Západočeská univerzita v Plzni

Fakulta pedagogická

Bakalářská práce

PŮVODNÍ TRILOGIE *HVĚZDNÝCH VÁLEK:*

AMERICKÉ KULTURNÍ DĚDICTVÍ

Petr Harmáček

Plzeň 2012

University of West Bohemia

Faculty of Education

Undergraduate Thesis

THE ORIGINAL *STAR WARS* TRILOGY*:*

AMERICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

Petr Harmáček

Tato stránka bude ve svázané práci Váš původní formulář *Zadáni bak. práce*
(k vyzvednutí u sekretářky KAN)

Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracoval samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

V Plzni dne 26. června 2012   …………………………….
                                                              Petr Harmáček

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Bradley Vice, Ph.D. for his guidance, support, patience and encouragement during the writing of this thesis.

ABSTRACT

This thesis concentrates upon one of the most acclaimed science fiction and fantasy film works of all time, the original *Star Wars* trilogy and mainly the film which started it all, the 1977 *Star Wars*, as one of the most culturally influential motion pictures of the 20th Century and an important part of America's cultural heritage. The primary focus of the thesis is to determine the degree of the influence of this film and its sequels on American culture and factors that led to it.

The initial two chapters consult the important milestones, both in cinema and in the life of *Star Wars'* creator George Lucas, leading up to the creation of *Star Wars*. The following two chapters discuss the development and making of *Star Wars*, including the many influences on the script and the visual style of the film, underlining the importance of these influences for the popularity and cultural impact of *Star Wars*. The two final chapters aim to describe and interpret the events following the initial release of the original film, its critical reception and its cultural and social influence, as well as to underline its significance as American national heritage and the importance of its preservation for future generation of audiences and scholars.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

On May 25th 1977 a film called *Star Wars* opened in just over 30 cinemas all across the United States. Neither the studio nor the makers of the film believed in its success. It had no star actors; it was made by a relatively unknown director and it was released at a time when science fiction and fantasy were generally considered second rate genres. Yet, against all odds, it would win seven Academy Awards and become the highest grossing movie of all time, forever changing the face of Hollywood and having a significant impact on American culture. In this thesis, I would like to explore this huge success and cultural impact, the reasons behind it and the significance of preserving the film and its two sequels for future generations.

The 1970s in America were a period of social change and discontent. It was a time of economic recession and rising oil prices. The Vietnam War was drawing to an end, in which America would be on the losing side. The Space Race had ended and with the prevailing "Mutually Assured Destruction" policy of stockpiling huge amounts of nuclear weapons, the tension between USA and USSR was as high as ever. America was disheartened by the Watergate affair, leading to a first and so far only presidential resignation in the US history. The nation was growing skeptical of its leaders and heroes and its attention turned away from the future and the past and was deeply rooted in the present.

The Hollywood studios responded to this atmosphere of growing frustration by making films which reflected it. The early seventies' big screen was filled with gritty and often pessimistic films and the brave straightforward high-principled Western heroes of the yesteryear were replaced by unbalanced, cynical anti-heroes. The counter-culture, growing in the sixties was captured by a 1969 film *Easy Rider*. When *Easy Rider* became a huge success, the film studios realized that a low budget film, made by an avant-garde director could bring them large profit.

Under these circumstances, a new group of progressive young filmmakers entered the scene, among them, George Walton Lucas Jr., a young film school graduate, who dreamed of giving America a new kind of mythology, to replace what he thought had been occupied by the slowly dying genre of the Western.

In order to understand the significance of *Star Wars* for modern American culture and the mountainous effect it had and still has on it, which is the main focus point of this thesis, one needs to understand the cultural importance of motion pictures in general. Film as an art form was an immensely important part of American culture, perhaps more

so than in any other part of the world, because motion pictures played a major role in the formation of the, then still young, American nation. In a 2011 documentary *These Amazing Shadows* about the American National Film Registry under the Library of Congress, Patrick Loughney, The Chief of the American National Film Registry's Pacard Campus, says that films played a vital role in forming the nation's common culture and sense of unity, as a means to bridge the cultural gap between geographically remote places within the USA:

> If you look at the advent of movies from the 1890s forward, they were in many ways the most important force in shaping a common sense in American culture. There was a time when people in southern California didn't have much in common with the people in Maine and the people in Florida had virtually nothing in common with the people in the Pacific Northwest and it's movie that came along that began to create a sense of nationhood. (06:29)

This especially applies to the Western, a film genre telling stories from the American frontier, which can be perceived as an American mythology, giving the young nation, comprised of people whose origins lay all over the world, a sense of common history and culture.

As an anthropology student, the creator of *Star Wars*, George Lucas, became interested in mythology and felt that the use of myths as a means to convey social values was in decline in modern society. By the end of the 1960s the Western genre lost its popularity, leaving America without its myth. Lucas talks about how he felt this left the nation without its mythology and how he wanted to replace the Western with a new myth:

> When I got into college and started studying anthropology and got into this stuff, an instructor said that Westerns were the last American mythology, probably the last world mythology, to develop. In the sixties, that all fell apart. Westerns went by the wayside, especially film Westerns. We were sitting there with nothing specifically mythic. One of the reasons I started doing films, was to create a new kind of myth – using space, because that's theš new frontier. (Edwards 6)

Lucas was also worried that the young boys at the time didn't have the fantasy life he had had when he had been growing up, and were too rooted in reality, since the protagonists of the movies and TV shows young people were watching in the 70s weren't

brave idealistic heroes but hard cynical men like Kojak or Dirty Harry: "There's all these kids running around wanting to be killer cops," Lucas told *The New York Times*, "I want them to get beyond the basic stupidities of the moment and think about colonizing Venus and Mars" (Edwards 6).

Apart from westerns, Lucas drew on many other sources, in writing the script for *Star Wars*, including Japanese samurai films or the works of Joseph Campbell, in order to create a perfect mixture resulting in a universally appealing story and relatable characters. This process inarguably plays a significant part in the film's success and consequent cultural impact.

In the following six chapters, this thesis will attempt to present *Star Wars* as a significant part of American cultural heritage and offer insight into the reasons behind this. The first chapter will discuss *Star Wars*' most direct predecessors; it will further examine the Western as an American mythology and cultural phenomenon and will go through the most significant milestones of pre-*Star Wars* Science Fiction films. The second chapter will focus on the aspects of the origins and early career of George Lucas, significant for the creation of *Star Wars*. The complex set of Lucas' many inspirations in writing *Star Wars* will be analyzed in the third chapter. The fourth chapter will offer an overview of the film's difficult production and the fifth chapter will describe the circumstances of the film's release and initial critical reception. The film's global cultural impact will be underlined in the final chapter using practical examples, where for instance the film was used in American politics or where a new religion was based on it. This chapter will also inform the reader about the film's fate in recent years and the need of its preservation for future generations.

THE FORERUNNERS OF *STAR WARS*

One of the most distinctive genres of American cinematography was of course the Western. Westerns tell stories from the North American frontier between civilization and wilderness and are usually set during the second half of the 19th century, after the end of the American Civil War in 1865. The genre shows the time of civilization spreading further west, forcefully taking the still wild nature from the hands of the Native Americans, who are often portrayed as inhumane savages. The usual settings of the stories are small frontier towns or isolated rural homesteads, and the heroes, usually sheriffs or cowboys are in most cases "masculine persons of integrity and principle - courageous, moral, tough, solid and self-sufficient, maverick characters (often with trusty sidekicks), possessing an independent and honorable attitude" (Dirks "Western Films, Part I").

Western is often considered to be a kind of American mythology. In comparison with other nations, the USA is a very young nation that is formed out of a mixture of different nationalities and cultures, and as such, it needed a sense of inner unity and separation from other cultures surrounding it. One of the things which form a nation's sense cultural identity is mythology. Due to the lack of ancient history common to all its nations, America had to find itself a new kind of mythology and it was mainly through the motion pictures that the genre of western became this new purely American mythology. This newly invented American mythology provides a means to go deeper than the political ideology of independence and liberty and "into the realm of understanding on an archetypical level" (Unruh "The Western: An American Mythology").

