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HOW I BECAME A

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# PYROTECHNICIAN



BY ADAM BISCOW

**AS A KID, I spent summers working at a theater near my house in Connecticut. I was really fascinated by lighting and all the technical things involved in show business. One year, there was a bunch of flash powder around for some show, and it was just really exciting. What kid doesn't like explosions and fire?**

I went to college for a design-technology program, but I only spent about a year there. In the technical side of theater, you really learn by actually doing it. I tried to get onto Broadway, but I didn't have a lot of success. So I spent about three years as an electrician, working on people's houses. One of those people owned a shop that built Broadway sets. I worked at his shop for a couple of years, and I also got involved with a fireworks company and took the test to get a license to be a pyrotechnician — someone who creates effects out of fire, gunpowder or anything that combusts.

After that I worked on Broadway as a special-effects technician, doing everything from water effects, like rain, to pyrotechnics, like torches and exploding chandeliers. Then I got a call from a company that needed a pyro-and-laser technician for Justin Timberlake's tour. I spent the next few years touring with different musicians, and working on award shows like the Grammys. Eventually I was hired by a company called Strictly FX. We've done everything from WrestleManias to Super Bowl halftime shows to Joe Biden's presidential inauguration.

When I'm working on a show, first I'll sketch and storyboard the effects. Then I use software that allows you to fire the show and see what it looks like, and I send the layout to other designers. Everybody in this business has their own signature; my thing is Armageddon, a big display. I like a lot of noise. It's got to be big, flashy and loud. *Interview by Jenna Marotta*