

Feature



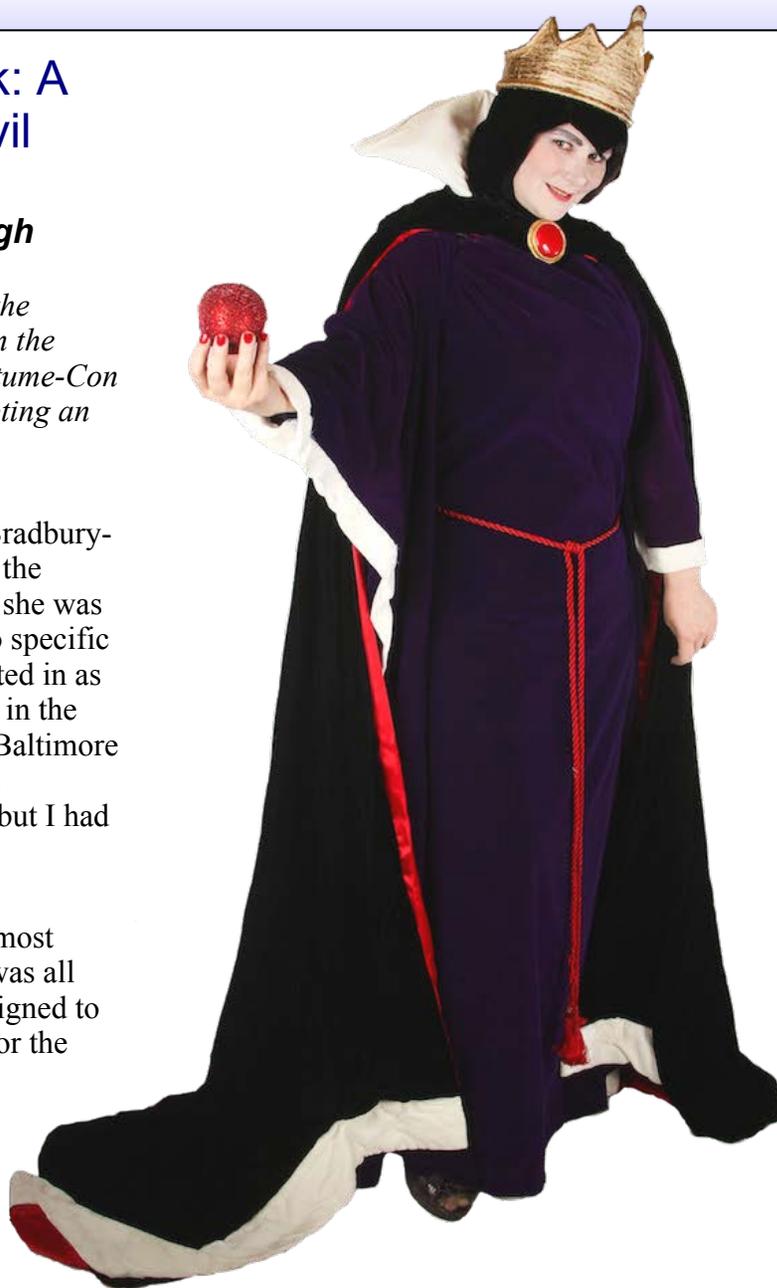
Basic Black: A Naughty Evil Queen

Reagan McHugh

The costumer who portrayed the earliest of the Disney villainesses in the “Basic Black” presentation at Costume-Con 31 discusses the difficulties of adapting an earlier version of her costume to requirements of this presentation.

I don’t remember when Rae Bradbury-Enslin approached me to be part of the “Basic Black” group. I believe that she was looking for costumers that could do specific Disney characters and I had competed in as the “Evil Queen” from *Snow White* in the Journeyman division Worldcon in Baltimore in 1998. When Rae asked if I could participate, I still had the costume, but I had many issues with using the original costume for this presentation.

The biggest problem was the most difficult. My original dress which was all layers of velvet had never been designed to come apart. It was built and sewn for the layers to work onto each other and the under-layers were never meant to be seen. Removing layers meant that they would be. This was a requirement for the “Basic Black” presentation.



The “Queen” had a cowl that I had not finished since it tucked into the dress and was never seen. This meant that when I removed the dress I would have this ugly black hood over a beautiful little black dress.

