

**Smog Monster
stalks suburbia!
Create this and
other Famous
Kaiju of Filmland
without having
to exhume even
a single corpse!**

MASTER

MONSTER

MAKER

by James Babbo



Two Godzillas - Ken (Heisei) Satsuma and Haruo (Showa) Nakajima - form the "bread" in a Gamera sandwich at G-FEST '96.

If you've ever gone to G-FEST or seen pictures in G-FAN of the event, then you'd notice people dressed in amateur monster (or kaiju) costumes. Who are those people? How do they do that? Could you do that? As one of "those people," I wrote this article to give you insight as to how I build my monster suits. What I describe is by no means the only way, or perhaps even the best way to do it. I encourage readers that attempt these techniques to innovate and find better ways to build their critters.

I'm only going to deal with building monster suits. There are many human characters you can dress up as that are just as fun (Dr Serizawa, the Twin Faeries, Controller from Planet X, etc.) but I like my kaiju!

A good way to start is to ask questions of other suit builders. How did they do it? From the incredibly detailed work of Paul Gavin to a kid with a hand drawn paper mask, if you appreciate the work, let them know, and ask questions.

I learned by assisting my good friend Davis Bradley on building a Gamera '95 suit. We were very pleased with how it came out, and as a result, Dave went on to a job designing costumes and props for the metal band, GWAR.

My second suit was Gigan '72, built mostly on my own. It suffered without a second pair of eyes to help with problems. Nonetheless, I'm happy I built it.

Years later I plunged back into suit-building to make Hedorah (a.k.a. the Smog Monster) and the following year, Gabara from GODZILLA'S REVENGE.

What should be obvious is that I have a soft spot for the

underappreciated characters in the kaiju film genre. I'll probably never build a Godzilla suit because it's been done and, from what I've seen (from Dawn McKechnie & others), done well.

Before you start creating your "monster-piece," there are some essential questions you need to ask yourself:

ten critical questions

What character do I want to build? Who do you like? Your favorite monster? Godzilla? Kong? Rodan? Who would you like to see if you went to G-FEST? Maybe a character you've never seen done before? Why limit yourself to the Godzilla series? I'd like to see a Bemlar (Ultraman) or Ymir (Harryhausen).

What's my budget? Five bucks? A hundred? A thousand? How low or hi-tech you want your suit to be will probably dictate your costs, but not limit your creativity. For example, using store bought materials, Hedorah cost around \$350 to build, while a much superior suit like Gamera cost only \$100, which was the cost of the latex rubber to coat the skin. The building materials were found entirely on the street. More on that later. But creativity and innovation cannot be measured in dollars. Which leads to...

What style should you use? Ultra-realistic? Cartoony? Super-deformed? Scary? Cute? Showa, Heisei or Millennium series? After you decide, find as many reference photos of the character that you can. Sometimes,



Fans swoon as Gigan meets Sailor Moon in an anime vs live action clash at G-FEST '97.

built up model kits are a better source than the films themselves.

Would it be a practical suit to build? Would I fit in it? Could I walk in it? Will I need assistance in getting inside? In moving around? The idea of building Ghidorah or Biollante or Megaguirus might sound cool, but would it work as the costume you envisioned? Maybe it'll wind up being a giant prop if you don't drastically redesign the look. Gabera worked well because he's the rare kaiju that doesn't have a tail to drag around and get stepped on.

What do I intend to do with it? Am I going to G-FEST? A Halloween party? Costume contest? Parade? Make an amateur movie? How often will I use it? Once? Twice?

Where will I build it? Back yard? Basement? Apartment? Will your space have enough room to build something huge? If inside, will you have proper ventilation if you use harsh chemicals like contact cement or latex?

How much time do I have to build it? A year? A month? Days?

How do I transport it? Ship it? Can you drive it to G-FEST? Will it fit in your car? Fly it there? Airlines have strict guidelines on the size and weight of luggage. You may have to break up your suit into parts to fly.

What will I do with it afterwards? Will I store it? Will I sell it? Throw it away? Donate it?

The above are important questions you need to ponder. Otherwise, you might abandon your project midway through. (*Hey, I know there were only nine questions. I just wanted to see if you were paying close attention!* - J.D.)

