

## Q&A: Cleve Hall, "MONSTER MAN"

Written by Joshua Emerick  
Tuesday, 15 May 2012 06:23

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From monster kid to GODZILLA costume builder, to working on such Charles Band/EMPIRE classics as ELIMINATORS and GHOULIES, special FX wizard Cleve Hall is fascinating (as even casual viewers of his hit show MONSTER MAN can now attest too). Hall has seen and done it all. Hell, he even built Gene Simmons's iconic chest armor. In light of his current run on Syfy, Fango sat down with the artist to talk up his career and all it's entailed.

**FANG:** It's well known that Godzilla inspired your career, do you recall what age you were when you first saw it?

**CLEVE HALL:** I was in 2nd grad, I believe, in Catholic school in Jacksonville, FL. I remember being so excited. I'm not sure how I first became aware of Godzilla. I loved dinosaurs and Lionel trains. I had seen Mothra and Gorgo, so my love for giant creatures had already been forged. I remember seeing the ads for KING KONG vs GODZILLA in the newspaper, along with one murky black-and-white picture, but my mom wouldn't take me because it was playing in a "bad section of town;" whatever that meant. I had also seen the Aurora Godzilla Model with rather inaccurate painting of Godzilla (which thrilled me in a way I can't describe nevertheless). When I found out GODZILLA VS THE THING (MOTHRA VS. GODZILLA) was opening in a few days, I couldn't stop thinking about it. We had driven past the theater and I saw the poster. That Reynold Brown artwork is still one of the most powerful images I have ever seen. I must have driven everyone nuts at school, because I couldn't shut up about it. Well, the day came when my mom had promised to take me, and that was the longest school day of my life. My teacher, Sister Davida, came by my desk and looked in my notebook. She was not pleased to see that, instead of math, every page was filled with drawings of Godzilla! That evening, while bolting my dinner down in an effort to make us leave quicker, my mom got a call from my teacher. She told my mom about my lack of attention at school and suggested I be punished by not taking me to the movie. My mom listened patiently, nodding, then hung up and said "Okay! Time to go! Get in the car!" My mom was cool!

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**FANG:** Who`s been the most difficult client to work with?

**HALL:** Well, I hate talking shit about people, and to be honest there have been a few clients that, no matter what, just couldn't be pleased and kept wanting changes. Most of them were the ones who had the least money, and I had agreed to give them a break on the price. Now, Gene Simmons was somewhat difficult at times, but that's Gene. [It]takes a while for him to warm up to you.

No, the number one most difficult client was this ventriloquist named David Strassman (I refer to him as Stressman) who, it turns out, is quite famous in Australia and lands far away. Basically, he's the equivalent of Jeff Dunham (whom he hates) here. He would approve something one minute, then come back the next day and hate everything.



**FANG:** What was the first horror film you can remember seeing?

**HALL:** I believe it was the Hammer film, CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF. I mainly recall the ending scene where he is cornered in the bell tower by the village mob, and throws a burning hay bale down at them. Now, the one horror film I saw that scared me so bad I made my mom take me out of there was the original HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL with Vincent Price. That scene where the girl backs up and the hag is standing behind her freaked me the fuck out! I also recall seeing THE RAVEN and PIT AND THE PENDULUM and being weirded out by some of the images.

**FANG:** Who were your FX mentors?

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**HALL:** Well, obviously Eiji Tsuburya was like a god to me, and Ray Harryhausen as well. I started with the desire to do stop motion animation before I got into makeup FX. But, as far as the one person who became my greatest inspiration and a friend, I met him in '77 at a convention, and then would meet up whenever he had business in FL.

**FANG:** NIGHTMARE was the first feature film you worked on. What was the experience like, what were your impressions of Tom Savini?

**HALL:** I got a call from a friend in Cocoa Beach and he told me there was a horror film shooting there and they needed a makeup FX assistant. I called the production, and was hired. I drove down there with no idea what to expect and met the FX person, who was also the producer, Bill Milling. Nice guy, [he] is credited as assistant to Rick Baker on SQUIRM. Not sure what exactly he did on that because, as I came to find out, he had no idea how to do the FX for the killings. Since production had already started, there was no time to prep or order materials, and the first FX scene was three days away; the throat slicing. Bill was so relieved to have someone who knew what he was doing—at least compared to him—he went around telling everyone what fantastic stuff to expect. He had me so stressed the night before the shoot that when we went to the local mall to buy acrylic paints, I stayed in the car while he went inside. As soon as he was out of site I gunned the engine and burned rubber out of there. I got a couple of miles away before his girlfriend, who was still in the car with me (she played the girl who gets killed in that scene) talked me down from my sudden anxiety attack and convinced me to turn around and go back for him. I pulled up and parked about 30 seconds before he came out of the mall, clueless as to the drama he'd just missed.

