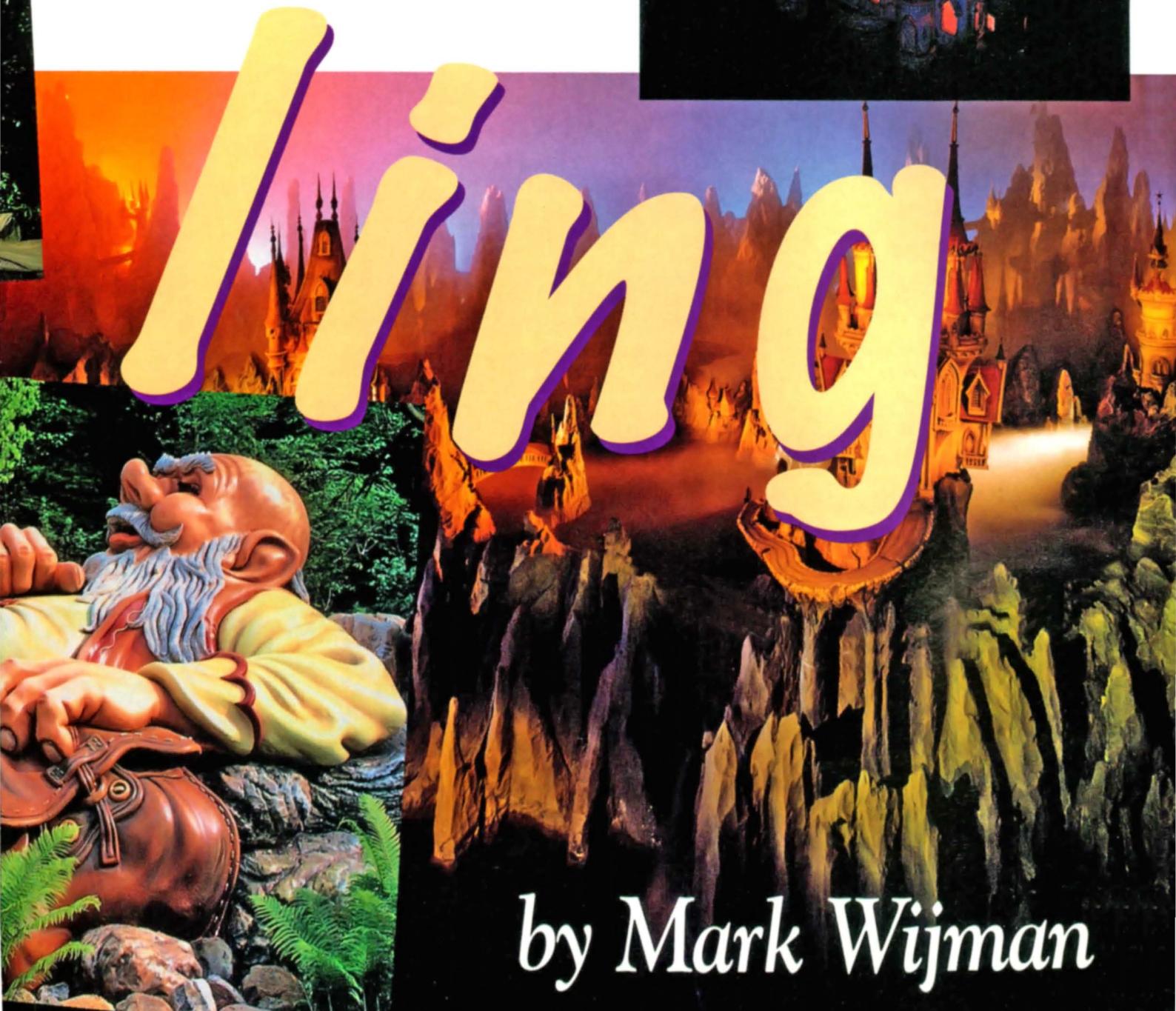
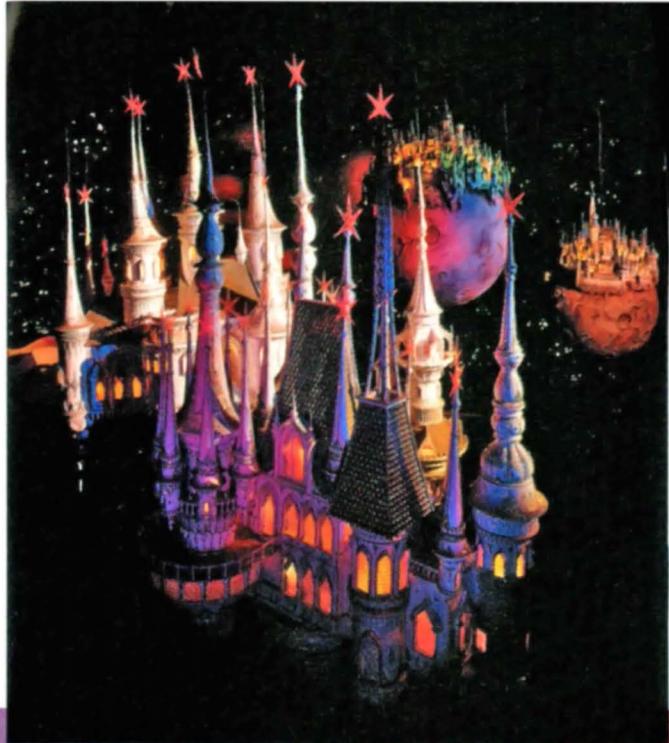


