

PHANTOM IS A MENACE

Decision to hold back on digital release deserves criticism

Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace was finally released April 4 on home video, which was exciting for some, disappointing for others.



JILL RILEY

Star Wars' writer and director George Lucas specifically instructed 20th Century Fox and Lucasfilm not to release the film on DVD. As soon as this news hit the airwaves, thousands of Star Wars fans

mitted their wrath on what else but the center for high-tech — the Internet. Several Internet sites teamed up to form the "Star Wars on DVD" campaign, which issued a letter to Lucas as well as a growing petition containing over 28,000 signatures.

The answer Lucas gave as to why he would not embrace the newest video technology is incomplete at best. The reasoning behind his decision leaves much to be desired, and the fact that he is only releasing it on laser disc in Japan is ridiculous.

Simply put, George Lucas should release The Phantom Menace on DVD now.

According to Lucas's response, Lucasfilm is so busy working on Episode II that the company does not have time to create a DVD with the special additions Lucas wants.

The bootleggers have the time and will surely take the burden from Lucasfilm's back. With Internet sales doing so well, bootleggers will soon be creating illegal DVD copies from laser disc and selling them for as little as \$15 per DVD.

Lucasfilm said they are "very concerned about pirated DVD copies of Star Wars" and that it is not encouraging bootlegging by not releasing the DVD. However, that is exactly what they are doing.

Lucasfilm is encouraging Star Wars junkies to buy the DVD from bootleggers. People who own a DVD player want to buy DVDs to play in it. They spent a fair amount of money on the player and want to watch movies with better picture and sound quality, which is not an unreasonable demand.

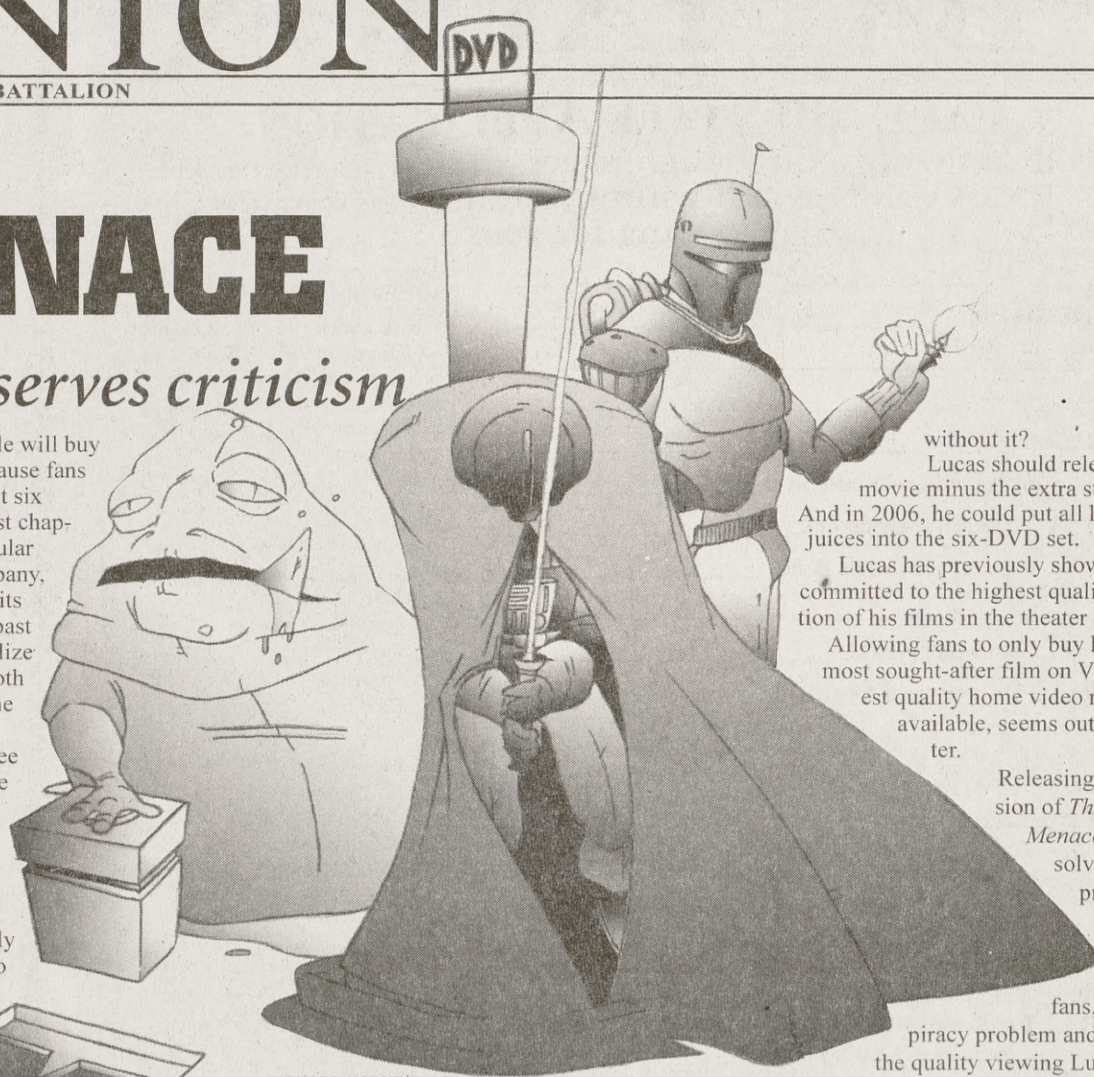
Lucasfilm also said that the bootleg version, which will be created from laser disc, will not have the quality of the real Star Wars DVD — which will not be released until 2006. But the bootleg version will be better than VHS.

