

## arts

## 'Star Wars' sequel definitely worth the wait

By Ann Smallwood

The much-anticipated *Star Wars* sequel has finally hit the big screen of Raleigh's North Hills Cardinal I cinema, and Triangle residents are queuing up in droves to see still more brave battles, dashing rescues and evil deeds and hear more wise counsel from the priests of The Force. They shouldn't be disappointed.

*The Empire Strikes Back*, the fifth installment of writer/producer George Lucas' proposed nine-episode series, is more than a commercial add-on to the highest-grossing film of all time. It has a new-improved style all its own. The theme-music fanfares seem a bit brighter, faster and louder, the action more polished, the characters more confident and the

philosophy more blatant, if not more mature, or well-defined.

In short, the saga has grown up a bit, and with the wide-eyed Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) the audience is taken along a more violent, realistic adventure in which good and evil, though still simplistic, become a little less clear-cut. But along with its wordy disillusionment and death, *The Empire* retains most of the comic-book fantasy and naive humor that made the original *Star Wars* so magical.

As the title implies, the plot involves Darth Vader's revenge on the rebels for their destruction of the Death Star in the first film, now billed as *Star Wars, Episode IV: A New Hope*. *Episode V* opens as evil meets good in fiery splendor on the spectacular ice planet Hoth.

Once again set decorators, costume designers and monster and model makers should be commended for their imagination and ingenuity, but unfortunately, in the first scenes on Hoth, stop-motion animation of the rebels' snow camels is amateurishly jerky. And, perhaps I'm a cynic, but the Empire's spectacular tank monsters on stilt-legs were so incredibly stupidly and clumsily designed that I couldn't believe that intelligent bad-guy engineers would propose that they be used to lead ground assaults against fighter planes.

see lips meet lips, raw sex and dirty words do not taint outer space's PG reputation. The heroic trio of Luke, Leia and Han still chide each other with nifty insults like "nerf herder," "laser brain," and "scoundrel."

Han is, as could be expected, still the rogue, but with more sexual bravado. Luke, although he still does his daring-young-flier act, does finally learn to show fear convincingly. Unfortunately, Leia still issues her jut-jawed commands as if some asinine male pilot just hissed at her that her slip was showing. She still seems more over-assertive than truly commanding.

Darth Vader (with James Earl Jones' uncredited voice) still enjoys growling dark threats and knocking off his enemies with Force-powered clutches at the throats. Attempts to show his humanity were well-intentioned and perhaps overdue, but for the most part, his character stays flat.

The best new face is a green one—Yoda the Jedi warrior trainer. This Muppet-style imp may seem cuddly and cute, but he's tough and wily enough to teach Skywalker, still a reckless boy, a thing or two about the Force. Here, in a luscious, swampy-snakey setting, the cackling but spry 800-year-old Yoda emits a charmingly jumbled but thematically useless flow of wise thoughts from Freud to Confucius to Dr. Norman Vincent Peale.

A less-stunning debut comes from Billy Dee Williams as Han's old friend, a renegade-turned-businessman named Lando Calrissian. It's at Calrissian's mining city in the clouds that the unrelenting action reaches its zenith.

Here, at Dagobah, an unexpected twist is introduced which should keep fans wondering and arguing until the next episode appears in '83. *The Empire* is a little better than a sequel, but it unquestionably ends like one—like a beginning. We'll just have to wait.

## cinema

Despite these and other incongruities—the expected but ridiculous vulnerability of the the white-armored Imperial storm troopers, who still drop like flies at the most random laser blasts from Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) or Han Solo (Harrison Ford), and the space ships zooming and booming in a vacuum every good physics student knows to be utterly soundless—this film has enough action and beauty to transfix even the most skeptical. It's amazing what epic splendor and titillating detail a \$20 million budget can provide.

Mercifully, the android comedy team of C3PO and R2-D2 was toned down while the performances of actors and aliens, under the direction of Irvin Kershner, were brought out.

Although eager romantics this time get to

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