

Bakshi's animation suits trilogy

Middle Earth fantasy on screen

By JOHN WARD
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

Somewhere between Disneyland and reality lies the world of Ralph Bakshi. It's a world full of fantasy, wonder, love and violence. And never before have any of these themes been brought together so graphically as in Bakshi's adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy trilogy "The Lord of the Rings."

Tolkien's epic tale of hobbits, elves and sorcery has been Bakshi's pet project for several years. It has taken him that long to create the intricate animation effects necessary for such a project.

Bakshi, is famous for his X-rated "Fritz the Cat" and "Heavy Traffic" cartoons. Fewer people, however, are aware of "Wizards," a small fantasy cartoon that, in hindsight, seems like prep work for "The Lord of the Rings." "Wizards" came out two years ago to a lukewarm critic and public reception.

Undaunted, Bakshi dove into the "Rings" project, and his resulting film is currently filling the screen locally at the Movies. In its scope and length—two hours, 15 minutes—"The Lord of the Rings" is definitely the most ambitious animated film since Walt Disney's "Fantasia."

The film's length is both a help and a hindrance. Bakshi has taken great pains to detail the escapades in Tolkien's books. But so much time is taken toward this goal that it becomes impossible to cram the complete trilogy into one film. Hence, the film stops dead at the end of "The Two Towers," the second book in the trilogy. Purists will no doubt go home unhappy at this.



Illustration by Della Hoko

That's the wrong attitude to take. While the film loses some of its impact by ending so abruptly, it's still a richly entertaining piece of animation. The backgrounds are beautifully painted, and Bakshi achieves a fluidity with his animated characters that only the Disney studios could hope to match.

"The Lord of the Rings" is at once both simple in characterization and complex in plot. Tolkien's hero is Frodo Baggins, a hobbit who is entrusted with the mystical One Ring. Among other things, the ring can turn its wearer invisible. But it can also corrupt whoever wears it continuously.

The ring is also coveted by Sauron, the embodiment of evil in Middle Earth. To keep the ring from Sauron, a conclave of hobbits, elves, dwarves and men decide to destroy it by casting it into the fire from which it was forged. The catch is that the forge, a volcano named Mount Doom, lies on the very doorstep of Sauron's lair.

A fellowship is formed to take the ring to Mordor and destroy it. Heading the quest are Frodo, his best friend Sam Gamgee and Aragorn, an enigmatic adventurer-type. Their travels make up the latter part of the film and provide an interesting backdrop to Bakshi's artistry.

It will be interesting to see how Bakshi wraps up the trilogy because, rest assured, a sequel is planned. It would be a major crime to leave audiences hanging on the last image, that of the good wizard Gandalf with his sword held high. "The Lord of the Rings" deserves to be told in full, with its magic and entertainment intact.

Cat's not making it even with old style

By PATRICK J. KIGER
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Back in the days when Barry Manilow was grinding out ditties for deodorant commercials and current soft-rock fave raves like Dan Hill and Olivia Newton-John were but fantasies in the mind of some record company vice-president, Cat Stevens was big time.

And I mean really big time. "Moonshadow" was a virtual anthem for a generation of demure, "serious" girls-academy, kneesocks and cold cream types. But the Cat, unsatisfied by mere fame, had to be artistic as well; he proceeded to kiss off his notoriety by putting out a series of jazzy, avant-garde albums which alienated many of his following.

However, with his latest offering, Back To Earth (A & M Records) the Cat shows evidence of returning to his softtouch, folksy style of old. Apparently, he's aiming for another shot at the featherweight crown of rock music. But unfortunately for him, this album is unlikely to further any such ambitions.

Other than "Bad Brakes," a bouncy, medium-hard rocker, the grating over-orchestration and pseudo-poetic lyrics ("... my heart would never lie down/cause that's the way my arrow flies," he sings on "Randy," one of the album's real gobblers) are enough to turn even the knee-sock set nauseous. Maybe it's that the Cat has simply lost it, but I

tend to suspect the explanation is that what seemed touching in 1972 is just plain tacky in 1979.

The Grateful Dead, on the other hand, have no such problems, even though Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir and Co. have been around for so long that they probably can remember when smoking dope was supposed to be a mystical experience, not just an adolescent vice. In any case, Shakedown Street (Warner Bros. Records) is ample proof that old Dead never really die, they just forget it, it's a stupid joke anyway.

Like last year's "Terrapin Station," the latest Dead offering is produced by Lowell George of Little Feat, and his jazzrock fusion influence is particularly apparent on the title cut, a tasty bit of be-bop funk, and on "From the Heart of Me," which includes a standout vocal by Donna Godchaux. Bob Weir gets into the act with a good job on "I Need a Miracle" and the Dead's cover of "Good Lovin'."

Of course, the best thing about the album is Jerry Garcia. That's right, he of the motheaten beard and shoulder length hair, the one who looks like he should be a poster child for the Save Our Vanishing Hippies Foundation. Garcia's subtly innovative guitar work and sense of humor (dig the words to "Shaker Lee," to see what I mean) are what has kept the Dead in the limelight and out of the bargain bin all these years.

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