Lucasfilm almost deserves to lose money due to bootlegging for being so selfish. They claim "rumors and speculations that waiting to release DVD versions is motivated by a desire to simply drive up demand, or force fans to buy multiple copies are completely false." However, not releasing the film on DVD

does just that. People will buy multiple copies because fans are not going to wait six years to own the first chapter of this most popular film saga. The company, aware of how loyal its fans are from their past behavior, surely realize that fans will buy both the VHS now and the DVD later.

The previous three Star Wars films have each been released four different times on VHS — and laser disc. Since the re-releases were obviously commercially successful enough to repeat, it is incomprehensible why Lucasfilm will not release multiple DVD versions.

The fact that the movie has already grossed \$922 million worldwide is shocking.



RICHARD HORNE/THE BATTALION

without it? Lucas should release the movie minus the extra stuff now. And in 2006, he could put all his creative juices into the six-DVD set.

Lucas has previously shown that he is committed to the highest quality presentation of his films in the theater and at home. Allowing fans to only buy his latest, most sought-after film on VHS, the lowest quality home video medium available, seems out of character.

Releasing a DVD version of The Phantom Menace would solve many problems: It would satisfy frustrated fans, curb the piracy problem and preserve the quality viewing Lucas usually demands for his films. Then, in 2006, everyone will plop down their credit card for the extra-special-super-duper-edition DVD boxed set.

Jill Riley is a senior journalism major.

TAAS changes place spotlight on ESL

As TAAS testing began last week, there were many students across the state who were hurrying to learn the essentials required to pass the exam. For some of these students, however, it was not the basic math formulas or finicky grammatical rules that they were trying to improve. Instead, they were hurrying to learn the English language to be able to read each question. In the past, many students were exempt from the TAAS test based on language learning deficiencies, but recent changes are making the exam more worthwhile. The previous law stated that schools were allowed to exempt any student (even native-born children) if their English skills were shown to be inadequate. The new rule states that all students must be tested in either English or Spanish. But there is a loophole. This year immigrant students who have been in the country for less than three years will still be allowed TAAS exemptions.



MELISSA BEDSOLE

If these students' English skills are so poor that they can not read the questions on the TAAS test, what have they been doing in Texas schools over the past two years? This change that TAAS is implementing raises many issues concerning where immigrant students fit in the U.S. education system.

The Texas school board makes it seem that they are improving the TAAS regulations by changing this rule to a three year maximum, but what is the point of revamping the testing criteria when there are still thousands of children being served a great injustice? Last year, 10,428 first, second and third graders combined (about 18 percent of students in those grades) failed the TAAS test. What is the real problem here and is

anyone even trying to find a solution?

The TAAS may stand for the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, but in reality the results are only an assessment of the skills of the native, English speaking Texas students.

The real reasons behind these new rules are simple. At first glance, it seems unfair to test recent immigrants because they do not understand English well enough for the exam. But by exempting some students the results are not representative of the overall achievements of students in public schools.

