



BLUEGRAS no. 43

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So it is here with us, **The Phantom Menace**, fourth of the **Star Wars** movies and the most hyped and anticipated film event of the last ten thousand years ... well, except for **Gone with the Wind**, I guess, but that was ten years before I was born. Anyway, the first episode of science fiction's most revered saga has opened at last, and as I raise the curtain on this **Bluegras**, I am fresh from it.

I was primed for disappointment by the reviews, but guarded from dismay by my own appreciation of what George Lucas has done. The key to enjoying **The Phantom Menace** is to remember that you're only seeing the first third of a story, which is itself but half or, if we're lucky, a third of a grand saga "begun" in 1977 with **Star Wars** and continuing with **The Empire Strikes Back** and **The Return of the Jedi**. Those who lament the incomplete or inadequate human stories in **Menace** must realize that these tales have two more films in which to work themselves out -- that we won't see their culmination for at least six years, until episodes II and III are made. If, like me, one craved more of the relationship between young Anakin Skywalker and his beloved mother, or more clues to the molten darkness within the brat which will, in time, erupt into the mountainous evil of Darth Vader, that one should remember how **Empire** was quantum leaps superior to the first movie in *that* trilogy. So now, once again, we get to guess at plot points to come ... and stoke our excitement for the next time.

As it stands, yes, I found some flaws with **Menace**. The kid playing Anakin was wooden. Two-thirds of the trademark three-pronged battle scene at the climax of the movie was simply noisy animation, and not at all involving. While I admired the beautiful underwater city -- it's the best fx of the movie -- I found the vistas of the various cities and orbiting space stations less spectacular than tiresome. I couldn't understand Jar Jar, the computer-generated floppy-eared comic relief, and found him annoying. But.

George Lucas understands that movies are *action*; he has a better grasp of this truth than anyone since Kurosawa. The remaining third of that epic final battle was the best swordfight I've ever seen on a screen -- yes, even better in terms of visceral excitement than that in Zefferelli's **Romeo & Juliet**. (How easily, also, we accept two good guys attacking one double-bladed villain. Who needs fair play when the planet's on the line?) Liam Neeson was awesome, Ewan MacGregor worthy of the role of the young Obi-Wan Kenobi. The fx overwhelm -- but the human stories are there, waiting to unfold. And they are great, epic, classic stories, of mentors, of mothers, of trust, love and betrayal -- dressed in comic book colors and a fantastic setting, true, but still great, still epic, still classic, still undeniable.

The best movie moment of my life? No way. But *the best is yet to be*. And though it's as frustrating as it is heartening, this much remains true: *The Force will be with us ... always*.

MAILING COMMENTS on KAPA 98...

Dear Former KAPA Member |Pat| The 100th mailing celebration at Rivercon promises to be an epic affair! I am *sick* that I probably won't be there! DeepSouthCon is coming up a week later and I'll need to save my money and strength. I salute you for offering former members a place in the disty, and I hope 100% of them show. And stick around!

Kentucky Nuggets 54 |Jodi| First of all, here's a wish that andy is doing fine. Secondly, *wow*. This is a wonderful piece about Mrs. Jayne, your children's teacher, full with pride and grief, and the wonder about the epochal effect people have upon one another. I'm lost in admiration for such a

person as Mrs. Jayne; when I pass, it's a prayer that someone will say such things of me, that I was kind, courageous, and helped others. As if I needed to say so, this writing deserves a larger audience, and I know where I'd like to see it, but I hesitate, since I hate to be obvious, but truly, this is excellent, heartfelt, *real* writing.

Bluegras no. 42 Imel The saga of my Geo Metro's rear bearings didn't end with the three replacements mentioned here. They went out twice more before I finally decided to take the car to the dealership, pay the big bucks, and get them done right. At least, I *hope* they're done right. I've got a long road trip coming up in June, to Buffalo and (I hope) Boston. Birthday #50's coming up in July, you know, and I wanted to do something for myself fulfilling a childhood dream. Jayne Mansfield being unavailable, I've decided to go see Old Ironsides, the magnificent Revolutionary War vessel, whose decks I've wanted to trod since I was a boy. Missed the chance in 1980. Not this time.

