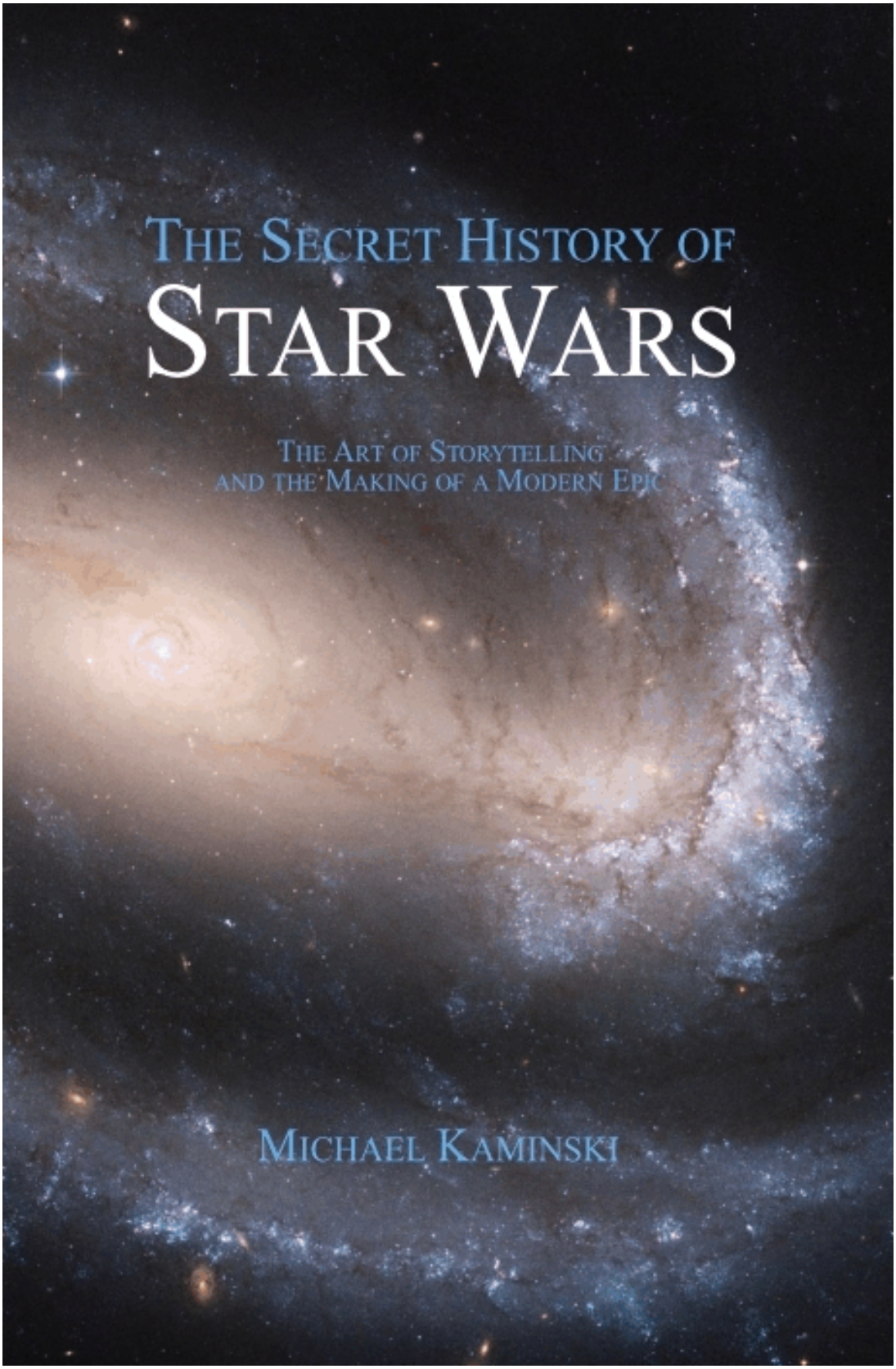
THE SECRET HISTORY OF
STAR WARS
THE ART OF STORYTELLING
AND THE MAKING OF A MODERN EPIC
MICHAEL KAMINSKI

The Secret History of Star Wars

The Art of Storytelling and the Making of a Modern Epic

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No Imperial Stormtroopers, Sith, Ewoks, or Jedi were harmed in the writing of this book.

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Acknowledgments

MUCH of this book was born out of discussion, debate and shared research with other *Star Wars* fans, primarily through online means. To those of you who continue to hold such an interest in the subject matter and to those willing to examine the films with a rational and critical eye, this book is a testament to your efforts. From these sources, special acknowledgment must be made to Noah Henson, Geoffrey McKinney, Chris Olivo and "Toshe_Station," Greg Kirkman, Duane Aubin, and David Furr in this regard, among others. A work as large as this book did not spring into existence without the support and help of countless other individuals I am surely forgetting.

Special mention must also be made to The Starkiller Jedi Bendu Script Site, a site dedicated to preserving and archiving early *Star Wars* drafts and written artifacts, as well as containing a reservoir of various essays and papers exploring the evolution of the *Star Wars* screenplays. Among these, Jan Helander and Bjorn and Brendon Wahlberg's work provided the most useful information, and were often used as convenient reference tools.

Finally, as will become evident upon reading the body of this work, much of this manuscript is comprised of quotations from individuals gleaned from secondary sources. This, in fact, is one of the purposes of this book, to demonstrate that the fractured history of *Star Wars* has remained buried in time over the years and need only to be stitched together into some sort of cohesive explanation—and most importantly, many of these

are from as early a time period as could be found, as the history has shifted in its telling as time has transpired. There are too many to even begin to list here—the End Notes section is particularly meticulous to ensure that an accurate record of these sources exists, most of them quoted from magazine and newspaper sources (*Starlog* and *Rolling Stone* in particular being consistently cited, with Kerry O' Quinn's excellent series of interviews which ran from July to September of 1981 in the former being exceptionally illuminating into Lucas' early writing efforts). For those wishing for a good base for full, re-published interviews, the University Press of Mississippi's *George Lucas Interviews* is available, containing many wonderful reprints of vintage interviews.

Dale Pollock's *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* continues to remain as the golden standard for an objective analysis of the man and his work, being the only book containing a revealing insight into his early years, and was a source of much information, and of course Laurent Bouzereau's magnificent *The Annotated Screenplays* continues to be upheld as a rare insight into the many X-factors of *Star Wars* history. For those wishing for a journal of the making of *Star Wars*, J.W. Rinzler's authoritative book on the subject is your one-stop source that will forever remain as *the* source of information on the film, and provided invaluable supplemental information. It is mandatory reading for anyone wanting to know about the original film and the origin of the series, and contains mountains of information that has not been included here, including additional insight into the writing process.

Finally, I must also give enormous thanks to my editor, Robert Marks, who believed in this book from day one and has been a great source of encouragement; without his efforts, *The Secret History of Star Wars* would not be in your hands.

Foreword

ON May 25th, 2005, twenty-eight years to the day that a film called *Star Wars* burst onto cinema screens for the first time, I sat and watched *Revenge of the Sith*, the final piece in a generation-spanning cinematic epic quietly begun all those years ago, and now finally ended. As the curtain closed on the silver screen before me and the celluloid reels spun empty in the projection booth behind me, there was at once the overwhelming feeling of relief, knowing that the decades-long journey of telling this mighty tale had now been finished, but I also felt something much deeper: that an entire generation of viewers was being inaugurated that was largely ignorant to the historic process that led us to this sixth and final film.

The *Star Wars* saga is no ordinary one: told out of order, funded almost exclusively on a private bank account, utilising thousands of artisans and millions of dollars, it comprises the single most successful series of films in movie history. It is a true cultural phenomenon, the scale and scope of which may be unequalled in the world, one that has enthralled hundreds of millions and made its modest creator rich beyond his wildest dreams.

Today, it is unofficially known as *The Tragedy of Darth Vader*–a true epic of mythical proportions that charts the rise, fall and redemption of an iconic character on a scale unrivalled in cinema. So gargantuan is its cultural imprint that it is commonly compared to classic myths of the past. Yet things were not always as they now are. What appeared and enchanted people who first saw and heard the words "Star Wars" is very different to

the "Star Wars" that people see and hear today. It was once a tale so unlike its current embodiment that it is no longer viewed under that original groundbreaking configuration, so different that its own creator has even distorted the truth in certain instances, essentially reshaping film and cultural history in the process.

This is "the Secret History of Star Wars." But what exactly do I mean by that? I first became aware that something was amiss sometime in 2002 when it was demonstrated by a fellow fan that Darth Vader, the iconic figure of evil, and Anakin Skywalker, the flawed Jedi who turns to evil and *becomes* Darth Vader, were originally conceived as separate people. Not separate constructs, as they now might be said to exist in the saga "from a certain point of view"—but entirely different characters, totally independent of one another, each existing in some imagined history within the same narrative time and space. Indeed, a cursory evaluation of Lucas' own early notes and script material reveals that Darth Vader and the father of Luke Skywalker were characters that existed *together*, onscreen as separate entities. Clearly, the history of the early story differed drastically from the account in common knowledge, which held that the story had been more or less blueprinted in the mid-1970's.

As my research began to grow I realised that I was embarking on a truly ambitious mission, travelling back in time to uncover the story that once was. A mountain of different sources stood in my way and the process of sifting through all the facts and evidence was itself a daunting task—such is the challenge that has thusfar prevented ardent researchers from composing such a synthesized overview of the series. The history of *Star Wars* is one fractured and broken, disconnected and contradictory, but now, I hope, I have tied it all together, re-constructing the jigsaw puzzle like a sort of cinematic detective. What is presented here is not really "secret" so much as it is an entirely new approach to the films that better reflects their historical reality.

Some people refer to events that shatter all preconceived notions and force the viewer to re-evaluate material in a whole new way as consciousness-raisers. That, I suppose, is what you might characterise this work as: one which will raise the viewer's consciousness about the *Star Wars* series, its genesis, its transformation, and what its current state truly means.

Introduction

APRIL 17th, 1973 was a chilly Tuesday in San Francisco, USA. Rain peppered the Bay area here and there, springtime not yet disappeared. From the radios of GTOs, Oldsmobiles and Volkswagens the sounds of Deep Purple's Smoke on the Water, David Bowie's Space Oddity and the current hit by Donnie Osmond, The Twelfth of Never, could be heard. The banks open at 9 and a parade of trenchcoats hustles its way through Market Street, newspaper boxes crowded with readers attracted by headlines about President Nixon's first statement before the Senate committee in the Watergate trial. Elsewhere in the city, the San Francisco Giants are getting ready to face the Atlanta Braves later that day after losing their previous game to the Cincinnati Reds.

As all of this is happening, something far more interesting is occurring in a small corner of the suburbs, just outside the city. Medway Avenue, Mill Valley. A small house occupied by a young married couple crests the top of the hill, a white 1967 Camaro in the driveway. Inside, the house is silent, light rainfall pattering against the window panes, and a figure sits at a desk, deep in thought. He is young, only twenty-eight years old. A beard covers his thin face, his eyelids fallen closed behind thick glasses. In front of him is a blue-lined yellow pad of paper. It is blank. Finally, the young man picks up the number two hard-lead pencil that sits on the desk before him and touches its tip to the empty page. His tiny printing scrawls out a simple title: *The Star Wars*.[1]

Four years later, a new film was opening in theatres around the country bearing that very title, written and directed by a man hardly anyone had heard of named George Lucas. No one in the film community had anticipated its arrival but one thing was sure by the time it was released: the world of cinema would never be the same again.

Star Wars has undoubtedly become one of the prime mythologies of the twentieth century, a tale so well known that it is studied in university courses alongside Shakespeare and Dostoevsky. It is one which has permeated the culture unto which it was released with such far-reaching influence that it has literally become a religion—on the 2001 UK census, thousands declared their official religion Jedi Knight, leading to its (short-lived) official recognition; according to reports, there were more Jedi than Jews, and the phenomenon spread to Australia where 70,000 proclaimed themselves followers of Jediism.[2] Given that the six films have collectively sold nearly a billion theatrical tickets alone, this should hardly be surprising. If critics may trivialize its study on the grounds that the films are merely juvenile entertainment pieces, the *Star Wars* saga nonetheless remains among the most well known and influential stories of the modern era. Anthropological studies not just of twentieth century culture and entertainment, but of modern folklore, must place *Star Wars* and its five sequels and empire of spin-offs at or near the top of the list of important works.

Perhaps most incredible of all, the entire story of this culture-shaping saga has sprung from a single mind, its first seeds planted that day back in April of 1973. George Lucas has been labelled many things in his day, from the world's greatest storyteller to the world's greatest sell-out; he's been attacked by critics just as often as he has been praised by them. Interest in the creation of the *Star Wars* films has been immense, and indeed, there are few films whose productions are rivaled in public curiosity. For many, *Star Wars*' impossible story and otherworldly visuals were the first realisation that human artists are responsible for the creation of a film.

The story *behind* the story of *Star Wars* was as interesting as the film itself—that of an underdog filmmaker who struggled through many years of toil, crafting a tale too large for even one film to contain. Written from the study of Joseph Campbell and the research of thousands of years of mythology, and fused with the action and adventure of matinee science fiction serials, Lucas had a massive, expensive epic on his hands, and divided the story into three separate films. He had also developed a backstory for his elaborate tale, which together totalled six chapters, and sought to make Episode IV first, due to technical and storytelling reasons. When the film by some miracle went into production, it was beset by

problems of all kinds and Lucas was sure it would be a failure—and was shocked when it became the biggest sensation of the year, garnering ten Academy Award nominations and winning seven. With financial independence, George Lucas finally had the freedom to finish the story he had started, the remaining chapters set aside all those years, and thus completed his *Star Wars Saga*. This is the accepted story of *Star Wars*' history.

The accepted story.

Lucas even tells it in his own words:

> The *Star Wars* series started out as a movie that ended up being so big that I took each act and cut it into its own movie… The original concept really related to a father and a son, and twins—a son and a daughter. It was that relationship that was the core of the story. And it went through a lot of machinations before I even got to the first draft screenplay. And various characters changed shapes and sizes. And it isn't really until it evolved into what is close to what *Star Wars* now is that I began to go back and deal with the stories that evolved to get us to that point… When I first did *Star Wars* I did it as a big piece. It was like a big script. It was way too big to make into a movie. So I took the first third of it, which is basically the first act, and I turned that into what was the original *Star Wars*… after *Star Wars* was successful and I said "Well gee, I can finish this entire script, and I can do the other two parts."[3]

For as long as that beloved trilogy endured—at least two generations—this was the account of its creation. *The Adventures of Luke Skywalker*, as the series was called, and his metamorphosis from wide-eyed farmboy to Jedi master, set alongside the battle between Rebel Alliance and Galactic Empire, divided into three acts. As George Lucas reminded Alan Arnold in 1979, "The *Star Wars* saga is essentially about Luke's background and his destiny."[4] But as the prequels were eventually released and the collective focus of the films changed from Luke Skywalker to Darth Vader, so too in turn changed Lucas' account of its origins:

> You have to remember that originally *Star Wars* was intended to be one movie, Episode IV of a Saturday matinee serial. You never saw what came before or what came after. It was designed to be the tragedy of Darth Vader. It starts with this monster coming through the door, throwing everybody around, then halfway through the movie you realise that the villain of the piece is actually a man and the hero is his son. And so the villain turns into the hero inspired by the son. It was meant to be one movie, but I broke it up because I didn't have the money to do it like that—it would have been five hours long.[5]

Here we have two different accounts of the story behind *Star Wars*. But which one is right? Is the long-held first version correct and Lucas merely exaggerating to include the prequels in the second version, or is the newly-revealed second version correct and Lucas had simply omitted such detail previously? Perhaps a combination of the two is where the truth lies?

What if *neither* version was correct? What if Darth Vader was never written as the father of anyone? What if the story was unknown and revealed to the creator of it at nearly the same rate as it was to the audience?

The real story behind *Star Wars* is much more interesting than the accepted one that Lucas had revealed the entire saga in one piece, as if divinely inspired. Instead, we will see how a documentary cameraman was forced into writing and then stumbled through a three-year scripting effort before arriving at a masterpiece of simplicity, and then gradually added on to this simple story, arriving at ideas through serendipity, accident and necessity, all of which would form and shape the growing mythology of the saga over a period of more than three decades.

Star Wars is a film series that has been consumed by its own legend, one with many tall tales and urban myths surrounding it. It is one which has changed to such an extent that, as I shall examine throughout the length of this book, the series that now exists may very well constitute an entirely separate one from that which was unveiled in 1977; this book will hence seek to journey back to the original perspective offered by the first film, uncovering how the story was created, then destroyed and re-configured into what we now call *The Star Wars Saga*. I have attempted to place *Star Wars*, its creation and subsequent transformation, in the context of history, so that a clearer understanding of the processes which formed and shaped its story can be gained.

Of the many reasons that compelled me to compile this book, none was more prominent than the fact that the account of the story's origins promulgated by George Lucas was far from what the case actually was, and often not consistent with what he had expressed in decades prior. Scholars and critics seemed to be ignorant to the fact that buried in time was an entirely different perspective of the birth, growth and maturation of the series; redress of this historic flaw has been in dire need in recent times.

And indeed, before the prequels, Lucas' account of its making was fairly consistent and accepted at face value—but as the films themselves began to shift, subtle hints in Lucas' own telling of the story began to emerge which demonstrated some curious inconsistencies; a new history of *Star Wars* was being written over top of the old one. It was an on-going effort that had been progressing since 1978, when seismic shifts began to

be seen in the story of *Star Wars*, and now that Episode III has been released, the prequel trilogy completed and the two trilogies united into the six-episode *Star Wars Saga*, that shifting has finally settled, and the landscape of *Star Wars* only vaguely resembles its original configuration. Like massive continental drifting, *Star Wars* has slowly transformed, perhaps so subtly that we are not even aware of it.

A confounding problem to the version of history presented within this book, especially with respect to the formation of the character of Darth Vader, perhaps the linchpin on which now rests the entire storyline, is that viewers tend to read into the earlier material and writings aspects which reinforce the later storyline which simply aren't there when viewing the material on its own. A main feature of this book is the examination of how the more contemporary facets of the *Star Wars* saga, most notably the notion of Anakin Skywalker and his fall to the dark side and subsequent redemption by his son Luke, were totally absent from the earliest versions of 1977's *Star Wars*—even the finished film itself. From the "historical background" established in that first film, George Lucas combined characters and concepts and retroactively altered those in that film with revelations in the subsequent films, building, movie by movie, a series that, by 2005 when said "revelations" were complete, had absolutely no relation to the story contained in the initial 1977 film but still used its content and plot in the construction of the new storyline.

It is a fascinating development and a unique example in both cinema and popular storytelling, one which was made doubly so by the backwards process in which "prequels" were made and joined to the original three films and which solidified this newly-created storyline concerning a redeemed galactic messiah. What is more, this process appears to still be going on, with a seventh *Star Wars* feature film already released in 2008 heralding the animated *Clone War* series, which will then be followed by a live-action series; while these are considered outside the "canon" of the episodic saga, the *Star Wars* storytelling process nonetheless continues.

Before we proceed any further though, I am going to ask of you something which may seem bizarre and even a little difficult to do—I want you to forget everything you know about the *Star Wars* "Saga." But this goes beyond just the prequels. I want you to momentarily erase *Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* from your mind. I ask this of you so that you can look at *Star Wars* with fresh eyes, with the same eyes that gazed transfixedly at silver screens in 1977—it will soon become apparent that the film has not been viewed in the same light since its release. And I also recommend this self-induced hypnosis so that you can view the content of this book with objectivity, for large sections of it, particularly the first half,

defy accepted knowledge of the behind-the-scenes workings of the films. The *Star Wars* story remains entrenched in the consciousness of the moviegoing public, an entrenchment which has been dug in for over thirty years, and for many readers some of the realities I ultimately unearthed in the writing of this book may be controversial. Certainly so for anyone who has read anything about the origins of the films—which, I am assuming, are well known by anyone interested enough to be reading this book. In any case, I urge the reader to keep an objective point of view and look at the evolving story as a chronologically-built entity.

Now, I want to take you back to the beginning. May 25th, 1977. *Star Wars* has been released. No, there is no "Episode IV," there is no "A New Hope"—those are additions in the years to come. For now, there is only *Star Wars*, a magical fairy tale about a young farm boy who fights an evil Empire and rescues a beautiful princess, along with the help of his wizard mentor, loyal droid servants, pirate friend and a cowardly lion. A mysterious power known as "The Force" aids the hero with the strength to vanquish the forces of evil and destroy the battle station Death Star, while the menacing black knight of the Empire, Darth Vader, survives the battle; the conflict between good and evil will continue another day. Ending the tale, the heroes are bestowed medals of honour in light of their heroic deeds which stand to "restore freedom to the galaxy," just as the opening scroll promised.

Do you remember that movie? It is hard to nowadays imagine *Star Wars* as simply "*Star Wars*, the movie." While today, *Star Wars* has become an epic saga, filled with melodrama and a scope which spans the forty-year rise and fall of Anakin Skywalker, it is surprising to look back on the magical simplicity of that first film way back in 1977. Indeed, it would be as strange as looking at a "*Wizard of Oz* Saga," instead of merely "*Wizard of Oz*, the movie," magical and timeless as we remember it.* Audiences today are largely unaware of how differently the first *Star Wars* film was perceived—and most importantly, presented—way back then. A swashbuckling fairy tale, filled with humour, adventure and simple mythology, with good guys on one side and bad guys on the other. It was

* There actually are many *Wizard of Oz* tales, from the original series of books written by L. Frank Baum, which totaled thirteen, as well as countless sequels by subsequent authors which have produced well over twenty additional books, plus the many cinema versions, such as Walter Murch's sequel to the 1939 film, *Return to Oz*, which Lucas himself helped finance, as well as the many Broadway and animated spin-offs.

a romantic story in its idealised and heroic depiction of chivalry and adventure, a perfect fusion of old-fashioned storytelling and modern technology, all told with the most sophisticated of cinematic technique. It was pure and simple, and anyone could watch it, young or old, man or woman.

When one looks back at that film, it is surprising to find how much the story has changed. George Lucas has said the prequels will alter our perception of the original trilogy, but before that the sequels alone altered the original film as well. The Emperor was not a wicked sorcerer but a crooked politician, modelled after Richard Nixon. Yoda did not train Ben Kenobi, because we didn't know Yoda existed, and Princess Leia was not Luke's sister.

The plot thickens with the mere mention of an iconic name: Darth Vader. Remember, Anakin Skywalker does not exist, so far as the audience is concerned. Darth Vader is the name of a man, a seemingly robotic henchman of the Empire, who was once a student of Obi Wan's but betrayed him long ago and murdered Luke's father. He was labeled in the publicity materials and novels as a "Dark Lord of the Sith"—but for all audiences of the time knew, "Sith" could have been a race or an Imperial rank; in fact he is stated as a Sith *Lord*, presumably one of many, who also serve the Emperor, and it was not clear that Darth was even human.

Yes, it was a very different galaxy.

So how then did we get to a six-episode saga of Biblical scope? How did we get to Anakin and Leia Skywalker, Darth Sidious and Master Yoda? Well, first we have to go back to the beginning.

Chapter I: The Beginning

GEORGE Lucas' original vision was basically "cowboys in space," a swash-buckling adventure with heroes and bad guys, set in a science fiction world. In an interview conducted after the release of *American Graffiti*, Lucas was asked what his next project will be—"I'm working on a western movie set in outer space," he replied. The interviewer and other guests looked at each other uneasily. "Uh, okay George…" But Lucas laughed their apprehension off. "Don't worry," he said, "Ten year old boys will love it."

Born in 1944, Lucas had a rather normal, middle-class upbringing in a north California small town, the only son of a Republican Methodist father who owned a small stationery business. He found a closer bond with his two older sisters Anne and Katherine, and especially his younger sister Wendy, as well as his mother. "I was as normal as you can get," Lucas recalled of his childhood in an interview for *American Film*. "I wanted a car and hated school. I was a poor student. I lived for summer vacations and got into trouble a lot shooting out windows with my BB gun."[1]

Modesto was a small town with flat, dusty roads, located centrally in the state of California, miles away from anything resembling civilization—an Earth-bound Tatooine. Its population when young Lucas was born was less than twenty thousand, and it was this quaint "Norman Rockwell" environment, as he once described it, that the young Lucas grew up in, a safe, traditional-values post-war small town.

For a filmmaker who would grow up to make his life's work about fathers and sons, his own relationship with his father should naturally be a point of interest. A stern, old-fashioned man, one gets the impression that Lucas' father felt that George never quite measured up to his ideals of what a good son should be. His father, George Lucas Sr., was the only son of a roughneck oil-worker who died when George Sr. was only fifteen; George Sr. became head of the family, thrusting responsibility upon him and molding him into a self-made man, a responsibility that was made even harder on the struggling family when the Great Depression hit. He met his wife Dorothy, whom he married two years later, on the first day of high school upon settling in the small town of Modesto, California in 1929.

