

'Star Wars' A Trip to a Far Galaxy That's Fun and Funny.

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'Star Wars'—A Trip to a Far Galaxy That's Fun and Funny.

By VINCENT CANBY

STAR WARS" George Lucas's first film since his terrifically successful "American Graffiti," is the movie that the teen-agers in "American Graffiti" would have broken their necks to see. It's also the movie that's going to entertain a lot of contemporary folk who have a soft spot for the virtually ritualized manners of comic-book adventure.

"Star Wars," which opened yesterday at the Astor Plaza, Orpheum and other theaters, is the most elaborate, most expensive, most beautiful movie serial ever made. It's both an apotheosis of "Flash Gordon" serials and a witty critique that makes associations with a variety of literature that is nothing if not eclectic: "Quo Vadis?," "Buck Rogers," "Ivanhoe," "Superman," "The Wizard of Oz," "The Gospel According to St. Matthew," the legend of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table.

All of these works, of course, had earlier left their marks on the kind of science-fiction comic strips that Mr. Lucas, the writer as well as director of "Star Wars," here remembers with affection of such cheerfulness that he avoids facetiousness. The way definitely not to approach "Star Wars," though, is to expect a film of cosmic implications or to footnote it with so many references that one anticipates it as if it were a literary duty. It's fun and funny.

The time, according to the opening credit card, is "a long time ago" and the setting "a galaxy far far away," which gives Mr. Lucas and his associates total freedom to come up with their own landscapes, housing, vehicles, weapons, religion, politics — all of which are variations on the familiar.

When the film opens, dark times have fallen upon the galactical empire once ruled, we are given to believe, from a kind of space-age Camelot. Against these evil tyrants there is, in progress, a rebellion led by a certain Princess Leia Organa, a pretty round-faced young woman of old-fashioned pluck who, before you can catch your breath, has been captured by the guardians of the empire. Their object is to retrieve some secret plans that can be the empire's undoing.

That's about all the plot that anyone of voting age should be required to keep track of. The story of "Star Wars" could be written on the head of a pin and still leave room for the Bible. It is, rather, a breathless succession of escapes, pursuits, dangerous missions,

Comic-Book Sci-Fi

STAR WARS, directed and written by George Lucas; produced by Gary Kurtz; production designer, John Barry; director of photography, Gilbert Taylor; music, John Williams; editors, Paul Hirsch, Marcia Lucas and Richard Chew; a Lucasfilm Ltd. production, distributed by 20th Century-Fox. Running time: 123 minutes. At the Astor Plaza, 44th Street west of Broadway, Orpheum Theater, 86th Street near Third Avenue, and other theaters. This film has been rated PG.

Luke Skywalker.....	Mark Hamill
Han Solo.....	Harrison Ford
Princess Leia Organa.....	Carrie Fisher
Grand Moff Tarkin.....	Peter Cushing
Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi.....	Alec Guinness
See Threepio.....	Anthony Daniels
Artoo-Deetoo.....	Kenny Baker
Cheebacca.....	Peter Mayhew
Lord Darth Vader.....	David Prowse
Uncle Owen Lars.....	Phil Brown
Aunt Beru Lars.....	Shelagh Fraser
Chief Jawa.....	Jack Purvis
General Dodonna.....	Alex McCrindle
General Willard.....	Eddie Byrne
General Tagge.....	Don Henderson
General Motti.....	Richard Le Parmentier

unexpected encounters, with each one ending in some kind of defeat until the final one.

These adventures involve, among others, an ever-optimistic young man named Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), who is innocent without being naive; Han Solo (Harrison Ford), a free-booting freelance, space-ship captain who goes where he can make the most money, and an old mystic named Ben Kenobi (Alec Guinness), one of the last of the Old Guard, a fellow in possession of what's called "the force," a mixture of what appears to be ESP and early Christian faith.

Accompanying these three as they set out to liberate the princess and restore justice to the empire are a pair of Laurel-and-Hardyish robots. The thin one, who looks like a sort of brass woodman, talks in the polished phrases of a valet ("I'm adroit but I'm not very knowledgeable"), while the squat one, shaped like a portable washing machine, who is the one with the knowledge, simply squeaks and blinks his lights. They are the year's best new comedy team.

In opposition to these good guys are the imperial forces led by someone called the Grand Moff Tarkin (Peter Cushing) and his executive assistant, Lord Darth Vader (David Prowse), a former student of Ben Kenobi who elected to leave heaven sometime before to join the evil ones.

