



POODOO

MATT
SPRINGER

**BULLSHITTING ABOUT STAR WARS
1999 - 2009**

FROM THE INTRODUCTION

"HERE, YOU, GENTLE READER,
HAVE THE DOCUMENT OF ONE MAN'S
JOURNEY FROM AWE TO DISGUST.
BUT MORE THAN JUST
INDULGING WORLD-WEARY CYNICISM,
HERE YOU ALSO HAVE A
CELEBRATION OF THAT SHARED
EXPERIENCE OF WONDER.
LET'S BE HONEST: OUR POPULAR CULTURE,
MOSTLY, IS CRAP. BUT IT IS THE
EXPLORATION AND DISCUSSION
OF THE GREATNESS AND THE
CRAP THAT BUILDS AND MAINTAINS
FRIENDSHIPS, THAT KEEPS OUR
CONVERSATIONS AND OUR
CRITICAL MINDS ALIVE."

- STEVEN P. MILLIES, PH.D
(REAL DOCTOR & COLLEGE PROFESSOR)



i love you



i know



Alert Nerd
Press

Matt Springer: *Star Wars* Pundit

“Matt also seems to think we're doing this because we're afraid of offending Lucasfilm. What a load of Bantha Poo-Doo. We've pissed off LFL numerous times, we just don't care to go broadcasting it to the world. This site could be shut down tomorrow and frankly it wouldn't be the end of the world. We'd spend more time away from the computer, avoiding carpal tunnel syndrome, and life would go on.”

From “Cinescape Flames TFN Over DVD Issue,” *TheForce.Net*,
January 27, 2000

“I thought about going on a diet while I was on line,’ said Chicago Force member Matt Springer. ‘But I thought I'll go nuts seating here for 10 days with nothing to do [but] think about how hungry I was.”

From “Hype Building for New 'Star Wars' Installment,” ABC News,
May 9, 2002

“People who've been on the bubble, and people who didn't like *Phantom Menace*, like me, I think dread - there's fear, there's definitely anxiety. It doesn't keep me up at night, but I think about it. We're planning a line (at the theater) and all this stuff and then you think, May 16, I could be in for a huge letdown,’ Springer says.”

From “Can Lucas Overcome the Jar-Jar Jinx?” *Chicago Daily Herald*,
May 14, 2002

The Critics Sound Off on Matt Springer's *Unconventional*

“This story must have been almost as fun to write as it is to read. Several of the extreme characters are clearly attempts by Springer to cast off his own inner super villains...Then again, Springer may not have been entirely successful in his attempts to cast out the inner geek: He dedicates the book to his fiancé, promising her that they will ‘live long and prosper!’ Oy.”

Jeremy Lott, *The American Spectator*

“Hey Matt, Your book kicks @\$\$\$. Congrats. Everyone should own a copie of this book.”

Rex_Karrde, Chicago Force Jedi Council

“I keep my copy of *Unconventional* in my desk at work, as evidence to anyone who cares that I am, in fact, a fictional character...”

Thom Olsen

Mandatory type!

PoODOO

**BULLSHITTING ABOUT *STAR WARS*,
1999-2009**

MATT SPRINGER

**Alert Nerd Press
Orlando, FL**

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Good lord, this type is tiny.

For Dave Gray, Steve Millies, Brian Bender and Tom McKone—four of the best nerd pals a geek could ever want.

And of course, as always, for Ginna and Cate.

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“You just never know with these things. I did *More American Graffiti*. It made ten cents. It failed miserably. You can destroy these things, you know. It is possible.”

—George Lucas

“Are ya loose?”

—Bruce Springsteen

Introduction

Matt Springer has an excellent memory.

He also is a cunning writer. And, he is a good friend. (I cannot say much about his abilities as a star pilot. For years, he drove a 1990-ish Ford Tempo that made the Millennium Falcon look like a Nubian Cruiser. Also, and I have to be honest—he drives like a half-deaf 78-year-old.)

Still, I was flattered that Matt's memory brought him to me when his mind searched for someone to write these introductory words. But when Matt pointed out how much it would boost his readership to have an introduction written by “a real doctor and a college professor,” I confess that a funny kind of realization came over me. The *Star Wars* universe, like much in literature and entertainment, mirrors our own universe. There are politicians (Palpatine, Padme) and there are small businessmen (Lando Calrissian); there are gangsters (Jabba) and there are physicians (2-1B). But, where are the universities? Where are the navel-gazing academic snobs? Is my own work so irrelevant that there is no place for it in George Lucas's well-populated and by-now exhaustively-explored mythology? Indeed, just what was Matt hoping to accomplish by involving somebody like me?

Yet, the answer is obvious.

Surely Matt remembers the countless hours he and I have spent dissecting this common cultural experience, from the sense of wonder shared by so many of us born in the 1970's and raised in a popular culture shaped by the *Star Wars* movies, to the disappointed and inevitable conclusion that, far from being a visionary or mythmaker, George Lucas lucked out with the first two *Star Wars* movies, made billions of dollars, and has fed American audiences a steady diet of half-compacted trash ever

since. Surely, with thanks to Lucas, we have discovered an incredible smell.

Here, you, gentle reader, have the document of one man's journey from awe to disgust. But more than just indulging world-weary cynicism, here you also have a celebration of that shared experience of wonder. Let's be honest: our popular culture, mostly, is crap. But it is the exploration and discussion of the greatness and the crap that builds and maintains friendships, that keeps our conversations and our critical minds alive.

Maybe, having cultivated our critical faculties by discussing these films, I might suggest to you that you give up on the movies and go read a book. In fact, go read this one.

*Dr. Steve Millies. Ph.D.
A Real Doctor and A College Professor
Aiken, South Carolina
May 14, 2009*

Preface

I have a terrible memory.

That's not true. I have a strangely selective memory. There are whole sections of my life about which I have only the vaguest of recollections, and yet I can sing you all of *Jesus Christ Superstar* word for word. I won't unless you ask, but I can.

I do, however, remember one thing vividly from my childhood, and that is seeing *Return of the Jedi*.

I was six years old. Before the film's release, I convinced my mother to buy the officially licensed *Jedi* magazine. I stared endlessly at its white cover with its portrait of the hand of Luke Skywalker holding his lightsaber aloft—the same image that would grace one of the *Jedi* posters—and I devoured over and over the secrets within its pages; it literally fell apart in my hands.

I read about an Ewok rebellion in the forests of northern California, stared at pictures of Salacious Crumb and Admiral Ackbar, and wondered time and again how the story would end. A partial summary was offered, even a tantalizing description of the writing of the climactic final battle, but no clues were given about the ending of the *Star Wars* saga. Where would the films go? What would happen to Luke, Han and the others, these strange characters from another galaxy who I'd come to know so well through the magic of our first VCR, which was roughly the size of a two-bath ranch house?

On Memorial Day 1983, I found out. My mom dropped my dad and I off in front of the River Oaks Theaters in South Holland, IL to wait in line for *Return of the Jedi*. It was a long line, winding outside the theater's front doors, and while waiting I goofed around with a kid I didn't know while my dad and his dad chatted. I remember going into the theater and taking our seats,

and I remember being blown away. This movie kicked my tiny Underoed ass.

At one point, the Rebels have finally reached the power generator on Endor; they're ready to shut down the shield around the second Death Star and give the fleet battling above them a shot at blowing up the bad guys. Han and Leia need R2D2 to help them open the blast doors. Being a hero, Artoo runs off to help them, but as he approaches the door to open it, he's hit by enemy laser fire. His body is engulfed by sparks of energy; he's thrown back from the building by the impact, and he sputters and smokes. He screams, as only a droid can.

The entire audience gasped in unison. I was six years old, and even I could sense the anxious worry that filled the air. A room full of people—adults and kids alike—were desperately concerned about the well-being of a fictional robot from a long time ago and a galaxy far away.

I didn't know it then, but I had just learned an unforgettable lesson in the power of film. And I had just fallen unspeakably in love with *Star Wars*.

To say that the *Star Wars* films are permanently stitched into the fabric of my life is like saying the Pope pisses holy water. It's not so much a hobby or interest for me as it is a mild (and frequently not very mild at all) obsession—in other words, exactly like the Pope and his relationship with his urine.

Once I start, it doesn't take long for my brain to stack up an imposing pile of *Star Wars*-related memories: staging massive action figure battles on my living room floor, braving several busy streets and a highway overpass on my bike to get to the mall and buy Timothy Zahn's sequel novels, nearly beating the shit out of some douchebag who tried to steal my preferred seat at the *Empire Strikes Back* Special Edition on opening night. *Star Wars* looms large in my legend.

So if you're prepared to dismiss this book with a wave of your hand and a sneering "It's only a movie," then perhaps it's not for you. At the risk of sounding batshit crazy, the *Star Wars* films have never been just "movies" for me. They're the backdrop against which all of my other encounters with pop culture—the one-night stands, the passionate affairs, the enduring relationships—have taken place. Music, movies, comic books,

television shows, and the internet have all got their place, but they came along later. *Star Wars* will always be my first and most enduring love.

