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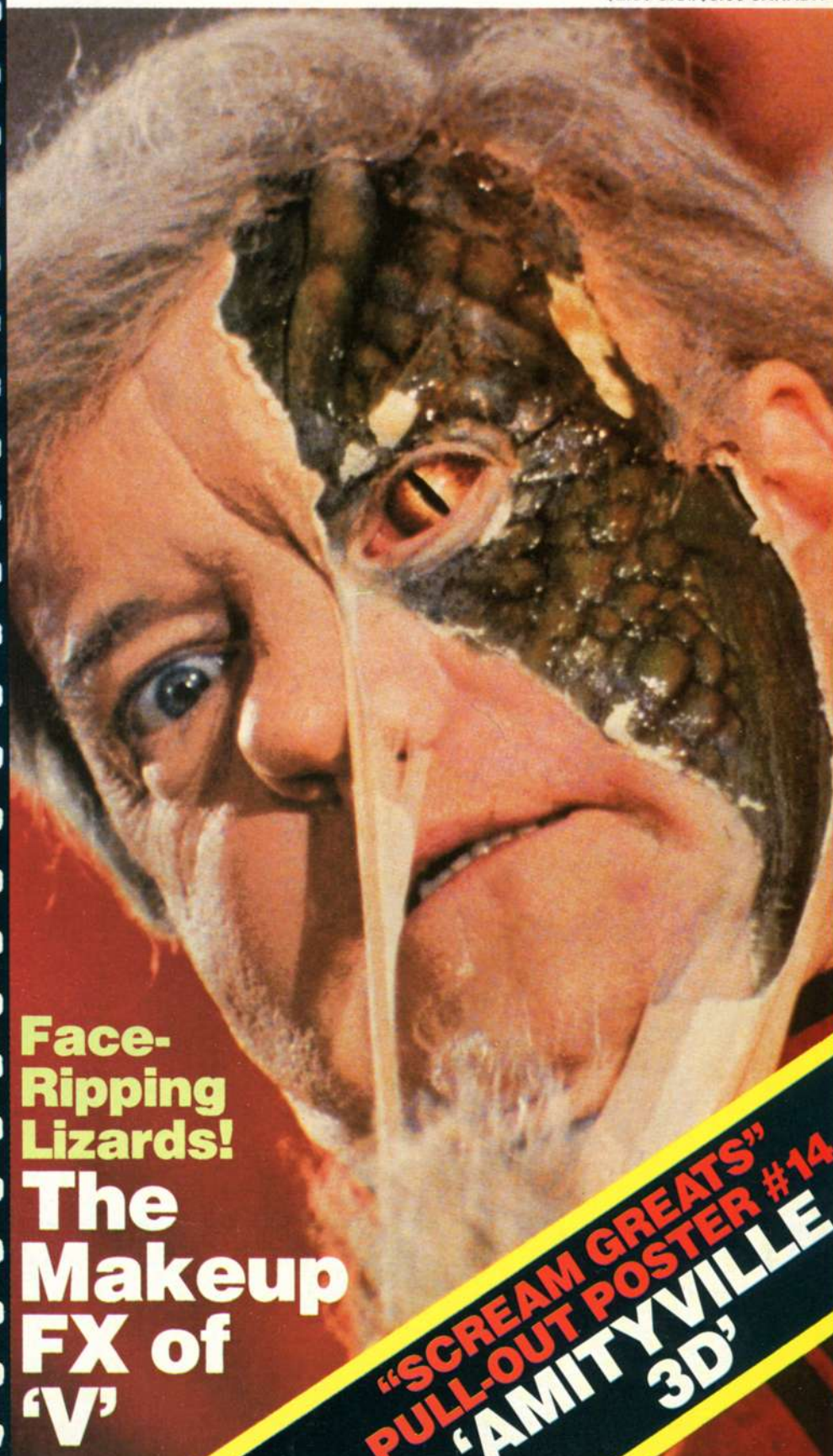
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Only a Movie!
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The Monster Chef: Randy Cook

