

PLANET OF DINOSAURS

Not very long ago, dimensional animation fans were bemoaning the apparent passing of an art form, or specifically, of the fantasy pictures with which it is usually associated in America. Now, however, there are more dimensional animation feature films in production than ever before in the history of filmmaking. Ray Harryhausen, Jim Danforth, and David Allen are all at work on separate films; and lo, from an unexpected corner comes PLANET OF DINOSAURS, done by a group of relative newcomers operating under the corporate heading of Cinema Dynamics.

The majority of the film's animation was performed by Douglas Beswick, now animating Jim Danforth's TIMEGATE. Beswick started-out on the GUMBY and DAVEY AND GOLIATH animation TV series, and did animation for Wah Chang's shorts DINOSAURS, THE TERRIBLE LIZARDS [see 1:2:34] and ALPHABET ROLL CALL, release by AIMS-Cahill.

Much of Beswick's animation is very good. For example, he gives the tyrannosaurus a smooth, ponderous stride—not an easy thing to achieve with a stiff-jointed animation model which weighs only a few pounds. The models used in the film were fabricated by executive producer and special visual effects supervisor Stephen Czerkas.

Composite photography was supervised by James Aupperle, who built two projectors used in making the composites. Ideally, if one cannot rent one of these rather scarce machines, one has it built by professionals who specialize in constructing precision photographic/optical equipment. "We didn't have the money to spend on that," says Aupperle, "so I began learning the basics of putting together process projectors." Starting with an Acme optical printer head, he modified it for rear projection. It was not ideal for this purpose, so when an old RKO process projector became available, Aupperle purchased it for rear projection and reworked the Acme for front projection, for which it was better suited. With two projectors in operation then, Aupperle could do set-up work with one while Beswick animated in a finished set-up using the other. Lighting had to be done at different times, however, because the building which housed the studio did not have sufficient electrical power to light two composite set-ups simultaneously.

In general, the composites in the film are good, particularly when one considers that, except for a few shots he did for FLESH GORDON, Aupperle had little professional experience to draw on. The composites are especially fresh and strik-

Facing Page, Top: A tyrannosaurus menaces a group of space travellers, crashed on a PLANET OF DINOSAURS. Compare to photo on the bottom of page 46 to detect the composite split. Bottom: A rear projection set-up with a foreground miniature set used in the film. This Page, Top: Pamela Bottaro and an animated spider. Note matte split along her leg. Middle: Bottaro and Charlotte Speer in a composite using Jim Danforth's matte painting of a prehistoric cave. Bottom: Chuck Pennington spears a struthiomimus. Note excellent matching of the foreground miniature here.

by S. S. Wilson





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ing in their design and composition. A consistent effort was made to broaden the scope of the projection composite technique originally developed by Ray Harryhausen. For example, one composite shows a dinosaur in the foreground and another one in the background (generally, animation models appear in only one "plane" of the image in any single shot because it is easier to work that way). In another shot, three men approach a cow-sized dinosaur, polacanthus, from all sides; two men distract it until the third clobbers the slow-witted brute on the head—a very well-designed and well-executed shot. For another sequence, Aupperle actually ran a split screen matte along the edge of a supine actress' leg, allowing a large animated spider to run right up her body.

There are flaws in some of the composites, but they are subtle enough to pass unnoticed by the average viewer, who is more likely to object to the film's more obvious shortcomings. The amateur cast is often a source of unintentional humor. The action sequences of producer/director James K. Shea are sometimes rather confused, lacking the editorial and directorial polish which complements similar sequences by more seasoned filmmakers. Finally, though the script by Ralph Lucas based on James Aupperle's story contains laudable elements, it is uneven and rough-hewn, having been written in a terrific rush in order to meet a production start deadline when plans to use a script by an established science fiction writer fell through.

PLANET OF DINOSAURS is not that elusive combination of excellence which fantasy filmgoers yearn for, but it certainly doesn't scrimp on animation effects. Furthermore, it showcases the talents of a new group of visual effects artists. There is every indication that they will be making more and better films in the future, provided, as always, that this one finds a distributor and makes money. □

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Rice best-seller before it hit the bookstores, seeing the potential for an excellent horror film. David Picker, then head of Paramount in early 1977, gave the go-ahead for a first draft of a screenplay based on the novel. Frank DeFelitta (AUDREY ROSE, THE SAVAGE IS LOOSE) was assigned to write a draft which was abandoned; "not quite what I wanted," recalls Sylbert. William Friedkin was interested in the property and wanted to direct, but was busy with several projects of his own.

Sylbert said some rock stars were interested in doing a film, not in the traditional style, but as "some kind of high camp." Mick Jagger and David Bowie both expressed desire to portray Louis, the quasi-homosexual vampire charter of Rice's story. "There is no doubt that either Jagger or Bowie could play the part," explained Sylbert, "as they are both good actors. But the material, I feel, should be done correctly, and in high taste. This film has the chance to become 'the one,' not just 'another one.' There is now an emergence of a revived interest in the vampire story on film. Not just *Dracula*, which is high camp, and doesn't deserve to be done again. Rice's story develops into a whole new appreciation of the vampiric existence; the sexual, Freudian aspects and the hitherto unobserved emotional trauma involved in accepting one's immortality as opposed to one's mortality." Sylbert was so unimpressed by DeFelitta's script he followed a gut feeling and asked Rice to adapt her own novel. In six weeks, she turned out a workable draft. "It needs work, but it's in a direction I'm pleased with," he said, "the screenplay is an exercise in serious passion. We will not play up the special effects."

Sylbert is able to offer a wide range of names he's contacted to direct: Nicholas Roeg, John Boorman, Ridley Scott. Roeg appears to be Sylbert's favorite. Under

consideration for the lead role is Jon Voight, while the character of the elder vampire may be consigned to Peter O'Toole, who is, according to Sylbert, "perfect for the role." Paramount has not officially put INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE on its roster, but reports indicate the budget will be between \$6-7 million and the film may be shot in London. Sylbert explained his interest in hiring a director who is visually-oriented: "I'd rather have someone who's not a specialist in the genre. I think it takes another kind of sensibility, a director who can do moves with a camera, and, as Roeg can, do a kind of fright that is compelling and artful." The major casting decision, that of the child-woman vampire Claudia, is unresolved. Although the character's age has been predictably upped from eight to "thirteen or fourteen" in Rice's script.

Jeffrey Frentzen

James Aupperle takes a light-meter reading on a composite set-up.