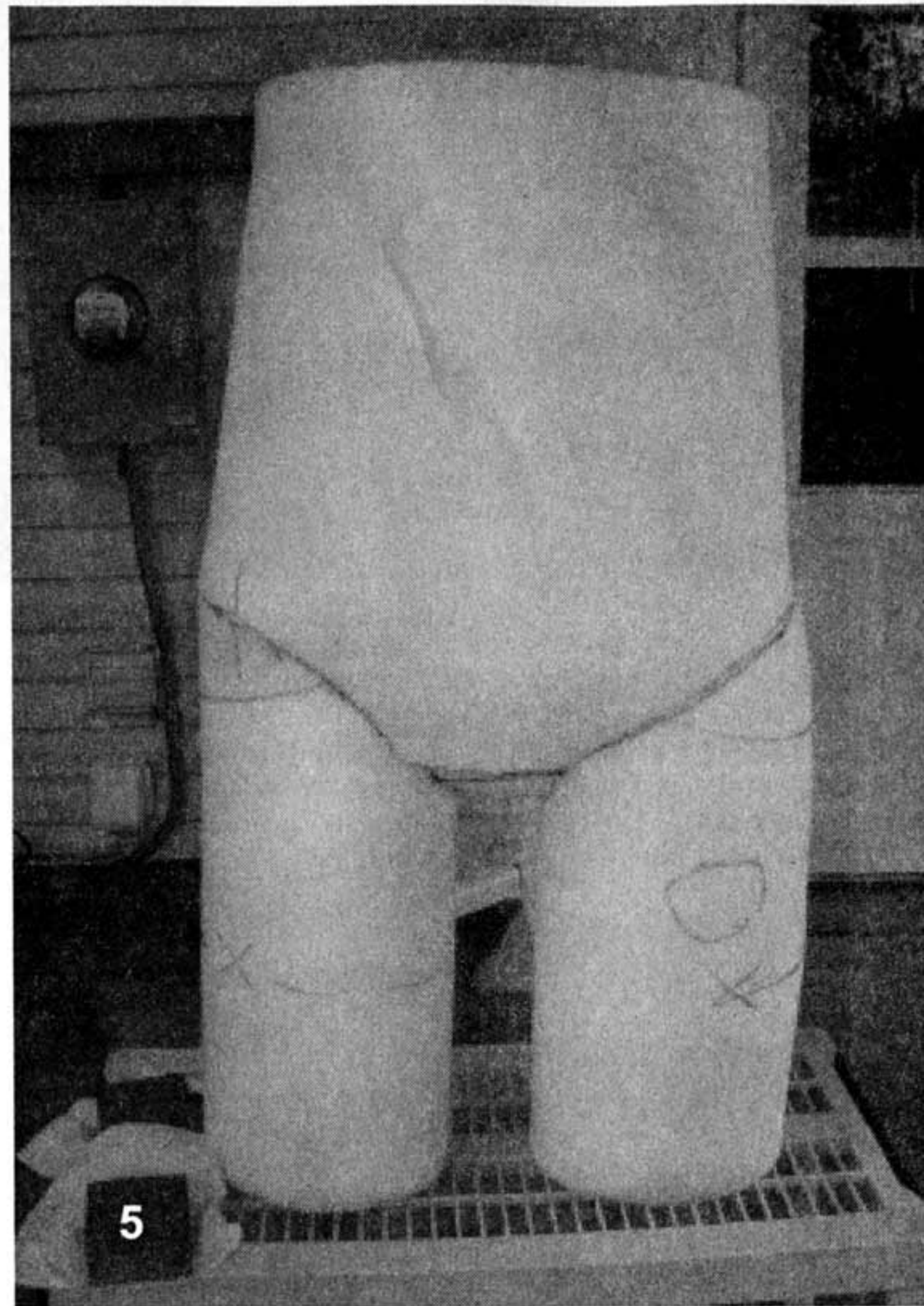
Ok, enough with the Q&A's. You've gone through the list and still want to make a monster suit. Let's build it!

The majority of the suit will be made of hi-density foam. This is the stuff that makes up coach cushions and carpet padding. Foam is a great all-purpose material that's light, flexible and easy to work with. It's available at most fabric stores and on-line. You can also find it for free on trash day! People throw out foam all the time when replacing carpets and couches, usually in springtime. All the foam for my Gamera suit was found on the street. But don't use the multi-colored patchwork stuff. It falls apart easily.

For our purposes we'll buy some. You'll use sheets of it (**pic 1**) to make tubes for a torso, arms & legs and possibly blocks to sculpt larger pieces for heads or extraneous parts (ex. dorsal fins).

The two other main materials are contact cement to connect foam pieces, and liquid latex to coat the suit (**pic 2**). A good source of latex (L-200 casting latex) is Cementex in NYC and they'll ship anywhere. Contact cement can be had in any hardware store.

The tools you'll need are a pair of scissors, a box-cutter, a sharpie, work and latex medical gloves, various brushes, eye goggles and a face mask or respirator (**pic 3**). The latter are protection against fumes from the cement and latex. I cannot express strongly enough the need for caution. These materials are hazardous and should be used



outdoors or in a very well-ventilated area.

