

Contributed by Brent Simon
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Indie distributor Blue Underground has risen to notoriety through releasing movies like *The Toolbox Murders* and the oeuvre of filmmakers such as Jess Franco, Lucio Fulci (both *Zombie* and *Contraband*), Amando De Ossorio and other niche genre hands. But the key to their success is that they don't treat these titles as either lowbrow schlock or high art above reproach — they merely celebrate the cultish titles for what they are. *Fire and Ice* continues that trend, offering forth a professionally mounted presentation of innovative animator Ralph Bakshi's 1983 collaboration with Frank Frazetta.

Bakshi, of course, is director of the animated version of *The Hobbit* (loved by some, loathed by others), as well as the influential and lewd *Fritz the Cat*. Artist Frazetta is the creator of the original *Conan the Barbarian*, *Vampirella* and Edgar Rice Burroughs book covers. Both are fantasy genre godheads in a subset where loyalty means everything. Designed by Frazetta and almost entirely rotoscoped rather than drawn freehand, *Fire and Ice* is set in a stark, forbidding fantasy world of easily graspable good and evil.

Hewing more closely to the PG adventurousness of *The Hobbit*, the film centers around wizard Nekron (Sean Hannon), who controls the huddled masses of the world by melting a glacier. Warrior Larn (Randy Norton) teams up with a weakened King Jarol to lay waste to Nekron's wicked plots, and a mysterious figure named Darkwolf (Steve Sandor) — think Gollum Lite — figures into the proceedings as well. Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway's script is a worn if decently stitched together amalgamation of fantasy cliché and its overdubbing is at times disconcerting, but the movie's occasional visual punch is undeniable. It's a journeyman heavyweight that still has a puncher's chance, which makes it a worthy rental for those predisposed to such fare.

Spread out over two discs, *Fire and Ice* receives more than a fair shake in its transfer and treatment from Blue Underground, **starting with a nice 3-D lenticular cover art design that slips over the main case.** An audio commentary track from Bakshi anchors the first disc, and though prodded onward by interviewer, he provides a nice overview of the project, and has a clear admiration for Frazetta and even clearer opinion of how to best serve his unique talents in film form. A brief, if poorly sourced, making-of featurette examines the rotoscoping process of the animation, and a nicely detailed photo gallery with set stills, actor Sean Hannon's diary notes, plus the theatrical trailer round out the supplemental material on the first disc. Presented in its original, anamorphic widescreen aspect ratio of 1.78:1, the film is divided into 24 chapters and — in addition to the original, antiquated Dolby 2.0 stereo mix — DTS 6.1 and Dolby digital 5.1 audio mixes are also available, which make a world of difference on systems wired for their maximization.

The feature-length documentary *Frazetta: Painting with Fire* consumes the second disc, and offers forth a worthy birds-eye view of the artist as both a creative force and, more importantly, a man. Learning about his myriad health problems (including a misdiagnosed thyroid condition and, later, struggles with muscular control in the wake of a series of debilitating strokes) gives one a fuller sense and appreciation of Frazetta's imagination, and makes for a standalone treat quite apart from *Fire and Ice*. Duck in and out on director Lance Laspina and producer Jeremy DiFiore's audio commentary track, which at times colors in nicely outstanding details of Frazetta's life but also meanders every once in a while into self-congratulation. **B- (Movie) A- (Disc)** original article: <http://www.nowplayingmag.com/content/view/2613/47/>