In the article *The Western: An American Mythology*, the author goes on to say that in America, where the inherent ideas of personal freedom, equal rights and free market capitalism are often in contrast with the amount of governmental control and the power of money, the Wild West represented a "magical land" half way between the extremes of "anarchic lawlessness" and "the oppressive control of the big cities to 'the east'." Unruh continues:

> Honor and personal codes are no less important than the laws set forth by others. At the end of the day in "the West" things will often come down to two people standing in the middle of a deserted street in a contest decided by their wits and skill with a gun alone. Is there anything more American

than that (despite all our talk of equality)? The Western's (American's) freedom is the freedom to excel to the limit of your abilities even at the expense of others. Is there any better way to describe capitalism? The Western brings everything that is good and bad about America to terms with itself. It is the magic equilibrium point in which all things are in balance. (Unruh "The Western: An American Mythology")

Some of the earliest American films depicted scenes from the "wild west", such as 1903's *The Great Train Robbery*, which is considered to be the first narrative film of all time and depicts a band of bandits holding up a train and the pursuit that follows. This film was also first to use many of the filming and editing techniques which were to later become commonplace in moviemaking, such as camera movement and cross cuts. (Dirks "The Great Train Robbery")

In the following two decades, westerns gained even more popularity and importance:

"Later, in the 1920s, the uniting role of Western became even more important. America was looking for national myths to underscore our potential strength and greatness in the face of economic depression and growing nationalism in Germany and Japan. In the Western and its cowboy hero we found national myths to meet these needs." (Hausladen 310)

This trend continued throughout the thirties and forties, however in the fifties, while some of the greatest westerns were made in this decade, (such as the 1956 film *The Searchers* directed by the master of western John Ford and starring John Wayne, which ranked number one on American Film Institute's list of top ten western films) having come victorious out of World War II and becoming a great political and economical superpower, America had to deal with new issues and the culture had to reflect this, so the themes in many of the western movies started changing and the popularity of the Western genre began a slow decline (Unruh "The Western: An American Mythology").

Another film genre important for understanding *Star Wars* is of course science fiction. Sci-fi was there from the very beginning of film history; in 1902, inspired by the fathers of literary science fiction, H.G. Wells' *First Men in the Moon* and Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*, French filmmaker and illusionist Georges Melies used innovative photographic techniques and tricks to make his groundbreaking masterpiece *Le Voyage Dans La Lune (A Trip to the Moon)* (Dirks "Science Fiction Films").

The year 1927 saw the premiere of a two and a half hour long silent epic *Metropolis*, a work of one of the masters of German Expressionism, Fritz Lang. With its futuristic industrial vision allegorical of its own time, and breakthrough camera work and effects, it is one of the defining milestones of the genre (Dirks, "Metropolis").

The thirties and forties mark the birth of first two science-fiction film heroes, Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers, who appeared in cliff-hanger Saturday matinee serials. It was these escapist serials that served the role of George Lucas' initial inspiration for writing *Star Wars*. It is worth noting, that the Flash Gordon serial became so popular, that a pornographic parody of it, entitled *Flesh Gordon*, was actually made (Dirks "Science Fiction Films").

In the fifties, the increasing interest in space exploration caused a boom of cheap science fiction films so big, that the fifties are called The Golden Age of Science Fiction Films. Alongside space travel, another theme often reflected in the 50s science fiction is the beginning of the Cold War.

> Many other sci-fi films of the 1950s portrayed the human race as victimized and at the mercy of mysterious, hostile, and unfriendly forces. Cold War politics undoubtedly contributed to suspicion, anxiety, and paranoia of anything "other" - or "un-American." Allegorical science fiction films reflected the collective unconscious and often cynically commented upon political powers, threats and evils that surrounded us (alien forces were often a metaphor for Communism), and the dangers of aliens taking over our minds and territory.
> (Dirks "Science Fiction Films")

With only a few notable exceptions however, most of these 1950s sci-fi movies were low budget "exploitative, second-rate" films with "corny dialogue, poor screenplays, bad acting, and amateurish production values" (Dirks "Science Fiction Films"). Amongst the most prominent of these exceptions is the 1956 film *Forbidden Planet*. This, for its time very high budget, science fiction tells a story of a military spaceship arriving to an off-world colony to investigate a cease of communication. The story is inspired by Shakespeare's *The Temptest* and has been described as "a dramatization of repressed sexual desires" (Dirks, "Science Fiction Films Part 2").

In the 60s, another sci-fi phenomenon took off; on September 8th 1966 aired the first episode of the cult television series *Star Trek*. At the time it received a rather cold critical response and only average viewer ratings and it was canceled 1969, although it

became a hit in later reruns. After the success of *Star Wars, Star Trek: The Motion Picture* was announced in 1978 and released in 1979. (tvobscurities.com, "A Look at Star Trek")

Before *Star Wars* science fiction was nowhere near being the huge money-maker that it is today; In the 2004 *Empire of Dreams* documentary, George Lucas speaks about the difficulty of selling the idea for *Star Wars* to the studios, because up to that point there were only a few financially successful sci-fi films, the biggest of which was Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which earned close to 57 million dollars, (which was nearly five times the film's original budget) and the only other successful sci-fi series at the time were the Planet *of the Apes* films but even those films couldn't be marked as big hits based on their box office performance with the first *Planet of the Apes* only earning around 16 million on its initial releases (<u>Empire of Dreams</u> 12:25). The popularization of the science fiction and fantasy genres was one of the biggest cultural changes brought about by the release of the original *Star Wars*; only two out of the top ten sci-fi films of all time according to American Film Institute are pre *Star Wars*.
(afi.com, "Top 10 Sci-fi")

GEORGE LUCAS – YEARS LEADING UP TO *STAR WARS*

George Walton Lucas jr., the man behind *Star Wars*, was born in 1944 in a small town of Modesto, California. As a child, he loved to watch adventure serials and old Western films on television, which would later become one of the biggest inspirations for *Star Wars*. But actually, before setting on the way to becoming a filmmaker, young George dreamed of being a race car driver. (White 7-15) This dream ended, when in 1964, just after his high school graduation Lucas got into a near fatal car accident, which made him rethink his life (Pollock 34). He decided to study social sciences at the Modesto Junior College and his major in his first year was anthropology, through which he first found out about the writings of Joseph Campbell. Lucas however recalls his interest in social sciences as a "fluke" he went through before deciding to follow an artistic career (Kaminski 25).

Before he got into film-making, Lucas got interested in photography, having done a lot of photography of racing events, because even though he gave up his earlier dream of being a race-car driver, he still had many friends in racing and was an amateur mechanic. It was actually photography that later brought him to film-making, when an old friend asked him to apply with him to study photography at a film-school of the University of Southern California. Lucas agreed to take the test, even though he thought it unlikely that he could be accepted because of his bad grades. Around this time, Lucas made acquaintance with a famous cameraman Haskell Wexler, when doing some work for him on his racecar and Wexler influenced Lucas to start leaning towards cinematography, so when, to his own surprise, he passed the USC test and got into the film school, he decided to study cinematography (Kaminski 28-29).

At the USC Lucas became interested in foreign and experimental films. It was here that he first came into contact with the works of a Japanese director Akira Kurosawa, which would later become a major inspiration for *Star Wars*. While in film school, Lucas made eight student films including his visually impressive student film *THX 1138: 4EB* (1965) which earned great success at student film festivals (Kaminski 29-31).

After graduating Lucas worked as a freelance editor and documentary cameraman, having for example filmed part of the infamous 1968 Rolling Stones concert in which an audience member was stabbed to death (Kaminski 31).

During this time he met Marcia Griffin, a film editor, whom he married in 1969. Marcia was responsible for editing of most of Lucas' films and was a great influence on him when writing *Star Wars* (Kaminski 38).

In 1967 Lucas won a scholarship from Warner Brothers Studios, thanks to which he was able to be on the set of Francis Ford Coppola's *Finian's Rainbow*. Lucas befriended Coppola and Coppola made him his personal assistant for the film. Later, when Coppola's next film, *The Rain People* was being made in 1968, Lucas was hired to do a documentary about the making of the film entitled *Filmmaker* (Kaminski 32).

During this time Lucas and Coppola, who both dreamed of freeing themselves from the Hollywood studio system, met an independent filmmaker John Korty and together they started a production company American Zoetrope, which was "an idealistic commune of filmmakers who strove for artistic independence from movie studios" (Kaminski 34).

It was thanks to American Zoetrope making a deal with Warner Brothers, that Lucas was able to make his first feature film *THX 1138*, an extended adaptation of his most successful student short. The film was financed by Warner Brothers. Inspired by George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, *THX 1138* is a film about dystopic totalitarian future in which the government controls every aspect of people's lives, including feelings and sexuality, through violence and drugs. Lucas, being primarily a documentary filmmaker at this point, decided to use documentaristic camera techniques and editing (Kaminski 37).