For a long time, I didn't understand what that meant. I would read rock critics I admired, like Lester Bangs or Griel Marcus, and envy their experiences, their passion, and the way both are communicated through their words. I was desperately jealous that I never experienced the Beatles on Ed Sullivan, or Springsteen at the Roxy, or the Clash in their glory days. I could vicariously appreciate these artists I loved in the most powerful moments of their careers, but I could never claim these moments as my own.

Then I realized that I can claim *Star Wars* as my own, just as so many other people of my age group can. We are the children of C3P0 and the Force, of Neim Numb and Jabba, of Luke and Darth and Chewie. We are the product of endless afternoons spent at the movie theater and then with the VCR, watching these films over and over. In ways both obvious and transparent, we have all in some way been influenced by the Trilogy. We are the *Star Wars* generation, just as many of our parents belonged to the Beatles generation.

If I want to write about something with all the passion and verocity of my heroes, I have to write about what belongs to me, what I love the most, and for better or worse, that's *Star Wars*. I'm both glad and disappointed that it's also what has betrayed me the most; it's something to grapple with, but it gives me plenty to say.

I'm worried that I've already apologized too much for this, but I am sorry if this sounds a bit self-inportant—creating this collection feels really...necessary to me. I wouldn't say it's closing the book on me and *Star Wars*, but it's definitely summing up a significant chapter of my life—not just in pop culture, but friendships, events, everything. I had an R2D2 groom's cake at my wedding, for the love of Yoda—this shit runs deep.

There is at least one significant chapter missing. Shortly after the first prequel was released, I wrote an editorial for *Cinescape* Online, published by my employer at the time, entitled "Muy! Muy! Mesa Loved *The Phantom Menace!*" (I think you can blame

world-renowned mystery author Steve Hockensmith for that title; he was editor of *Cinescape* at the time.)

Anyway, that chapter is lost to the four winds of the internet, so I'll sum it up by simply saying that in the days following Episode I's release, I was very much an apologist, talking myself and anyone who would listen into believing the movie was great. It's not.

Other than that large blank spot, I've resisted too much of an urge to edit these pieces; they represent how I was feeling when I wrote them, and I think taken as a whole, they represent my hero's journey from slack-jawed fanboy to sad, overcritical fanman. Lucas will do that to ya.

**From the Episode I Ticket Line
Monday, May 10, 1999, 1 a.m.**

Earlier today, I stood forlornly in line at the Dominick's near my parents' home, a two-stem bouquet of lilies in my hands for my mom.

"You know what makes a mom happy on Mother's Day?" asked the woman in line in front of me. "Knowing their kids are okay. You don't need a down payment on a car, you don't need rent money, you've got somewhere to live and a job and you're okay. That's what makes a mom happy."

After I rushed home to pay my matronly respects, I was set to head back over to McClurg Court theater, there to wait in line for three days for *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* tickets. And as I drove home to deliver my wilted gift, it struck me that such a campout might be the worst Mother's Day gift I could offer: it was NOT "okay," and while I was there, she would worry like Richard Lewis on crack.

But what could I do? It's *Star Wars*. Worry be damned. Mom be damned. Real life be damned.

The vigil for George Lucas' latest mythic epic/summer trash flick/cultural landmark had begun at four p.m. on Saturday, May 8, with the two biggest *Star Wars* fans in Chi-town: Bob and Chris. Our group, the Chicago Force, had staked out our camp behind them at noon on Mom's Day, with T-shirts, raffle tickets and sugary snacks in hand. Prepared to buy twelve tickets apiece on Wednesday (when tickets go on sale), we were all either brave pioneers heading toward a new explosive cultural event, or a troupe of pathetic dorks willing to freeze our privates off just to watch Lucas' latest creative masturbation.

Me, I arrived at 1:15 p.m. that afternoon, feeling a bit like the former and a lot like the latter. Earlier that morning, as I blew

liters of mucus from my nose and suffered through the middle stages of a nasty cold, I'd been ready to chuck it all and suffer the indignity of being the only die-hard *Star Wars* freak who would have to wait until June to see the damn movie. Could this really be worth it? Would the world end if I didn't see *The Phantom Menace* on opening night?

Maybe not, but what the hell? Every other mad fan in the history of pop culture had their big campout moment, from Springsteen tickets to the original *Star Wars* films, and I was determined to claim this one as my very own. Plus, when my kick-ass boss decides to give me permission to do my work from a laptop on Ohio Street, who am I to say no?

Nobody, that's who. I'm nobody.

We're proud to say that for the most part, those who've passed us by and questioned us about our motives have been polite and understanding. We've gotten lots of "Ooooh! *Star Wars*! Cool!" A few have just given us glances and smiled, possibly knowing in their hearts that if they had the balls to go shit-faced irresponsible for three days straight, they'd be out here too.

"You guys are waiting for *Star Wars*?" asked a former Department of Defense employee, who passed us by a few times to get our full story. "Man, if I had to wait this long for a movie, I'd probably just wait to see it on TV."

Yeah, right. On the second pass, he shared a bit more about his own personal *Star Wars* history.

"I remember when I saw the first movie back in 1978, or '76, or whenever. We were leaving the theater and all these people were talking about how advanced all the technology was. The thing is, it wasn't even science fiction. Most of the stuff in that movie had been around and in development for a while."

This theory conflicted somewhat with the latest Trivial Pursuit knowledge I'd picked up from fellow Chicago Forcer Dave Grey, who told me of "300 mile per hour tape," a.k.a. "duck tape." It seems that in the Air Force, this tape is often used to do short-term repair work on airplanes that have suffered damage. It holds together at up to 300 miles per hour of wind resistance, hence its nickname.

The Air Force is using duck tape to repair planes, and the Department of Defense has had Death Stars and Tie Fighters in the works since the early seventies? I don't know who to trust anymore.

As you might expect, we liners have bonded together pretty quickly, especially when our leader Stephanie handed out playing cards with our names on them, to help us keep track of our places in line a bit more clearly.

"I have my own name tag? That's cool," exclaimed Brian, who sat between me and Steph in line. "I think I'm gonna keep it as my own souvenir."

As souvenirs go, I guess you could do much worse than a playing card with your name on it, especially when the damn new *Star Wars* toys are so expensive. Ten bucks for an action figure, thirty bucks for a ship. I remember the days when action figures were a couple bucks and they sat under my Christmas tree each year in piles, ready to be freed from their plastic prison and set loose in the galaxy of my living room. Now, I'd be more likely to buy a few, stash them unopened in my closet, and then whip them out in twenty years to help front a down payment on my midlife crisis.

That speaks to the ironic clash of motivations in our collective campout. On one hand, we're being very mature and responsible, so desperate to get tickets that we're willing to chance nothing. We've been tossing about our theories on how we should structure the line for months in an attempt to keep things fair and at the same time fun. On the other hand (and this is a much, much bigger hand than the mature one, believe me) we're all living out the final fantasy of our youth with this line. I know for sure that I am. In three years, when Lucas unleashes Episode Two onto our reeling culture, will I be in a position to camp out? Hopefully, I'll have a wife and maybe even a kid by then, and I'll definitely have a job. Chances are that this is my last window to fuck most of my responsibilities for three days with the drop of a hat and engage in wacky fun with my fellow geeks.

So I'm a big grown-up slobbering kid out here with a laptop and a cold. Things could be worse.

I should probably wrap things up now, as I'm ready to snuffle my way toward some semblance of slumber. As I write, I look around and take in our motley crew—Dave scanning his five-disc minidisc changer. Shauna and Heather chatting beside Andy (a.k.a. Obi-Wan) espousing on finance theories. Bob and Chris tucked away in their tent. Mike (Brian's replacement) already struggling to sleep. It's unlikely that anything but *Star Wars* would have brought us all together, but through this shared obsession, we're taking to each other like poop to a fly (or a fly to poop, depending on your point of view).

For the next three days, we'll be out here in front of McClurg. At this early stage, I can't even fathom my state of mind three days from now, after about sixty hours of living outside. At the very least, I hope I don't lose any toes.

If you're out there in the Land of Chicago, stop on by to the 300 block of Ohio (in da Loop) and say hello. Otherwise, feel free to live vicariously through our exploits as communicated through the web. I'll try to keep everyone updated as often as possible, two or three times a day. Until next time, stay strong with the Force and say a prayer for us. We're outside, we're cold and we could get desperate.

Monday, May 10, 1999, 11:30 p.m.

It's been a long day of much activity and growth for our impromptu *Star Wars* community. First, our first encounter with WGN's afternoon news was accompanied by a reunion with Scary Heroin Hotel Room Guy, who this time asked the WGN crew to please announce his lost dog on the air, because he was offering a \$100 reward. He then produced a harmonica with a grand flourish and proceeded to play what was either the *Star Wars* theme or "Candy" by Iggy Pop. Of course, this came after he promised to produce a karaoke machine for our group. Yeah, I had just been thinking that what our group really needs is a few drunk old white guys singing "Wind Beneath My Wings."