**T**he fairy tale of Efteling starts in 1933 when two chaplains set up a "sports complex" consisting of a couple of fields for games and a playground for the local children. Sixteen years later, coinciding with the economic boom after World War II, the mayor of the municipalities of Kaatsheuvel and Loon op Zand saw potential for the area in the fields of leisure and entertainment. Within 12 months the Efteling Nature Park Foundation was established in what is today one of the most highly regarded

theme parks in Europe.

The famous Dutch illustrator Anton Pieck was brought on board to design various fairy tale scenes that were brought to life technically by Peter Reijnders. With the scenes complete, The Efteling Fairy Tale Forest opened its gates on May 31, 1952, and more than 240,000 visitors came in that first year.

Today Efteling receives three million guests a year. In addition to the Fairy Tale Forest it houses 15 major rides, including some elaborately themed dark rides. Efteling is regarded as a trendsetter by



by Mark Wijman

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The public relations building fits well in the theme of the park.

many in the industry, with many rides making their first appearances at the Dutch themer. For its visitors Efteling is more than a just a theme park.

The history of Efteling emanates with every step through the park. Ronald van der Zijl, CEO of the park, acknowledges that the park management strives to keep the fairy tale atmosphere, noting the "Pieckesque" environment and "Dutch living room values" to be key factors of the park. One of the trends Van der Zijl sees around him is the quest for higher, steeper, faster thrill rides. "This is an area we do not want to be in; it doesn't fit into our product's setting and it is surely not something that should be dominating the park. Surely

we are not going to have a record-breaking roller coaster anytime soon, because of the fairytale-ish character of Efteling and because there is no way something like that will fit in."

One of the other key factors of Efteling is that it is truly a park: Less than 10 percent of the park's 72 hectares (180 acres) is occupied with buildings. The remaining 90 percent is occupied by three large lakes, and landscaped gardens and forests.

The park is divided into four separate "Rijken" (Realms), the Travel Realm, Wild Realm, Fairy Realm, and Alternative Realm. Until last season the park areas were simply called North, East, South, and West. Communications manager Henk Groenen explains the vision behind

the name changes: "The new names open the path to further develop the individual character of the different areas leading not only to new or remodeled attractions but also to places to shop, eat, and drink, as well as a more specific entertainment program for each of the four Realms."

Efteling is home to 33 fairy tales including *Sleeping Beauty*, *Long Neck*, *Snow White*, *The Troll King*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and the *Flying Fakir*. The durability and attraction of Pieck's Fairy Tale Forest is reestablished every year when the park opens. This has been the case for more than 47 years, and the park continues to grow with more fairy tales and other rides and attractions to delight young and old.