When Lucas showed *THX 1138* to Warner Brothers, they were highly displeased, because they were expecting a hip sci-fi film made for young people and instead Lucas gave them an abstract depressing art film, where the futuristic world is not explained to the viewer, which was highly unusual for a sci-fi film at the time. To Lucas' great disappointment, the studio decided to cut some footage out to make the film shorter and market it as "a futuristic love story" (Kaminski 38). Lucas talks about his struggle of going from doing independent student films to doing studio-controlled features in a rare 1971 video interview with a renowned film critic and media theorist Gene Youngblood called *George Lucas: Maker of Films*:

> When you're in a little controlled situation, you can just put something in there that you feel and it's very easy to do…When it just feels right, you just put it there and that's the only reason for it being there. On a feature, if you try to explain that to a studio executive, that it feels right,

they'll go crazy. And they say - because they don't feel it, because I don't think they feel anything, they won't let you do it. When I started the feature of *THX*, we were in a real little, you know, about an eight month renaissance there. All of a sudden it was freedom. Mainly because of *Easy Rider*; *Easy Rider* did a great thing but it didn't last for very long. And the feature was started in that atmosphere of total freedom, you know. 'These kids are crazy but we'll let them do it because it seems to make money.' So when I started the film I had all kinds of freedom but when I finished the film, when I had a rough cut and I started putting in these feeling things and it seemed to work and it seemed to work to everybody around me, the studio saw it and went crazy…" (10:23)

After the version of *THX 1138* cut down by the studio failed at the box office, Warner Brothers canceled the deal with American Zoetrope, leaving it bankrupt and both Lucas and Coppola had to find new projects and while Coppola went on to make *The Godfather,* (1972) Lucas had already been thinking about a Flash Gordon style space fantasy film. But being pressured by his peers to make a more "socially acceptable" film, he decided to make a low budget coming-of-age comedy inspired by his teenage years car-cruising in Modesto, which would be called *American Graffiti* (Kaminski 40).

He developed the idea for *American Graffiti* with his friends Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck, who were husband and wife and he wanted them to write the screenplay; but by the time he signed the deal for financing the film with the United Artists in 1971 the Huycks, who went on to direct their own film, weren't available any more and Lucas decided to hire writer Richard Walter. Walter's script however wasn't at all what Lucas had in mind, partly because the idea for the film originated from Lucas' personal experience, which Walter, who grew up in New York, didn't share. Lucas was forced to write the script himself, although the Huycks would eventually polish the final draft (Kaminski 41). Lucas explained their involvement in writing the script as follows:

> 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 rewrite 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." (Kaminski 42)

Having finished the screenplay, Lucas began shooting on a very tight schedule – the whole film was shot in 28 days of on location night shoots for less than $800,000. It was a very difficult shoot and Lucas actually began to think about not going back to directing after *American Graffiti*. He 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" (Kaminski 43).

But having closed quite a bad deal with the studio for the film, only getting $20,000 for writing and directing, when after two years the work on *American Graffiti* was finally finished, Lucas was left without money, surviving only thanks to his wife Marcia. Marcia, being a professional editor, supported Lucas financially throughout the years of making *THX 1138* and *American Graffiti.* At this time, the couple decided to move to Mill Valley near San Francisco, where Lucas was hoping to become a part of the independent scene which had risen from the ashes of American Zoetrope and Marcia worked as assistant editor on Michael Ritchie's *The Candidate* (Kaminski 44).

Lucas, who was now waiting for *American Graffiti* to be released and dreading that it would be another box office failure, still had his mind set on the space adventure film. He knew that he needed a new film just to survive financially, because the couple was deeply in debt, and so he decided to start working on what he still thought of as mainly a children's film. Ha said in an interview for Starlog magazine:

> 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. (Kaminski 44)

And with this conviction, Lucas set out to create not only a children's film but a new myth he felt America was sorely missing. But he would soon find that coming up with an original story of such epic proportions wouldn't be a simple task and he would first have to gather many diverse sources of inspiration, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

ORIGINS AND ISPIRATION

The script Lucas developed was a melting pot of many influences. In order to understand the appeal of *Star Wars* to American audiences, we need to look at these influences in witting and designing it, since one of the greatest attractions of *Star Wars* is the successful combination of the familiarity of the story and character archetypes deeply rooted in both ancient and modern mythology with the otherworldly feel of the setting.

As we already know, as a boy in the 1950s USA, George Lucas used to watch old black and white adventure serials on television, such as *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe*, the short episodes of which were originally made to precede an unrelated feature film in cinemas and always ended on a cliffhanger in order to draw the audience in for the next week's episode. In these shows, the protagonist fought and defeated various aliens from outer space but always ended up in a perilous situation in the cliffhanger ending, only to quickly find his way out of it at the beginning of the next episode and end up in another, just as dangerous at the end of it (White 15). These serials provided substantial inspiration to Lucas when writing *Star Wars*. In the 1995 interview with the renowned film critic and historian Leonard Maltin, Lucas says: "I would say, probably the original impetus for the whole thing was I used to watch a serial on television called *Adventure Theater* and they had *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* on it and I used to love that, so I went off and wrote my own space opera" (1:10).

In fact, Lucas' original intention was to film a feature length remake of the *Flash Gordon* adventure serial and he even approached the copyright owners, who however asked for a sum, which Lucas considered unreasonable, so instead he started working on his own script in which he wanted to capture the spirit of the old matinee sci-fi adventures he loved to watch as a young boy (Edwards 4-5) but he also wanted to bring this genre to a higher quality level, because while he loved those serials as a boy, when he watched them again through the eyes of an adult, he was shocked at how bad they actually were. In Dale Pollock's *Skywalking*, Lucas is quoted to have said: "I was appalled at how I could have been so enthralled with something so bad. Holy smokes, if I got this excited about this stuff, it's going to be easy for me to get kids excited about the same thing, only better" (Pollock 17). And even though he didn't expect the immense success that *Star Wars* would become, he was quite confident that it would be a viable project (Edwards 7).

But Lucas' aimed higher than just recreating the excitement he got when watching the aforementioned adventure serials; he dreamed of producing a new kind of mythology. In T. Edwards' book *The Unauthorized Star Wars Compendium* Lucas is quoted to have said at a press conference:

> Mythology in general is used to convey certain social values and social precepts from one generation to the next. In the beginning it was oral tradition designed to give the community a cohesive set of thinking modules that allowed them to be a society. And these were told in story form because it was the best way to teach them. In modern society, where there's competition from lots of media, better communications, larger masses of people, the conscious use of mythology has gone by the wayside. (5)

In an earlier chapter I already spoke about the Western playing the role of mythology for America and how Lucas felt there was a necessity of replacing it with a new myth, due to its loss of popularity. In the 1997 *Making of Star Wars Special Edition* documentary Lucas says: "I was very interested in creating a modern myth to replace what I'd seen had been occupied by the Western. The Western was sort of a modern American mythology that helped explain the morals and the values and the way things worked in our society" (02:07).

Coming up with an original story was not easy and Lucas therefore started brainstorming different ideas and putting exotic sounding names down on paper and pairing them up with short character descriptions. Besides names such as Emperor Ford Xerxes XII or Xenos, this brainstorming exercise was also where names such as Luke Skywalker or Han Solo first appeared, although their character descriptions were quite different from those in the final film, Han was described as "the leader of the Hubble people," and Luke as "the Prince of Bebers." This brainstorming excercise finally resulted in a short handwritten plot summary titled *Journal of the Whills*, the beginning of which read: "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." As you can see, the concept of the Jedi knights, a crossover between a superhero and a Japanese samurai warrior was there from the very beginning. It also sported a pilot named Han and a Galactic Empire but otherwise, it had little in common with the final film (Kaminski 48-49).

From Michael Kaminski's book *The Secret History of Star Wars*, we learn that this first story outline was very confusing and when Lucas showed it to his agent, Jeff

Berg, "Berg was left utterly confounded at the incomprehensible story and recommended Lucas try something simpler. 'I knew more about the story based on what George had told me than what was in that brief treatment.' Frustrated, Lucas began anew" (49).

When trying to come up with an all-new story, Lucas had to look for further inspiration and after some consideration he decided to draw from one of his all-time favorite filmmakers, the famous Japanese director Akira Kurosawa. Lucas found out about Kurosawa when attending film school, from one of his friends and classmates John Milius and grew very fond of Kurosawa's works (Kaminski 49).

The, for Americans, exotic setting of Kurosawa's ancient Japan samurai films (for which he was best known, even though he also made several films from present day Japan) was ideal for what Lucas had planned (Kaminski 49-50). As Lucas says in the 1997 *Making of Star Wars Special Edition* Laser Disc documentary, "it had to be somewhere over the hill, outside of people's known realm of awareness" (2:30). Lucas' inspiration in Kurosawa's work can be seen not only in terms of story and characters but also in terms of visuals, including the use of lenses and Kurosawa's signature wipes between scenes. (Kaminski "The Influence and Imagery of Akira Kurosawa Part II") Lucas talks about this in an interview originally found on the DVD of Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* released by Criterion in 2001:

> 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.