We then suffered a few minor setbacks: first, our line was moved from in front of the doors after being condemned as a fire hazard, and then our power disappeared. This last indignity came as the result of some *Three's Company*-esque misunderstandings between ourselves, the McClurg Court management and the

Holiday Inn management. See, the Holiday Inn thought we didn't ask to use one of their outdoor electrical outlets, when in reality we had asked McClurg management, because we thought that they were in charge of the plug! Who knew?!

Unfortunately, we have yet to solve this problem, and we are still currently powerless. Our hope is to be juiced up again by tomorrow morning, thanks to the limber legwork of Dave Gray, but we can't be sure. I'm writing this to you courtesy of the battery power in my trusty laptop.

The afternoon saw a great deal of scurry and bustle on the line, as Dave left for class and I left to head home for a shower and a bit of rest. Here's how stupid I was: after being up for about thirty hours straight because of my inability to sleep overnight outside, I actually thought that I could lay down in my bed and rest without falling asleep. HA! I was unconscious within seconds. I then staggered from my bed with spots floating in my eyes and stumbled through a shower. Turns out I was so groggy not because I had so little sleep, but because I hadn't eaten since Sunday night. Someday, I swear I'll figure out how to work this damn body of mine.

While I was at home knocking things over and generally being groggy, the line had been assaulted by the MEDIA. Every major television news outlet, a few minor news outlets and some print outlets all converged on McClurg at once, after a trickle for the previous two days. What had begun as a drip had become a flood, and we were suddenly awash in reporters. Andy continued to flail his lightsaber and generally spout off for the cameras, while reporters actually fought for our various attentions. Steph and Aaron even had their moment with a *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter ripped off by an obnoxious newswoman.

The after-work hours brought a filling meal at Corner Bakery (YUM), a quick run back to the apartment for some T-shirts and a more than doubling of our line population. We gained a bunch more folks on the back end, clustering together in eager groups for chatter. All around basked the eager glow of *Star Wars* fans connecting and schmoozing, debating topics of grave importance and sharing our collective love of the films.

There's a buzz that develops as the crowd relaxes and begins to open up to each other; walls fall down and bonds are formed. We share our theories on the trilogy and establish a running series

of jokes; a community is born. It's easily the most amazing geek phenomenon I've ever seen, and it grows and glows as the hours slip away.

Tuesday, May 11, 1999, 8:30 a.m. (approx. 29 hours until tix)

Fortunately for moi, sleep did arrive last night for about four hours, though I was awoken by the bitter cold this morning. It's nice to sleep and actually lose consciousness for a change. This morning so far has been very slow and low-key, with everyone groggily arising from slumber and facing this last day before T-day. Our campsite is cluttered and chaotic, but still warm and family-like.

Also arriving today is the full-swell media backlash against Lucas and *The Phantom Menace*. David Ansen skewered the film in the latest issue of *Newsweek*, which boasts a *Star Wars* cover; the movie's not good enough to deserve a positive review, but its buzz is big enough for those sluts at *Newsweek* to shamelessly whore themselves to the media monster. Richard Corliss in *Time* also gave it a mediocre review. As I write, I'm listening to some Mancow lackey talk about his feelings on the film, and he's got very mediocre, sometimes nasty things to say about it. Part of me is surprised that it's not a total inflammatory nasty review, and part of me is disappointed to hear so much negative buzz, and a BIG part of me is just shutting my ears and not caring.

Here's the thing: I KNOW it's not going to be as good as the hype. I know there's gonna be lame stuff, I know Jar Jar could suck big-time, I know it's a kids' movie in many ways. Hell, this is still the same "genius" who made *Return of the Jedi* and *Howard the Duck*. I feel as though I'm ready for the worst.

But so much of this negative buzz that's growing and pulsing around us seems motivated purely out of bitter reaction to Lucas' unfair practices, both with regard to screening the film and to the press surrounding it. Perhaps the saddest aspect of the whole backlash is that it's well-deserved. All the obsession with control that Lucasfilm has practiced, from the review embargo to the well-engineered profiles that have littered every media outlet from *60 Minutes* to the *New York Times*. is paying off in the worst way possible. So on one hand, you have a bitter media lashing out in a totally biased way, and on the other hand, you have Lucas

and his gestapo tactics with the media and film distributors. Nobody wins, and everybody loses.

Speaking of the media, we had Turd, a Mancow representative down here this morning, and some wacky shit went down. We had actually begun our line on Sunday because we were tipped off that Mancow would be starting his own line on Monday morning, so we were waiting for his inevitable participation. It turns out that he decided to go with a negative slant on our group, going the “geeks and losers without jobs and girlfriends” route on the air; he spoke to Dave Gray and he hung up on him. A chant of “Hate you, hate your show” was started up at one point.

Mancow then offered two tickets to an advance screening for anyone who would be willing to cross the line and leave forever. I took this as my cue to refocus our efforts; I took the phone from Turd and told Mancow that I would leave line and never come back..if he donated two tickets to our charity drawing. Mancow then offered us TWO TICKETS FOR OUR DRAWING!

Oh, and WE GOT POWER BACK FROM THE HOLIDAY INN! THANK YOU, HOLIDAY INN! Things are falling into place now...the vibe continues to be very cool...and I'm gonna try to do a bit of “real” work before I head home to shower and prepare for a trip out to a wrestling school tonight. Take care folks, come down to see us...force OUT!

May the Force Be With Me!
From *Pop-Culture-Corn* Magazine
November 1999

Dear Mr. Lucas,

Hi there! I read on the internet—yes, that vile dreaded medium for twisted obsessives out to destroy your vision—that you are casting the part of Anakin Skywalker in the next *Star Wars* film even as I type, and I wanted to get in my bid to play the part!

I know what you're thinking: Who the fuck is this jabroni? Why should he get cast in one of the most eagerly-pursued roles in the history of Hollywood?

Me, I know what hardship is all about. In fact, I've often reflected on the striking similarities between my own life and that of young Anakin. I know very well the anguish of leaving my mother at a formative age. And even if that "formative age" was eighteen, it still took me many months to recover from the shock.

Like Anakin, my childhood was dominated by the sense that I would grow up to do great things, and by my uncanny displays of preternatural talents. It was detected at an early age that I was gifted with a penchant for mimicry—I often wowed my family with my magnificent Ed McMahan impersonation, for example. My dad still brags that I was able to read the newspaper at age four, though a tragic blimp accident on New Year's Day 1983 left me illiterate until quite recently. On top of all that, I know that if I concentrated really hard, I could levitate a pencil or something like those Jedis do in your movies. I just know it!

Not only do I understand Anakin, but I also understand you, Mr. Lucas, and the many burdens under which you suffer to produce your art. Like you, I have my own Rick McCallum-esque worshipful toadies who waddle around behind me and pronounce me "God" on a regular basis. I have a few too many

chins and my hair looks pretty nasty. And I've never been grilled by Leslie Stahl about my love life, but I have been grilled by a few women about my more esoteric sex fetishes, so we're about even on that score too. (By the by, do you get off when a girl rubs a Chewie mask all over your genitals and howls as though the Wookiee himself were licking your crotch? Man, I do!)

Like you, I understand that greed, for lack of a better word, is good. All that merchandising—the action figures, the sleepwear, the books, the candy, the paper plates for kiddie birthday parties—is right up my alley. It's pure exploitation, which you have every right to indulge in with abandon. You built this vast multibillion dollar media empire with your own two hands; why the hell shouldn't you suck your fans dry for every last penny they have?

And man oh man, do I know about the fans—all those lazy bottom-feeders who think they're "showing their love" for *Star Wars* when all they really wanna do is ruin your movies by blabbing secrets all over that devil Internet. I can see them now in their sweat-stained T-shirts, pizza oil dripping from their chins, pounding on the keyboard as though they're trying to kill it and hammering unfounded rumors into the delicate fabric of the *Star Wars* mythos. It's like McCallum said on that *Star Wars: Behind the Magic* CD-Rom; real fans don't want to figure out all the secrets in advance. They just sit there like good little slaves and suck up what they're given. That's what being a "consumer" means, goddamnit: CONSUMING!

More than anything else, Mr. Lucas, I truly understand what it means to be misunderstood. As a world-famous co-editor of a major web entertainment magazine, I deal on a daily basis with the small-minded, the hangers-on, the perverted sex maniacs. I know what it's like to toil day in and day out in pursuit of a hazy vision, only to have that vision torn to shreds by fat-ass movie critics whose only real gift for film is salting their jumbo popcorn buckets so that the top kernels don't taste like the bottom of a urinal. I know exactly what that feels like, man—all too well.

As you can see from this letter, it's the deep identification I feel with both yourself and your latest film hero that will make me the best man for the job of bringing Anakin Skywalker to life. I'll leave the next step up to you—every weekend until May 2002 is free and easy for me to jet to California and get fitted for my

costumes. I'd even be happy to pay my own airfare, though I'd expect a major moneybags such as yourself probably keeps enough cash for a plane ticket just lying around the office in the event he wants to wipe his ass or blow his nose. Yet if you're too cheap to pick up the tab, I'll happily pay my own way.

