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How Did the Wizard Become Respectable?

By Ray Bradbury

IF YOU HAD crossed the United States by car in 1933, angling down Route 66, dropping in small-town libraries along the way, you would have discovered an incredible thing.

All of L. Frank Baum's "Oz" books had been burned.

Or, let me put it another way, they had never been purchased. There are all sorts of ways of burning books. One is by pretending they don't exist.

Librarians, plus certain citified intellectuals, were sure from 1901 on up to, well at least the '50s, that L. Frank Baum couldn't write his way out of Munchkin Country or across that Deadly Desert. Oz, after all didn't exist. Don't take fantasy before bedtime. It's bad for you.

Despite this, see how Baum and Oz have survived. Those mean librarians have stepped on that Deadly Desert and gone to dust. Baum's Emerald City shines now from most library stacks, leaning here against acceptable Alice, there with immortal Huck.

★ ★ ★

HOW is it that the fraudulent Wizard became respectable?

Of immediate help in answering the nutcracker question are two new books.

The first, "The Oz Scrapbook," by David L. Greene and Dick Martin (Random House: \$10), is a text and picture



INHABITANTS of the Moon, an engraving by William Hogarth, is the frontispiece from a collection of poetry by the imaginative writer Ray Bradbury titled "Where Robot Mice and Robot Men Run Round in Robot Towns," published by Knopf (\$6.95).

history of the 13 journeys to Oz that Baum undertook, plus the dozens of sequel journeys made by other authors long after his death. Here with 250 pictures, 16 pages in color, the authors take a long and loving look at the thousands of puppets, playing cards, puzzles, jam-jars, Jell-O booklets, figurines, games, radio shows inspired by the magician of Ozcot, Hollywood, Calif. Baum, we see, transported his Oz back

to Kansas in stage plays, comic strips and films that he produced himself, the latter being almost invariable failures.

For readers who have never ticketed themselves to Oz, the book is probably meaningless. For those of us who have always wanted to rent the next tornado and go there, the "Scrapbook" is joy and delight alternating with simple awe

and perhaps simpleminded wonder, page on page.

"The Making of the Wizard of Oz," by Aljean Harmetz (Knopf: \$12.95), is an alternate Yellow Brick Road, more understandable and of interest to the non-nostalgic reader. For if you prefer not to think of Tin Woodmen, Scarecrows or Wogglebugs, you have a grand good opportunity to enter a much more impossible country: MGM. There you can watch the incredible accidents, collisions, misconceptions, Toto-dog hunts, makeup poisonings and almost-witch burnings that could have birthed a monster but came up with a beauty.

Somehow "The Wizard of Oz," hoping to star Shirley Temple but finally settling for Judy Garland, stumbled, fell, crawled, danced, sang its way through the fall and winter of 1938, in sound stages without air-conditioning, under the greatest battery of film lights ever assembled, inside costumes and makeup that suffocated and almost killed, to collapse, finished, in August, 1938 at the feet of critics who really didn't care all that much.

Aljean Harmetz has trapped it all, partly through long and diligent research, partly because she is the daughter of the secretary to the head of the wardrobe department at MGM, and grew up on the lot during the beautiful, terrible age of the man-eating tyrannosaurs and gods fresh down from Olympus.

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