

= Heavy Traffic =

Heavy Traffic is a 1973 American adult animated comedy @-@ drama film written and directed by Ralph Bakshi . The film , which begins , ends , and occasionally combines with live @-@ action , explores the often surreal fantasies of a young New York cartoonist named Michael Corleone , using pinball imagery as a metaphor for inner @-@ city life . Heavy Traffic was Bakshi and producer Steve Krantz 's follow @-@ up to the successful and coolly controversial film Fritz the Cat , the first animated feature to receive an X rating . Though producer Krantz made varied attempts to produce an R @-@ rated film , Heavy Traffic was given an X rating by the MPAA . The film received positive reviews and is widely considered to be Bakshi 's biggest critical success .

= = Plot = =

The film starts out in live action , introducing the protagonist Michael Corleone , a 22 @-@ year @-@ old virgin (inaccurately referred to as 24 in the movie 's trailer) playing pinball in New York City . The scene then transitions into animation . New York has a diseased , rotten , tough , and violent atmosphere . Michael 's Italian father , Angelo " Angie " Corleone , is a struggling mafioso who frequently cheats on Michael 's Jewish mother , Ida . The couple constantly bicker and try to kill each other . Michael ambles through a catalog of freaks , greasers , and dopers . Unemployed , he dabbles with cartoons , artistically feeding off the grubbiness of his environment . He regularly hangs out at a local bar where he gets free drinks from the female black bartender , Carole , in exchange for sketches of the somewhat annoying Shorty , Carole 's violent , legless bouncer devotee . One of the regular customers at the bar named Snowflake , a nymphomaniac transvestite , gets beaten up by a tough drunk who has only just realized that Snowflake is a man in drag and not a beautiful woman . Shorty throws the drunk out and the bar 's white manager abusively confronts Carole over this . Fed up with her manager , Carole quits .

Shorty offers to let Carole stay at his place , but not wanting to get involved with him , Carole tells Shorty that she 's staying with Michael , and that they 've been " secretly tight for a long time . " Michael is turned on by her no @-@ nonsense attitude and strong sense of self @-@ reliance . This relationship also arouses his father 's racist fury , as well as the jealousy of Shorty . But Rosa comes over to rape Michael while Angie slaps Ida in the face with a gun . Michael and Carole decide to move out of Michael 's parents ' house and try to earn enough money to move to California , in order to avoid Shorty . Michael gets a chance to pitch a comic strip idea to an old executive lying on his death bed , who seems enthusiastic enough to listen to the idea .

Michael 's story is too much for the mogul and he dies during the pitch . Meanwhile , Carole tries to work as a taxi dancer . Michael , acting as her manager , tries to pass her off as " the fourth Andrews Sister " (" ' cause she was black , they kept her in the background ") . A quick flash of her panties gives an old man a heart attack , and Carole gets fired . Meanwhile , Angie tries to use his Mafia connections to put a murder contract out on his son for " disgracing the family " by dating a black woman . The Godfather refuses to do this , because the hit is " personal , not business " . However , Shorty eventually meets up with Angie , and agrees to do the contract .

Michael and Carole turn to crime as a means of getting by , with Carole taking the role of a prostitute . Carole flirts with a sleazy businessman and brings him to a hotel room , where Michael beats him to death with a lead pipe . The two walk out into a pinball background with the dead man 's cash . Just then , Shorty shows up and shoots Michael in the head with a gun that Angie gave him to finish the job before Ida chases him ; the bullet is seen going through Michael 's skull in slow motion . Many of the movie 's characters run around in a circle and a kaleidoscope of shocking images and horrifying events proceeds before reverting to the live action story . The " real " Michael destroys a pinball machine after it tilts and walks out onto the street , bumps into the " real " Carole , and follows her into a park . The two are seen briefly arguing before they finally take each other 's hands and begin dancing in the park .