He eventually began working for a stationery store called L.M. Morris, named after its owner; the elderly Morris had no son of his own, and with George Sr. not having a father the two naturally bonded and George Sr. eventually took over the business.[2] When World War II hit the homefront he volunteered but was rejected for his married status. On May 14th, 1944, his first son was born—George Lucas Jr. Naturally, George Lucas Sr. was a stern parent with tough expectations from his own son, especially since his other children were all girls. He often disapproved of his son's interests, such as his affection for comic books and the arts; he felt George was wasting his time with trivial and silly things. In the summer he would shave off George's hair, leading to young Lucas being nicknamed Butch. "He was the boss; he was the one you feared," Lucas recalled of his father in Dale Pollock's *Skywalking*.[3] "I've always had a basic dislike of authority figures, a fear and resentment of grown-ups."[4] Naturally, no authority was more significant than his own father.

When George turned eighteen his father expected him to accept his offer to take over the stationery business—but George refused, hoping instead to go to college to study art. The incident escalated into an enormous argument that for many years created a rift between the two. "It was one of the few times I can remember really yelling at my father, screaming at him, telling him that no matter what he said, I wasn't going into the business."

"Well, you'll be back in a few years," his father smugly replied.

"I'll never be back," George shouted, and then added, "And as a matter of fact, I'm going to be a millionaire before I'm thirty!"[5]

But his father was no tyrant—he was strict but fair. He instilled in his son a strong sense of discipline and a notorious work ethic—George Sr. had to struggle and work hard for everything he had and so too would his son. George also learned the value of money, as his father was quick to pass on to him the lessons he learned from the days of the Depression, and indeed,

Lucas would be notoriously cautious with his earnings, but also a smart businessman like his father. It is not hard to pinpoint the theme of Luke Skywalker fearing he would become like his father, Darth Vader, as stemming from Lucas' issues with his own. The two Lucases are perhaps more alike than the filmmaker would wish. "I'm the son of a small town businessman," Lucas told *Playboy* in 1997. "He was conservative, and I'm very conservative, always have been."[6]

"A scrawny little devil," his father recalled, as a child Lucas was often a target for neighbourhood bullies, who would pick on him and throw his shoes into the sprinkler, leaving his younger sister Wendy to chase them away.[7] A poor student, Wendy would sometimes get up at five in the morning to correct his English papers misspellings. "He never listened to me," George Sr. remarked to *Time*'s Gerald Clarke in 1983. "He was his mother's pet. If he wanted a camera, or this or that, he got it. He was hard to understand. He was always dreaming up things."[8]

Escaping his dull Modesto life, young Lucas found comfort in fantasy, and comic books ruled his imagination. He became obsessed with them until he was introduced to television, amassing such a collection that his father had to house them in a shed he built in the backyard. "I've always been interested in the fantastic, and have always been prone to imagining a different kind of world from the here and now, and creating fantasies," Lucas said.[9] Whenever he or Wendy got a dollar, they would head down to the drugstore and buy ten comic books, which they would read in the shed behind their Ramona Avenue house. When Lucas was ten years old, the family finally got a television and his comic book obsession was replaced, spending Saturday mornings watching cartoons.

As a child he also frequently played war games. "I loved the war," said Lucas, who grew up in the patriotic shadow of the World War II victory. "It was a big deal when I was growing up. It was on all the coffee tables in the form of books, and on TV with things like 'Victory at Sea.' I was inundated by these war things."[10]

With a childhood in the 1950's, cowboy films naturally took centre stage. "I liked westerns," he said in a 1999 interview. "Westerns were very big when I was growing up. When we finally got a television there was a whole run of westerns on television. John Wayne films, directed by John Ford, before I knew who John Ford was. I think those were very influential in my enjoyment of movies."[11]

In addition to comic books, Lucas also began devouring science fiction magazines such as *Amazing* and *Astounding Tales*, which were the regular homes of science fiction gurus like Robert Heinlein and E.E. Smith. "As a kid, I read a lot of science fiction," Lucas recalled in 1977. "But instead of

reading technical, hard-science writers like Isaac Asimov, I was interested in Harry Harrison and a fantastic, surreal approach to the genre."[12] He has also cited *Metropolis* and *Forbidden Planet* as impressive films in the fantasy field. "They stand out in my mind."[13]

It is no surprise, then, that a staple of young Lucas' childhood became watching the old science fiction and adventure serials on television. *Adventure Theater*, a 1956 television show, re-broadcast episodes of vintage serials, with tales involving pirates and swashbucklers and filled with action and adventure. In 1954, *Flash Gordon* was revived in a new series, and the older, 1930's and 40's serial episodes were re-discovered. Similarly, *Buck Rogers* was revived in a 1950 television series. The quick-paced world of television and the serials ingrained in Lucas a short attention span, and he was quick to change the channel if there wasn't enough action and excitement onscreen. "The way I see things, the way I interpret things, is influenced by television," Lucas admits in *Skywalking*. "Visual conception, fast pace, quick cuts. I can't help it. I'm a product of the television age."[14] He told *Starlog* magazine in 1981:

> One of my favourite things were Republic serials and things like *Flash Gordon*. I'd watch them and say, "This is fantastic!" There was a television program called "Adventure Theater" at 6:00 every night. We didn't have a TV set, so I used to go over to a friends house, and we watched it religiously every night. It was a twenty minute serial chapter, and the left over minutes of the half-hour was filled with "Crusader Rabbit." I loved it… And I loved *Amazing Stories* and those other science fiction pulps that were around at the time.[15]

He soon developed an affinity for visuals and graphics, having skills as an illustrator, painter, and photographer. Lucas discussed his early influences with Alan Arnold in 1979:

> George Lucas: I wasn't much that much of a reader. It wasn't until I went to college that I started to read seriously. I liked novels of exploration and works about and by the great explorers.
>
> Alan Arnold: Did comic strips play a part in your early life?
>
> GL: Yes. The 'Flash Gordon' strip was in our local newspaper and I followed it. In the comic book area I liked adventures in outer space, particularly 'Tommy Tomorrow' but movie serials were the real stand-out event. I especially loved the 'Flash Gordon' serials. Thinking back on what I really enjoyed as a kid, it was those serials, that bizarre way of looking at things. Of course I realise now how crude and badly done they were.

AA: Do you think the enjoyment you got from those serials led you eventually to make the *Star Wars* pictures?

GL: Well, loving them that much when they were so awful, I began to wonder what would happen if they were done really well. Surely, kids would love them even more.

AA: How old were you when 'Flash Gordon' and the other serials fascinated you?

GL: Nine and ten.

AA: The term 'comic strip' is a bit misleading. Comics are seldom comic, are they?

GL: Originally, they were comic but the comic strip is now a sophisticated medium. It's storytelling through pictures. I was naturally drawn to the form through an interest in painting and drawing. Comic strips are also sociologically interesting, an indication of what a culture is all about. To me, Uncle Scrooge in the 'Donald Duck' strip is a perfect indicator of the American psyche.

AA: So you're not offended when someone calls your work animated comic strip?

GL: No. I'm a fan of comic art. I collect it. It *is* a kind of art, a more significant kind sociologically than some fine art. It says more about our time, which is what fine art should do…There are quite a few [contemporary] illustrators in the science-fiction and science-fantasy modes I like very much. I like them because their designs and imaginations are so vivid. Illustrators like Frazetta, Druillet and Moebius are quite sophisticated in their style.[16]

Lucas' love of comic books and adventure serials did not surprise critics in 1977, who hailed *Star Wars* as a comic book come to life and a throwback to the adventure films of cinema's golden age. Lucas was such an aficionado that he even co-owned a comic book store in New York in the 1970's, one of the very first in the world and one that treated the subject as "Art" and not disposable schlock—the legendary Supersnipe Comic Emporium, famous for its comic art gallery.

Flights of Fancy

The *Buck Rogers* comic strip was launched in 1929 as the first science fiction comic strip, although *Flash Gordon* is often remembered as being the originator since it was this series that first reached silver screens. *Buck Rogers* followed the adventures of its title character, a US Air Service pilot who awakens five-hundred years in the future and must save the galaxy from evil forces. Author Kristen Brennan wrote of the strip's origins:

> Buck Rogers first appeared in a novella called *Armageddon-2419 A.D.* by Philip Francis Nowlan, in the August 1928 issue of *Amazing Stories* magazine. It was John Flint Dille, president of the National Newspaper Service syndicate, who had the inspiration to make the first science fiction comic strip. He hired Nowlan to write scripts based on his Buck Rogers novel, and artist Richard Calkins to illustrate them. The spaceships and most gadgets in the Buck Rogers strip were strongly influenced by the paintings of Frank Paul, house illustrator for *Amazing Stories Magazine* from 1926 through 1929. Paul's vision was most responsible for creating the public perception of what a spaceship would look like from 1926-1966: a brightly-colored cross between a rocket and a submarine.[17]

In 1934, five years after the *Buck Rogers* strip was first published, writer and illustrator Alex Raymond launched the *Flash Gordon* comic strip. The vernacular of *Flash Gordon* was the same as *Buck Rogers*—capes, ray guns, spaceships, aliens and gadgets. However, the true source of inspiration for Raymond came from Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter of Mars novels, released over twenty years earlier starting in 1912, whose action-packed plots were natural precursors to comics and serials. Kristen Brennan explained:

> Burroughs' first novel was *A Princess of Mars* (1912), which was really the first swashbuckling, wish-fulfillment science fiction novel: The hero is magically transported to Mars, which is filled with beautiful, forever-youthful women who wear elaborate jewelry but no clothes. Men are valued solely on their combat ability, and the reader's alter-ego, being from the higher-gravity world of Earth, is many times stronger than Martians. This series routinely falls out of the public's memory, because the literati don't care for science fiction and the science fiction community takes great pains to distance ourselves from such 'juvenile fantasies' in (futile) hopes of convincing the literati to take us seriously. It's a shame this book isn't better-known, because if you can look past the silliness (which is no worse than any *James Bond* movie), *Princess* is one of the most exciting, imaginative and well-crafted adventure stories of all time, in the same league as *Star Wars*... Like many early science fiction

> adventure writers, Burroughs borrowed ideas from H.G. Wells, Westerns, H. Rider Haggard and the other usual sources, but he seems to have also broken convention by importing into fiction ideas from 19th century psychics, in particular Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) and Edgar Cayce (1877-1945).[18]

Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* strip followed a trio of heroes—Flash Gordon and his companions Dale Arden and Dr. Hans Zarkov. The story begins when Dr. Zarkov invents a rocketship which transports the three of them to planet Mongo, where they find themselves stranded. Mongo contains a number of different alien races who have all fallen captive to the tyrannical rule of Ming the Merciless, and soon the trio get caught up in the great rebellion to vanquish Ming. The series had a very distinctive look and style, with medieval costumes, architecture and swords mixing with high technology like spaceships and ray guns, along with a good balance of improbable fantasy. Although these were precursed by *Buck Rogers*, it was *Flash Gordon* that added the more fanciful elements and gave them heavier stylisation.

The *Flash Gordon* comic strip was released in America at the height of the Great Depression. With many living under such impoverished and gloomy conditions, the escapist adventure of *Flash Gordon* was welcomed with open arms, and the more sophisticated writing and illustrating of Alex Raymond made the strip outshadow its precursor, *Buck Rogers*. It was at this time that the motion picture serials were also reaching their height.

The motion picture sound serials belonged to the era of the Saturday Matinee, when kids bought a half pound of candy for a few pennies, paid the ten cent theater admission and were delighted to a handful of cartoon shorts, a two-reeler, a B western and a serial episode. The serials were crudely produced and simplistically fashioned adventures, typically running ten to twenty minutes in length and lasting roughly a dozen episodes, with each episode ending in a cliffhanger to ensure the audience returned the following week for the next instalment—essentially, a prototype form of television. They were jam-packed with action, suspense and excitement, with nary a moment to let the audience catch their breath (or ponder the dubious construction of the films themselves). The characters were all one-dimensional: you immediately knew exactly who the villain was, and he was uncompromisingly bad, while the square-jawed hero was instantly recognizable to the audience—dashing, brave and incorruptibly good. Characters bounded from one predicament to the next, always escaping certain doom in the nick of time, leaving the villain to remain at large and swear to catch them next time. There was the hero, the heroine, often a sidekick, a villain—usually not battled until the last chapter, preferring to

strike from a distance—and his henchman, a proxy for the villain and often caped and/or masked and bearing names such as The Scorpion and The Lightning.

The disposable, escapist fun that the serial offered for young people was the perfect solution to the terrible depression the nation was enduring at that time. The first of the sound serials were the westerns, giving John Wayne his first roles in *Shadow of the Eagle* and *Hurricane Express*, both in 1932; aviation and jungle series soon followed, such as *The Phantom of the Air* in 1932 and *Tailspin Tommy* in 1934, the first serial based off a comic strip, while serial legend Larry "Buster" Crabbe got his start with 1933's *Tarzan the Fearless*. 1934's *The Lost Jungle* and 1937's *The Jungle Menace* continued to popularize the jungle serials, which were helped by the success of the ultimate jungle adventure film, *King Kong*, a few years earlier. 1935's *The Phantom Empire* proved to be one of the most influential serials, a surreal amalgamation of westerns and science fiction in which singing cowboy Gene Autry discovers a long-lost advanced civilization living miles underneath his ranch, featuring robots, mad scientists, oversized laboratories and ray guns, yet with the inhabitants using swords and dressing in medieval costume. *The Phantom Empire* was produced by Mascot pictures which soon merged with other studios to become Republic pictures, often regarded as the king of the serials, and quickly put out two serials that were virtually identical to *Phantom Empire*, one set in a jungle (*The Darkest Africa*) and one set underwater (*Undersea Kingdom*), both in 1936. This all naturally set the stage for the serial adaptation of *Flash Gordon*.

When *Flash Gordon* made its way to the silver screen in a twelve-parter in 1936, it represented a peak in the genre, and is the most remembered and beloved of all the sound serial films cranked out between 1930 and 1950. Produced by Universal, it had a budget many times higher than the ordinary serial, reused expensive sets from *The Mummy*, *Bride of Frankenstein* and *Phantom of the Opera*, and starred Buster Crabbe in the title role. *Flash Gordon* was immediately popular, especially since the comic strip was still going strong. It was followed by two sequels, *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* in 1938, and *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* in 1941. The enormous success of the *Flash Gordon* adaptation made studios realise that comic books were natural sources for the simple, fast-paced, heroic adventure fantasy of the serials, and soon *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*, *Batman*, *Superman*, *Dick Tracy*, *The Shadow*, *The Green Hornet* and *The Lone Ranger* were all plundered and put on the big screen in weekly installments.

When the first *Flash Gordon* serial ended, not only did Universal eventually bring it back for two sequels, they also adapted *Buck Rogers* in 1939—naturally, it starred Flash Gordon himself, Buster Crabbe. Because the characters were already so similar, they were, in effect, blurred into one.

The serials died out in the late 1940's as times changed and audiences grew tired of the repetitive plots and formulaic structure. However the explosive growth of television in the 1950's represented the perfect opportunity for the serials to return—now as episodes of television series. The twenty-minute running time was perfectly suited to the thirty-minute time slots when padded with a cartoon short and commercials, and the cliffhanger endings ensured that audiences returned next week. *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* became television favourites, and just as had happened in the 1930's, comic books were adapted as the medium became popular, from early efforts like 1949's *The Lone Ranger* and 1950's *Dick Tracy*, to later efforts such as 1966's *The Green Hornet* and the most memorable of all the television serials, Adam West's immortal turn as the title character in 1966's *Batman*, with the cliffhanger voiceover urging viewers to tune in next week, "same Bat-time, same Bat-channel!" With the level of camp reached by *Batman*, the television adventure serial died once again, replaced with soap operas and more serious dramas.

The swashbuckler adventure movies would meet their end around the same time as the serials: Errol Flynn had entranced young audiences in the 30's and 40's in films such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Sea Hawk* and *Captain Blood*, always the charming hero who defied tyrants, rescued the girl, swung in on a rope with a sword in his hand and saved the day, whether he was a 17th century pirate of the Caribbean seas or an 19th century calvary officer charging into canon fire. But as scandal and old age caught up with him in the 1950's he had stopped making those films. The special effects of fantasy auteur Ray Harryhausen continued the flame of adventure in the 50's and 60's, wowing kids with his stop-motion visions of cyclopses and dragons, but by the time Lucas had grown up these too would be dying off.

Modesto Part II

When Lucas turned fifteen, the family moved to a walnut ranch on the dusty outskirts of Modesto. Desolate and remote from anything, the family ranch made Lucas feel even more isolated, far away from friends and

settlements. It is no wonder that Lucas became preoccupied with the only means of temporary escape—cars.

As a teenager Lucas had been obsessed with automobiles, initially hoping to be a race car driver, until his life nearly ended in a terrible crash the day before graduating from high school. His specially-built racing seatbelt ripped in two, throwing his body through the window of the car as it rolled over and over—an act that saved his life as the car wrapped itself around a walnut tree (on his own property, no less). If he remained in the car he would have surely been killed. Lucas cannot recall the crash, but remembers waking up in the hospital days later. "They thought I was dead," he reported. "I wasn't breathing and I had no heartbeat. I had two broken bones and crushed lungs."[19]

The event made Lucas reconsider his life and what he was doing with it. "I wasn't *just* in an accident, I was in an accident that by all logic I should have been killed," he told *60 Minutes*. "And you go through kind of an experience like that you say 'How did I survive? *Why* did I survive?'"[20] He elaborated in a 1981 *Starlog* interview:

> I spent some time in the hospital, and I realised that it probably wouldn't be smart for me to be a race driver—especially after this accident. Before that accident you are very oblivious to the danger because you don't realise how close to the edge you are. But once you've gone over the edge and you realise what's on the other side, it changes your perspective. I was in a club with a lot of guys who were race drivers—one of 'em went on and drove in LeMans—and he eventually quit too because of the same thing. You see what the future is there, and you realise that you'll probably end up being dead. That's where most of them end up; it's inevitable, because the odds are if you stay with it long enough that's what will happen to you. And I just decided that maybe that wasn't for me. I decided I'd settle down and go to school.[21]

After the accident, the academically below-average Lucas began to apply himself in his education, attending Modesto Junior College where he studied social sciences to surprising success. If the combined ingredients of his childhood formed the basis for *Star Wars*, it may be argued that the deeper and more subtextual elements of *Star Wars* fell into place here. In his first year of junior college, his major was in anthropology.

"Well, I started out in anthropology," he told *The Boston Globe*, "so to me how society works, how people put themselves together and make things work, has always been a big interest. Which is where mythology comes from, where religion comes from, where social structure comes from."[22] At that time it was also the mid-60's and the United States space program was in full swing as the space race reached its peak. Unmanned

satellites were being launched and the once unconquerable frontier of outer space was finally being explored after centuries of speculation. Lucas recounted to John Seabrook a realisation that would help form the shaping of *Star Wars*:

> When I was in college, for two years I studied anthropology—that was basically all I did…Myths, stories from other cultures. It seemed to me that there was no longer a lot of mythology in our society—the kind of stories we tell ourselves and our children, which is the way our heritage is passed down. Westerns used to provide that, but there weren't westerns anymore. I wanted to find a new form. So I looked around, and I tried to figure out where myth comes from. It comes from the borders of society, from out there, from places of mystery—the wide Sargasso Sea. And I thought, space. Because back then space was a source of great mystery.[23]

But being a beatnik or an artist was the cool new thing at the time, and Lucas began to consider pursuing a future in his more creative interests instead. "What I really wanted to do was go to art school," he explained to author Alan Arnold. "My father, however, was very much against it. He didn't want me to become a painter. He said you can go to art school, but you'll have to pay your own way. Aware, I think, that I'm basically a lazy person, he knew I wouldn't go to art school if I had to work my way through. In the meantime, I had been getting more involved in still photography."[24] At the suggestion of his childhood friend John Plummer, he applied to the University of Southern California's film program, knowing they had camera courses. He told *Hollywood Reporter*:

> I went to junior college in Modesto and got very involved in social sciences, (and) I was going to go to San Francisco State to get my degree in anthropology. I was also trying to get into Art Center College of Design (in Pasadena) to become an illustrator and photographer. (Meanwhile,) a friend of mine was going to USC and thought they had a cinematography school; I applied, got in and was surprised to see there was a film school—I didn't even know there was such a thing.[25]

Indeed, USC was home to one of the earliest film schools, which were just beginning to spring up in the early 60's. Back then, nobody *got into* the film industry—you were either born into it or you didn't get in. If your father was a cameraman then you could become an assistant cameraman, or if your father was an editor then you could become an assistant editor; Hollywood was an impenetrable fortress. The 60's saw the creation of "film schools," where film theory and criticism was taught and low-budget

equipment was made available for students to learn on—but this was not thought of as a stepping stone to Hollywood. Film students went on to make corporate or industrial films, or perhaps do documentary and news crew work. Hollywood was the last thing film schools were made for, and the term "independent filmmaking" did not yet exist in America.

At the same time Lucas was applying to USC, he was finally beginning to be exposed to films outside of the standard domestic fare. Although Lucas likes to give the impression that all he knew was Hollywood cinema before film school, in truth he was very much into the San Francisco underground filmmaking scene, where auteurs such as Jordan Belson and Bruce Conner were mesmerising art students and beatniks with their experimental cinema, as poets and painters began using army surplus 16mm film cameras to create their own movies and give birth to the west coast indie scene. Lucas would regularly venture up to the city with John Plummer to attend the screenings and festivals that were popular there. "Once I started driving, I'd go up to San Francisco on the weekends and occasionally see a foreign film or other kinds of film," Lucas recalled in Marcus Hearn's *The Cinema of George Lucas*. "There was a group called Canyon Cinema, which did avant-garde, underground movies. There were a few little theatres where they'd hang a sheet on a wall and project a 16mm movie onto it. I liked the more avant-garde films, the ones that were more abstract in nature."[26]

Steve Silberman described the San Francisco scene during Lucas' filmic awakening in the 1960's:

> A filmmaker named Bruce Baillie tacked up a bedsheet in his backyard in 1960 to screen the work of indie pioneers like Jordan Belson, who crafted footage of exploding galaxies in his North Beach studio, saying that he made films so life on Earth could be seen through the eyes of a god. Filmmakers Stan Brakhage and Bruce Conner had equally transcendent ambitions for the emerging medium: Brakhage painted directly on film and juxtaposed images of childbirth and solar flares, while Conner made mash-ups of stock footage to produce slapstick visions of the apocalypse. For the next few years, Baillie's series, dubbed Canyon Cinema, toured local coffeehouses, where art films shared the stage with folksingers and stand-up comedians.
>
> These events became a magnet for the teenage Lucas and his boyhood friend John Plummer. As their peers cruised Modesto's Tenth Street in the rites of passage immortalized in *American Graffiti*, the 19-year-olds began slipping away to San Francisco to hang out in jazz clubs and find news of Canyon Cinema screenings in flyers at the City Lights bookstore. Already a promising photographer, Lucas embraced these films with the enthusiasm of a suburban goth discovering the Velvet Underground.

> "That's when George really started exploring," Plummer recalls. "We went to a theater on Union Street that showed art movies, we drove up to San Francisco State for a film festival, and there was an old beatnik coffeehouse in Cow Hollow with shorts that were really out there."[27]

Lucas and Plummer then began migrating south to the New Art Cinema in Santa Monica where European art house films were being screened—films like Goddard's *Breathless* and Trauffaut's *Jules et Jim*, films which delivered stories that were unlike anything seen through the stale filter of Hollywood at that time, showcasing off-the-wall editing and handheld cinematography.[28]

It was this sense of counterculture experimentation that would form Lucas' earliest cinematic influences, instilling in him a natural inclination for unusual documentary and self-made filmmaking.

Still fascinated with machines and cars, Lucas had been working as a mechanic, and while photographing cars on a race track met Haskell Wexler, one of California's best cameramen and early American pioneer of the "cinéma vérité" documentary style, whose car was being fixed by Lucas' boss. Noticing Lucas' camera, the two started talking and quickly became friends, sharing their mutual love of racing. Cinéma vérité, meaning "cinema of truth," was a documentary style characterised by its natural, unobtrusive "fly on the wall" style of observation, which became popular in the 1950's and 60's in the US in dramatised films, where it was also known as "direct cinema," imploring a natural, documentary-like approach to the story. Wexler was the first of Lucas' role models, shaping him towards cinematography and documentary work. Wexler tried to get him into one of the film unions but the notoriously closed-door system wouldn't budge. Lucas applied to San Francisco State in the hopes of studying anthropology, as he had in junior college, before awaiting his rejection from USC—but miraculously he was accepted. Legend states that it was Wexler's recommendation that gained him admission, but, as author Dale Pollock showed, Lucas did it on his own.[29]

"USC was a good school, but it needed people," Lucas recalled of the film program's lenient standards. "So we all got in. The way USC was organized at the time was that if you had the drive to make a film, then you got to make a film."[30] George Sr. however was still unhappy about it, viewing Hollywood as a corrupt cesspool. "I fought him," the elder Lucas said. "I didn't want him to go into that damn movie business."[31]

Lucas recalls the life-shaping years in a 1981 interview with *Starlog*:

I still had all my friends in racing; I was still interested in racing, so I started doing a lot of photography at the races—rather than driving or being a pit crew. I had always been interested in art, and I'd been very good at it. My father didn't see much of a career in being an artist, so he discouraged me from doing that whole thing. When I went to junior college I got very interested in the social science—psychology, sociology, anthropology—that area. But it was really by fluke that I ended up going to the University of Southern California and getting into the film business.