It is interesting that this rule is directed at students with "learning deficiencies." The deficiency lies in the way they are being taught. The TAAS test is not the only problem these

immigrant students face. Their troubles begin the day they register for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in Texas public schools. English as a Second Language classes are structured to teach students coming from foreign countries math and history skills in Spanish. Who decided that this was at all effective? Yes, the students are learning math and history, but they are in a class of students just like them, learning the same subjects they would have learned back home and not advancing their knowledge of the English language. Texas schools are making very lit-

tle effort to help them adapt to American life and learn the English language.

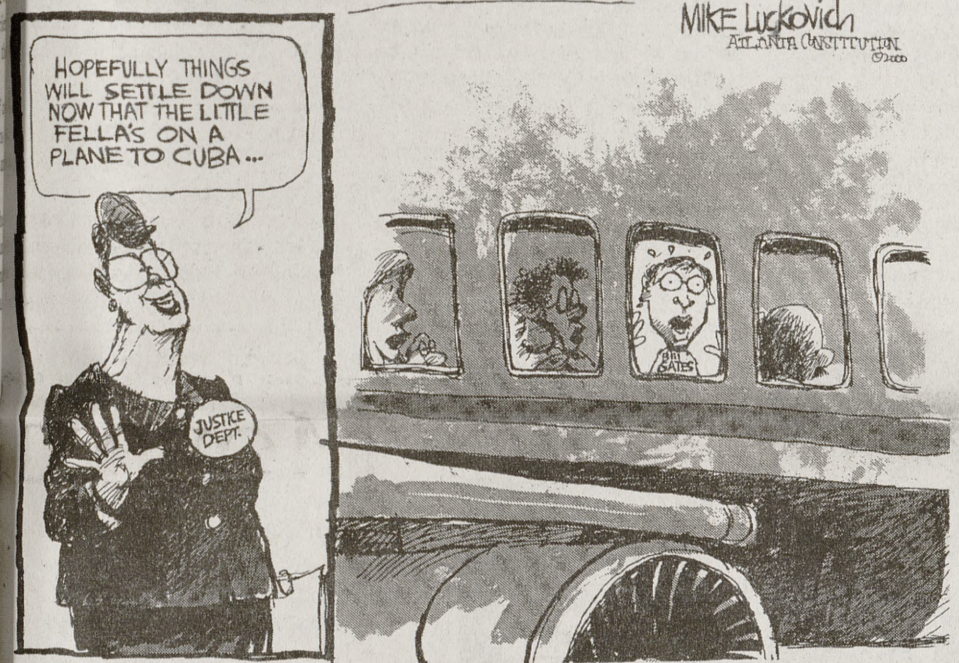
English is the primary language of the United States. That does not mean that anyone who wants to get in the doors to this country needs to be fluent in English first, but it does mean that learning this language should be the top priority for any immigrant students.

The children in Texas schools graduate with an understanding of the math and other skills they need to pass the TAAS, but without being able to communicate in English well enough for a job interview. There has got to be a better solution.

Perhaps the students should not have the option for ESL classes. Instead, incoming immigrant students should have one or, if necessary, two years of intense English language classes. Yes, this would seem to put them a year behind their peers in age, but this imbalance is nothing compared to the difference in quality of education for these students who know only basic English skills.

Everyone wants to believe that America is the land of opportunity and that is probably one of the biggest reasons that draws immigrants to this country. These children deserve the opportunity to go to school and learn in the same way as native born American children. However, the opportunity offered in Texas needs to be specified with the logical rule that American schools are taught in the primary language — English. While this may seem harsh, slipping through the cracks of the education system and graduating to the next grade without sufficient skills in the English language is going to provide these students with much greater problems in the future than whether or not they pass the TAAS.

Melissa Bedsole is a sophomore general studies major.



MIKE LYKOVICH

Time for U.S. to rethink relationship with Israel

Being the world's only superpower, the United States is in a perilous position. It is faced with more than a few enemies and an even more dangerous group of "quasi-friends." These nations — France, Japan and Saudi Arabia — are allies of the U.S., at their convenience and are a far greater threat to American national security because they are unpredictable. The recent actions of Israel proved that it is not a "quasi-friend," but an expensive one at that.



