



ter and became terrestrial due to the filming locations.

Tippett Studio and Industrial Light & Magic created the creatures, which appear in the film's 500 visual effects shots. In fact, a modeler at Tippett helped that studio land the job by creating one of the creatures in his downtime.

"Sven Jensen was learning Mudbox, and he thought the goblin was a cool little creature that would be fun to

ALL CREATURES WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

ILM and Tippett Studio join forces to create the magical world of *The Spiderwick Chronicles*. by Barbara Robertson

As wonderful as they are, until now, most fantasy films have missed something. "The whole fantasy genre happens in the past, or a particular period, or in Britain," says Mark Waters, who directed Nickelodeon Movies' *The Spiderwick Chronicles*. "Even in [*Bridge to*] *Terabithia* the creatures appeared in a dream sequence. But, what if the creatures were around us?"

What if, for example, they were hanging out in New England on the creepy Spiderwick Estate where, much to their dismay, nine-year old twins Jared and Simon Grace and their older sister Mallory have moved. Jared is the first to see a faerie, the house brownie Thimbletack, who appears inside the secret room where Jared finds great, great uncle Arthur Spiderwick's illustrated *Field Guide to the Fantastical World*. The field guide gives its owner power, which means the evil shape-shifting ogre Mulgarath and other nasty creatures want it, and

the children must keep it from them.

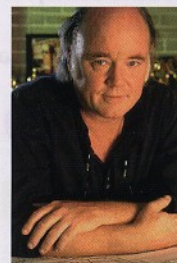
"The creatures are around them in the real world," says Waters. "They're mutations of creatures that could live here. That

build," says Blair Clark, co-visual effects supervisor with Joel Friesch at Tippett. When the studio rigged the model in Maya, animators started doing animation studies with it.

"We had a disgruntled little goblin on a pedestal basically staying alive, but well within character," Clark says. "We gave him crunchy food items and a microphone and put some sound on it." At the time, Tippett was still working on *Charlotte's Web*, another Paramount film, so people from the studio showed their goblin to Paramount. Clark remembers the reaction: "Mark [Waters] said, 'That's amazing. No direction and he's pretty

"We had a good starting point with [book illustrator] Tony DiTerlizzi's designs. So, to make the characters seem like real animals, we assigned some kind of observable reference that we could pin to each, like frogs, salamanders, lizards. I invented the term 'biologize.' "

—Phil Tippett, animation supervisor, *The Spiderwick Chronicles*



makes it feel like it could happen to you."

The Paramount Pictures release, based on Holly Black and Tony DiTerlizzi's popular book series of the same name, compresses five books into one super-sized arc. Many of the faerie creatures from the books appear in the film, but not all, and one, the troll, walked out of the wa-

much good to go."

At the beginning of the project, Tippett Studio founder Phil Tippett, who acted as animation supervisor and character designer for the film, helped organize the visual effects work. "We broke it up very early in terms of the types of shots and numbers of characters each studio would do," he says.

Tippett Studio took the goblins, Red Cap (a bull-goblin), Hogsqueal (a hob-goblin), the troll and some of the shapes into which Mulgarath shifts. ILM created Mulgarath, the sprites, Thimbletack, Byron the griffin and the sylphs.

For the most part, each studio designed the creatures they created, although Tippett worked on initial designs for Thimbletack. The two studios shared 30 shots.

"We had a good starting point with Tony's designs," says Phil Tippett, referring to illustrations in the books. "So, to make the characters seem like real animals, we assigned some kind of observable reference that we could pin to each, like frogs, salamanders, lizards. I invented the term 'biologize.'"

Similarly, ILM's art director, Christian Alzmann, whose crew of seven concept artists created 500 pieces of art, 10 characters and seven environments, looked to the field guide and to nature. The griffin is a classic half-eagle, half-lion; the sprites transform from their camouflage as flowers into delicate insect-like creatures and Mulgarath is a cross between a bull, a goat and a tree.

On location, Phil Tippett, working with ILM vfx supervisor Pablo Helman, acted as an onset choreographer for the CG creatures. "I was most concerned with what the reaction of the live-action actors would be to the creatures," Tippett says. "It was important to get the eye lines and the timing beats."

For example, during one sequence Mallory (Sarah Bolger) fights invisible goblins until she's tossed a "seeing stone," and then the nasty little creatures become visible. "We come up with a hunting strategy for the



goblins," says Tippett. "As they move on Sarah, they surround her."

Once the film moved into postproduction, Clark, Friesch and animation supervisor Todd Labonte took charge at Tippett Studio leaving Phil Tippett free to concentrate on continuity. At ILM, Tim Alexander organized and supervised the visual effects crew with Tim Harrington acting as animation supervisor.

Two of ILM's characters have speaking roles: The evil Mulgarath (Nick Nolte) and Thimbletack (Martin Short), who is a good house brownie until he isn't and then he transforms into a green, mean boggart. "We had rigging challenges for the transformation and also for the griffin's wings and tail," says Alexander. "And we also changed our facial system."

ILM's new facial animation system gives modelers and animators cut and paste tools for blocking in facial expressions quickly without sacrificing capability. With a tool called "Face Select," animators can control particular muscles. "The big win is that we can quickly create models, change proportions and do animation tests," says Harrington. For rigging, a system dubbed "Block Party" made it possible to remap skeletal structure and muscles from one creature to another.

At Tippett, a primary challenge centered on the visible/invisible goblin sequence. "We knew we'd have to

deal with magical barrier effects and sell the fact that the creatures were invisible," says Russell Darling, CG supervisor. "We had everything set up for footprints in grass and mud. And then we discovered we had 97 shots of invisible creatures walking through dead leaves." The crew solved that problem with CG

leaves, wet ones that stuck to surfaces and dry leaves that the goblins kicked in the air. To make the goblins materialize, lead technical director Erin Borland developed a special RenderMan shader.

Todd Labonte supervised the 28 animators at Tippett who orchestrated the goblin battle. "We talked about doing a crowd system, but when you have only 15 or 16 goblins, you can watch each one and see if one is doing the same thing as another," he says. So, they had to be hand animated by multiple animators working on one shot. "Everyone had to jump in and it was hard. The scenes were exhausting."

Exhausting, but rewarding. After all, the crew had created the goblin that got them the job out of their own enthusiasm. "We do so much cute furry stuff at Tippett, and it's fun to make appealing stuff," Labonte says. "But a lot of us got into special effects to do dragons and things that eat people. When you read about the goblins in the field guide, that they jab broken glass into their gums because they don't have teeth, you go, 'Oh. We've got to get this movie.'"

From beautiful flower sprites and dandelion-seed sylphs created at ILM to Tippett's troll, from ILM's ogre Mulgarath to Tippett's con-artist hobgoblin and from ILM's transforming trickster Thimbletack to Tippett's goblins, the combined efforts of the two visual effects studios have created a family film . . . with teeth. ■

Paramount/Nickelodeon Films' *The Spiderwick Chronicles* opens in theaters nationwide on February 14.

