



For over a decade, Andrew Clement's Creative Character Engineering has given birth to alien beasts, CGI monsters and silicone babies.

Photo: RobertEvans.com

## Special effects master takes on monsters and the macabre

BY NICK THOMAS

Conjuring up a few benign Halloween ghosts, goblins or ghouls might be a once-a-year treat for many people. But for Andrew Clement, ghoulish creatures surround him daily and are entirely of his own making.

As a special-effects make-up artist supplying Hollywood with horror and science fiction props, Clement thrives on designing gruesome prosthetics for actors, as well as monstrous mechanical puppets and animatronic aliens at his Van Nuys studio, Creative Character Engineering.

Equipped with workshops, tools and giant, walk-in ovens, the modest exterior of the 5,000 square foot building gives little indication of the bizarre fiberglass creatures, urethane skulls, shrunken heads, latex masks, and silicone eviscerated body parts that are forged inside.

Clement traces his interest in exotic make-up to a childhood fascination with animals and their great diversity of shapes. A career turning point, however, was the 1977 Star Wars film which 13-year-old Andy watched spellbound, as a memorable cast of alien characters paraded across the screen. He soon set to work constructing his own monsters from clay and latex rubber in his father's Connecticut workshop.

“My dad was a weekend artist,” said Clement, a seven-year Sherman Oaks resident, from his Van Nuys office. “One day he’d be developing his own photographs in the bathroom, then he’d be oil painting or sculpting. I would follow along, fascinated by his skill with all these crafts.”

Clement eventually found his way into the New York make-up business. After mastering the basics, he began creating zombie masks and crazy wigs for the zany “Saturday Night Live” crew and rubber noses for Chris Elliott sketches on David Letterman’s show in the 1980s.

Restless for more experience, he soon headed west to expand his talents.

Arriving in California, he took a course offered by legendary make-up genius Dick Smith.

“Back then, there were few books or manuals that taught this stuff,” said Clement. “Make-up artists just passed notes and tips around to each other. Dick put it all down on paper and the thought of getting my hands on all those tech sheets was intoxicating to me.”

According to Smith, who created the shocking transformation of a possessed Linda Blair in *The Exorcist* and later won a Best Make-up Oscar for his work on *Amadeus*, Clement was actually the first to enroll in his advanced professional make-up course 20 years ago.

“He had such enthusiasm,” recalled Smith, by phone from his home in Connecticut. “He’s become very talented in all aspects of make-up design and is a fantastic sculptor, which is number one with me, and has a great imagination which is essential in this business.”

By the early 1990s, Clement’s plans for establishing his own company were slowly coming together. Meanwhile, he worked on the Jim Henson T.V. show “Dinosaurs,” repairing and painting animatronic dinosaur skins.

He vividly recalls one particular day, while still at Henson’s, when a visitor arrived with a videotape to show some associates at the company. They shut themselves in an office to view test footage of computer generated imagery (CGI) dinosaurs for a new movie project called *Jurassic Park*. But the video was also inadvertently broadcast to a room of coworkers, Clement among them.



Not all of Clement’s work is as creepy as his Barnabas Collins make-up for *Dark Shadows* (top left) or the silicone animatronic head for *Jekyll & Hyde* (top right). He also created the test puppet (above left) for the upcoming film *Alvin and the Chipmunks* and this model of Stuart Little (above right).

"We all just sat there with our mouths wide-opened watching the amazing computer generated skeletons running around," he said. "At the time, this was top secret stuff. Now, of course, anyone can view what we saw in the behind-the-scenes segments on the Jurassic Park DVD."

After witnessing the revolutionary application of computers to special effects, Clement said he was determined to learn all he could about CGI technology and apply it to his work.

"I emptied my bank account that day, ran out and got a computer."

That was 15 years ago. Since then, he and his current staff of twenty have combined CGI with their sculpting, casting, and painting talents to create props for numerous T.V. shows like "Xena," "Hercules," and several "Star Trek" series, as well as dozens of big screen credits, such as The Matrix, Blade, Stuart Little, Meet the Fockers and Spiderman 3. One of the projects he's presently working on is the Universal sci-fi thriller, Repossession Mambo, starring Forrest Whitaker and Jude Law.



Clement holds one of his lifelike, animatronic babies.

Photo: RobertEvans.com

Despite his expertise in creating monsters and macabre make-up, not all Clement's creations instill horror. For over a decade, the company's workshops have given birth to silicone babies alongside alien beasts.

The babies have appeared in numerous television shows, such as "House" and "ER," and are so lifelike that most viewers are completely unaware they're watching animatronic infants.

"I'm in awe of Andrew's work," admitted veteran "ER" actress Yvette Freeman, who has played nurse Haleh Adams since 1994. "His animatronic babies are beyond belief. It's like working with a piece of fine art."

British actress Alex Kingston (who played Dr. Elizabeth Corday for seven seasons) left "ER" three years ago, but still remembers the babies.

"They were extraordinary and it was very easy to believe they were real while acting," said Kingston by phone from London, where she's working on a new T.V. series. "When I held them, they were the right weight and movement, and felt so natural. I wanted to take one home with me!"

Tricking viewers into believing his babies are alive is a real treat for Clement, who keeps about 50 babies in stock and rents them out to productions all over the world. "They are very lifelike and flexible, and we spend a lot of time and money keeping them looking good," he says of the tiny human creations. "They have really helped the company get noticed."

"Make-up is a lifelong course of study," Clement added. "It's still an evolving field and there are so many new materials and techniques now. We're bringing it into the 21st century."