I had been interested in photography and art, and a very close friend of mine, whom I grew up with ever since I was four-years-old was going to USC and asked me to take the test with him. I was going to San Francisco State and become an anthropology major or something like that. And he said, "They've got a film school down there, and it's great 'cause you can do photography." So I said, "Well, all right, but it's a long shot 'cause my grades are not good enough to get into a school like that." So I went and I took the test and I passed. I got accepted!

At about that time, I had been working on a race car for Haskell Wexler, and I met him, and he influenced me in the direction of cinematography—being a cameraman. So the idea wasn't remote. I said, "Yeah, I know a cinematographer, and I like photography, and maybe that wouldn't be a bad thing to get into." But I didn't know anything about the movies at that point. Just what I saw on television, and going to the movies once a week.[32]

Adventures in Filmmaking

At USC's film school program, the world of foreign and experimental films opened up to Lucas, who had already been fascinated with alternative cinema in his ventures to the San Francisco scene. The documentaries and animated shorts produced by the National Film Board of Canada made a strong impression on him, such as Norman McLaren's combination of live-action and animation, or Claude Jutra's Goddardian use of documentary-like camerawork. Arthur Lipsett's esoteric documentary *21-87* affected him the most. Lipsett was a Montreal filmmaker who worked as an animator at the National Film Board of Canada but would later be known for his experimental short films—he used bits and scraps of footage that others had thrown away, crafting together an exhilarating montage of bizarre images and sounds, juxtaposed to create emotion without any hint of plot or character. He later went mad and committed suicide in 1986. "I said, '*That's* the kind of movie I want to make—a very off-the-wall, abstract kind of film,'" Lucas remarked to Dale Pollock. "It was really where I was at, and I think that's one reason I started calling most of my [college] movies by numbers. I saw that film twenty or thirty times."[33]

21-87 would be influential on Lucas first feature, the abstract *THX 1138*, and it also clearly inspired Lucas' very first short film, a montage of sounds and images called *Look at Life*.

Lucas' visual aesthetic would be influenced by legendary Japanese director Akira Kurosawa, which his classmate John Milius first introduced him to. He explains in an interview conducted for *Hidden Fortress*' DVD release:

> I grew up in a small town. Central California. And the movie theaters there didn't show much beyond *Bridge on the River Kwai* and *The Blob*. So I didn't really experience foreign films until I found my way into film school. And at that point is actually when I was exposed to Kurosawa… The first one I saw was *Seven Samurai*, and after that I was completely hooked… It's really his visual style to me that is so strong and unique, and again, a very, very powerful element in how he tells his stories. I think he comes from a generation of filmmakers that were still influenced by silent films, which is something that I've been very interested in from having come from film school…he uses long lenses, which I happen to like a lot. It isolates the characters from the backgrounds in a lot of cases. So you'll see a lot of stuff where there's big wide shots, lots of depth, and then he'll come in and isolate the characters from the background and you'll only really focus on the characters… you can't help but be influenced by his use of camera.[34]

Very clearly, Lucas was someone whose strengths and interests lay in images—plot and character were still alien to him. He was in his element with machines and gizmos, where the controls and levers of editing machines and cameras replaced the automobile engines he had been so intimate with in his previous life, lending him a natural talent for visual communication. His first venture into creative writing would be made during his tour of duty at USC; Lucas discussed his early writing in a 1981 interview:

> No [I hadn't done any writing before film school]. I mean, I had taken some creative writing classes, normal English, and all the things you end up taking—and if I had gone to San Francisco State I might have become an English major. But I had no intention of becoming a writer. I was always terrible in English…I don't think I am a good writer now. I think I'm a *terrible* writer. The whole writing thing is something I was very bad at—I can barely spell my own name, let alone form a sentence—and I struggled through English classes. I went to USC as a photographer—I wanted to be a cameraman—but obviously at film school you have to do everything: cinematography, editing and script writing. Well, I did terrible in script writing. I hated stories, and I

> hated plot, and I wanted to make visual films that had nothing to do with telling a story.
>
> I was a difficult student. I got into a lot of trouble all the time because of that attitude. I felt I could make a movie about *anything*; I mean, give me the phonebook, and I'll make a movie out of it. I didn't want to know about stories and plot and characters and all that stuff. And that's what I did. My first films were very abstract—tone poems, visual.[35]

His early attitude is especially amusing given *Star Wars*' focus on elaborate plotting and multiple characters, one of the reasons he would struggle so much with the material. He said in 1974:

> I'm not a good writer. It's very, very hard for me. I don't feel I have a natural talent for it—as opposed to camera, which I could always just *do*. It was a natural. And the same thing for editing. I've always been able to just sit down and cut.
>
> But I don't have a natural talent for writing. When I sit down I bleed on the page, and it's just awful. Writing just doesn't flow in a creative surge the way other things do.[36]

Lucas' first film, *Look at Life*, was made in an animation class of all places.

> The first class I had was an animation class. It wasn't a production class. And in the animation class they gave us one minute of film to put onto the animation camera to operate it, to see how you could move left, move right, make it go up and down. They had certain requirements that you had to do…It was a test. I took that one minute of film and made it into a movie, and it was a movie that won about 25 awards in every film festival in the world, and kind of changed the whole animation department.[37]

Following that, Lucas made an impressive total of eight short films during his time at USC, all with his trademark affection for graphics, visual juxtaposition, non-narrative structure, prominent audio design and off-beat editing, culminating with *THX 1138 4: EB*, a visual-based tale of a man on the run in a futuristic world, containing virtually no conventional character or narrative elements and featuring unusual editing and sound design. At a party at Herb Kossower's House (an instructor in the animation department), Lucas mentioned the idea of a futuristic "Big Brother" type of film that could be made with existing locations. "The idea had been floating in my mind for a long time," he said. "It was based on the concept that we live in the future and that you could make a futuristic film using existing stuff."[38] Lucas' USC classmates Walter Murch and Matthew

Robbins had already written a two-page treatment called "Breakout" and gave the story to Lucas.

Lucas had already graduated from USC by that time, leaving the university in 1966 with a Bachelors of Fine Arts. The Vietnam war hung over young Americans like a dark cloud and Lucas knew that he would be drafted once he finished college. USC had a large military population on campus, and air and navy students being taught documentary techniques told Lucas he could easily get a job as an officer in the photography unit. Lucas tried to join the air force but was rejected because of his many speeding tickets from his Modesto days. "I was just doing it out of desperation," he admitted.[39] He briefly considered fleeing to Canada with friends like Matthew Robbins but USC students warned him he would be homesick. He inevitably would be rejected from the draft once his medical exam revealed he had diabetes.

With his major background in camera and editing, he suddenly found himself on his own in the independent world of film production, taking any work he could get, even as a grip, and as an assistant and animation camera operator for graphic designer Saul Bass; he later applied for a job at the Hanna-Barbara animation studio but was rejected.[40] An aspiring documentary cameraman, Lucas would later do freelance documentary camerawork, being one of the cameramen on the *Woodstock* documentary of 1970 and the Rolling Stones' infamous 1969 concert at the Altamont Speedway where an audience member was stabbed to death. "I loved shooting *cinema verite* and I thought I would become a documentary filmmaker. Of course, being a student in the sixties, I wanted to make socially relevant films, you know, tell it like it is."[41] Lucas eventually returned to USC a short time after graduating, in 1967, for their graduate program, also becoming a teaching assistant for night classes where he taught cinematography to navy students, with his emphasis on using available light. It was here, in this class, that he filmed *THX 1138: 4EB*, having access to a plethora of futuristic-looking navy equipment and a ready crew of students, using the project as a sort of teaching exercise. Light years ahead of any student film being made at the time, it was an enormous hit at student film festivals.

This led to him being invited to a student documentary competition sponsored by Columbia Pictures for the film *Mackennan's Gold*—along with other student filmmakers, they were to each make a documentary on the production, which was shooting on location in Utah and Arizona, with the intention of using the documentaries as promos for the film. While the others had made more standard documentaries in the vérité tradition, Lucas' was a more poetic and esoteric exploration that barely even paid

notice to the production. Instead, it focussed on the desert that the studio had descended upon for filming, showing the crew as ants in the distance while desert life continued on after the film abandoned the location. It impressed producer Carl Foreman. Lucas won another scholarship program (narrowly edging out classmate Walter Murch), this time with Warner Brothers, eventually landing on Francis Ford Coppola's movie *Finian's Rainbow* as a student observer in 1967. Lucas was more interested in the Warners animation department (birthplace of *Looney Tunes*) but the department was closed down as the studio underwent a massive re-structuring after being sold by Jack Warner to Seven Arts Productions, and the only sign of life on the studio lot was Coppola's production.

Francis Ford Coppola was a film school legend—a graduate of UCLA, he began his career as a successful screenwriter before making the jump to directing. "Francis Coppola had directed his first picture as a UCLA student and now, Jesus, he's got a feature to direct!" Lucas recalled in *Skywalking*. "It sent shock waves through the student film world because nobody else had ever done that. It was a big event."[42]

Finian's Rainbow was a corny musical starring Fred Astair that was made almost entirely on the studio backlot—Coppola hated it but went along with it because it was an opportunity never before bestowed upon a former film student. Ironically, it would be the antithesis of all that he would later stand for. It represented the very last of the Old Hollywood type of films, before the new Seven Arts regime change would allow *Easy Rider* to throw open the doors for young filmmakers like Lucas and Coppola to lay this type of film to rest.

In the summer of 1967, Lucas aimlessly wandered onto Coppola's set. "I was working on the show and there was this skinny kid, watching for the second day in a row," Coppola remembered. "You always feel uncomfortable when there's a stranger watching you, so I went up to him and asked who he was."[43] Being the only young people on a crew where the average age was fifty, the two naturally bonded and became good friends, and Lucas became his personal assistant for the film. In Coppola, Lucas found a mentor, a big, boisterous older brother who complimented his quiet, reserved nature and before long Lucas began sporting his trademark beard in mimicry of his older teacher. Lucas shadowed him as a one-man documentary crew for Coppola's next film, *The Rain People*, creating a documentary entitled *Filmmaker*. *Rain People* was shot on the road with a very small crew, a low budget and little planning, the atmosphere reminiscent of the student film days at USC; it was a type of production that was gaining in prominence across the country, culminating with 1969's

Easy Rider, released the very same year. In *The Cinema of George Lucas* he recalled the radical concept:

> Francis said, "I've had it with these big Hollywood movies, I don't want to do this. I've got this plan to do a tiny movie with just a small group of people, a bit like making a student film. I'm going to start in New York, get in a truck and drive across the United States, making a movie as I go. No planning, no nothing—just do it."[44]

Lucas shot his *Rain People* documentary while also writing the feature-length script of *THX 1138*. "I wanted George also to make a film, and George wanted to make a feature version of *THX 1138*," Coppola explained. "And so I said, 'Well, you know, we could get money in the budget for you to do a documentary on the making of the film, but really you could be writing your script.'"[45]

This is where we come to the most earliest and primitive beginnings of what would eventually become *Star Wars*. *THX 1138 4:EB*—the student film—had been written by Lucas' USC friends (and soon to be fellow Zoetrope employees) Walter Murch and Matthew Robbins, but once Lucas began making professional films it was at Coppola's insistence that he picked up a pen.

"I come from experimental cinema; it's my specialty," Lucas said in a 1977 interview. "My friendship and my association with Coppola compelled me to write. His specialty is 'literature,' traditional writing. He studied theater, text; he's a lot more oriented towards 'play writing' than I am: mis en scene, editing, the structured film. He told me, 'you have to learn to write, to structure.' So it's because of him that I got into it. He forced me."[46]

Lucas was lucky to have such a mentor: Coppola came from a very literary background, already having an impressive resume of screenplays behind him, and could practically write in his sleep; in fact, around this time, he was co-writing *Patton*, which would bring him his first Oscar. Lucas recalls Coppola's advice: "He said, 'Look, when you write a script, just go as fast as you can. Just get it done. Don't ever read what you've written. Try to get it done in a week or two, then go back and fix it—you keep fixing it. But if you try to get each page perfect, you'll never get beyond page ten!'"[47]

But, in setting out to develop *THX 1138*, Lucas still hoped to hire others to script the film. Lucas told Kerry O' Quinn in a 1981 interview:

> Francis's main areas of expertise were directing actors and writing—and mine was primarily in camera and editing. So we interfaced very well and complimented each other. I became his assistant, and I helped him with the editing, and I'd go around with the Polaroid and shoot angles, and that sort of thing.
>
> In the meantime I was trying to get a movie off the ground, because Carl Foreman had been impressed with the [documentary] movie I'd made for him, so I was talking to him about this other project I wanted to do which was based on a short subject I did in film school—*THX-1138*. So Francis heard about that too, and he said, 'Well look, I'll do it for you.' He said he'd get me a deal to write the screenplay. I said 'I can't write a screenplay. I'm not a writer. I can't possibly write!'
>
> And he said, "Look—if you're going to make it in this industry, you've got to learn how to write. You can't direct without knowing how to write. So you're going to sit down, and you're going to learn how to write!"
>
> So they chained me to my desk and I wrote this screenplay. Agonizing experience! It always is. I finished it, read it and said, "This is awful." I said, "Francis, I'm not a writer. This is a terrible script." He read it and said, "You're right. This is a terrible script." So he and I sat down together and re-wrote it, and it still was a pretty bad script. I said, "Look, we've got to get a writer." So we hired a writer to work on the project—a playwright who'd written some stuff for films [Oliver Hailey]. I worked with him and gave him the screenplay, and we talked about it, and he wrote a script, and it was all right—it just wasn't anything at all what I wanted the movie to be…You know I had this idea and I just couldn't express it. I tried to express it to the writer, and he tried to give it back to me, but his script was just not what I wanted. It was worse than what I'd done. So after that experience I realized that if the script was going to be written the way I wanted it, I was going to have to write it myself. So a friend of mine from film school, Walter Murch, sat down with me, and we wrote the screenplay…Francis talked Warner Brothers into going with it, and that's really how I got into writing.[48]

In 1968, Lucas took a few days off the production of *Rain People* to substitute for Coppola as a panelist at a convention of English teachers in San Francisco, where he met John Korty. Korty was an independent filmmaker in the area, making movies on his own for pocket change and operating his production company out of a barn in Stinson Beach. It was proof that the dream of independence was possible, and Lucas immediately put him on the phone to Coppola, who visited Korty shortly after and an alliance was made.[49]

What resulted was the infamous American Zoetrope production company, an idealistic commune of filmmakers who strove for artistic independence from movie studios. While Coppola took a trip to Europe to sample the latest editing machines, he also discovered an independent

production company in Denmark that laid the foundation for Coppola's Zoetrope philosophy. "They had like a big mansion out by the sea," Coppola remembered, "and of course they had made all the bedrooms into editing rooms, and the garage was a big mix studio, and they would have lunch together in the garden. And there were all these beautiful Danish girls there with the boys, working together. And I said—'This is what we want!'"[50] Coppola returned to California with excitement. "I told young George Lucas about having this house in the country, and there'll be all these young people working together, and we'll be independent."[51] Coppola found a countryside estate near San Francisco, but its cost was too high—he had already spent more money than he had on the editing equipment. Lucas, however, would not forget this.

Instead, an industrial building near downtown San Francisco would become the new home to the dozen or so indie filmmakers involved in the company, complete with such bohemian frills as a pool table and espresso machine. It became a hangout for young artists stopping by the area, which at one time or another included Woody Allen, Sidney Poitier, Ken Kesey and Jerry Garcia,[52] no doubt wandering in from the fledgling office of *Rolling Stone* just around the corner. "We used to have these parties and we'd dance and drink and carry on," filmmaker Carroll Ballard remembered, "and in the middle of the party somebody would show up—one time *Kurosawa* showed up!"[53] John Milius remembers its legendary grand-opening party: "At that party you could go around to different floors, and all kinds of things were going on. There was a lot dope being smoked, a lot of sex; it was great."[54] Proving that they weren't just a collection of pot-smoking hippies but could deliver a product, the just-arrived European editing machines were put to use and *Rain People* was cut, with Lucas' girlfriend Marcia Griffin assistant editing and Walter Murch mixing sound. "The clatter of film was heard twenty-four hours a day," Murch said.[55]

Coppola had made a deal to develop pictures from the company for Warner Brothers, who were looking to scoop up a fresh pool of young talent after *Easy Rider* turned the industry on its head. The first film to be made at American Zoetrope was to be produced by Coppola and was also Lucas' directorial debut—the feature-length adaptation of his student film, *THX 1138*.

Warner Brothers' acceptance of the abstract and countercultural *THX 1138* was due to the imminent explosion of the American New Wave, or "New Hollywood." Cultural revolutions had been happening around the world in the 1960's, and in the cinema they had taken place as well—in all

places of the globe except in Hollywood. Although the American cultural revolution had already made its mark on the country by the time the 1960's were fading, it was mysteriously absent from one particular art form, motion pictures, which were controlled by old-timer executives.

In the late 1960's the last of the studio heads from Hollywood's so-called Golden Era—people like Darryl Zanuck and Jack Warner—clung to their backlots like captains of a sinking ship, all of them in their seventies and older and incredulous to the youth counterculture taking over the country. In the meantime, the films being churned out by the studios were tired and outdated, the box office was doing terrible business and theatre attendance was at record lows. The movies were dying. Most of the studios were sold off—legend states that Lucas' first day on the lot of Warner Brothers when he won his scholarship was the day Jack Warner left,[56] and the once-majestic compound was turned into a ghost-town. In the meantime, *Bonnie and Clyde* was released in 1967, followed by entries such as *The Wild Bunch*, *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Graduate*—films that finally began to break down the conventions typically regarded by movie studios, exploring risqué, violent and more socially relevant subject matter. When *Easy Rider* burst on to the scene in 1969, it was a revolution in American cinema. With its nudity, language, drug-use and existentialist outlook, it represented a turning point when young people began to make films about young people, films that were real and defied conservatism. The advent of cheaper and lighter film equipment allowed *Easy Rider* to be made on the road, without stars, without studio representatives and without much money—an *independent* film. It was a sensation in theatres.

Studio executives were left in freefall. They didn't understand this new wave of films and why audiences were flocking to them—but they knew that it was the only market left for the endangered species that was Hollywood cinema. In 1970 and 1971, suddenly a barrage of youth-oriented films were put into production—the stranger the better.

"Because of the catastrophic crisis of '69, '70, and '71, when the industry imploded, the door was wide open and you could just waltz in and have these meetings and propose whatever," said Paul Schrader, writer of *Taxi Driver*, who was then film critic for LA underground newspaper *Free Press*.[57] Hollywood was in chaos and young people were taking over. "If you were young or you came out of film school, or you made a little experimental film up in San Francisco, *that* was the ticket into the system," added Peter Guber, who was head of Columbia Pictures in the 1970's.[58] Warner Brothers in particular was interested in hiring hip, young directors who could make more of these types of pictures for them and were

desperate for fresh films. In this environment, two young, bearded men from San Francisco—George Lucas and Francis Coppola—were given just under a million dollars by Warner Brothers to make an artsy science fiction film called *THX 1138*.

Ned Tanen, executive at Universal who would later green-light *American Graffiti* and reject *Star Wars*, recalls in Peter Biskind's *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*:

> [Studios] said to kids who could not have gotten an appointment on the lot two weeks earlier, "It's your movie, don't come back to us with your problems, we don't even want to know about them." These were not movies where the studio was dealing with someone they trusted. They were dealing with kids whom they didn't trust, didn't like their arrogant behavior, didn't like the way they dressed, didn't want to see ponytails and sandals in the commissary while they were eating. They viewed them with absolute dread. Beyond dread. It was like they just wanted to send them to a concentration camp. But the studio left them alone because they thought they'd screw it up if they interfered, and the movies didn't cost anything. They realised that there was a fountain of talent. That's how, in the late 60's, early 70's, it became a director's medium.[59]

In this light, *THX 1138* was truly the product of an auteur, an esoteric film that could never have been made at any other time. The twenty-six year-old Lucas had lucked out, landing in Coppola's hands immediately after film school and was being pushed through open doors at an alarming rate, now finding himself heading an art-house film without studio interference.

Stanley Kubrick's watershed *2001: A Space Odyssey* had come out just before Lucas began writing the film, showcasing not only the first realistic, tangible conception of space travel, but also the first serious depiction of science fiction in film and the same avant-garde form Lucas was obsessed with. "To see somebody actually do it, to make a visual film, was hugely inspirational to me," Lucas says. "If [Kubrick] did it, I can do it."[60]

The student film of *THX* had lacked any plot and was simply a visual montage of a man running through underground corridors while high-tech surveillance technicians studied him from their control rooms—in his attempt to surround this set piece with a plot for the feature version, Lucas took influence from George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, novels published in 1949 and 1932 respectively which told downbeat stories of a dystopic future where the populace is bleakly oppressed by its government, who control all forms of emotion, sexuality

and individuality, and where drug use, torture and manipulation sedate opposition.[61]

Expanding on the student film, *THX 1138* is a typical example of its era, containing sex, nudity and drug use (futuristic as it may be), violence and abstract structure, as well as heavy social commentary, portraying the public as complacent consumers and the government as violent fascists. This type of content was still very risqué at that point in time—the MPAA was created in 1968 to deal with this new influx of filmmaking, making the R-rating only three years old. Documentaries were all Lucas knew and so naturally that is how he approached the film. He described *THX 1138* as a "documentary film of the future";[62] it was filmed by documentary cameraman (among them, Haskell Wexler), shot almost exclusively on location in San Francisco, using only available light and with hardly any rehearsals—an extension of the method used in Lucas' student version. So involved with the photography of the picture was Lucas that when *American Cinematographer*, the industry trade magazine, covered the shoot in 1971 it was Lucas who wrote an article for the magazine on the technical photographic aspects of the film, revealing that he served as the unofficial director of photography. "I was playing off the fact that it was a documentary, but I wasn't doing the shaky camera and all that kind of stuff," Lucas recalled to author Marcus Hearn. "I was doing an extremely stylized look with no camera movement to speak of. The only camera movement occurred if an object moved—I would pan with it. Sometimes, I'd shoot people and let them go off camera, or let them get halfway off camera, and I would adjust the frame."[63]

The film purposefully did not explain the unusual futuristic world—it was a science fiction story completely devoid of exposition, something of a first in any medium. As Walter Murch explained, it was an idea culled from Lucas' love of Japanese cinema. "Japanese films are interesting to us because they were made by a culture for itself. The problem that George and I found with science fiction films that we saw is that they felt that they had to explain these strange rituals to you, whereas a Japanese film would just have the ritual and you'd have to figure it out for yourself."[64]

Lucas even entertained the idea of filming the movie in Japan before budgetary demands forced him to keep the production in the United States.[65] "Sometimes we'd only have about two hours to shoot in a particular place," Lucas recalled. "There were a lot of things that made it seem like a street film—we would get in there, get our shots before the police came, and then run away as fast as we could."[66] After a short production period of a mere thirty-five days, Lucas edited the picture in the attic of his house with his wife Marcia.

Lucas had met Marcia Griffin while making his way as an editing assistant after graduating from USC. They married in 1969 and bought a small house in Mill Valley, just on the outskirts of San Francisco. A professional editor herself with years of experience in the world of commercials by the time they met, Marcia would be responsible for the picture cutting of nearly all of her husband's films, and unbeknownst to most, would be one of the prime influences in the shape of the *Star Wars* films during their writing and editing. "I always felt I was an optimist because I'm extroverted," Marcia reflected. "And I always thought George was more introverted, quiet, and pessimistic."[67] It has often been said that the two were a pair of opposites that complimented each other: "I say black, she says white," Lucas commented in *Skywalking*. "We want to complete ourselves so we look for someone who is strong where we're weak."[68] Bold and assertive, she was one of the few who could go toe to toe with Lucas in an argument and occasionally emerge victorious. "Marcia was very opinionated, and had very good opinions about things, and would not put up if she thought George was going in the wrong direction," Walter Murch remembered in a 2001 interview for *Biography*. "There were heated creative arguments between them—for the good."[69] Being concerned more with character and emotion, she complemented George's more technical and intellectual interests. Perhaps unsurprisingly, she was not very pleased with *THX 1138* because she felt it did not engage the audience, left them cold.

