

THE LOST WORLD

CGI and robotics combine to bring those terrible lizards back to life.

There is a belief that a battle is under way in filmmaking: traditional special effects versus computer generated imagery. Nothing could be further from the truth. If anything, they are a close team. In *THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK*, Dennis Murren oversaw CGI, and Stan Winston handled the physical effects. Both had one goal, according to Winston: "We're not creating effects," he said. "We're creating actors."

For Winston, this has always been a goal. "I was inspired by a number of people," he said. "Definitely I was inspired by Ray Harryhausen, but I was also inspired by Spencer Tracy playing Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Charles Laughton playing the Hunchback of Notre Dame. I was inspired by great performances of fantastic characters. Those performances have been created by effects artists, by actors, and by great filmmakers."

Both Winston and Murren worked on the first *JURASSIC PARK*, a film which set new standards for dinosaur performances on screen. The question, then, was: What did they hope to accomplish that they hadn't the first time around? Well, there are new dinosaurs—including a family of tyrannosaurs (papa, moma, and baby), a pachycephalosaur, a dead parasaurolophus, and an adult and baby stegosaurus.

"It's more; it's bigger; and it's better!" enthused Winston, with a laugh. "The question always comes to me: After you do *JURASSIC PARK*, how can



One of Stan Winston's 15,000-pound live-action tyrannosaurs bears down on Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum) and Sarah Harding (Julianne Moore).

you top it? Well—we did! Everything we did actually surpassed, technically and artistically and from a performance standpoint, what we did on *JURASSIC PARK*—new dinosaurs, new technology of how to get performance out of these dinosaurs."

Murren added, "Since the beginning of the show, we were wondering: What should we do? And people ask me, 'Why do you want to do that movie? You've already done it! How can you do it better than you did before?' Whenever I hear that, I figure we're onto something, because nobody can figure it out. So I spent a few months thinking, before we even got started trying to figure out what the next step would be, so it would look different and not be the same movie over again. It

shouldn't look like a *JURASSIC PARK* sequel. So that's what the goal was. Technically speaking, we have refinements in the look of the animals: skin, muscles, how the light hits them and things like that. We've got more complex and subtle performances from the animals."

A computerized image spoken of like an actor? That's the level of technology now available. Murren explained that, on the *JURASSIC PARK*, "we actually didn't know if we could pull it off as we were doing it [on *LOST WORLD*]. It was so new to us. We now know we can do it, so we're pushing the aesthetic way beyond what we did in the first show: the shot design, the camera moves, the motions of the animals—all that stuff you would do after you've

