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Not Wise to Criticize 'Star Wars'... **But Here Goes**

By Michael Gallagher New York (NC) -- "The Return of the Jedi" (Fox), George Lucas's completion of the "Star Wars" trilogy, has both the strengths and weaknesses of its two predecessors, both intensified.

Thus the gadgets are better than ever, but the human element, never too prominent, becomes even more negligible than before.

The main plot propellant this time is the effort of Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) to confront Darth Vadar, who, we've been led to believe, is his father.

Then of course, the Empire's ruthless lust for conquest has to be combatted as before, and something does have to be done about poor Han Solo (Harrison Ford), who was cast in carbonite or something last time we saw him.

A long first episode is devoted to saving Han, who, at the onset, is functioning as a wall hanging in the sinister and quite messy pleasure dome of Jabba the Hut, a huge, bloated creature to whom Han, before he became part of the decor, owed a great deal of money. Jabba's place, by the way, is pretty much an over-extended reprise of the bar scene in the first film.

A not very well coordinated but nonetheless successful effort carried out by Luke, Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) -who doesn't complain at all this time out, you'll be glad to hear -- and Lando (Billy Dee. Williams), with assists, of course, from Artoo-Detoo, See-Three Pio and Chewbacca, restores him to his old insouciance and deflates Jabba and his motley minions.

This is the liveliest portion of the picture, but, narrative flow not being one of Lucas's strong points, it has nothing to do with what follows. For next we're abruptly caught up with the rebels marshaling their forces to attack another and more powerful Death Star

that the Empire is now constructing before it becomes fully operational. Luke, however, goes off on his own for his fated rendezvous with his father, and while a double battle rages without -- a space clash between the rebel and Empire forces around the Death Star and a ground battle on an adjacent moon pitting Empire infantry and armor against Han, Leia and company allied with some friendly natives who look and act like mildly truculent teddy bears -- an inner struggle takes place within Luke as the evil Emperor /lan McDiarmid), who makes old Darth look like a pussycat, tries to turn him to the "dark side of the Force."

Of these three contests, the one featuring the Teddy Bears is by far the best. The interior struggle falls flat because poor Hamill has to play his emotions against a masked, expressionless Darth Vader and also because Lucas and his friends are even less adept at philosophy and logic than narrative flow, though they obviously have heard of Freud.

The space clash leans too heavily on special effects (done, admittedly, to dazzling perfection) with not nearly enough care taken to let us know where the various combatants are and who is doing what to whom at a particular time.

Everything, as before, is pretty much on a comic book level. There is no point in asking such questions as where does the money come from to build all these gadgets, where is the industrial base, where in fact are the people who are being defended, and who is the sinister Emperor and where does he come from both literally and metaphorically.

But even in comic book terms, Lucas could do better with regard to motivation, I think. Bad guys should be bad, and for the most part we never, over the



Mark Hamill as Luke Skywalker and Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia prepare to swing to safety from deck of Jabba's Sail Barge in George Lucas' "Return of

course of all three movies, see the Empire gang doing anything especially naughty. (Yes, they did destroy a whole planet in "Star Wars," but it's not what you do, it's how you do it, and that was all special effects not like the kind of stuff the Nazis and the Japanese used to pull in the old war movies.)

Criticizing any of the "Star Wars" trilogy, however, is like criticizing Mount Rushmore. If this is the kind of thing you like, then you'l like this kind of thing. Here, with the third film, is a picture that lacks the shining naivete and

the Jedi." All the featured players from sthe first two "Star Wars" space adventures appear in the third. (NC PHOTO)

enthusiasm of the first, but which is, I think, far more entertaining than the anti-climactic second outing. And those Ewoks (the teddy bears) are decidely cute, as well as brave.

The direction is by Richard Marquand with script by Lucas and Lawrence Kasdan. Because of the rather scary creatures in the opening episode and some violence involving a loathsome monster in Jabba's basement, the U.S. Catholic Conference has classified it A-II, adolescents and adults. The industry rating is PG, parental guidance suggested.

Fascinating' Study of Chesterton

(Father Hennessy, member of the Passionist order of missionary preachers, is a former theology professor and editor and was a charter member and president of the Catholic Theological Society of America.)

1982). 354 pp., \$18.95.

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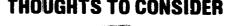
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