The fairy tale setting is expressed in virtually every aspect of Efteling, all the way down to an original way of keeping the park free of trash conceived in 1958: Holle Bolle Gijs (Big Mouth, the Paper Gobbler). This creature disposes of large quantities of paper, plastic containers, and other waste, day in and day out in an environmentally friendly manner. Children particularly enjoy putting their pieces of waste between his mighty chops and hearing him say "thank you."

On March 30, 1972, Efteling again received international recognition by receiving the Pomme d'Or, Europe's



premier award for tourism and recreation. The award was given for the original way Efteling has succeeded in providing a continually increasing number of visitors with affordable recreation of a constant quality.

In 1978, Efteling introduced the imposing *Haunted Castle*. The \$2 million castle was to be the first in a series of additions that were part of a multiyear plan to provide guests with more than the fairy tales alone, and also more than could be seen in a single day. In 1981, after strong local opposition, the *Python* opened as Europe's then largest steel coaster with four inversions. This Vekoma-built double-loop-corkscrew ride still proves to be particularly popular amongst the young visitors.



*Children immediately take to the fairy tale characters at Efteling.*

For older guests there is the *Gondoletta*, 40 nine-seat boats that glide peacefully past ducks, swans, and landscaped gardens. Other successful additions include the giant swinging galleon, *De Halve Maen*, and the *Piranha*, an Incan-themed river rapids ride built in 1983.

In 1984, as part of the investment plan, the *Steam Train* track was extended and three new attractions were introduced. The largest was *Carnival Festival*, a ride similar to *It's a Small World* found at the Disney parks. Smaller, but equally popular were the *Polka Marina*, a cockleboat carousel, and an *Old Timer* track with Model T Fords. In 1985, *De Bob (The Bobsleigh)*, an Intamin-built lightning bobsled run, opened and annual

park attendance jumped to two million.

In 1986, 35 years of Efteling were celebrated with yet another new attraction: *Fata Morgana, The Forbidden City*. During their 8-minute exploration of this mysterious oriental castle, guests pass 140 animatronic figures, not to mention snakes, tigers, camels, and crocodiles. This amazing attraction took five years and \$10 million to build.

As in previous years, Efteling also had a number of new attractions ready for the 1987 season. Like every year, the park was turned into a permanent sea of colorful flowers. Three hundred thousand bulbs and thousands of summer blooms, including petunias, begonias, and lobelias, were planted on a total area of about 12 acres throughout the park. And to provide guests with even more vistas the *Pagode* made its debut. The

whimsical *Thai Flying Temple* enabled visitors to see Efteling and the surrounding area from a completely new perspective.

In 1988 the *Troll King* arrived at the park to predict the future from his throne in the Fairy Tale Forest. The *Troll King* is a remarkably complex animatronic figure with moving hips, wrists, arms, and back. The figure has a total of 26 functions, 9 in his head alone. He sits in a hollow 21-foot tree, which is surrounded by water so he can daydream without being disturbed.

The arrival of the Laafs marked 1990 in exceptional fashion. Under the leadership of their Earthmother, Lot, the Laaf people decided to make their home at Efteling after centuries of roaming underground. In the village that the Laafs built, guests can admire their fantastic buildings and become acquainted with their lifestyle.

In 1991 the park added *Pegasus*, a wooden coaster designed by the late Curtis Summers. This year also saw the beginning of construction on the Efteling Hotel, part of a larger growth plan that called for an entertainment center, a holiday village, and 9- and 18-hole golf courses.

Efteling celebrated the 40th anniversary of the opening of the Fairy Tale Forest in 1992. A new one-of-a-kind dark ride *Droomvlucht* (*Dreamflight*) was due to open this season. Unfortunately problems arose with its prototype transportation system and the opening of the ride was postponed for a season. The Efteling Hotel Kaatsheuvel opened attracting a large number of guests. As part of the anniversary celebrations, a tribute was paid to Anton Pieck—"the father of Efteling's success"—in the form of an extensive exhibition of his work.

