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Who Lives In The Star Wars Galaxy?

By Stephen Schochet

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It's hard to say where old Hollywood ended and new Hollywood began. People in the industry don't think of themselves as making history, they are just going to work. But the day in 1967 that Jack Warner cleaned out his desk at Warner Bros. studio, George Lucas and Frances Ford Coppola arrived on the lot.

The two young filmmakers were very different in demeanor. Coppola a legend at UCLA film school was 27, a loud boisterous mixture of mogul and marxist, who prided himself in dressing like Fidel Castro. He impressed film executives at first with his bravado, but later would upset them with his reckless overspending. Five years younger, Lucas, who went to USC, was quiet and introspective. The only guys at Warners who were below 30 and wore beards, they hit it off instantly with Coppola taking the mentor role. Lucas had made a thirteen minute science fiction film project called THX 1138, a dark look at a computer controlled future. Coppola convinced his protégé to extend it into a full-length film and talked Warner Bros. into financing it.

Over the next few months the wily Coppola played both sides. "I'm telling you this kid Lucas is making a great film." Coppola told the Warner brass. "Don't put pressure on yourself, they don't expect anything," He reassured Lucas. When they saw the completed THX 1138 the Suits were furious. "Francis what is this?" "I don't know, I've never seen it." replied the bewildered producer. To Lucas's dismay the studio cut out parts from THX 1138 before they released it. "They're cutting the fingers off my baby."

THX failed at the box office and Coppola was held financially liable for \$300,000, but the two filmmakers were given another chance to make a low budget movie at Universal. Impressed by the success of Easy Rider (1969) the old guard at the studio was reaching out to new talent, once again Coppola would produce and Lucas would direct. Lucas was encouraged by his wife Marsha to make the second project more positive. At USC he had studied anthropology learning that the American male has a unique mating ritual, he drives around in cars trying to pick up girls. Lucas combined this

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observation, with his own love of classic cars, his small town upbringing in Modesto, CA and his appreciation for top 40 songs played on the radio by disc jockeys like Wolfman Jack. The result: *American Graffiti* (1973).

The now beloved film got off to a rocky start. It was previewed in San Francisco to young crowd who adored it. After the show Lucas and Coppola waited for the Universal executives to come and congratulate them. Instead they were shocked by angry accusations that they had planted their friends in the crowd and *American Graffiti* was not releasable. True to their personas Coppola argued and Lucas stood quiet. Once again George saw his film taken away and cut up by what was in his view an interfering, know nothing studio. But there was one difference between THX-1138 and *Graffiti*; *Graffiti* was a hit, a highly profitable film that made Lucas a millionaire.

Now Lucas decided to return to science fiction, this time wanting to do a more positive story than THX. After failing to acquire the rights to *Flash Gordon*, he sat down to write his own screenplay. Influenced

by the writings of Carlos Castaneda and the mythology of King Arthur, he based the characters on familiar figures. Luke Skywalker's personality came from George Lucas himself, young, adventurous, and quiet from a small town, with a love of racing cars, or in this case space pods. Han Solo was based on . . . Francis Ford Coppola. He was loud, cocky, reckless, always in debt, going through a love-hate relationship with the younger Skywalker. And the empire was actually the Hollywood studios. George Lucas striving for his creative freedom as a filmmaker would parallel Luke Skywalker's journey to win liberty from the empire, and both would achieve it thanks to *Star Wars*.

Stephen Schochet is the author and narrator of the audiobooks *Fascinating Walt Disney* and *Tales Of Hollywood*. The *Saint Louis Post Dispatch* says, "these two elaborate productions are exceptionally entertaining." Hear realaudio samples of these great, unique gifts at

The History Of The Star Wars Films

By Gray Rollins

Star Wars was one of those magnificent films that was an instant phenomenon when it hit the box office and continues to be a hit today. Why not take a moment to follow the intriguing history of *Star Wars*.

After a successful run in the early 1970s with the box office hit *American Graffiti*; in 1975 George Lucas writes a basic story about Anakin Skywalker's rise, fall, and redemption. The story is so long that it needs to be divided into 2 trilogies.

The first trilogy focuses on Anakin Skywalker's young life while the second focuses on the life of Anakin's son Luke Skywalker. Since the second trilogy is the most interesting, Lucas decides to film it first.

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He offers the film to Universal Studios who had financed his American Graffiti film, but they chose to pass thinking it was a ridiculous movie. They would live to regret this decision which would cost millions of dollars in lost profits. But they wouldn't be alone in those regrets as every Hollywood studio passed on the movie. That is except for 20th Century Fox who came up with \$10 million for Lucas to make his first Star Wars movie a reality.

In May of 1977 Fox released Episode 4 of Star Wars, A New Hope. The tone was quickly set. The film was instantly seen as the biggest adventure ever on film. The special effects were considered magnificent and outstanding. In fact, nothing remotely close had ever made it to the big screen before.

On opening day, the Star Wars movie ran in only 32 theaters, but it still produced an amazing \$254,309 in ticket sales. By the end of its first run it had become the most successful film ever in North American history grossing more than \$290 million.

Lucas reportedly received \$50 million of those profits. When Lucas cut his deal with Fox he was more interested in control of the film than he was in his percentage. He wanted all rights to the final cut and all rights to future sequels, Star Wars merchandise rights, and 40% of the gross. This deal ultimately made Lucas a billionaire.

By 1978 Lucas had purchased the more than 1800 acre Bulltail Ranch in San Rafael and soon production of the sequel to Star Wars, The Empire Strikes Back, was underway. Lucas was financing it out of his own pocket and it had a budget of \$18 million; however due to budget overruns the actual filming cost more than \$30 million. In May of 1980, The Empire Strike Back, hit the theaters grossing \$222 million, making it the highest grossing film of the year.

In May of 1983, Return of the Jedi, hit the theaters grossing \$265 million in North America and Lucas decides to retire from Star Wars projects to pursue some of his other interests. He made a vague promise to make the Prequel Trilogy someday if special effects ever become advanced enough.

That day arrived in 1994 when Lucas announces he will begin working on the Prequel Trilogy with a tentative release scheduled for 1998. In 1996 Lucas signs the biggest deal ever seen in the industry

with PepsiCo for movie tie ins, and later in the year he announces that the pre-production has started, and in May of 1999 Episode 1 titled, The Phantom Menace, was released, followed by Episode 2 titled, The Attack of the Clones.

Many believe that 100 years from now Star Wars will still have a following. In fact by then it may have grown to epidemic proportions.

Gray Rollins is a featured writer for

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movies, visit

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