(YouTube.com "George Lucas talks about the influence of samurai movies on Star Wars")

Akira Kurosawa's own relationship with Hollywood and western films in general is an interesting one; having grown up in the 1910s and 1920s Kurosawa would watch many American silent films, the influence of which can be traced in Kurosawa's own films. Later Kurosawa was also greatly influenced by American Westerns, especially those by John Ford, whom Kurosawa regarded as his idol, drawing a lot of inspiration from these American classics (Kaminski "The Influence and Imagery of Akira Kurosawa Part I"). Ironically, later, many of Kurosawa's samurai films were adapted or remade into Westerns by American and European filmmakers. For example the Westerns *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) and *The Outrage* (1964) were licensed remakes of Kurosawa's films *Seven Samurai* (1954), *Rashomon* (1950) respectively and when in 1964 Sergio Leone made his Spaghetti Western *The Fistful Of Dollars* staring Clint Eastwood and it became an international hit, Kurosawa sued Leone for copyright infringement, since *The Fistful Of Dollars* was basically a scene-by-scene remake of Kurosawa's 1961 samurai film *Yojimbo*. Kurosawa won the lawsuit and and ended up making more money on the royalties from the Leone's film than he made from his own original (Kaminski 54).

It is therefore no wonder that for his first 1973 story outline following the unsuccessful *Journal of the Whills* synopsis, Lucas actually decided to do a straightforward space opera remake of *The Hidden Fortress,* Kurosawa's 1958 film set in feudal Japan. And even though throughout the next four drafts the story got further and further away from that of *The Hidden Fortress* many elements of Kurosawa's film still remain in the final script and in the final *Star Wars* film. *The Hidden Fortress* is told from the point of view of two unimportant peasants, who get mixed up in events grander than themselves and who serve as a comic relieve throughout the film, just like the two famous droids R2-D2 and C3P0. The hero of Kurosawa's film is an old samurai general, who has to come out of retirement and go on a mission to infiltrate the enemy's hidden fortress and rescue the princess and in the process he has to face his old arch enemy in a swordfight, just like the character of an old Jedi master and retired general Ben Kenobi who has to infiltrate the evil Empire's space fortress to save the princess in *Star Wars* (Star Wars), (The Hidden Fortress). Another example of Kurosawa's influence on *Star Wars* is Ben Kenobi cutting off an arm of a minor villain in the famous cantina scene in *Star Wars* being a direct homage to a similar scene in another Kurosawa samurai film, *Yojimbo* (Kaminski 61). The only main character types missing from Kurosawa's story

arch are Luke Skywalker and Han Solo, whose origins can be tracked to the other two of Lucas' main influences, classic mythology and Western.

The story of Luke Skywalker, the naïve young farmer, who meets an old warrior and embarks with him on a journey to becoming a hero, follows most of the steps of a "hero's journey" as described by professor Joseph Campbell in his 1949 book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Kaminski 102). Lucas first came into contact with Campbell's works about these archetypes which can be found in all world's myths and fairytales, when he studied anthropology in college and is said to have rediscovered Campbell when writing the third draft of the screenplay (Kaminski 25,102). Since we already know that Lucas was aiming to create a new kind of myth, it then seems perfectly logical that he would turn to the works of professor Campbell's, who spent his whole life researching the World's mythologies and trying to find inner connections between them – in other words trying to discover what it is about mythology that speaks to human kind on an unconscious level (Christian 603). Campbell himself extensively cited the works of a Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, who in turn used the writings of his colleague Sigmund Freud to form his theory of archetypes (Campbell 364). In *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* Campbell proposes the idea of a universal pattern into which the stories of most mythological heroes would fit, he calls this series of steps the hero has to go through during their story the "hero's journey". Campbell shows these patterns on such examples as Greek mythology or the Arthurian legends and the same pattern can be applied to the character of Luke Skywalker (Henderson 19, 20).

The character of the roguish smuggler Han Solo bears a great resemblance to the heroes of Lucas' another major influence, the genre he aimed to replace with *Star Wars*; the Western. Han's character is clearly reminiscent of western heroes such as Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, outlaws and criminals who however secretly have a soft heart. When Lucas was asked about his following project after *American Graffiti* in 1973, he actually replied: "I'm working on a western movie set in outer space" (Kaminski 17). Probably the most clearly western-inspired sequence in *Star Wars* is the Mos Eisley space port, which Ben Kenobi describes, when the heroes are overlooking the small town from a nearby mountain, as "a wretched hive of scum and villainy" (Star Wars). The scene inside the Mos Eisley cantina then evokes the typical saloon scenes, which can be found in majority of westerns. The western film often cited as probably the most influential on *Star Wars* is John Ford's 1956 film *The Searchers* starring John Wayne. References to *The Searchers* can be found in several scenes in *Star Wars*. The scene

between Han Solo and the bounty hunter Greedo, who comes to collect the price on Han's head is an homage to a scene from another western, Sergio Leone's 1966 *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* starring Clint Eastwood (Davies "Before the Galaxy Far, Far Away").

As can be expected from a film with the word "wars" in the title, another influence definitely worth mentioning is war films, particularly then films depicting World War II, which inspired mainly the visual-effects-heavy starfighter dogfight sequences to a point where Lucas actually used footage from various World War II movies to demonstrate to his visual effects artists at Industrial Light and Magic the kind of shots he wanted to see. Later he also used World War II film footage to make rough cuts of the space battle scenes in order to determine their pacing and the way of intercutting the starfighter shots with the pilots and base shots, before the final effect shot could be delivered by ILM (Edwards 34). A World War II film, particularly influential on *Star Wars* was J. Lee Thompson's 1961 epic *The Guns of Navarone* in which a British military unit is sent to destroy a strong enemy weapon, (imdb.com, "The Guns of Navarone") similarly to how the rebels in *Star Wars* have to destroy the Empire's super weapon the Death Star (Davies "Before the Galaxy Far, Far Away").

While we already know that the Jedi knights were largely based on ancient Japan's Samurai warriors, the origins of their supernatural powers and the semi-religious concept of 'The Force' is another subject to be taken into account here. In the film, we learn about the Force from the character of Ben Kenobi, who describes it as follows: "Well, the Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It's an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us; it binds the galaxy together." (Star Wars 32:55) This final concept of the Force is much more mystical than the way it appeared in the earlier drafts of the screenplay. In the first draft of the screenplay, the force is practically non existent and only appears in a phrase "May the force of others be with you", which merely serves to wish someone good luck and as Kaminski says "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" (Kaminski 77).

The Force of Others first appeared as a fully formed concept in the second draft screenplay but rather than a mystical religious notion, it was designed as much more of a superpower inspired by old sci-fi novels and comic books such as E.E. Smith's *Lensmen* series or Jack Kirby's *New Gods*. Lucas himself admits that it is not an original idea.

When Mark Hamill (the actor who portrayed Luke Skywalker) asked Lucas about the origins of the idea, Lucas reportedly answered: "It's in about 450 old science fiction novels" (Kaminski 78).

According to Kaminski, the spiritual side of the Force, appearing in its incarnations of the later versions of the script and of the final film, is largely inspired by the New Age spiritualism movement, which embraced the ideas of eastern religions and mysticism, melting the religious philosophies of Japan, China but even ancient Egypt and various other aboriginal religions including that of native Americans, into a New Age religion, the main idea of which was that "all lifeforms emitted some kind of life-energy that flowed throughout the universe." This new religion was being largely accepted and spread by the hippie culture of the 60s and 70s in the United States as a kind of counterweight to the "Christian stronghold of the 50s" and it is possible to see the appearance of a similar idea in *Star Wars* as a "commentary on the culture of the 1970's" (78).

SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION

Before he could start the time consuming process of working on a script for what he called *The Star Wars* at the time*,* Lucas had to make sure that he would get paid for it. When he first pitched the idea for *The Star Wars* to the film studios, he still didn't have much beyond a mere concept. As we learn from the 2004 *Empire of Dreams* documentary, the first studios to which he showed the idea were United Artists and Universal Pictures, who financed his previous film. Both of these studios refused *Star Wars*, so he took his project to 20th Century Fox and Fox's newly appointed head of creative affairs, Alan Ladd jr. gave the project a green light, even though he didn't quite understand the movie but being impressed by having seen a preview screening of Lucas' then unreleased *American Graffiti*, he believed in Lucas as a movie maker. In *Empire of Dreams* Ladd says:

> We had a meeting and George said, 'well, I've been thinking about this thing called *Star Wars,*' and he told me about it and I said 'that sounds terrific.' I mean, the technology part of it was completely over my head but I just believed in him and his genius. I sort of recognized of off *American Graffiti* that he really was a genius, so I just flew with it. (13:20)

Another reason Fox agreed to make Lucas' space movie was their previous success in the field with the *Planet of the Apes* series (Edwards, 8). Fox closed a deal with Lucas for $50,000 to write the script and $100,000 to direct *Star Wars* - a film which would eventually hold the title of the highest grossing film of all time for several years until the 1982 release of Lucas' friend's Steven Spielberg's *E.T.* and reclaim the title after the 1997 20th Anniversary *Special Edition* theatrical re-release (only for a short time before the release of James Cameron's *Titanic* later the same year) (Edwards 9).