*Droomvlucht* opened in 1993 and proved to be a first-rate crowd puller. Designed in-house, the six-minute attraction takes guests in suspended gondolas through the world of fairies and trolls. *Droomvlucht* is still the park's

most popular attraction.

A record-breaking 2,717,000 people visited the park in 1993. For 1994, a new playground was built for the younger children.

In 1995 the expansive Efteling Golf Park and *The House of Five Senses*, the first phase of the new entertainment center, was opened. Once completed, the entertainment center will be an experience in itself and will contain several attractions including shows, amusements, street theater, cafes, bars, and restaurants.

The new attraction for 1996 was *Villa Volta*, a huge mansion located next to *Droomvlucht*. The \$6 million attraction was built in collaboration with Dutch ride manufacturer Vekoma and is a reincarnation of a popular turn-of-the-century fairground ride known as the revolving house. The attraction tells the story of Hugo, the leader of a gang named "e Bokkenrijders" who made the surrounding neighborhoods of the park unsafe during the 1760s. After he robs a local monastery, a curse is put on him by mysterious women whom he finds floating above his mansion (*Villa Volta*) when he returns home. Inside his mansion Hugo invites guests to step inside his impressive living room to stop the curse. *Villa Volta* received the 1996 THEA award of outstanding achievement for this unique attraction.

In 1998 *Vogel Rok* (*Bird Rock*), a \$13 million indoor roller coaster, opened. This latest major ride takes guests in pitch darkness through high-speed helixes and sudden drops at speeds of up to 45 mph. *Vogel Rok*'s trains feature an onboard sound system that plays music especially created for the



*The Troll King features 26 separate animatronic functions.*

attraction. In addition to *Vogel Rok*, Efteling added two new fairy tales: *The Giant and Tom Thumb*, and *Rumpelstiltskin*.

In the final year of the 20th century the park again gives a central position to the Fairy Tale Forest where a new fairy tale, *The Chinese Nightingale*, is added and two existing fairy tales are expanded: Next to the cave where Snow White sleeps, a small castle arose showcasing an impressive, somewhat frightening version of "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall." Next to the castle *Eersteling Inn* opened its doors, being home to the two remaining scenes of the fairytale of *The Table, the Donkey, and the Stick*.

## Admission

Admission for the park is \$17.02; children under four are admitted free of charge. Seniors and disabled pay \$15.88. There is a flat group rate of \$13.61 per person while school groups are charged \$10.89 per person. The park has special arrangements for admission and meal.

The park features two season passes, one costing \$72.60 per person, which is valid daily throughout the



Live shows recreate traditional fairy tales.

season, and another one costing \$52.18, which is limited to weekdays in the early and late season. In addition a two-day ticket is available for \$29.50.

## Special Events

During the summer months of July and August Efteling presents the Seven League Summer when the park is open from 10 a.m. until 9 p.m. In addition to the normal range of rides and attractions there are also more live entertainment and shows. A special Seven-League ticket is available from 4 p.m. at the reduced price of \$12.48.

Van der Zijl has no fear that the arrival of the Euro in 2001 will influence the perceptional price level. Efteling is, compared to other Northern European parks, one of the cheapest, with a quality level that is one of the highest. "The Dutch customer is very cautious when it comes to prices, and you have to ask yourself how much effect an increased admission price has on your per capita spending in the park," he says.

For the first time in history the park also opens during the '99 holiday season. On selected days from mid December until early January the park will open as "Winter Efteling" with added special events, including an ice rink. Because of the weather some rides, such as *the Piranha*, *de Bob*, *the Python*, and *Pegasus*, will not be operational. Van der Zijl explains this rather interesting move: "We have hundreds of millions worth of rides and attractions on our property, which we only use for 200 days a year. If we can turn that figure into 220 and have a reasonable number of guests, our return on investment will increase enormously."

It goes without saying that this small season, added to the normal winter period, creates some interesting challenges. For instance, the maintenance department usually starts to refurbish all rides and attractions in mid-October, finishing in March. The *Gondelleta Boats* are put on the shore of the lake. There are no flowers, no green trees, but

"We are now going  
to 'redevelop'  
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fresh again."