That should do it. Please call soon—I can't stand the suspense, and my "people" are eager to send out the press release so's I can hit the hip L.A. club scene as the flavor of the week and score me some Hollywood poon tang. Rest assured of one thing, Mr. Lucas: I'm ready, willing and able to lead hate straight into suffering and carry *Episode II* to another \$500 billion worldwide box office tally!

Sincerely,
Matt "Scourge of the Galaxy" Springer

P.S. When you call to offer me the role, could you also give me Natalie Portman's home phone number? She's a major hottie, and being as I'm the newest star in the *Star Wars* universe, I know she'll be dying to get in my pants. Thanks, bro!

The Phantom Menace: One Year Later
From *Pop-Culture-Corn Magazine*
May 2000

One year ago this morning, I stood outside the McClurg Court theater with my dad and a few of my best friends, and waited in line to see *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* for the first time. I had camped out the night before, and a week before that, I had camped out three nights to buy tickets for the first showing of the film. My dad and I heckled former Chicago Bulls star Norm Van Leer. My friends and I joked nervously about the film, and tried to mask our excitement behind ironic commentary, but it was impossible to completely belie our true moods. We were excited. Really, really fucking excited.

One year ago this afternoon, I left the theater, having seen *Episode I* for the first time. I felt a massive thrill, but also a nagging disappointment, which I quickly disregarded. After all, what could live up to the massive hype that I'd built inside me? Nothing, I figured. Any disappointment would only be my exhaustion—and my huge expectations—talking for me. This was a great movie, I immediately began to convince myself.

I saw *The Phantom Menace* four more times in the theater that summer—with other friends, with the same friends who'd joined me the first time, even by myself on one rainy Friday evening. And every time I saw it—EVERY time—I dozed off during some portion, usually somewhere in the middle. I could not keep my eyes open. But each time, I would blame it on my lack of sleep or my familiarity with the film. It's still a great movie, I whispered to my inner conflict—sure, it has problems, but from a certain point of view, it's genius.

On April 4 of this year, I was among the first to pick up my widescreen video copy of *The Phantom Menace* at my local Best

Buy. I tossed aside the lousy packaging—who the fuck needs a film slide, anyway—and placed the tape near my TV. A week later, I tried to watch it.

This time, I had no problem staying awake. I had no trouble because I stopped the film every five minutes or so to rant to my roommate about some flaw, either major or minor, that I'd just perceived for the first time. I also had no trouble keeping my lids peeled because halfway through the film, I shut it off. I could take no more.

Not only is *The Phantom Menace* not a great film, it is not a good film. It is not a mediocre film. It is a flagrantly awful film, one of the biggest BAD movies in the history of the medium. It is a massive “fuck you” from George Lucas to his millions of fans. It is a toy commercial, an incomprehensible mess of a story and is populated by vapid, poorly-developed characters. It sucks.

Now that my eyes have been opened, what is the biggest problem with *The Phantom Menace*? It has no dramatic drive WHATSOEVER. The film's flaccid drama is built in from the opening scroll: “Turmoil has engulfed the Galactic Republic. The taxation of trade routes to outlying systems is in dispute.”

Every time I see that scroll, I have to stop for at least ten seconds and figure out what the fuck it means. That's the first problem. The second problem, and ultimately the more damning one, is that once I've decoded Lucas' piss-poor phrasing, I simply don't care. Taxation of outlying trade routes? Who really gives a shit?! You could follow that first sentence with any one of a thousand other factoids—“Queen Amidala's pizza is late,” “Jar Jar's ex-lover has returned for his Sy Snootles records,” “Obi-Wan has slipped into a coma due to abject boredom from his scant role in this movie”—and it would be more exciting. Instead, it boils down to a trade dispute, which is uninteresting to the extreme.

But here's the tricky thing. Lucas has SAID that the Republic is in “turmoil.” Therefore, he must expect the audience to believe it. He then takes his viewers on a two-hour-plus journey through a series of largely unrelated events that just seem to HAPPEN. The Jedi are on the Naboo ship, they leave the ship, they wind up underwater with Jar Jar, they encounter three dangerous fish, their submarine inexplicably breaks down, their starship also breaks down and they wind up on Tatooine—and

on and on and on. All of it packed to the bursting with clunky bits of dialogue and weak characterizations, and all of it built on top of the flimsy plot foundation of a “trade dispute.”

Throughout, he expects that we’ll watch with bated breath, because in Lucas’ mind, these events are important simply because he has dictated that they must be presented on the screen as part of HIS *Star Wars* mythology. They are not interesting or dramatic because there is anything interesting or dramatically engaging within them. They are important because George Lucas says so.

Imagine a film with many of the same plot and character deficiencies as *The Phantom Menace*—but written, directed and produced by a neophyte director. Imagine a virtual no-name proposing that two mystical warriors should fight to protect a planet that has been captured FOR NO DISCERNIBLE REASON. Imagine that as comic relief, the young talent envisions a computer-generated foppish cartoon who speaks in pidgin English. Imagine that the film’s big, sinister villain has about fifty words of dialogue, and is never even questioned by the bad guys as to why he’s doing all these evil things.

Let’s face it—as the product of any filmmaker other than Lucas, *Episode I* would be a direct-to-video release, starring Jimmy Doohan as Qui-Gon, Rutger Hauer as Darth Maul and Rip Taylor as Yoda. Yet because it is a *Star Wars* film from the mind of George Lucas, it is assumed that we will lap it up as nectar from the cinematic heavens.

What hubris. Lucas has honestly reached the point where he cannot summon any ability to create a film with any dramatic merits on its own—we should all accept it because it is a *Star Wars* movie, not because it is a good movie. He’s grown mindbogglingly lazy—and that’s being kind to the guy. To believe that, you must ignore the decadent disdain for the viewer throughout this film—in the writing, in the direction, and even in the editing, which is where Lucas used to truly shine. It’s less a writer/director crafting a film and more a holy prophet handing down the sacred word.

God complex, megalomania, hyperegotism—call it what you will, Lucas has got it. *The Phantom Menace* reeks of it. And yet, it will always occupy a place in my heart. Part of that is because I adore the original films so much. Another part of it is that *Menace*

will always bask in the glow of the events surrounding it; the months preceding that film are filled with fond memories, especially the line itself, and I'll always treasure those. Yet another part is the tiny bits of classic *Star Wars* that somehow managed to make it into the movie, almost in spite of Lucas' efforts—John Williams' score, Watto the cagey junk dealer, the occasional dialogue snippet or brilliant visual. There are just enough of those moments to redeem the film for me as a *Star Wars* fan.

But as a lover of film in general, I cannot abide *The Phantom Menace*. It's aggressively bad, constantly setting new standards for its own awfulness—and all of that badness stems purely from Lucas' disconnection from any filmmaking finesse he used to possess. I could dissect the film more closely—perform an autopsy on its bloated, stinking corpse—but why bother? The bottom line is that as a filmmaker, Lucas has completely lost it.

While I am excited for *Episode II*, I also dread it. Because if he hasn't learned any lessons from the critical backlash against *The Phantom Menace*, it will just be another foul screed passed down from Lucas' high throne over all of pop culture.

Empire Roolz!
From *All the Rage*
January 2001

I cannot fucking believe what an amazing movie *The Empire Strikes Back* is.

Really. Y'know how some people sometimes will say that they felt like the Beatles' music came from another planet? How it was so different and mind-blowing that it couldn't have been from this planet? (I agree, by the way.)

Well, that's how I feel about *ESB*. It's so great, so emotional and sprawling and crackling, that I don't even believe it's a *Star Wars* movie.

Don't get me wrong—I am a huge *Star Wars* geek. I am a geek, period. This we all know. And to some extent, my passion for *ESB* is just geek lip-service.

But it's really just A GREAT MOVIE. It's art. It's high drama. It's sweeping romance. It's a guy and a girl and a universe.

As I rewatched it for the bazillionth time yesterday, I was newly moved by some interesting scenes. Typically, I get all emotional and shit when Han goes into the freezing chamber, and Leia says, "I love you," and Han says, "I know." Fucking amazing.

This time, I was far more drawn into their first kiss, the scene where Leia is trying to fix the Falcon and Han massages her bruised hand and she says "I like nice men" and Han says "I'm nice men" and then smoochorama.

Previously, these have been characters best known for saying shit like "Replace the negative power coupling" and "The more you tighten your grip, the more star systems will slip through your fingers." They're fighters, not lovers.

Within a half-hour, they're throbbing bundles of passion. They're cavorting around the galaxy trying to avoid the Empire and they're ratcheting up the sexual tension so fast it will make your crotch spin.

And then—AND THEN—after Lawrence Kasdan (the screenwriter) and Irvin Kershner (the director) have turned up the heat so much it leaps from the screen, THEY TAKE HAN AWAY. They DENY the audience what it has wanted for about three years. They snatch it and stuff it into their pockets and scamper away. That right there is a ballsy move.

