

Cinema

Fantasy-adventure film 'Willow' hits the screen

George Lucas fails to duplicate tried and true movie formula

Once you come up with the winning formula for a movie, the temptation to stick with it must be very great. Unfortunately for Ron Howard and George Lucas, the director and screenwriter of "Willow," too much reliance on a proven formula makes for a stale replica.

In its set of main characters and plot, "Willow" closely follows "Star Wars," with two differences: "Willow" takes place on a fantasized medieval earth rather than a galaxy far, far away, and "Star Wars" is an exciting film.

In "Willow," the story of a band of renegades who set out to shield a young princess from an evil empire, two characters share the Princess Leia role: a princess-to-be baby girl and

Christopher Sellers Cinema

the daughter of the evil Queen Bavmorda.

The casting department struck gold in the expressive face of the baby playing the younger princess, though shots of her reactions become routine after a while. But the striking Princess Sorsha, who falls for Willow's human companion Madmartigan and betrays her mother, gets short-changed by the script. The quickness with which she switches sides seems awkward — another testimony to the laziness of the film-makers.

In most of Lucas' films, ordinary humans have the lead roles, but here a dwarf named Willow Ufgood (Warwick Davis) plays the hero as a member of a miniature race. His sympathetic face as well as his natural acting style easily win the audience over. But the choice of real dwarves to play featured non-human races probably sounded better on paper than it looked on the screen.

No cartoon medium or make-up job separates the viewer from a dwarf's actual appearance. As a result, the close-ups suggest a freakish image in our real society prejudiced against those who do not look ordinary. With this intrusion of reality, the intended mood fizzles.

Willow's magical powers and wits

allow him to take part in the battles between normal-sized humans. It is in those battles that the filmmakers allow themselves the greatest expression of creativity through magic.

But both the fantasy and science fiction genres require the creation of an entirely new fictional world, particularly in movies. Lucas used to be good at this, but in "Willow" he does a mediocre job.

The main creatures all have human forms and differ only in size. Two chipmunk-high "Brownies" step into almost exactly the same roles played by R2-D2 and C3PO in "Star Wars," providing some very funny moments but sometimes appearing in an all-too-predictable fashion.

The background scenery consists

mostly of conventional woods instead of imagined landscapes. The castles are huge and detailed, resembling the usual Middle Ages models.

Lucas' light and magic has never been flashier, particularly in transformation scenes. Still, magical events like the final scene receive no fictional explanation like the "Force" did; they just happen.

Though not a bad movie, "Willow" shows a lack of imagination, particularly in comparison with the earlier work of Lucas. Like the final magic act Willow uses to outwit Queen Bavmorda, it is more a routine trick than a spectacular act of sorcery. One good thing may come from it, however, if bad reviews force Lucas to stop resting on his laurels.

Realistic special effects, strong acting bring enchanting story to life

You've heard the previews for almost a year: "Willow: an epic adventure from the creator of 'Star Wars' and the director of 'Cocoon' ... Coming May 1988." Well, May 1988 has arrived and so has "Willow." Was it worth the wait? The answer is undoubtedly yes.

George Lucas, the man who brought you the "Star Wars" trilogy and the Indiana Jones series, has created yet another magical world to enchant and amuse you. With Ron Howard as the director, "Willow" is the best two hours of fun to come along in ages.

Many critics have given the movie bad reviews, calling it a disappointment or worse. Indeed, the movie has been hyped for months and may leave some viewers expecting too much. But those who go to "Willow" with an open mind and a desire to be entertained won't be disappointed.

The first of the summer movies, "Willow" is a fun, action-filled, fast-paced sword-and-sorcery adventure

James Mills Cinema

for everyone. Kids and adults alike will marvel at the special effects the movie possesses and become engrossed in this enchanting, good vs. evil story.

As the movie begins, the evil Queen Bavmorda rules over a Tolkienish land filled with hardships and suffering. A child who ancient prophecy says will end the evil and begin an era of good and prosperity has been born. Queen Bavmorda's armies search for the baby in order to destroy her soul and ensure Bavmorda's continued reign.

However, the infant princess, Elora Danan, eludes the armies and falls into the hands of Willow Ufgood, a member of a peaceful, farming society of munchkinlike people. Willow

undertakes a perilous journey through lands of forests, ice and deserts to return the child to her people.

Along the way, Willow is joined by Madmartigan, the greatest swordsman in the land; a pair of 9-inch-tall forest people known as Brownies; and a sorceress, Reselle, who is trapped in the body of an animal by a spell.

During their journey, Willow and company encounter trolls; a two-headed, fire-breathing creature; huge ratlike dogs; magic spells; love potions; and much more until the climactic ending in Bavmorda's castle.

The movie is a visual feast of special effects. The viewer will believe that the 9-inch-tall Brownies are actually

standing beside the 3-foot Willow — an illusion created by special effects.

The ending in the castle tower with lightning, rain, people flying and other events may seem real, but it is all done through special effects. With more than 400 different effects created at Lucas's Industrial Light and Magic factory, "Willow" is sure to set the industry standard for special effects for years to come.

The movie's star, Willow Ufgood, is played by Warwick Davis, an 18-

year-old British midget, who brings a sensitivity and a center to the movie. The evil Queen Bavmorda comes to life thanks to British character actress Jean Marsh. The husband and wife duo of Val Kilmer and Joanne Whalley play Madmartigan and Princess Sorsha, respectively, a pair of warrior enemies turned lovers.

Let the child in you enjoy "Willow." Escape the world for two hours and follow Willow on his journey. You won't be disappointed.

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