

6D—Reno Gazette-Journal Tuesday, August 6, 1996

ANALYSIS

Hollywood trend: Are computers replacing actors?

By Malcolm Johnson THE HAVITWOOD COUNTRANT

Computerized Hollywood is giving the world new ways to dream, or perchance to live through waking nightmares. From singing cockroaches to massive, hovering spaceships, cybertricks have been vying with one another to knock out moviemakers' eyes all summer long. The special-effects craze, born in George Lucas' "Star Wars" and his Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) special-effects house, has gotten so mad that even the first Skywalker trilogy is not safe from enhancement. Entertainment Weekly reports that Lucas is re-jiggering scenes involving Jabba the Hutt in "The Empire Strikes Back," which will be rereleased along with the first and third chapters, "Star Wars" and "Return of the Jedi," in the winter of 1997. "Independence Day," the summer's big hit, marks a huge comeback for 20th Century Fox, which also looks forward to a second windfall from the "Star Wars" films and the start of a second trilogy in 1999. But Fox will have plenty of rivals, as Hollywood goes all-in on the realm of science fiction and disaster movies.

The big F/X boom — which this summer has levitated livestock in a massive funnel cloud, towed Tom Cruise aboard a high-speed Chunnel train and cloned Michael Keaton — reaches into nearly every film. Earlier movie years delivered eye-popping effects, especially in the specialties of James Cameron, most memorably the shimmering water sloshy in "The Abyss" and the liquescent metal humanoid in "Terminator 2: Judgment Day." But no summer has ever rivaled this one. Blockbuster after blockbuster demonstrated that hard-drive technology reigns supreme in a new Hollywood that prizes digital artists as much as, or even more than, acting. Wired, a fat, glossy computer journal with splashy "Toy Story" graphics, recently headlined this story: "The New Hollywood: Silicon Replaces Superstars." Consider the summer's lineup, beginning with "Twister" and its airborne cows and trucks. Next came Effects From page 1D "Mission: Impossible" and its fantastic helicopter-train rendezvous. The half-forgotten "The Arrival" featured impressive aliens whose knees bend creepily backward, while "Dragonheart"

filled the screen with a fire-breathing reptile with the voice of Sean Connery. "The Phantom" served up only modest special effects, which perhaps put a lid on its profits, but "The Rock," which opened the same weekend, abounded in cinematic trickery, including a villain blown away about a mouse. "The Cable Guy" also suffered from a lack of computerized magic, but "The Handicap of Notre Dame" glowed in its milling crowd scenes, and "Eraser" propelled Arnold Schwarzenegger through a dazzling leap into a jet blast and free-fall, not all of which was stunt work. Then came Eddie Murphy, whose acting combined brilliantly with digital trickery in "The Nutty Professor." But it remained for "Independence Day," the highly promoted "ID4," to blow away the competition with a kaleidoscope of sometimes-layered special effects that made for great "how-they-did-it" television segments. Oddly enough, "Phenomenon" released the same day, managed to hold its own through the power of an actor, John Travolta. "Courage Under Fire," like "Phenomenon," was driven by its characters, although it took



DRAGONHEART: One of many high-tech extravaganzas that came out this summer.

advantage of state-of-the-art technology for its war scenes. And "Multiplicity," as with Murphy in "The Nutty Professor," worked more because of Keaton's powers of transformation than through the camera's ability to put four of him in the same shot. More F/X, fests followed. Some were impressive, like "The Frighteners," with its pulsing walls and flying black swasth of death. Some were dumb, like "Kazam," or tiresome, like the live-action "The Adventures of Pinocchio."

Computer effects competed so fiercely on big screens that even a 4-year-old Jackie Chan stunt show like "Supercop" or the pairing of Woody Harelson and Randy Quaid in "Kingpin," as a "Dumb and Dumber" team, seem oddly refreshing, especially when contrasted with musical-comedy cockroaches in "Joe's Apartment."

Gifts

From page 1D Gift certificates for overnight stays are a popular gift. "It's one of the most popular things we offer here," owner John Farahi said. Gifts or services include complimentary champagne, ice, in-house service, an in-house florist, and a wedding chaperone.

Price ranges: Rooms can cost from \$55 to \$80, and suites run more than \$100. Rates may depend on the season and the day of the week. ■ Outdoor gear: At Reno Mountain Sports, 155 E. Meana Lane in Reno, wedding gifts have become so popular that some couples form registries there. Popular wedding gifts include his and hers sleeping bags, backpacks and water filters.

"Find out what outdoor activities the bride and groom hope to enjoy on their honeymoon," said Dave Eastwood, a floor manager at the store. Price ranges: ■ Under \$50: a popular water filter sells for \$49.95. ■ From \$50 to \$100: single set roller blades can be fun. ■ Over \$100: sleeping bags and backpacks. An \$800 two-person kayak recently sold for a white computer case. ■ Kitchen utensils: Andrea's Kitchen Consignary-Gourmet Cookware: At 8175 S. Virginia St., Reno, near Patriot Boulevard, it offers a wide variety of products — 80 percent of which owner Andrea Way says would make a great wedding gift.