MARK PASSWATERS

Israel recently reached an agreement with the People's Republic of China on a multi-billion-dollar sale of Advanced Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) aircraft. AWACS, filled with technology taken directly from the United States, are radar platforms that can detect incoming threats from hundreds of miles away. These PHALCON jets are superior to any ground-based radar that China possesses and are more difficult to jam. They can also track ships in the South China Sea, a capability that the Chinese did not have before.

More precisely, the Chinese now have the capability to shadow the U.S. Navy. With the election of a government in Taiwan that supports total separation from the mainland, the relations between China and Taiwan have grown increasingly hostile. China threatened to invade the island, an act that would lead directly to war with the U.S. With advanced weapons purchased from Russia and radar systems from our Israeli allies (not to mention nuclear weapons data that was generously supplied by the Clinton administration), China is potent force to be reckoned with.

Israel has ignored repeated U.S. requests to scrap the deal with China. Now, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has requested that the U.S. give Israel another \$17 billion to aid withdrawal from the Golan Heights and make peace with Syria.

The facts show the hypocritical nature of the

Israeli government. They are willing to sell weapons systems that may lead to the deaths of many Americans, yet they expect the U.S. to give them billions of dollars to serve their best interests? This is ludicrous!

Israel has proven through their actions that the U.S. is not their friend — just their largest extortion victim. If the interests of both nations do not coincide, separate actions should be taken. The tune from Jerusalem would probably quickly change from "My Way" to "How do I live without you?"

The answer for the Israelis is simply that they would not exist without American support. The U.S. should not hesitate to remind them of this truth. When Israel not only forgets who their largest benefactor is and works to their undoing, the U.S. should act swiftly with purpose. Cutting off all aid to Israel would probably be a sufficient slap in the face.

Unfortunately, this will never happen. Vice President Gore and First Lady Hillary Clinton both need strong support from the Jewish lobby in the U.S. in order to win their respective races. Israel certainly does not want to see Governor Bush or New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in office, as they have both shown a more independent streak than the Clinton administration.

However, it is very important for American citizens to recognize that their nation's relationship with Israel is not wine and roses. While both the Washington Post and Houston Chronicle have run editorials condemning Israel's hypocritical actions, there have been very few news stories. Considering that the action of Israel could lead to America's sons and daughters dying when they otherwise might not have, this is a travesty.

For its own sake, America must reassess its relationship with Israel. If less powerful nations take advantage of the sympathetic U.S., they must be corrected. A swift and forceful reminder of who is in control is past due. This reminder may save American lives and cannot be put off any longer.

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.

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MAIL CALL

Creationism has strong following

In response to Brienne Porter's April 18 column.

I am amazed that the column's main point is that it is wrong for the government to put a bias in science education, and yet the article is one big "bias" in favor of evolution science education.

It goes on for four long paragraphs about Oklahoma's decision as wrong with three wussy sentences stating the other side of the case. That is biased. One statement — "The ability to put disclaimers and opinions into textbooks is the first step toward a totalitarian government where school children learn only what the government believes is right" made me laugh.

When evolution was the only thing taught, that wasn't teaching only what the government believes is right? Porter must have forgotten that all the children who have been taught by their families to believe in God and his creation have been just as confused when they come to school and have their beliefs uprooted in the name of evolution science. Porter must have forgotten that these are more than "a few" who believe in creationism and these people have the same rights as the people who believe in evolution. If you are going to write and publish an article on unbiased, do not be a hypocrite and use bias in your article. It kills your point.

Julie Thomas
Class of '02

U.S. should stay out of Taiwan

In response to David Lee's April 13 column.

Lee's states that "the United States must clearly state

whose side it is on." Why? I might understand the U.S. getting involved in a civil war if it were its own, but it should not become involved in a foreign civil war. Lee went on to say that the U.S. is merely prolonging the standoff instead of bringing it to "an amicable conclusion". What conclusion is that? Would a hundred thousand dead Americans be satisfactory, or should we try for two hundred thousand? And how many dead Chinese?

His article then goes on to say that by ignoring this issue the Clinton administration will risk hypocrisy. When the U.S. sends a carrier fleet into Chinese waters, I think the administration would be risking more than hypocrisy. They would be risking the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

I am currently serving in the U.S. Marine Corps and I personally agree that Taiwan should be an independent nation, but I'm not willing to die for that cause. When Taiwan formally declares independence, and China decides to invade, think about the men in uniform who will go and see what you think of an "amicable conclusion" when it's written in blood.

Andy Slaven
Class of '99

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