When *THX 1138* was finally done, Warner Brothers was left aghast. Far from the hip and edgy youth-oriented project they thought it would be, they had an abstract science fiction documentary in the vein of the San Francisco and Canadian experimentalists like Bruce Conner and Arthur Lipsett. They trimmed off a few minutes of material in a desperate attempt to shorten the film and dumped it into cinemas, advertising it as a futuristic love story. Not only did the film bomb, but Warners cancelled the American Zoetrope deal (in effect, robbing themselves of *The Conversation* and *Apocalypse Now*), leaving American Zoetrope bankrupt and Coppola and Lucas without money or jobs. *Apocalypse Now* was to be their second project, a low-budget film about the Vietnam war, but with the Warner deal collapsed and both of them nearly ruined they sought out more commercial projects to dig them out of their hole.

The deletion of a few minutes worth of material from the film traumatized Lucas, and only reinforced his distaste for authority. He would endure the same experience on *American Graffiti*, forging a lifelong complex for absolute control of his material. He told *Film Quarterly*:

> There was no reason for the cutting…it was just arbitrary. You do a film like *American Graffiti* or *THX*—it takes two years of your life, you get paid hardly anything at all, and you sweat blood. You write it, you slave over it, you stay up twenty-eight nights getting cold and sick. Then you put it together, and you've *lived* with it. It's exactly like raising a kid. You raise a kid for two or three years, you struggle with it, then somebody comes along and says "Well, it's a very nice kid, but I think we ought to cut off one of its fingers." So they take their little axe and chop off one of the fingers. They say "Don't worry. Nobody will notice. She'll live, everything will be all right." But I mean, it *hurts* a great deal.[70]

After *THX*, Lucas wanted to make a film about the Vietnam war—which was still going on at that point. He recruited his friend John Milius to write the script, an avid fan of the military and all things machismo, and whom was also rejected from the Vietnam draft due to medical conditions. He told *Starlog* in 1981:

> My second project was *Apocalypse Now* which John Milius and I had been working on in school, and we got a deal with Francis to develop that project. So I said, "This is great; I love John Milius; he's a terrific writer." I was going to get a screenplay, and I wasn't going to have to write it. Finally, I had someone better than me.[71]

Lucas' vision of *Apocalypse Now* is one of the most fascinating entries in filmdom's "what could have been."[*] Coppola all but did away with Lucas' version, instead adapting Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* into a sepulchral tale of madness—an infamous effort that consumed 16 months of filming and had many costly disasters. Lucas' vision was altogether different, a darkly satirical look at the war, filled with comic-book-like characters and done in the style of a documentary.[**] He told *Rolling Stone*:

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[*] Although Coppola would ultimately make the film, Lucas would fulfill his desire through a 16mm Vietnam combat sequence for *More American Graffiti* in 1979, made with the comic satire and documentary look that Lucas originally envisioned.

[**] John Baxter (p. 86) surmises that Lucas' approach was inspired by Haskell Wexler's documentary-like film *Medium Cool*, which had experimentally mixed reality and fiction by placing actors in a real-life riot.

> I was doing it much more as a documentary in the style of *Dr. Strangelove*. It was going to be shot in 16mm. That's how John and I originally pitched it to Francis. Until he made it [in 1979], though, you couldn't do a film about the Vietnam War. That's what we discovered. No one would even have anything to do with it…Most of the things in the film were things the public didn't know about yet. Nobody had any idea that people were taking drugs over there. Nobody had any idea how crazy it was. None of that had come out. The film at that time was vaguely an exposé, vaguely a satire and vaguely a story about angry young men.[72]

With American Zoetrope all but folded, *Apocalypse Now* was shelved when Lucas decided to make a more commercial film about small-town teenage cruising, mostly due to his troubling financial woes. The themes, visuals and storytelling devices Lucas would implement in *Star Wars* can be seen through all his films, and they are just as prominent in *THX 1138*; it is here that *Star Wars* began to bubble up from his subconscious.

Lalo Schifrin, the film's composer, supposedly has said that Lucas confided in him as far back as 1969 that he wanted to make a *Flash Gordon* type of film. The first issue of *Bantha Tracks*, the *Star Wars* Fan Club newsletter, stated that "as early as 1971 [Lucas] wanted to make a space fantasy film."[73] It was an idea planted in Lucas' head during film school, as he would later reveal,[74] one that had been forming, essentially, since his childhood. "I think that damn movie was whirring through the editing machine in George's head on the day we met," Marcia Lucas said with characteristic irreverence. "He never doubted it would get made. Even when he was a film student at USC, he spent a lot of his time thinking of ways to get those spaceships and creatures on the screen."[75]

As Lucas took his first steps into the world of professional filmmaking, he still had in his mind the memories of comic books, pulp science fiction novels and adventure serials, swirling together to form a growing vision. Mona Skager, Zoetrope associate and script supervisor of *The Rain People*, had typed up his *THX* script as he wrote it and remembers the first hints of Lucas' grander ambitions: "George was watching television—and all of a sudden he started talking about holograms, spaceships and the wave of the future."[76] Tellingly, *THX 1138* would begin with a clip of Buster Crabbe portraying Buck Rogers. Lucas reveals in a 1999 interview:

> I conceived [*Star Wars*] at about the same time I finished *THX*, which was my first film. I was getting a lot of pressure from my peers to do something other than these artsy character movies; they said I should move into a more socially-acceptable medium. I was thinking of something that I could get excited about that would be a little less esoteric. I came up with the idea for *American*

> *Graffiti*. At the same time, I came up with the idea of doing a sort of modern mythology, like Saturday morning serials for kids. I came up with two ideas: one was *Indiana Jones* and the other was *Star Wars*.[77]

But first Lucas would make *American Graffiti*, a low-budget coming-of-age comedy with a rock and roll soundtrack, inspired by his teenage years cruising the streets of Modesto. Lucas had personally paid to enter *THX 1138* in the prestigious Cannes film festival that May, and with their last two thousand dollars, George and Marcia headed to France with backpacks. Lucas remembered the troubled time in an interview with *Rolling Stone*:

> Francis had borrowed all this money from Warner Brothers to set [American Zoetrope] up, and when the studio saw a rough cut of *THX* and the scripts of the movies we wanted to make, they said "This is all junk. You have to pay back the money you owe us." Which is why Francis did *Godfather*. He was so much in debt he didn't have any choice.
>
> …I was left high and dry. *THX* had taken three years to make and I hadn't made any money. Marcia was still supporting us, and I thought, "Well, I'll do the rock and roll movie—that's commercial." [*smiling*] Besides, I was getting a lot of razz from Francis and a bunch of friends who said that everyone said I was cold and weird and why didn't I do something warm and human. I thought "You want warm and human, I'll give you warm and human." So I went to Gloria [Katz] and Willard Huyck and they developed the idea for *American Graffiti*, and I took the twelve-page treatment around…And it got turned down by every studio in town. The situation was pretty grim. Then I got invited to the Cannes Film Festival, because *THX* had been chosen by some radical directors' group. But Warner Brothers wouldn't pay my way. So, with our last $2000, we bought a Eurail Pass, got backpacks and went to Cannes.[78]

It was here, at Cannes in 1971, that Lucas finally got a development deal for his future—United Artists was interested in the offbeat Lucas and he proposed to them two ideas: one a quirky coming-of-age film titled *American Graffiti* and the other a swashbuckling space adventure that he was calling *The Star Wars*, for which he hadn't yet developed any story or content but rather the concept of a *Flash Gordon*-esque space opera. "I decided to stop in New York on the way to [Cannes] and make David Picker, who was then head of United Artists, have a meeting with me." Lucas remembered in a *Rolling Stone* article. "I told him about my rock and roll movie. We flew off to England and he called and said, 'Okay, I'll take a chance.' I met him at his giant suite at the Carlton Hotel in Cannes and we made a two-picture deal for *American Graffiti* and *Star Wars*."[79]

Second Chance

United Artists signed the deal at the Carlton Hotel, and *American Graffiti* was to be made first. As he had done on *THX 1138*, Lucas wrote the script himself—after the original planned writers, his husband-and-wife friends Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck, became unavailable. Richard Walter initially wrote a draft but Lucas discarded it because it was nothing at all like his life in Modesto, instead being more in the vein of the hot-rod exploitation flicks popular at the time. "I'm a Jew from New York. What do I know about Modesto? We didn't have cars. We rode the subway, or bicycles," Walter remarked.[80] Lucas was forced to write it himself. Listening to his old rock and roll 45's, Lucas delved into his memories of being a teenager in Modesto and quickly churned out a screenplay after a few weeks. Eventually, the final draft would be re-written by the Huycks, a process which would occur on *Star Wars* as well. Lucas explained to Larry Sturhahn:

> Originally I wasn't going to write it at all because I don't like writing and only do it if I have to. But Bill [Huyck] and I went to USC Film School together. I had read all of his screenplays and loved them and thought he was a brilliant writer, so when I had the idea for the film about four guys who cruise around and do all this stuff on the last night of summer, I sat down with Bill and Gloria (they're husband and wife) and together we hacked out this idea about four characters who do this, that, and the other thing.
>
> Then it took me about a year to get the money because I wasn't the hottest thing in Hollywood. By that time and with the miniscule amount to write the screenplay, Bill had gotten the chance to direct a picture and wasn't available, so I sat down and wrote the original screenplay.
>
> Then I got the deal to make the film based on the screenplay, but I wasn't happy with it because I don't have a lot of confidence in my screen-writing ability. By that time—and due to begin shooting in two months—Bill was available, so I suggested they come in and re-write it. They didn't change the structure; what they did was improve the dialog, make it funnier, more human, truer…the scenes are mine, the dialog is theirs.[81]

Lucas met Gary Kurtz around this time, another pivotal player in Lucas' early days who would be regarded as his personal manager (though his creative involvement is sometimes exaggerated). Lucas told Alan Arnold:

> We met when I was cutting *THX*. I had shot the film in Techniscope and was cutting it on a Steenbeck editing machine which was then still fairly rare in the

> US. Gary came up from LA with Monte Hellman (director of *Two-Lane Blacktop*) because they were thinking about shooting *Two Lane Blacktop* in Techniscope. They wanted to see what the process was like, and to see the Steenbeck which was in the attic of my house in Mill Valley.
>
> Gary and I found that we had a lot in common, including the background of USC. Francis Coppola thought Gary might be the right person to be the line producer for my next film, *Apocalypse Now*, as it was a war film and Gary had been a sergeant in the Marines. So, we started to do *Apocalypse* together, but as it happened Francis couldn't get the financing and I had to put it aside.
>
> It was after I'd talked to United Artists in Cannes and thought that I'd made the deal for *Graffiti* that I told Gary that I wasn't going to do *Apocalypse* but *Graffiti*, a sort of hot-rod movie. As he'd just done a hot-rod movie (*Two-Lane Blacktop*), I asked if he would like to work for me, and he agreed.[82]

Lucas recounted the tumultuous period of scripting *Graffiti* in this interview with *Rolling Stone*:

> Bill and Gloria had a chance to direct their own movie, so I hired another friend to write the script. The first draft wasn't at all what I wanted. It was a desperate situation. I asked Marcia to support us some more. I was borrowing money from friends and relatives. I wrote the script in three weeks, turned it in to UA, and they said, "Not interested."… Then Universal said they might be interested if I could get a movie star. I said no. Universal said that even a name producer might do, and they gave me a list of names and Francis was on the list. See, *Godfather* was about to be released, and the whole town was abuzz. Universal, being what it is, was trying to cash in on this real quick.
>
> … [But] Universal wouldn't give us our first check. Francis came very close to financing *American Graffiti* himself. Finally, Universal mellowed… at the bleakest point in all of this, I got an offer to direct. I was writing every day, which I hate, so there was a temptation, but I said no. It went on until the price was $100,000 and points. The most I had ever been paid to direct a movie was $15,000. I said no. It was a real turning point… [the film was] *Lady Ice*, starring Donald Sutherland. It was a disaster. If I had done that movie, it would have been the end of my career.[83]

Filming *American Graffiti* was difficult, shooting almost exclusively at night on location and made in twenty-eight days on a budget of less than eight-hundred thousand dollars—conditions even more constrained than Lucas' first film. Haskell Wexler graciously stepped in to photograph the film after a rocky first few days—as Lucas was, initially, playing the role of director of photography as well. Being a cameraman himself, Lucas was more interested in the technical matters and hired a drama coach to help the actors.[84] Coppola said, "He had to shoot so fast that there wasn't any time

for any directing. He stood 'em up and shot 'em, and [the actors] were so talented, they—it was just lucky."[85]

Once again, Lucas approached the film the only way he knew how to: "I shot the film very much like a documentary… I would set the scene up, talk to the actors about what was going to happen, where they were going to go and what they were going to do, set the cameras up with long lenses, and let the actors run through the scenes with each other."[86]

The shoot was trying on everyone and Lucas became ill, while producer Gary Kurtz threw his back out and required a cane for a number of months. "I'm not really a 'night person,' and making a film in that short a time with all sorts of cars—it was a very complicated thing," Lucas said. "Directing is very difficult because you're making a thousand decisions—there are no hard fast answers—and you're dealing with *people*, sometimes very difficult people, emotional people—I just didn't enjoy it."[87] Lucas began to grow tired of the wearisome effort of directing motion pictures—his real passion had been in camerawork and editing—and says he planned on retiring from directing. But he had "long dreamed of making a space movie that would evoke the *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* serials he had watched on TV as a child," according to biographer Dale Pollock, and was determined to somehow realise this.[88] The images of duelling swashbucklers and spacecraft dog-fights continued to swell in his mind.

Lucas financially survived through his wife Marcia. Being a professional editor herself, the years it took Lucas to make *THX 1138* and *American Graffiti* were ones in which Marcia was the sole supporter for the two of them, even as they sank deeper in debt—in fact, they were dead broke at the time *American Graffiti* was made. Marcia was involved in all of George's projects, and even in those of his friends—she was assistant editor on *Rain People* and Haskell Wexler's directorial debut that same year, *Medium Cool*, and her first editing credit was on Lucas' documentary, *Filmmaker*. After *THX 1138* she would go on to edit *American Graffiti* and all three *Star Wars* films, winning an Oscar for the first one, as well as being picture cutter on Martin Scorsese's peak period of *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, *Taxi Driver* and *New York, New York*. She was as much a part of the American New Wave as supporting players John Milius and Walter Murch, perhaps more so, and her influence not only on *Star Wars* but on cinema in general is often forgotten. In *Mythmaker* John Milius raved:

> She was a stunning editor…Maybe the best editor I've ever known, in many ways. She'd come in and look at the films we'd made—like *The Wind and the Lion*, for instance—and she'd say, "Take this scene and move it over here,"

> and it worked. And it did what I wanted the film to do, and I would have never thought of it. And she did that to everybody's films: to George's, to Steven [Spielberg]'s, to mine, and Scorsese in particular.[89]

George and Marcia had moved into a small house in Mill Valley, just outside of San Francisco, with George hoping to become part of the independent scene that had nonetheless started developing there in the wake of Zoetrope's collapse. Marcia, on the other hand, would have been content to stay in Los Angeles and go the secure union route, where she had steady work. "Marcia's career was in Los Angeles and I respected that," Lucas said. "I didn't want her to give it up and have me drag her to San Francisco."[90] But Marcia liked San Francisco and was happy to move there, but became disappointed when work didn't immediately find her way. Marcia was ready to have a baby, but George wasn't. "He didn't want the extra responsibility at that time because he might be forced into taking a job he didn't want to take," Marcia said.[91] Soon enough, however, she would find herself one of the pre-eminent editors in the budding locale.

"Slowly but surely, a film community is being developed here," Lucas said of the burgeoning San Francisco scene in 1974. "Michael Ritchie lives up here now, John Korty lives up here, I live up here, Francis lives up here. They are all close friends of mine, and we are continuing to make movies up here. We sort of support each other. My wife worked as an editor on *The Candidate*, and she's also worked for John Korty to get us through these little tough spots between movies. Phil Kaufman moved up here, and a couple more of my friends are thinking seriously about moving here. So there's community here, a very small one, and we all exchange ideas. It's not something you can create overnight."[92]

Marcia was assistant-editing Michael Ritchie's *The Candidate* while Lucas was licking his wounds from *American Graffiti*, sure it would be another flop. It was here that Lucas began developing his space opera film into more than just an idea floating within his mind, as he explained to *Starlog* magazine:

> When I finished *American Graffiti* again I was broke. I had got paid twice what I made for *THX*—$20, 000 for *Graffiti*, but it took me two years to do it, so when you take taxes out there was not much left. So by the time I was finished, I was out of money again. My wife was working, and we were trying to make ends meet, so I said "I've got to get another picture going here—just to survive." So that's when I decided that I wanted to do a children's film.
>
> It was a very eccentric idea at the time. Everyone said, 'Why don't you make another *THX*? Why don't you make some kind of *Taxi Driver* movie? Some kind of important movie?' But I said, "No, no—I think I'll just go off in

a completely different direction." My first movie had been made in the streets, using absolutely nothing, and I thought before I retire I want to make one real movie—you know, on sound stages with sets, the way they used to make movies.

I'd had this idea for doing a space adventure. In the process of going through film school you end up with a little stack of ideas for great movies that you'd love to make, and I picked one off and said, 'This space epic is the one I want to do." Like *American Graffiti*, it was such an *obvious* thing that I was just amazed nobody had ever done it before.[93]

Chapter II: The Star Wars

"GEORGE and I had dinner one night, and we were looking through the paper while we were editing *American Graffiti*," Gary Kurtz remembered in a 2002 interview with *IGN Film Force*. "We were looking through the newspaper, looking at the film listings to see if there was anything out there worth going to see. And, there wasn't. Discussion came around to *Flash Gordon*, and wouldn't it be great to have a *Flash Gordon* kind of science fiction movie–that would be great. We'd love to see that. That's sort of the gestation of *Star Wars*–and that was based on something that we wanted to see, that we would pay to go see! And no one was making it."[1]

It was during the making of *American Graffiti* that Lucas took his initial steps to making his *Flash Gordon* film a reality. Lucas had first proposed the film to United Artists in 1971 as a two-picture deal with *American Graffiti* but only as a broad concept of making some kind of "space opera" type of adventure film—now he was actually making it real. The title "The Star Wars" had been registered by United Artists with the MPAA on August 1st, 1971[2] but it sat unproduced as only a vague, indistinct vision in Lucas' head of capes and swords, ray guns and spaceships.

"I had thought about doing what became *Star Wars* long before *THX 1138*," Lucas has said.[3] Lucas had, in fact, attempted to purchase the rights to remake *Flash Gordon* on a whim while in New York with Coppola in

May, 1971.[4*] On his way to Cannes, Lucas briefly visited the city to convince United Artists to give him money to make *American Graffiti*, but he also used the opportunity to check in on the *Flash Gordon* copyright holders to see if they would part with the trademark. Lucas was unsuccessful—King Features owned the rights and demanded more money than he had. Famed Italian producer Dino DeLaurentis had beat him to it and was in the process of courting Federico Fellini to direct a feature film version. "I remember having lunch with George at the Palm restaurant in New York," Coppola remembered, "and he was very depressed because he had just come back and they wouldn't sell him *Flash Gordon*. And he says, 'Well, I'll just invent my own.'"[5]

Thus was born "The Star Wars." When Lucas met United Artists president David Picker at the Carleton Hotel in Cannes a day or two later he didn't have *Flash Gordon* but he had something just as good—his own version. Lucas was only supposed to be securing a deal for *American Graffiti* but he was able to also get backing for his childhood dream of making a heroic space fantasy, which he now had to create from scratch. Lucas told *American Film* in 1977:

> I loved the *Flash Gordon* comic books…I loved the Universal serials with Buster Crabbe. After *THX 1138* I wanted to do Flash Gordon and tried to buy the rights to it from King Features, but they wanted a lot of money for it, more than I could afford then. They didn't want to part with their rights—they wanted Fellini to do *Flash Gordon*.

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[*] The dating of this incident is somewhat ambiguous; accounts place it anywhere from 1973 all the way back to before *THX 1138*, and even Jonathan Rinzler, in *The Making of Star Wars*, is very tactful not to assign it to any specific time period. Most likely Lucas had tried to purchase *Flash Gordon* while visiting United Artists in New York on his way to Cannes in 1971; the Cannes film festival occurred in May that year. Rinzler states that, on this visit, Lucas stayed with Coppola. Coppola actually was there filming *The Godfather* on location (the film was shot between March and August 1971). This would explain how, after Lucas' offer was rejected, he proceeded to have lunch with Coppola at the Palm restaurant. This must mean that Lucas originally planned on proposing the two-picture deal of *American Graffiti* and *Flash Gordon* to United Artists when he got to Cannes. Arriving in France without *Flash Gordon*, he instead started calling it "The Star Wars" and decided he would create the story himself.

> I realized that *I* could make up a character as easily as Alex Raymond, who took his character from Edgar Rice Burroughs. It's your basic superhero in outer space. I realised that what I really wanted to do was a contemporary action fantasy.[6]

Two years later, in 1973, Lucas finally started figuring out what, exactly, "The Star Wars" was. "When I made the deal I had to give it a name," he said, "but it wasn't until I finished *Graffiti* in '73 that I started writing it."[7] He took the basic charm of *Flash Gordon*—good guys who fight a never ending battle against villains, always finding themselves in new adventures and unlikely danger, and who inhabit a setting with a strange mix of magic and technology—and began making it into his own. In place of Emperor Ming, he would place the aptly-named Emperor, and eventually in later drafts his henchman Darth Vader. Laser swords, ray guns, capes and medieval garb, sorcerers, rocket ships and space battles would all stem from the *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* episodes Lucas grew up with. The film needed to be filled with impressive visuals and constant peril and excitement, a non-stop action film with lots of explosions and graphics. "One of the key visions I had of the film when I started was of a dogfight in outer space with spaceships," Lucas said in *The Making of Star Wars*. "I said, 'I want to make that movie. I want to *see* that.'"[8] According to the first issue of *Bantha Tracks*, the official *Star Wars* fan club newsletter, Lucas also researched where Alex Raymond, the author and illustrator of the 1930's *Flash Gordon* comic strip, got his inspiration from, which led him to the John Carter of Mars novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs, which were similar in style and design.*

After making the dark and dismal *THX 1138*, a film which had a disastrous release, Lucas had learned that an audience responded much more to hope and optimism than to bleak cynicism. Lucas said in 1974:

> I realised after *THX* that people don't care about how the country's being ruined. All that movie did was make people more pessimistic, more depressed, and less willing to get involved in trying to make the world better. So I decided that this time I would make a more optimistic film that makes people feel positive about their fellow human beings. It's too easy to make films about Watergate. And it's hard to be optimistic when everything tells you to be pessimistic and cynical. I'm a very bad cynic. But we've got to regenerate optimism. Maybe kids will walk out of this film and for a second they'll feel

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* Further research, the issue reports, led him to discover that the John Carter of Mars books were inspired by Edwin Arnold's *Gulliver of Mars*, published in 1905.

> "We could really make something out of this country, or we could really make something out of ourselves." It's all that hokey stuff about being a good neighbor, and the American spirit and all that crap. There *is* something in it.[9]

Lucas was speaking of *American Graffiti* but it was a lesson that would be carried over to *Star Wars* with even more prominence, though the screenplay would morph through various incarnations before this emerged with the significance with which it carries in the final film. Lucas began outlining *Star Wars* even before *Graffiti* was released, and when *Graffiti* finally was it only reinforced his beliefs, as he told *Bantha Tracks* in 1980:

> After seeing the effect *Graffiti* had on high-school kids… I started thinking about ten and twelve year olds…I saw that kids that age don't have the fantasy life we had as kids. They don't have westerns; they don't have pirate movies; they don't have all that stupid serial fantasy life that we used to believe in. They also don't have heroes. I had been a big fan of Flash Gordon and a believer in the exploration of space. I felt, then, that *Star Wars* would be a natural and give kids a fantasy life that they really needed to have.[10]

Lucas is quick to admit he hates writing, and at every opportunity he had tried to get friends to write his scripts for him—usually with complicated results: writers deserting (*American Graffiti*), drafts unsatisfactory (*THX 1138*), and projects shelved (*Apocalypse Now*). "*Star Wars* was a little bit different," he told *Starlog* magazine in 1981, "because by that time I'd decided that it was useless to try to get someone else to write my screenplays…I finally gave up!"[11]

"My Little Space Thing"

The *Star Wars* Souvenir program states that Lucas began working on story material in January of 1973, which would be just around the time *American Graffiti* was having its first audience screening at San Francisco's Northpoint Theater (on January 28th).[12] In fact, Lucas may have began writing immediately afterwards—the screening audience loved *Graffiti* but Universal head Ned Tanen hated the film and called it "unreleasable," perhaps fuelling Lucas to begin his next project. Lucas stated to *Rolling Stone*:

> It was January 1973. I had been paid $20,000 for *Graffiti*, it had taken two years, I was $15,000 in debt and Universal hated the film so much they were contemplating selling it as a TV Movie of the Week. I had to start paying back

> some of this movie so I thought, "I'll whip up that treatment, my second deal at United Artists, my little space thing."[13]

Creating an entire space fantasy from scratch was no easy task though. He wanted to have a comic-book-like feel to the story that recalled the great pulp space opera works like E.E. Smith's *Skylark of Space*, but had trouble devising an actual story. To jog his mind, he began by brainstorming exotic names that he could use for characters and planets, almost in a free-association manner, simply to develop the sort of bizarre atmosphere and far-out style that he was looking for. The first name is "Emperor Ford Xerxes XII" (Xerxes being a Persian king who invaded ancient Greece), which was followed by "Xenos, Thorpe, Roland, Monroe, Lars, Kane, Hayden, Crispin, Leila, Zena, Owen, Mace, Wan, Star, Bail, Biggs, Bligh, Cain, Clegg, Fleet, Valorum."[14] He then started combining first and last names and fleshing out their purpose and characterisation: Alexander Xerxes XII is the "Emperor of Decarte," Owen Lars is an "Imperial General," Han Solo is "leader of the Hubble people," Mace Windy a "Jedi-Bendu," C.2. Thorpe is a space pilot, while Anakin Starkiller is "King of Bebers" and Luke Skywalker "Prince of Bebers." He came up with planets such as "Yoshiro" and "Aquilae" the desert planets, "Norton III" an ice planet, and "Yavin" is a jungle world with its native eight-foot-tall Wookies.

