

THE OBSERVER

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■ AND IN THIS CORNER ...

'Star Wars': In pursuit of the hero within

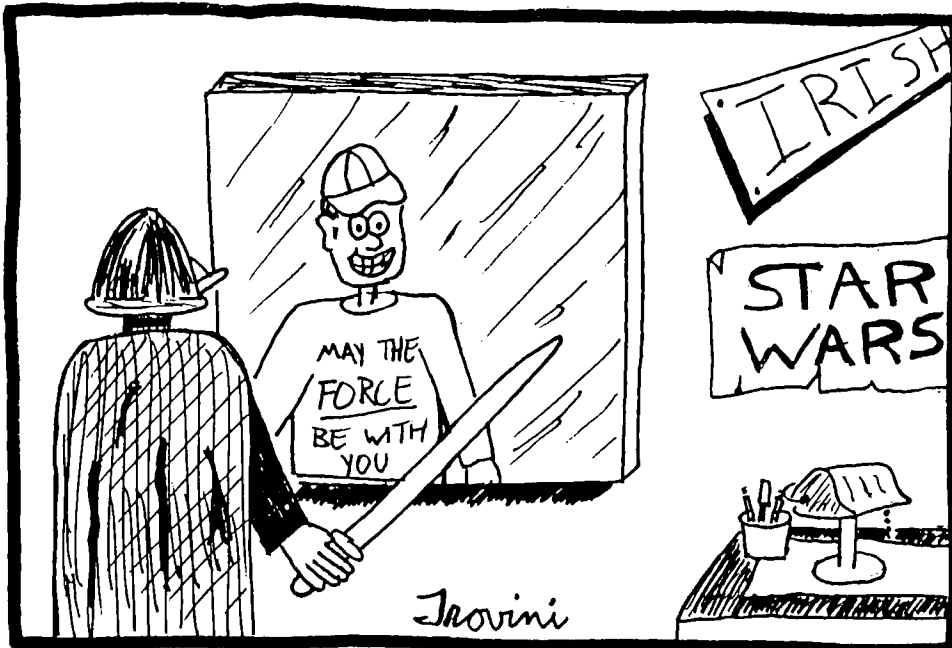
After having been delayed a week past its initial re-release date, "Return of the Jedi," the third and final installment of the "Star Wars" trilogy, hit the movie theatres at the Ides of March. Although "Star Wars" itself drew nation-wide sell-out crowds the first weekend of its re-release, "The Empire Strikes Back" and "Return of the Jedi" drew successively fewer movie-goers. Generally considered the weakest of the three in terms of both character and plot, the third movie in particular educes complaints

such a bad guy after all as he decides he needs a cause, besides himself, in which to believe.

But when the "great enemy" reveals himself as the hero's father in "The Empire Strikes Back," things become complicated. The movie raises the spectre of generational conflict to add to the previous dualisms of man against machine, mysticism against pragmatism: the hero must not simply battle "evil," he also has to battle the father he never knew and did not have to satisfy or to emulate while growing up as a child. Over the course of the last two movies, Luke must undergo the stages of denial, anger, resentment, hopefulness and acceptance as he battles for the souls of his father and his own — a battle which takes precedence over the surface battles of good versus evil.

In this light, what is the true conflict in the "Star Wars" trilogy? Light vs. dark, "good" vs. "evil," harsh artificial black-and-white order vs. joyous brown-and-green natural chaos? Or is the conflict less concerned with the external world and more with the internal?

In the first movie, Luke is thrust into the role of hero by circumstance, by necessity, and by what some call fate, and he finds that this role suits him well. In the second, he tries too hard to become that which he is not ready to be and, in paying the price, learns from his mistakes but becomes tainted by machines and loses his innocence. And in the third movie, Luke confronts not only the older generation which insists its descendants must follow in its halloved footsteps, but he also must face the possibility of the darkness of fear and desire within himself drowning out his will to be an individual. Though he masters his own anger, even the brief eruption of these self-destructive impulses allows Luke to recognize this part of himself and to accept it, fully integrating his light and dark halves into the enlightened sense of I. And yet, he wants his father to survive. He refuses to abandon Vader to the dark, even



though he knows he has come too late and has already lost the father he never knew.

What is the audience to make of all this? I don't think it is too far fetched to see an extended meaning embedded within the trilogy. The story implores us to undergo ourselves the challenges of Awakening, Trial and Triumph. It is a story which demands personal interpretation and application, as all good stories do, rather than a simple dismissal with a wave of the hand as we turn off our temporary suspension of disbelief once we re-enter the "real" world outside the movie theatre.

"Star Wars" is, of course, a highly idealized trilogy of movies, which only makes it all the more appealing to the private imagination and sense of self. Everyone at some point has dreamed of being a hero, a princess, a warrior, a wizard or a savior. During the hour-long series of televised interviews of "The Making of Star Wars," to a person each of the actors and directors professing the influence of George Lucas's vision

described the movie as somehow larger than life. It is this sense of overwhelming power and grandeur that gave "Star Wars" the cultural impact it continues to wield two decades after it first hit the big screen. Its universal appeal lies in its ability for subjective incorporation, the personal recognition of aspects of the individual as it relates to society and the willingness and the need to strive for the ideals which make living worthwhile.

The "Star Wars" trilogy is not so much about the hackneyed adventure tales of "good" vs. "evil" as it is about the vindication of the construction of a healthy personality and of the triumph of the will. In these space operatic movies, we can see the triumph of the divided self over its own doubts, fears, worries and insecurities: the successful overcoming of the human soul.

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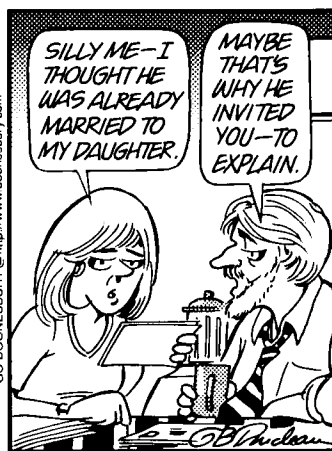
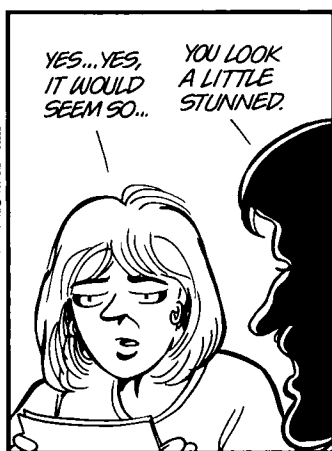
Matt Apple

about the renouncement of the dark side by Darth Vader and the chaotic antics of the bumbling, jangling, primitive Ewoks.

Perhaps more audiences feel attracted to the first movie because of its straightforward plot and patent heroic image. In "Star Wars," the men in black have their way for a while, a mentor passes his wisdom on, and the clash of clear-cut good guys and bad guys results in a decisive victory for the young hero. Darth Vader in the first movie has no relation to Luke Skywalker; he is merely another bad guy in need of fighting. The only major female character is a princess, a surprisingly laconic figure for having watched the wanton obliteration of her entire planet. Leia shows some resourcefulness during her rescue but afterward does not get into fighter craft with the men, instead remaining behind as support staff as befits her station. Guilt overcomes pride in Han Solo, who claims he only flies solo, and the selfish swashbuckler turns out to be not

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■ QUOTE OF THE DAY

"If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a dog and a man."

—Mark Twain