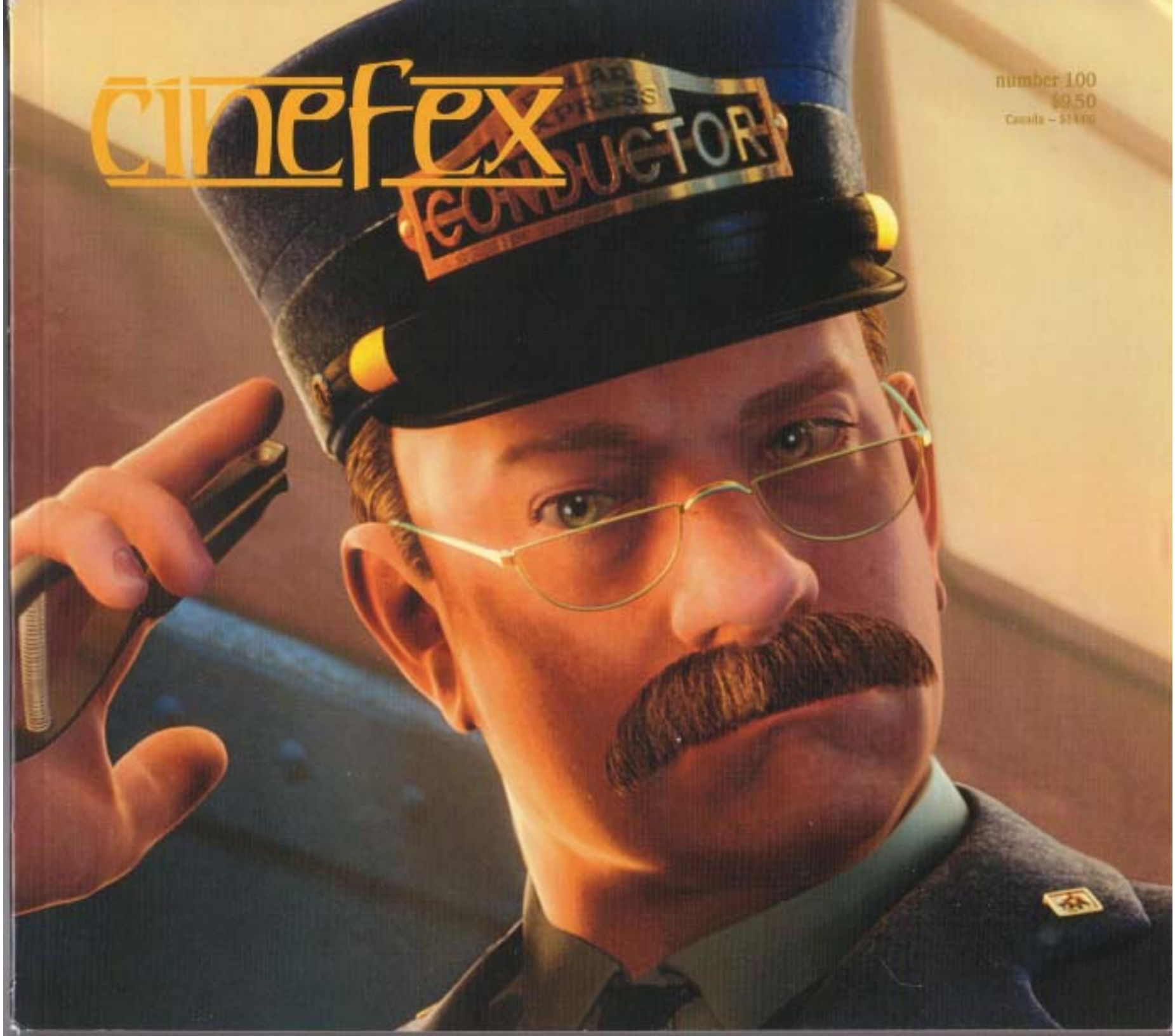
cinefex



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CINEFEX: Assuming it does stay around for a while, what technological advances in live creature effects can we expect?

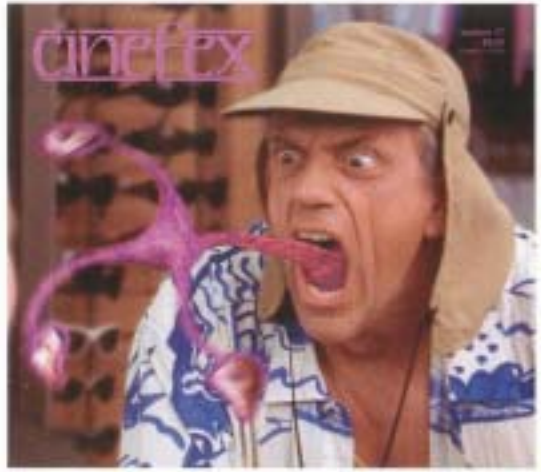
STAN WINSTON: There are amazing advances in hair and skin technologies, and movement. One of the things we're developing is a performance capture system — the same kind you use to send a performance to a digital character — to optically capture the performance of a live actor and then send it right to the animatronic character. So there would be no need for a bunch of guys working joysticks.