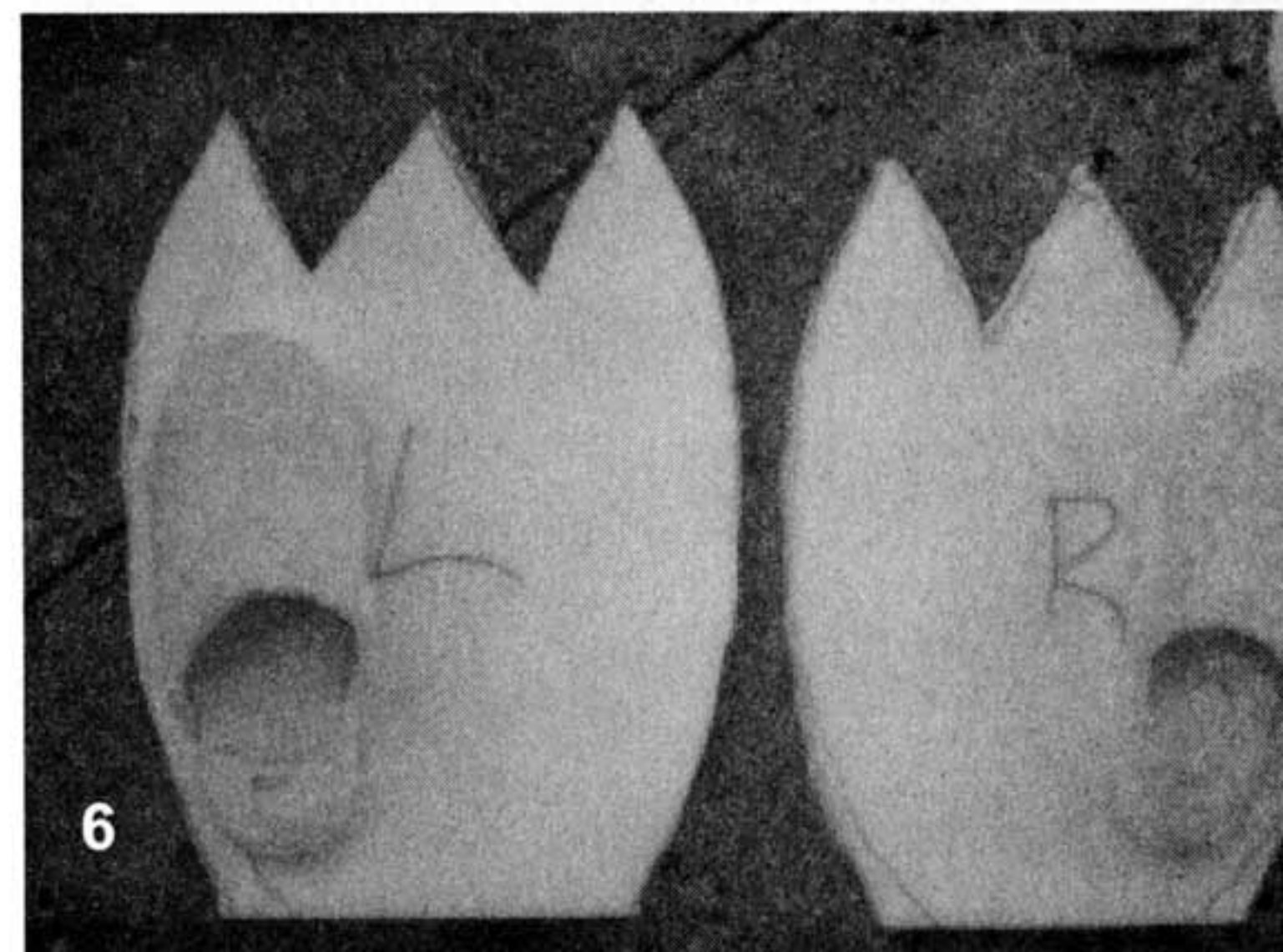
To build Gabera I started with the lower torso by gluing a large piece of foam into a tube that was a good few inches wider than my waist (**pic 4**). I recommend building these costumes a bit larger to accommodate some breathing space. Too tight a fit can be quite stifling. Foam is an insulator and it can get unbearably hot, but more on that later.

