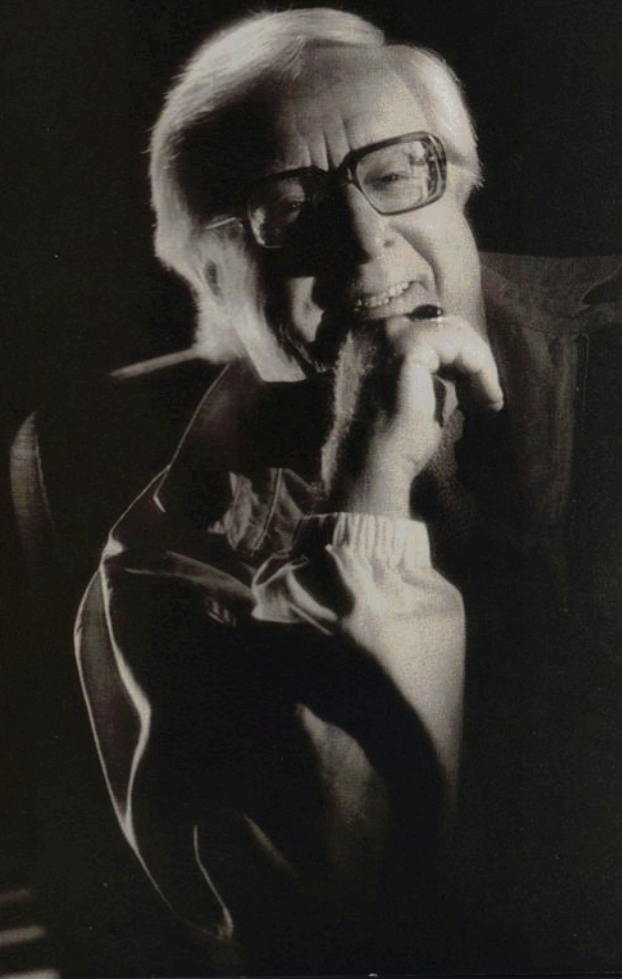


Cosmic Ray

*Novelist Ray Bradbury's passion
for the futuristic and fantastic
casts him in the role of
renaissance man.*



Writers see themselves in many guises: as priests and pariahs, court jesters and cameras. Ray Bradbury professes a juicier metaphor. "I'm a pomegranate," he says. "If you cut me open, there would be a million seeds, each one different."

The ripe-unto-bursting image suits this bluff, silver-haired man whose restless creativity has borne fruit in myriad forms, including short stories, novels, poems, plays, scripts, songs, essays and even urban design. As the author of works such as *The Martian Chronicles*, *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Illustrated Man*, Bradbury gained popular and critical success in the 1950s and 1960s and broke through the moldy wall protecting High Culture from the two-headed dragon of fantasy and science fiction. In fact, his fiction is fairly heedless of science and technology, instead bending reality in the age-old manner of fables. Putting imagination ahead of theory also marks his visionary, why-not thinking on urban design, which has influenced the shape of world's fairs, shopping malls and other public spaces.

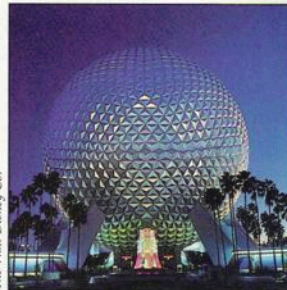
In Bradbury's case the boy is unabashedly father to the man—and to the writer. Long strands of memory and fantasy weave through a life that began in 1920 in Waukegan, Illinois. He says he remembers being born, suckled and circumcised. Slightly less momentous is his memory of being awestruck at age 3 by the silent film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Waukegan furnished endless fodder for his vivid imagination, especially in places like the train yard. "It was full of smoke and confusion and big, brutish iron things—this was all beautiful to me," he recalls. "Every few years, Ringling Bros. would arrive there, and we would watch them unload in the morning mist a huge menagerie of elephants and zebras and camels and tigers and lions." (Bradbury conjured a different sort of spectacle in the pages of *WESTWAYS* in 1974 when he wrote

about the time he attended a broken-down, one-ring circus in Mexicali in the summer of 1945.)

At a performance by Blackstone the Magician, Bradbury the boy found himself walking offstage clutching a live rabbit. Enthralled, he declared his ambition to be the world's greatest magician; then, at age 12, he received a toy typewriter. Inspired by the written tales that had captivated him through idyllic summers, Bradbury decided he was meant to be a writer. "I loved Frank Baum's Oz stories and John Carter, Warlord of Mars," he says. "And I would sit on the porch by the screen door and listen to the radio shows—'Buck Rogers,' 'Vic and Sade,' 'Chandu the Magician.' That was all part of my root system."