= = Cast = =

Joseph Kaufmann as Michael
Beverly Hope Atkinson as Carole
Frank DeKova as Angie
Terri Haven as Ida
Mary Dean Lauria as Molly
Charles Gordone as Crazy Moe
Jim Bates - Snowflake
Jacqueline Mills as Rosalyn
Lillian Adams as Rosa
Peter Hobbs as Jerry
Candy Candido as an uncredited voice

= = Production = =

In 1969 , Ralph 's Spot was founded as a division of Bakshi Productions to produce commercials for Coca @-@ Cola and Max , the 2000 @-@ Year @-@ Old Mouse , a series of educational shorts paid for by Encyclopædia Britannica . However , Bakshi was uninterested in the kind of animation he was producing , and wanted to produce something personal . Bakshi soon developed Heavy Traffic , a tale of inner @-@ city street life . Steve Krantz told Bakshi that studio executives would be unwilling to fund Heavy Traffic because of its content and Bakshi 's lack of film experience . Bakshi directed 1972 's Fritz the Cat , an adaptation of Robert Crumb 's comic strip of the same name . The financial success of Fritz the Cat allowed Bakshi to produce the film he had always intended to produce , and to focus on human characters rather than anthropomorphic animals . Bakshi pitched Heavy Traffic to Samuel Z. Arkoff , who took an interest in Bakshi 's take on the " tortured underground cartoonist " , and agreed to fund the film .

Production began in 1972 . However , Steve Krantz had not yet paid Bakshi for his work on Fritz the Cat . Halfway through the production of Heavy Traffic , Bakshi asked Krantz outright when he would be paid , and Krantz responded that " The picture didn 't make any money , Ralph . It 's just a lot of noise . " Bakshi found Krantz 's claims to be dubious , as the producer had recently purchased a new BMW and a mansion in Beverly Hills . Because Bakshi did not have a lawyer , he sought advice from directors he had become friends with , including Martin Scorsese , Francis Ford Coppola , and Steven Spielberg , asking them how much they made on their films . Bakshi soon accused Krantz of ripping him off , which the producer denied . Bakshi began pitching his next project , Harlem Nights , a film loosely based on the Uncle Remus story books . The idea interested producer Albert S. Ruddy during a screening of The Godfather .

While working on Heavy Traffic , Bakshi received a call from Krantz , who questioned him about Harlem Nights . Bakshi told Krantz : " I can 't talk about that " and hung up . The next day , Krantz locked Bakshi out of the studio , reportedly tapping Bakshi 's phone because he was wary of his loyalty as an employee . After Krantz fired Bakshi , he began to seek a replacement director for Heavy Traffic , calling several directors , including Chuck Jones . Arkoff threatened to pull the film 's budget unless Krantz rehired Bakshi , who returned a week later . During the film 's production , Krantz attempted to maintain some level of control by issuing memos to Bakshi and other artists requesting various changes . John Sparey remembers being issued a memo asking Sparey to stop posting caricatures of Krantz on the middle of his door .

Ed Bogas and Ray Shanklin returned to write and perform the film 's score , as they had done for Bakshi 's previous feature , Fritz the Cat . Other music featured in the film included the songs " Twist and Shout , " performed by The Isley Brothers , " Take Five , " as performed by the Dave Brubeck quartet , and Chuck Berry 's " Maybellene . " " Scarborough Fair " is used as a recurring musical motif , first heard in the film 's opening credits and later reappearing during the end of the film as performed by Sérgio Mendes and Brazil ' 66 . Bogas also created several other arrangements of the song that appear throughout the film . A soundtrack album was released in 1973 .

= = = Directing = = =

Inspiration for the film came from penny arcades , where Bakshi would often spend his time playing pinball , sometimes bringing his 12 @-@ year @-@ old son Mark . Bakshi wanted to use pinball as a metaphor to examine the ways of the world . Heavy Traffic began a tradition in which Bakshi would write poems before beginning production on each of his films , starting with Street Arabs . According to Bakshi , " My background was in Brooklyn ? my Jewishness , my family life , my father coming from Russia . All these things had to be somehow represented on film . "

Because Bakshi wanted the voices to sound organic , he experimented with improvisation , allowing his actors to ad lib during the recording sessions . According to James Bates , the voice of Snowflake , " I said , ' How about a little Wolfman Jack , Charles Nelson Reilly , Pearl Bailey and a little Truman Capote ? ' Ralph couldn 't believe it . We ad @-@ libbed a lot , and he usually got what he wanted in three or four takes . We worked hard and not for much coin , but it was a blast . "

