

THE NEVERENDING STORY

Introduced by **Brian Johnson**, Director of Special Effects



The NeverEnding Story is one of the best loved children's fantasy films of the 1980s. Film critic Roger Ebert of *The Chicago Sun Times* reviewed the film on its release.

RELEASE YEAR: 1984

RUNTIME: 102 mins

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER:

Wolfgang Petersen

SCREENPLAY:

Wolfgang Petersen and Herman Weigel

ORIGINAL NOVEL BY:

Michael Ende

PRODUCERS: Bernd Eichinger,

Bernd Schaefer and Dieter Geissler

CO PRODUCER: Gunter Rohrbach

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS:

John W Hyde and Mark Damon

How's this for a threat? The kingdom of Fantasia is about to be wiped out, and the enemy isn't an evil wizard or a thermonuclear device, it's Nothingness. That's right, an inexorable wave of Nothingness is sweeping over the kingdom, destroying everything in its path. Were children's movies this nihilistic in the old days?

The only thing standing between Fantasia and Nothingness is the faith of a small boy named Bastian (**Barret Oliver**). He discovers the kingdom in a magical bookstore, and as he begins to read the adventure between the covers, it becomes so real that the people in the story know about Bastian. How could that be? Well, that's the very first question Bastian asks. This is a modern kid with quite a healthy amount of skepticism, but what can he do when he turns the page and the Child Empress (**Tami Stronach**) is begging him to give her a name so that Fantasia can be saved?

The idea of the story within a story is one of the nice touches in *The NeverEnding Story*. Another one is the

idea of a child's faith being able to change the course of fate. Maybe not since the kids in the audience were asked to save Tinker Bell in *Peter Pan* has the outcome of a story been left so clearly up to a child's willingness to believe. There is a lot we have to believe in *The NeverEnding Story*, and that's the other great strength of this movie. It contains some of the more inventive special-effects work of a time when battles in outer space, etc., have grown routine. Look for example, at *The Last Starfighter* where the special effects are competent but never original – all the visual concepts are ripped off from *Star Wars* – and then look at this movie, where an entirely new world has been created.

The world of Fantasia contains creatures inspired by *Alice in Wonderland* (a little man atop a racing snail), *The Muppets* (a cute dragon-dog that can fly), and probably *B.C.* (a giant made of stone, who snacks on quartz and rumbles around on his granite tricycle). Many of the special effects involve sophisticated use of Muppet-like creatures (there are scenes that reminded me of *The Dark*



Crystal). They are, in a way, more convincing than animation, because they exist in three dimensions and have the same depth as their human co-stars. And that illusion, in turn, helps reinforce the more conventional effects like animation, back projection, and so on. The world of this movie looks like a very particular place, and the art direction involved a lot of imagination. The movie's director, **Wolfgang Petersen**, is accustomed to creating worlds in small places; his last film, *Das Boot* (The Boat), took place almost entirely within a submarine.

Within the world of Fantasia, a young hero (**Noah Hathaway**) is assigned to complete a hazardous quest, sneak past the dreaded portals of some stone amazons, and reach the Ivory Tower, where he will receive further instructions from the empress. In most movies, this quest would be told in a straightforward way, without the surrounding story about the other little boy who is reading the book.

But *The NeverEnding Story* is about the unfolding of a story, and so the framing device of the kid hidden in his school attic, breathlessly turning the pages, is interesting. It lets kids know that the story isn't just somehow happening, that storytelling is a neverending act of the imagination.

Roger Ebert, *The Chicago Sun Times*, January 1 1984.

BRIAN JOHNSON

Brian Johnson is a multiple award winning director of special effects for film and television. He began his early career working with Gerry and Sylvia Anderson on their Supermarionation productions *Stingray*, *Thunderbirds* and later, *Space: 1999*.

During the production of the first TV series of *Space: 1999*, Brian was visited on set by Star Wars creator George Lucas. He was so impressed with Brian's work, that he offered him the role of special effects supervisor on the original 1977 *Star Wars* film. Having already been commissioned for the second series of *Space: 1999*, Brian was unable to accept although he later worked on the sequel, *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980).

His work on Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Alien* and *Star Wars* have helped shape the look of some of the most iconic science fiction films in the history of the genre.

Brian has won Academy Awards for *Alien* (1979) and *The Empire Strikes Back* for which he won a Special Achievement Academy Award, shared with Richard Edlund, Dennis and Bruce Nicholson. He received an Academy Award nomination for his work on *Dragonslayer* (1981). In addition, he is the winner of a BAFTA Film Award for Best Special Visual Effects for *Aliens* (1986) and a Saturn Award for *The Empire Strikes Back*.

So you think you know about the cult fantasy film *The NeverEnding Story*? Here are 10 fantastic facts You Might Not Know

- 1 Director Wolfgang Peterson was nominated for a BAFTA for his film *Das Boot* (1981) in the Best Foreign Language Film category. This claustrophobic film classic, set in a German U-Boat submarine during WWII, also received a staggering six Oscar nominations!
- 2 Barret Oliver who played Bastian in *The NeverEnding Story* later appeared in spooky sci fi chiller *Cocoon* (1985), about a group of senior citizens who become rejuvenated by aliens.
- 3 The film's special effects were directed by the multiple award winning effects expert, Brian Johnson. His awards include a BAFTA win for his effects on James Cameron's *Aliens* (1986), an Oscar win for his work on Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and an Oscar nomination for his effects on Walt Disney's *Dragonslayer* (1981).
- 4 Brian Johnson was involved in the building of the model spacecraft Nostromo which featured in the sci fi classic *Alien*.
- 5 One of the first films Brian worked on was Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) as a special effects assistant (uncredited). Last year the film was voted number one in a poll of The 100 Best Sci-fi Movies of all time, published by Time Out magazine.
- 6 *The NeverEnding Story* was adapted from a book of the same name by German author Michael Ende, written in 1979. Only the first half of the book was adapted for the film, with the second half of the original novel appearing as a number of plot lines in *The NeverEnding Story II*. The third film in the trilogy features a new story line, with only the character's names remaining the same.
- 7 The aurora medallion, given to Atreyu by the Empress to protect and guide him, is now in the hands of Steven Spielberg. The original prop was given to the director of *E.T.* after he gave advice to Petersen regarding the release of *The NeverEnding Story* to US audiences.
- 8 *The NeverEnding Story* was the most expensive film ever made in West Germany at the time.
- 9 The soundtrack was performed by British singers Limahl and Beth Anderson and reached Number 4 in the UK Charts. It was produced by legendary, electro pop composer, Giorgio Moroder.
- 10 The character of Urgl was played by British character actress, Patricia Hayes, who later appeared as Fin Raziel in another classic fantasy film, *Willow* (1988).

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