Do Canada’s cultural commissars (no names — we all know who they are) ever wake up in the middle of the night and realize that their funding for the arts is not only a waste of tax dollars, but that it is also helping to prop up the very forces that they are fighting against? Is it possible that the government’s own cultural policies are not only failing to achieve their stated goals, but are actually contributing to the very social and cultural problems they are supposed to be fighting against? 

We need to think deeply about the consequences of our actions and the impact they have on society. We need to ask ourselves if we are truly making a difference, or if we are simply creating more problems. We need to be honest with ourselves and with each other, and to be willing to make tough decisions. We need to be creative and innovative, and to be willing to take risks. We need to be strong and resilient, and to be willing to stand up for what we believe in. We need to be compassionate and caring, and to be willing to help those who are less fortunate. We need to be proactive and engaged, and to be willing to take action. We need to be leaders, and to be willing to take responsibility for our actions. We need to be committed to making a difference, and to be willing to give it our all. 

John G. Harkness

**REVIEW OF HEAVY METAL**

Directed by Gerald Potterton and scripted by Dan Goldberg and Len Blum (who also scripted *Metalballs* and *Stripes* for Reitman), *Heavy Metal* does have its problems. As in most of Reitman’s films, there are almost no women characters. Reitman’s world-view is distinctly anti-sex, and all the characters of sex that one wishes to make will be firmly supported by this reviewer. On the other hand, this is true of most of the great popular animators, from Disney and the Fleischers through Chuck Jones and Tex Avery up to Ralph Bakshi. Some of the animation is not quite up to par (during the comedy sequence “So Beautiful and So Deadly,” for instance, you can see the clouds through a supposedly solid spaceship.)

The follow-the-bouncing-ball-of-evil method of linking the six episodes is fairly juvenile. There is enough happening on the screen to keep the most concentrated plot fiend distracted, and the audience seemed amused by the concept of universal evil.

Finally, the soundtrack, which features a heavy douse of musical heavies, is almost irrelevant. With one or two exceptions, like Don Felder’s “Takin’ a Ride” and Devo’s “Through Being Cool,” the selections tend to run together, homogenizing even a distinctive voice like Steely Dan’s Don Fagen into the general sludge. Part of the problem stems from the fact that the bands – Nazareth, Black Sabbath, Journey and Grand Funk Railroad – already sound very similar. As Joey Ramone has noted, almost all heavy metal rock is just recycled Led Zeppelin, with stupider lyrics.

On the plus side are some generally stunning visuals, proving the superiority of full animation and the multiple-camera system over the abomination of rotoscoping that Bakshi used in *American Pop*.

There is a genuine wit at work in some of the sequences, and some truly thrilling excitement in others. The voices of the cartoon characters are brilliantly executed, with special kudos to John Candy, Joe Flaherty, Marilyn Lightstone, Harold Ramis, Alice Playton and August Schellenberg.

The best sequences are superb; “B-17,” about the death of a bomber crew, has the chilling look of old EC comics (Tales from the Crypt, Weird Tales) and the twisted humour of the best of 2c.

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**Heavy Metal**: “A genuine wit in some sequences.”

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**Twilight Zone**: “Canyon” crosses the urban apocalyptic of *Taxi Driver* and *Escape from New York* with The Maltese Falcon. Even the weakest sequences, like the overlong “Taarna,” have moments of animation that are positively breathtaking in their image depth and quality.

**Of the actors**, John Candy of Second City fairs best with “Den,” the story of a Tom Swift nerd (the sort of guy who carries 17 pens in one of those plastic shirt protectors and always wins the science fair who is transported to another world and turned physically into a powerhouse that makes Arnold Schwarzenegger look like Dustin Hoffman. Candy’s voice is a marvellous choice for the part because he has always been physically too large for his rather soft voice. Harold Ramis, as the pilot of an alien ship, comes second, if only because there is something ineffably right about hearing his supercilious whine coming out of a stoned alien.

Certainly *Heavy Metal* is the best animated feature to appear in the past 10 or 12 years. Reitman has wisely handed director Potterton a crew of top animators and let them indulge some of their wildest fantasies. *Taarna*, “B-17” and “Canyon” are classic animated shorts. Still, the film’s stature as cinematic art remains problematic.

Can a great work of technique be great art without a mature intelligence guiding it? Goldberg and Blum do have the glow of intelligence, but it is the glow of a lava lamp illuminating some foul rag and bone shop of pop culture, its flicker brightening to reveal shelves stocked with Frank Frazetta posters, Hammer horror films, EC comics, scratchy old heavy metal rock albums, dusty video-cassettes of *The Twilight Zone* and the Outer Limits and an assortment of low-budget soft porn. Of course, this conflict has always been inherent in discussions of popular animation – particularly when people generally do not see much difference between the meretricious Woody Woodpecker and the sublime Bugs Bunny. Suffice it to say that *Heavy Metal* is a superbly crafted popular entertainment, but that like many Canadian productions, its knowledge and audience and tastes intimately. Not only that, but for those with a healthy taste for sex and drugs and rock & roll is a lot of fun. 

**John G. Harkness**