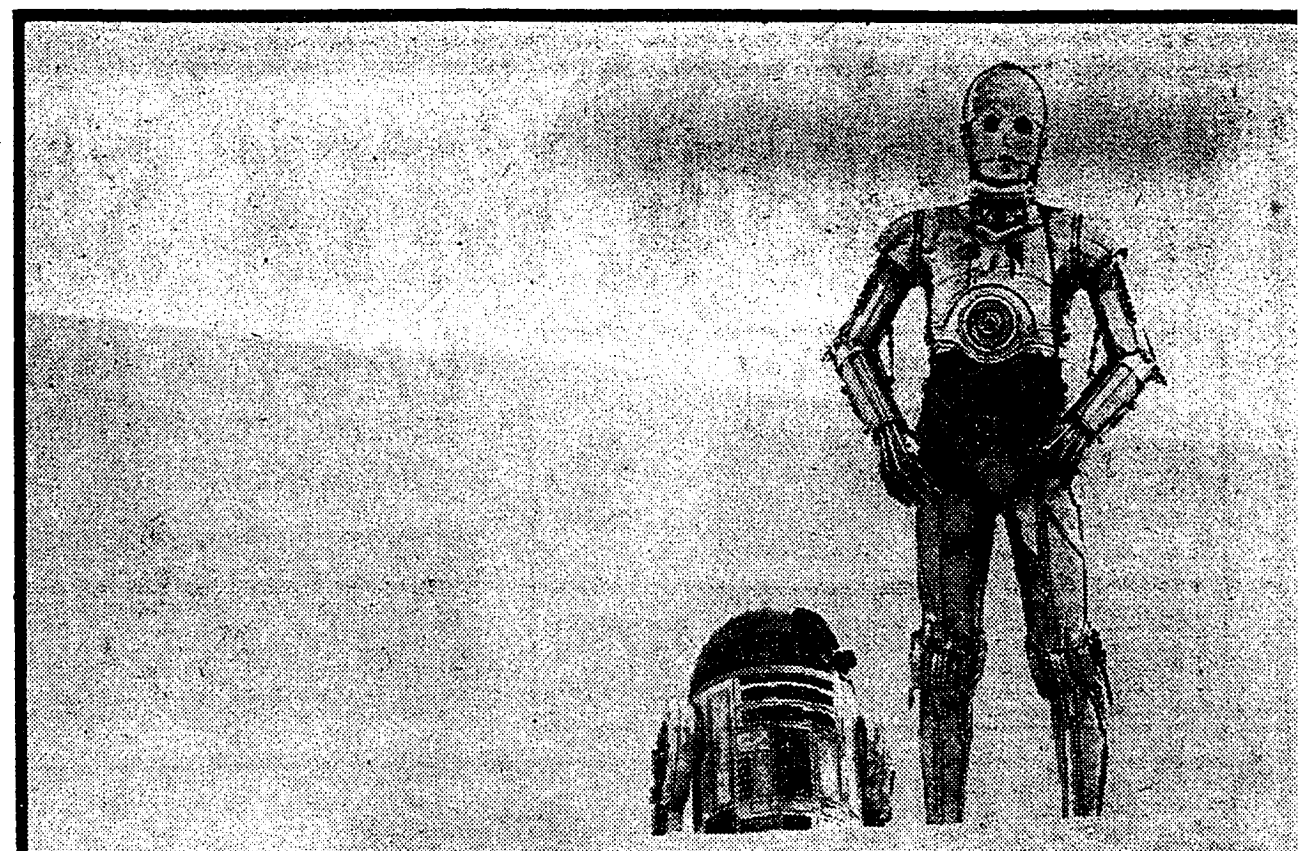
The true stars of "Star Wars" are John Barry, who was responsible for the production design, and the people who were responsible for the incredible special effects—space ships, explosions of stars, space battles, hand-to-hand combat with what appear to be lethal neon swords. I have a particular fondness for the look of the interior of a gigantic satellite called the Death Star,

a place full of the kind of waste space one finds today only in old Fifth Avenue mansions and public libraries.

There's also a very funny sequence in a low-life bar on a remote planet, a frontierlike establishment where they serve customers who look like turtles, apes, pythons and various amalgams of same, but draw the line at robots. Says the bartender piously: "We don't serve their kind here."

It's difficult to judge the performances in a film like this. I suspect that much of the time the actors had to perform with special effects that were later added in the laboratory. Yet everyone treats his material with the proper combination of solemnity and good humor that avoids condescension. One of Mr. Lucas's particular achievements is the manner in which he is able to recall the tackiness of the old comic strips and serials he loves without making a movie that is, itself, tacky. "Star Wars" is good enough to convince the most skeptical 8-year-old sci-fi buff, who is the toughest critic.

"Star Wars," which has been rated PG "Parental Guidance Suggested", contains a lot of explosive action and not a bit of truly disturbing violence.



A pair of robots trudge across the desert in a scene from the motion picture "Star Wars"