Concerts

From page 1D nothing to do with trying to spur ticket sales. Ticket sales also are reported going well for the Reno Hilton's Blues Music Festival Sunday, featuring B.B. King, The Neville Brothers and Delbert McClinton. One explanation for Reno's sudden good musical fortune comes from Lucinda Geller. Bill Graham Presents (BGP) spokeswoman, BGP is producing all three Thursday shows (and all major Reno Hilton shows), and Geller says the three Thursday shows were set up that way because they serve potentially different audiences. "Each [entertainer] had one day available to be in Reno, and it happened to be the same day," Geller said. "We would rather book them (at the same time), that let them go by without performing — when we feel they're good artists."

Hilton officials were told by Graham representatives they're good, high-quality acts that'll sell, Hilton spokeswoman Susanne Casarini said. Not all music fans are excited about this week's lineup. On Monday at the Reno Hilton Ticket Office, former state Sen. Diana Ghom of Reno, a social worker, bought tickets to a Sept. 6 Santana show at the hotel. But Ghom passed on this week's surge of music. "I'm not that turned on about seeing those people," she said. Jamie Henning, 38, a Reno surgical technician and a blues fan, has mixed emotions: So much music, so little time. "Summer only lasts so long, and you can only see so many bands within a certain period of time. It's unfortunate. But I'm happy to see this town is picking up musically," he said. He saw last summer's Hilton Blues Festival, and he has bought tickets for Sunday's show. Van Zandt's Friday show at Rancho Nevada was originally

planned for Reno's Little Waldorf Saloon. But promoter Jeff Lewis said the Waldorf has too much bar activity. "The kind of music we're doing is not background music; it's the kind of music you sit down and pay attention to." But Lewis says it'll be easy for Van Zandt fans to see his performance and the Walker shows — if tickets are available. But you have to buy tickets for both shows, totaling \$56. It's an easy commute, however: Van Zandt will play under an outdoor tent at Rancho Nevada and Walker will play inside. About 60 seats remained for Walker's 11 p.m. performance. In advance of Saturday's country shows, Carano of the Silver Legacy lower-range ticket prices to Duffie's show. Those are \$30 and \$25, down from the original \$35 and \$29; premium seats remain at \$39. "The budgets came in lower than expected. We're passing the savings on to our guests," Carano said.

UPCOMING SHOWS

Wednesday ■ Six and Kansas: At 7:30 p.m. in the Reno Hilton's Outdoor Amphitheater. Tickets: \$25. Thursday ■ Neil Diamond: 8 p.m., at Lawlor Events Center. At 12:30 tickets sold last spring, at prices ranging from \$17.50 to \$35. ■ Lyle Lovett and His Large Band: 8 p.m., Reno Hilton Pavilion. Tickets: \$25, advance; \$30, show day. ■ Brian Setzer: 8 p.m., Reno Hilton Showroom. Tickets: \$25. Friday ■ Jerry Jeff Walker: 8 p.m. and 11 p.m., at Cotton's Rancho Nevada. Tickets: \$40. ■ Townes Van Zandt: 9:30 p.m., at Rancho Nevada. Tickets: \$18 (tickets to Walker and Van Zandt shows are available at Rancho Nevada and various other venues. Details: 345-6768). Saturday ■ Alabama: 8 p.m., Reno Hilton Amphitheater, with opening act Kenny Chesney. Tickets: \$27.50, advance; \$30, show day. ■ Joe Duffie: 8 p.m., at downtown Reno's Silver Legacy Resort. Tickets: \$25, \$30, and \$38. Silver Legacy tickets are available at the casino, or BASS Ticket outlets, or by calling BASS. Sunday ■ Blues Music Festival: From 5 p.m. to late at night in the Reno Hilton Amphitheater, starring B.B. King, The Neville Brothers and Delbert McClinton. Tickets: \$25. Tickets: Reno Hilton show tickets are available at the hotel's box office, or call it at 789-2285, or call (800) 225-BASS from Nevada, or (916) 920-BASS from California.

Don't believe that politicians will listen to someone like you?

It takes little less than two minutes to register to vote. That means your voice will be heard in the next election. And that should get the attention of, at least, a few politicians. Don't let an elite few manage issues that control your life and pocketbook. Register to vote now. Here's how: you must be a U.S. citizen, 18 years of age by election day, and you must physically and legally reside in the county where you want to vote. If registering in person, you must provide a photo identification and proof of current residence and identity. If registering by mail you must have Social Security, Nevada driver's license or identification card number. Then read the Reno Gazette-Journal for continuing coverage of election issues and candidates.

Where to register: Registrar of Voters: 1001 E. Ninth St., Reno, 328-3670 Justice Court, Incline Village, 865 Tahoe Blvd. Justice Court, Sparks, 630 Greenbrae Drive Courthouse, Curry and Musser St., Carson City, 887-2087 Clerk-Treasurer, 1594 Esmeralda St., Room 105, Minden, 782-9023 Or, any local Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles office.

Last day to register to vote in the general election is October 5

RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL