

Computer generated wizardry

Review by
Lois Wadsworth

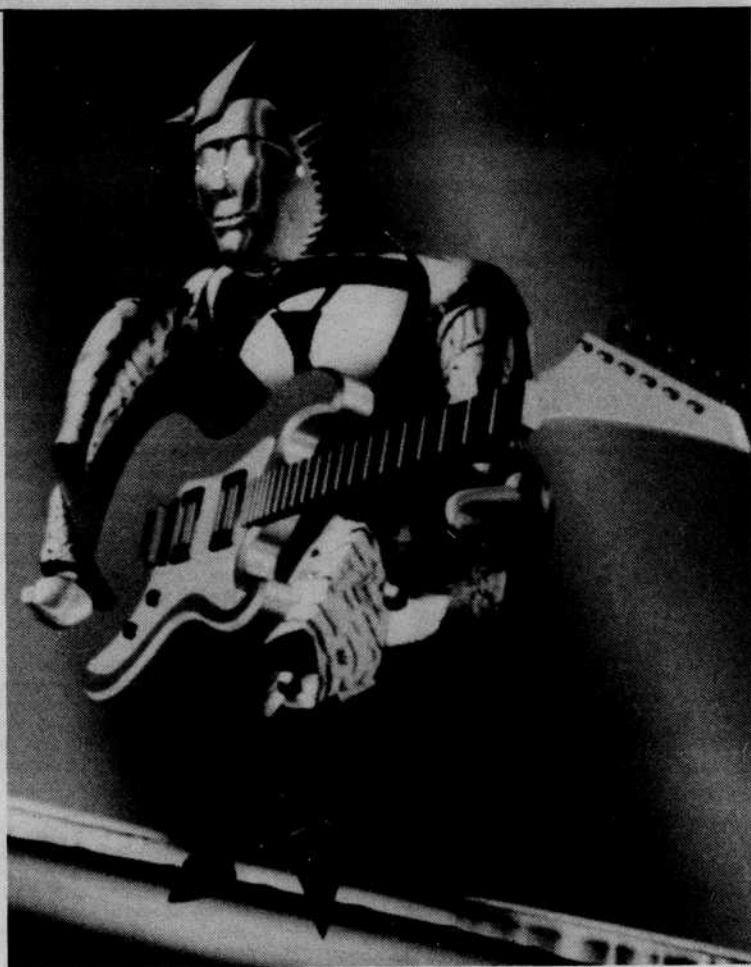
Computer Animation Show

Twenty-plus short, recent films and videos offer the thrills-a-nano-second pace of the best of computer animation in a one-and-a-half hour show that leaves the viewer bedazzled and delighted.

Crisp, concise images stream from the screen in a razzle-dazzle display of technical wizardry. Some of these images are unforgettable: the gleaming metal woman from the future who preens and stretches her long, lovely limbs in an exhibition of all-too-human vanity; the molten gold cat who leaps through fire in a brazen blare of power and strength; the adult and child Luxo lamps who play a game with a ball; robot-like workers toiling in a future factory, a gray, gear-driven mechanistic work-place not unlike Charlie Chaplin's vision in *Modern Times*; a drop of water gathering at a faucet and falling, so liquid and sensuous that erotic is the only word for it; graceful, comic dancing stick figures who change form with abandon.

Neither gravity nor any other natural law limit the possibilities of action in these computer-generated scenes. At some crucial point in the creative process, a computer that has been fed all the necessary information to conjure up an image in three dimensions can almost move that image through imaginative space in its own way, full-throttle, without human intervention. The enthusiasm of one of these space age filmmakers is particularly instructive; in an interview, he seemed to be not only thrilled but surprised by the unfolding action in his award-winning film.

Beginning with the special effects in 2001 nearly 20 years ago,



A scene from *Fantasy*, featured in the Computer Animation Show.

"flying" low and very fast over "alien" landscapes has been a favorite device of filmmakers. With computer animation this effect achieves perfection, and rare indeed is the computer whiz kid who can resist showing off his or her roller-coaster expertise. It's a trip, man.

Computer animation as an expression of technology is awe-inspiring in the same way that holography is, but its mass media applicability makes it a more public phenomenon. It is a hip, high-profile medium with a slick and ultra-stylish image. And it goes without saying that this technology is high priced. Very, very high priced.

Ahhhh... there's the rub. Most of the pieces (but not all) in *The Computer Animation Show* are, in a word, ads. The big bucks required to support the industry come from clients such as Benson and Hedges, for whom Robert Abel & Associates created the golden jungle cat and other delectable images on an Apollo computer. Also at this high-end of the computer graphics spectrum is Pixar's *Luxo, Jr.*, a flawless, whimsical ad for Luxo lamps made by

the company spawned by George Lucas to further develop the hardware and software capabilities for special effects that he used in the *Star Wars* epics.

There is little doubt that computer-generated imagery is at the frontier of a new visual art form which is futuristic in every sense. The images are stylistically influential; the medium is the message. Those values of the human imagination which we recognize in what we call art are not absent from this powerful image-making technology, but they are not dominant at this stage of development. They will come. The future is shaped by what we can imagine.

The print for the week-long showing that starts Friday, October 16 at Cinema 7 came straight from the lab, brand spanking new. The Eugene date is only the film's third showing (it played L.A. and Seattle), and it has not been seen on the East coast yet. Good timing, too, coming just before the computer graphics convention comes to town. Don't miss *The Computer Animation Show*: stunning images, terrific show!

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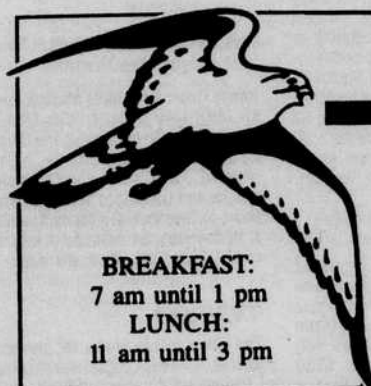
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