Having bombarded himself with such an exotically alien ambiance he finally attempted to construct a story. What he ended up with was a vague two pages of a hand-written plot summary with the curious title *Journal of the Whills*. It opened with the convoluted line, "This is the story of Mace Windy, a revered Jedi-Bendu of Opuchi, as related to us by C.J. Thorpe, padawaan learner to the famed Jedi." In the brief plot outline, Mace Windy is a "Jedi-Bendu" or "Jedi-Templer," a vague sci-fi adaptation of a space superhero crossed with a samurai. Windy takes on an apprentice, C.J. Thorpe, who narrates the story retrospectively in the first person. The tale is uncharacteristically literary in prose, and is divided into two parts, headed with "I" and "II" respectively, Part I being Thrope's training and Part II being his greatest mission. J.W. Rinzler described it:

> The initials *C.J.* or *C.2.* (it switches back and forth) stand for "Chuiee Two Thorpe of Kissel. My father is Han Dardell Thorpe, chief pilot of the renown galactic cruiser *Tarnack*." At the age of sixteen Chuiee enters the "exalted Intersystems Academy to train as a potential Jedi-Templer. It is here that I became padawaan learner to the great Mace Windy…at that time, Warlord to the Chairman of the Alliance of Independent Systems…Some felt that he was

> more powerful than the Imperial leader of the Galactic Empire…Ironically, it was his own comrades' fear…that led to his replacement…and expulsion from the royal forces."
>
> After Windy's dismissal, Chuiee begs to stay in his service "until I had finished my education." *Part II* takes up the story: "It was four years later that our greatest adventure began. We were guardians on a shipment of fusion portables to Yavin, when we were summoned to the desolate second planet of Yoshiro by a mysterious courier from the Chairman of the Alliance." At this point Lucas's first space-fantasy narrative trails off…[15]

This plot summary has little relation to the final product, but contains a few elements which would be later incorporated into the screenplays, such as the phonetics of "Chuiee" ("Chewie"), a pilot named Han, a galactic Empire, a space academy, and intergalactic superheroes named Jedi. Much of it recalls the space opera works of E.E. Smith and his Lensmen series, with its intergalactic space commandos, far-fetched comic-book style plotting and exotic names.

Lucas took this summary to his agent, Jeff Berg, for an opinion—unsurprisingly, Berg was left utterly confounded at the incomprehensible story and recommended Lucas try something simpler, later saying: "I knew more about the story based on what George had told me than what was in that brief treatment."[16] Frustrated, Lucas began anew.

It seems coming up with an original story was harder than Lucas realised—despite claiming that he was determined to make his own "superhero in outer space" adventure, he would end up *adapting* another story for his first proper story synopsis, completed after the disastrous *Journal of the Whills* attempt. Aside from *Flash Gordon*, the other main influence, at least for Lucas' initial conception of *Star Wars*, is the Japanese samurai films of Akira Kurosawa, but in particular 1958's *The Hidden Fortress*. Lucas discovered Kurosawa at the recommendation of John Milius while attending film school and quickly fell in love with Kurosawa's films.

Akira Kurosawa had a prolific, successful but sometimes tumultuous career—at the time Lucas was developing *Star Wars* in 1973, the Japanese director was considered a has-been and attempted committing suicide after he proved unable to find any work. He began his career in the 1930s as an Assistant Director, becoming Toho studios' top AD and a protégé to director Kajiro Yamamoto before finally making his directorial debut in 1943 with *Sugata Sanshiro*, or *Judo Saga*, based on Tsuneo Tomita's novel about a martial arts student who comes to learn the meaning of life through the study of judo. Though Kurosawa frequently depicted contemporary

Japan, he is best known for his "jidai geki," or period films, portraying the stoic samurai warriors of Japan's past. Kurosawa wrote nearly all of his films—over thirty, and usually in collaboration with a team of his usual writing partners—but rarely were the stories original creations. He often adapted Shakespeare, remaking *King Lear* in 1985 as *Ran* and *Macbeth* in 1957 as *Throne of Blood*, and frequently sourced folk tales and novels as the basis for many of his stories, such as in *Red Beard*, *Dersu Uzala*, *The Idiot*, *Rashomon* and *Hidden Fortress* itself. Like Lucas, and some would argue the best storytellers, very little of Kurosawa's stories were "original." Indeed, even Shakespeare could be regarded as a literary thief if originality is the basis for our appraisal. In fact, this is one of the largest misconceptions of the creative process—a misconception usually asserted by those ignorant of the process. Artists take from what they know and what they've seen and combine them in new ways, and it is this unique sum of influences that gives us creative variation when they are combined with the particularities of the artist.

Lucas even extended this creative synthesis to the visual design: "I'm trying to make everything look very natural, a casual almost I've-seen-this-before look," he said in 1975. "You look at that painting of Tusken Raiders and the banthas, and you say, 'Oh yeah, Bedouins…' Then you look at it some more and say, 'Wait a minute, that's not right. Those aren't Bedouins, and what are those creatures back there?' Like the X-wing and TIE fighter battle, you say, 'I've seen that, it's World War II—but wait a minute—that isn't any kind of jet I've ever seen before.' I want the whole film to have that quality!"[17]

So, in the tracing of the *plot* of *Star Wars* we come to Akira Kurosawa, and more specifically a 1958 film entitled *The Hidden Fortress*. More than any other of Kurosawa's films, *The Hidden Fortress* is a fairy tale, a fast-paced adventure film aimed at a much younger and broader audience than his usual complicated and dark subject matter. Lucas has admitted to borrowing the two bickering peasants from whose perspective the story is told and turning them into R2-D2 and C-3P0—but in fact, not only were the droids not robots but human, literal adaptations of the bickering peasants in his initial treatment, Lucas "borrowed" nearly all of *The Hidden Fortress* for the first treatment, so much that he even contemplated purchasing the rights to the film.[18] He flat-out *remade* it. The first proper version[*] of "*The*

[*] Because *Journal of the Whills* is so distinct from the progression that began with *The Star Wars*, I often consider it as a separate entity, a proto-*Star-Wars* that was abandoned; it contains super-commandos named Jedi, but otherwise is not

Star Wars" takes the form of a fourteen-page story synopsis, also called a treatment or outline in filmmaking terms, which essentially is *The Hidden Fortress* set on another planet. There are no Jedi or Sith, or even the Force—these were dressings that Lucas later added to his initial plot base, which fundamentally is an adaptation of Kurosawa's film and which includes practically every scene from it.

Without the advantage of home video, Lucas relied on a plot summary of Kurosawa's film, copying entire passages from *Hidden Fortress*' synopsis in Donald Richie's authoritative book *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, first published in 1965. Although the final film transformed and shifted more than enough to qualify it as a unique work unto itself by the time it reached the silver screen, its plot remains similar to its very incarnation in the 1973 treatment, at its most basic, a "re-imagined" version of *The Hidden Fortress*.

"*Hidden Fortress* was an influence on *Star Wars* right from the beginning," Lucas said in *The Making of Star Wars*. "I was searching around for a story. I had some scenes—the cantina scene and the space battle scene—but I couldn't think of a basic plot. Originally, the film was a good concept in search of a story. And then I thought of *Hidden Fortress*, which I'd seen again in 1972 or '73, and so the first plots were very much like it."[19]

Journal of the Whills was overly complicated and too strange to translate into audience friendly terms, but Kurosawa was a master at understanding how to entertain the masses in broad, simple strokes. "A film should appeal to sophisticated, profound-thinking people while at the same time entertaining simplistic people," Kurosawa once said.[20] "A truly good movie is really enjoyable too. There's nothing complicated about it. A truly good movie is interesting and easy to understand."[21]

The Hidden Fortress opens with two bickering peasants, Tahei and Matashichi, wandering the desert landscape, cursing their "lot in life." It is a period of civil war, and the various clans of Japan are all at battle with one another. The two peasants bicker until they split up, each wandering in a different direction—they are both individually found by the enemy and placed in a slave-camp, where they are miraculously reunited to each others

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directly related to the entity which began with the *Star Wars* treatment and is conceptually quite different, whereas the *Star Wars* treatment is related to the first draft, and that draft to the next draft, and so on. That *Journal of the Whills* has a separate title helps differentiate it. When I speak of "the treatment" or synopsis, I will be referring to the May fourteen-page version.

delight. After an uprising in the prison camp allows them to escape, they stumble upon a gold bar hidden inside a piece of wood, and soon find themselves intertwined with a duo of strangers—a beautiful peasant girl and her roughneck companion. In reality these two are Princess Yuki and General Rokurota Makabe, the two peasants having stumbled across the hidden fortress in which they are hiding, for a reward has been posted for the princess' capture. The gold bar hidden inside the stick is one of hundreds, and is the secret royal treasure, which the enemy is also seeking. General Makabe is attempting to escort the princess through the dangerous enemy territory, and the two peasants find themselves helping them in exchange for a share of the gold. Together, the four of them embark on a treacherous quest through enemy lands, dodging soldiers and evading enemy forces, somehow surviving close-call after close-call. Along the way, after an exciting horseback chase, General Makabe duels his arch opponent who later helps them escape after they are captured. They reach friendly territory, and the General and princess are revealed in all their true glory, much to the bafflement of the two peasants who stumble away realising they have been adventuring with demigods.

On April 17th, 1973, Lucas began writing a new story.[22] Handwritten at ten pages and typed at fourteen, the *Star Wars* treatment was completed in the first week of May, 1973.[23] There is some interesting debate as to what and when Lucas first wrote, and it has also been frequently erroneously reported that Lucas began writing in 1972; for an in-depth look at the holy grail of *Star Wars* lore, the *Journal of the Whills* (a document conceptually separate from Lucas' attempted plot summary of that same name), see Appendix A. But to simplify things, it is accurate to say that *Star Wars* was officially born on the first week of May, 1973, with the completion of the fourteen-page synopsis, which was begun following Lucas' failed *Journal of the Whills* summary of late January of that year. It was titled *The Star Wars*, and told the adventurous tale of a General who leads a princess on a dangerous escape route through enemy lands, a sci-fantasy remake of *The Hidden Fortress*.

Jan Helander, in his authoritative essay "The Development of Star Wars as Seen Through the Scripts by George Lucas," describes the synopsis as follows:

> The galaxy is plagued by a civil war between an evil Empire and rebel forces. Two bickering Imperial bureaucrats try to flee from a space fortress which is under attack, and crash land on the planet of Aquilae. A wanted rebel princess and her relentless general Luke Skywalker, on their way to a space port in order to get the princess to safety, find and capture them and after a hazardous

journey the group make it to a religious temple where they discover a band of young boy rebels. The boys decide to follow them across the wasteland in spite of the general's reluctance, and they soon reach a shabby cantina near the space port where the general is forced to use his "lazer sword" to kill a bully who is taunting one of the boys.

The group, pursued by Imperial troops, must steal a fighter ship in order to escape and after a long chase they manage to hide in an asteroid field. However, the rebels' ship is damaged and they are forced to jettison towards the forbidden planet of Yavin with rocket packs. On Yavin, they travel on "jet-sticks" made from their rocket packs, until they are attacked by giant furry aliens who capture the princess and the bureaucrats and sell them to an Imperial platoon. Skywalker is almost killed, but one of the aliens helps to take him to an old farmer who knows where the Imperial outpost is. After an attack on the outpost, the general and the boys learn that the princess has been taken to Alderaan, a "city-planet" and the capitol of the Empire. After rigorous training, Skywalker and the young rebels man a squadron of fighter ships, and disguised as Imperial rangers they manage to reach the prison complex of Alderaan. They free the princess, but an alarm goes off and a few of the boys are killed before the group is able to escape to the friendly planet of Ophuchi. There, everyone (including the bureaucrats) are rewarded at a ceremony, as the princess reveals her true goddess-like self.[24]

Influences

A summation of the treatment does not reveal the full impact of *Hidden Fortress*—a reading of the actual document itself reveals nearly a scene-by-scene remake of Kurosawa's film.

From Lucas' synopsis:

> It is the thirty-third century, a period of civil wars in the galaxy. A rebel princess, with her family, her retainers, and the clan treasure, is being pursued. If they can cross territory controlled by the Empire and reach a friendly planet, they will be saved. The Sovereign knows this, and posts a reward for the capture of the princess.

Versus Kurosawa's film: It is the sixteenth century, a period of civil wars. A princess, with her family, her retainers, and the clan treasure is being pursued. If they can cross enemy territory and reach a friendly province they will be saved. The enemy knows this and posts a reward for the capture of the princess.

From Lucas' synopsis:

> She is being guarded by one of her generals, (Luke Skywalker) and it is he who leads her on the long and dangerous journey that follows. They take along with them two hundred pounds of the greatly treasured "aura spice", and also two Imperial bureaucrats, whom the general has captured.

Versus Kurosawa's film: She is being guarded by one of her generals, (Rokurota Makabe) and it is he who leads her on the long and dangerous journey that follows. They take along with them two hundred pounds of the greatly treasured royal gold and also two peasants, whom the general has captured.

From Lucas' synopsis:

> The two terrified, bickering bureaucrats crash land on Aquilae while trying to flee the battle of the space fortress. They accidentally discover a small container of the priceless "aura spice" and are rummaging around the rocks pushing and pulling each other trying to find more when they are discovered by Luke Skywalker and taken to his camp.

Versus Kurosawa's film: The two terrified, bickering peasants stumble upon the hidden fortress while trying to flee the battle of the prison camp. They accidentally discover a small piece of wood containing the priceless royal gold and are rummaging around the rocks pushing and pulling each other trying to find more when they are discovered by Rokurota Makabe and taken to his camp.

From Lucas' synopsis:

> The princess and the general are disguised as farmers, and the bureaucrats join their party with the intention of stealing their "land speeder" and "aura spice." It doesn't take them too long to realize the general isn't a farmer and that they are captives about to embark on a dangerous mission. The two bureaucrats are essentially comic relief inserted among the general seriousness of the adventure.

Versus Kurosawa's film: The princess and the general are disguised as farmers, and the peasants join their party with the intention of stealing their horses and royal treasure. It doesn't take them too long to realise the general isn't a farmer and that they are captives about to embark on a dangerous mission. The two peasants are essentially comic relief inserted among the general seriousness of the adventure.

From Lucas' synopsis:

> The small group in their sleek, white, two-man 'land speeders' travel across the wastelands of Aquilae, headed for the space port city of Gordon, where they hope to get a spacecraft that will take them to the friendly planet of Ophuchi.
>
> At a desolate rest stop, the rebels are stopped and questioned by an Imperial patrol. Apparently satisfied, the captain lets the group continue on their way, but a short distance into the wilderness, they are attacked by the patrol. The Imperial patrol of twelve men is no match for the incredibly skilled and powerful general, who makes short work of the enemy.

Versus Kurosawa's film: The small group and their horses travel across the wastelands of Yamana, ending up in a small town, where they get a cart that will help them take the gold to the friendly province of Hayakawa. At a desolate rest stop, they are stopped and questioned by an Imperial patrol. Apparently satisfied, the captain lets the group continue on their way, but a short distance into the wilderness, they are attacked by the patrol. The Imperial patrol of four men is no match for the incredibly skilled and powerful general, who makes short work of the enemy.

As you can see, 1973's *The Star Wars* was indeed a remake of *Hidden Fortress*, although the later sections of Lucas' synopsis add scenes beyond the scope of Kurosawa's story, most notably the last third where primitive aliens and young boys help the General free the princess. Kurosawa's films had often been the target of western pilfering—*Seven Samurai* was remade as *Magnificent Seven* in 1960, *Rashomon* as *The Outrage* in 1964 and *Yojimbo* as Sergio Leone's *Fistful of Dollars* in 1964. Leone's film became an international hit, which brought it to the attention of Kurosawa—who sued Leone.

Jan Helander made the following observation:

> This thirteen page synopsis bears little resemblance to the 1977 *Star Wars* picture. The space opera feel of old science fiction films like *The Forbidden Planet* is present, and the laser weapons and the constant action were trademarks of the Flash Gordon serials Lucas had seen in his childhood… The similarity between *The Star Wars* and *The Hidden Fortress* is evident if one compares Lucas's outline with a plot summary from Donald Richie's 1965 biography *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*:
>
> The Star Wars:
> "It is the thirty-third century, a period of civil wars in the galaxy. A rebel princess, with her family, her retainers, and the clan treasure, is being pursued. If they can cross territory controlled by the Empire and reach a friendly planet, they will be saved. The Sovereign knows this, and posts a reward for the capture of the princess."

> The Hidden Fortress:
> "It is the sixteenth century, a period of civil wars. A princess, with her family, her retainers, and the clan treasure is being pursued. If they can cross enemy territory and reach a friendly province they will be saved. The enemy knows this and posts a reward for the capture of the princess."
>
> This transcription-like example is not representative of Lucas's entire synopsis, but it gives a good insight into the influence of *The Hidden Fortress* as well as Lucas's struggle to get his own ideas down on paper. Both *The Star Wars* and *The Hidden Fortress* contain a journey across enemy lands, but while Kurosawa's characters mount horses, Lucas lets the general, the princess and the bureaucrats travel in 'land speeders'. The rebel princess's clan treasure is two hundred pounds of 'aura spice', while Kurosawa's princess brings sixteen hundred pounds of gold with her. A horse chase in the Japanese film has been adapted to a scene where the rebels, on their jetsticks, are being pursued by the furry aliens, riding bird-like creatures much like those in the *John Carter on Mars* books by Edgar Rice Burroughs. General Skywalker is challenged by one of the aliens to a spear fight, a duel which also is present in *The Hidden Fortress*.[25]

Kurosawa biographer Donald Richie described *Hidden Fortress* as a "romantic", "mythic", "adventurous" and "operatic" "fairy-tale,"[26] five of the most common words used to describe *Star Wars*.

It has been said that *Hidden Fortress* was Kurosawa's attempt to remake an earlier film of his own with the extravagance and scope he had always wanted but never quite achieved[27]—that earlier film was 1945's *They Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail*, based on a medieval legend which forms the basis for both the Noh drama *Ataka* and the Kabuki play *Kanjincho*.[28]

They Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail is a sixty-minute film about a feudal Lord in medieval Japan who is on the run from the enemy along with his loyal bodyguards. Escaping through a forest to avoid the enemy, they disguise themselves as priests in order to pass through a border crossing. Kurosawa took this from one of the Kabuki theatre's most famous plays, *Kanjincho*, first performed in 1845, which is about two famous warriors (Benkei and Yoshitsune) disguised as priests in medieval Japan who attempt to pass through an enemy border crossing (the Ataka gate) being guarded by a soldier named Togashi. The play's title comes from a famous moment where Benkei and Yoshitsune, in order to pass through the Ataka gate, claim they are monks collecting donations for a Buddhist temple, and

the guard Togashi demands they show him the kanjincho, or subscription list of those who have donated.

Kanjincho was a Kabuki version of a play from the medieval Noh style of Japanese theatre, *Ataka*, written by Kanze Kojiro Nobumitsu, who lived from 1435-1516. The characters in *Ataka* (and by extension *Kanjincho* and Kurosawa's film) were real-life historical people who lived in the 12th century: the famous samurai-warlord Minamoto Yoshitsune and his servant Benkei, who fought through the great civil wars that broke out in that century. By the time *Ataka* was written, Yoshitsune had been dead for two hundred years and was already mythologized in Japanese folklore, such as in the literary epic *Tale of the Heike* (or the *Heike monogatari*), which is described as being "to the Japanese what *The Iliad* is to the western world."[29] *Tale of the Heike*, which relates specifically about the great Genpei war from 1180-1185, was not set down in writing until around 1220 and was completed by many authors in episodic fashion over a period of a hundred years,[30] and was originally an oral tradition sung by travelling monks.

Minamoto Yoshitsune lived from 1159 to 1189, and is one of the most popular characters in Japanese history. His older brother was Minamoto Yoritomo, who created Japan's first military administration, or shogunate. Yoshitsune's father, Minamoto Yoshitomo, and two of his brothers were killed in an unsuccessful uprising in 1160 when they attempted to usurp the rival Taira (or Heike) clan in what is known as The Heiji Rebellion. During the Siege of Sanjo Palace, the Minamoto clan and its allies (a force of roughly five-hundred men) kidnapped the Emperor and sacked the palace, but after much fighting the Taira clan defeated them. Young Minamoto Yoshitsune, only an infant, was decreed banished by the Taira clan, and was imprisoned in a monastery. In 1180, now a young man, he escaped and joined a rebellion that his brother Yoritomo, now head of the clan, had organized. Prince Mochihito, the son of the Emperor that the Minamoto clan had captured in the Heiji Rebellion, had turned against the Taira clan because he believed they were attempting to take the throne, and supplied the Minamoto clan with an army, beginning the Genpei wars. Over the next several years Yoshitsune became a great warrior and led the Minamoto army to victory in many battles, defeating the Taira clan. Eventually, tensions developed between Yoshitsune and his brother Yoritomo, and they fought at the Battle of Koromogawa, where Yoshitsune was defeated and his retainer Benkei was killed heroically defending him. Fleeing north, Yoshitsune and his family committed suppuku, or ritual suicide.

So, if we follow the rabbit hole deep enough then, this mythologized historical character, who lived nearly a millennia ago in Japan, is in some distant way responsible for *Star Wars* existing as it does.

A point of distinction to make about the characters of *The Star Wars* is that although General Luke Skywalker in the treatment bears the same name as the protagonist of the final film, his character has more in common with Obi Wan, that of an elderly Jedi master—although the Jedi do not yet exist in the story development, with the character instead being a mere General, a port of the General Makabe character from Kurosawa's film. Lucas would make this character a secondary one in the next draft, with the protagonist in that draft essentially one of the young boys in training. The Luke Skywalker of the final film does not exist yet, nor does Darth Vader. Neither of them were any part of Lucas' original concept. Nor are the Jedi, Sith or even the Force—his original story was simply a futuristic adventure tale, a self-contained story about an elderly General leading a princess to safety and a rebellion against a dictatorship. It was, at its most basic roots, an elaborated version of Kurosawa's *Hidden Fortress* set in outer space.

Despite the fact that Lucas now claims to have had the whole story pre-decided in his head, he was much more accurate in this quote from 1977's theatre souvenir program:

> I had the *Star Wars* project in mind even before I started my last picture, *American Graffiti*, and as soon as I finished I began writing *Star Wars* in January 1973... In fact, I wrote four entirely different screenplays for *Star Wars*, searching for just the right ingredients, characters and storyline. It's always been what you might call a good idea in search of a story.[31]

Being a college student in the mid-60's and living in the liberal Bay-area of San Francisco, the growing political and social climate had a shaping influence on Lucas' life as well, which would be reflected in all of his work, including *Star Wars*. "The sixties were amazing," he told Alan Arnold in 1979. "I was in college and was just the right age. I guess everybody who lived through that period felt a very strong sense that something special was happening."[32] But unlike many of his contemporaries who grew up in L.A. and New York, Lucas' quaint small-town roots instilled a certain naiveté in his childhood, where Errol Flynn and Buster Crabbe captured his imagination—a quality of work that was no longer being made by the cynical and "serious" American New Wave.