Vanish with the Rose #59 INickil Funny to read about Washington snowfall on an 85 degree day in late May. Your *chutzpah* in the face of such disaster as a blizzard is downright inspirational! ## Whenever it happened, Chinese espionage is going to be a principal issue of the 2000 campaign, if only as part of *the* critical question of the election: what is America's place in the 21st Century world? Do we have a moral obligation to protect oppressed minorities in other countries? Must we intervene in every dispute? As a superpower, do we have a morality to propound? the right to impose it by force of arms? and just what *is* our morality, anyway? One reason I like Al Gore is that questions of the future are at the heart of his public service. His focus is *there*. I believe he has a vision of what he wants to see there -- and I want to hear it. Being almost 50, I'm willing to listen to George W. on this subject, too -- but expect little more than the usual winger platitudes. Let's see if he can surprise me. It wouldn't surprise me -- but it would be a terrible waste -- to see him win on unfamiliarity alone. Nobody knows anything about the guy except that his father was President a thousand years ago and he killed Karla Faye Tucker. The Republicans in Congress are going to be sliced and diced in 2000; will voters want to balance that evisceration by electing a GOPresident? Stay tuned. ## What's y'all's itinerary in Oz (i.e., Australia)? Going anywhere near Hanging Rock? I've signed on to receive an instant e-mail from the worldcon with its Hugo news, not that I expect anything unusual to happen. For me, the major suspense will be whether Ian Gunn gets the fan artist award he deserved and whether Connie Willis' comic **To Say Nothing of the Dog** wins third Hugo for Dr. Dunworthy's time travel project. I wonder how close **Challenger** came to the final ballot this year? ## **Farscape** didn't interest me after the blue woman took off her clothes; once the suspense was past, who cared? But a line from the premiere has stuck with me. The hero's father is an early astronaut who gives his son a pin of some sort just before takeoff. The kid is reluctant to take it: "Yuri Gagarin gave that to you!" A nice though sad reference; I wondered how many viewers recognized the name. The mention dated the father as a first- or second-generation spaceman, since Gagarin died (in a plane crash, ironically) in 1968; it also started me thinking about the first man in space. The Net had a few photos of him, and one Picasso drawing named for the cosmonaut (a bird), and some basic information: he was only 5'2"; worked in a tractor factory; there's a statue of him in his home town of Podunkski; he slept well the night before his orbit "because that was my duty." I wonder if there's a biography available ... and if he ever met Neil Armstrong.

Sawdust and Caviar |Tony| Well, it's **Bluegras**, not **Bluegrass**. My title is a dumb ... pun, I guess, on the nickname of Kentucky and New Orleans' signature holiday. ## Want to see New Orleans? Start with DeepSouthCon this August! It's based a few miles outside of the city but they are miles easily negotiated. ## Weather continues to astound us as spring comes on. The photos from Oklahoma City could have been taken over Hiroshima. Except ... the weird thing about tornadoes ... one house was reduced to kindling, while across the street, nary a shingle seemed to be mussed. Says frightening things about twisters' concentrated power. ## I can't define myself politically anymore, except on specifics. I ... will vote for Gore ... think prosecutors and cops need to be kept under constitutional rein ... believe in the First and the Fourth Amendments but *not* in the Second (I favor strict gun control) ... despise drug use but *really* despise cheesy "get tough" laws that punish drug victims ... champion toleration of other lives but despise political correctness, which insists that we *share* in those other lifestyles ... don't oppose capital punishment in all cases but believe it should be "the expression of society's ultimate outrage," reserved for the ultimate crimes ... believe government should help the helpless but never punish the innocent, as "affirmative action" almost always does ... am against abortion but *for* abortion rights ... support space travel ... and the arts ... opposed Vietnam and think we should send in the Marines in Kosovo. Is that confusing and contradictory enough? ## As I said to Nicki, I don't think the impeachment fiasco will have an effect on the *presidential* elections. Unless I miss my guess, most of the players will have had nothing to do with it (though John McCain would be the smart GOP choice for veep, and Gore may opt for a Senator for *his* #2). Congress, though, will be turned topsy-turvy, and it's because the Republicans therein botched this business badly, baby.