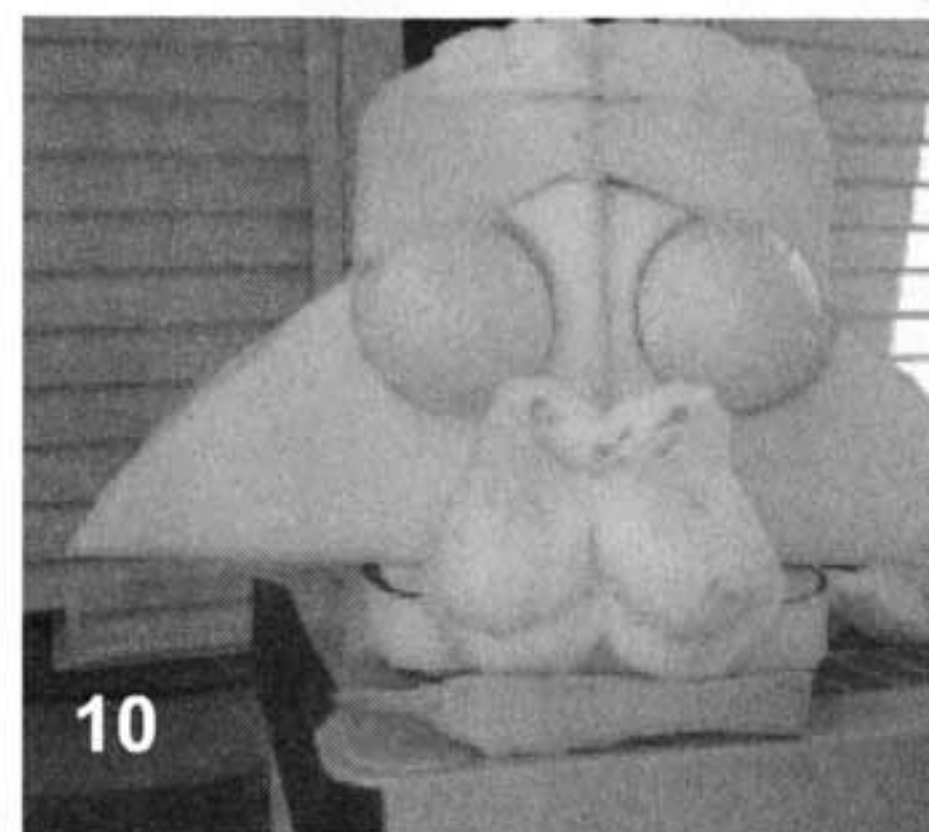
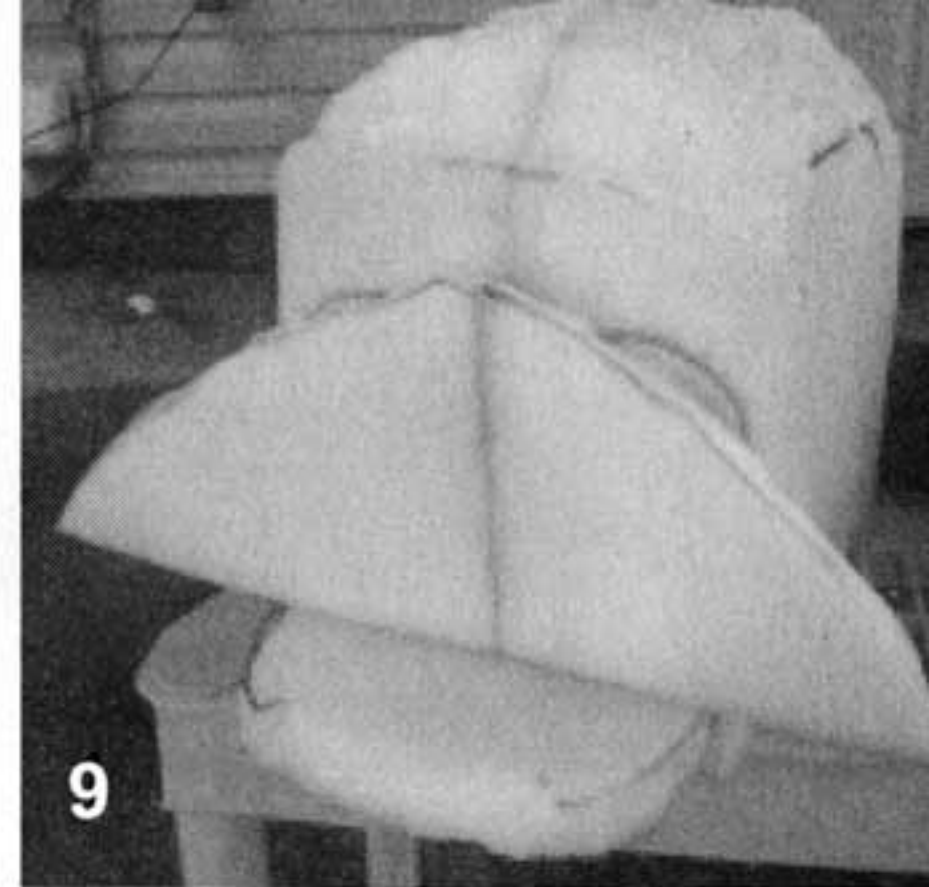
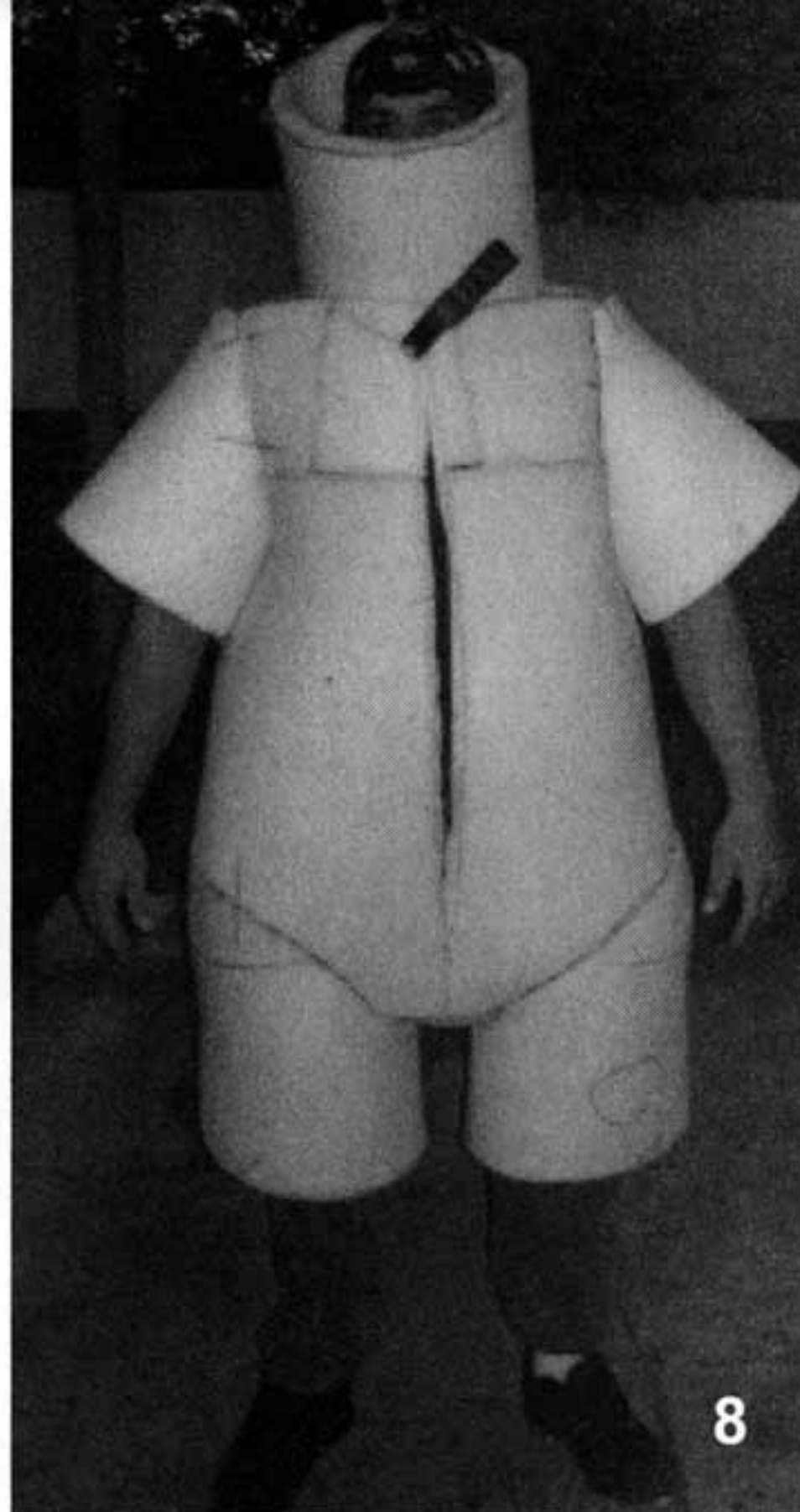
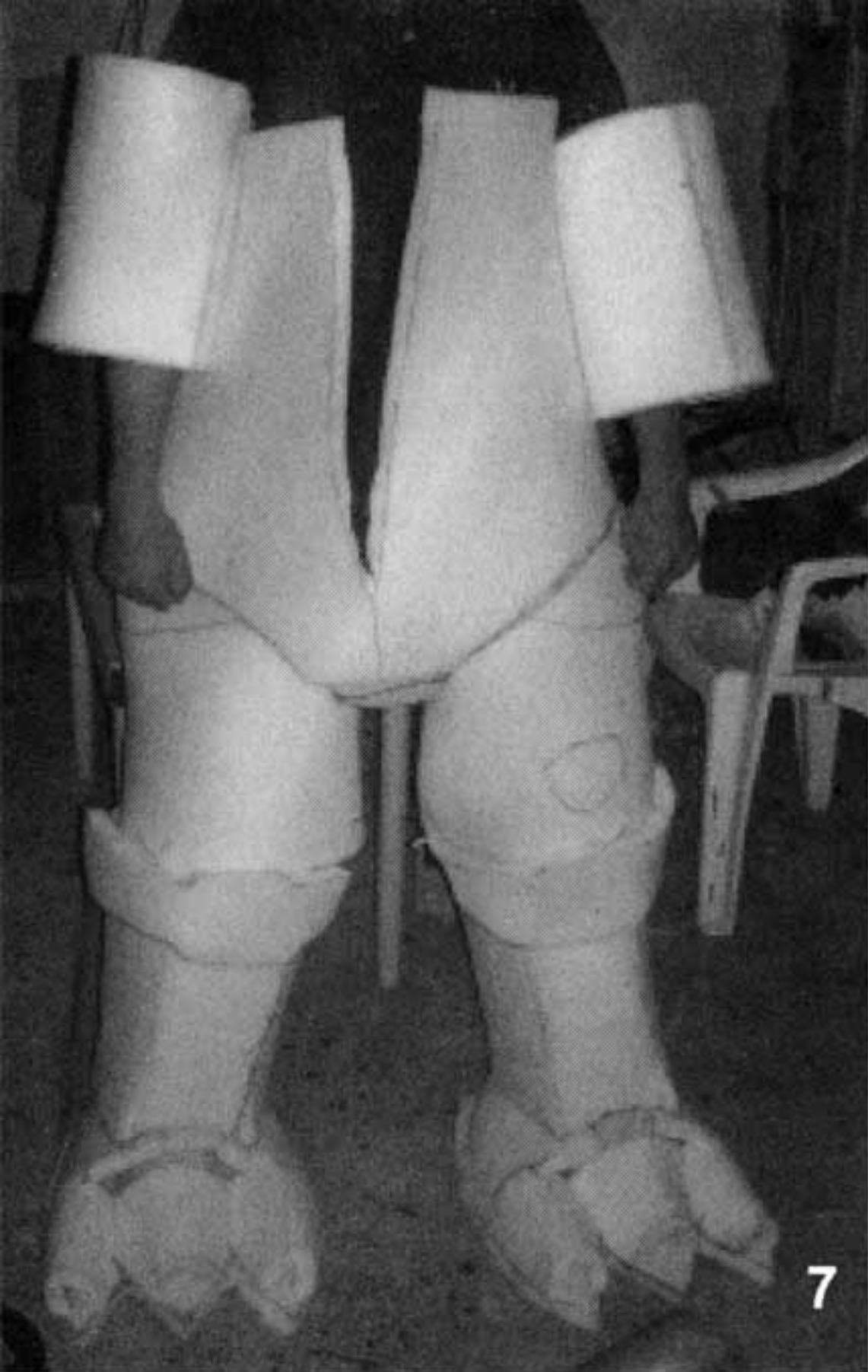
It doesn't take much contact cement to glue foam together. The two pieces don't need to be coated but just dabbed every inch or so. Just hold them together until they stick. As it dries the bond will get solid.