Although his more contemporary statements on the matter play up the mythological aspect of the film, his comments during its release concentrate on what was the film's true audience hook—its escapist fantasy

fun, the counterargument to the more gritty, serious and pessimistic films being made in the 1970's, such as *French Connection*, *Dirty Harry* and *Taxi Driver*. It had little to do with creating a complicated saga or a "modern mythology," as the 1973 synopsis shows. It was about reviving the traditional adventure genre, about revitalising the imagination of an increasingly-bleak generation of kids with an action-packed sci-fi swashbuckler (but also one with a certain warm, fairy-tale-like charm, which is why *Hidden Fortress* was so perfectly suited). "Some of my friends are more concerned about art and being considered a Fellini or an Orson Wells," Lucas said back in 1974 when he first began work on the project. "I'm more drawn to Flash Gordon. I like action adventure, chases, things blowing up, and I have strong feelings about science fiction and comic books and that sort of world."[33] Rejecting the self-aggrandising seriousness he felt in the work of some of his contemporaries, he went on to state: "I don't care if I make a piece of art or a piece of shit."[34] He said in 1977:

> My main reason for making it was to give young people an honest, wholesome fantasy life, the kind my generation had. We had westerns, pirate movies, all kinds of great things. Now they have *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Kojak*. Where are the romance, the adventure, and the fun that used to be in practically every movie made?[35]

In *Star Wars* we also see the residual remains of his first two films. *THX 1138*, also a science fiction piece with heavy Japanese influences, contains many visual similarities, and in effect *THX 1138* can be seen asa sort of low-tech precursor in many ways. The robotic police men became the stormtroopers, the car chase would become the speeder chases in later films, proto-Jawa's appear as "shell dwellers," there are holograms, gritty yet futuristic hardware (a "used universe" as the term was later coined), a mysterious cloaked spectre who bears more than a passing resemblance to the Emperor, and the prevalent themes of man versus machine and of the underdog fighting back against an oppressive system. The film even opens with a vintage clip from the *Buck Rogers* serials. Like *THX 1138*, *Star Wars* also did little to explain the fantastic world, plunging the audience into the midst of the story and providing little in the way of exposition.

If *THX 1138* provided the visual reference and mis-en-scene, *American Graffiti* would provide the characters, telling the tale of a young man's first initiation into the world and the all-important act of leaving home—though this would not come to prominence until a few more years, with the second draft screenplay. "[*Star Wars* was] my next movie after *American Graffiti*,"

Lucas said in 2004, "and in a way the subject and everything is young people, and it's a subject that is the very same subject that *American Graffiti* is about. It's about a young boy leaving his world and going off into the unknown to a great adventure. *American Graffiti* focuses on that final night when that decision is made. *Star Wars* carries that story on to what happens after you leave."[36] Amusingly, a hot-shot racer appears in *Graffiti* as well, played by Harrison Ford ("A lot of the elements of Han Solo are a lot like Bob Falfa in *American Graffiti*. But I don't—I *hope*—they're not the same person," Ford commented in 1977[37]). Even Lucas' never-filmed war project, *Apocalypse Now*, later transformed into a film by Coppola, contained much of the same themes, such as ill-equipped humans overcoming technological oppression. Walter Murch offers the opinion that *Apocalypse Now* essentially transformed into *Star Wars*. "*Star Wars* is George's version of *Apocalypse Now*, rewritten in an otherworldly context," Murch explained. "The Rebels in *Star Wars* are the Vietnamese, and the Empire is the United States."[38]

This transformation can even be read into the first treatment, in which a group of rebels strike out from a jungle and topple an empire, and this theme would swell in importance in the subtext of the eventual screenplay. "A lot of my interest in *Apocalypse Now* was carried over into *Star Wars*," Lucas admitted in *The Making of Star Wars*. "I figured that I couldn't make that film because it was about the Vietnam War, so I would essentially deal with some of the same interesting concepts that I was going to use and convert them into space fantasy, so you'd have essentially a large technological empire going after a small group of freedom fighters or human beings."[39]

Influences other than Kurosawa and *Flash Gordon* are peppered in this synopsis, the primary one being the work of Frank Herbert, most specifically his novel *Dune*.

Frank Herbert was one of the most popular contemporary science fiction writers at the time Lucas was writing *Star Wars*. His epic novel *Dune* had been released in 1965 (after being serialised in *Analog* magazine in two parts in 1963 and 1965) and was an instant hit in science fiction circles, marking a milestone in the genre—many have compared its context in science fiction to *Lord of the Rings*' context in the fantasy genre.

The story of *Dune* concerns an intergalactic empire made up of three regional Houses, the largest of which is the Imperial House Corrino, which controls the lesser two fiefdoms, House Harkonnen and House Atreides; the plot is propelled by the political struggles between these three Houses. The protagonist of the novel is young Paul Atreides, son of Duke Leto Atreides and heir to the dukedom—due to his noble status, he receives special

martial arts training, as well as the mystical powers of the Bene Gesserit sisterhood cult. House Atreides becomes seen as a threat, and so the Corrino Emperor Shaddam IV decides that it must be destroyed. The Emperor cannot wipe out House Atreides with an open attack, and so he employs subterfuge, granting the Atreides control of the treacherous desert planet Arakis, also known as Dune, an inhospitable world coveted for its spice Melange which increases one's lifespan and which had previously been controlled by House Harkonnen. The Emperor's scheme culminates when he sends an army dressed as Harkonnens to Dune to wipe out the royal family, but Paul and his mother escape into the desert wilderness. Here they meet a roaming desert band of fighters known as Fremen. With Paul's developing abilities, he begins training the band of rebels, later becoming known as demigod military leader Paul Muad'Dib. He and his army quickly overwhelm the Imperial forces with their mystical skills and Paul becomes the head of the Imperial throne.

Many have observed the desert setting of *Dune* as being an obvious inspiration for Tatooine, although the planet does not exist in the synopsis. The 1973 synopsis, however, does indeed bear a strong *Dune* influence, and that is the latter half, where it drifts from the Kurosawa source material. The subplot involving the band of rebel boys might stem from two sources, one of them being *Dune*. In Frank Herbert's novel, Paul Atreides comes across a band of rebels, and in order to finally assault the Empire he will need their help; he comes to lead them, and with his small army he attacks the Imperial fortress and topples the Empire. In the *Star Wars* treatment, General Skywalker comes across a band of rebels, and in order to finally assault the Empire to free the captured princess he realises he needs their help; he begins training them and they attack the Imperial stronghold and rescue the princess. The use of coveted "spice" in the synopsis is evidence of *Dune*'s influence.

The second influence from where the rebel subplot stems is yet another Kurosawa film. General Skywalker encounters a group of young boys who are eager to attack the Imperial outposts—Skywalker overhears their boastful plan and laughs at them. They turn to see him walking into their hideout, scratching himself, looking down on them as the block-headed young fools that they are. They can see that he is a real General, a great warrior, and beg to join him but the General refuses and commands them to return to their homes; they plead that they have no where else to go and instead follow the General on his mission. This sequence is straight out of an early scene in Kurosawa's 1962 film *Sanjuro*, where Toshiro Mifune's scruffy, cynical samurai character encounters a group of young boys who plan on attacking a corrupt superintendant who has imprisoned the uncle

of the leader of the boys. They beg the samurai to help them but he refuses and tells them to go home—realising that at the mercy of the corrupt superintendant they have no future, the samurai finally joins forces with them.

In Lucas' treatment they eventually make their way to a cantina, where one of the boys is taunted by a bully—Skywalker draws his lightsaber and in an instant the bully's arm lies on the ground (this scene survived all the drafts). This is taken from Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*, from 1961, which *Sanjuro* was a sequel to.

Other influences on the *Star Wars* treatment is the work of Edward Elmer Smith (aka E.E. "Doc" Smith), who is known as one of the greatest science fiction writers of all time, and is credited with inventing the "space opera" genre with his story *The Skylark of Space*, published in 1928 as a serial in *Amazing Stories* (though it was actually written in 1919). His direct influence on the initial treatment is minimal but his series of Lensmen tales would come to mold the coming drafts Lucas would write.

The section where Skywalker encounters the "furry" aliens on the jungle planet is also deviant from *Hidden Fortress*, although the jet-stick chase and spear fight appear in Kurosawa's film. These creatures have been thought to have been taken from H. Beam Piper's *Fuzzy* stories, the first and most famous of which was published in 1962, which revolved around a forest-dwelling race of primitive furry creatures. Piper was a noted space opera author whose work was often published in magazines such as *Astounding Science Fiction*.[40]

Finally, Isaac Asimov is one of the most influential science fiction writers, though unlike most of Lucas' influences was more of an intellectual rather than action oriented writer. His *Foundation* series has been said to have had an impact on *Star Wars*, though its influence is minimal on the 1973 synopsis. Asimov initially wrote three *Foundation* novels between 1951 and 1953 which formed a trilogy; the first novel, however, was a collection of four short stories which had been published in *Astounding* magazine between 1942 and 1944. The *Foundation* series is notable in relation to *Star Wars* for charting the rise and fall of an interplanetary civilization known as The Empire.

The *Foundation* novels are sometimes erroneously attributed to Lucas' very first treatment, although they are influential on the subsequent drafts where Lucas fashioned an environment that was more unique and developed. There is but one instance where Asimov's work may be cited in the synopsis, which is the "city-planet" Alderaan which is home to the Empire, which parallels Asimov's "city-planet" Trantor, home to the

Empire (though such a generic concept could arguably boil down to coincidence).

For whatever reasons, however, the story of the 1973 synopsis did not entirely satisfy Lucas. Unlike any of Lucas' other stories, this one does not tell the tale of someone, especially a youngster, taking their first steps into some kind of larger world, a theme running throughout all of Lucas' works, and perhaps Lucas felt that the Kurosawa source material restricted his imagination from the more outrageous and space opera-esque concepts milling about in his mind, the ones he had attempted to put down on paper with his *Journal of the Whills*. He began thinking about ways to transform the story into something more complicated and interesting, surrounding it with more prevalent comic-book influences and truly making it into a "superhero in outer space" adventure tale.

The Screenplay Begins

Since Lucas had written the outline in May, *American Graffiti* had been released in August—and to everyone's surprise it was a hit! Made for well under a million dollars, the film would eventually gross over $100 million, making it the most profitable film in history. It was released at a time when independent filmmaking was beginning to dethrone the immovable studio system—*Easy Rider* had paved the way in 1969, giving the world a gritty and realistic film made for young people by young people, shot on the road for pennies (and often under the influence of drugs). Universal hoped to catch some of the market that had been created in *Easy Rider*'s wake, resulting in a handful of films made for under a million dollars and aimed at young adults, of which *American Graffiti* was a part of.[*] With its mega-success Lucas was hailed as the savior of independent filmmaking, being one of the few post-*Easy Rider* indie films to truly break into the mainstream, and in the aftermath of *American Graffiti* and *Godfather* (released the year before) a new wave of moviemaking finally broke open to popularity, such as Friedkin's *The Exorcist* and Scorsese's *Mean Streets* in 1973—it was an *American* New Wave (or "New Hollywood" as the press had labelled it).

[*] Other films in this production series were *The Hired Hand* (1971), *The Last Movie* (1971), *Taking Off* (1971), and *Silent Running* (1972), though the last title had a fairly substantial budget

With the release of *American Graffiti* in August of 1973, Lucas was suddenly a known name in the film community and it is around here that the first published record of Lucas' *Star Wars* concept appears, this one way back to when he first began work on the project in 1973, in the midst of beginning work on the rough draft screenplay. Lucas said in the fall of 1973:

> *Star Wars* is a mixture of *Lawrence of Arabia*, the James Bond films and *2001*. The space aliens are the heroes, and the Homo Sapiens naturally the villains. Nobody has ever done anything like this since *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* in 1942.[41*]

United Artists passed on *Star Wars* when Lucas approached them with it in the summer of 1973, since it had been part of the initial deal made at Cannes in 1971, as did Universal, who had made *American Graffiti* but not yet released it.[42**] Lucas was fed up with the way Universal was bulldozing him with the troubled release negotiations for *Graffiti* and feared that they would accept *Star Wars*, as they had contractual first rights after United Artists. "We did not want to go with Universal," Lucas' lawyer Tom Pollock said.[43] Universal asked for more time to make its decision, but when the ten day waiting period was over Lucas was released of his obligation and sought another home for his film. Ten days after Universal passed, Twentieth Century Fox took on *Star Wars.* Lucas' bizarre fourteen-

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[*] Lucas' description of it here shows how much more outrageous and comic-book-like he was making it.

[**] Although it is often thought that UA and Universal hated and did not understand Lucas' concept, this is not the case. In their rejection letter, UA states that "The innocence of the story, plus the sophistication of the world [Lucas] will depict makes for the best kind of motion picture. It is truly a film for children of all ages," but surmises that "There seems to be too much cost involved for this kind of juvenile story," and concluded it to be "a risky project." Universal concludes in its internal rejection memo "If the movie works, we might have a wonderful, humorous and exciting adventure-fantasy, an artistic and very commercial venture. Most of what we need is here. The question, in the end, is how much faith we have in Mr Lucas's ability to pull it all off." In other words, the script was well-liked but considered a risky project, and since Lucas' only film had bombed it was one the studios were not confident enough to take.

page outline had miraculously found a home due to the conviction of Alan Ladd jr., who had been smuggled an advance print of *American Graffiti*. Amazingly, the very synopsis Ladd signed on for could not possibly have been filmed—Lucas didn't tell him that it was a remake of *Hidden Fortress* and that he hadn't secured the rights from Toho studios. Luckily, by this point Lucas was developing an alternate storyline of his own. Ladd understood little of Lucas' obscure story but felt that he was talented. "When he said, 'This sequence is going to be like *The Sea Hawk* or this like *Captain Blood* or this like *Flash Gordon*,' I knew exactly what he was saying," Ladd told Dale Pollock. "That gave me confidence that he was going to pull it off."[44]

Ladd's decision proved very wise when *American Graffiti* was released three weeks later. In June of 1973, the *Star Wars* deal was closed, giving Lucas $50,000 to write and $100,000 to direct, more money than he had seen in his life, plus control of merchandising and sequel rights, and Gary Kurtz $50,000 for producing. The stunning success of *Graffiti* when it was released later in August finally gave George and Marcia true wealth, turning them into overnight millionaires. In the fall of that year they sold their tiny Mill Valley home and moved into a much larger one, and soon bought a Victorian house to use as an office in the nearby district of San Anselmo, 52 Parkway. "It was a house in itself, on an isolated piece of property," Gary Kurtz recalled in John Baxter's *Mythmaker*. "We could rent out rooms to other pictures, but it was only local; it wasn't a matter of advertising in the Hollywood trades for clients. First of all, it was always dubious whether we could legally have that as an office, since it was zoned as a single family residence, so we just didn't tell anybody. And nobody cared, really. San Anselmo is kind of lackadaisical about that kind of thing."[45] Lucasfilm had been created in 1971 at the suggestion of Lucas' lawyer Tom Pollock in order to legally protect Lucas, but now it was taking its first steps towards becoming an actual film company. The first employees were hired—Gary Kurtz' sister-in-law Bunny Alsup became Lucas' personal secretary, and Lucy Wilson became his financial bookkeeper.[46] Michael Ritchie, Hal Barwood and Matthew Robbins rented space in the large house, which soon resembled a casual, Zoetrope-like atmosphere.

"George rented out rooms in his house to various filmmakers," Hal Barwood said in *The Making of Star Wars*. "And George of course had his offices there. He was living in another little house down in San Anselmo. And we would all stroll down the hill and walk off to various venues in San Anselmo and have lunch. And it was just a wonderful way, through enthusiastic conversation, to keep our interest in the movie business alive.

Because the movie business is very difficult for most of us; we don't usually get a majority of our projects to completion. Most of our dreams turn into screenplays, but they stall out at that stage. So it was a great way for us to encourage each other."[47]

Shortly after Lucas moved in, someone bought nearby property and built houses close to Lucas' property line. "He didn't like the fact that they were built," Kurtz told John Baxter. "And he bought them, just to keep them out of peoples hands. We used them for offices and editing rooms for a while. We used the garages for storing posters and film clips, and the houses for meeting rooms."[48] It was the beginnings of Lucas' empire-aspirations that would eventually become Skywalker Ranch.

"When I was writing *Star Wars*, for the first year, there was an infinite number of distractions," Lucas remembered in Rinzler's *Making of*. "*Graffiti* was a huge hit, plus I was restoring my office at the same time. Building a screening room kept me going for nine, ten months."[49]

Around September of 1973, Lucas began thoroughly reworking his synopsis into an actual script,[50] and had even begun preliminary work on it during a vacation he took after *Graffiti* was released[51] (likely sketching out the complex world he was creating), drifting away from Kurosawa and towards more outrageous space fantasy material.

The struggle to script *Star Wars* is legendary for its complications and evolutions—plot points, themes and characters changed and transformed with each draft to such an extent that an entire volume could be dedicated to exploring this aspect of *Star Wars*' history. Jan Helander provides the best assessment in his paper "The Development of Star Wars as Seen Through the Scripts of George Lucas." I will not delve into less relevant information but instead offer more abbreviated versions of the content.

Basically, there were four versions of the script, plus the initial treatment, totalling five, all written by Lucas (though one may count the initial *Journal of the Whills* summary as a sixth, and some of the script synopses may be viewed as "missing links" between the drafts). The first major development was the May 1973 story treatment already discussed. After that was done, he developed the story even further with the rough draft screenplay, first introducing the concept of the Jedi, here known as Jedi-Bendu as in the *Journal of the Whills*, a powerful group of intergalactic warriors sworn to protect the galaxy, and the Sith,[*] who are

[*] The term "Sith" is a tribute to Edgar Rice Burroughs, who first used that word in the first "John Carter of Mars" novel; Burroughs' Sith were fearsome Wasp-like creatures that were few in number but very difficult

portrayed as a sinister warrior sect counteracting the Jedi-Bendu. It was a much different story from his previous synopsis, though he kept much of its characters and basic plot.

According to Lucas, because the elderly General Skywalker left little room for character development he shifted that character into a supporting role and turned the protagonist into an eighteen-year-old named Annikin Starkiller, perhaps someone Lucas could better relate to and whom kids could better identify with.[52] Annikin's brother Biggs is killed by a fearsome Sith knight in the opening scene, and the Sith is in turn killed by their father, Kane. Kane Starkiller and his friend the elderly General Luke Skywalker are the only two surviving Jedi left in the galaxy, having escaped death at the hands of the Sith knights who have hunted down all the other Jedi-Bendu. The two Jedi lead a rebel alliance against the Empire and destroy the "death star" space fortress. The Black Knight of the Sith and commander of the Empire's legions is Prince Valorum, who is assisted by his General, a man named Darth Vader.

Here the story begins to differ drastically from *The Hidden Fortress*. Had Lucas gone and filmed his treatment he would have had on his hands the biggest plagiarism lawsuit in cinematic history—he *had* to change the story. Of course, since August of that year the Lucases had become millionaires due to the success of *American Graffiti*—if Lucas truly wanted to he could have easily purchased *Hidden Fortress*, especially since Fox had agreed to develop his treatment, and so his inaction to do so indicates that he merely felt he could develop the story better if he was not so strict at following Kurosawa's source material.

Instead, Lucas began combing the annals of science fiction literature for inspiration for a more original tale. It seems as though Lucas was not interested in creating something of his own but more in taking from that which he enjoyed—first failing to remake *Flash Gordon* and then failing to remake *The Hidden Fortress*. "If someone tells me an interesting story, I can easily transform it into a screenplay," Lucas once said to Rinzler. "But to be the initiator of the idea, that's very difficult."[53]

The film was ever-present on his mind, obsessing him. "I'll wake up in the middle of the night sometimes, thinking of things, and I'll come up with ideas and write them down," he said at the time. "Even when I'm driving, I come up with ideas. I come up with a lot of ideas when I'm taking a shower in the morning."[54] Lucas explains this further in an interview quoted in *The Unauthorized Star Wars Compendium*:

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to kill.

> On our first vacation after I'd directed *American Graffiti*, my wife, Marcia, and I went to Hawaii. That was great except that I wrote the whole time I was there. I'd already started thinking about *Star Wars*. A director can leave his work at the studio; a writer can't. There's always a pen and paper available. A writer is thinking about what he's supposed to be doing, whether he's actually doing it or not, every waking hour. He's constantly pondering problems. I always carry a little notebook around and sit and write in it. It's terrible, I can't get away from it.[55]

It is here, when Lucas began to write his own original tale, that the true agony of writing *Star Wars* began. Lucas read science fiction magazines, bought armfuls of pulp fiction and comic books and even looked into fairy tales and children's stories—anything he could get ideas from. It would be a slow and difficult process. Dale Pollock recounted the period:

> *Star Wars* ruled Lucas's life. He carried a small notebook in which he jotted down names, ideas, plot angles—anything that popped into his head. On the first page in the notebook was a notation scribbled during the sound mixing of *Graffiti*. Walter Murch had asked him for R2, D2 (Reel 2, Dialog 2) of the film, and Lucas liked the abbreviated sound of R2-D2.
>
> Lucas returned from the local newsstand each weekend with a large collection of science-fiction magazines and comic books. Marcia wondered what was going on, but George told her not to worry, he was making a movie that ten-year-old boys would love…he thoroughly researched the science-fiction field from *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* to Stanley Kubrick's watershed film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, made in 1968… Lucas also borrowed liberally from the Flash Gordon serials he had watched as a child, transplanting video screens, medieval costumes, art deco sets, and blaster guns to *Star Wars*…Lucas used Ming, the evil ruler of Mongo in the Flash Gordon books, as another model for his emperor. Alex Raymond's *Iron Men of Mongo* describes a five-foot-tall metal man of dusky copper who is trained to speak in polite phrases. From *John Carter on Mars* came banthas, beasts of burden in *Star Wars*; Lucas also incorperated into his early screenplay drafts huge flying birds described by Edgar Rice Burroughs. George watched scores of old films, from *Forbidden Planet* to *The Day the World Ended*, and read contemporary sci-fi novels like *Dune* by Frank Herbert and E.E. "Doc" Smith's *Lensmen* saga.[56]

It is here that the earliest origin of *Star Wars* comes from: not from myth and legend, but from the "schlock" sold on newsstands and played in matinees. Lucas revealed to *Starlog* in 1981: "I have to admit that I read *Starlog*. Starting in 1973 I was very much focused on science fiction—the genre people, the conventions, the magazines, every fantasy thing I could

get my hands on—to see where everybody's head was."[57] While the media, in the 80's and 90's, would expound primarily upon the film's ties to King Arthur and The Odyssey, *Star Wars*' origins are rooted in quite the opposite, in comic books and pulp science fiction, the "trash" of literature. Trying to move away from *Hidden Fortress*, he dressed the simplistic plot with an assortment of elements from science fiction, in time culling everything from comic book writers Alex Raymond and Jack Kirby to science fiction sages E.E. Smith and Isaac Asimov, peppered with cinematic influences of everything from John Ford's *The Searchers* to Nazi propaganda milestone *Triumph of the Will* and infused with the constant action and thrill-ride plotting of the 1930's serials.

It was the cumulative influence and absorption of all of this material—including myths and fairy tales, especially in later drafts—that eventually informed the film. Direct elements from a particular film, indirect elements from a genre of novels, iconography from comic books, certain repeated themes from fairy tales, a memorable scene from a movie remade in a different way—many of the influences in *Star Wars* don't come from willful copying or deliberate academic design but rather the unconscious absorption of the whole of these things, of millions of stories, images, scenes, themes and characters that Lucas had been exposed to, from a variety of media. When *Star Wars* was released many critics saw it as a *homage* piece since it was brimming with references to other films, novels and stories, whether directly or indirectly. Although much of it was indeed deliberate mimicry, much of it was also simply due to a sort of unconscious synthesis.

For example, Martin Scorsese would later state that Lucas screened *Adventures of Robin Hood*,[58] and while there are no specific references to that film in *Star Wars*, its style and tone is quite similar, and certain elements such as swashbucklers, sword-duelling and a secret rebellion against a tyrant can be found in common, elements which also are informed by influences taken from other sources (for instance, the swashbucklers in *Star Wars* also are given a spin in the direction of the old west and the superheroics of *Flash Gordon*, while the sword duels fused with the samurai tradition of Japan, and the rebellion plot is common to everything from *Flash Gordon* to *Dune* and hence not owing influence to either of them alone but rather a more indirect amalgamation of all three and more). As Lucas has said, the "research," if one can call it that, gave him feelings for themes and motifs[59] but it was the combined sum of these elements that trickled out of him and into the script, explaining the enormous catalogue of references and influences in the film. "[Analysing it] becomes academic, and when I was doing it it wasn't academic," he said.[60]

At some point, though, Lucas had to finally get to writing the first screenplay of his *Star Wars*. Returning to the more exotic and space opera-like world that his convoluted *Journal of the Whills* had instigated, he prepared himself with the same method he had used at the beginning of that year—by making lists of names. "Kane Highsinger/Jedi friend; Leia Aquilae/Princess; General Vader/Imperial Commander; Han Solo/ friend."[61] He also lists "Seethreepio" and "Artwo Deetwo" as "workmen" in his notes but then later ponders "two workmen as robots? One dwarf/one Metropolis style," the latter in reference to the mechanical woman of Fritz Lang's 1927 film; the idea of robotic workmen characters stuck, as a later note reads "Make film more point-of-view of robots."[62]

Trying to re-develop his story, Lucas expelled his thoughts onto paper by scribbling down notes, some of them specific directions and ideas, some of them vague and ending in question marks, almost stream-of-conscious-like. Jonathan Rinzler transcribed some of these notes as Lucas attempted to develop a new world and set of characters in the latter part of 1973:

> Theme: Aquilae is a small independent country like North Vietnam threatened by a neighbour or provincial rebellion, instigated by gangsters aided by empire. Fight to get rightful planet back. Half of system has been lost to gangsters…The empire is like America ten years from now, after gangsters assassinated the Emperor and were elevated to power in a rigged election…We are at a turning point: fascism or revolution
>
> …Notes on new beginning…for three main characters—the general, the princess, the boy (Starkiller)—make development chart…Put time-limit in children's packs…every scene must be set up and linked to next…make scene where Starkiller visits with old friend on Alderaan…Han very old (150 years)…Establish impossibility of Death Star…Should threat be bigger, more sinister?...A conflict between freedom and conformity…Tell at least two stories: Starkiller becomes a man (not good enough); Valorum wakes up (morally speaking)…Valorum like Green Beret who realises wrong of Empire…Second thoughts about Plot…Make Owen Lars a geologist or something…The general addresses men…Skywalker leaps across (ramp being pulled away)…thundersaber…[63]

The most significant additions in Lucas' first full-length script were the Sith and Jedi, two rival warrior sects, the latter of which had been peacekeepers of the galaxy until they were wiped out by the former. The concept of the Jedi was created as a basic sci-fi adaptation of the samurai warriors from Kurosawa's films—they are neither superhero-like nor mystical in this version. General Luke Skywalker is still the same character from the synopsis, a port of General Makabe from *The Hidden Fortress*.

