

The Battle Over 'Star Wars'

■ **PRO:** The re-release of the trilogy is welcome, adding new scenes and rekindling a unique spirit among fans

People in Chewbacca and Darth Vader costumes wove through throngs of guys clad in "May the Force Be With You" T-shirts and girls sporting Princess Leia buns.

When the line, which had been standing still for 30 minutes, finally began to move, everybody cheered.

When everyone was seated in the theater and the lights began to dim, everybody cheered. When the speakers blared the first few notes of the "Star Wars" theme, everybody cheered.

Cheers also accompanied the first appearances of Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker and Han Solo. When Skywalker scored the hit that destroyed the Death Star, everybody cheered once more.

With the excitement of the crowd and the energy in the packed cinema, "Star Wars" became more than just a movie; it became a communal experience.

Seeing "Star Wars" in the theater is almost like seeing it for the first time (after memorizing much of the script), and not just because it is bigger and louder than usual.

Of course, this does make a large difference. The explosions are huge, the space scenes actually seem spacious and the Millennium Falcon's jump to hyperspace is almost dizzying. Plus, the theater's speakers almost do justice to the movie's clever sound effects and John Williams' incredible score.

Industrial Light and Magic's tinkering with the visual effects also makes a difference. Some of the original effects, such as the gliding of Skywalker's landspeeder, are made a little more realistic. The enhanced population of Mos Eisley makes the place seem like more of a teeming city than a deserted slum.

Although some of the computer-generated additions — the small creatures near the entrance of Mos Eisley, for example — have that jerky, unrealistic look of most computer-generated images. For the most part, they enhance rather than distract from the movie. Plus they give "Star Wars" fans, many of whom have memorized the film, something new to look at.

The added footage of Solo and Jabba the Hutt and of Skywalker and his friend, Biggs Darklighter, brings out storylines that were lost in the original movie but that tighten the plot and tie it in more with the rest of the trilogy. The new Solo and Jabba scene is kind of fake-looking, and the difference between computer Jabba and puppet Jabba is pretty drastic, but the scene brings out the relationship between Solo and the creature so that later events in "Return of the Jedi" make more sense.

The scene also fleshes out Jabba's character by showing a younger and more mobile Hutt, and the sound effects that accompany Jabba's movement, which were created using a garbage can filled with wet towels, make up for the shoddy imaging.

Purists complain that George Lucas shouldn't have altered a classic with such a strong fan base as "Star Wars", but the

fact is the trilogy is based on his vision. The changes made don't alter the plot at all; rather, they bring the film closer to what it was intended to be. The mechanics may not be perfect (they weren't in the original, either), but the heart of the film — which is the storyline, not the special effects — is enhanced and improved.

But that's not what makes seeing "Star Wars: The Special Edition" worthwhile.

The re-release of "Star Wars" in movie theaters allows younger fans to see the trilogy on the big screen, where almost any movie is more exciting and more engaging. The staggered release of the three movies also allows fans to experience or re-experience a bit of the suspense people felt several years ago when they were waiting to find out who the "other" is that Yoda refers to in "The Empire Strikes Back."

But the best part of watching "Star Wars" in the theater is, cheesy as it sounds, the feeling of excitement and camaraderie that is created when a group of strangers gather to watch a near-cult classic on the silver screen for the first time in 20 years.

Nicole Krueger is the entertainment editor for the Emerald. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.

■ **CON:** The re-release is an overhyped waste and a tired recreation of a past masterpiece

When I first heard about the re-release of the original "Star Wars" trilogy last year, I had mixed feelings.

The idea of anything "Star Wars" in theaters was, at first thought, exciting. But the first of the three movies was released 20 years ago, and the whole trilogy has been on video for almost as long.

Combined with my apprehension toward the "new" scenes and marketing-savvy dates of the re-releases, I had far from "A New Hope" when "Star Wars" finally made it to theaters on Friday.

And after seeing the movie on Saturday, I realized that my worst nightmares had come true.

Hearing about ticket lines around the entire building on Friday morning didn't help much. And seeing the enthusiastic moviegoers in line on Saturday, complete with Yoda dolls and other trilogy paraphernalia, sure didn't make me any happier.

One thing I realized long ago: When it comes to mass

movements like "Star Trek" and "The X-Files" and of course, "Star Wars," there is a clear difference between liking and appreciating something and being a complete freak about it.

These freaks were the ones who camped out on Thursday night for tickets and called the re-release an "event" and something they had been waiting for their whole lives. "Star Wars: The Special Edition" was hardly an event and the next two movies won't be any bigger.

Instead, seeing all of George Lucas' additions and tinkering with the original showed me "Star Wars" is still the old (albeit classic) movie it once was. And it will never be any different.

The much-anticipated scene between Han Solo and smuggling guru Jabba the Hutt wasn't so much a disappointment as it was confusing. Why did Lucas feel like he needed to add this? The computer-generated Jabba looked like a moving blob of Jell-O and suddenly appeared very agreeable — a far cry from the ruthless slug of "Return of the Jedi."

And the dialogue is almost a carbon copy from the previous scene in the cantina with Han and Greedo, Jabba's spiny henchman. In that scene, Greedo's new willingness to pull the trigger is pure idiocy, detracting from one of the best exchanges in the movie.

The so-called "new" experience of seeing "Star Wars" in a theater was also lackluster. Sure, the final battle was a bit more cinematic, but for the most part, I was seeing (and hearing) the same movie I had been seeing for 15 years in my living room.

I must admit, however, that watching the movie wasn't entirely negative. Seeing Harrison Ford's performance as Han Solo was once again magical. (Like many critics have asked, was he ever better?) And noticing the film's many fallacies and signs of the times was enjoyable. (Check out Aunt Beru's collar; it's precious.)

Despite my cynicism, I do proudly proclaim my status as a bona fide "Star Wars" fan. I always have been. But I won't hop on every bandwagon Lucasfilms throws at me. If I did that, I'd have about 50 books and a collection of role-playing games and sub-par toys that would put any comic book store to shame.

"Star Wars" fans should look past this financial facade and instead look forward to the prequels, the first of which to be released in 1999.

These new movies will be everything that the re-releases aren't — new.

The original trilogy is indeed a classic. And seeing it in the theaters is something that every "Star Wars" fan may want to get around to. But it is not an event. It's closer to a bunch of movie executives, including Lucas, trying to make some money.

A friend of mine, when asked by an excited fan if he was going to see "Star Wars: The Special Edition," said, "No, I've already seen that movie." I couldn't agree more.

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OPINION



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