After Lucas' *American Graffiti* was released in 1973, it became a huge hit, making more than hundred times its original budget. Lucas was told by his agent that he could renegotiate his contract with Fox to more than $500,000 (Edwards 9) but Lucas, who finally no longer found himself in financial need, him and his wife having become millionaires after the release of *American Graffiti* (Kaminski 64) opted instead to "supervise all merchandise and receive a percentage of the profits, retain all literary and music rights and all sequel rights, although Fox would have first crack of distributing said sequels." Fox gave in to these demands easily, thinking they were actually saving a lot of

money, which they would have had to pay Lucas, had he demanded renegotiation of his salary agreed upon prior to *American Graffiti* becoming a hit. Their belief would naturally prove erroneous, especially in terms of the merchandising (Edwards 9).

This is a point which is often cited as a proof of Lucas being a marketing genius, since he ended up making much more profit from the merchandising than the film itself, but it actually seems that Lucas' original goal in acquiring the merchandising rights may have been different. Today merchandising is a big part of a film's promotional campaign but back then, the studios didn't invest in promotion far as much as today and all that changed thanks to *Star Wars* (Kaminski 280). Lucas says in the *Empire of Dreams* documentary: "When I took over the licensing, I simply said I'm gonna be able to make T-shirts, I'm gonna be able to make posters and I'm gonna be able to sell this movie, even though the studio won't." So it seems that he actually wanted control over the merchandising because he knew the studio wouldn't promote the film enough; he wanted the merchandising to provide publicity to the movie rather than the movie serving as advertisement, so that he would make a lot of profit from the merchandising sales (Empire of Dreams 20:05). This theory is also supported by the infamous "empty box" strategy that Kenner, the toy making company hired to produce *Star Wars* toys, had to employ when, not expecting the huge sales, they weren't able to make enough toys to satisfy the demand of the 1977 Christmas market, so they decided to send the retailers empty boxes with a card saying that the owner can pick up their toy as soon as it becomes available (Marich 144).

Demanding the sequel rights of course also paid off enormously for Lucas but here too it seems his original intention wasn't a financial one. Lucas said that at the time of writing the second draft of the screenplay, he already had too much material and an extensive back story, so he decided to split it into three parts, leave the other ideas for the sequels and only make the first act into a movie that could stand alone but he always wanted to go back to the other concepts and finish them. According to Edwards in a late 1990s interview Lucas said:

> I told myself, 'Some day I'm going to get back to those.' This is partly what a writer does; you get an idea that's too big for one book, so you put the rest over there and you concentrate on this one part. That's what I did. I finished the first one. Some said I showed wisdom in retaining the sequel rights, but the reason was I didn't want some clause in there that would make it virtually impossible to take the sequels anywhere

else. I decided that even if the first one didn't do well, by hook or by crook I would finish the other two." (13-14)

Having secured the financial and legal side of the project with Fox, Lucas could finally concentrate on developing the script, which would prove to be a very demanding and time consuming work. Lucas spent nearly three years working on the script, during which time the story went through many different versions. The first draft screenplay, finished in May 1974, follows the story of two brothers, Anakin and Deak Starkiller and their father Kane, the last of the Jedi Bendu. The draft also introduces two villiains: general Darth Vader and a Black Knight of the Sith, Prince Valorum, who would later be merged into the character of the astray Jedi Knight Darth Vader. In fact, in the final screenplay Vader is a combination of three different characters from the first draft, since he inherits the external characteristics of Kane Starkiller, who is described to be wearing a cybernetic armor, which is keeping him alive and in the second film *The Empire Strikes Back*, the story was altered, so that the Vader character encompasses the character of the hero's father as well. The space smuggler Han Solo is featured in this draft as well, although he appears as a large alien with green skin (Edwards 11). Later Lucas made a revised version of this script in which the storyline remains the same but several names and concepts were changed, such as Anakin Starkiller being renamed to Justin Valor and Prince Valorum, the Black Knight of the Sith being changed to Captain Dodona, a member of a warrior sect known as the Legions of Lettow. Lucas wasn't satisfied with this version of the script either and decided to start fresh (Edwards 12).

The second-draft screenplay, finished in January 1975 is titled *The Adventures of the Starkiller, Episode One of the Star Wars* and although it centers around a quest for the Kiber Crystal, "a powerful energy source that controlled the Force of Others," it is much closer to the final story and finally Lucas had a script that was "manageable from both an aesthetic and technical point of view. He had pared his story down, blended characters and discarded material that would eventually comprise the other two films" (Edwards 12).

On May 1st 1975 Lucas produced a new six page synopsis which he sent to 20th Century Fox to inform them about the development of the story. This new synopsis was basically a short summary of the second draft screenplay. In May 1975 Lucas decided to rename *The Star Wars* to *Episode Four in the Adventures of Luke Starkiller*. At this point however this decision probably wasn't made because of the planned prequels; In the

Unauthorized Star Wars Compendium the producer of *Star Wars* Garry Kurtz is quoted to have said in an interview for *Starlog* magazine:

> Certain kinds of movies just work better – or seem to work better – when you come in in the middle. I know that was the case with a lot of the low-budget films I made with Roger Corman. When you arrive in the middle, you miss all the tedious exposition and jump right into the action. We wanted that effect with *Star Wars* – the feeling that you had come in after the movie had started." (13)

This idea was later dropped however, and the third draft of the script was titled Episode I again (Kaminski 104) and the final film was simply called *Star Wars* and the Episode title was omitted completely. It was only after the huge success of the film and during the production of the first sequel that Lucas decided to go back to this concept and dub the sequel *Episode V* and then he retroactively renamed *Star Wars* to *Star Wars Episode IV A New Hope* in 1981 (Kaminski 230).

The third screenplay finished in August 1975, was once more much closer to the final film as we know it than its predecessor, although it still included the concept of the Kyber Crystal as an embodiment of the Force (Edwards 14).

In J.W. Rinzler's book *Making of Star Wars* is this quote from an interview Lucas gave having just finished the third draft:

> The problem is what happens in a lot of movies. It started as a concept. So I wanted to make a movie in outer space, let's say an action-adventure movie just like Flash Gordon used to be. People running around in spaceships, shooting each other, and exotic people and exotic locations, and an Empire. I knew I wanted to have a big battle in outer space, a dogfight, so that's what I started with. Then I asked myself, What story can I tell? So I was searching for a story for a long time. I went through several stories, trying to find the one that was right, that would have enough personality, tell the story I wanted to tell, be entertaining, and, at the same time, include all the action-adventure aspects that I wanted. That's really where the evolution came from: Each story was a totally different story about totally different characters before I finally landed on the story. A lot of the scripts have the same scenes in them. On the second script I pilfered some of the scenes from the first script, and I kept doing it until I finally got the final script—

which is the one I am working on now—which has everything from all the other scripts I wanted. Now what I'm doing in this rewrite is I'm slowly shaving down the plot so it seems to work within the context of everything I wanted to include. After that, I'll go through and do another rewrite, which will develop characters and dialog. (93-94)

So as we can see, Lucas now only needed to "polish some rough edges" and in March 1976 he finally had in his hands a finished screenplay which he decided to film (Edwards 14).

For the main trio of characters, Lucas decided to cast relatively unknown actors; Luke Skywalker would be played by Mark Hamill, Princess Leia by Carrie Fisher and to the role of Han Solo Lucas decided to cast Harrison Ford, who played a small role in *American Graffiti*. The role of Luke's mentor, an old Jedi general Ben Kenobi, was reluctantly accepted by a renowned British actor Alec Guiness, who won an Academy Award for his role in *The Bridge over the River Kwai*. The main villain, Darth Vader was played by a British bodybuilder David Prowse, although his voice would later be dubbed over by an American actor James Earl Jones (Edwards 19-25).

With his cast complete, Lucas could start filming. First, the cast and crew had to go to Tunisia, where Lucas found his dramatic, otherworldly exteriors for the desert planet called Tatooine (Edwards 26). As we learn from the *Emipre of Dreams* documentary, the filmmakers were working on a very tight schedule and the shoot was riddled with all kinds of problems. "Just one day after the shooting started, the Sahara was pelted with its first major rainfall in 50 years" and the shooting had to be suspended for a few days (34:33). In the documentary, Lucas says:

It was the first two weeks of shooting, we'd run into a lot of weather problems. The sets have blown down. I didn't get everything shot. It was a disaster. At that point I was pretty depressed, saying: "Boy, I've gotten myself way over my head. I don't know what I'm gonna do". (35:40)

After the hardship of the shoot in North Africa, the production could move to a more controlled environment; the huge soundstages of Elstree Studios in London, where impressive sets had been built over a period of several months for all the interior scenes to be filmed in. But even here Lucas was confronted with a variety of problems, especially with the strict British union regulations and the crew not believing in the film (Empire of Dreams 39:10). The film's cameraman Gil Taylor frequently disagreed with

Lucas, who had his own specific ideas about the cinematography. The films producer, Gary Kurtz remembers:

> Gill Taylor was a very old school cameraman – very crotchety. George, coming out of low budget filmmaking was used to doing a lot of things himself. So George would say things like, "Well, put a light here." And Gil took offence at that kind of thing. He says, "That's not your job, son. You tell me what you want to see and I'll do it, the way I think is best to create what you want to see." It was a clash of style of working. (Empire of Dreams 42:43)

In addition to this, the schedule was still very tight and the studio was very adamant that the shoot had to finish on time and rather than adding another week of shooting, opted to shoot with two units and at the very end of the shoot the crew actually had to slit up into three units, so the last scenes were shot "at breakneck speed, with Lucas frantically bicycling from one soundstage to another" (Empire of Dreams 51:40).

