"SO YA WANNA BE A KAIJU..."

Making a Monster Costume

by Dawn McKechnie

As a fans of the kaiju genre, I'm sure at one time or another we have all thought it would be cool to be our favorite monster, just for a day. Perhaps it is such thoughts that inspire us to create and wear costumes of our most beloved beasts, particularly to participate in a costume event such as the one held each year at G-FEST.

Last year there were fourteen costume entries at G-FEST, a record number. This year promises even more, and it will likely be the year that the costuming event takes off and comes into its own, much as Stan Hyde's model thread has. In fact, making and displaying a costume is not unlike creating a scratch-build model. And in the end, you can actually "be" your creation.

However, while many might dream of participating in the costume event, actually stepping up to the plate and doing so can be intimidating. The purpose of this article is to reduce that intimidation, by offering ideas for costumes and strategies for their creation. If you've ever toyed with the idea, keep an open mind, and read on...

There is no solid, tried and true method for making monster costumes. There are as many approaches as there are people making them. Through the format of question and answer, I want to share with you some of my own thoughts, experiences, and techniques in kaiju building, in hopes that someday (soon?) you will be sharing with me your own.

Question: I would like to do a costume for G-FEST, but how do I get started?
**Answer**: Getting started is by far the hardest part of making any costume. It's intimidating, especially if you've never done it before. But never fear! Both your talent and confidence will grow with each step you take toward a finished project. Making a kaiju is a lot like being a mad scientist. There will be lots of trial and error, and you'll have to experiment with different materials and techniques. But you will find that each success offers a great sense of accomplishment.

Chances are, if you are thinking of making a costume for competition, you probably already have some idea of what you would like to build. Perhaps you have a favorite monster, or there is a particular character's costume that you have always admired and would like to re-create. Or it may be that you have your own original kaiju design you would like the world to see. Whatever your motivation I suggest you begin with *Research*.

Research, especially in re-creation costumes, is essential for getting the information that will make your costume a success. When
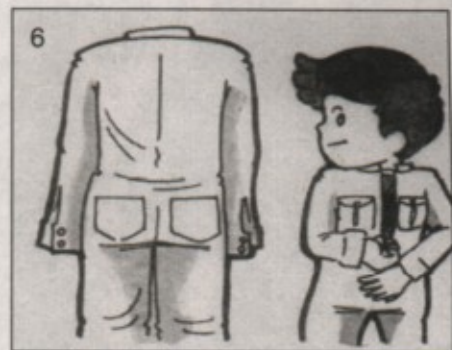
researching your character, you can focus on and define all the details that make your character unique. Most of us know what our favorite characters look like, but there are few of us who can actually tell all the details off the top of our heads. For example, how many stripes did the original Mothra have on her butt end? See? When all the little details of what makes your character unique come together, the results will be impressive. Attention to detail can separate a great costume from a mediocre one.

Even with your own original designs, research is important. You can often avoid serious mistakes or delays in construction, or learn valuable tricks, by reading about the experiences of others. In the case of kaiju, it is exceptionally handy to see how the orginal suits fitted together.

Books and websites with both pictures and tutorials are excellent sources for research. (There is a Yahoo group devoted to monster costume creation; from there, the members can offer assistance or provide links to other helpful websites. Check out http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MonsterCostumeMakers/)

The movies themselves are good reference. I like to sketch out characters while I'm watching a film. I personally love using toys for reference whenever I can. Toys are great because they provide a full turn around of what the character looks like from all points-of-view. They are basically a mini-version of what you are trying to make. Beware when using this method though. Often toys are somewhat inaccurate due to cost-cutting, bad-sculpting and mispaints. It's best to check against the movie or photo reference for overall accuracy.

Question: Doesn't a costume have to be fairly

elaborate?

Answer: No, what counts is getting involved in the fun. Some people do elaborate costumes. Last G-FEST saw fantastic Mechanikong, Rodan, Mechagodzilla, and Angilas costumes, not to mention my own Godzilla. But you don't have to go that route. We also has Goro and Ruku-san from *Godzilla vs Megalon*, and a Black Hole Alien from *Godzilla vs Mechagodzilla*. In the past there has been a Raymond Burr as Steve Martin costume.

Possibly the greatest impediment to participation is the same thing that ruins high school "dress-up" days: the fear that dressing up will invite ridicule. Actually, the more likely reaction is envy, as in, "Gee, I wish I'd gotten involved." And the more people that participate, the more fun it becomes.

There are lots of characters in the Godzilla movies that lend themselves to impersonation, without having to resort to creating a Ghidorah costume. There are the aliens: Xians, Kilaaks, and Black Hole Apes, all instantly recognizable by their garb or appearance. The Mysterians are also very unique. Don't forget the Seatopians. Even many of the human characters are memorable: Agent SSS9 from *Godzilla vs Biollante*, the hippie from *Godzilla vs Gigan*, Dr. Asimov from *Godzilla vs Mechagodzilla 2*, the Peanuts, the Cosmos, Agent Nanbara from *Godzilla vs Mechagodzilla*, Katsura from *Terror of Mechagodzilla*, or Miss Namikawa from *Invasion of Astro-Monster*, the Science Patrol members.... The possibilities are practically endless!

Question: What is the difference between a "hall costume" and "competition costume"?

Illustrations: Godzilla in twelve "easy" steps! 1. Create the basic shape of the head out of a lightweight material, such as styrofoam blocks glued together. 2. Sculpt the features of the head. 3. Create the surface texture with a latex material. 4. Carve claws, horns, teeth, fins, etc. 5. Make the hands from gloves, attaching claws with glue. 6. Use coveralls, back to front, for the basic suit. 7. Build up the suit by attaching foam blocks in appropriate areas. 8. Refine the shape of the body. 9. Cover with a cloth skin. 10. Create surface texture with foam latex or similar material. 11. Paint the suit. 12. Attach the head, and climb in! (Have someone around to help you climb out!)

Answer: In the parlance of science fiction/fantasy/anime conventions, there are two kinds of costumes: those worn for competition at the masqurade, and those worn just for the fun of it. The latter are collectively called "hall costumes." You will often find costumers wearing versions of old costumes around the halls. Some people have costumes just for the purpose of wearing about all day. Often they will wear a costume for the whole duration of the convention, and yet show a completely different costume in the masquerade itself. Often, even dealers and concom staff will wear hall costumes while performing their other duties. Hall costumes help enliven the convention atmosphere and inject fun and humor into the day's events. And who can resist a snapshot with their favorite kaiju or Lovely Lady?

There are a few conventions which do