I then added a piece to mark a division point for the legs. Then thighs were added (**pic 5**). The pieces don't have to fit perfectly. You can always trim off any excess. The latex process will cover any and all seams.

The feet bottoms were cut next. Gluing slippers (purchased at a dollar store) to them will provide great control when walking (**pic 6**). Another cylinder was built for the lower legs with a rounded kneecap (**pic 7**). This was done in order to slip on the feet as boots. They could be attached permanently but in order to fly it to G-FEST, the suit had to be in pieces. Half cones made toes, with smaller full cones for claws later on.

Next, an upper chest piece was added, along with shoulders (**pic 8**). A slit was then cut in the center to provide a way in and out of the suit. Snaps will be added later to close it up. The clamp is holding it closed temporarily. The neck piece is just a place holder to see where the mouth will be situated. The eyelevel will be between the jaws.





The head was carved from a block piece of foam. A straight piece was added for the upper jaw. The faceplate provides a base from which to build up. (pic 9). A wiffle ball (dollar store!) cut in half makes up the eyes. A carved foam muzzle was glued at an angle overhanging the jaw (pic 10). Smaller pieces were used to build up the eyebrows, nose, cheeks, etc (pic 11). Scraps work great. Keep every leftover piece of foam in a nearby bag because you never know when that 2 inch rhomboid will come in handy.

At this point we have the general body together (torso, legs, upper arms, upper head) so we begin adding the skin. No, we didn't

take a right turn into serial killer-ville! We're adding a layer of cloth to the suit in order for the liquid latex to take hold. The suit is basically a big foam sponge that will soak up liquid unless we have a material to act as a thin barrier between the foam and the latex. To do this, take white or lightly colored cotton sheets (100% or mostly cotton, no patterns), cut them up into pieces and glue them as tightly as possible to the foam, smoothing out any wrinkles and air bubbles (pic 12).

You may use more contact cement in this process than actually building the suit. It's necessary, because it'll save you a bunch of latex. A typical suit will take up 2-3 queen size sheets. Pick them up at a Salvation Army site for a few bucks (wash them before use). No need to use new ones.

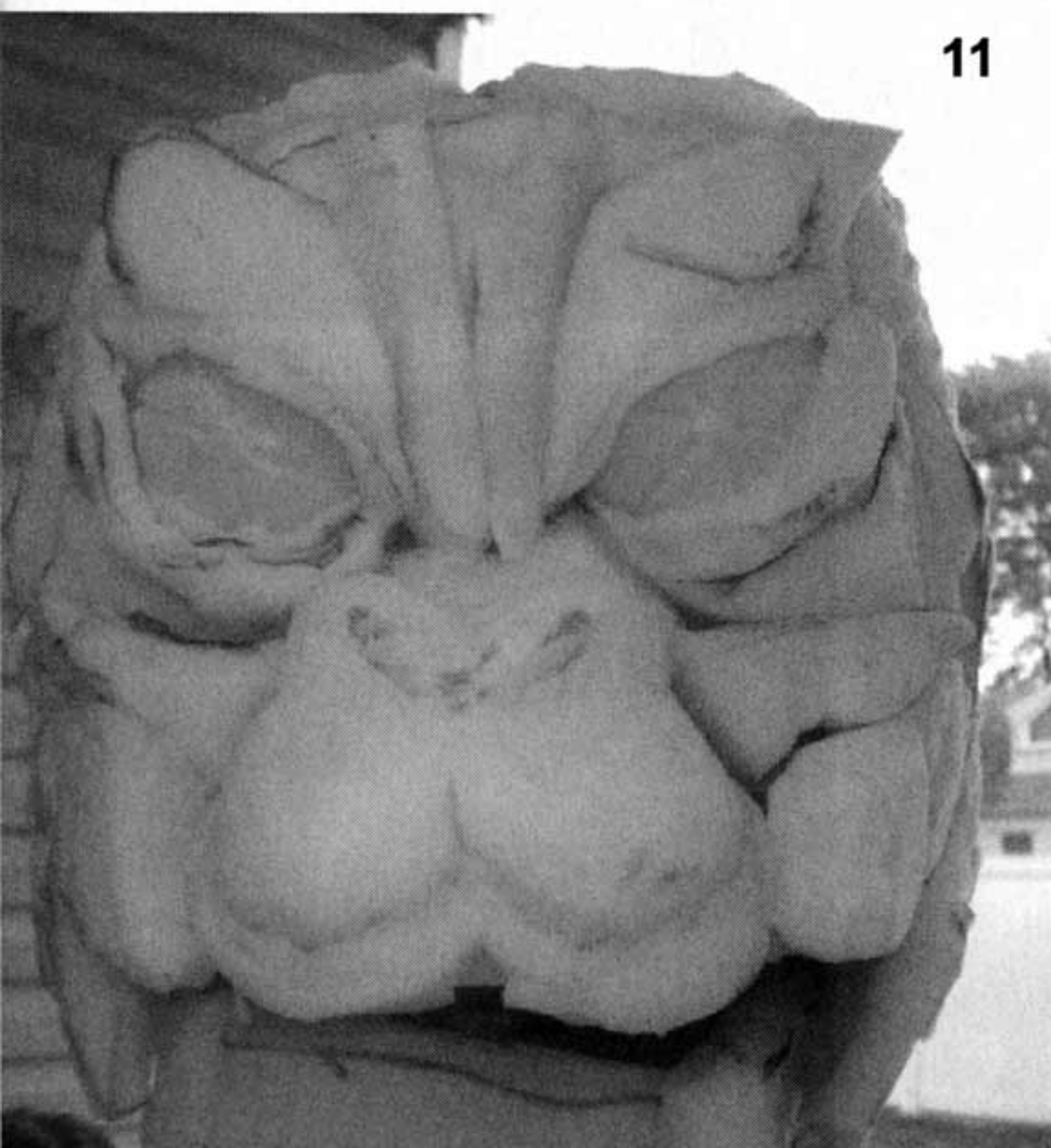
While building your suit, you should constantly try the parts on or get a friend to model it for you. If they're flaky, at least get someone to observe you in it, and maybe take some digital pictures. Shots from odd angles will be a great help with proportion and likeness.