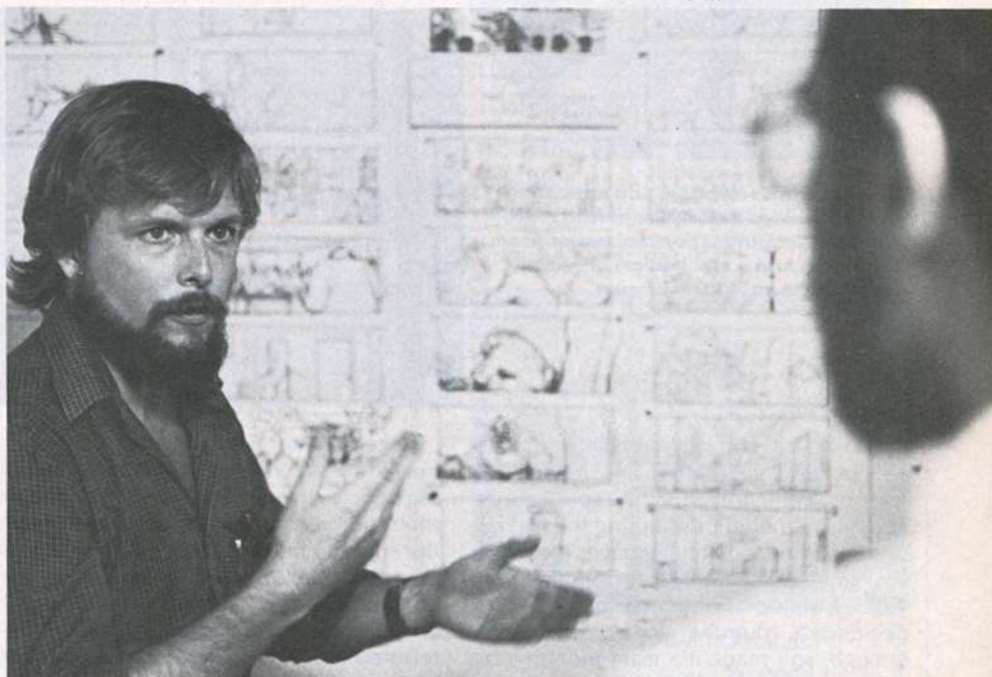
After seeing his work for *The Thing* clipped, Cook comes into his own with work for *Ghostbusters*!

By R.H. Martin

There aren't many prehistoric adventure films worse than *The Lost Continent*. Even so, we must acknowledge some sort of debt to this abysmal film, because it's the one that got young Randy Cook hooked on dinosaurs—an addiction that led, inevitably, inexorably, to his current status as one of Hollywood's leading stop motion animators. "I have a very strong memory of seeing the triceratops kill Sid Melton," Cook recalls. "I'd like to say that I remember noting the very inferior effects work, but I didn't. It was fascinating to me. Then I had an even greater realization, when I was seven years old and my grandfather took me to see *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*. I was awed; not just due to Ray Harryhausen's artistry, but by the colors and the Bernard Herrmann score. Everything in that film worked together in just the right way to excite a child's imagination.

"Like any child, I did my best to get as much attention as possible. I found, in various phases of my childhood, that different things would bring me different degrees of praise. I started drawing early on, when I was about five, and that, I found, would encourage adults to smack their hands together and bring compliments for my ability, so I kept it up.

"But what got me really interested in movies was something I came across in an



Cook reviews the storyboards for *Ghostbusters*' terror dog sequences.

old encyclopedia. It had an entry on Lon Chaney, a two-page spread that included perhaps a dozen different photographs of Chaney in various makeups. It was a stunning realization, to see all these different makeups—as a delicate-looking mandarin in *Mr. Wu*, as a brutish hunchback—and

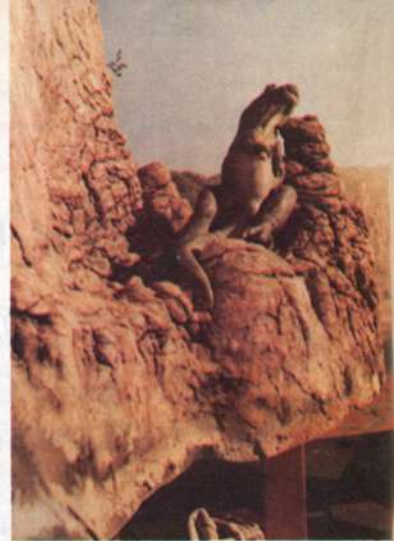
know that this was the same man. That was really interesting to me, so I started working with makeup, which led me into sculpting. That, in turn, eventually got me started with stop motion animation, which had previously been a passive interest of mine."

The animator at work, left, and the Cook version of Carpenter's *The Thing*.





Cook at work sculpting, and animating the terror dogs before the blue screen. Far right, tyrannosaurus animation from *Caveman*, and a mechanical bug-eyed Gerber tyke built for *Hishman*.



Cook's first stop motion epic, shot with an old brownie, starred a wooden ball-and-socket manniken, of the sort used by artists as a model in sculpting the human form. "I wrapped it in bandages that I had soaked in tea to 'age' them," Cook recalls, "and sculpted a clay face for it. Then I decided a mummy wasn't interesting enough, so I made it a giant mummy, by cutting pictures from magazines of trees and buildings, and pasting these onto a backdrop.

"Naturally, the result showed *no promise whatsoever*. But it *ved!* Sometimes it even moved the way that I'd intended it to move, and doing it was an awful lot of fun, so I kept at it. I refined my technique somewhat, and eventually stepped up to some slightly better equipment."

During Cook's late teens, his stop motion experiments slowed to a halt, as he pursued his other interests; acting, makeup and cartooning. "And at that time," recalls Cook, "I fell in love with filmmaking itself, and enrolled at UCLA as a film major."

During and after college, Cook began a directorial career in the customary manner, taking on various small assignments. "I directed a few educational films for the state of California, dramatic documentaries," he says. "Basically they were recruiting films, designed to encourage kids to enter certain fields; psychiatric technician was one such field. Another was designed to show that California's teacher retirement system was the best darn retirement system going—propaganda films, really. My partner and I did them with very short schedules and budgets, with uneven but promising results.

"Shortly after I was out of college, I heard through a friend that Disney was hiring people. I applied, and found myself in their animators' training program, under the supervision of Eric Larson, one of the grand old men of that studio, and a hell of a great guy. Eric knew that, even though I could draw, I was a great deal more interested in the live action end of filmmaking; so, when word came down that they needed an artist with a knack for personality to work on one of the *Herbie* pictures, Eric recommended me.

"So I switched over to a live action unit, doing storyboards and coming up with gags and personality bits for *Herbie Goes To Monte Carlo*. The Disney people were, I felt, very generous in terms of giving all the young talent there a chance to contribute. I wasn't exactly writing the movie, but I was contributing ideas, which were *usually* met with a reasonable amount of receptivity. But, at one those meetings, I also learned that one doesn't disagree with Ron Miller [Disney Chairman of the Board], and you certainly don't make any attempt to argue with him, or stick to your guns on an issue, no matter how correct you may feel yourself to be. So, not long after, I left Disney."

Once at liberty, Cook again began pursuing disparate leads that might bring him closer to the realization of his filmmaking ambitions. One apparently heaven-sent opportunity presented itself in mid-1975; a friend of Cook's who was attending Harvard College told him about another student, a well-to-do sort who was looking for a film project in which to invest.

"I called David Allen [the stop motion animator, profiled in issue #8], whom I'd

met and gotten to know shortly after I'd come to California," says Cook, "and asked if he was still interested in getting his old project *The Raiders of the Stone Ring* going. David gave me the script, but said that he felt that it had dated in the five years or so since he's last worked on it. He'd done an outline, though, for a new script, using some of the same creatures, but changing the concept from a 1912 period film with biplanes and derring-do, to a contemporary action picture concerning the quest for the abominable snowman, entitled *The Primevals*. At our first meeting, I made a few suggestions for the script that David liked, so we decided that we could work together on the script.

"While we were working on that, I found myself spending a fair amount of time around David's shop. On one occasion, he was animating some test footage with some wonderful lizardmen puppets; I asked him if I might try animating one shot, just for the hell of it—since I'd pretty much abandoned stop motion in my late teens, I had never worked with anything quite so 'professional' as these puppets.