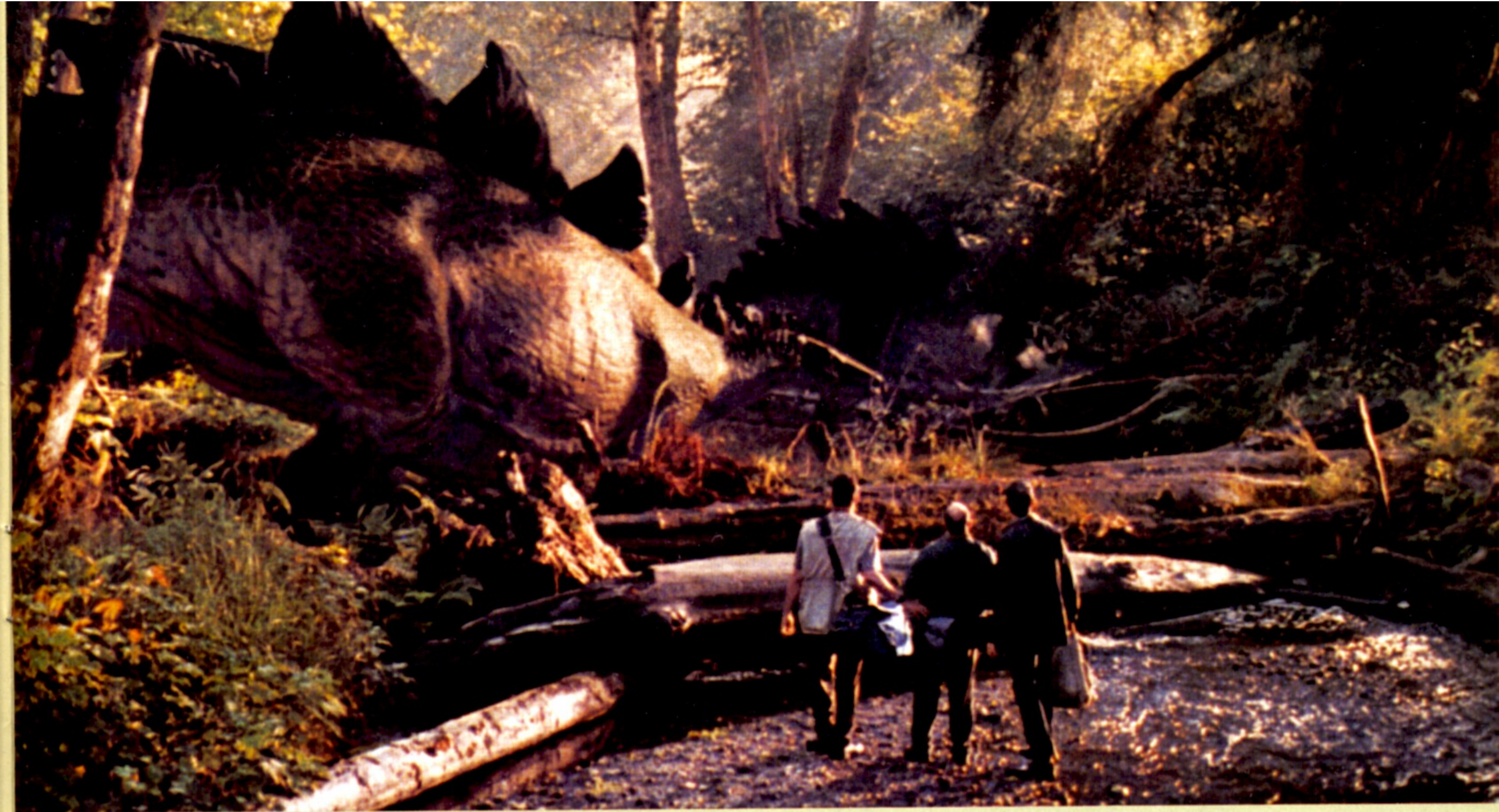
made some of these dinosaur movies and you want to do something different."

Winston estimated that "in *JURASSIC PARK*, 65% of the movie was live. If you can do it live, you do it live. That's always the way we go into it. Our live action dinosaurs are the state-of-the-art technology when it comes to robotics today. People don't realize that the robotic aspect of puppeteering and performance has been improving year-by-year, technically paralleling what's happening with animation. And our art is being enhanced by CGI."

But in terms of cost, how does CGI compare with modeling? "You can get more shots from a model," Murren explained. "But they may not be as interesting to look at as CGI. What the audience responds to these days is something they've never seen before, and that comes from CG. So you've got your choice when you're going to make a movie. You can say you're going to do it cheaply, and it'll probably show on the screen. It'll show up because the monster's in the dark most of the time. The shots are cut really short because they didn't work. You can get your shots cheaply, and that's one way to make a movie. The other way to make a movie is to give the audience something they haven't seen before. You spend money on it, and what you get back are \$900 million grosses. But the costs are also relative to the complexity, the requirements of the shot.

"If you saw the first show,

By Chuck Wagner



Top, right: Goldblum, Vince Vaughn and Richard Schiff watch stegosauri cross a river. Bottom: dino hunters attempt to capture a live specimen.

you saw a lot of CGI in that," Murren continued. "It may have just struck you like, 'What am I looking at?!' A lot of the shots that you responded to were ones we'd done. The reason it was so shocking was that you'd never seen it before. It wasn't anything that you could get as an incremental advance in existing technology. It took a whole new technology to get it—CG."