Notes from the Club Car #52 |Pat| I note the official status of your engagement to Naomi and raise a teary cheer (while shedding a cheery tear). You are a wise and a lucky man! Noting the date of the nuptials -- 11/27 -- and the place -- Nashville, I am once again aghast, since I have very distant plans for the Thanksgiving holidays. But in spirit, I'll be there, standing on a chair when the God Guy asked if anyone knows a reason why this man should not be joined to this woman, and shrieking "I want her! I want her!" Yay, team. ## New films worth seeing aside from **Star Wars: The Mummy**, very funny; if it wouldn't fire Nicki into paroxysm, I'd say it was the movie **Raiders of the Lost Ark** *should* have been. And **Election**, funny as Hell and twice as perverted. Pretty gross, though ... not sure it's a KAPA type of movie. ## I'd love to take the train between Buffalo and New Orleans in the future, but as I've said before, Amtrak has priced the first class sleepers out of my range, and I'm *not* going to take an overnight train journey without privacy. ## This year's Academy Awards were fun Oscars, all right. I smelled upsets going in, and how right I was. Best delight: Judi Dench. I first saw her playing Titania the Fairy Queen in a late '60's version of **A Midsummer Night's Dream** ... wearing nothing but green paint and a few sparkles. When you realize that the theatrical empress playing Elizabeth the First in **Shakespeare in Love** (and M in the new 007 movies) was 34 at the time and looked wonderful, then you can realize why I've always envied Bottom. (I still do. *PFIEFFER!!!*)

Transitional Phases 41 |Naomil| Tony didn't mention the recent death of his father. I second your message of condolence. ## I have two ideas about those issues of **TP** which you "mostly" finished but never distributed. First, print'em up and run'em through. Second, cull out the material from

each zine which is still timely and run that. A little extra pagecount never hurt KAPA, especially KAPA #100, and more Naomi is more righteous apa writing. ## Re your matrimoniphobia (great word): have you sat down and analyzed it? Why is this fear of commitment so "bone-deep"? I know why *my* fear of commitment is so profound, but I'm a loser at these things, and you're part of a proven long-term lasting relationship. What do you *want*? Anyway, I imagine y'all will write your own ceremony, since you're determined not to have a traditional wedding. Please share it with those of us who can't be there. (A girl in LASFAPA about 25 years ago -- **urk** -- was writing a book called **How to Have a Non-Sexist Wedding**. I wonder if it ever made print. Also, don't certain other cultures have less "objectionable" ceremonies? Why do I get the feeling that all this chatter only makes you more nervous? ## Regarding KAPA #100, here's a project I wish someone like Pat would take up: a *history* of the apa. I don't mean anything involved, just a sketchy rundown of the creation of the group, its OEs, the membership flux, that sort of thing. I know all about the last 7 years' worth, but that's less than half the disties. What happened before? ## **yih** Taxes ... ## I like modern dance. Did you ever see **Pilobolus** in performance? Very lively, funny, surprising group, into lifts, balance, strength, humor, whimsy. ## Another heartbreaking ConCave report. I'm stunned to learn that Jane Dennis has a son old enough not only to drink beer, but to make informed recommendations on the brands. Very pleasing news about the Art Show. Since starting my genzine I've haunted them much more carefully than I used to, because I'm always on the lookout for the next **Challenger** cover. The fronts to #s 2, 4, and 9 were all bought at conventions for just that purpose. ## A classic comment about an eternal beauty: "Speaking of Sophia Loren, I just give up." One of my judges, the day after the Oscars, hooted that she made all of the *belles du jour* look like underfed orphans. No wonder Roberto Benigni whooped it up: he got to *hug* her! ## I forget whatever crack I made about Vietnam veterans, but I'll only mention that my Drug Court partner served two tours, I regard several such dudes as friends, and I'm always interested in hearing their stories. Most behaved well, and the war itself wasn't their fault. ## Abandon worldcon site selection zones? Indeed! An obsolescence, antique, outmoded, wrong. The purpose of the zones, as I remember it, was to prevent a bi-annual shuttle between Boston and L.A. That's no longer a problem. ## Strong words on the Alabama anti-abortion kooks. As a lawyer and a First Amendment nut, I can't dispute their right to picket a public place. But I take it they harass *everyone* walking into family planning clinics *just in case* they're there for a TAB. Well, I shouldn't be surprised. Surely it is only the most extreme lunatics among them who bomb clinics and murder doctors. But what of the movement which gives those terrorists its tacit approval? I have a lot of problems with abortion. It offends my conscience, an offense I articulate only in dreams. You should see those dreams. But I understand why it must remain legal and uncriminalized, if this is to stay a free society, which is and always must be the only *public* concern. Oops -- I'm being obscure again! Maybe someday I'll talk up the subject in **Challenger**, challenge myself as well as everybody else to lay it on the line.