The Bradbury family lived for a while in Tucson before moving to Los Angeles in 1934. Despite the Depression it was a glorious time to be a teenager in love with movies and radio. Bradbury haunted studios and premieres in search of stars and their autographs. He wangled admission to a broadcast of "Hollywood Hotel" from the redoubtable Louella Parsons and became a regular in the studio audience of the "Burns and Allen" radio show, salvaging scripts from the trash can and writing dialogue for the duo during typing class at Berendo Junior High School, in what is now Koreatown. "I would give it to George, and he would pretend to read it," he recalls. "He was very kind and encouraged me to become a writer." When Bradbury encountered Burns again, decades later, the comedian remembered the persistent young man with the puppy-dog enthusiasm. "I was a real pest," Bradbury admits. "But people responded—I guess it was the elation that showed in my face. You can't resist love, even if it's pestiferous." He began submitting his

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The Walt Disney Co.

Bradbury's essay on Spaceship Earth (above) contributed to Disney's EPCOT Center. An early love of show business led to a friendship between a young Bradbury (below) and the cigar-wielding comic George Burns.



Rocky Schenck

stories to magazines whose names buzzed with words like *astounding*, *fantastic*, *weird*, *amazing* and *thrilling*. After trying unsuccessfully to emulate writers he admired, Bradbury discovered his true path during his last year in high school, when he wrote about the deep ravines near Waukegan. "In those ravines I could swing on vines, build tree houses, dig caves and hide from bullies," he recalls. "But at night they became terrifying places"—especially when the cat burglar Waukegans called the Lonely One was at large. Bradbury later relived this boyhood scare in his novel *Dandelion Wine*. Tapping into his childhood sense of fear and wonder helped the young writer find his voice.

By the time Bradbury graduated from Los Angeles High School, he and his family were on relief. "I sold newspapers at the corner of Olympic and Norton for three years. I made nine or 10 dollars a week." In his spare time he wrote stories, saw movies and sought knowledge in the libraries of Los Angeles. "I went to the library three or four times a week," he says. "I wandered among the stacks and educated myself to all the important essays, plays and poetry from different countries. And all the short stories of the major American writers. That was all mulch." The book-burning firemen of *Fahrenheit 451* came out of his bibliomania and were conceived on the dime-a-half-hour typewriters in the basement of the UCLA library. He sold his first stories in 1941 and quit peddling newspapers the following year, when he determined he could make at least \$11 a week from his burgeoning writing career.

If Bradbury's life seems the stuff of storybooks, it may be because he has mined it so effectively in his fiction. As a young writer he made free-association lists of words drawn from what he calls the "loppside" of his brain, "trusting my subconscious to give bread, as it were, to the birds." Evoking potent images and memories, this

subliminal bird feeding gave rise to fanciful tales, both light and dark. A frightening childhood carousel ride sparked "The Black Ferris," which evolved into the novel *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (which was adapted as a film in 1982 and is currently touring Canada as an opera-cum-ballet). The optical trickery of the mirror maze on the old Venice Pier inspired "The Dwarf." After the pier's demise, the ruins of the roller coaster suggested the remains of a dinosaur, which became the lonely sea monster in "The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms"—the story that led John Huston to ask Bradbury to tackle a different beast and co-write the screenplay for *Moby Dick*. The time spent working with Huston in Ireland yielded a number of whimsical Irish stories and a play, *Falling Upward*.

Serendipity—in retrospect it seems more like destiny—has struck often in Bradbury's life. He wrote an essay drawing parallels between *Moby Dick* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, explaining, "Captain Nemo says, 'Don't kill the whale, build a whale, and live inside of it and call it the Nautilus; don't strike the sun, plug into it, use the scientific method, and light the cities of the world.'" That essay led to his being hired to help create a major exhibition in the U.S. Pavilion at the 1964 New York World's Fair, including the writing of a 17-and-a-half-minute narrated prose poem that covered 400 years of American history.

That same year he met one of his heroes, Walt Disney, while both men were Christmas shopping at I. Magnin. Disney invited him to lunch at his office the next day—a lunch that stretched into a tour of his studio. It was, perhaps, inevitable that Bradbury and Disney would meet. Beyond his boyhood membership in the Mickey Mouse Fan Club, Bradbury has lived a life and created humanistic fantasies that mirror the themes that run through Disney's movies and amusement parks: the homey Main Street nostalgia of Waukegan, the