But wait—there's more!!! The dialogue in this movie is so amazing. That's what is maybe most remarkable to me. They had the adventure part down; they had the special effects; they had the whole mythic thing and the sweeping epic universe thing down cold in the first movie. They ADDED to that all these amazing words. All these great one-liners you want to repeat to everyone you know.

The whole fucking thing. Yoda. Luke. Vader. Boba Fett. Hoth, then Dagobah, then Cloud City. Think about that—think about just the idea of a city floating in the clouds that mines gas from the planet below. What a fucked-up amazing idea. Just the ideas alone are amazing—a tiny Jedi Master with this weirdo speech impediment and Grover's voice, and he's one of the coolest characters in the whole damn world.

I can't get my head around it sometimes. Have you ever had art that's like that for you? A movie, a song, an album, a book? ("Penny Lane" is also like that for me.) I find some things to be so great, I cannot completely understand every aspect of their greatness. They can never be entirely consumed, so that I know every ridge and nuance of them. There will always be mysteries inside of them, new aspects to discover and explore. They're really almost from another planet.

But if they were from another planet, at least we'd know that much, and could say, "Hey, a green guy directed this *Star Wars* movie, so that's why it's so unfuckably great!" Instead, they're all too human, but transcendent.

(Am I overstating it? I hope not. I don't think so.)

Jedi Marketing Masters: An *Episode II* Trailer Review
From *Entertainment Weekly*
November 2001

I would like, if I may, to read far too much into the most important minute in sci-fi right now, and I'm not talking about the awful song that opens up Enterprise each week.

No, I'm talking about the new *Star Wars: Episode II--Attack of the Clones* trailer, which premiered with *Monsters, Inc.* last Friday at megaplexes across the nation. Fortunately, this trailer is attached to another gem of a flick from Pixar, one that's not quite as strong as either of the *Toy Story* movies but still offers a unique glimpse into a brilliantly-realized fantasy world. In its own way, which is to say as a pure marketing vehicle, the *Episode II* trailer is just as brilliantly realized and conjures just as vivid a fantasy world, the one residing inside George Lucas' feverish ego.

I went into last Friday's screening of *Monsters, Inc.* cautiously optimistic about the new trailer. I thought back warmly to that November day in the fall of 1998, when myself and my buddy Chris Kivlehan slipped out of the *Cinescape* editorial offices at lunch with a video camera smuggled under a jacket and illicitly videotaped the first *Phantom Menace* trailer for our work cronies. Seven months later, I was shivering in the wet cold outside the McClurg Court theater in Chicago, rain pelting down on my face as Chris stood there and reported his impressions from the Chicago press screening of the film. I had camped out three nights for tickets and one night for the film itself, so I was more than ready for the movie, more ready than any trailer could have made me.

Though it's clear that this first *Episode II* trailer is little more than a teaser, it's still packed with its own brand of suggestive imagery. Where the first trailer for *The Phantom Menace* offered a

spine-jarring mix of CG tomfoolery and classic John Williams *Star Wars* film music, this teaser opts instead for a spooky approach; brief shots from the film are backed solely by the sound of Darth Vader breathing. We see Anakin smooch Amidala on a barren Tatooine landscape, Obi-Wan soaring through the streets of Coruscant on some unidentified vehicle, and a guy that can only be Mr. Bo-Jango Fett flying around on his rocketpack. (And may I just say now that if his action figure doesn't incorporate the missile-launching technology abandoned for the original Boba Fett figure, I'm gonna raise ten kinds of hell.)

What's amazing about the trailer is not anything it tells us about the next *Star Wars* movie, but everything it doesn't. It shamelessly links the events of the film to the tragedy of Vader's life, but offers no proof that the film itself will do the same. It offers a handful of fleeting imagery to fans, but hoards the vast majority of the film from eager eyes, a technique that not only protects the movie's secrets but also Lucas' fragile creative image after the controversial debacle that was *The Phantom Menace*. And it doesn't come out and announce the onslaught with a trumpet fanfare, but it effortlessly implies that we've just come over the first hill on the nine-month roller coaster of slowly-building hype for *Episode II*, orchestrated by Lucasfilm's marketing gurus like Bernstein heading up the New York Philharmonic.

It's a nice teaser for the film, but where this trailer really triumphs is as a piece of marketing. You can't score better branding than the *Star Wars* imprimatur, and playing that breathing sound effect makes it clear that you should instantly associate this movie with three of the most breathtaking movies ever. Before we've seen more than a minute of it, it places the film inside a context it may never deserve, especially after we've seen Lucas already forever fouling his own universe with the first *Star Wars* prequel. It's the kind of revisionist history Lucas excels at, the stuff he began with the *Star Wars* Special Editions in 1997 and continues with the DVD commercials for *The Phantom Menace*, in which the film is suddenly an unmitigated artistic triumph because DVD websites said so. Not only are there better movies out there, there are far better DVDs.

Ultimately, that's the job of marketing—to make us believe what something is before we've had the chance to decide for

ourselves. And sci-fi fans are getting hosed all the time, whether it be by Rick Berman and his crack team of *Star Trek* hacks or by John Travolta's gushing over *Battlefield Earth*. The key is not to buy into the hype, and that will be the challenge for *Star Wars* fans in the next nine months, especially those disappointed by *The Phantom Menace*. Not only might *Attack of the Clones* suck more, it might destroy the prequel trilogy beyond repair.

But for now, let us simply allow our minds to drift back over some pretty images consumed in a dark theater on a Friday in November, and offer our praise to the marketing department at Lucasfilm. The true geniuses behind the *Star Wars* phenomenon have scored another hit with the first *Attack of the Clones* trailer, and the classics will surely just keep coming. Anyone can come up with self-indulgent geek wankery, but to make us believe it's the work of a forlorn genius who crafts the myths of our age? That's truly brilliant.

From the Desk of George Lucas...
From *Entertainment Weekly*
April 2002

Friends, fans, Linda Rondstadt—

Who would have thought, back in the days when I was stuffing midgets into garbage cans and standing idly by while Carrie Fisher developed enough narcotics addictions to bench the starting lineup of the Lakers, that I was really creating a modern mythology? Not me, that's for sure. But here I am, Mr. George Lucas, King of the Hill, cock of the block, the Boy of Summer, the Big Cheese, the Head Honcho, the Blockbuster Dandy, the man with the plan and the lightsaber in his pants who's just happy to see you. And boy howdy, have I made the big time!

I've made such the big time that you might be wondering why I, Mr. George Lucas himself, need to trickle this jewel of a missive onto the great unwashed masses of *Star Wars* fans. (And trust me about that "unwashed" part—you ever been to a sci-fi convention? Of course, I never have—wouldn't dare set foot near those freaks—but I'm told it smells like a slaughterhouse in those places. To which I have to say, "What a wonderful smell they've discovered!" But I digress, and end parens.)

I decided to write because I wanted to make sure that all my fans knew that I, Mr. George Lucas, am BACK! Yes, I know that *The Phantom Menace* represented a slump in pretty much every way. I know that fans weren't as enamored of the adorable Jar Jar Binks as myself and my good pal Rick McCallum were. I know it seems pointless now that Anakin began the saga as a precocious child, though it wouldn't seem as pointless if you could see the toy sales numbers for boys 8 to 14! Hoo hah!

Again, I digress. Basically, I wanted to put the word out on the street among my people that I have RETURNED with *Attack of the Clones*. This is the George Lucas you know and love. There's lots of shooting and fighting in this movie, for example, because I know how much my fans love shooting and fighting. There's also lots of computer effects, because again, I know you crazy kids love it. You just cannot get enough of it. There isn't a day goes by that one of the members of my corporate entourage doesn't say to me, "George, my gosh, that Guffalamp crawling in the background of that completely fabricated world looks so *real* to me."

Yes, it does look real, and you'll see more real-looking fake stuff than you can shake a Jawa at in *Episode II*. Hell, I don't need to tell you that—you've seen an eyeful of it already in that trailer you taped off Fox and watched sixty thousand times already. Am I right? I know I'm right.

But of course, such greatness does not come without its price, and for me, the cost is twofold. First, I must suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous critics, each of them hellbent on demolishing the grand story I have worked for so many hours over a legal pad to build. And what right have they? Were they there when I spent three weeks debating with myself what to call Chewbacca? Did they pipe up at all when it was time to compile the forty-two page document that details the mating rituals of the Bantha? Did they even have to bother with such a complex task as drawing out Luke Skywalker's family tree back six thousand years, just for the sake of fully understanding his backstory?

No, they didn't, and they can carp all they want, but I am a storyteller, and I will still make my movies the way I need to make them—as massive, bloated commercials for billions and billions of dollars in merchandise, just waiting on store shelves to be trampled over by tykes even before frame one of the movie has made it into theaters.

The other price of my own greatness is paid in—you guessed it—money. And that is the other reason for this letter. It is, in its own brilliant way, a plea of sorts.

