

# Animated fantasy film gains from new techniques

By Chuck Lieurance

*Heavy Metal*, created by the artists who produce the magazine of the same name, contains some of the best feature film animation that has been done outside of Walt Disney Studios. It also represents a new era of complexity for the technique of rotoscoping (converting photographs to animated cells).

*Heavy Metal* shuns the dreary simplistic watercolor washes that filled the frames of Ralph Bakshi's *Fritz the Cat* and *Wizards*, adult animated features. *Heavy Metal*'s cells have complicated, layered backgrounds that create an incredible illusion of depth that animated features seldom have.

Although plot is secondary to technique (an unwritten rule among modern animators and filmmakers in general), *Heavy*

*Metal* does manage to derive a complex relationship between various stories from the pages of *Heavy Metal* magazine. The transition piece and focal point for these seemingly disparate stories is a glowing, green orb that is "the force of ultimate evil in the universe." This element manages to connect many segments, ranging from a remake of *Taxi Driver* and *The Big Sleep* in twenty-first century New York, to the tale of an adolescent boy transported into the past to fill the body of a great warrior and lover.

At times, the tie between these episodes and our little green orb are a bit strained and we begin to wonder where the whole affair is leading, but, of course, it all ties together (perhaps a bit too nicely) and the forces of good triumph.

Perhaps the most entertaining and attention-getting elements in the film are

the voices. Harold Ramis, John Candy, John Flaherty, and other members of the infamous Second City Improvisational Comedy Company (also stars of the movie *Stripes*) provide the voices for the characters. The vocal performances of these comedians give the movie some humor and prevent the fantasy elements from becoming unwieldy. John Candy, the overweight, sadistic misfit in stripes, portrays the skinny, sweaty-palmed adolescent turned warrior who must save an Aztec-like culture from the influence of the evil green ball.

*Heavy Metal* (the movie) has all the standard elements that have made the magazine such a popular fantasy/sci-fi

magazine. It is quite easy to tell for whom this movie was made; the soundtrack is deluged with inane three chord pubescent rock, offering only Devo and Donald Fagen for those with more complicated tastes.

But positively, *Heavy Metal* does realize the potential of rotoscoping and does deliver more plot and complexity than was necessary to claim the audience for which it aims.

The movie is more ambitious than its predecessors, *Wizards*, for instance, and that has its merits and its detractions. One feels that perhaps more went into this movie and, if animated fantasy has become a genre, then this is certainly the best of the lot.



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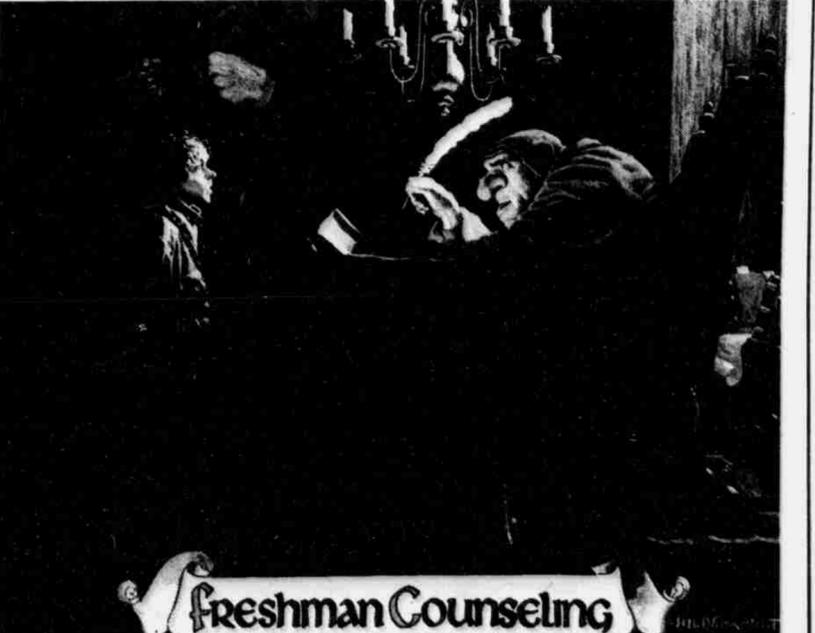
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