Also, her standing collar had been built to stay up with the help of the many layers of the dress, and removing the very heavy cloak first would make the collar be unstable immediately. So first I had to transfer the collar to the very large cape so that it would be one of the first things to drop.

To address these issues I realized I had to figure out the sequence in which I would be losing layers so that nothing was attached or would show unfinished. Since I had the most layers to remove, it was decided in the presentation planning that I would start the stripping. Once I knew I would start, then I had to map out at what points of the song what parts of the dress would come off, making sure I had enough time to hit the next mark.

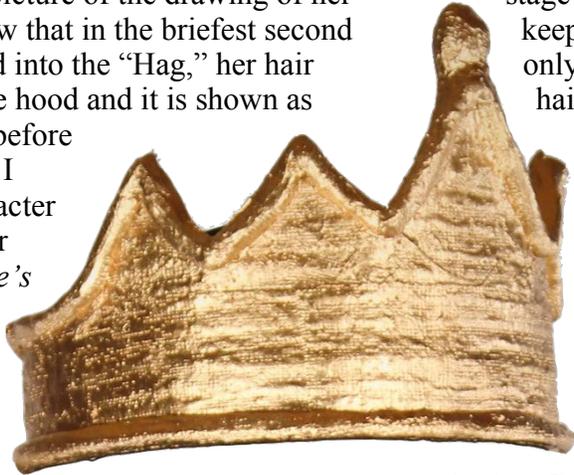
Knowing when a piece would come off let me decide what seems to separate and re-sew with Velcro. This made it possible to reseal the seems so they looked attached, but would come apart with right pulling pressure, and not through pressure of movement. This took some trial and error, eventually I could attach the right amount of seams with Velcro in the right places.

“Evil Queen” before the big “reveal.” (left) Photos Don Searle.

Next I had to solve the problem of the hood. Rae (“Maleficent”) had designed a wonderful neck corset to finish her head piece, which would remain on to lend continuity to her silhouette. Lisa Ashton (“Ursula”) would wear her wig, and Bill Kennedy (“Jafar”) would retain his hat and upper section of his costume. So I needed to figure out what would work best for the group under my constraints of the garment I had.

In my research (watching every pre-hag scene of the “Evil Queen” in Disney’s “Snow White” – and searching out every still production picture of the drawing of her I could find, I saw that in the briefest second before she turned into the “Hag,” her hair breaks free of the hood and it is shown as long and black- before tuning white. So I thought my character could remove her hood to a *Charlie’s Angel* style wig flip, to the horror of the other two characters!

While trying on wigs I feared that I was losing a part of her iconic silhouette, but trying to hide a second cape and collar, where I could end the hood under the outer dress and cape, did not work. Also pulling off the hood and revealing beautiful hair was a wonderful twist.



(Honestly, I wonder whether animation artists ever think about how you translate that swooping costume they draw into actual fabric and a human body? Probably not...)

Of course in the first dry run of this presentation I did not have wig clips in, and even though I had practiced dozens of times and never lost the wig, my wig came off on stage and I had to keep going with only my own short hair slicked back.

Also the crown was designed to fit with the wig- no wig meant I had to drop the crown. Naturally, it broke, which forced me to build yet another crown before Costume-Con 32.

The original was all Sculpey that I rolled it out with a rolling pin and cut the shape of the crown. Then I rolled long worm like shapes to make the rolled edge of the crown. I had to make a tinfoil



support because Sculpey softens as you bake it, and I had to bake it standing up, with the ends joined. It was quite an ordeal to make it.

The new crown (far left) was a piece of poster board, cut to the right shape and size, then covered with plaster strips – the kind for casts for broken arms. Of course I ran out of time to find something to cover that, so even when I spray painted it metallic gold, I could still see the web pattern of the strips. However, it looked good on stage, fit well, and was light weight, which meant no headaches!

Wig clips - I can’t stress the importance of using them enough. That, and a dry run at a smaller convention to work out the bugs.

Reagan McHugh didn't actually go on stage until Balticon in 1996, although she has always made outfits for the halls. She has only entered a few masquerades and has done well in each of them. Her presentations always have something go wrong, but she prides herself in keeping it going no matter what. She has also been blessed to work with some very amazing costumers. For her next competition, she hopes to go after the last frontier - a workmanship award!

Naughty “Evil Queen” after the big “reveal.” (right) New crown. (above) Photos Don Searle.