Monster-movie fans, does the phrase “man in a suit” hold a special place in your heart? Then the feature-length documentary MEN IN SUITS needs to be on your radar! Wyrd Studios and director Frank H. Woodward have crafted a fun, educational and loving tribute to “suit performers,” as the documentary refers to them—people whom the film industry doesn’t quite consider actors, yet are responsible for bringing to vivid life our favorite practical screen creatures.

The documentary has been shot and edited, but there’s still a ways to go in terms of sound mixing, color correction and other fine details, so the producers are raising postproduction funds via Kickstarter (see details below). The project is a genuine labor of lover for director Woodward, whose passion for the subject, he tells Fango, “started with monsters. I wanted to do something about them, but anybody can just do a documentary on monsters, and there have been many makeup documentaries. So when we were looking for a new angle, suits is where we ended up!"

Woodward marvels at the unique position of suit performers in pop culture, reflecting, “You look at the Creature from the Black Lagoon, Godzilla, Robby the Robot, C-3PO, Chewbacca, Predator, Alien…these guys are as big as Indiana Jones or James Bond, and nobody knows who they are!” Woodward's camera captures everyone from Guillermo del Toro and his monster regulars, Brian Steele and the inimitable Doug Jones, to TV’s GHOST BUSTERS gorilla performer Bob Burns, original Godzilla Haruo Nakajima, Stan Winston protégé and xenomorph/Pumpkinhead performer Tom Woodruff Jr. and many, many others. Topics include the most obscure goofy dinosaur suits in THE LAND UNKNOWN, the Gorn from STAR TREK, Rick Baker’s ape creations, the late Kevin Peter Hall (the eponymous performer of PREDATOR and HARRY AND THE HENDERSONS) and more.

The performers’ difficulties and rewards of being in the suit are discussed in a good-natured but honest fashion, with the rigamarole of lugging around hundreds of pounds of rubber and trying to make it look natural a must-watch for anyone interested in pursuing this kind of work. The interviews are intercut with suit performer Douglas Tait as his costume from Joe Lynch’s upcoming KNIGHTS OF BADASSDOM evolves from a spongy bodysuit to a fully articulated demon, giving the audience a first-hand look at the process of creating and inhabiting a monster. There’s also a straightforward and pragmatic discussion of suit work in the age of CGI, which the interviewees both defend and criticize as an overused tool.

Producer William Janczewski chimes in on behalf of modern suit work, saying, “I think the problem with CGI, as good as it is today, is that by tomorrow it’s going to feel cold. Because it’s going for this illusion of reality, but with the suits there’s something organic you buy into.” Woodward agrees, stating, “When it’s real, you can imagine it on the street. When you know it’s CGI, you know it can’t follow you home.”

Not that the documentary or its creators feel the need to pit CGI and practical against each other. “I share the feeling, which I’ve heard from just about everyone who does this sort of thing, that to do it right means a combination of practical and digital,” the director affirms. “There’s a saying in performing magic that ‘The trick to a magic trick is to not do it twice.’ Movies that mix up practical and CGI are the ones really pulling off an illusion.” The documentary itself addresses the need for suit performers even for exclusively CGI creations, as it features scenes on a motion-capture soundstage, where the performer is still integral.

It all adds up to essential viewing for anyone who loves creature FX, and if you count yourself among them and want to see the film completed, go to MEN IN SUITS’ Kickstarter page and make an investment and learn more about the sweet incentives that await your participation. “The donations equal a pre-order, if you want to look at it like that,” chuckles Woodward. So if this flick sounds up your alley, make your contribution today with the satisfaction of knowing you’re helping to ensure its place on your DVD shelf.