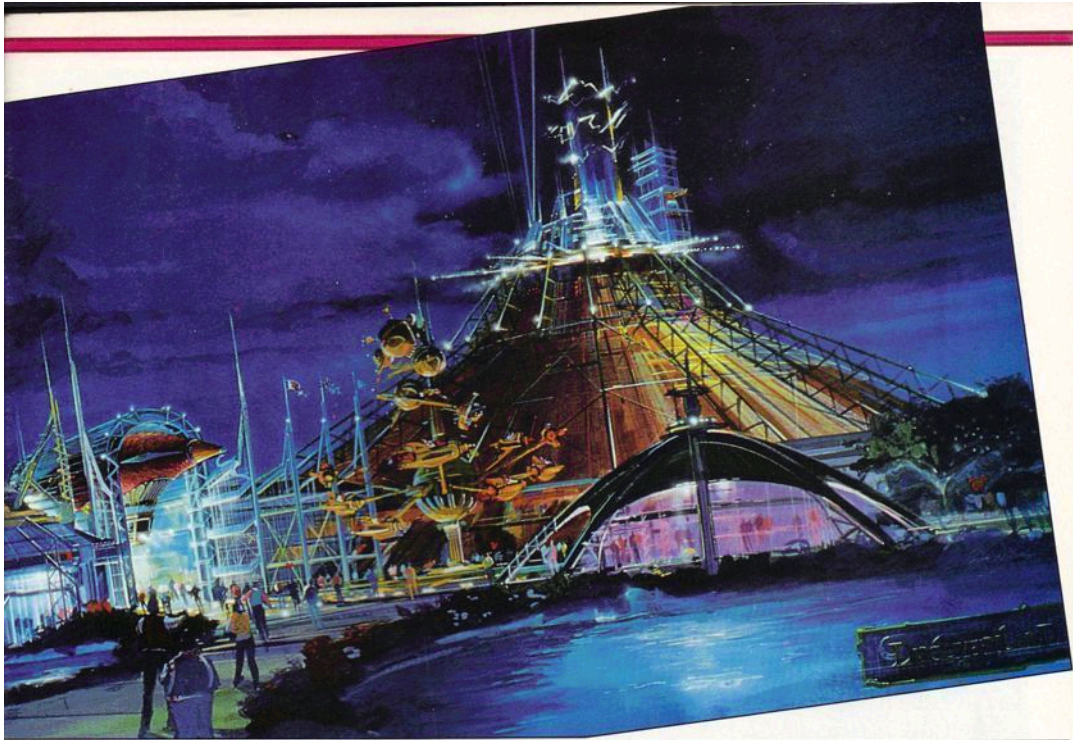
The Walt Disney Co.



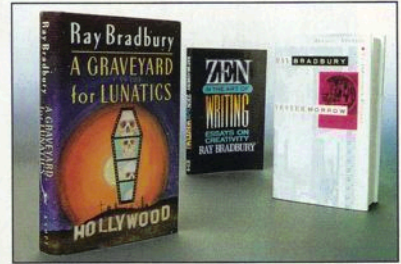
Frontierland adventures of Tugson and the Tomorrowland wonders of science fiction.

"I feel like Walt was a brother of mine," says Bradbury. "He was the most influential creator of this century. A lot of New York intellectuals made fun of Disneyland, but it's changed the world." According to Bradbury, Disneyland is more than a mere amusement park for children; it's a working model for contemporary developers and city planners. Its lesson? "There is profit in excellence. Don't do anything sleazy; don't do anything halfhearted. When in doubt, plant a hundred thousand flowers. People may think you don't need those flowers, those fountains, those benches and trees, but, yes, you do. It's the unnecessary

Continued on page 59



Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences



Todd Masinter



Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

Bradbury's concepts cover a broad range of mediums. They include a ride at EuroDisneyland's Discoveryland (top), several successful films based on his fantasy-allegories such as *Fahrenheit 451* (above) and *The Illustrated Man* (right), novels, and essays, including many on urban design.

Cosmic Ray

Continued from page 45

things that are necessary."

Not surprisingly, Bradbury has been an enthusiastic contributor to Uncle Walt's vision. He wrote an essay for Disney's EPCOT Center in Florida, where an auditory Walter Cronkite in the communications exhibit intones words based on Bradbury's concept of Spaceship Earth. Visitors to EuroDisneyland will actually be able to ride in one of Bradbury's ideas. "I worked on a solar space ride called the Orbitron for EuroDisneyland," he says.

Even shopping malls have been shaped by Bradbury's fertile imagination: As a consultant to architect Jon Jerde, he contributed ideas for Horton Plaza in San Diego and the Westside Pavilion in Los Angeles.

Bradbury has lived to see science fiction emerge from the pulp ghetto to find space on library shelves and in university curricula. He has always believed in writing in a blaze of passion, taking the muse's dictation at high speed and refining it later. At age 71 he is as busy as ever. Already this year he's published two books, a novel called *Green Shadows, White Whale* and a collection of design-related essays called *Yestermorrow: Obvious Answers to Impossible Futures*. And he's still adding short stories to the thousand or so he's already written, adapting some of them for the "Ray Bradbury Theater," now in its sixth year on the USA Network.

"I've always lived at the top of my lungs," he says. "I bother a lot of people, and it drives them mad, and they want to drown me. If you're born hungry, you stay hungry, and the more excitement you pour into your eyes and ears, the more exciting every day is. I've got a million things to do." For Ray Bradbury, the future is now. ☐

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