The whole shoot was an amazing experience, and the beginning of a technique for creating FX that I have become quite amazing at; the ability to, no matter where I am and what materials I seem to be missing, create something totally workable out of whatever is laying around.

**FANG:** You're best known for TROLL and GHOULIES, do you personally have a favorite?

**HALL:** On GHOULIES, I was only a puppeteer. I had worked on a couple of films for Charlie Band previously, METALSTORM and DUNGEONMASTER, where I had met John Buechler on set. I met John's crew—most of whom have moved on to very impressive careers—but at the time were just starting, GHOULIES being their first film. So, all of the ghoulie puppets were

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already made and just needed touch-ups, plus some gore FX I helped with. TROLL was the first film I worked on for John, having been hired for a few days to foam fabricate the minotaur costume. As things worked out, I ended up working with John for a couple of years. Band had several films he was trying to do and we never knew which would shoot first, so all of the FX for TROLL, ZONE TROOPERS, ELIMINATORS, and TERRORVISION were done at the same time. Then, RE-ANIMATOR got thrown in as well. Since John was directing TROLL, his first feature, which was set to shoot in Italy, he kept me on that to handle the design of the puppet staging. ELIMINATORS was shooting in SPAIN simultaneously. I have enough stories concerning the making of TROLL to fill a book—some not for youthful ears—but I had an amazing time in Italy doing it! Some might say I had *too* much fun!



**FANG:** Any recent horror films you`ve really enjoyed?

**HALL:** WOMAN IN BLACK; Totally old school, simple storyline, scary as hell, plus the Gothic setting and use of suspense over gore—yeah, I know, I still prefer atmosphere over gore, even though it does pay the rent. But mainly, when the first title to appear on the screen read HAMMER FILMS, I was in love with it.

**FANG:** In your vast career, what are you most proud of?

**HALL:** Playing Godzilla in PEE WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE is definitely a career highlight! This little kid's dream come true! Stomping on tanks, fighting King Ghidorah, riding in a sleigh with Santa and crashing into Twisted Sister's car. I could have died that day and felt my life had been worth it.

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**FANG:** You work with your daughters Constance and Elora. Is it more difficult to work with family?

**HALL:** Sometimes it is. They don't feel they owe you the respect of some newbie who is afraid of getting fired. But they do great work otherwise!

**FANG:** You're currently on the hit show, MONSTER MAN. What can fans of the show expect this season?

**HALL:** Well, there were several things about the first season that I feel need to be altered somewhat that will make the second a vast improvement. One major difference will be that this time, all creative decisions, from design to zipper, I will have the final word on. There were a few things that Roy had done that I wasn't pleased with which were represented as my work in the final edit of the episode. It had been a verbal agreement that I was to be in charge of aesthetics, but not always adhered to. Another is that there will be more money for these builds, so we aren't emptying our pockets for supplies. While the deadline aspect of these projects was constantly emphasized on the show, there was never any mention that these were also limited budget and I couldn't afford extra help, which I would've done to make sure we were finished on time. The last major difference is that, recently, Roy and I agreed to become partners in SOTA FX, with him handling the clients and business end, and myself responsible for the creative decisions.

**FANG:** I heard you're quite the ladies man, has the show boosted your appeal with the female viewers?

**HALL:** Well, I don't know about being a ladies' man. I mean, I was a total slut back in the 80s, but I would be lying if I didn't say that I have not received... quite a surprising amount of comments online in the various social media sites, posted by women ranging in age from 18 to 50s, all stating how incredibly hot they think I am. Now, I admit that back in the 80s, I was mad hot [ *laughs* ], but now, who am I to argue? Oh, and there have been a few proposals of marriage.

**FANG:** Finally, any advice for future Monster men?

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**HALL:** Yes, follow your dreams, but have a back up plan!