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*Efteling blends high and low tech attractions in a pastoral setting.*

still people are looking for an "Efteling" atmosphere. "With lighting and other effects we are going to create a completely different product than the 'summer Efteling,'" Van der Zijl says.

## Macroeconomic Factors

Efteling is in the same two-hour radius as many other parks, Phantasialand in Germany, Warner Bros. Movie World, Bobbejaanland, and Walibi Wavre. Still, Van der Zijl sees more competition from the fact that customers go farther and farther to spend their vacation, and from local events such as flea markets, flower exhibits, or music festivals. "If you combine that with the increasing number of traffic jams as well as the demographical changes, you just about have an idea of all the challenges we are facing."

Van der Zijl notes that there are more and more people who have less leisure time. "When you have young kids, you even have an exhausting program during weekends. The youngest has to go to soccer training, another to athletics, and the oldest wants to go shopping with her mom. This gives people less time to relax during their leisure time."

## Marketing

Efteling is located in the south of The Netherlands, with the Belgian border less than 30 kilometers (20 miles) away. No surprise that approximately 85 percent of its visitors are from these countries, with most others coming from Germany and the United Kingdom. All these groups are treated with different marketing activities. The park works with a leading agency in The Netherlands, which develops the advertising programs. These are then altered by local Belgian, German, and UK agencies to meet specific cultural standards and reach specific markets. For instance there are different programs for Germans in Germany (who drive 2-3 hours to the park for a one-day visit) and those already in the area (who drive 30 minutes at the most).

The park advertises frequently with small ads in national newspapers stressing events taking place on specific days, and uses TV and billboards regularly as well. Press relations are also used more frequently than in the past. At present one press release is given out every 10 days stressing upcoming events and additions.

## Future Plans

"Over the past couple of years we have invested heavily in the Fairy Tale Forest, and we will continue doing so," says Van der Zijl. "One of the more important things for the next few years is the 'Greenplan.' When I assumed my position here three years ago, I was of the opinion that our forest had evolved into huge tree trunks with some green on top. In other words, it wasn't really an exciting forest anymore. We are now going to 'redevelop' all green areas of the park to really be green and fresh again, not tall brown trunks which make the whole park dark."

For the future the park is also looking into adding a boulevard with shops and restaurants from the *House of the Five Senses* to a new central plaza close to the *Haunted Castle*. Says Groenen, "Together with the creation of the Realms this year we feel that this will further improve the infrastructure of the park." When seen from above after the addition of the boulevard the park will look like a butterfly, the four realms serving as wings, the boulevard as its body.

When the park opened in 1952 it was a fairy tale forest; nobody even thought about things like merchandising, live entertainment, and food and beverage, because those had nothing to do with the core product. Van der Zijl acknowledges that Efteling doesn't feature a very good balance of these last three things and rides and attractions. "Of course we feel this better balance is needed because a visit to Efteling should be a total experience. Rides and attractions will remain important, but they need to become something like a chapter of a book, not the book."

Regarding new rides and attractions it is quite clear, says Groenen. "Most likely the next major ride will open in 2002, as part of our 50th anniversary, and it will probably be a fairy tale attraction like *Droomvlucht* or *Fata Morgana*, because that is what we do best. We have made a decision to not install a major

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attraction every one to two years because of the fact we feel that alone will not keep the guests coming. Our guests want a total experience; they want to be entertained from the moment they enter until the moment they leave. Meeting a character or listening to a story from the princess can be far more touching than riding the *Python*." Groenen also sees that many parks are losing balance because they are only adding big major new rides and forget about the charming little things. "Of course we want to have something new every year," he adds. "But that can also be a fairy tale or new sorts of small scale live entertainment."

Efteling has always been the Fairy Tale Treasure Trove; it is suiting that the park chooses to further expand by looking back at where it came from and what the expectations of its visitors are. Their future plans may look reserved at first sight and most likely will not



*The Pegasus, built in 1991, was designed by the late Curtis Summers.*

lead to record-breaking numbers of visitors. But, in the long run, it will lead to a deeper impact with visitors and Efteling will again make its name as a trendsetter. The niche of fairy tales and quality will always be around in our fast-paced world. **fw**

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