The growth that Lucas now gave him was that he is now known as a "Jedi-Bendu," returning to the terminology from the *Journal of the Whills* summary—making the concept of the Jedi from the very beginning synonymous with the military, being the primary forces of the "Imperial Space Force," according to the rough draft. The Force does not exist yet, so naturally they have no super-human powers. Like the samurai, the Jedi-Bendu have been disbanded by the new corrupt Emperor, slowly withering away and being killed off by rivals.

Lucas had transferred General Skywalker to a supporting role and turned the main character into a boy, his apprentice, whom he now named "Starkiller" (to be expanded into "Annikin Starkiller"—his *Journal of the Whills* era writings list a similar name, Anakin Starkiller). Lucas' notes refer to the three characters of the story—like *Hidden Fortress*, there is a princess and a general, but now there is a third character. "Three main characters—the general, the princess, the boy (Starkiller)," Lucas writes. He also developed a comrade of General Skywalker's; Lucas' early notes list "Kane Highsinger" as "Jedi friend." But Lucas soon made a transformation whose repercussions would later echo down to the heart of his future story: it would be General Skywalker who would become the "Jedi friend," while the boy, Annikin Starkiller, would instead be apprentice to Kane—his father. "Kane Highsinger" became "Kane Starkiller," the noble Jedi father of the young hero.[64]

At some point, Lucas also added a younger brother, who would be named Deak—his story was slowly becoming a family affair.

Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series was incorporated into the setting of Lucas' script, building on the synopsis which had simply adapted Japan's feudal empire which was at war with itself in *Hidden Fortress* into "The Empire." However, while we are now used to the familiar version of *Star Wars* history in which a Republic turns into an Empire after an evil ruler takes over, in Lucas' initial script the history was more like Asimov's *Foundation*, where there was no Republic, only the Empire, a benevolent one of which the Jedi were guardians, until a civil war erupted and a corrupt Emperor took over. The opening text roll-up from the rough draft explains:

> Until the recent GREAT REBELLION, the JEDI BENDU were the most feared warriors in the universe. For one hundred thousand years, generations of JEDI perfected their art as the personal bodyguards of the emperor. They were the chief architects of the invincible IMPERIAL SPACE FORCE which expanded the EMPIRE across the galaxy, from the celestial equator to the farthest reaches of the GREAT RIFT.

> Now these legendary warriors are all but extinct. One by one they have been hunted down and destroyed as enemies of the NEW EMPIRE by a ferocious and sinister rival warrior sect, THE KNIGHTS OF SITH.

Lucas also created a number of villain characters, as his initial 1973 outline had no antagonist, plundering General Hyoe Tadokoro from *Hidden Fortress* and splitting him into two personas, calling one Prince Valorum, a Sith Knight who took on Tadokoro's warrior side, and calling the other General Darth Vader, who took on Tadokoro's military side as a villainous henchman.

With all of these elements thrown into the story it now began to resemble a more original creation, however, re-building his treatment from the ground up using a myriad of science fiction pieces made the screenwriting process was a long and laborious one. Dale Pollock described the torturous period of creating *Star Wars*:

> Lucas confined himself to the writing room he had built in the back of Parkhouse. He spent eight hours a day there, five days a week, writing draft after draft. It was worse than being in school. His smooth features grew haggard, the brown eyes behind the horn-rimmed glasses became bleary, and his scraggly beard went untrimmed. His writing room was tastefully furnished, with a large photograph of pioneer film editor Sergei Eisenstein on one wall and a poster from *THX* facing it from across the room. Lucas's prize 1941 Wurlitzer jukebox, a garish pink-and-purple creation resembling a neon gas pump, dominated the room. George had a self-imposed rule: no music until his daily allotment of script pages was completed. Some days he wrote nothing at all and slammed the door behind him in frustration when it was time for Walter Cronkite and the "CBS Evening News," his traditional quitting time…"You beat your head against the wall and say, 'Why can't I make this work? Why aren't I smarter? Why can't I do what everybody else can do?'" His creative limitations were his own limitations as a person: his inability to express emotions crippled him as a writer... Instead, he suffered stomach and chest pains and headaches until the script was finished.
>
> Lucas tried all kinds of approaches to writing. He organized the screenplay by writing so much description, a short patch of dialog, then more description in the hope that everything would balance.[65]

The agonising scripting turned him into a true obsessive-compulsive. All his *Star Wars* drafts (as well as those for *THX* and *Graffiti*) were written by hand on carefully selected blue-and-green-lined paper, and he used only number two hard lead pencils. If his secretary, Lucy Wilson, didn't buy the right brand he would lecture her on the importance of conforming to his specific instructions (echoes of the L.M. Morris business

perhaps). Lucas' weirdest quirk was to cut off his hair with a pair of scissors when he felt frustrated. "I came in one day and his wastebasket had tons of hair in it!" Wilson said to Dale Pollock. "It was driving him that crazy."[66] Lucas made his approach to the writing process explicit in *The Making of Star Wars*:

> I grew up in a middle-class Midwest-style American town with the corresponding work ethic…So I sit at my desk eight hours a day no matter what happens, even if I don't write anything. It's a terrible way to live. But I do it; I sit down and I do it…I put a big calendar on my wall. Tuesday I have to be on page twenty-five, Wednesday on page thirty, and so on. And every day I "X" it off—*I did those five pages*. And if I do my five pages early, I get to quit. Never happens. I've always got about one page done by four o'clock in the afternoon, and during the next hour I usually write the rest. Sometimes I'll get up early and write lots of pages, but that doesn't really happen much.[67]

In early 1974, Marcia joined the production of Martin Scorsese's *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and was editing on location in Arizona. Lucas didn't like being separated and decided to join her, locking himself in a hotel room and trying to hash out his script as it slowly drove him mad. "I remember George was writing *Star Wars* at the time," Scorsese said to author Jonathan Rinzler. "He had all these books with him, like Isaac Asimov's *Guide to the Bible*, and he was envisioning this fantasy epic. He did explain that he wanted to tap into the collective unconscious of fairy tales. And he screened certain movies, like Howard Hawks' *Air Force* [1943] and Michael Curtiz's *Robin Hood* [1938]."[68]

Finally, an entire year after he finished his first treatment, Lucas emerged with a rough draft screenplay. It was called "The Star Wars" and was dated May 1974. This gruelling time period is indicative of the struggle Lucas was going through in trying to tell his story.

Jan Helander summaried the rough draft:

> Kane Starkiller, a Jedi-Bendu master, is in hiding on the Fourth Moon of Utapau with his two sons Annikin and Deak, when a Sith warrior finds them and Deak is killed. The surviving Starkillers head to the Aquilae system, where they are met by Kane's old Jedi friend, General Luke Skywalker. Kane, whose war-battered body is a concoction of artificial limbs, knows that he is dying, and persuades Luke to become Annikin's Jedi teacher. He then travels to the city of Gordon, leaving his son with Skywalker and the King of Aquilae. Clieg Whitsun, a rebel spy on the emperor's planet of Alderaan, has learned that an Imperial fleet, led by General Darth Vader and Governor Crispin Hoedaack, is about to conquer Aquilae with a "death star" space fortress. Rebel fighters

are sent out to stop the attack, but the Aquilaean king is killed, and instead of Princess Leia (the rightful heir), a corrupt senator takes over, surrendering the planet to the Empire.

Annikin, Luke and Whitsun, joined by Artwo Detwo and See Threepio (two bickering robots who have escaped from the space fortress), bring Leia and her two younger brothers to the spaceport at Gordon, from where they can reach safety. After a fight at a cantina, where Skywalker uses his "lasersword" to kill his antagonists, the group meet up with Kane and his alien friend Han Solo who have arranged transport to a friendly planet. They need a power unit for suspended animation in order to get past Imperial scanners, and Kane heroically rips one from his body, causing his death. After avoiding a trap set by Vader and Prince Valorum (the black Knight of the Sith), the rebels are pursued into space, where the arguing Leia and Annikin realize that they love each other. Their craft is damaged in an asteroid field and Whitsun dies as it explodes, but the others abandon ship in time and land on the jungle planet of Yavin, where Leia is captured by alien trappers. Annikin tries to rescue her, but only succeeds in freeing five “Wookees” (huge, grey and furry beasts), and Leia eventually ends up in the hands of the Empire.

After a tip from two anthropologists, the rebels and the Wookee tribe (including Prince Chewbacca) attack an Imperial outpost, and a forest battle ensues. When he learns that Leia is held captive aboard the space fortress, General Skywalker starts training the Wookees to fly fighter ships in order to conquer the death star. Annikin is sceptical of the plan and gets onto the fortress (together with Artwo) on a mission of his own, dressed as an Imperial “skyraider”, but he is soon captured and tortured by General Vader. Valorum sees this and realizes that the Imperials are completely without honour and codes, and that he has more in common with the young Jedi than with the emperor. Turning his back on the Empire, he frees both Annikin and Leia, and they escape down a garbage chute. After almost being crushed in the garbage receptacle, Valorum, Leia, Annikin, and Artwo manage to abandon the station just before the Wookees destroy it, killing both Vader and Governor Hoedaack. Back in her throne room, Queen Leia honours the heroes (including Valorum), and Annikin is appointed new Lord Protector of Aquilae.[69]

This rough draft was a huge step up from the outline previously written. It was also very large, with nearly two hundred scenes, and in the end, would be condensed for the final film, with some of the other scenes recycled in the eventual sequels. When you hear Lucas speak of the script that was too long to be one movie, the one which he supposedly cut into a third and used the other two thirds for *Empire* and *Jedi*, this is the one he is referring to. However, the story bears no resemblance to any of the subsequent films. Concepts are retained, like mechanical limbs, asteroid belt chases and Wookie forest battles (later to become Ewoks), and some names are later recycled throughout the series, but the “epic” story

contained in this draft is basically a more elaborate version of a prototype *Star Wars*, loosely based off of *The Hidden Fortress*.

A typical example of Lucas' description of the matter, this one from 2002:

> When I started to write it, it got to be too big, it got to be 250, 300 pages…I said, well, I can't do this. The studio will never allow this. I will take the first half, make a movie out of that, and then I was determined to come back and finish the other three, or other two stories.[70]

Variations on this statement can be found ad nauseam (in some versions with him explicitly describing how his "original script" which he split apart ended with the forest and Death Star battles, indicating that he is indeed referencing the rough draft of 1974[71]).

Aside from the fact that the rough draft was only 132 pages—making it twenty-four pages *shorter* than the final screenplay, and not the exaggerated behemoth he claims—the basic plot is remarkably similar to the final film. The protagonist is introduced on a desolate planet, travels to a spaceport with his mentor, is involved in a cantina brawl, recruits Han Solo and rescues the princess from the space fortress, ending with its destruction by one-man fighter ships, while the mentor is earlier killed and medals are bestowed by the princess in the triumphant ending.

Moreover, when relating this screenplay to the later storyline, Darth Vader as we know him would still not come to be created for many years, and in fact would not be finalized until the 1980s. His character is hardly in this first script, and is nothing more than a minor villain General, nor is he monstrous, memorable or even a Sith Lord; instead he is a slimy Imperial, a spineless General who likes to give orders and collect the spoils of war. A particularly illustrative sense of what this General Darth Vader's characterisation was like can be seen from this excerpt wherein he finally meets Prince Valorum in the first half of the story:

> 66. LIBRARY - PALACE OF LITE - AQUILAE
> The king's old library has been converted into an office for General Vader. He is sitting behind his desk as Prince Valorum, the black knight of Sith, enters and salutes. The black knight is dressed in the fascist black and chrome uniform of the legendary Sith One Hundred. The general returns his salute.
>
> VADER
> Welcome, Prince Valorum. Your exploits are legendary. I have long waited to meet a Knight of the Sith. If there is any way I can assist you, my entire command is at your bidding.

VALORUM
I want a tie-in to your computer network, a control center, and communication access.

VADER
Right away! I'll also transfer all information we have on the general. His command post was self-destroyed, but we believe he is still alive. .... Do you really believe he's a Jedi?

VALORUM
If he was not a Jedi, I wouldn't be here.

Lucas admitted in 1983 that no script contained the whole story and that he simply reused deleted concepts in the sequels:

> There are four or five scripts for *Star Wars*, and you can see as you flip through them where certain ideas germinated and how the story developed. There was never a script completed that had a the entire story s it exists now… As the stories unfolded, I would take certain ideas and save them; I'd put them aside in notebooks. As I was writing *Star Wars*, I kept taking out all the good parts, and I just kept telling myself I would make other movies someday. It was a mind trip I laid on myself to get me through the script. I just kept taking out stuff, and finally with *Star Wars* I felt I had one little incident that introduced the characters. So for the last six years [1977-1983] I've been trying to get rid of all the ideas I generated and felt so bad about throwing out in the first place.[72]

Heroes and Villains

The single most important issue introduced here in the first draft is the one which will later become the focus of the "Saga" story: Darth Vader.

Darth Vader was not the mechanical, black-knight "I am your father" super-villain/fallen-hero we know today. Rather, he was simply a man, albeit a "tall grim-looking" one according to the rough draft, but merely a man. And not only that, he is a relatively minor one, acting as more of a bodyguard or muscleman for the Galactic Empire, and he dies along with Governor Hoedaack when the giant "Space Fortress" is blown up by the Wookie attack ships. He doesn't wear his trademark costume or mask—those don't appear until the second draft and wouldn't even become permanent fixtures until the final.

This first draft does however contain a number of separate elements that, in time, would be combined to form the basis of the Vader which we are all familiar with. In simplifying the complicated first draft, Lucas eliminated many characters and elements for the second draft, and instead made the script more focused by combining these, and in the formation of Darth Vader this occurred more than anywhere else.

First, the Imperial bad guy with the name Darth Vader, as discussed above. I must stress that this character bears little relation to the one we are familiar with, and is simply a human General who shares his name (Lucas shuffled names around freely, as will soon become evident). However, he fills the *role* of Darth Vader in the final film—he is the Empire's muscle, a henchman who orders officers and tortures the Rebels.

Second, the idea of a Sith Lord redeeming himself and turning to good. However, it is not Vader, but his boss, Prince Valorum, who, unlike Darth Vader in this draft, is a knight of the Sith. Valorum is also an expert at exterminating Jedi, and along with the other Sith Knights has hunted down and killed all the Jedi-Bendu. When the hero Annikin infiltrates the space fortress Leia has been captured in, he is caught and tortured by General Vader. Valorum sees this and realises that the Imperials are without morals, without any respect for the higher samurai-like code of honour that the Jedi-Bendu and Sith subscribe to. He turns his back on the Empire and helps the heroes escape, and together they free the princess and leave the station just as it is destroyed.

This character, it may be noted, appears to be loosely based off of General Hyoe Tadokoro from *The Hidden Fortress*, continuing Lucas' porting of Kurosawa's film. In that film the heroes are captured and about to be executed when an arch-opponent of General Makabe (Makabe would become the Kenobi character, named Luke Skywalker in this draft) and also a leader in the clan about to execute them comes to pay his last respects. Since he has lost a duel to Makabe earlier in the film his master has punished his defeat by hideously scarring him. The captured princess remarks that General Tadokoro's master must be cruel to punish him so brutally, and Tadokoro realises that the heroes are nobler than his own forces—he turns on his men, freeing the heroes and escaping with them to safety.

Third, the concept of a family of Jedi. Similar to the "Saga" story which tells of a son (Luke), a daughter (Leia), a father (Anakin-Vader) and a mentor (Obi Wan), the dynamic of a family with Jedi ties is introduced here. Annikin is the son of Kane—Kane is one of two surviving Jedi left, and will not be able to train his sons because he is dying. After Annikin's brother Deak is killed in the opening scene, Kane introduces Annikin to his

friend Luke Skywalker, the other elder remaining Jedi, and requests that Luke train Annikin in the Jedi ways. The names may be confusing here—they aren't necessarily the same character as in the film. Kane would become Anakin Skywalker, Annikin would become Luke Skywalker, and Luke would become Obi Wan. To get a clearer picture of where the story was headed: Father Skywalker (a.k.a. Anakin), a Jedi who has become half machine in his battles, takes his son Luke to his Jedi friend Obi Wan Kenobi to train him in the Jedi ways.

Fourth is the concept of a man who is becoming a machine, or more specifically a *father* who is becoming a machine. Kane Starkiller is revealed to have all of his limbs replaced with artificial ones, and even parts of his organs, a by-product of years of battle. As a result, he is dying, and requests his friend General Luke Skywalker to train his son Annikin when he dies. He later sacrifices himself by ripping a power unit from his body in order for his son and friends to be able to use it to freeze themselves in suspended animation and avoid Imperial scanners.

So here you have four different aspects, which, when combined together, would form the Darth Vader character presented in the "Saga" version of *Star Wars*. But they are all separate, and will stay that way for many more years, slowly being combined bit by bit in the sequels.

Similarly, although Prince Valorum's renunciation of the Sith/Empire is vaguely reminiscent of the finale of *Return of the Jedi*, the character is wholly and distinctly separate, and bears little resemblance to the Darth Vader of the final storyline; even Valorum's renunciation of the Empire is totally different in nature and style from what appears in *Return of the Jedi*, and is similar only in premise. Additionally, the Sith are less like the evil sorcerer-cult seen in the final films and more like a mercenary band of pirates, thus allegiance is more rough and tumble, rather than the final saga in which one pledges their soul.

The Force of Others

It is interesting to note that the Force is not existent in this draft—the phrase "may the force of others be with you" is used, but it is merely a generic "good luck" phrase, and is used casually by various people in the script, as are expressions such as "thank god." Most agree that it is a play off of the Christian phrase "May God be with you," intended as a sort of ambiguous science fiction version of a theistic colloquialism. When Lucas began writing the second draft he would transform the samurai-inspired Jedi-Bendu of the rough draft into characters based on E.E. Smith's

Lensmen, making them super-powered warriors. In determining the source of their power, Lucas took his "force of others" reference and turned it into a supernatural power, coupled with a crystal called the Kiber crystal which acts in a similar manner to the Lensmen's lenses, increasing one's natural abilities. The concept behind the eventual "force of others" appears in many science fiction works as a means of giving a general, universal supernatural belief system; for instance, in Jack Kirby's *New Gods* comic books it was called "The Source," and gave the heroes their strength, while in E.E. Smith's Lensmen series it was "The Cosmic All." Lucas himself even admitted this privately to Mark Hamill: "I asked him about the origin of the idea, and he said it's in about 450 old science fiction novels," Hamill told *Preview* magazine in 1983. "He's the first to admit it's not an original concept. It's nice how George presented the idea so everyone can get as much or as little out of it as they want. Some see it as a very religious thing."[73]

The vague notion of some kind of general spiritual belief also has its roots in the New Age spiritualism movement that saturated the hippie-populated San Francisco area in the 60's and 70's, where self-proclaimed gurus indulged in the newly-discovered eastern mysticism. After the Christian stronghold of the 1950's, the aboriginal and eastern spiritualisms were embraced with open arms by counterculturalists looking to experiment and open their minds to alternate systems of belief. They eventually combined all of these beliefs into their own generalised one, calling it a "New Age" religion, a main tenet of which was the belief that all lifeforms emitted some kind of life-energy that flowed throughout the universe. This type of belief was mainly adopted from the east, where it was the Japanese Ki and the Chinese Qi/Chi, but it is found in various aboriginal creeds as well, and is one of the oldest forms of supernatural belief, appearing in ancient Egypt as the Ka. This type of "life-energy" or "life-force" belief was common in the 1970's when New Age spiritualism reached its peak, as were those terms, which also explains its surfacing in science fiction at that time, such as in 1973's *The New Gods*—its appearance in *Star Wars* can be seen as a commentary on the culture of the 1970's.

An oft-reported claim is that Lucas got the term and basic concept of "the force of others" from Carlos Castaneda's book *Tales of Power*, a semi-anthropological account of the author's encounters with a Mexican shaman named Don Juan which talks about warrior mysticism. Castaneda's books had been published since the late 60's, starting with *The Teachings of Don Juan* in 1968, and were very influential in the rising popularity of such

mysticism in America.[*] His early books frequently equate "will" with being a "force" and "force" with "power." In *Tales of Power*, Castaneda also occasionally refers to the soul as the "force of life." This is all a bit of a stretch, however. The error of the *Tales of Power* link is that *Tales of Power* was published in 1975, many months *after* Lucas would have already invented the basic premise of "the force of others" being a supernatural power, in fact many months after Lucas had *completed* the second draft where this is the case. Even Castaneda's seldom and casual reference to "force of life" is a highly unoriginal notion, as the concept of the soul as "a force," "life force," "energy force," "life energy," "force of life," and many similar such terms was common and popular amongst New Age spiritualists by that point. He was, in fact, drawing from the same cultural belief of the 1960's which Lucas himself was reflecting.

Additionally, the strongest supposed influence from Castaneda appears in his book *The Eagle's Gift*, where he describes an energy which defines and shapes the universe and emanates from all living things, finally detailing the vague "force of life" in which he earlier spoke of. However, *The Eagle's Gift*, like the frequently cited *Tales of Power*, is published far too late to be an influence—*The Eagle's Gift*, very obviously similar to Lucas' concept of the Force in specific details, was published in 1981. In fact, Castaneda was highly criticised by real anthropologists once his work became known, and many inconsistencies and fabrications have been unearthed—most actual anthropologists believe that Castaneda was making up most of the content, especially since the books have more in common with novels than non-fiction, and he is now regarded as a fraud. Thus, the influence may have been the complete reverse—*Star Wars*' "the Force" may have influenced *Castaneda*, which is why the only explicit link appears well after *Star Wars*, and especially the more spiritual *Empire Strikes Back*, was released. The books were very popular with young people, especially the 1970's New Age spiritualists who dug the similar themes in *Star Wars*—however, most probably didn't realise that there was no relation between the film and Castaneda (at least in this regard—the Don Juan character would have an impact on a certain *Star Wars* character, as we will later see).

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[*] Although the Force is absent of any sort of immediate Castaneda influence, Lucas was obviously familiar with Castaneda's work, as it would have been prominent in the Bay area of San Francisco, and Lucas would later make references to it

Like the film's connection to Joseph Campbell, it was one trumpeted by the intelligentsia after the film became popular in an attempt to explain the success through more scholarly influence. The truth is that "the Force" comes from comic books and science fiction novels if it is to come from any specific source, from Kirby's *New Gods* saga to Smith's Lensmen saga. But it is much more reasonable to observe that this is all a product of the 1970's culture itself, when such notions were "in the air" and especially common amongst young people, artists and those in the area in which Lucas was living. "The 'Force of others' is what all basic religions are based on, especially the Eastern religions," Lucas once said, "which is, essentially, that there is a force, God, whatever you want to call it."[74]

The name and concept behind the Force can also be vaguely traced in influence to experimental Canadian filmmaker Arthur Lipsett's *21-87*, one of the most influential films on Lucas during his years at USC. In one of the film's more memorable moments, the life-energy of the universe or god is referred to as a "force," again showing that the term and concept were common amongst counterculturalists long before Lucas made it famous. The audio clip Lipsett sampled comes from a conversation between artificial intelligence pioneer Warren S. McCulloch and cinematographer Roman Kroitor. McCulloch argues that living beings are simply highly complex machines, but Kroitor replies that there is something more to the universe: "Many people feel that in the contemplation of nature and in communication with other living things, they become aware of some kind of force, or something, behind this apparent mask which we see in front of us, and they call it God."

