

Riding through centuries of sunsets with 'Time Bandits'

At his father's insistence, Little Kevin pulls up the covers, puts up his book and flops over heavily on his pillow to sleep. Suddenly through his closet door bursts a knight. In full armor. On a horse. Who crashes through the opposite wall and is gone.

The next night, Kevin is prepared. With a flashlight and a Polaroid at his side, he awaits another visitor. Sure enough, along come seven dwarves, well, six midgets actually. They explain that they are The Supreme Being's servants, and have borrowed (well, ... stolen if you want to get technical) a map of "time holes" from Him, and plan to use it to burgle wealthy people from different points throughout history.

And this is how Kevin (Craig Warnock) gets to meet folks like Napoleon, Robin Hood, Agamemnon, an Ogre and his wife, and eventually The Evil Genius and The Supreme Being himself. And get insta-color prints of most of them.

"Time Bandits" is the best fantasy-adventure-comedy flick since "Raiders of the Lost Ark,"

and is put together by what's left of the Monty Python troupe: it is written by Michael Palin and Terry Gilliam, directed by Gilliam, and starring John Cleese and Palin.

But it is a different style of humor, less bawdy but just as funny as earlier Python successes. All in all, "Time Bandits" is to earlier Monty Python as Velveeta is to medium cheddar: a little less bold, but a lot more palatable to us dull Americans.

The Python people haven't lost their sense of the absurd: Robin Hood is a kind PR-type surrounded by slimy brutes who pound the poor to pulps as they distribute the booty. The boat our heroes are sailing in is lifted from the water on the head of an enormous giant. Napoleon makes the gang generals because they, too, are short.

Nor have they lost their perversity, but it is severely confined (this is, after all, rated PG). The youthful audience squeals when one of the gang noisily munches a mouse like a raw cucumber.

What Gilliam and Pallin have

added is a thicker strand of logic connecting the story, a rich sense of fantasy and much more adventure. No longer do we see the haphazard chain of events of "Monty Python and the Holy Grail." Although the story line is not predictable, it is also not irrational. The fantasy and adventure are good and rollicking, but aren't too far out.

This refining (and restraining) of the Monty Python style results in a film that is refreshing, exciting, yet hysterical.

Warnock is great as Kevin. It would be quite easy for the kid hero to be a real drip, especially when he's so sickeningly good and unassuming all the time. Yet Gilliam manages to keep Kevin a great kid, someone you'd like to have living down the street to come over and play Yahtzee with.

The midgets are also surprisingly good. David Rappaport (who stands 3' 8") is an excellent leader for the gang of bandits, adapting to the various oddball situations perfectly. His character is likably real, yet silly enough to make the film really work.

Even Sean Connery is good in this picture, portraying a surprisingly likable Agamemnon. He makes an excellent king, rivaling Richard Harris' performance in "Camelot."

Through it all, Gilliam keeps the story rolling and the giggles flying by at a perfect pace. Combined with good timing, good camera work, good acting and a great script, Gilliam's direction makes for an excellent film.

"Time Bandits" is a great children's movie for adults. It's exciting, silly, lots of fun, and it even manages to say a thing or two. While it would be a great



Kevin (Craig Warnock) and Agamemnon (Sean Connery)

loss if Monty Python were to turn to this style permanently. "Time Bandits" is an excellent piece of Americanized British humor, and shouldn't be missed.

(Be aware, the Cinema World folks have relegated it to a small mini-theater reserved for kid's shows, and it tends to sell out well before show time.)

by matt meyer



'Decline of Western Civ.':

Prophecy of punk society?

People tend to get confused. When rock and roll first appeared, many older folks claimed that it would destroy the youth of our nation. It didn't (did it?).

Art doesn't destroy youth. Art only reflects what is already there. Art often acts as a barometer by which one can determine the condition of a society.

The film "The Decline of Western Civilization" is aptly titled. It is the story of art gone wrong. And more. It is the story, a brilliant exposition, of man at his most disgusting. It is the story of L.A. punk rock.

For 100 minutes we are shown a series of top punk bands playing on stage and talking at home. Promoters, managers, and club owners also get in on the act as the film makers ask the obvious question, "Why?"

Ranging from boredom to pent-up aggression to nihilism, the answers given are pretty much what one would expect. Violence and frustration are the only metaphysical realities. This is as apparent in the music as it is in the lyrics, for to spread the bad news of nihilism through an aesthetically pleasing medium would be the worst sort of contradiction. The medium is the message. The listener must be assaulted—he must be made to feel disgust and despair.

The makers of "Decline" know this well. They want the audience to do more than observe in a reserved manner. By zooming in for lots of tight face shots and freezing quick glances of despair, the film manages to capture the transcendental nature of the punk culture. As the camera pans

the crowd during a sequence of a "Black Flag" gig, we see an incredible range of facial expressions, from frenzied to comatose. Yet the underlying reality is the same for all, it just surfaces in different ways. Any serious viewer cannot help but feel the nothingness.

The punk scene in Britain (the birthplace of punk) is a dream world for Karl Marx. Class division and struggle has produced a very angry young working class. Their alienation is expressed in punk culture.

In L.A., however, things are different. Economics plays a very small role in punk despair. As Excene, a member of the group "X" says, "There are worse ways of being poor." The problem is not that some have and some have not. The problem is that even the haves really don't have anything. There's nothing to be had.

L.A. punk is the outgrowth of our social emptiness. In a terrifying way it suggests what may become of us all. The lack of hope, and the growth of faith that trusts only the material, have left an interior void that will eventually eat its way outward.

"The Decline of Western Civilization" cries out prophetically for self-examination. By offering a preview, a look into the crystal ball, the film begs for reflection and suggests "meaning" as the only way to avoid punk society.

One can laugh at "Decline's" funny faces, and be disgusted by its violence, but it is a film that deserves to be taken seriously... and thoughtfully.

by tom senior

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