



Photo courtesy of Warner Brothers

A CGI-animated Anakin Skywalker (voiced by Matt Lanter) defends himself with a light saber in the newest take on the Star Wars franchise. The movie, which opened Aug. 15, has grossed almost \$30.5 million in its first three weeks at the box office.

## Fantasy cartoon too cute for comfort

BY JOHN HITZEL  
Reviewer

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, a director named George Lucas felt constrained by film technology while working on the original Star Wars. He wanted a way to create all his ideas, images, aliens and worlds without the limitations of props, stop-motion photography and bipeds wearing masks. He wanted a pure medium, and that medium was animation. Once technology developed to the point where Lucas and his team of wizards at Industrial Light and Magic could computer-generate entire characters, we experienced the broad cityscapes and elaborate settings of the Star Wars Original Trilogy Special Edition. In effect, we got to suffer through Jar-Jar Binks in *The Phantom Menace*.

Those who watched the original Star Wars: Clone Wars animated shorts that aired on Cartoon Network leading up to the release of *Revenge of the Sith* will understand that cartoons can convey the same drama,

tension, action and voice that film can. Simply, the director can do more with them visually. These Clone Wars were well written and stunningly animated by the folks who worked on "Samurai Jack." Unfortunately, that crew of animators and writers was not present for this installation of the Star Wars saga, so instead we are greeted with this:

Count Dooku has cut off communications throughout the galaxy. The Jedi are fighting battles for numerous planets and are spread very thin. And (Are you ready?) Jabba the Hutt's baby son has been abducted!

Jabba petitions the Jedi to help find his son. Of course, the Jedi realize that Jabba could be an ally in this conflict, so they agree to help. Anakin

is assigned a Padawan learner against his will. He thinks the youngling will "just slow me down." The Padawan is the cute, feisty, earnest Ahsoka Tano and could prove to be too much for Anakin to handle.

"The fights seemed unbelievably forced, pardon the pun. ... It just goes to show that fancy computers and special effects are no substitute for good writing."

I was jazzed to see another Clone Wars because the TV series on Cartoon Network did exactly what I had wanted it to do: portray the Jedi as warriors. Yes, this is against a central tenet of Jedi lore (the Force is only to be used for defense because aggression leads to the Dark Side), but it's just so cool to watch acrobatic light saber duels. These are the Clone Wars and the

type of Jedi that Obi-wan Kenobi alludes to in *A New Hope*.

Yes, Star Wars: Clone Wars delivers some sweet action scenes on the

big screen, but instead of paying to see them, you could just go to the official movie Web site and check them out. Nothing crucial to the greater Star Wars story is revealed in this movie.

One of the joys of engaging in the Star Wars story is finding new pieces that fit into the larger puzzle. *Revenge of the Sith* starts out with Grievous coughing, and the only way to find out how the cave on Dagobah became a refuge for the Dark Side and how Yoda was able to mask his Force presence from Palpatine all those years is to read Timothy Zahn's novels that take place nine years after *A New Hope*.

The CGI-animated characters look like cloth dolls with pinched joints, sometimes things move too fast for the eye to follow and throughout the movie, I kept thinking I was watching something made for kids.

This installment in the Star Wars saga is just so campy it's forgettable.

Any good Star Wars fan will make excuses for George Lucas' infusing dire action sequences in order to make the movies more likeable and engaging for kids, but this is a bit much. It didn't feel like Star Wars. It felt like Saturday morning cartoons back in grade school. Toward the end, the fights seemed unbelievably forced, pardon the pun.

The Cartoon Network's Clone Wars far outdoes this feature-length animation with regard to action, believability and relevance to the greater Star Wars plotline, and it was only (gasp!) two-dimensional. It just goes to show that fancy computers and special effects are no substitute for good writing.

May the Force be with us as the adults in George Lucas' audience watch a story about galactic wars, space cruisers, laser cannons, alien cultures, the pursuit of oneness with existence, planets being destroyed to prove a point, duality and Anakin Skywalker's Faustian rise and fall, becomes kid stuff.

## Rage members tease fans with solo releases

BY HARRY BURSON  
Reviewer

I remember Zack de la Rocha sitting on the floor next to Bono, Chuck Berry, Keith Richards, Dr. Dre and other hit-makers du jour. It was the November 2000 issue of *Vanity Fair* (I think my mother had a subscription at the time).

Buried on the inside flap, placed among real rock legends — I admit his wasn't the only face I recognized — was the only face that excited me. I recently had bought a copy of *Rage Against the Machine's* 1999 album "The Battle of Los Angeles," and I was quite taken with de la Rocha's angry rants and Tom Morello's guitar wizardry.

But, alas, it was not to be. Before I even had bought a copy of the band's fourth album, "Renegades," I discovered *Rage* had disbanded — on the eve of the second Bush administration, no less, years that really should have given de la Rocha something to complain about.

