but I don’t think we should talk about that. A whole headache on that one; it was awful.

REBERT: Maybe I better keep my mouth shut on that gag. It worked great actually.

MARK VINNIELLO: The newscaster getting his spine ripped out [in season three’s “Everything is Broken”] was my favorite effect. I think he was going to have his heart ripped out, which we’ve seen a million times, but Dan came up with the idea that he would punch through, pull back and yank his spine on the way out.

REBERT: I thought it would be cool to see the spine, but I was being worried about it being too gory. There was a little false front of a fist on an air bladder that would come through the chest. Initially they wanted like a whole hand to come out and they were going to add that digitally, but

after seeing how well the effect worked, they didn’t. There’s no digital at all. It’s just the front of the hand, and it’s on a bladder, with a little spring-activated piece to open up his chest. Blood would come out and he would fall over and the spine was actually on a piece on his back.

VINNIELLO: That was my favorite effect; he took the wind completely out of my sails now! Like Dan said, there were multiple elements to it, and we had a great actor, who came in for multiple tests like the 1.0 the 2.0 and finally we did a full test. And on the day, we had the puppeteers, we had the actor, we had the guy pulling the spine; it all came together like an orchestra.

REBERT: We did it maybe seven times, but that’s the way [director] Scott Winant is, because he’s having fun with it. When we did the blisters on Sookie’s back, for “Scratches,” he was like, “Is there anything else this could do? This is so much fun popping the blisters!”

MASTERS: That was all he wanted to shoot: “Keep pushing those blisters! More pus!”

REBERT: “Scott, it’s smoking, there’s pus. What more could you want?”

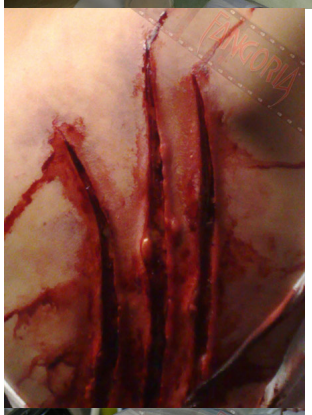
JOHNSON: I have a favorite effect, which is the crispy-fried guy in season three.

REBERT: It is, but I have to say, there is a similar makeup in 28 DAYS LATER, and Alan Ball had referenced that. He wanted it to look like burnt, dried log, but I think ours looks better. Again, but the way I think a lot of people f**k up makeup effects is they think if you put a really

good sculptor or a really good moldmaker or painted on it, you’re going to get a really good piece. With something like this, it couldn’t be further from the truth, because you can’t think about a burnt log. A burnt log isn’t some incredible sculpture; it’s basically layer upon layer of destroyed material. That makeup was little collodion flakes, which were tinted and dried and attached to all of the appliances. And the appliances were sculpted very quickly. David Snyder sculpted them and they were sculpted in like an hour, because all we really needed was some rubber on the face and everything else just fabricated on top of that.

JOHNSON: It was really unique. In the close-up you can see the little flaky areas, and I’d never seen anything like that.

REBERT: In-between takes, we would add flakes to him, so when he moved around, stuff would fall off of him. What was interesting about that was the way we did his hands. We had finger extensions that were little bone tips and then topical bone appliances over the top and we fabricated all that burning stuff over the top of it.

VINNIELLO: There’s actually a gag where he gets punched and spits up some ashy stuff out of his mouth. I thought “How are we going to do that?” and Dan said, “Give him an Oreo cookie!” That’s genius! It’s exactly what he did, and it looked like he’s spitting up ash.

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