

LADYHAWKE

"An uncontroversial fairy tale for young children"

Although Richard Donner has directed successful films like *The Omen* and *Superman*, his new fantasy film *Ladyhawke*—about a mythological romantic love affair which has been eternally cursed by an evil bishop, borders on the crude approach to what Hollywood regards as 'History'. Supposedly a medieval period piece, *Ladyhawke's* score—composed and conducted by Andrew Powell resembles incongruous modern day rock music, thus undermining the film's claim to authenticity from the beginning. And although the picture is well lit by Vittorio Storaro, *Ladyhawke's* premise of a medieval myth comes across as old fashioned, especially after the fairly recent glut of medieval period pictures like the superior *Excalibur*.

Rutger Hauer and Michelle Pfeiffer play the doomed lovers—respectively Etienne Navarre, the nobleman knight and Isabeau of Anjou, whose face has been described as the "face of love". Their desperate and seemingly futile quest for release from their curse is reluctantly aided by a cutpurse—"Phillipe the Mouse" (Matthew Broderick) whose claim to fame is he is the only person to have escaped from the notorious dungeons of Aquila, an amazing feat we witness during the film's opening scenes.

Matthew Broderick, so good in *WarGames*, does not excel under Richard Donner's exaggerated direction. Affecting an English accent, his performance as the fast-talking, supposedly engaging and witty young rogue who lives on his wits, is not only over the top (in his acting) but is also undecidedly unfunny when wisecracking. Which is a pity, as he has the largest part in the film, with the charismatic Rutger Hauer and Michelle Pfeiffer trailing behind in their secondary roles as the romantic heroes.

Broderick's role is necessarily laræ, as the uninspired and unim-



Top: Broderick and the bird (Kes style). Left: Knight Hauer and feathered friend. Above: Michelle Pfeiffer as the hooded hawke lady.

aginative script (Edward Khmara, Michael Thomas and Tom Mankiewicz) calls for him to guide and look after the lovers as they make their way to Aquila so that Etienne can wreak revenge on his and Isabeau's persecutor, the bishop (John Wood). And this is what helps make the film mundane, for most of the action centres on a monologue talking Broderick who leads the lovers, in their human and beast forms, through the manufactured medieval countryside and villages of an alleged France. (*Ladyhawke* was shot in Italy as according to Richard Donner—"We needed crumbling castles and medieval ruins, and there seems to be more of them, in more suitable condition, in Italy than anywhere else".)

The bishop's ingenious curse, con-

sisting of Etienne turning into a wolf by night, and Isabeau turning into a hawk by day, so only for a split second, at sunrise and sunset, could they almost touch is a fascinating theme in itself. But the weakest point of *Ladyhawke* is the transition scenes when the human lovers metamorphosise into dumb beasts. John Richardson, the special effects supervisor has done away with special effects altogether, and has substituted soft focus imagery during the so-called transition scenes!

Donner, in his own words strove for a "blend of mysticism and reality", but there is no mysticism in *Ladyhawke*, largely due to the lack of effects.

The climax of *Ladyhawke* comes when Etienne and the bishop sword-fight on the bishop's home-turf of the

Cathedral of Aquila, but the script's unfeasibility has the bishop's court looking upon the action, without one of them prepared to come to their superior's aid.

Richard Donner has made *Ladyhawke* an uncontroversial fairy tale for young children, as the film's blandness and stereotyped performances from actors like Leo McKern as an eccentric friar offers nothing interesting, let alone new.

Frances Lynn

Starring: Matthew Broderick (*Phillipe*), Rutger Hauer (*Navarre*), Michelle Pfeiffer (*Isabeau*), Leo McKern (*Imperius*), John Wood (*Bishop*). Directed by Richard Donner, Produced by Richard Donner and Lauren Shuler, Screenplay by Edward Khmara, Michael Thomas and Tom Mankiewicz, Story by Edward Khmara.