

Fiberglas Mask

e shooting. "Alec came up to me one day, and said 'Guess what? I'm going to get killed.' I asked him *when*, and he looked quite puzzled and said 'I don't really know.' The whole film went like that."

Looking back, says Daniels, he's amazed at how well the film turned out. And, he adds, very proud. "I think that George did a very difficult thing very well. He's certainly earned any laurels he gets from the film."

Daniels says that Lucas arranged for a private screening of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* before his troupe left for their first Tunisian locations.

"It seemed to me before, and it was certainly reinforced by the screening, that the real hero of that film was Douglas Rain, the Canadian actor who plays the voice of HAL, the computer. Every time I see a red light flashing in a recording studio, signifying that a session is taking place, I am reminded of that scene where HAL is finally turned off. It's amazing — in that film, all you have is a light and a voice, and ever since then you've had people discussing HAL's character. When we were discussing voices for 3P0, the first reference we had for what a robot sounded like was Rain.

"Now, if you've seen *Star Wars*, you realize that what we've done for 3P0 is turn HAL around. 3P0 is always on the verge of being hysterical, and HAL is always very calm — everything that happens, no matter how drastic, he sees it as just another problem that must be surmounted, and treats it very calmly and wastes no energy. Even at the end when he's being suffocated, HAL merely suggests that it's hurting him — at the same volume and in the same tone of voice that he would give any other communication. In the same position, 3P0 would be beating the ground, saying 'I give in, I give in!' He wouldn't want to be hurt. He wouldn't even like thinking about the chance of being hurt."

Though Daniels was the C3P0 character through the film's shooting, it became clear that there was a question as to whether his would be the voice of the robot. "We all knew from the beginning that all of the voices would have to be dubbed in later. There was no way that I could be heard clearly through the mouthpiece in the head. I'd have to shout to get anything across, and even that would be muffled.

"On the other hand, 3P0 is so much of a character that the body, voice, and even his attitude are integrated. It would be impossible for me to do one without the others. So I read all of the lines, in character, while we were shooting.

"As time wore on, I would ask when we were going to do the dubbing. And the answers that [producer] Gary Kurtz gave me were always very evasive. It wasn't until after the film was released that I found out that George had auditioned thirty other actors for their voices before deciding to use mine, after all."

A number of other actors fared less well; many of the lesser characters' voices were dubbed by anonymous actors with American accents. "... in order to smooth out the sound. We wound up with Alec Guinness, Peter Cushing and myself speaking English, if you see what I mean, and the rest doing whatever you Americans do with the language." Though British actor David Prowse is given screen credit as the evil war lord Darth Vader, and Prowse does wear the suit throughout the picture, the dubbed voice is that of James Earl Jones — one of the worst-kept secrets in cinema history.

Daniels' costume took several months to build; even so, he refers to it as a "rush job." He was nearly stripped, and then wrapped in wet plaster from which a life-sized mold was eventually made. *Star Wars*' costume designers then built the C3P0 suit to fit him exactly. Or as exactly as the materials could be made.

The suit itself was something out of *The Wizard of Oz*. Built for appearance first, with comfort of only secondary importance, it was constructed of Fiberglas, aluminum, rubber, cloth, and plastic. The eye assemblies alone give some idea of the complexity involved: in front were gold slats, which Daniels describes as "vertical venetian blinds." Behind those were three little light bulbs, backed by a reflecting mirror. Behind that was a colored lens, behind that a black background, and behind that, Daniels' eye. The entire assembly was 1½ inches thick, with only a tiny pinpoint for the actor to see through — straight ahead.



"The result was sometimes quite amusing. It was absolute tunnel vision. So I would sometimes miss the mark where I was supposed to stop, and then wander away randomly looking for it. Or talk to somebody who might have wandered away minutes before."

The rest of 3P0's body offered little more mobility. The chest and back pieces were Fiberglas, with aluminum shoulders and arms. His cotton gloves had plastic backs, steel fingers, and many decorative wires. Around his stomach was something that Daniels refers to distastefully as "a sort of rubber corset — very good for slimming, as it was always quite hot inside." He wore plastic shorts, and Fiberglas legs and feet.

"Even after you've gotten over the claustrophobia and have learned how to move — very slowly — there's still the physical pain. The costume was very tight: if I'd gained a pound, I wouldn't have been able to fit into it. And, it was very heavy. But it was also very stiff. Those heavy leg pieces would bear into the shoes like knife edges of Fiberglas. The first time I put on the suit took four hours. It was our first location, I was only able to walk a few steps without having to stop altogether. The pain was unbearable. Eventually, at least some of those discomforts were seen to, though it was still hot, heavy, and difficult to move."

Even the slightest movement became an effort for Daniels. And so he takes pride in actions that may slip by any but the most careful viewer. "Mark asks me to pick up a pair of handcuffs, and I turn around and pick them up. It's all very neat, and takes place in a couple of seconds. What people don't realize is that for half an hour I stood there, moving backwards and forwards, placing the handcuffs exactly where I wanted them to be when I turned around. Of course, viewers aren't supposed to know how difficult that was. But I think that it was wonderful."

If C3P0 was difficult for all concerned, his companion, R2D2, was all but impossible. Fans call R2 "an endearing, talking fire plug," and consider the squat robot to be a Stan Laurel to C3P0's Oliver Hardy. To the crew, R2 wasn't all that cute, and anything but funny.

There were three R2s, says Daniels, each presenting its own particular set of problems. The first was, like 3P0, fit to contain a man; in this case the actor was a midget, Kenny Baker.

But even with a man inside, R2 was less than completely mobile. "He was able to rock the robot from side to side," Daniels explains, "or move the head around a bit. Or, he could push an arm out a bit, after which a man with a hydraulic

arrangement would push it out the rest of the way — which was invariably too far."

The second R2D2 was a totally empty shell, pulled by a lengthy cable. It's the model that is seen early on, when R2 and 3P0 are crossing the desert. What is not seen is the cable breaking every so often.

The third R2 was radio controlled, by an operator standing a few feet away with a remote-control transmitter. "I think that there must have been a lot of interference on the set from walkie-talkies that the crew were using for communication. And they were giving the remote-control R2 'headaches' that were sending him berserk.

"It was like a lottery, guessing what R2 was going to do. Generally, though, it was the opposite of what it was supposed to. If he was supposed to go left, R2 would go right — and often into me. Other times, he'd walk into a wall."

To the great relief of all concerned, *Star Wars* technicians have since come up with a fourth R2: one that works accurately by remote control. This is the model used for personal appearances, and would presumably be featured in any *Star Wars* sequels.

And what of *Star Wars*' sequel? Daniels says enigmatically that he "has been approached." But would he be interested in such a project?

"I can't honestly say that I would be anxious to repeat the physical hardship that went on throughout the project. On the other hand, it would probably be possible now to construct a C3P0 suit that would look like the old one, but which would be more comfortable to wear and easier to move around."

And what about money? Is that a major consideration?

"I was never too good at negotiations; that's why I have an agent. On the other hand, I don't want the producers to think that I'd do the part for practically nothing... a second time. But really, the most important thing for an actor is to be working."

Daniels pauses, and smiles with a slightly evil sweetness. "Have I made myself clear?"

Del Porter's first appearance was in Keynotes, the Capitol Record Club magazine-catalog, back in 1968. He hasn't looked back since.