After the difficult shoot was finished, postproduction could start; this would include editing, special effects, scoring and sound-mixing. Just like the shooting, the editing process was very trying for Lucas, who, dissatisfied with the first rough cut made by the British editor John Jympson, had to step in, fire Jympson and ask his wife Marcia to help him edit the film from scratch. This, of course, stretched the already tight schedule, so Lucas ended up hiring editors Richard Chew and Paul Hirsch to help have the first rough cut finished by Thanksgiving 1976. The uphill battle they had to fight was handsomely rewarded when in April 1978, *Star Wars* won an Oscar for Best Editing, making Marcia the 6th woman to ever win an Oscar for editing (Kaminski "In Tribute to Marcia Lucas").

Another Oscar winning side of *Star Wars*, of course were the groundbreaking visual effects. As in the 70s there were no visual effects companies and as more realistic film were becoming more and more popular, many of the studios' special effects departments were being disbanded, so when *Star Wars* got a green light for production in 1975, Lucas, knowing that he is going to need a large number of complicated special effects shots, founded his own visual effect company called Industrial Light and Magic or in frequently used short form ILM. Lucas decided to staff ILM with young people working in commercials and on architectural models and such (Empire of Dreams 19:38).

A team of model-builders began sketching and constructing model spaceships based mainly on paintings done by Ralph McQuarie, a concept artist and designer who

worked for Boeing and whom Lucas hired to create paintings based on scenes described in his scripts, so that he could present the visual appeal of *Star Wars* to 20th Century Fox and persuade them to approve the budget he needed (<u>Empire of Dreams</u> 16:30).

Meanwhile ILM's technical department worked on perfecting a visual effects technique called motion control, which enables the artists to repeat the same camera motion when shooting several separate elements, such as spaceship models and backgrounds, so that when these elements are later (at this time optically) composited into one finished shot, the motion matches perfectly. This method was revolutionized by ILM by using computers to program the camera movement precisely. In *Empire of Dreams* ILM's supervisor, an experienced special effects cameraman John Dykstra remembers:

> We made [motion control] production-savvy by tying it into a computer, which was at that point custom built processors. There were no P.C.s. You didn't go down and buy a P.C. We built them from scratch. (<u>Empire of Dreams</u> 21:10)

The groundbreaking special effects of *Star Wars* are inarguably an important part of the film's huge success and historical importance and ILM became one of the world's leading visual effects companies.

Another important, Academy Award winning part of *Star Wars* was its soundntrack. In this area *Star Wars* was awarded three different Oscars; aside from composer John Williams winning an award for his epic symphonic score, *Star Wars* also won a Best Sound Mixing award and the film's young sound designer Ben Burt, the creator of, among many others, the distinctive light saber sound effect, won a Special Achievement award for the creation of the alien, creature and robot voices featured in *Star Wars*.

RELEASE AND RECEPTION

When *Star Wars* was released on May 25th 1977, it became an instant hit. "Word of mouth spread like wildfire and its box office numbers climbed quicker than Fox executives could keep track of. Show after show was selling out, and there were permanent line-ups around city blocks." The film made its budget back in just over a week (Kaminski 142) and soon it became the most successful film of all time, beating Lucas' friend's Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (Edwards 42). It became the biggest film event of the summer and it was talked about everywhere. In *Secret History of Star Wars* Kaminski describes the situation:

> The film was an out of control phenomenon, like a cinema version of Beatle Mania. Everyone involved in the film became celebrities, and kids would ask ILM modelmakers for autographs, while the stars of the film could hardly venture outdoors without being mobbed in the streets. At work, adults excitedly talked about the film around the water cooler, while at the playground kids excitedly talked about the film around the jungle gym. It was an unprecedented feat in the entertainment business. (Kaminski 144)

The over-all critical reception was just as positive. In 2010, Kaminski published on his website a study called *Original Trilogy Reception 1977-1983*, in which he researches the original critical reception of the *Star Wars* films by browsing through dozens of contemporary reviews from major periodicals. His research method led to expression of the favorability of each review on a percentage scale and his final average result for *Star Wars* was 83%. He further divides his results into three waves based on the time the reviews were published; the first wave of reviews coming out shortly after the initial release of *Star Wars* was the most favorable one, with an average of 94% with no expressly negative reviews. The second wave of reviews coming out approximately a month after the film's release and the third wave coming out two to six months after the release both averaged at 73% with many thoroughly positive reviews but also a few expressly negative ones. Kaminski however remarks that the negative reviews were more "a reaction against the cult status the film had earned by that time" and counter-reaction to the previously overly positive reviews. For example Martin Knelman's late June review in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, opens with the words, "Meet the hardest of hearts," in reaction to an earlier review published in *Newsweek*, which stated: "Lucas wants to touch

the child in all of us. Only the hardest of hearts won't let George do it" (Kaminksi "Original Trilogy Reception 1977-1983").

As Kaminski himself says, this study cannot be thought of as entirely accurate but it can be used as a useful guideline:

> Any study such as this is subjective to some degree and limited to an equal degree. I do not hold that these figures be considered absolute. However, I believe my methodology was valid enough and my sampling rate high enough that these can be useful as indicators or rough guidelines--perhaps a 5% margin of error can be reasonably expected (either higher or lower), but overall I would consider these accurate enough to invite broad discussion. (Kaminksi "Original Trilogy Reception 1977-1983")

In any case, it can be stated with some confidence that the initial reception of *Star Wars* both by the audiences and by critics was very positive.

After the exhausting experience of writing and directing *Star Wars*, Lucas decided to only take on the role of executive producer and author of the original story for *Star Wars*' two sequels, released in 1980 and 1983 respectively, and leave the directing job to others; *The Empire Strikes Back* was directed by one of Lucas' USC film-school teachers Irwin Kerschner and *Return of the Jedi* was directed by Richard Marquand. Both of the sequels, while not quite as successful nor critically acclaimed as the original, still managed to make the list of top ten highest grossing films of all time at the time of their release. The sequels also introduced popular characters such as master Yoda or Jabba the Hutt and further pushed the envelope of special effects.

With the success of the sequels (when the numbers are adjusted for inflation, all three films are in fact still within the fifteen highest grossing films of all time) the popularity of *Star Wars* continued well into the 80s and was being constantly renewed by Lucasfilm's merchandising machine producing *Star Wars* themed toys, TV shows, books, comics and computer games. In 1997, for the original film's 20th Anniversary and in anticipation of the announced *Star Wars* prequels, the *Star Wars* trilogy was re-released to cinemas as a *Special Edition* with added scenes, new soundtrack and digital visual effects and earned a huge profit. In 1999, *Star Wars Episode I The Phantom Menace*, the first of the prequels came out, followed by *Star Wars Episode II Attack of the Clones* in 2002 and *Star Wars Episode III Revenge of the Sith,* all very financially successful.

With the success of *Star Wars* and its sequels and merchandising sales going through the roof, George Lucas was able to build himself an entertainment empire branching into several companies including Lucasfilm, Industial Light and Magic, Skywalker Sound, LucasArts or Lucas Animation, and help other filmmakers achieve their dreams, among others Lucas served as an executive producer on his friend's Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones* films or his role-model Akira Kurosava's 1980 film *Kagemuscha* (lucasfilm.com "Company History").

A CULTURAL LANDMARK WORTHY OF PRESERVATION

Star Wars became a global phenomenon and an inseparable part of not only American but the world's culture. To illustrate this, in the following three paragraphs, I decided to list some events that show the lasting global influence of *Star Wars*.