Lemme level with you. These prequels—they aren't getting any cheaper to make. For every sorta real-looking frame of film you'll see sixty times over the course of this summer, I've gotta pay like forty people. You wouldn't believe all the jobs there are

on a damn movie! And trust me, I tried making it all myself, but I just couldn't master the mouse. And I really wanna make *Episode III*—only half as much as you wanna see it, but whatever—but I can't do it alone. I need your support.

So if you could see it in your hearts to pick up a few extra tickets this summer for *Attack of the Clones*, then gosh, I'd really appreciate it. You don't even need to have anyone use the tickets—as long as you give your cash at the box office, I'll get my cut. Or better yet, take this opportunity to introduce some new eyes to my magnificent *Star Wars* saga. Has your grandma been transported to a galaxy far, far away yet? What about your dog? Or even your parakeet? There's truly something for everyone in *Attack of the Clones*—romance, intrigue, and lots of shooting staged against the most amazing sorta-real backdrops you ever did see.

And hey, if you bring Grandma and Spot and your parakeet to the movies, then when I re-release these movies in five years featuring pointless new effects and scenes that add nothing to the story, that's more money for me. Which means more movies, which means more toys, which means more stuff for you to fill your empty lives with—which again, means more money for me! You see how it works.

Okay, I better dash. I've got to approve these Hempaleefer designs before I take off and spend the evening masturbating into big piles of crisp, aromatic cash. Don't forget to see my movie lots this summer!

Oh, shit—and may the Force be with you. I almost forgot. Sorry.

Your pal,
George Lucas

A Toy Story
From *Entertainment Weekly*
May 2002

I am a glassy-eyed crizzniggity crizznack whore for George Lucas' schizznit.

It is more difficult for me to admit this now than it has ever been. Like so many, I saw *The Phantom Menace* and grew to hate it. I've spent the past two years in an endless and winding conversation with various friends, all of whom hated the movie. It's an inexhaustible topic.

And yet, on Monday night I was in line at the Toys 'R' Us store in Orland Park, IL, waiting in the unseasonable cold with about fifty other unrepentant dweebs for my first crack at the *Episode II: Attack of the Clones* toys.

Yeah, I know, lame. I've given up trying to understand it...well, almost. I've given up enough to know that I'm not going to stumble upon any resolution in my prickly relationship with *Star Wars* while I'm just trying to pound out a lengthy toy review. I'll just note my own patheticness, and bid you move forward, to more words pouring from my sad fingers.

(Does it help if I said I was trying to help sell T-shirts for my *Star Wars* club, Chicago Force, as part of our charity drive for Hull House here in Chicago? Maybe? Eh?

(Okay, it doesn't. Sorry.)

My buddy Dave and I arrived at the Orland TRU at about five minutes till midnight. It was our final stop on a three-store tour to hand out Chicago Force business cards. We had actually attempted to hit a Wal-Mart instead, thinking maybe it would be less crowded, but the one we were sent to by a "kindly" Orland Parkian was closed. Thanks for the info, asswipe.

So we end up near the end of the line, but the line moves fast, and I can feel that ol' classic geek adrenaline rush, the one that says you're about to spend money you don't have on shit you don't need. And let me tell you, it feels just fine. I am not doing the most ghetto fabulously when it comes to scratch lately, but thanks to a check recieved last Saturday, I was a bit flush last night. So I indulged in a little geek shopping spree, and the acquisition high from packing a cart with action figures is something I'll be riding for weeks to come.

Finally, we get into the store, and we're immediately distracted by the awesome 12" figures to the left, and the Zam Wessell speeder, and even the *Star Wars* Stratego. I was smitten. Ah, new toys. Ah, ah, ah.

And while we're swooning, all the collector gimps were busy raiding the figure bins of anything we might want. So we spent most of our time fondling Amidala, Captain Typho and C3P0 action figures. Fun.

But I did make it out with some loot. So for those of you who couldn't make it as Monday night drifted into Tuesday morning, a brief rundown of some of the cooler *Episode II* swag, in the form of the Top Slabs O' Lucasfilm Merchandising You Must Whore To.

Count Dooku's Lightsaber

I remain skeptical about watching a geriatric Christopher Lee seeming to cavort on the screen in lightsaber duels with all the vim and vigor of a creepy guy half his age. Yet the Dooku saber is undisputably cool, with a neat curved handle and three-foot retractable blade. It makes neat noises when you hit stuff and swish it around. Only drawback: Unlike the sabers released around the time of the Special Editions, this saber doesn't snap into place when fully retracted, so you get a drippy saber effect when you hold the handle toward the ground. Still, when in action, it looks sweet. I can't wait to beat the crap out of kids in the *Episode II* line!

C3P0 and R2D2

The two classic characters from the entire saga are represented with fine figures that illustrate the finer points of the new *Star Wars* Saga line. The 3P0 figure comes with a set of

attachable plates that go over his wiring, so you can finish assembling him yourself. The armor is so detailed that one of the plates even has a smear of paint on it, as though it's been laying around someone's garage. As for Artoo, he makes cute noises and blinks a lot. No Commtech reader necessary. These figures are all jam-packed with cool accessories and features; Hasbro has done some fine, fine work.

The Fett Family

Lucas knows his fanboys, and there's no better proof of that than his shameless exploitation of the Fetts. We used to just have Boba Fett; now we have his daddy, Jango Fett. And while I've always considered myself immune to Boba's charms, I am irresistibly drawn to Jango, probably because his armor is shiny.

If you want the full Fett package, you'll need to pick up the Jango Fett and Boba Fett Kamino Escape figures, along with the Deluxe Jango Fett and Jango Fett's Slave I. Should you attempt this daunting outlay of cash, you will find yourself greeted with a plethora of action pleasures, from a buttload of shooting missiles (even Jango's backpack has one! Finally, a Fett with a missile that shoots from his back!) to an adorable little jetpack and helmet that you can use to dress up lil' Boba as his daddy. Awwwww.

Deluxe Mace Windu

This Jedi kicks ass. He's got the magnet in his hand to use the "Force" to retrieve his saber, he's got a "Force repel" ball of schizznit that shoots out of his hand, and he comes with a snap-apart battle droid. Which action figure is his? It's the one that says "Bad-Ass Motherfucker."

So I'm a little broker and a lot more happy. I'm biting my tongue nearly off in an effort to keep from running out and buying the *Episode II* novelization. And I'm going a tiny bit nuts, because it's *Star Wars*, and it's happening all over again, and I feel kinda powerless against it in shameful ways, and my spine has melted in the face of Lucas' hype monolith, and please just look over there for a few weeks until I get back from camping out and return to my prickly edgy critical self...

The *Episode II* Line Journal
From *Entertainment Weekly*
Monday, May 6, 2002, 1 p.m.

I told my mom the other day that I was camping out for *Star Wars* tickets again.

“Just be sure to wear a sign that says, ‘I am not Lee Springer’s son,’” she requested.

Yeah, I waited in line for *Star Wars* in May 1999. And I’d do it again. In fact, I am doing it again. I have just arrived at McClurg Court theaters in the heart of Chicago for a ten-day campout.

Then again, I’m hardly one to talk. I’d wait in line for just about anything. I’d wait for concert tickets, the toilet, anything that’ll have me. When my youngest sister was born, I even tried camping out at the hospital, but the cops booted me. They said eight-year-olds didn’t belong on the streets in their *Empire Strikes Back* sleeping bags. Whatever!

It’s not just about the end of the line, you see. It’s something to do with wanting to see *Episode II*, and loving *Star Wars*. But that’s not all. There are some fringe benefits to living outside for a couple weeks.

You never have to shower. Usually, if you stink up your surroundings with pungent body odor, it’s offensive. But if you crinkle any noses while in line, it only adds to the power of your fannish mystique.

You can eat junk and only junk. How are you expected to stay healthy when the only sustenance is McDonald’s? If you thought the Subway diet was good, try the Big Mac diet.

You make great new friends. Sure, there’s all the fans you hang out with, but what about the local police, who wake you up just as you’re about to sleepwalk into the middle of the highway?

Or businessmen on their way to work, who take time to shout, “Get a life, losers!” Ah, Chicagoans are fine people.

You get to enjoy the lovely weather. Snowing one minute, scorching the next—Chi-town isn’t just the Windy City; it’s the most exciting weather city on the planet.

You can tackle those pesky projects you’ve been putting off for months. What better time to balance your checkbook, write your novel, or shave all your body hair than through the endless hours spent waiting for *Episode II*?

You get to debate endless details of the *Star Wars* films with people who are as obsessed as you are. Should Greedo have shot first? Why did Boba Fett die? And could better lotion use as a child have helped Darth Maul clean up that nasty skin condition? Answers to all these questions and more await you in line.

Seriously, it’s a once-in-a-lifetime experience...part endurance test, part campout, part endless party. I do it for the movies, I do it for the geek cred, but more than that, I do it because it’s an unforgettable experience.

I have unloaded the cooler and the suitcase and the lawn chair, I have kissed the girlfriend goodbye, I have parked the car in a metered spot.

I am in line.

Friday, May 10, 2002, 5 p.m.

