



Ray Bradbury's
*Something Wicked
 This Way Comes*

RAY BRADBURY'S MAGICAL NOVEL IS AT LAST ON FILM—WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM THE MAGIC OF SPECIAL EFFECTS. ED NAHA CHRONICLES THE THREE-MILLION-DOLLAR FACELIFT.

Eighteen months ago, when production began on Walt Disney Studios' version of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, hopes were high that this would be the first faithful adaptation of a Bradbury work to hit the screen. Bradbury himself had authored the script, and director Jack Clayton (*The Innocents*, *The Great Gatsby*) was taking great pains to come up with visuals that would do the words justice. Eye-boggling sets were constructed on the Disney lot. Press releases were handed out. A Christmas 1982 release was promised. And then . . .

Something strange happened to *Something Wicked*.

Now slated to appear in May, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* is *not* the movie Disney intended to make back in 1981. "It's a lot better," says director of special effects/associate producer Lee Dyer. "We've captured the essence of the book and retranslated it into visual terms."

During the past ten months, the movie has undergone some drastic overhauling to the tune of three million dollars. The process began last June when Dyer was asked to view a rough cut of Clayton's film by studio execs who felt it to be weak in spots. Dyer agreed with the honchos, although he hastens to add, "Jack Clayton was short-changed on this movie from the beginning. There were a lot of projects getting more attention than his. EPCOT [Disney's futuristic community in Florida] was the number-one priority around here. Then there was *Tron*, on which I was effects supervisor. As a result of all this other activity, there was no one around to work on effects for *Something Wicked*."

After Dyer saw the floundering film, he made pages of notes suggesting where effects sequences could be added to strengthen its clout. He also figured out ways to spruce up existing scenes, adding, in all, some twenty minutes of new footage.

"We used whatever techniques we felt would strengthen the story. The first sequence I developed employed spiders. I hate spiders. They scare the heck out

of me. I used them to heighten the power of the carnival's Dust Witch. In the book, the witch seeks out the boys in a fairly traditional way. I came up with the idea that she could send her essence to the boys' homes in the form of ectoplasm. Once there, she'd transform herself into an army of spiders. We used two hundred live tarantulas, four hundred fake ones, and six mechanical models. I'm still not over my fear of spiders, but I *love* that scene.

"You know," Dyer adds, "scaring audiences is nothing new here. The studio has been doing it since *Snow White*, if you think about it. We've simply taken that sense of fantasy fright and done it with live action."

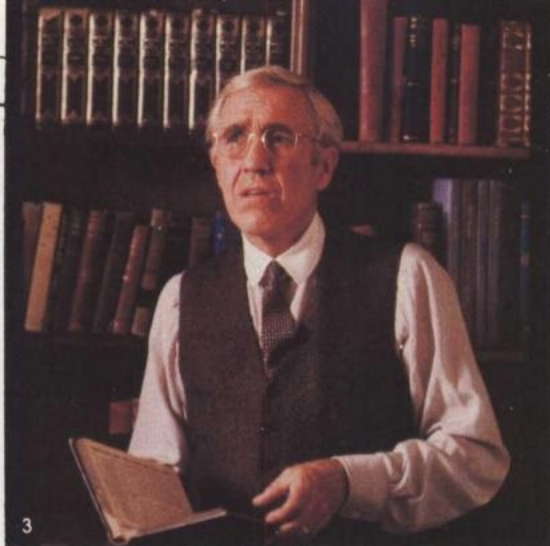
After restaging a few more scenes, Dyer moved on to one of the movie's most startling sequences. "We show the carnival completely resurrecting itself without the use of human hands, in a combination of very advanced computer animation and hand-painted animation. It's the first time a computer has been used to animate organic material." In this scene, the carnival materializes out of the smoke from a passing train and takes form by using objects in an open field as a foundation. Train smoke becomes ropes and canvas tents. Tree limbs grow together to form a ferris wheel and a spider web mutates into a wheel of fortune.

Yet another high point called for the carnival to be sucked up into a churning storm. For that effect, a detailed miniature was suspended upside down twenty feet above a cloud tank. "I showed that sequence to Jack last week," beams Dyer, "and he just fell over. We built the largest cloud tank in existence, and our storm is really something to see, bursting with lightning and energy effects. In fact, we've redone the movie to the point where, as the story progresses, our storm becomes one of the stars. It's the 'good' entity in the movie, an ever-present force, almost godlike. If Mr. Dark is the devil, then our storm is the force of light."

Aside from generating completely new effects scenes,



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Dyer's gang went back to existing scenes and added hand-generated animation techniques to underscore their power.

"There was a point where Mr. Dark was trapped on his carousel, his foot caught on a stirrup, that made no sense to me," says Dyer. "If Mr. Dark is a power to be reckoned with, he could easily have gotten out of that fix. So we added a bit where lightning strikes the carousel. It completely energizes the structure. Electricity surges through everything. The horses snort sparks. Now Dark is still trapped on the carousel, but he's held there by an overwhelming wave of energy."

In another episode, Halloway is cornered by Dark in a library and tempted with the promise of a second childhood. "Dark begins ripping pages out of a book," says Dyer. "Each torn page represents a slice of Halloway's youth lost to him. After this page is torn, you can no longer be twenty. After this page, you lose twenty-five."

"We've added animation to heighten the drama. When each page is torn out, there's a blast of fiery light. The page is red hot, cooling off only when it hits the floor. With each blast, we added interactive lighting to Dark's face, making him look even more demonic. The light also reflects off Halloway and the books around him. Finally, when Dark throws the book at Halloway, the entire library is illuminated by a flash of light."

"It's touches like this that add to the magic. When I first started working on that scene, Ray Bradbury was worried that we'd ruin it. When he saw the finished effects, he had one word for us: 'fantastic.'"

Dyer feels the extra work has paid off. "I showed the spider sequence to six women from the studio last week," he says. "One nearly fainted. One almost threw up. One had her knees up to her chest—and that was an elderly lady!"

"On the way out, one of the women turned to me and said, 'I can't believe this is a Disney film!'" A wicked laugh escapes Dyer's lips. "That's probably the biggest compliment anyone could pay me!" **17**



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1. Lightning rod salesman Tom Fury (Royal Dano) warns young Jim Nightshade and Will Halloway (Shawn Carson and Vidal I. Peterson) of a coming storm. Throughout Ray Bradbury's novel lightning is an ever-present threat to the carnival, revealing its true nature.
2. Bradbury poses before a miniature of the Pandemonium Carnival. A life-size carnival was built on a two-acre set nearby.
3. Jason Robards plays troubled small-town librarian Charles Halloway, whose relations with his son Will are clouded by a long-ago act of cowardice.
4. Sneaking into the carousel to spy on Mr. Dark (Jonathan Pryce), the boys are discovered by him and his assistant, Mr. Coogar (Bruce Fischer)—and, to their surprise, are offered free tickets to return.
5. Associate producer Lee Dyer and director Jack Clayton study the Mirror Maze, in which Will Halloway is trapped.
6. Mechanical-effects designer Isidoro Raponi (*Close Encounters*) displays a box of fake tarantulas he built to augment the two hundred live ones used in a "Dust Witch" sequence.