"The little bit I'd done turned out looking pretty good, and Dave and I started working together in an animation capacity. Unfortunately, the upshot of the *Primevals* project was that this fellow from Harvard got himself into trouble when it was discovered that he'd enrolled in the college by using forged transcripts—and this was the *second time* he'd been booted out of Harvard for the same reasons. There was quite a scandal, and I think the last I heard was that he was hitting the high seas..."

The Primevals thereafter became a

perennial project of Charles Band, one often announced in the past seven years, but never actually getting as far as production. Cook, however, continued working on staff with David Allen through various projects utilizing stop motion, including *Crater Lake Monster*, *Laserblast*, and *The Day Time Ended*.

Cook's first work on a major effects picture came with United Artist's *Caveman*, where he worked on the animation staff headed by Jim Danforth and David Allen, oft described as a "difficult" project. "Difficult is a redundancy," says Cook, "since any major picture using effects has its difficulties; that will always be so. Producers will continue to set ridiculously optimistic deadlines for completion, and effects men will invariably agree to deliver according to such schedules, resulting in bedlam and manic last-minute maneuvering to get a picture finished."

It was such a situation that led Danforth to leave the effects in the hands of David Allen and crew, as he went on to join Ray Harryhausen's *Clash of the Titans* team. "David Allen did a marvelous job of supervision, and keeping things running smoothly, after Jim left," says Cook. "But I think that many people remain unaware that those dinosaurs are Jim's. Certainly a lot of their charm came from the animation, but so much of it also comes from the look of the creatures, particularly the tyrannosaurus. While Jim didn't actually animate any of the tyrannosaurus shots that were in the film, he made a major contribution to the characters of all of the creatures in the film through his designs. It's like a good director being presented with Oliver Hardy; given the character, you have a pretty good idea of just what can be done, where to go with it." [Danforth holds forth on himself and Hollywood in an exclusive interview in CINEMAGIC #27.]

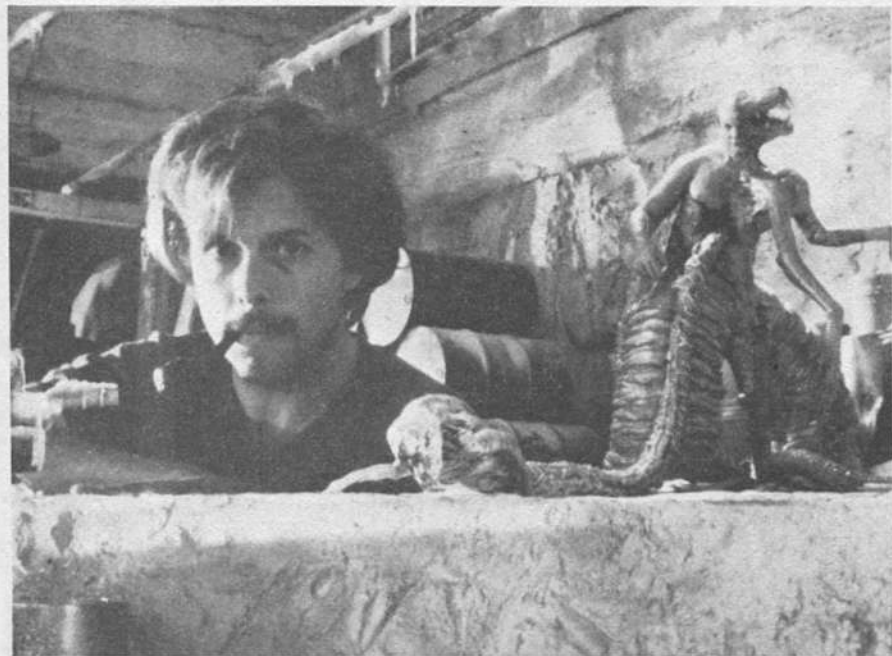
It was Cook's longstanding acquaintance with a young effects man named Rob Bottin that led to his assignment as stop motion animator on John Carpenter's *The Thing*, shortly after completion of *Caveman*. Some years before, Cook had painted several of the appliances used for Bottin's apesuit featured in *Tanya's Island*. Later, for *The Howling*, Bottin had enlisted Cook to design the werewolf incarnation of Dee Wallace, which Cook describes as "a drag queen version of Jean Marais' makeup in *Beauty and the Beast*."

