By Stephen R. Wilt

Wizards, written, produced and directed by Ralph Bakshi, released by Twentieth Century-Fox.

Ralph Bakshi's Wizards is set in a world common to comic book art. It's a world of sword-wielding heroes, ill-clad misfits, sorcerers, elves, fairies and Nameless Beasts. Set two million years after an all-consuming nuclear holocaust, Wizards is concerned with the battle between the grotesque beings of the radiation-scared land of Scortch and the elves of the pastoral Montaga.

Fighting on the side of the elves is Avatar (Steve Romanus), an elf; Elidor (Jesse Wells), a fairy; and Peace (David Provot), one of Blackwolf's robots, new reformed, and there breaks Blackwolf's power.

This premise holds great potential for a fantasy epic. In fact, it seems to have been taken from that magnum opus of fantasy epics, Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings. Wizards, however, fails to live up to its possibilities.

The most striking feature is its inco- fortable blend of the cutey and the hor- rible. The image presented by the bedtime story narration and the Kewpie doll fairies clashes with that of the blood-and-guts battle scenes and Nazi regalia. Further, Bakshi's world has not been clearly deline- ated. What are the limitations on the wizards' powers? Why is an old movie projector so important to Blackwolf's strategy? The characters are inconsistent and vague, and many of the incidents confusing.

Blackwolf's wife, for instance, is intro- duced only to be knocked off. One gets the impression that we are not supposed to think about what's going on, but just look at the pretty pictures. Bakshi has a flair for visual imagery. The steeds used by the combatants look like a hybrid of horse and ostrich. Bakshi's music is at its most biting when he shows two priests engaging in a ceremony calculated to rival atrocity. The bearded figures mur- mur, bow in rhythm, hit each other, de- sign and dance, and wheel each other around on a crucifix while their parish- ioners are massacred.

But although the animation is of excel- lent quality, large portions of the film are given to high-contract prints of scintillating vikings and knights from old movies pictures, sometimes destroyed to give the figures the appearance of gar- goyles. One is soon bored of this repetition. Finally, the length of Wizards is a short ninety minutes.

Wizards is ultimately aimed at a specific audience — the adherents of Robert E. Howard, Frank Frazetta, and "adult fan- tasy." Anyone else is liable to find it all rather silly.

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