In the census conducted in 2001 in the United Kingdom, "Jedi" was surveyed as the fourth largest religion in Britain, when nearly 400,000 people put it as their religion. And this is not a singular occurrence, similar thing happened in New Zeeland, Australia and even the Czech Republic. (Carbone "Czech Republic Sees Rise of 'Jedi Knights' as Religious Movement")

In the late 1970s a Vietnam Veteran Jim Channon, inspired by the New Age movement, started doing research financed by the U.S. Army on training a unit called "The First Earth Battalion", which would be comprised of soldiers with supernatural powers. The project's codename was "Project Jedi" and the soldiers were called "Jedi Warriors." (Choi "How 'Star Wars' Changed Everything")

In 1983 American president Ronald Regan announced a program called Strategic Defense Initiative, which included such things as space-based nuclear X-ray lasers, subatomic particle beams or computer-guided projectiles fired by electromagnetic rail guns. The critics of the program dubbed it the "*Star Wars*" program, to portray it as unrealistic, infeasible "science fiction" as opposed to an achievable technology. Regan himself however probably used this connection to Lucas' film, when in a speech to support the program he called the USSR "the evil Empire." In an interesting twist of events, Regan's speeches about the SDI mirror the theory the Western being the cultural predecessor of *Star Wars*; during the promotion of the SDI, Regan, himself an ex-actor, used a western analogy to describe the current situation between USA and USSR: "It is like having two westerners standing in a saloon aiming their guns at each other's head permanently. There has to be a better way." And the better way according to him was what would be known as the "*Star Wars*." The program was however eventually abandoned in favor of more conventional methods. (Weinberger "Regan's Strategic Defense Initiative")

One could of course find many other such stories throughout the years that followed the release of *Star Wars*. *Star Wars* was quoted or referenced in countless films and popular TV shows and inspired many filmmakers to make their own films. The co-

writer and director of the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy, Peter Jackson says in the short 2004 documentary *The Force Is with Them – The Legacy of Star Wars*:

> *Star Wars* smashed open the possibilities of what film could actually do and it was like a seismic shift in how people perceive the cinema going experience. Not only did it have a powerful theme and stories that could resonate but it was executed in a way that was so much more believable and so much more exhilarating than anything that we'd seen before. (03:37)

In the same documentary, the director of such movie hits as *The Terminator*, *Aliens*, *Titanic* or *Avatar*, James Cameron says: "I got really energized by *Star Wars*. In fact, I quit my job as a truck driver and said: 'Well, if I'm gonna do this, I better get going' " (0:16) and Ridley Scott, the director of such films as *Alien*, *Blade Runner* or *Gladiator*, admits to being heavily influenced by *Star Wars* (6:36). And that is only the tip of the iceberg, *Star Wars* opened the door for countless new film makers and allowed them to transfer their dreams onto the big screen.

When the American National Film Registry was opened as a special branch of the Library of Congress in 1989, with the mandate to select 25 American films every year and preserve them for future generations, 1977 *Star Wars* was among the first 25 films added to this list of most important American films. But here a problem occurred, to this day, the National Film Registry still has not received the requested archival print of *Star Wars* from Lucasfilm, instead, a 1997 *Special Edition* print was offered to them. The 1997 version was however heavily altered and since the legislation clearly dictates that "the version of a film first published" be archived, the NFR refused to accept this print and Lucasfilm is still refusing to deliver an archival print of the original theatrical 1977 version of *Star Wars* (savestarwars.com "Request Denied").

This problem stems from Lucas' determination to wipe the original version from existence. In 1997 Lucas told American Cinematographer:

> There will only be one. And it won't be what I would call the 'rought cut', it'll be the 'final cut.' The other one will be some sort of interesting artifact that people will look at and say, 'There was an earlier draft of this.'...What ends up being important in my mind is what the DVD version is going to look like, because that's what everybody is going to remember. The other versions will disappear. Even the 35 million tapes of *Star Wars* out there won't last more than 30 or 40 years. A hundred

years from now, the only version of the movie that anyone will remember will be the DVD version [of the Special Edition]. (Kaminski "How the Grinch stole Star Wars").

When the *Star Wars* trilogy did finally come out on DVD in 2004, with even more alterations, the outraged fans demanding the original versions to be released actually organized themselves in an online petition at originaltrilogy.com. The petition was submitted to Lucasfilm in 2006, containing over 70,000 signatures. This resulted in the original versions being released as bonus discs alongside the 2004 versions, effectively forcing the fans to buy the same discs most of them already bought in 2004, only to find out that the original versions were sourced from a seriously outdated 1993 home video master, falling far behind the 2006 home video standards, not to mention film preservation standards. Lucasfilm's claim in response to the criticism of the 2006 release, that there are no film elements available for a proper restoration, has since been disputed. And even this version was taken off the market prior to the release of the 2011 Blu-Ray version, officially making the originals unavailable from retail in any shape or form (Kaminski "How the Grinch stole Star Wars").

Not counting the first, rather minor alteration, only done to the original film for its 1981 re-release, when the subtitle *Episode IV A New Hope* was added to fit with the sequels, (although until the prequels started coming out, the films were marketed as simply *Star Wars, The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, the full titles of the sequels were *Star Wars Episode V The Empire Strikes Back* and *Star Wars Episode VI Return of the Jedi*,) the *Star Wars* trilogy has now been altered three times. The first alteration was done for the trilogy's 1997 *Special Edition* re-release. Many changes were made; Many shots were digitally altered by adding computer generated animals and characters, sometimes obscuring the view of the camera for several seconds. Many of the original groundbreaking effect shots were replaced by new computer generated shots. Whole new scenes were added, altering the pace of the original editing. And a new soundmix was made using digital tools. The second round of alterations was done for the 2004 DVD release, this time, aside from more alterations of a similar kind to the ones done in 1997, an attempt was made to make the original trilogy more in line with the prequels, not only by digitally adding characters from the prequels to some scenes, but also aiming for a more modern appearance by significantly altering the visual look and color-palette of the original cinematography. The sound was also re-mixed yet again. (Kaminski "How the Grinch stole Star Wars") And finally for the 2011 Blu-Ray release,

even more alteration were made to both picture and sound (savestarwars.com "The Blu-Ray Blues").

I am not going to argue here, which version is superior, because it is largely a question of personal taste. I am however going to try and make a case for the preservation and release of the original theatrical version. My main argument is simple, all the post 1997 versions alter many of the aspects of *Star Wars* which won an Academy Award in 1978; *Star Wars* won an Oscar for Visual Effects and a vast majority of ILM's original effect shots were replaced by CGI or at least digitally recomposited; when, in the aforementioned documentary *The Force Is with Them – The Legacy of Star Wars*, James Cameron talks about how the groundbreaking effects of *Star Wars* with the revolutionary use of motion control when shooting model space ships, paved the way for many later hit films, his voice plays over clips of the computer generated spaceship shots, which replaced ILM's 1977 model-work in 1997. It won an Oscar for Film Editing and by adding new shots and even whole scenes, the original Oscar winning editing was altered. Two more Oscars were awarded to *Star Wars* for Costume Design and Art Direction and some of the alien costumes in the cantina scene were replaced by new ones and some of the award winning sets were digitally expanded or otherwise altered. Another academy award was given to *Star Wars* for Sound Mixing and Ben Burt was given a Special Achievement award for the creation of the alien, creature and robot voices featured in *Star Wars*, both of which are rendered meaningless by the new digital soundmix. This means, that six out of the seven Academy Award winning aspects of *Star Wars* were altered to one degree or another and the Oscar winning version of the film is not only unavailable to the public but is not being officially preserved for future generations.

It is ironic, that George Lucas was one of the initiators of the idea behind the National Film Registry when in 1988 he gave a speech against alteration of films before the American Congress. Here are some quotes from said speech:

> People who alter or destroy works of art and our cultural heritage for profit or as an exercise of power are barbarians, and if the laws of the United States continue to condone this behavior, history will surely classify us as a barbaric society. … These current defacements are just the beginning. Today, engineers with their computers can add color to black-and-white movies, change the soundtrack, speed up the pace, and add or subtract material to the philosophical tastes of the copyright holder. Tomorrow, more advanced technology will be able to replace

actors with "fresher faces," or alter dialogue and change the movement of the actor's lips to match. It will soon be possible to create a new "original" negative with whatever changes or alterations the copyright holder of the moment desires. … In the future it will become even easier for old negatives to become lost and be "replaced" by new altered negatives. This would be a great loss to our society. Our cultural history must not be allowed to be rewritten.

(savestarwars.com "The Greatest Speech against the Special Edition")

It is my opinion that *Star Wars* and its sequels are an important part of American cultural heritage and as such deserve a proper preservation in an unaltered form for future generations to not only enjoy but also study as a part of film history.

CONCLUSION

The original 1977 *Star Wars* indisputably belongs among the most important American motion pictures and with its immense influence on all parts of not only American but the world's culture it ranks as one of the most important 20th Century American works of art.

In the early seventies George Lucas set out to create a new myth; a myth that would replace the Western, American mythology of the frontier regions, where civilization meets wilderness and oppression meets anarchy and brave pioneers explore the dangerous regions, which was slowly giving way to the difficult reality of the moment. Lucas wanted to give a new spark to the imaginations of the children and young people of his time. He wanted to give them a new kind of pure righteous hero to look up to. In order to do this, he had to create a new frontier and by combining the Western with ancient mythology as well as the sci-fi adventures of the forties, he found this new frontier in outer space.

