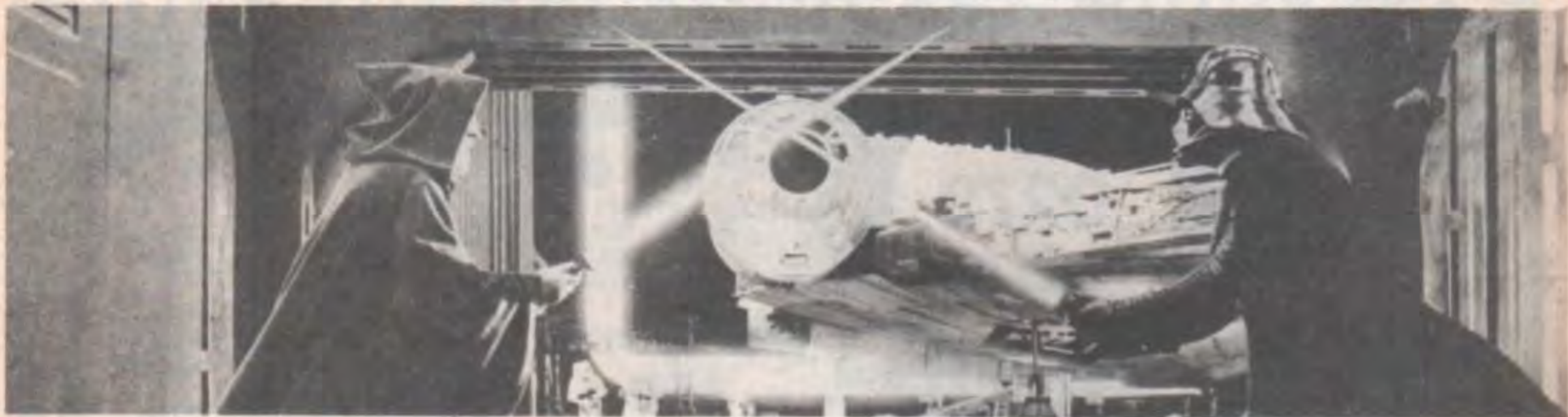




STAR WARS AND THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK!



Review by Phil Edwards

Presenting two of the most successful films of all time together on one double bill would almost seem to present cinema-goers with an embarrassment of riches and a piece of film programming which gives what can only be described as superb value-for-money. But that's what Twentieth Century-Fox have done, and the four hour-plus programme has received saturation release in 400 cinemas to tie in with the kid's half term Summer holidays.

Who can forget the buzz of excitement with which *Star Wars* was first greeted, with queues around the blocks just for the opening day? I must admit to having seen both films several times (who said critics can't also be fans?) and yet I couldn't help but wonder how the two films would now look a few years on, what with all the advances in movie effects technology. Well, they look simply *GREAT!*

One of the complaints lodged against *Empire* was that the construction of the film was lop-sided, with the most spectacular scenes taking place within the first twenty minutes and the rest being a mish-mash of seemingly disconnected scenes. Though I was never one to particularly agree with that theory, I could see the point so many made. However seeing the two films together, I was surprised how seamlessly the two features fitted together.

Certainly *Star Wars* retains its charming naivete and the simple story occasionally seems too lightweight to support the pyrotechnics of the effects but, overall, it

holds up very well indeed. It still *works!* With John Williams lushly beautiful score filling the Dolby tracks it's difficult not to be affected by the simple shot of Luke Skywalker standing outside his desert planet home as two moons rise in the night sky.

Star Wars' strengths in 1977 remain its strengths five years later. Peter Cushing brings a quiet villainy to his portrayal of Grand Moff Tarkin, barely able to control the psychopathic Darth Vader and all the action on the Death Star nicely compliments the other world adventures. Interestingly, many critics felt that the Death Star gave *Star Wars* a focal point missing from *Empire*, and reportedly a Death Star Mark 2 makes an appearance in *Revenge of the Jedi*. Never let it be said that George Lucas doesn't take notice of his critics.

But what still holds *Star Wars* together is the performance of Alec Guinness as Obi Wan Kenobi. While the juvenile leads spend their time blasting away with lasers and generally revelling in derring-do, Guinness brings a veracity to his scenes which seems to contradict his comment at the time that he really didn't understand the script. Whether explaining the powers of the Force to young Luke or coolly dealing with a nutso-alien in the cantina scene, Guinness is a pure delight. I for one was disappointed that his return in *Empire* was as a ghostly second stringer to Frank Oz' Yoda. The good news is that good old corporeal Obi Wan is back in *Jedi*.

I always preferred *Empire Strikes Back* to *Star Wars*, feeling that its more complex story and character development lent the film a greater depth than its predecessor. And

Empire still retains this atmosphere. Thanks to Peter Suschitsky's beautifully lit sequences, particularly the carbon freezing chamber on Bespin. I was genuinely surprised to find that the two films, when seen together, have a visual continuity which is quite unique to series films.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the double bill is that one can just immerse oneself in the world of *Star Wars* for over four solid hours. The action never lets up, and it is indeed like watching one long movie. Thrill again to the attack on the Death Star (which is in real time as opposed to movie time and contains over three hundred separate cuts in thirteen minutes); gasp with amazement when Darth Vader reveals to Luke that he is his father; boo Lando when he betrays Han, Leia and Chewie to the Empire; wonder at what happened to Vader for him to be so horribly scarred; shudder with fright when Luke is confronted by his innermost fears in the swamp of Dagobah; be inquisitive as to why Yoda sounds like Fozzy Bear; be astounded at the technical expertise of Industrial Light and Magic's dazzling and non-stop effects.

There was a joke going around Hollywood a few years ago that went something like this: There's a boy in San Jose who has two dollars in his pocket, and *George Lucas wants it!* Well, I don't know about San Jose, but here's a boy (and when it comes to *Star Wars*, I'm still a kid) in London whose got three quid in his pocket. As long as *Star Wars* (the saga, not the movie) keeps delivering such fabulous entertainment, then Mr Lucas is welcome to it! ●