I’m back after a break, during which I encountered an actual Sith Lord. No shit. A real life practitioner of the Dark Side.

Her name’s Lucy. She’s a cat.

I was over at my girlfriend’s sleeping, and so so tired. Also, so so very sick. I finally conk out around 11 p.m. after spending a few hours making fun of *The Phantom Menace* on Fox.

Just before I go to bed, I down most of a glass of water. Like a fool, I place the half-filled glass on the table just next to the bed.

At around 7 a.m., I’m shocked awake by a splash of cold, cold water. I swear to God, I was mighty freaked. I nearly had a heart attack and shat myself at the same time. That is no easy feat.

Sure enough, Darth Lucy had knocked the freakin' water over. Right onto my face. At 7 a.m. When I'm so so tired and so so sick.

As soon as this goddamned line is over, you mark my words. I'm gonna slice her paw off with my lightsaber.

Sunday, May 12, 2002, 3 p.m.

It's been a rough weekend.

Saturday was all about rain, rain and more rain. We were dry and relatively cozy under the theater's large box office awning, but it was still demoralizing to sit and watch a bleak grey sky deposit endless gallons of water upon the world.

I also had my car broken into last night. I went to it this morning and the passenger side rear window was shattered in. Nothing appears to be gone, except maybe a black bag that had a lot of important if worthless personal shit in it. But it doesn't matter. They could have stolen the car itself and it would have had the same emotional impact. It's a grand "Fuck you" from the elements themselves, from fate, from every force that seems to be conspiring against me sitting outside in a lawn chair for ten days just to see a movie.

Does it need to be so wet and cold? No. Did my car window need to be shattered for no absolute fucking reason other than than to make me hit the car and bruise my knuckles in one of millions of moments today when my emotions seem ready to fucking explode from every pore of my body, hot white fury just leaking from my body and searing into everyone around me, turning an experience that ranges from harmless to unforgettable into an infuriating, worthless draaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaag?

No, but it all happened, and my heart feels broken.

I am driving down Lake Shore Drive with a tarp flapping wildly out my broken back window, rain and Lake Michigan herself dribbling into my car, and I am beaten. My mind wanders and I cannot for the life of me figure out any reason to continue this bullshit. I wonder for the first time why I have bothered to spend all this time doing this. "For *Star Wars*" is a terrible answer; "For charity" is better, but still not great. "To spend time with my friends" is the best I can come up with, and I cherish them, but when I think about how I'm just burning right now with anger,

ready to smash in anything I can get my hands on, nothing seems worth that, not even a million great friends.

I pray to the Maker that I feel better tomorrow. Right now, I think I need some sleep.

Tuesday, May 14, 2002, 12:30 p.m.

Things are better.

The weather has gotten gorgeous, there are some new fans joining our ragtag crew, one kid brought a PlayStation 2 and we're generally feeling kickass again.

And this is around the point where this experience becomes hard to explain and best experienced. It's hard to tell anyone who hasn't done it just how cool it is without the inevitable, "Sure it is, gimp." Even the most diehard geeks can balk at the concept of the extended campout for a *Star Wars* movie.

It's been supershitty at times, and I have struggled as have my brethren and sisteren in line. But we have persevered. We have endured. And if we have accomplished nothing with our modest line, we have survived, and that is something.

It may mean nothing to you. It may be hard to comprehend unless you are here with me or in your own line somewhere. But from where I'm sitting, we did it. We saw it through. We bonded, we shivered, we conquered it.

It's not curing cancer, but it still feels good.

More from the epicenter tomorrow, the day I see the movie. Until then, may the Force be with you. Play with your figures. Watch your videos. And if there is a line crew in your locality, bring them coffee or donuts or cheeseburgers. They want them. I know they do. And damnit, they deserve them.

Star Wars: Episode II — Attack of the Clones
From *Entertainment Weekly*
May 2002

I give up.

I'll be honest with you. I needed *Episode II* to be great, and not just to justify my ten-day campout on the mean streets of Chicago to see the film. I can justify that pretty easy; I'm freakin' nutso, that's how I justify it!

It was more a point of personal pride. In order to look myself in the mirror every morning and respect my own geekdom, I needed George Lucas to hit a home run with *Attack of the Clones*, to deliver a movie that would allow me to continue being a *Star Wars* fan with my head held high.

Unfortunately, *Attack of the Clones* is not a home run. It's a ground-rule double, a nice play that brings in a run but won't make anybody's evening news highlight reel. It's a surprise in some ways and a disappointment in others, and for me, it's the final sign that *Star Wars* will never be truly great again. When it's all said and done, George Lucas' saga will comprise one brilliant movie, one fun popcorn ride, and eventually four scattered flicks that vary in quality from greatness to shit, often within the span of minutes.

That's exactly what you have with *Clones*, a wildly mixed bag of *Star Wars* nonsense. On one end of the genius spectrum, there's the Obi-Wan as Philip Marlowe subplot, which is cleverly written by Lucas and Jonathan Hales and exquisitely played by Ewan MacGregor. And weighing down the other end, there's the Anakin and Padmé romance, packed to the gills with groanworthy dialogue but really repulsive simply because Padmé buys Anakin's pouty "I'm a Jedi, my mom's dead, I'm obsessed with you" line of malarkey in the first place.

It's easy to believe that Anakin would sound like a gimp when it comes to chatting up the ladies; not only is he a gawky

kid in his late teens, he's also spent his formative years sequestered within the ranks of the Jedi, where he is forbidden to know love. But why in the name of all that is holy would Padmé, a mature woman who is allegedly smart and poised enough to have served as both queen and senator before her thirtieth birthday, buy into Anakin's teenage lurches toward nookie? Either Hayden Christensen's silky good looks are silky good in ways this straight male can't imagine, or there is a serious deficiency of eligible fellas on Naboo. Of course, it doesn't help that Padmé's "character" is still as vacuous as a black hole after two movies' worth of "development," but who cares about that bullshit when you can see her hooters poke out of her clothes? Right, George?

The wildly divergent levels of quality in these two storylines suggest that Lucas has completely lost control of his own saga. And beyond these twin story engines, *Clones* pretty much spews all over the map. Actually, it's quite a moviegoing value. For your eight bucks, you get three giant monsters, two slimy little snakes, millions of clonetroopers and battle droids marching to their death, and much much more. It's clear that everything but the Kamino sink is being thrown in your face with the vain hope that some of it will stick to your forehead.

Even the action sequences, which are usually the one area in which Lucas is still a master, run long and flaccid instead of short and tight. The chase scene through the skies of Coruscant extends well past any logical point of conclusion, and the adventures of Padmé, Anakin, Threepio and Artoo in a Geonosian droid factory are positively interminable, perhaps the worst action sequence in any *Star Wars* film.

On the other hand, it is WAY better than *Episode I*, and there are big parts of it that pay off in ways the first prequel couldn't nearly reach. Yoda's neat; though I wasn't as bowled over by the combination of Rob Coleman's animation team and Frank Oz's voice talents as some were, he's still pretty freaking cool. I can't say enough good things about Obi-Wan's storyline; it's perhaps the strongest proof that Hales might be yet another talented, creative guy who got his ideas smothered by Lucas' overbearing idiocy. Ian McDiarmid as Palpatine has several delicious moments of slimy malevolence, his victorious sneer barely hidden beneath the mask of the compassionate politician.

Many small touches, like greasy informant Dexter Jettster or Jango Fett's jetpack missile, also work; Lucas is truly a devil of the details.

Beyond all that, the movie somehow manages to convey Anakin's turn to the dark side in a powerful way. As petulant as Anakin is, Christensen manages to capture his desperate desire to make everything in his life work exactly as he wants it to. He wants Obi-Wan to let him go, he wants Padmé to be his lover, he wants everything. When he chooses to give in to his feelings and secretly marries Padmé, you are crushed by the inescapable weight of Anakin's destiny. In that moment, he has already fallen.

But mostly, you just have to pick through the mess that is *Attack of the Clones* and take away what you like. Are you a Jedi fan? You'll surely enjoy their many spectacular fight sequences. Do you take your movies dark? Then watch as Anakin descends into desire and loses control of his feelings. Do you like hooters? Hey, that Portman lass has got some major funbags, let me tell you! It lacks control; it's not the work of a confident filmmaker at the top of his powers but the product of a man who seems slightly desperate to connect with a fanbase that was bitterly divided over his last movie.

And yet, I will see *Clones* several more times at the theater. I will geek out over the parts I can enjoy and try not to wince during the more horrific moments. I will embrace this movie happily, even though I don't respect much of it, because I will always be a *Star Wars* fan, for better or worse.

But I have no illusions left. What *Episode II* proves is that *Star Wars* will never reclaim its former glory; there is no bottom-of-the-ninth creative grand slam waiting in the wings to redeem all the shit. A new *Star Wars* movie will never again make my hair stand on end, and I will never recapture the blush of my nerd youth by watching the prequels. George Lucas has turned *Star Wars* into a new animal, one that exists solely in the service of his mythmaker delusions and whichever technological breakthrough has become his latest obsession. I may like it, but it's not a good movie.

