Screen in review

‘Star Wars’ pure adventure

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“Star Wars” is enchanting in the most literal sense of the word.

It engulfs the audience in its own time capsule, beginning with the old 20th Century-Fox fanfare music and a receding narrative scroll. From there, it’s pure comic strip fantasy, to be enjoyed even more by nostalgic adults than by wide-eyed youngsters.

Director-writer George Lucas (“American Graffiti”) has composed a stunning visual symphony with elements of “The Wizard of Oz,” “The Three Musketeers” and even “Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo” as well as obvious science-fiction antecedents. Yet its technical scope and creativity, with space sequences more varied than those in Stanley Kubrick’s “2001,” place the film in a firmament of its own; you will not confuse “Star Wars” with any other movie you have seen.

“Star Wars” attains the spirit of pure, golden adventure which eluded the “King Kong” remake largely because Lucas never spoofs the genre he celebrates. Despite the familiarity of plot and dialogue, the film is played with dead-center earnestness, and the cast speaks archaic lines without even suggesting a snicker.

OUR HERO, a clear-eyed, square-jawed farm boy whose slain father was “the best sky pilot in the galaxy,” is aptly named Luke Skywalker to avoid any confusion regarding his athletic skills. Luke, joined by an eccentric but benign hermit (actually a noble general fallen on bad times), a proud mercenary, a pair of lovable robots, and a furry 8-foot Wookie, plunges into an extraterrestrial search for the imprisoned Princess Leia Organa, a rebel leader held captive by the corrupt Galactic Empire. It all culminates in a superbly staged civil war, with dogfighters circling the planets.

Lucas peppers his elementary script with moments of droll humor. Space creatures, including wondrous grotesques, mingle in a seedy bar which a prim, British-toned robot righteously refuses to enter. The

Luke Skywalker, played by Mark Hamill, prepares to counterattack the Imperial stormtroopers in “Star Wars,” opening Friday at Cinema II NorthPark.

8-foot Wookie, despite its ominous groans, is more a Cowardly Lion than a fierce Godzilla.

Mark Hamill plays the heroic Luke with Prince Valiant sincerity and courage. Carrie Fisher, resembling her father Eddie more than mother Debbie Reynolds, makes a spirited yet imperious princess, and Harrison Ford is an engaging cynic. As the eccentric hermit, Alec Guinness is a figure of undiminished dignity, with an elocution that can stretch the word “evil” into three syllables.

John Williams’ majestic, thrilling musical score deserves the best possible sound system; but the entire film is a monument of behind-the-scenes wizardry.

“Star Wars” opens Friday at Cinema II NorthPark. It should be around for a long time.

IN A WORD: Fantastic voyage.