



Working with I.L.M.
(Insane Lunatics and Madmen)

Doing the Lord's Work

The climax of *Raiders* was supposed to be an extravaganza of visual effects, with supernatural entities under the direct supervision of God himself, delivering the inevitable triumph of Good over Evil. To give us an idea of the level of grandeur expected, early discussions mentioned Disney's *Night on Bald Mountain* sequence a lot. Looking back, I don't think anyone really understood how difficult this was going to be. But, we did know it was going to be "a challenge," which is usually code for "we may die here."

Richard Edlund was the VFX Supervisor and watching his management of the creative team to determine how this was all going to be accomplished was an education in itself. He surrounded himself with the best people available and then plowed through various concepts to find the foundations of discoveries that could be developed and brought to fruition. This was classic creative R&D management at it's best.

That blank canvas was daunting and indeed there were a lot of problems in finding the answers. But if you're in an optimistic frame of mind, you try to look at it as just a lot of opportunities. Some of the problems had mercifully painless solutions but most of the answers remained elusive to us as we slogged thru the tests. We had only vague ideas of how, and more importantly, *what* the end result was going to be. Achieving a workable process to create the spirits and Hellfire for the film's finale became a long and frustrating pursuit. It wasn't pretty...



A lot of ideas were tried...some were really great ideas that turned out to be dumb ideas in disguise (ideas sometimes liked to fool you like that). More than once we would finish a test, look at the results and say, "What were we thinking?" It was always worse when it was the client who said, "What were you thinking?" We tried to do our tests in an organized fashion with the theory that we could learn from our mistakes. More importantly, if it went spectacularly bad, we would know who to blame.

But occasionally a great idea that had been disguised as a dumb one came crawling out of the wreckage. Then everybody would take opportunity to congratulate themselves on being such geniuses, add it to the knowledge base and move on.

Interestingly enough, in spite of all of the pressure and frustration, the only time I ever heard Richard raise his voice, was when some poor slob made an especially vile pot of coffee. The man certainly had his priorities straight.