"So Rob called me to ask if I was interested in working on *The Thing*, doing various designs for it, some sculpting and what-have-you. A few weeks later, though, funding came through for a low-budget horror script called *Graveyard Shift* that I had co-written with another fellow, Steve Neilson, so I left *The Thing* in order to attend a battery of meetings with this financier. But, to use a phrase about as familiar in Hollywood as 'let's meet for lunch'... the deal fell through."

Cook moved on to Q, another project with David Allen. "We finished that up in January, and shortly after that I was contacted by Rob to do some animation for *The Thing*." The fact that stop motion was going to be used to supplement the on-set effects by Bottin and Arbogast was first reported in our February, 1982 issue, #17; but we later found that everyone involved was vehement in denying that any such effects were in preparation. Was Cook advised that his part in the film was to be kept secret? "I know they wanted to be secretive about it," says Cook. "But I have no idea why. They were ready to give me a nice credit at the end, so I can't imagine why they felt it should have been so secret."

The shots that Cook prepared for the film were designed in collaboration with Bottin and concept/storyboard artists Mike Ploog

Cook poses with his *Thing* model, revealing its rather tiny scale.





Motion control devices aid in the flight of the terror dogs.

Unfortunately, little of Cook's animation was included in the film. Cook's work does appear in the tentacle-action that occurs shortly after the buckling of the generator room floor, and the snake-tentacled creature that breaks through the floor is also his. But none of Cook's most elaborate work—for the Blair sequence—was included. "John Carpenter was certainly gentlemanly enough, and considerate enough, to call me up and tell me that these three cuts would not be in the picture. It was his feeling that the two things [Rob Bottin's full-scale version of the "thing" popping from Blair's body, and Cook's version] really did not look that much alike, and therefore wouldn't cut together."

and Mentor Huebner. "When I came in, the basics were already designed—a semi-digested man emerging from Blair, with a dog coming out of his stomach, sort of a barking intestine," says Cook. "Rob and I then had several meetings where additions were made, such as the mouth at the side of its head, various little things to push it, make it even more different. I drew up

Early maskwork for Dave Allen's ill-fated *Primevals* project.



some sketches from these discussions, and then John okayed the final concept."

Cook's model was built *before* the full-scale creature had been constructed, and some alternations in design occurred after the animation model had been built and photographed. "The full-size puppet was built by so many diverse hands, and without Rob's supervision—Rob was in the hospital for a brief time—that it didn't match too terribly well. I felt that, since the creature had demonstrated its amorphous nature to such a great extent already, those differences would be not at all crucial to the believability of the sequence. But John felt otherwise, and it was his picture.

"But I am my own toughest critic, and it still mystifies me; two out of the three cuts that they chose to omit are quite believable. Every artist does work at times that is not up to his or her normal standard, because inspiration really does play a major part in putting over technique. But these cuts were technically as good as anything I'd ever done.

"But, while I was bitterly disappointed, working with John Carpenter was a *dream*. He's a very nice guy, and an exciting person to work around."

Whatever disappointments attended Cook's work on *The Thing* didn't amount to a hill of beans stacked next to the headaches attending his next project, the TV pilot *Wishman*. "What can I say?" Cook inquires. "It was... it was... a TV pilot. There are those experiences one has in life where the elements involved get so completely out of the range of tolerability that one has no choice but to label the entire range of events as part of what is called 'a learning experience.' *Wishman* was a learning experience for me, though at this point I am not at all sure just what lesson I can gather from it all."

Cook is reluctant to speak further on the subject, in part fearing that he might lose his temper and say all sorts of legally actionable things about certain parties in-

volved. However, in speaking with other parties (including Rick Stratton, interviewed elsewhere here), we have gleaned the following:

The proposed series was to concern a clean-cut scientist employed by a highly advanced genetic engineering outfit engaged in experiments to produce a semi-human life-form useful as a source of slave labor. The scientist, much too nice a guy to be involved in such nasty work, develops an affection for a cute little critter, the "wishman" of the title, who is considered an experimental failure and has been tagged for vivisection in order to determine just what went wrong. After rescuing the little bugger from the lab, the good-guy scientist discovers that the little dude has a unique ability to interfere with power currents, hence capable of wreaking havoc with all things electrical.