Yet for the past eight years, de la Rocha has remained silent. Occasionally, news would surface that he was crafting his debut album with Trent Reznor, DJ Shadow and a slew of others. But with the exception of some stray sound-track singles, de la Rocha remained silent.

Meanwhile Morello, the rest of the band and Chris Cornell formed Audioslave, which is in the running with Hoobastank for the worst-named band of the decade. I was a little too old to enjoy Audioslave, but I could appreciate Morello's high-profile philanthropic work with his non-profit Axis of Justice.

It was a long seven years. I found myself playing my *Rage* albums less and less. Audioslave faded into irrelevancy and de la Rocha into obscurity.

And then they reunited. Fans everywhere celebrated. The band self-importantly took the blame for the Bush years, as if another "Guerilla Radio" would have kept us out of Iraq. Surely another album is imminent?

Well, perhaps. But, for now, the wait continues. The year 2008 will see no new *Rage Against the Machine* releases, but instead, Morello's second solo release as the Nightwatchman, and de la Rocha's first major project after *Rage*, "One Day as a Lion."

"One Day as a Lion" is a collaboration between de la Rocha and former Mars Volta member Jon Theodore. De la Rocha raps and plays keyboards. Theodore plays drums.

On the self-titled debut EP, de la Rocha plays Morello-like blues scale riffs on a heavily distorted keyboard instead of a heavily distorted guitar. He hopes his audience will appreciate his production daring and not notice Morello's

absence. He doesn't pull it off.

"One Day as a Lion" sounds like a *Rage* record, except not as good. Morello's guitar can produce more interesting sounds than de la Rocha's synth. Sure, Theodore may be a better drummer than Brad Wilk, but that doesn't matter here. The album lacks the hard-hitting aural assault of *Rage Against the Machine*.

The songs are all virtually identical: gritty production, sludgy keyboards and a melodic sing-songy raps. The squelchy synth bass workout of "If You Fear Dying" is a highlight, weighted down by de la Rocha's proselytizing.

The lyrics are more of the same from de la Rocha: shallow political sloganeering. Some semi-literate stoner in a Ché T-shirt yelling about Mumia is entertaining to a 14-year-old. But after a few years of high school — not to mention college — it's harder to take the man's rants.

Angrily damning virtually all social institutions can be fun (look at Johnny Rotten), but after nearly a decade of inactivity in the wake of a hugely profitable reunion, it's getting harder and harder to stomach de la Rocha's simplistic rhymes.

This month Morello will be putting out his second solo album under the Nightwatchman moniker. After Audioslave disbanded, Morello recorded a classicist disc of acoustic protest music, which, let's be honest, sounded about as appealing as that Chris Cornell solo record.

Thankfully, Morello has lifted some of the self-imposed restrictions of his last album, beefing up the sound with a full band and his signature effects applied to his acoustic guitar. Additionally, he changed the name of the project from "The Nightwatchman" to "Tom Morello: The Nightwatchman."

Sonically, the album falls somewhere between a stripped-down Bruce Springsteen and those recent Rick Rubin-produced Neil Diamond records. Amazingly, Morello's dramatic bass warble sounds eerily similar to Diamond, although Morello has a much more limited range.

Lead single "Whatever it Takes" starts with one of Morello's signature riffs (the kind de la Rocha fails to emulate) segueing into a piano-driven almost dance-y chorus. Other highlights include the Springsteen indebted "Fabled City" and the alt-country stomp of "The Iron Wheel" featuring Shooter Jennings. Yes, that's Waylon's son.

Lyricaly, Morello owes much to the folk revival storytelling tradition of the early '60s and its acolytes through the years, most notably Dylan and Springsteen. Maybe the lyrics aren't as good, but compared to de la Rocha's one-note screeds, they're a relief.



Photo courtesy of ANTI-Records

Former *Rage Against the Machine* member Zack de la Rocha (left, vocals/keyboards) and former *Mars Volta* member Jon Theodore (right, drums) now form *One Day as a Lion*.



### music review

album **"One Day as a Lion" & "The Fabled City"**

artist **One Day as a Lion & Tom Morello**

label **ANTI-Records & Epic Records**

release date **July 22, 2008 & September 30, 2008**

rating **★★★★☆ & ★★★★★**

Even at 14, I could appreciate the irony of a would-be revolutionary being on the cover of a consumerist magazine like *Vanity Fair*.

As enjoyable as it is, *Rage Against the Machine* was never the cultural force the band aspired to be. With de la Rocha delivering us

the same old crap and Morello coming into his own as a songwriter, I'm content with the old albums and a reunion tour for the time being. These new discs are a pleasant enough diversion, and, really, that's all the band ever was — entertainment.