One of the most powerful and sinister of the Disney villains, Maleficent made her on-screen debut in Sleeping Beauty on January 29, 1959. She is an evil fairy. Although some might consider her to be a sorceress by the definition of the word. With her magic powers, she is capable of shape-shifting into a number of various forms. She can teleport herself in an instant and throw lightning bolts at her enemies from the glowing green orb at the top of her ever-present staff. With her pet raven and legions of goons at her command, Maleficent casts her evil spells and wields her dark forces as the self-proclaimed "mistress of all evil."

"I set my trap for a peasant and lo! I catch a prince." –MALEFICENT
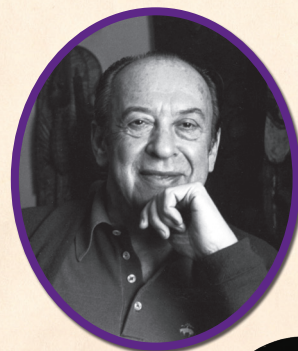
MALEFICENT

A Villain By Design

The name Maleficent is derived from the words "malice" and "malevolent." After making an uninvited appearance at the princess's christening, Maleficent curses the infant Aurora to "prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel and die" before the sun sets on her sixteenth birthday. Wicked to the core, Maleficent's curse conveys a dark sense of humor, but she clearly lacks the usual sense of "goofiness" displayed by later Disney villains. This wicked twist, along with her magical abilities, makes Maleficent perhaps the evilest of all Disney villains.

Marc Davis was the designer and lead animator of Walt Disney's legendary Nine Old Men of animation. Maleficent presented a new direction for Davis as he was usually assigned to the genteel female leads. Created in gothic style, Marc Davis, the directing animator of the wicked Maleficent, compared her to a "giant vampire bat."

Early concept designs by the story teams ventured off into a number of directions. In reaching the final design of the character, Davis scoured through numerous art books on the Middle Ages, where "I found some figure that was kind of a religious nature, but a part of the gown, there were these kind of medallions and they had a look of flames...I started with that." Stemming from this, Davis continued, "Since she was evil I decided, the horns of the devil wouldn't hurt, so I put the horns on her. Then around her neck, kind of like bat wings I added in the shapes of those things along her gown sleeves...and then the hands and ring and the pole that she had."

Marc Davis used Eleanor Audley's voice and look as a reference. "Working with her was just great. There's a lot of the facial look that I have put into Maleficent that really is Eleanor Audley...her look was just right." Regarding her vocal performance, Audley later stated, "I tried to do a lot of contrasting to be both sweet and nasty at the same time."

Eleanor Audley modeling as Maleficent

"...that's the thing with all these characters, to make them alive...make you believe in them because after all, it's just a drawing."
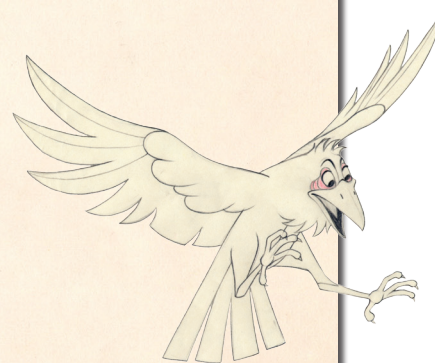
Maleficent's role was primarily a "talking role" as she didn't have close contact with anything. Davis gave Maleficent her pet raven to have something to interact with and to serve as an extension of her evilness. "These are the toughest of all things to animate. Somebody stands up and gives a speech directly into the camera...very difficult to bring to life, so actually, the idea for Maleficent, (was) she'd have this raven. She could pet it if she wanted. She could talk to it. She could send it off to look for Briar Rose. This was the thing I came up with that had the greatest tendency to make her alive, and that's the thing with all these characters, to make them alive...make you believe in them because after all, it's just a drawing."

The dragon that she later transforms into holds many physical similarities, but as Davis described, "I had nothing to do with the dragon, but it was based on Maleficent...there was a consistency; this wasn't just a dragon that she turned into, this was her own particular dragon."

Regardless of whatever form, Maleficent was so successfully evil, parents had to leave the theatre with crying children whenever she appeared on screen. From the animator's desk to the animated screen, Maleficent reigns as the darkest of the Disney villains by design.

First Time on Diamond Edition Blu-ray™ and Digital HD