

WIZARDS

Review by Alan Jones

One of the saddest things about creating something, anything, is if it doesn't work. When it's got terrific potential, but doesn't realise it. Be it the fault of money, time or talent, it frightens everyone off the whole field, does irreparable damage to the genre.

Such is the case with *Wizards*.

Ralph Bakshi's two early animation films, *Fritz the Cat* and *Heavy Traffic* earned him the title of "the X-rated Disney". He was an innovator and audiences responded with mild shock and a lot of laughter when they realised what could be done (and got away with), in a genre that was believed to be totally reserved for the sub-teen market's favourite stories and fairy tales.

Now events have come full circle. Bakshi was removed from *The Nine Lives of Fritz the Cat* and saw both *Coonskin* and *Hey there, Goodlookin'* shelved by their respective companies. Bakshi obviously thinking he was wide off the audience appeal mark decided to make a film called *War Wizards* in an attempt to bridge the gap between Art, Commercialism and Acceptance.

The final result, *Wizards*, fails. It's mediocre and twee and commits one of the cardinal sins of fantasy cinema—it bores.

The story involves a set of twins born to an ageing elf/fairy in the aftermath of an atomic war. Avatar is lovable and cute and grows up to be the wise ruler of Montagar. Conversely Blackwolf is a repulsive hideous creature who greedily sets out to extend his kingdom of Scorch into his neighbouring brother's but has failed due to his mutant/goblin force being too imbecile. They need an incentive and this is found in an ancient movie projector complete with Nazi propaganda films. How Avatar travels with Elinor, the daughter of their recently assassinated President, and their bodyguard, Weehawk, to vanquish Blackwolf constitutes the remaining plotline.

As can be gathered, there's Good and there's Evil, the stereotypes are there for all to identify immediately. *Star Wars* works on the same principles which proves it can be done, but here they are *too* firmly rooted in cliché. Avatar is a scatty Disney-esque seven dwarf type, Elinor a Marilyn Monroe, Tinkerbell alone and particularly pathetic



Above: Peace, the converted assassin, returns to Scorch to aid Avatar in his quest for peace. Facing page: Blackwolf gloats over the victory almost within his grasp, and the conquest of Montagar.

is the Hitlerism involved. Add a droid called Peace, because he defects to Avatar's side and you really have nothing for anyone of intelligence to work out.

The animation throughout the film is of the standard level you find on television these days, with only some Roger Dan inspired backdrops and Mike Ploog sketches of interest. Many scenes are repeated, especially in the battle sequences and even these are mainly composed of old epic footage customised with the additions of wings and fangs. Whole chunks of the film aren't even animated at all. During the monotonous female narration that links the storyline together, all there is on view are

pre-production sketches of scenes obviously not even attempted by Bakshi, that lends yet another touch of cheapness to the whole enterprise.

In the final analysis, however, a talent like Bakshi's must not be ignored by any serious Science Fiction fan. Suffice it to say, all one was asking was an entertainment in its own right and not what it looks like in the way that Bakshi has presented it to the world—an 80 minute trailer/experiment for his upcoming two-part United Artists film, Tolkein's *The Lord of the Rings*.

For buffs only, note the voice of Sean, it's none other than Luke Skywalker himself, Mark Hamill.





Above/Top: Elinor, the fairy princess, held captive by a race of elves. Above: Two of Blackwolf's trained killers from the mutant land of Scorch.