Has this new technology rendered old-fashioned model work obsolete? "I think some people would like that, but I think it would be a big mistake," said Murren. "There's a real advantage to having a model for the shots that they work on. You don't want to get a model out there and have it not work. But if it does work, for whatever it's supposed to do, there's an advantage to having it in the scene, too."

Making the models work on screen has been aided by several advances in technology that have helped animatronics keep pace with CGI. Advanced micro-machines, robots driven by software (or by actors whose performances can be stored for easy repeating), seamless inter-





THE LOST WORLD features some new dinosaurs: here a herd of poisonous comsognathusi (sort of like piranha on land) pursue a hapless victim.

weaving of robotic actors and CGI—these are some of the advances currently in use in Winston's shop. The full-scale adult T-Rex models, weighing in at 15,000 pounds, were constructed at an estimated cost of \$1-million apiece and required up to ten puppeteers, assisted by computer programming, to operate them. "It's across the board," said Winston of the technological advances that bring the beast to life. "It's in everything we do. It's the finessing of signals from performer to performance. That is, the electronic interface between the performer and the acting dinosaur—the tolerances to which the machine is built, giving the robot the ability to move fast and dynamic and yet also get very subtle actions. We can get an organic, smooth performance and have the power that's needed to give that performance speed and dynamism and the subtlety of electronic control which allows you to take that performance down to very small, subtle moves that are extremely dramatic. Put it all together and you come up with a character. The perfect example, of course, is the T-Rex. It can

look you eye-to-eye; carry on a very small, subtle performance; and then immediately rip the shit out of everything."

How is the choice made of which technique to use for a given shot? "It's largely what the director feels," Murren explained. "If he can shoot the sequence and get the robotic characters to work and look good, then he'll try to use those. Because they're on the set. The actors can see them. The cameraman can light for them. Everybody can see them. It's when you get into complex performances, or seeing an entire creature walking on screen for ten seconds or more—

an elaborate performance—that you go to CGI."

So there is still a place for live-action effects, even in this digital age. More important, a careful fusion of animatronics and CGI can create results difficult or impossible to achieve with either one alone. "When you designed the shots and sequences," Murren said, "if you could use robotics, you used them. Then if you get something that can't be done with robotics, you go CG. But you don't throw out one for the other. It's a mixture of them that looks so striking. I think you get a better movie with a mix-

ture of the two."

On this, Stan Winston is in perfect agreement with Murren. "The true magic of what we create with film today is the seamless blend between the real world—the live-action world—and the CG world," said Winston. "If in fact in the CG world you can do what we can't do in the live world, that is enhancing what you believe you're watching us do. And if what you're watching us do is somehow slightly more real and in your face than what you can do in the CG world, we're enhancing what you can do in the CG world. So these two technologies coming together create a seamless blend, and in fact then the audience is no longer looking at technology. You're looking at the live dinosaur, because you don't ever really know how it's done. You look at it and you go, 'That couldn't be CG!' or 'That couldn't be live!' and then you forget about it because it's bouncing back and forth, shot to shot, sometimes within the same shot. Part of the shot is live, part CG. Then another shot is totally CG. Then another one is totally live. And it all looks the same." □

Stan Winston's live-action triceratops makes an unexpected visit to his captor's tent.



CINEMA

By Steve Biodrowski

THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK Spielberg's dino-sequel is just another walk in the park.

It was easy to imagine a sequel to JURASSIC PARK, since the film omitted many memorable set pieces from Michael Crichton's novel; all that was needed was some plot device to get the characters back on the island. However, this method was rendered unnecessary when Crichton wrote his own sequel, *The Lost World*. Based upon this book, which does a fine job of creating a new story, the film had a good chance of standing on its own. Unfortunately, director Steven Spielberg and screenwriter David Koepp adopted the former method as much as the latter in making THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK. Although it borrows plot elements, scenes, and (sometimes composite) characters from its namesake novel, the film is essentially a grab bag of sequences tied together by a minimal storyline that allows several abandoned scenes from the first book to reach the screen.