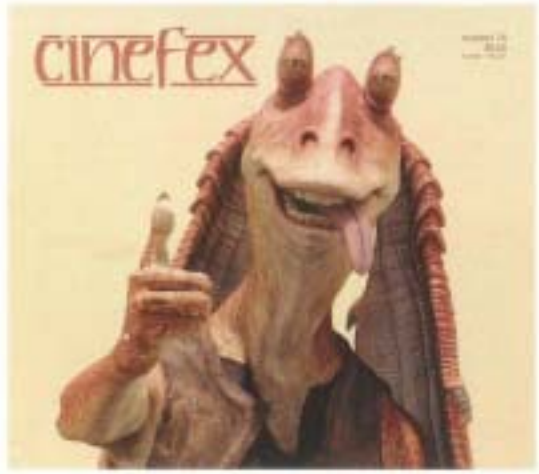
CINEFEX: You would motion capture an actor and translate that motion to your animatronic controllers? Kind of like a super-telemetry thing?

STAN WINSTON: Exactly. The performance of the animatronic would be driven by the performance of one actor. It will be especially important for facial performance. Right now, we can do puppets that have brow and eye movement, and can even lip-sync — but it still feels like a puppet, partly because you have one performer on the lips, another one on the brows, another one on the eyes. With this performance capture system, all the subtleties that happen in a single performer's face would go to the puppet, all in sync.

CINEFEX: Any advances coming from the artificial intelligence arena?

STAN WINSTON: I've been working with a professor from MIT for three years, developing a robot, Leonardo, that can learn through its interrelationships with humans. Through that collaboration, I have access to technology that allows Leonardo to see and hear. He will look at you; and, as you move, he'll keep his eyes on you — and it's *freaky*. It will be years before I can actually use this and get it into small eyes — because right now, they are using very big cameras in very big eyes. But we'll get there, and it will give us more organic performances in our artificial characters.





CINEFEX: Let's move on to another area of real-world versus digital effects. A few years ago, there was a lot of doom-and-gloom talk about the future of miniatures; and yet, there seems to have been a renaissance of miniature work, with more miniature effects than ever being used in films. Do you see that happening? Is that more proof of the pendulum swinging back?

ALEX FUNKE: There *is* a new fascination with using miniature photography. Among other things, it can be more cost effective to do a miniature than to do, say, a matte painting. Once you build a model, you have a wide range of things you can do with it; whereas, once you've done a matte painting, that's the shot. A miniature gives you more options. It's not the way to do everything, but I think that [illegible] photography is going to be with us for a long time.

STEVE BEGG: Directors are actually starting to *favor* the [illegible] of miniatures — and that totally surprises me! It could only be [illegible] rary, but the pendulum seems to be swinging back toward [illegible] in a big way. In a few recent productions, I've been stunned to [illegible] people say: 'We've got to use miniatures [illegible] got to be tactile. It's got to be [illegible] walk around and touch. I know it's got to be enhanced, but give me something real.' [illegible] return to miniatures is really heating up. Because if you mix and match the techniques and tricks, you continue to fool people.

GRAY MARSHALL: Miniatures are still a really good option, especially if something is going to be destroyed, blown up, has to interact with some natural [illegible] like water falling on it or fire wrapping around it. Anything where you are going to see a dynamic interaction between the parts [illegible] a miniature is the way to go.

IAN HUNTER: The simple truth is that a photographed object is 100 percent [illegible] photographed object. So you're jumping out of the gate with something that's real [illegible] with. When you're dealing with purely digital you have to put a lot of effort into getting it to that point. And only *then* can you start manipulating it to make it fit into the shot. A physical model is already real! If you have a fairly large-scale model and you know it's going to rip it apart or set it on fire, all of the [illegible] involved are built-in. We can light it with real light, get real reflections, and when we fill it with real smoke, we get real atmospheric effects. In digital backgrounds, you have to anticipate the need to put in artificial lighting and artificial atmosphere, and all these other things that are built into a miniature.

JOHN KNOLL: You've got to have your computer graphics render, tweak every little detail to make it look realistic. But if you're on the stage, you can put your light on your model, and there you go. The image coming back is physically correct, a realistic image. We have the physics working for us instead of against us. Real-time radiosity.

KEVIN HAUG: But a miniature is no more real than [illegible] just a cost relationship between one kind of detail and another kind of detail. If I build a miniature, I'm going to get this, this and this in it, but I will always be strapped with the constraints of its being [illegible] I will always have to shoot over-cranked, and the effects on it are going to be shot as separate elements, or they're going to be restricted. To get around that, people build giant miniatures. But