The creative drive behind *Star Wars* undoubtedly stems from a combination of Lucas' childhood experience of growing up with the Saturday matinee adventure serials and classic American westerns and his later interest in foreign and alternative experimental films but also his background in anthropology. Additionally, Lucas' ill experience with the studio system when making his first two feature films greatly influenced his attitude and decision making during the creation of *Star Wars*, when he made sure, that he not only had as much creative control as possible over the film itself, but also that he had control over the marketing of the film and over its sequels. This then resulted in the sequels and merchandising products originally intended to promote the film for its theatrical run contributing greatly to keeping *Star Wars* fresh in the minds of Americans long after it was out of movie theaters and thus helping to make it the lasting phenomenon, ingrained deeply in the American culture, which it has become.

The large variety of sources of inspiration ranges from the aforementioned westerns and adventure serials, over studies of world's mythology, to Japanese samurai films. While the experience of watching the Japanese films as a foreigner inspired the use of otherworldly locations and the attitude of not explaining the world and its rules, Lucas' anthropological education certainly played a big role in the aspect of *Star Wars*, that felt subconsciously familiar to the audiences all over the world, since it was when studying anthropology that Lucas found out about the works of Joseph Campbell; the theory of "a hero's journey," established in Campbell's book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, an

archetypical story, which can be discerned in almost of the world's myths was Lucas' inspiration for *Star Wars'* main hero, Luke Skywalker. It is evident that the perfectly balanced combination of those sources was one of the greatest factors behind the colossal success of *Star Wars*.

The overall high production value, creating a realistic looking world, which was quite unusual for sci-fi at the time, was surely also part of the success, as were the film's Oscar winning soundmix and symphonic score. Another very distinctive part of the film's success is the work of Industrial Light and Magic's special effects artists. Having revolutionized the methods used for visual effects, ILM was able to deliver hundreds of shots so exhilarating that the 1970s audiences were completely dazzled.

Star Wars wasn't only successful with the audiences, critics loved it too. In the weeks and months following its release, the majority of prominent publications gave *Star Wars* thoroughly positive reviews, no doubt contributing to the large box office numbers. This success, along with the success of the two sequels and the merchandizing sales helped Lucas build a huge entertainment empire.

In conclusion, all of the above contributions combined, create an unprecedented world-wide phenomenon, which is not only commonly quoted and referenced in the media but has been used for political propaganda and even to form new religions. It is therefore evident, that George Lucas managed to fulfill his original goal of creating a new modern myth and certainly succeeded in sparking the imagination of an entire generation of film-makers; without *Star Wars*, there would probably be no *Terminator*, no *Avatar,* no *Lord of the Rings* films, *Jurassic Park* or *The Matrix*. This makes it all the more unfortunate that the original version of the film which started it all, and its sequels, are not only unavailable to the public but by all appearances are not even preserved for future generations. While Lucas remains adamant about the suppression of the original versions, with the technologies necessary for film preservation becoming more and more affordable, it may in the end fall to the public to preserve and spread this important part of its cultural heritage.

WORKS CITED

"A look at Star Trek" tvobscurities.com, 1 Sept. 2006. n.d. n.p. Web. 28 May 2012

Becker, Edith, and Burns, Kevin, dir. *Empire of Dreams: The Story of the 'Star Wars' Trilogy.* Prometheus Entertainment, Fox Television Studios, Lucasfilm, 2004. Film.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Novato, Calif: New World Library, 2008.

Carbone, Nick. "Czech Republic Sees Rise of 'Jedi Knights' as Religious Movement." Time.com. 18 Dec 2011. Time Magazine. Web. 1 June 2012

Christian, James. *Philosophy An Introduction to the Art of Wondering*. City: Wadsworth Pub Co, 2011.

Choi, Charles. "How 'Star Wars' Changed Everything" csmonitor.com, Christian Science Monitor. 10 Aug 2010. Web. 15 May 2012

"Company History" lucasfilm.com, Lucasfilm, n.d. Web. 15 June 2012.

Davies, Gregory. "Before the Galaxy Far, Far Away: Influences on 'Star Wars'." Cineleet.com. 22 May 2008. n.p. Web. 18 May 2012

Dirks, Timothy. "Metropolis" filmsite.org, n.d. n.p. Web. 28 May 2012.

Dirks, Timothy. "Science Fiction Films" filmsite.org, n.d. n.p. Web. 28 May 2012.

Dirks, Timothy. "The Great Train Robbery" filmsite.org, n.d. n.p. Web. 25 May 2012.

Dirks, Timothy. "Western Films" filmsite.org, n.d. n.p. Web. 25 May 2012.

Edwards, Ted. *The Unauthorized Star Wars Compendium : The Complete Guide to the Movies, Comic Books, Novels, and More*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1999.

"George Lucas Leonard Maltin Interview Part 1" *YouTube.* 2009. Web. 25 May 2012.

"George Lucas Talks About the Influence of Samurai Movies on Star Wars" *YouTube.* 2009. Web. 1 May 2012.

Hausladen, Gary. *Western Places, American Myths How We Think About the West*. City: University of Nevada Pr, 2006.

Henderson, Mary. *Star Wars :The Magic of Myth*. New York: Bantam Books, 1997.

Hughess, Jerry, dir. *Empire George Lucas: Maker of Films.* n.p. , 1971. Film.

Kaminski, Michael. "How the Grinch Stole Star Wars" whatculture.com, 11 July 2008. n.p. Web. 15 June 2012.

Kaminski, Michael. "In Tribute to Marcia Lucas" secrethistoryofstarwars.com, n.d. n.p. Web. 22 April 2012.

Kaminski, Michael. "Original Trilogy Reception 1977-83" secrethistoryofstarwars.com, 2010. n.p. Web. 22 April 2012.

Kaminski, Michael. "The Influence and Imagery of Akira Kurosawa Part I" secrethistoryofstarwars.com, n.d. n.p. Web. 22 April 2012.

Kaminski, Michael. "The Influence and Imagery of Akira Kurosawa Part II" secrethistoryofstarwars.com, n.d. n.p. Web. 22 April 2012.

Kaminski, Michael. *The Secret History of Star Wars: The Art of Storytelling and the Making of a Modern Epic.* Kingston, Ont: Legacy Books Press, 2008

Kurosawa, Akira, dir. *The Hidden Fortress.* Toho Company, 1958. Film.

Lucas, George, dir. *Star Wars.* 20th Century Fox, Lucasfilm, 1977. Film.

"Star Wars Special Edition Featurette Part 1" *YouTube.* 2011. Web. 11 April 2011.

Mariano, Paul, and Norton, Kurt, dir. *These Amazing Shadows.* Gravitas Docufilms, 2011. Film.

Marich, Robert. *Marketing to Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009.

Pollock, Dale. *Skywalking : The Life and Films of George Lucas*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1999.

"Request Denied" savestarwars.com, n.d. n.p. Web. 10th June 2012.

Rinzler, J. *The Making of Star Wars : The Definitive Story Behind the Original Film : Based on the Lost Interviews From the Official Lucasfilm Archives*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2007.

The Force Is with Them: The Legacy of Star Wars. Leva Films, 2004. DVD

"The Blu-Ray Blues" savestarwars.com, n.d. n.p. Web. 10th June 2012. "The Greatest Speech Against the Special Edition Was by George Lucas" savestarwars.com, n.d. n.p. Web. 10th June 2012.

"Top 10 Sci-fi" afi.com, American Film Institute, 2008. Web. 28 May 2012.

"Top 10 Western" afi.com, American Film Institute, 2008. Web. 28 May 2012.

Unruh, Isley. "The Western: An American Mythology." isleyunruh.com, n.p. 1 March 2007. Web. 26 May 2012

White, Dana. *George Lucas*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 2000.

Weinberger, Caspar "Regan's Strategic Defense Initiative: Looking Back a Quarter of a Century Later." humanevents.com, n.p. 21 March 2008. Web. 2 June 2012

SUMMARY IN CZECH

Tato práce se soustředí na jednu z neuznávanějších vědecko-fantastických filmových sérií všech dob, původní trilogii *Hvězdných válek* a především pak na film, který to vše začal, *Hvězdné války* z r. 1977, jakožto jeden z kulturně nejvlivnějších filmových snímků 20. století. Hlavním zájmem této práce je především určit míru vlivu tohoto filmu na americkou kulturu a určit faktory, které k tomuto vlivu vedly.

První dvě kapitoly se zabývají nejdůležitějšími milníky, vedoucími k vytvoření *Hvězdných válek*, a to jak v kinematografii, tak v životě tvůrce *Hvězdných válek* George Lucase. Následující dvě kapitoly rozebírají vývoj a natáčení *Hvězdných válek*, včetně mnoha vlivů na jejich scénář a vizuální styl a podtrhují důležitost těchto vlivů pro popularitu a kulturní dopad *Hvězdných válek*. Závěrečné dvě kapitoly se zaměřují na popis a interpretaci událostí následujících po uvedení *Hvězdných válek*, jejich přijetí kritikou a jejich kulturní a společenský vliv, a také podtrhují význam tohoto filmu a jeho pokračování jakožto americké národní dědictví a důležitost jejich dochování pro budoucí generace diváků i badatelů.