FACE OFF’s first season was a huge ratings winner for Syfy, and the makeup FX competetion show has made a triumphant return for a second season (airing Wednesday nights at 10 p.m./9 Central). FANGORIA will have the exclusive first interviews with all the contestants as they leave the show, starting with this season’s first victim, Greg Lightner.

Lightner is a makeup artist from the Pittsburgh area. Not only was he sent home first, but he had an unpleasant surprise once he returned home from the FACE OFF set…

FANGORIA: What were you doing right before you found out you made it onto FACE OFF?

GREG LIGHTNER: I was doing a film with 72nd St. Productions called CORPSING.

FANG: As in making a verb out of a dead body.

LIGHTNER: [*Laughs*] Yeah. It was filmed in the suburbs of Pittsburgh.

FANG: A perfect place to be shooting anything to do with dead bodies.

LIGHTNER: Exactly.

FANG: Is that sort of the holy land for people who do makeup FX? Obviously, the craft didn’t start there, but the area is pretty famous for a certain film that kicked off a genre that uses them quite a bit.

LIGHTNER: I never had, growing up, an infatuation with zombies until I moved here. It was always the mainstream; Freddy, Jason and especially Michael Myers—they were always my faves. And then you get here, and you kinda have to love zombies when you live here.

FANG: It’s kind of like living in Hershey, PA. You just have to decide you love chocolate.

LIGHTNER: [*Laughs*] Exactly.

FANG: Speaking of those movies, there must have been an image from one of them that made you think, “I want to do that.”

LIGHTNER: My stepdad used to get FANGORIA, and we used to sneak in and look at it as kids. And it didn’t so much terrify me, but what it did was, I recognized actors in it that I knew were alive, and I was like, “How in the world did they do that? How do you make someone look dead who’s alive?” So it was growing up with FANGORIA that actually did it. There’s not one definitive movie—it was kind of all of them.

FANG: Do you remember one image that stuck out for you when you were sneaking peeks at the magazine?

LIGHTNER: Yeah, the one that really creeped me out was from CREEPSHOW, with the roaches coming out of that old man’s face. That always has stuck with me.

FANG: Love that. Are you self-taught?

LIGHTNER: Yes, I am.

FANG: Have you done most of your work where you live now? Or do you travel?

LIGHTNER: Pretty much everything has been here. I’m actually really, really late to the game. I always did makeup as a hobby, and never even really thought of it to be a job because my parents always wanted me to have a practical career. So I went to school for marketing and advertising. And even though I had a passion for makeup, it was kind of centered around Halloween. But then we had the zombie walk here in Pittsburgh, and I dressed up myself and my boyfriend at the time [in 2007], and got all kinds of…fans. There were interviews in newspapers and everything, and I was like, “Wow, maybe I do have something here. Maybe I can turn this into a career.” And then I got with the local amusement park and started off as an actor, then moved into the makeup department after they saw what I could do. Last year, I ended up running the makeup department.

FANG: We’re so excited to hear you have a boyfriend! We love having the gays on FACE OFF.

LIGHTNER: Yeah, except I don’t. I was dumped as soon as I got eliminated.

FANG: What?!

LIGHTNER: I got home, kind of cried myself to sleep that first night, and the next night he came home from work and was, like, “Uhhh, yeah…so, this isn’t going to work…”

FANG: He was ready to hitch his wagon to a rising star, and now he’s off to another makeup artist.

LIGHTNER: He hates makeup! He’s a mechanical engineer. He’s never been a big fan of makeup. He’s kind of like Dad—he wanted me to have a practical career. And I was like, “I got on the show. That kind of proves maybe I’m going down the right path here…”

FANG: Considering how they reacted on the show, and then interviewing them afterward, you probably took it harder than any other contestant I’ve talked to. At least, it looked like you did. Which tells me this opportunity must have meant quite a bit to you.

LIGHTNER: Initially, going in, it was proving to my family and the boyfriend that this is what I should be doing. And if I did great on FACE OFF, it meant I could quit the day job and move on with my true passion. You know, I wouldn’t say I had a lot riding on it, but I really wanted it to be a forum to get work and get my name out there and meet other creative people. Because I don’t know a lot of creative people in the industry. I met a few of those goals.

FANG: Even though your time there was short, do you feel something valuable came out of the experience?

LIGHTNER: Oh, yeah. I’m extremely close to Nix [Herrera] and Beki [Ingram]. I know them from the HAuNTcon. So it was a natural choice for us to room together. Other than that, we all stay in contact. We all consider ourselves family. It was bizarre. Almost from day one, we bonded. Peripherally, Gage [“Munster” Hubbard, season one finalist] has been—we talk every day. He’s been a huge supporter and advice-giver. I didn’t know him prior to the show. We were Facebook friends, but I was no one to him. I don’t know how we started talking, but one

day he messaged me and was like, “Did you audition for season two?” And from there, we just started talking.

FANG: Everyone on reality shows says, “I wish they would have shown…”

LIGHTNER: Since the only true creation that was mine was the Foundation Challenge, I really wish they would have shown more of her. I know it was a really, really fast makeup job, but it turned out really well. I even got props from Conor [McCullagh, season one winner] on it, for making my own prosthetic as opposed to pulling one of the prefab ones from the trailer. That didn’t air.

FANG: Did they sequester you, or just whisk you away the minute you got eliminated?

LIGHTNER: The way my elimination fell, on the weekend, I got to stay in the house because there wasn’t going to be any filming. I got to hang out with my friends a little bit longer. Which was a little emotional, because everybody would walk by and ask, “Are you OK?” And that would start the tears coming again.

FANG: What were your impressions of McKenzie Westmore and the judges—Glenn Hetrick, Patrick Tatopoulos and Ve Neill?

LIGHTNER: McKenzie is the nicest person on Earth. She’s not a prima donna; she knew all our names. She would actually talk to us. And she almost made me cry during judging. They announced that I was eliminated, and I looked over at her and she mouthed, “I’m so sorry” with this look on her face. And I was like, “Awww…I refuse to cry in front of the judges!” She almost made me do it. And then we had promo photos the next day, and she turned around and would say, “Are you OK? I’m sorry, I really liked what you did.”

Glenn is really a hardass on the show, and I kind of didn’t like him [while I was] on it. But after everything was done, he came up to us and said, “I have to be the hardass. It’s the role I fill. I just want to let you all know I truly think you’re all talented. And I don’t want you walking away from this feeling ashamed or anything. You never would have made it this far if you weren’t

talented and gifted.” And I was like, “Aw, Glenn, that’s really, really sweet.” So I have a better perspective after the show than being on the show. Patrick, I really didn’t get to know too well. I really, really like his designs. He’s the only one who truly said anything complementary to me during judging. I was a fan of Ve before the show, but not so much now. There was a huge disconnect between us; there’s really nothing there for me and her.

FANG: Now that it’s over, what’s next for you?

LIGHTNER: Good question. I just did a music video. My plan is to move out to LA. I’ve been in touch with a number of different little shops, and Gage is getting a lot of projects he says he needs assistance on. So it’s just kind of saving up my money and trying to get out there as fast as I can. Even though a lot of movies come here, my experience has been that they’re union, or they have everybody they need.

FANG: Would you be on a reality show again?

LIGHTNER: Even if you told me in the beginning I was going to be kicked off first, I still wouldn’t have turned them down. Just the friendships I got out of it, and the whole experience, has been crazy awesome. And I’m very, very proud to say I’m a part of the show.