Cook is credited with the design of *Wishman* in the pilot's credits, but the creature appearing in the film ("that rubber horror," Cook calls it) is a far cry from anything Cook came up with. Early on, the design control that Cook was promised was wrested away. Cook's plan, following the script, was to devise a mature, yet loveable alien; others in the production insisted on a Gerber-baby cutie pie with antennae. Ultimately, the compromise design was further undermined. Says Rick Stratton, "When the director saw the little woman in the full body suit, he decided that she was too big, and another, smaller woman was brought in to play the role." There was no time to cast the second actress for another suit, so only the head of the baby suit was used, with the rest turned over to the costume department. Since the head was made to fit the first actress, it was impossible to get a decent fit on the second actress, with predictably horrid results. "By this time, everybody on the crew had decided to chalk the whole thing up to experience," says Stratton, echoing Cook's words.

Cook's recent work on *Ghostbusters* went a long way toward clearing the gall from Cook's tortured tastebuds. A recommendation from veteran Lucasfilm animator Phil Tippett resulted in Cook's recruitment to the Edlund team, operating in the newly-expanded facilities of Douglas Trumbull's EEG shop. "We set up a whole 'monster shop' there with Stewart Ziff—Steve Johnson, working on the onionhead ghost, Billy Brian doing the marshmallow man, myself doing the terror dogs, with a massive support group, including the folks scaling up the full-sized dogs from my puppet. All of this was under one roof, in half of the building that we shared with Mark Stetson's miniature shop.

"There was considerable debate at the outset as to how much, if any, stop motion should be used for the terror dogs—the usual worries about matching stop motion to full-size puppets. As a result, I think we shot a little less stop motion than might

(Continued on page 64)

Randy Cook

(Continued from page 48)

have been used; but, when it turned out so well, we actually shot more than anyone had expected at the start. I think there were about 14 stop motion cuts in the picture."

The designs for the terror dogs, like most of the creature designs, were derived from dozens of preliminary concept sketches worked up by Berni Wrightson and Tom Enriquez. "The producers had settled on a particular drawing by Enriquez that made them happy," says Cook, "but which was not very useful in terms of producing a believable creature. It was a good illustration, but it was a better guide to feeling than to specifics. In a way, it was like looking at a sketch of a building in order to determine where the plumbing would be."

Cook's adaptation of the terror dog design into three-dimensional form was executed with the continuing input of Richard Edlund, art director Michael Gross and others. "But it was light years away from the situation on *Wishman*, where the producers would stand over me and say, 'bring the muzzle down—make the eyes bigger—make the dimples cuter' . . . instead they gave me more suggestions, and let me take my own lead from there. Their chief concern was that it retain the look of ferocity that the sketches had."

Cook's animating team consisted of himself, Jim Aupperle, and Michael F. Hoover, the latter serving as computer operator. While the computers were capable of making some puppet movements with the lens opened, thus creating a controlled amount of blur, the set-up was a good deal less sophisticated than the "go-motion" system used by Lucasfilm for *Dragonslayer*.

Recently, many in the field have expressed doubt as to the future of stop-motion, particularly the conventional, "hand-made" style, which, it is said, will soon be totally replaced by computer-aided techniques. "I don't know about that," says Cook. "Right now, the three biggest films of the summer—*Indiana Jones*, *Gremlins* and *Ghostbusters*—all have stop motion, all done in the 'old-fashioned' way; and I understand there's stop motion in *Never Ending Story* as well. If you have an animator who can do work that is believable, then these elaborate systems may not take over as quickly as others may expect."

"Stop motion seems to be having a renaissance right now, and deservedly so, I think. Of all the techniques used in a center-stage situation, to create a totally new form of life, stop motion is the best of an imperfect lot. It allows a creature to walk, jump, fly, change forms; it allows a creature to behave according to natural physics, or any set of unnatural physical laws the animator would care to impose. All the other techniques have their own specific, unique purposes, but stop motion is the only one with so broad a range."

Library

Marquette

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