Steve Silberman brought the similarity to Lucas' attention in a 2005 interview with *Wired* magazine, to which Lucas said that his use of the term was "an echo of that phrase in 21-87."[75]

This specific reference might have influenced this scene from the first draft of *THX 1138*, which contains similar phrasing:

> THX
> …there must be something independent; a force, reality.
>
> SRT
> You mean OMM. [the state-sanctioned deity]
>
> THX
> Not like OMM as we know him, but the reality behind the illusion of OMM.[76]

The Movie Brats

Lucas would turn his rough draft *The Star Wars* screenplay into a proper first draft in July of 1974. The only changes made were to names—for instance Kane Starkiller became Akira Valor, Deak Starkiller became Bink Valor, Annikin Starkiller became Justin Valor and Prince Valorum became General Dodona, while the Jedi Bendu became the Dai Noga and the Sith became the Legions of Lettow. The script was exactly the same otherwise. Lucas would revert to the names from the first version—the May 1974 rough draft—rather than the first draft when writing the subsequent scripts; the first draft is also fourteen pages longer than the rough, but no new scenes were added.

It had taken Lucas an entire year to write the rough draft screenplay—and another two months to revise it for the first draft. The creation of the second draft would be nearly just as difficult, finished six months later in January of 1975.

Lucas spoke about his burgeoning *Star Wars* in this rare 1974 interview:

> Larry Sturhahn: Would you like to talk about your new film?
>
> George Lucas: Well, it's science fiction—*Flash Gordon* genre; *2001* meets James Bond, outer space and space ships flying in it.
>
> LS: *THX* was a kind of 'process' film and *Graffiti* an autobiography—is the new film hooked to you personally?
>
> GL: I'm a real fan of Flash Gordon, and this is a much more plotted, structured film than the other two. *THX* is a milieu film, and *Graffiti* is a character film, but the new one is plot-action-adventure. Since I've never done that before, it's hard to say exactly what it is. Take the first two and combine them with another side of me that hasn't been seen yet and you get this new film. But where it comes from I don't know.
>
> Finally, you know, *American Graffiti* wasn't that hard to write. I did it in 3 weeks, but I've been working on this one for 6 months—it hasn't been easy at all. Maybe that has to do with having to make it up.
>
> I'm doing it myself, like last time, but then I'll look at it and if I'm not entirely satisfied, I'll hire somebody to do a re-write. I discovered something on *Graffiti*, having re-written it twice myself: your mind gets locked into something and it's hard to break loose, to get new ideas, a fresh point of view. It pays to have somebody come in with fresh enthusiasm and a new look.[77]

And yet another early reference from Lucas, in *Film Quarterly* in the spring of '74:

> [*The Star Wars*] is a space opera in the tradition of *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers*. It's James Bond and *2001* combined – super fantasy, capes and swords and laser guns and spaceships shooting each other, and all that sort of stuff. But it's not camp. It's meant to be an exciting action adventure film.[78]

Sometimes George and Marcia would hold barbeques from their San Anselmo "Parkhouse" home (as it was nicknamed); guests often included Gary Kurtz, Matthew Robbins, Hal Barwood, Walter Murch, Michael Ritchie, John Korty and occasionally the Huycks. While the wives cooked, the crowd of bearded men, cokes and beers in their hands, stood around and talked business (a popular topic being Francis Coppola's rising status and corresponding megalomania). Afterwards, Lucas would gather them up and read them his *Star Wars* script and tape record their reactions and criticisms.[79*] Not surprisingly, they understood little. "It was very difficult to tell what the man was talking about," Ritchie remembered.[80]

Francis Coppola saw the first draft as well, and was one of the few who liked it. "You finished the script and then you gave it to me," Coppola recalled in a 1999 conversation with Lucas. "I thought it was terrific. And then you totally changed it! And I kept saying 'Why are you changing it?'"[81] He particularly liked the more outrageous ideas, such as having Princess Leia as a fourteen-year-old girl (an inspiration from *Hidden Fortress*). "George became frightened of some of his own good ideas," Coppola said. "I think he shied away from his innovations somewhat."[82]

Lucas explained the collaborative nature of his circle of friends in *The Making of Star Wars*:

> I run around with a crowd of writers…with the Huycks and with John Milius, and both the Huycks and John Milius are fabulous. John can just sit there and it comes out of him, without even trying. It's just magic. The Huycks are the same way. With the first draft, I showed it to a group of friends who I help; having been an editor for a long time, I usually help them on their editing and they help me on my scriptwriting. They give me all their ideas and comments and whatnot, then I go back and try to deal with it. All of us have crossover

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[*] Rinzler states on page 24 of his *Making of* that notes of Lucas' survive indicating he had given his draft to the following eight people: Matthew Robbins, Hal Barwood, Bill Huyck, Gloria Katz, John Milius, Haskell Wexler, Francis Ford Coppola, Phil Kaufman

> relationships, and we are constantly showing each other what we are doing and trying to help each other.[83]

Gary Kurtz had an office in a bungalow on the Universal studios lot that Lucas sometimes made use of in order to avoid the Fox executives; Lucas' friend Steven Spielberg also had a bungalow office on the lot and the two would constantly check in on what each other was doing. Spielberg was preparing *Jaws* there at that time. On one occasion, Lucas and John Milius visited the studio space after hours where Spielberg showed them the giant mechanical shark undergoing construction. Spielberg grabbed the controls and began excitedly showing them how the mechanical beast worked, opening the enormous jaws which made a loud grinding noise like an oversized bear trap. Lucas climbed a ladder and poked his head inside the open mouth to see how it worked and Spielberg closed the jaws on him. As they laughed at Lucas' flailing Spielberg realised that the mouth wouldn't open, a troubling premonition of the mechanical failures on the film to come. Finally the mouth was pried apart and Lucas freed himself. The three of them ran back into the car and sped away from the scene of the crime, knowing they had broken an expensive piece of equipment.[84]

The friendship and co-operation within this circle of filmmakers was far-reaching; it was a time when ideas were fluid, collaboration was plentiful and all worked together to support each other. Like any movement in art, it was not one artists would be able to achieve operating independently—its success, both creatively and practically, depended on them remaining inter-connected.

During the troubled early period of scripting *Star Wars* Lucas also drifted to other projects, likely out of the frustrating difficulty he was encountering with his space opera. During the production of *American Graffiti*, Lucas had approached Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz with an idea for a screwball murder-mystery comedy set in the 1930's. "We came up with this idea of doing Ten Little Indians in a radio station," Lucas explained to author Marcus Hearn.[85] Lucas wrote a treatment and held story conferences with the Huycks, who then began work on a screenplay. Shortly after *Graffiti* was completed, Lucas was able to negotiate a deal with Universal to get the film made, and in July of 1974—just as Lucas finished his first draft of *Star Wars*—the Huycks also turned in their first draft, called *The Radioland Murders*. In an interview conducted with *Film Quarterly* in the spring of 1974 Lucas claimed that he would be tackling this film after *Star Wars*, though ultimately it would be plagued by set-backs for many decades.

Shortly later, Lucas developed "The Adventures of Indiana Smith," an action-packed tale about a globe-trotting treasure seeker based on the various jungle and adventure serials of the 1930's that Lucas had been mulling over since the genesis of *Star Wars* back in film school. In 1975 he would meet with Philip Kaufman and flesh out the story, however Kaufman was eventually called away by other filmmaking duties and the project was shelved.[86] The influence of this can be seen in the second draft of *Star Wars* from that same year where Luke is introduced as an aspiring archaeologist.

Apocalypse Now was also revived after the success of *Graffiti*, though it would ultimately dissolve into *Star Wars* itself. "We couldn't get any co-operation from any of the studios or the military, but once I had *American Graffiti* behind me I tried again and pretty much got a deal at Columbia. We scouted locations in the Philippines and were ready to go."[87] The *Apocalypse Now* deal would soon implode because Columbia wanted all the rights American Zoetrope controlled and Coppola refused to hand them over. "The deal collapsed," explained Lucas. "And when that deal collapsed, I started working on *Star Wars*."[88] With this, Lucas' *Apocalypse Now* was channelled into *Star Wars*' rough draft, giving the film a strong man versus machine theme and allegorical battles of primitives and rebels against a mechanised empire.

Star Wars refused to leave Lucas' mind and he pushed ahead with a second draft.

Endnotes

Introduction

[1] Lucas says he began writing the treatment on April 17th, 1973 in Starwars.com *Homing Beacon* # 223. This intro is somewhat inaccurate, however, but I use it more for dramatic effect: firstly, though in the first and second edition of the self-published online version of this book I attributed Lucas to living on Portola Drive, this is probably not true; he lived there while at USC but shortly before he was married, while writing *THX 1138* in late 1968, he and Marcia moved into a house somewhere in Mill Valley (as writes Marcus Hearn, on page 33 of *The Cinema of George Lucas*). The exact address of this location is still unknown to me, despite my best retroactive stalking efforts. In this edition I have changed the street name to Medway Avenue, the location of the home they bought just before *Grafitti* came out. However, the first home the Lucas' lived in 1968 until mid 1973, after Portola and before Medway, is still unknown, and wherever this was it would be where Lucas actually first wrote *Star Wars*. Secondly, though some—including myself—often speak of *Star Wars* beginning with this treatment, the truth is slightly more complicated, for Lucas had already taken a stab at it with the *Journal of the Whills*. However, since that was a somewhat unrelated piece that was discarded, *Star Wars* traces most of its direct origins to this treatment.

[2] "Religion of the Jedi Knights", *Museum of Hoaxes*, http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/jedi.html. The religion was later dismissed by officials due to the prank-like nature of the whole event—though a genuine faith called "Jediism" has also sprouted, vaguely New Age/Buddhist-like in beliefs. See http://www.thejediismway.org/

[3] *Star Wars* Definitive Edition Laserdisc interview, 1993

[4] *Once Upon A Galaxy: A Journal of the Making of The Empire Strikes Back* by Alan Arnold, 1980, p. 223

[5] BBC interview by Anwar Brett, May 18th, 2005, http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2005/05/18/george_lucas_star_wars_episode_iii_interview.shtml

Chapter I: The Beginning

[1] "Burden of Dreams: George Lucas" by Aljean Harmetz, *American Film*, June 1983
[2] *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* by Dale Pollock, 1983, p. 12
[3] Pollock, p. 36
[4] Pollock, p. 36
[5] Pollock, p. 38
[6] "Luke Skywalker Goes Home" by Bernard Weinraub, *Playboy*, July 1997
[7] "I've Got to Get My Life Back Again" by Gerald Clarke, *Time*, May 23rd, 1983
[8] "I've Got to Get My Life Back Again" by Gerald Clarke, *Time*, May 23rd, 1983
[9] Arnold, p. 219
[10] Pollock, p. 19
[11] *Academy of Achievement* interview, June 19th, 1999, http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/luc0int-1
[12] "George Lucas Goes Far Out," by Stephen Zito, *American Film*, April 1977
[13] Arnold, p. 221
[14] *Icons: Intimate Portraits*, "The Dark Side of George Lucas" by Denise Worrell, 1989, p. 188
[15] "The George Lucas Saga" by Kerry O' Quinn, *Starlog*, July 1981
[16] Arnold, pp. 220-222
[17] "Star Wars Origins" by Kristen Brennan, 1999, http://www.jitterbug.com/origins/flash.html. This website has moved since this book was first published in 2007, though I will still attribute its original URL. It can now be found at http://moongadget.com/origins/index.html.
[18] "Star Wars Origins" by Kristen Brennan, 1999, http://www.jitterbug.com/origins/flash.html
[19] "Burden of Dreams: George Lucas" by Aljean Harmetz, *American Film*, June 1983
[20] *60 Minutes*, March 28th, 1999
[21] "The George Lucas Saga" by Kerry O' Quinn, *Starlog*, August 1981
[22] "George Lucas Interview" by Ty Burr, *The Boston Globe*, October 2005, http://www.boston.com/ae/movies/lucas_interview
[23] "Letter From Skywalker Ranch: Why is the Force Still With Us?" by John Seabrook, *The New Yorker*, January 6th, 1997
[24] Arnold, p. 188
[25] "Dialog: George Lucas" by Steve Galloway, *Hollywood Reporter*, June 9, 2005

[26] *The Cinema of George Lucas* by Marcus Hearn, 2005, p. 16
[27] "Life After Darth" by Steve Silberman, *Wired*, May 2005
[28] "Life After Darth" by Steve Silberman, *Wired*, May 2005
[29] Pollock, p. 35
[30] Hearn, p. 16
[31] Pollock, p. 41
[32] "The George Lucas Saga" by Kerry O' Quinn, *Starlog*, August 1981
[33] Pollock, p. 47
[34] Interview on *The Hidden Fortress* DVD, Criterion, 2001
[35] "The George Lucas Saga" by Kerry O' Quinn, *Starlog*, July 1981
[36] "The Filming of American Graffiti" by Larry Sturhahn, *Filmmakers Newsletter*, March 1974
[37] *Academy of Achievement*, June 19th 1999, http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/luc0int-1
[38] Pollock, p. 67
[39] Pollock, p. 59
[40] Hearn, p.22
[41] "The Empire Strikes Back and So Does Filmmaker George Lucas With His Sequel to Star Wars" by Jean Vallely, *Rolling Stone*, June 12th, 1980
[42] Pollock, p. 72
[43] Pollock, p. 72
[44] Hearn, p. 28
[45] "A Legacy of Filmmakers: The Early Years of American Zoetrope", *THX 1138* DVD, 2004
[46] "The Morning of the Magician: George Lucas and Star Wars" by Claire Clouzot, *Ecran*, September 15th, 1977
[47] *Mythmaker: The Life and Works of George Lucas* by John Baxter, 1999, pp. 84-85
[48] "The George Lucas Saga" by Kerry O' Quinn, *Starlog*, July 1981
[49] *Cinema By The Bay*, by Sheerly Avni, 2006, p. 220
[50] "A Legacy of Filmmakers: The Early Years of American Zoetrope", *THX 1138* DVD, 2004
[51] "A Legacy of Filmmakers: The Early Years of American Zoetrope", *THX 1138* DVD, 2004
[52] Avni, p. 30
[53] "A Legacy of Filmmakers: The Early Years of American Zoetrope", *THX 1138* DVD, 2004
[54] "A Legacy of Filmmakers: The Early Years of American Zoetrope", *THX 1138* DVD, 2004
[55] Avni, p. 31
[56] This is reported in Pollock, p. 73, and other sources, but John Baxter shows that, as inspiring a story as it is, it's inaccurate. See Baxter, p. 30

[57] *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* by Peter Biskind, 1998, p. 22
[58] Biskind, p. 22
[59] Biskind, pp. 125-26
[60] "The Legacy of 2001," *2001* DVD, 2007
[61] Lucas even credits these two novels as being one of the few that impressed him (along with *Verne's 20, 000 Leagues Under the Sea*) on page 220 of Arnold's book
[62] "Artifact From The Future", *THX 1138* DVD, 2004
[63] Hearn, pp. 37-38
[64] "Artifact From The Future, *THX 1138* DVD, 2004
[65] Hearn, p. 37
[66] Hearn, p. 38
[67] Pollock, p. 66
[68] Pollock, p. 65
[69] *Biography: George Lucas*, A&E, 2001
[70] "George Lucas: The Stinky Kid Hits the Big Time" by Stephen Farber, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3, spring 1974
[71] "The George Lucas Saga" by Kerry O' Quinn, *Starlog*, July 1981
[72] "George Lucas" by David Sheff, *Rolling Stone*, November 5th, 1987
[73] *Bantha Tracks*, issue 1, May 1978
[74] "The George Lucas Saga" by Kerry O' Quinn, *Starlog*, July 1981
[75] "Star Wars Memories" by Kerry O' Quinn, *Starlog* 127, February 1988, p. 59, from *Phoenix Gazette*
[76] *The Making of Star Wars* by J.W. Rinzler, 2007, p. 2
[77] "George Lucas: The Well-Rounded Interview" by Well-Rounded Entertainment, http://www.well-rounded.com/movies/reviews/lucas_intv.html
[78] "The Empire Strikes Back and So Does Filmmaker George Lucas With His Sequel to Star Wars" by Jean Vallely, *Rolling Stone*, June 12th, 1980
[79] "The Empire Strikes Back and So Does Filmmaker George Lucas With His Sequel to Star Wars" by Jean Vallely, *Rolling Stone*, June 12th, 1980
[80] Baxter, p. 117
[81] "The Filming of American Graffiti" by Larry Sturhahn, *Filmmaker Newsletter*, March 1974
[82] Arnold, p. 196
[83] "The Empire Strikes Back and So Does Filmmaker George Lucas With His Sequel to Star Wars" by Jean Vallely, *Rolling Stone*, June 12th, 1980
[84] Biskind, p. 237
[85] Biskind, p. 237
[86] Hearn, pp. 61-62

[87] "The George Lucas Saga" by Kerry O' Quinn, *Starlog*, July 1981
[88] Pollock, p. 101
[89] Baxter, p. 66
[90] Pollock, p. 82
[91] Pollock, p. 83
[92] "George Lucas: The Stinky Kid Hits the Big Time" by Stephen Farber, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3, spring 1974
[93] "The George Lucas Saga" by Kerry O' Quinn, *Starlog*, July 1981

Chapter II: The Star Wars

[1] "An Interview With Gary Kurtz", *IGN Film Force* online, November 11th, 2002, http://filmforce.ign.com/articles/376/376873p1.html
[2] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 6
[3] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 2
[4] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 4
[5] "A Long Time Ago: The Story of Star Wars," BBC Omnibus TV special, 1999
[6] "George Lucas Goes Far Out" by Stephen Zito, *American Film*, April 1977
[7] *Mediascene Prevue* , issue 42, 1980
[8] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 15
[9] "George Lucas: The Stinky Kid Hits The Big Time" by Stephen Farber, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3, spring 1974
[10] *Bantha Tracks*, issue 8, May 1980
[11] "The George Lucas Saga" by Kerry O' Quinn, *Starlog*, July 1981
[12] Biskind, p. 243
[13] "The Empire Strikes Back and So Does Filmmaker George Lucas With His Sequel to Star Wars" by Jean Valley, *Rolling Stone*, June 12th, 1980
[14] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 8
[15] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 8
[16] Baxter, p. 142
[17] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 97
[18] Baxter, p. 158
[19] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 9
[20] *The Warrior's Camera* by Stephen Prince, 1991, p. 36
[21] *Akira Kurosawa: It is Wonderful to Create*, 2002
[22] Starwars.com *Homing Beacon* #223, Thursday, April 17th, 2008. It reports that this info comes from a 1983 *Rolling Stone* interview with Lucas. In that interview Lucas also allegedly states that he completed it on May 20th—the *Homing Beacon* addresses the apparent contradiction in Rinzler's book. Their

explanation is that the version submitted in the first week of May to UA might have been an earlier draft, and that Lucas continued writing it until the 20th. This may or may not be correct.

[23] As related in end-note 1, this timeline has been through a revision with information recently supplied by Jonathan Rinzler. The handwritten original merely states "May 1973" on its cover page, and the typed version begins with this date as well. However, it was thought that this treatment was actually dated to May 25th, 1973, since that date is suffixed in the bootlegged copy of the treatment. This, however, has turned out not to be the case—the typed version of this treatment was in existence as early as May 7th, 1973. This is revealed on page 11 of *The Making of Star Wars*, where Rinzler explains that United Artists VP David Chasman was given a copy of the fourteen-page typed treatment on that date. This treatment, then, comes from the very first week of May. However, given the info in the prior footenote—that Lucas alledges that it was May 20th that he actually completed it—it gives rise the theory that the May 25th date on the bootleg may be legitimate; perhaps the initial version was submitted in early May, but then the final version was not typed up by Lucas' secretary until the 25th (with Lucas' 1983 *Rolling Stone* quote regarding the 20th either being an approximation, a slight inaccuracy, or merely the date of completion of the handwritten original).

Its length is also clarified by Rinzler—he states on page 9 that the handwritten version was ten pages long, and clarifies that the typed version is fourteen pages, and not thirteen pages as is sometimes reported.

[24] "The Development of Star Wars as Seen Through the Scripts by George Lucas" by Jan Helander, 1997, http://www.starwarz.com/starkiller/writings/development_jan.htm

[25] "The Development of Star Wars as Seen Through the Scripts by George Lucas" by Jan Helander, 1997, http://www.starwarz.com/starkiller/writings/development_jan.htm

[26] *The Films of Akira Kurosawa* by Donald Richie, 1965, pp. 134- 139

[27] Richie, p. 137

[28] Richie, p. 31

[29] Encyclopedia Brittanica

[30] Enclopedia Encarta, 2001edition

[31] *The Star Wars Souvenir Program*, 1977

[32] Arnold, p. 188

[33] "George Lucas: The Stinky Kid Hits the Big Time" by Stephen Farber, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3, spring 1974
[34] "George Lucas: The Stinky Kid Hits the Big Time" by Stephen Farber, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3, spring 1974
[35] "Star Wars The Years Best Movie", *Time*, May 30th, 1977
[36] *Star Wars* DVD commentary, 2004
[37] *The Making of Star Wars As Told By R2-D2 And C-3P0*. Lucasfilm, 1977
[38] *The Apocalypse Now Book* by Peter Crowie, 2001, p.1
[39] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 8
[40] Interestingly in the 1993 Definitive Edition Laserdisc commentary track for *Star Wars*, Ralph McQuarrie states that Lucas wanted him to initially base Chewbacca on an image he got of a lemur-like alien from some old magazine.
[41] *Chaplin* magazine, fall 1973
[42] In *The Cinema of George Lucas*, p. 80, Marcus Hearn states that the film was submitted to Universal in February—but this was before the fourteen-page treatment even existed. As Rinzler shows in *The Making of Star Wars*, it was actually in the summer, just before *Graffiti* was released.
[43] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 11
[44] Baxter, pp. 145-146
[45] Baxter, pp. 153-54
[46] Baxter, p. 51
[47] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, pp. 24-25
[48] Baxter, p. 154
[49] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 14
[50] This is deduced from an interview published in *Filmmakers Newsletter* in March 1974, where Lucas states that he has been working on the screenplay for six months time
[51] *The Unauthorized Star Wars Compendium* introduction by Ted Edwards, 1999. Here Lucas says he was jotting down ideas while vacationing after *Graffiti* came out.
[52] Pollock, p. 144
[53] "The Morning of the Magician: George Lucas and Star Wars" by Claire Clouzot, *Ecran*, September 15th, 1977
[54] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 15
[55] *The Unauthorized Star Wars Compendium* introduction by Ted Edwards, 1999
[56] Pollock, pp. 141-42
[57] "The George Lucas Saga" by Kerry O' Quinn, *Starlog*, July 1981
[58] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 16
[59] Worrell, p. 182
[60] Worrell, p. 182
[61] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 18
[62] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 18

[63] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 16
[64] For additional discussion on this development, see the article "The Birth of Father Skywalker", http://secrethistoryofstarwars.com/birthoffatherskywalker.html
[65] Pollock, pp. 141-43
[66] Pollock, pp. 141-43
[67] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, pp. 14-15
[68] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 16
[69] "The Development of Star Wars as Seen Through the Scripts by George Lucas" by Jan Helander, 1997, http://www.starwarz.com/starkiller/writings/development_jan.htm
[70] "George Lucas: Mapping the Mythology", CNN Online, May 8th 2002, http://archives.cnn.com/2002/SHOWBIZ/Movies/05/07/ca.s02.george.lucas/
[71] For example, his comments in an interview on the 1993 Definitive Edition Laserdisc, as well as his August 1977 interview with *Rolling Stone*, where he gives even greater detail. He repeats many of these throughout the commentary track on the 2004 *Return of the Jedi* DVD
[72] Worrell, p. 185
[73] "Mark Hamill", *Preview* magazine, 1983
[74] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 18
[75] "Life After Darth" by Steve Silberman, *Wired*, May 2005
[76] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 18. Here he says it is a deleted scene. However the same scene is excerpted by Marcus Hearn on page 33 of *The Cinema of George Lucas*, revealing it to be from the first draft. While it is possible that it appeared in the first draft, survived the final draft, was filmed but then deleted, it's far more likely that Rinzler was simply not entirely accurate in his description of it being "deleted" (ie it was in fact deleted after the first draft) and that he got this info from Hearn, whose book predates Rinzler's.
[77] "The Filming of American Graffiti" by Larry Sturhahn, *Filmmakers Newsletter*, March 1974
[78] "George Lucas: The Stinky Kid Hits The Big Time" by Stephen Farber, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3, Spring 1974
[79] Baxter, pp. 155-157
[80] Baxter, p. 157
[81] "A Long Time Ago: The Story of Star Wars," BBC Omnibus TV special, 1999
[82] Pollock, p. 147
[83] Rinzler, *Making of Star Wars*, p. 24
[84] Biskind, pp. 255-256
[85] Hearn, p. 78
[86] Pollock, p. 222

[87] Hearn, p. 78
[88] Hearn, p. 78

Chapter III: Enter Luke Starkiller