

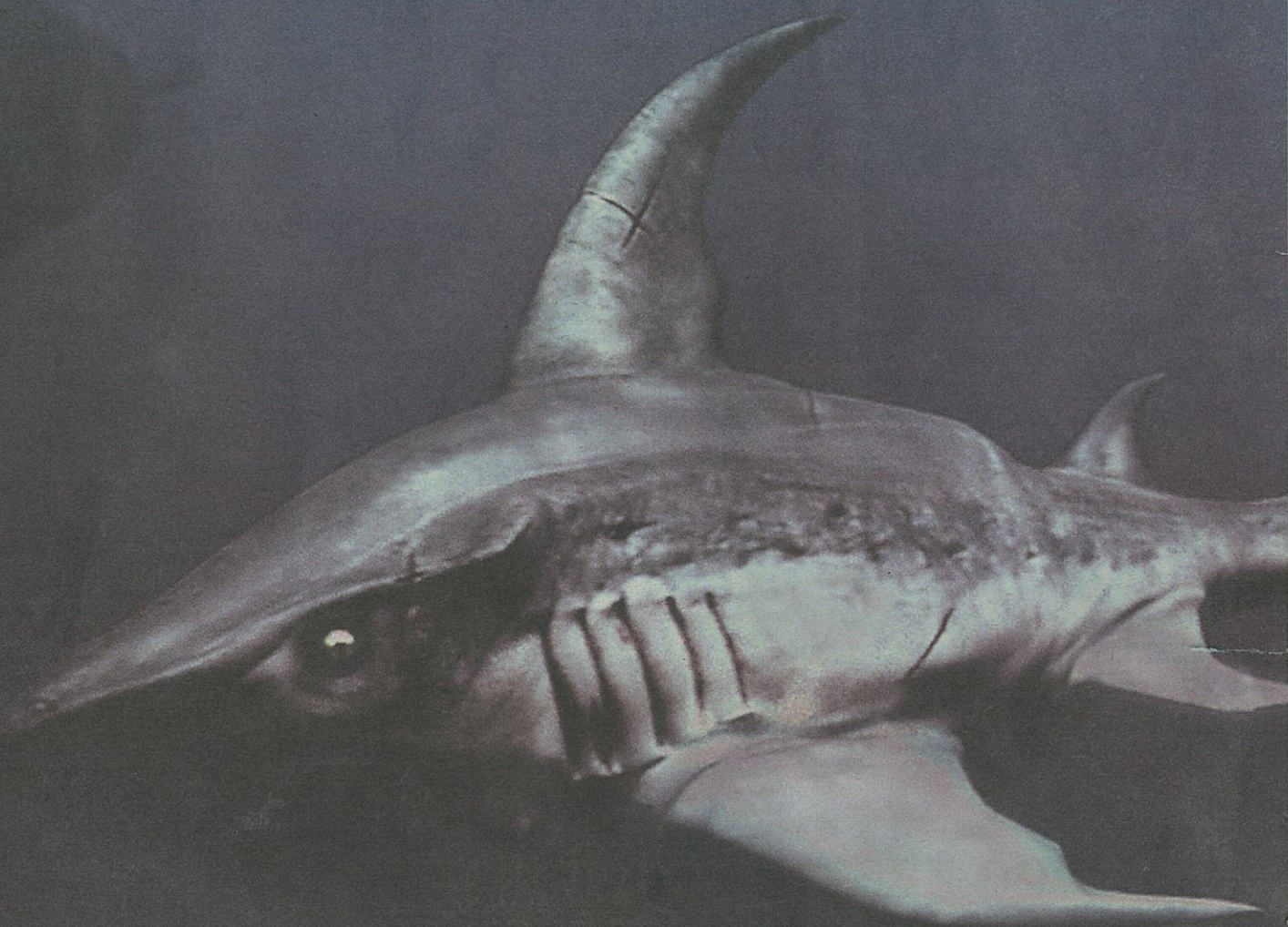
› TORONTO STAR ‹

# STAR WEEK

TV LINEUP FOR JULY 3 — JULY 9, 2010

An exploration of  
mythological monsters

## Beast Legends



# They just can't kill the beast . . .

**Dynamic duo go on a global quest to investigate ancient mythological creatures and find the truth in the legends**

BY BRIAN GORMAN

The world is full of tales of fantastic mythical beasts.

*Beast Legends*, debuting Wednesday, July 7, on History Television, brings those creatures to life — even though it's almost certain none of them have ever lived before.

The series combines computer-generated and traditional animation with science and travel.

"It's all about taking real science and then using it in an imaginative and speculative way to explore the realm between science and fantasy," says series producer Elliott Halpern.

"We're taking . . . creatures that have not been proven to be real by science at this point — and we're looking at what the biology of a creature like that would be if it were real."

The series investigates such legendary creatures as the griffin, a blend of eagle and lion; the gigantic, squidlike kraken; the wild man of Vietnam, which is sort of a tropical Sasquatch; and a giant shark said to rule the waters around Fiji.

The last started out as a spooky story.

"The first encounter a researcher had was being in a cab in Fiji and talking to the driver," Halpern says. "And the driver grew extremely fearful about even talking about it."

"That was the first clue we had that there were real believers. And it took a while to gain enough trust that people would even talk about it."

The series features a team drawn from science and the arts: British TV personality and veterinary surgeon Steve Leonard; Canadian comic book artist Francis Manapul (*Flash*); York University anthropologist Kathryn Denning, a specialist in mythology; and Harvard evolutionary biologist Scott Edwards."

"As we filmed, we could see each trying to pull things his own way," Halpern says. "Francis Manapul is more preoccupied with how things look, whereas Steve Leonard is very interested in how things could be. And that's what drives the action in the programs."

Each episode involves travel to such exotic locations as Mongolia, Vietnam, Fiji and



Steve Leonard (top left) and Francis Manapul roam the world in quest of beastly legends.



Poland, where team members explore local folklore and sketch out details of a creature.

Meanwhile, at home in the lab, other team members match the field material with scientific speculation to produce a 3-D anima-

tion working model.

And each episode ends with a two-minute film that puts the computer model into the real world. One episode finale involves Leonard and Manapul being attacked in the jungle by

an eight-foot-tall Vietnamese man-ape.

In some cases, research took the story into unexpected directions. Halpern says. For example, everyone recognizes the griffin as a medieval beast, but a little investigation discovered much more ancient origins.

"To find out that one of the theories of origin of the myth is in Mongolia, and this is a incredibly spectacular mountainous range," Halpern says. "We couldn't understand how it could have originated there, given that there are no lions in Mongolia."

"But it was very exciting to find out . . . that there once were lions there — huge ones called cave lions."

The beasts are more or less evenly split. There are creatures that could exist — such as the giant shark and the Vietnamese wild man. Others are a bit more extreme.

"A griffin cannot be," Halpern says. "I can say categorically that we will never catch one across a bird-lion."

*Beast Legends* premieres Wednesday at 8 p.m. on History Television.