As with Fritz the Cat , Bakshi and Johnnie Vita took location photographs for the film 's backgrounds . Instead of tracing the photographs onto backgrounds , as they had done in Fritz the Cat , the film uses actual photographs and live @-@ action stock footage as backgrounds for much of the film . Bakshi and Vita were also experimental in their photography : Bakshi requested that the lab technicians produce several prints for every photo , each print increasingly out of focus , giving the backgrounds a fuzzy quality . Bakshi states that " We didn 't want to risk shooting [out of focus] on the spot . That could have meant making some expensive mistakes . "

= = = Animation = = =

According to animator Mark Kausler , Krantz was so nervous about showing too much nudity and sexual activities that he had several versions of some sequences animated , for instance , in the " Maybellene " animation sequence . Kausler says that a sequence was animated in which the viewer sees " the key in the ignition metamorphose into a penis entering Maybellene 's vagina . " This sequence was deleted from Heavy Traffic , but the same action appeared in the film Down and Dirty Duck . Kausler also states :

" I covered this scene with another one of the key changing into the fat black guy , and the ignition slot turning into Maybellene . I covered a lot more cartoony foreplay scenes with a simple close @-@ up of the fat black man 's face with his hand covering his eyes . You can get a sense of how many scenes had to be altered , by how many times this close @-@ up drawing was used . It got used a lot ! At one point the original version " A " of Maybellene existed . Ralph had a print of it , but I have not seen it since I worked on it . We did versions " A , " B " , and " C , " with " C " being the tamest and that is what got into the so @-@ called " X " version of Heavy Traffic . Another scene I can recall doing multiple versions of was the guy in the racing cap , pissing on the fat black guy 's ass . This was completely eliminated , causing a jump in the action . "

Edward Hopper 's famous 1942 painting Nighthawks was used as a background in one of the film 's sequences . Several animation sequences appear as rough sketchbook pages , including a dream sequence influenced by the work of Otto Messmer and a George Herriman @-@ influenced sequence set to Chuck Berry 's " Maybellene " .

= = Response = =

Although Heavy Traffic received an X rating from the Motion Picture Association of America , more theaters were willing to screen adult @-@ oriented animated features because of the success of Fritz the Cat , and Heavy Traffic was a box office success . Ralph Bakshi was the first person in the animation industry since Walt Disney to have two financially successful films back @-@ to @-@ back . The film is considered to be Bakshi 's biggest critical success . Newsweek wrote that the film contained " black humor , powerful grotesquerie and peculiar raw beauty . Episodes of violence and sexuality are both explicit and parodies of flesh @-@ and @-@ blood porn [...] a celebration of urban decay . " Charles Champlin wrote in The New York Times that the film was " furious energy ,

uncomfortable to watch as often as it is hilarious . " The Hollywood Reporter called it " shocking , outrageous , offensive , sometimes incoherent , occasionally unintelligent . However , it is also an authentic work of movie art and Bakshi is certainly the most creative American animator since Disney . " Film website Rotten Tomatoes , which compiles reviews from a wide range of critics , gives the film a score of 89 % . Vincent Canby ranked it among his " Ten Best Films of 1973 " . The film was banned by the film censorship board in the province of Alberta , Canada when it was originally released .

Roger Greenspun of The New York Times wrote in his 1973 review " People who felt that his earlier feature , Fritz the Cat , merely debased a cherished original , can now judge Bakshi 's development of his own material . I think that development is as brilliant as anything in recent movies ? as brilliant and , in its own improbable way , as lovely and as sad . "

Michael Barrier , an animation historian , described Heavy Traffic and Fritz the Cat as " not merely provocative , but highly ambitious . " Barrier described the films as an effort " to push beyond what was done in the old cartoons , even while building on their strengths . "

= = Home video = =

An R @-@ rated version was released on VHS and Region 1 DVD by MGM Home Entertainment in 1999 . On July 16 , 2013 , Shout ! Factory and MGM released Heavy Traffic on Blu @-@ ray for its 40th anniversary .