

WORKING HOLLYWOOD

# He's a beastie boy

Special-effects artist Andrew Clement makes convincing creatures for movies and TV, but babies are his specialty.

By SUSAN KING  
Times Staff Writer

**I** am the baby guy," Andrew Clement states with some pride. No wonder, since Clement has literally made hundreds of babies over the past decade.

And it has nothing to do with his fathering skills. A special-effects expert, Clement's Van Nuys-based Creative Character Engineering is Hollywood's go-to company for prosthetics, animatronics and computer graphics characters.

He's created various animatronic creatures and beasties for theme restaurants in New York. 3-D animated effects shots for the popular syndicated series "Hercules" and "Xena" and concepts and design maquettes (the small models that are used for computer-generated animation). He's also provided practical effects, digital effects or effect support services for such films as "Stuart Little," "Blade," "Patch Adams" and "Mortal Kombat 2."

But Clement is best known for his realistic body parts, surgery simulations and silicone babies for such series as "ER" and "Strong Medicine." In fact, he's worked on "ER" since the NBC series started in 1994. Helped by a crew that ranges from two to 20 people, depending on how busy he is, Clement supplies practically every show in town.

He won't reveal how much they cost — that's "gauche" he says — but admits they're expensive.

Born and raised in Connecticut, Clement became interested in special effects after seeing "Star Wars" as a kid and began working at effects houses in New York City even before graduating from high school. While attending college at the State University of New York, Purchase, he worked on "Saturday Night Live" and on such films as "The Princess Bride" and "Black Rain."

In 1990, he moved to Los Angeles, where he joined Oscar winner Rick Baker's special-effects house and later was head of the paint department on the Jim Henson-produced ABC series "Dinosaurs." After seeing test footage of the CGI work on "Jurassic Park," he invested practically every penny he had in learning about the emerging computer technology. By 1993, he formed his own company and then "ER" came along a year later.

Surrounded by creatures in the conference room at Creative Character Engineering, Clement talked about his life as Hollywood's premiere baby-maker:

#### Getting in the baby market

I started with the first season of "ER." I never had done babies before. I had worked with someone who was doing some makeup on the show and they were looking for someone who did good babies and they said I do good sculptures and was conscientious to detail. They figured I'd take a crack at it.

[The babies are made] of solid silicone with [metal reinforcement].

We always used silicone because it looks so real and reflects the light and transmits the light.... You can see

through the ears.

Sometimes on a larger baby, we will put in a complete skeleton. We have done 23 or 24 individual baby sculptures and from that we can customize. We cast hands and feet, and we have a series of measurements [of real babies] that we take that will allow us to duplicate a baby really well. It makes you want to hold them like real babies.

We have done babies for the police shows in town — "NYPD Blue," "The Shield." We have done babies for "Friends." "Miss Match" has been renting babies from us. They use them for almost every prime-time show.

But "ER" is huge for us. We just had about 12 people in working. They had a baby episode and they needed all of these babies. I think we had like 25 babies or so to either make or transform, and that was in one week. We kind of did it like an assembly line. We had a hair person. We had painters.

#### Animatronic babies

They have a skeleton, and it has got a shell inside that has little motors in it. There are little model-airplane motors and we use controllers. It can breathe and move and the mouth moves. If someone is handling the baby, we try not to have an animatronic because it doesn't have the same floppiness.

#### Real versus silicone babies

It is much more cost-effective. You can only get brief little windows of time where a baby can work so these will suffice for so much more. We have gotten some really good close-ups on these.

#### Building a better baby...

I have had people who wanted to buy

these, individual collectors, but the longevity isn't there. We usually get a year out of them and then they get too soft. They begin to tear. The oil has risen to the surface, and we wind up destroying them. We could make them more durable, but we wouldn't get that great sort of [flexibility]. The oil is what gives it its softness.

When I paint a baby, I use about seven different colors and I use an airbrush. We have all of these different patterns that happen in human skin. We actually try to match the forearm color.

**... but not perfect ones**

The silicone is so much softer now, and the paint is adhering very, very well. We had problems with paint sticking in the beginning. Nobody really knew how to paint silicone. No one had done that in the past. It was a mold-making compound, and nobody ever really worried about how it looked.

**Chests and body parts**

We make chests that open up and blood spurts out; hearts beat. We do so many chests for "ER," we almost do a chest or two a week. We make them specific to an actor. We match the skin tone, the hair. . . . It changes the actors' performances. They have their hands in the chests and they are grabbing these organs that are all gushy.

We do prosthetics for "Malcolm in the Middle." They have a long-term rental on one of our babies. We do some crazy things for them. They want it big.

It's a strange little business. . . .

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*Working Hollywood is a feature that puts the spotlight on less-visible jobs in the entertainment industry.*

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