As you can see, the upper head is sitting atop my own, almost like a bicycle helmet. This is to accurately judge my eyeline, since I'll be looking out of the mouth. The Toho suit actors usually look through perforated holes in the neck. You can do the same, but I'm a big advocate of maximum visibility, so you may consider looking out of the mouth. This will also allow direct air to flow inside to cool you down. Also, a small battery operated fans help greatly!

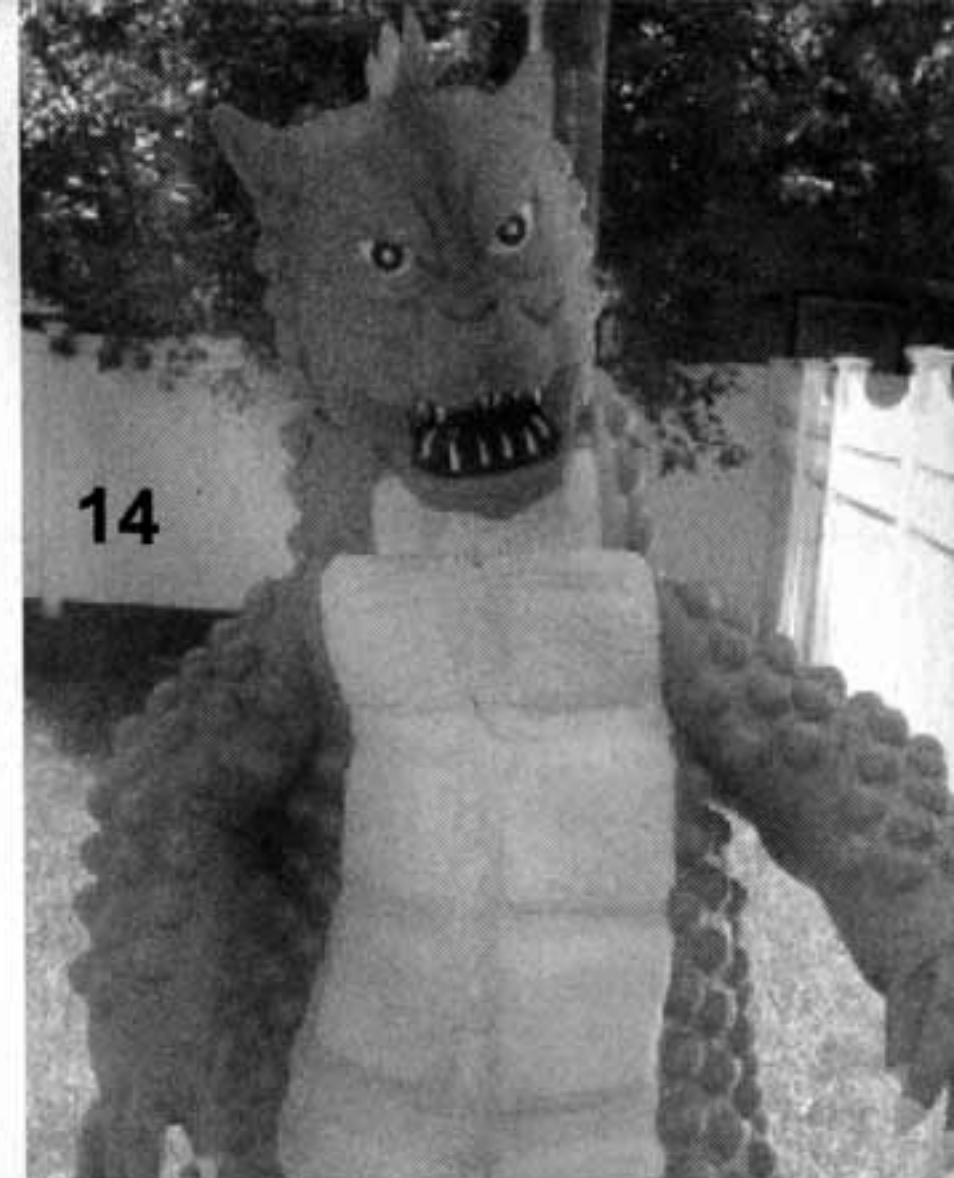
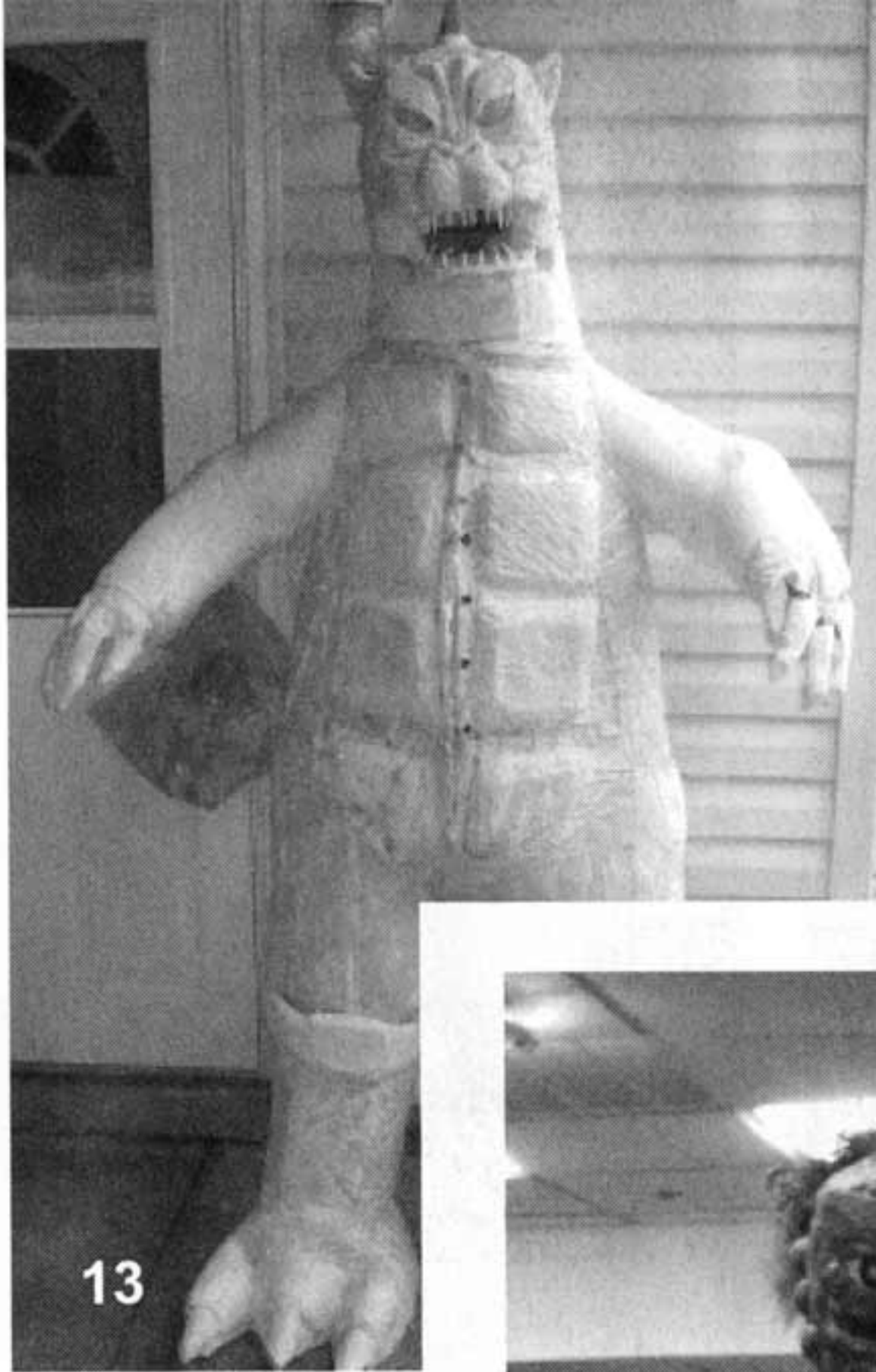
At this point, the suit is ready for latex and paint (pic 13). The arms were finished with two more cylinders for the forearms. I admit, I cheated on the hands. I just added small foam cones as claws to the end of a pair of lightly rubberized gloves I picked up at a dollar store. Thin foam panels were added as abdominal muscles.