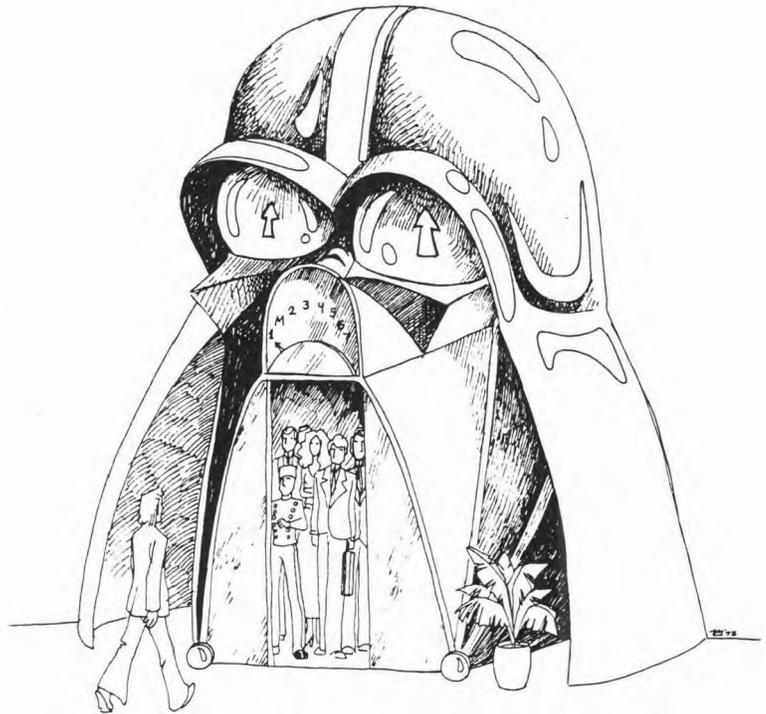
I've decided not to talk about Littleton here. None of us are teenagers, only Jodie of our number has children (as far as I know) ... this is not the place. But it has been on my mind, specifically, the place of the Misfit in the world. I plan to base the next **Challenger** on this theme, and if you have any thoughts along that line, please get in touch. Not only *negative* misfits will be featured! Though we'll start with Gargantua, we may well end with Julius Schwartz!

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Rivercon ... KAPA 100 ... Pat & Naomi's party ... damn! How I wish I could be there! Enjoy it for me, fellow KAPAns! I've been very proud to be part of this "friendly little apa," and this "friendly little apa" has a lot to be proud of. I hope we raise a shout for its "centennial" they'll hear on Tatooine!

May the Force be with you!

*To Guy
Best Always
Mark Hamill
(John Skywalker)*



Autograph by MARK HAMILL from MidAmeriCon, 1976

Illo by LINDA MILLER from Up the Darth Vator, 1978