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CINEMASCOPE

by Dave Wood

By now just about everyone knows something about Star Wars, the box-office success hit directed by George Lucas, the man who gave us American Graffiti a while back. Star Wars has been touted as the best movie of the year by virtually every publication from Family Circle to Time, and it's sure to win a truckload of Oscars at the Academy Awards banquet next spring. This film is all the rage. Magazines have devoted lavish full-colour articles to Star Wars, there is already a sequel in the works, a television show about how the movie was made has been aired in the U.S. and Canada, and the ABC network is reading a television series based on the movie. Why? Simply because Star Wars is such a good movie, and a refreshing change from the standard science-fiction fare.

At the big American cinema where I saw Star Wars, members of the audience cheered and applauded vigorously and enthusiastically throughout the film. This in itself is an indication that we have an unusual hit on our hands, for movie theatre crowds do not expect to have any reason to communicate with the screen; as a rule, the only communication happening in a cinema is one-way, from the screen into the heads of the viewers. Not so with Star Wars. Here we have a rather lack-lustre, hackneyed plot line, with blatantly melodramatic overtones, complete with a damsel in distress and a handsome hero who saves her, transformed on the screen into a gripping and intelligent adventure tale.

Star Wars is, above all else, good clean fun. Although the viewer cannot help but become involved with the characters and their predicaments, the whole thing is so fantastic that he realizes the whole time that it is a fantasy that he is watching. But what a fantasy it is! There is absolutely no sex involved and we almost never see anyone including the arch-villain, actually die on screen. Even though we know that Luke Skywalker and his co-hero Hans Solo will, with the help of the two "droids" (robots) Artoo Detoo and Threepio, rescue Princess Leia from the clutches of Darth Vader and the Grand Moff Tarkin, as well as put an end to the destructive activity of Vader's "Death Star", we are still applauding and cheering when it does happen. Perhaps this is because it is all so light-hearted -- the movie has no heavy moral or political message, it's just straightforward science fiction fantasy.

So there it is. Star Wars gives you more entertainment for your money than any other movie I've seen this year. No, it's not perfect, but it manages to be both fun and moving to watch. Not the greatest thing since sliced bread, as some of the advance publicity and hyperbole might have you believe, but certainly a solid two hours of film entertainment. No doubt the sequel will be a let-down, the theme music will be played ad nauseum by radio stations, and the television show will likely be pure drivel (like most ABC productions). But for now, Star Wars is a fine piece of entertainment.

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