A lower jaw was added, along with plastic teeth from a jungle necklace (\$4, Party City). The head wasn't permanently attached to the neck because it had to be detachable in order for the suit to meet the airline's space requirements for luggage. The head slides into the neck like a peg.

I added some electronics to give it a little oomph. An opaque horn (\$10, PC again) filled with a fiber optics wand (\$1, PC) atop the head replicates Gabera's own glowing appendage. To complete the ef-



11



fect of his electrical power, I purchased some blue fiber optics wire (\$6) with a control unit that fit inside the right glove (\$8.50) from Funhouse Productions, a web company that deals in all kinds of light gadgets. The unit connected up the right arm, across the back and down the left arm to three one foot pieces that fed through a poked hole in the left hand. When activated, the fiber cord would flash on and off with a blue light. Since Minya wasn't available to fry, kids volunteered to be faux-electrocuted at G-FEST.

Gabera's roar was simulated from a Toho soundtrack (thanks Dutch!) played through a MP3 player attached to a 4 watt speaker system (\$25 Radio Shack). Just plug and play. No special wiring. The speaker was placed in a pocket inside the neck.

To provide Gabera's skin texture, I used two inch dylite (a denser Styrofoam available through many web stores) spheres cut in half and glued. I got the idea from anime cosplay fans that use dylite for costume parts and weapons.

I matched Gabera's color by bringing a picture to Home Depot and had them mix up a gallon of flat latex paint (\$8). It doesn't take much to color liquid latex. The proportion is about a quarter part paint to latex (pic 14). About five coats were added using about two and a half gallons of latex.

Some thin brass yarn (\$2) for hair and black spray paint for highlights (I recommend using an air brush for better results) finished the job. The finished suit at G-FEST XV (pic 15).

To transport the suit, the head was placed inside the torso and suit was rolled in cheap shrinkwrap (available at Staples). The feet were rolled up also as a separate package. Again check with your airline for luggage requirements.

In total, Gabera took about a month and a half of time (after work and weekends) and about \$225 to make. Your suit may not cost as much, but the more time you spend the better. The method isn't difficult at all. It's fun to do and when finished, not only will you have a cool costume but a 7 ft action figure, as well. Beat that, Bandai!

I hope you'll try this process (or another) to build your own kaiju. As for me, I'm thinking about a Mechanikong suit. See ya at G-FEST!

END