Koepp's script is clunky in linking these scenes together, and requires a surprising amount of leaden exposition just to jump start the story. Crichton's novel was structured as a mystery, which gradually revealed the connection between the Lost World and Jurassic Park; the film explains everything thing up front, which doesn't leave much story to tell.

As a director, Spielberg again proves his inconsistency. Four years after the double triumph of JURASSIC PARK and SCHINDLER'S LIST, he has turned in a derivative film that features some dynamic staging but also betrays his penchant for inappropriate cuteness. He knows how to generate adult-frightening thrills; but in a sop to family audiences, he can't resist having an adolescent gymnast dispatch a velociraptor with a flying kick from impromptu parallel bars—a moment worthy of a Disney kiddie flick. At least the film has one grisly glimmer of black humor: a family sees their pet's dog house dangling by a chain from the T-Rex's mouth—the dog presumably being at the other end of the chain. (Now, if only the unfortunate pup had been named Rex!)

This is not to say that the film has nothing to recommend it. The dinosaurs, as envisioned here, are such magnificent animals that it is



Survivors of the two groups on the Island, hunters and scientists, are pursued by an unhappy tyrannosaurus parent.

impossible to be bored. As before, Dennis Muren and Stan Winston's visual effects (augmented by marvelous sound work) achieve equal levels of awe, beauty, and terror. Human characterization is serviceable, but the cast work overtime to imbue some humanity into the underwritten roles. In particular, Jeff Goldblum brings an eccentricity to Dr. Ian Malcolm that goes a long way toward keeping the character alive, even though his function has been seriously diminished from the novel (in which he solved the riddle of the Lost World's existence). His asides and comments even help gloss over some plot devices, as the character continually comments on the recklessness of what's happening (which is of course contrived in order to get dino-bait to the island).

Although JURASSIC PARK gave only a Cliff Notes summary of Chaos Theory, that was better than what we get here. All Crichton's theorizing about the cause of extinction has been dropped, rather than condensed. Instead, the film offers weakly developed notions of parental love and conservationism (the latter is somewhat hypocritical coming from Spielberg, whose DreamWorks compa-

ny is planning to pave over a large area of wetlands in Playa Vista to build a studio).

The "Save the Dinos" attitude is disappointing, because the film actually seems to be onto something when hunters and scientists first confront each other (Pete Postlethwaite even manages to make something out of his character, the big game hunter with dreams of taking down the world's most fearsome predator). But this conflict is short circuited by the dinosaurs, who eat the characters before their philosophical differences can reach any dramatic resolution. Likewise, having an adult T-Rex rescue its captured offspring from civilization is interesting—we're supposed to admire the creature's devotion even as we fear its attacks—but this San Diego sequence seems tacked on (it is—the scene is not in the book) rather than climactic.

But the script really isn't the problem. What is lacking here is not so much plot as mythic undertones. What was needed was more visual imagination to make the impact of these scenes truly memorable. Even a scenario of fairy tale simplicity can stir up considerable artistic power through clever im-

agery: King Kong's ascent up the Empire State Building is a good example; an even better one in this context is the climax of GORGO, in which icons of the patriarchal British Empire (London Bridge, Big Ben, etc) fall before a monster's maternal rampage.

Unfortunately, San Diego hasn't many memorable icons to destroy. In any case, Spielberg keeps the angry Rex confined to suburbia. The sight of this Saurian striding down the night-time streets is worth the price of admission, but it's not enough to elevate the film to classic status. The sequence also betrays the weakness of computer-generated imagery, which cannot achieve the kind of full-scale destruction possible with miniatures. These new dinosaurs are far more interactive than the ones in JURASSIC PARK, and they do a nice job of smashing through windows and tearing up hapless humans, but you're not going to see toppling buildings and massive explosions. You might be better off watching GORGO again. At least that entertaining 1960 effort expanded mother love to Godzilla-sized proportions for a truly stunning climactic confrontation. □