Oh well. At least I finally have my Count Dooku action figure.

On The Jazz #4: *Episode II* Problems
From *Entertainment Weekly*
October 2002

Time heals all wounds. And as Nick Lowe is fond of saying, time wounds all heels.

It's certainly wounded the filmic "heel" that was *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones*. That's not to say I feel myself turning against the movie the way I turned against *Episode I*. I still think *Clones* is a good film. Not nearly as good as it should be, mind you, and probably not "good" when held up against what most normal human beings perceive as "good" movies, like *Citizen Kane* or *The Godfather* or *Porky's*.

It's good enough. It's good enough for me as a hopelessly uncritical *Star Wars* fan.

But the rational non-fan side of my puny brain is disappointed, just as it was by *Episode I*, in the laziness of George Lucas' writing. Here is a man who has birthed a universe that is beyond intricate, with layers of character and detail and meaning that sometimes don't become apparent until decades after each film is released.

And what does he do to it? He runs all over it wearing spiked sneakers, by writing prequels that show little consideration for remaining true to the universe he's created. For whatever reason—call it boredom, call it greed, call it a distinct lack of genius—he just can't be bothered to pay attention.

Unfortunately, I can, and it's hard not to notice some of the more glaring, gaping maws within the construction of *Clones*...

The Memory Wipe: Throughout both *Episode I* and *Episode II*, C3P0 and R2D2 are learning things about the people and places in their universe that they don't seem to know in the later *Star Wars* films. They visit Tatooine, even though they seem

ignorant to it in *A New Hope*. They know Anakin Skywalker is their “maker,” but never bother to bring Anakin up to Luke when they meet him. This has led Lucas to already reveal that the droids are due for a memory wipe in *Episode III*, one that will rob them of any knowledge they have of the prequels going into the final three films.

Why? Why not write the films in such a way that the droids don’t learn things they shouldn’t know? Why does Anakin Skywalker have to be the one who builds Threepio? How does this serve the story or characters? Yeah, Anakin’s a gearhead; we get it, George. Does he need to construct a droid he later bumps into all the time to prove it? Does it do anything but force an undramatic and uninteresting plot contrivance to explain away the problem?

The “Mystery” of the Deleted Planet: When Obi-Wan can’t find Kamino, he takes the problem to Yoda. In one of the film’s most subtle and effective scenes, Yoda and a room full of padawans help Obi-Wan solve the mystery—if there’s a gravity pull, there’s a planet, even if it isn’t in the Jedi Archives. Then Yoda says, “Meditate on this, I will.”

Does he? Do we? Does anybody?

Who the hell did this? Count Dooku, I presume; or Darth Tyrranus, if you prefer. But why don’t the Jedi make figuring that lil’ mystery out an A1 top priority mission? Isn’t the mere idea that someone’s been rooting around in their Archives enough of a threat to get their asses up off those Ikea...I mean, Jedi Council chairs? And if the missing planet is tied into Obi-Wan’s mystery, and the mysterious clone order he discovers...for crying out loud, Jar Jar could put these pieces together, and yet, the Jedi don’t. They don’t even bother trying.

The New Yoda: Much has been made of Yoda’s big fight scene, and some fans seem to think that it’s not in Yoda’s character to engage in a knock-down drag-out lightsaber battle. I disagree; I think it’s set up in such a way that it makes perfect sense for Yoda to unleash his Super-Size can of whoopass on Dooku, and I think the final touch of Yoda picking up his cane after the battle is over makes it all fit—Yoda remains the wise and powerful wizard who only uses aggression when necessary.

What disturbs me more is Yoda’s sudden and inexplicable gift for commanding a major military force on a risky invasion of

an occupied planet. In one of the film's first scenes, Mace Windu reminds Palpatine, "We're keepers of the peace, not soldiers." Okay, the Republic's being threatened, so the Jedi become soliders at the end. Tragic. But when does Yoda become Mini-Patton? Not only does he zoom off to Kamino with nary a raised eyebrow to pick up a clone army that NO ONE SEEMS TO HAVE ORDERED, he then suddenly gains the experience necessary to COMMAND THIS ARMY IN BATTLE...AND WIN.

This is a serious rupture in Yoda's character. "Wars not make one great," he says in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and it's possible that participating in the battle on Geonosis has given him his peacenik perspective. But he sure seems pretty gung-ho on the war tip when he's told of the clone army's progress and says with pride, "Good, good." Throughout the battle, Yoda is never characterized as feeling any regret, remorse or hesitation over this tragic turn of events. He seems almost excited to see those clones slice and dice Dooku's evil army.

Come on, George. Why doesn't Bail Organa just command the army? It takes care of the "Years ago, you served my father in the Clone Wars" line from *A New Hope*. It gives Jimmy Smits, a recognizable and talented actor, something to do in the damn movie. And it sets up instant character tension—a man opposed to war forced to command an army by the machinations of Dooku and Sidious. But I guess that would have been too smart, too easy, too interesting for these new *Star Wars* films.

The very idea that Yoda becomes a general in *Clones* is the most glaring example of George Lucas taking a steaming wet dump all over his own creations, and in the process, he forever tarnishes one of the most compelling and moving characters in the *Star Wars* universe. The Yoda who battles Dooku to end a war and save two of his friends is the same Yoda we know from *Empire* and *Jedi*; even in combat, he is a creature of compassion, justice and restraint. The Yoda who leads an army of clones into a foaming bloody battle is an aberration.

**Excerpts from *Unconventional*
February 2003**

**PROLOGUE
November 1984**

Luke Skywalker was just about to take a spill into Jabba the Hutt's Rancor pit when Theo got kicked in the balls.

"DORK!" Tommy Livingston screamed as his foot made contact with Theo's groin. Tears welled in Theo's eyes and he dropped to his knees, his hands immediately traveling downward to his crotch. He bent his head and fell to his side.

Tommy was the top dog in fourth grade—not necessarily the most popular kid, and certainly nowhere near the smartest, but definitely the most feared. The lame, the dorky and the weak cowered in his presence—the mere whispered mention of his name was enough to send Danny Mandernach, the sickly anemic albino whose mom walked him to school, into bawling hysterics.

Decades later, all who were tortured by Tommy Livingston would be advised by their therapists that his tactics were little more than an unfortunate response to his premature physical development—Tommy was shopping in the big boys' section at J.C. Penney well before his contemporaries had left their Osh Kosh outfits behind. And running into him working the counter at the local Wendy's was plenty of consolation once they had overcome the indelible psychic scars brought on by his reign of terror.

But in 1984, the kid was just plain scary. Theo felt the full brunt of his fearful power as Tommy stood over his agonized form, grinning his half-toothless grin. Behind him, an ogling crew of his top cronies in the playground Gestapo snickered like

cartoon vultures. One of them had planted his boot on top of Theo's copy of the *Return of the Jedi* novelization.

"You are a DORK," Tommy screamed again. The cronies renewed their giggles.

"Way to state the obvious, Tommy," Theo muttered under his breath as he rolled in agony on the parking lot pavement.

"What did you say, dork?" Tommy was in Theo's face now, leaning over him, all four feet of his hulking frame towering over Theo's inert form.

"Nothing," Theo muttered, rolling away from Tommy. Tommy stared for a moment, chuckled to himself, then stepped away. The Gestapo followed a few feet behind, their hands entangling together in their race to eagerly slap Tommy's ample back, each occasionally pausing to gawk back at their lead henchman's handiwork.

Aside from the fact that he'd been kicked in the groin—a stripe of blow so vicious that even Tommy Livingston's near-boundless cruelty could only summon the hate to deliver it on rare occasions—this represented an average day for Theodore Makrakis. He'd be minding his own business in the corner during recess at St. Jude the Apostle School in Chicago's south suburbs, perhaps reading a *Choose Your Own Adventure* (he had them all) or studying his *Star Trek Compendium* for episode details he may have missed. Occasionally he'd glance up over his reading, not just to scope out for Tommy but to watch for any other classmate who might have singled him out on that particular day for a pantsing or verbal taunting. When you were at the bottom of the grade school food chain, everyone wanted their shot, and everyone took it.

He'd be standing there, keeping his eagle-eyed watch, and still Tommy would manage to surprise him—every single time—and then came the pain. If it wasn't a sharp knuckle punch on the upper arm, it was a kick to the shin. If it wasn't a kick to the shin, it was a punch in the gut. If it wasn't a punch in the gut, it was a knee to the crotch. It was as ritualistic as the sacrifice of the rebels to the Sarlacc pit, and no more enjoyable either. Sometimes he felt like he, too, was learning a new definition of pain and suffering as he was slowly digested over a thousand years.

Still, it could be worse. Theo wasn't always sure how, but he was certain there was some way.

Theo crouched cautiously on one knee, eyes saucer-wide, scanning the area for further threats. Fortunately, he was alone again in his corner of the playground. He dusted off his jeans and reached over for his novelization, only to find it missing. His eyes rolled into the back of his head and he groaned. First, the daily Tommy assault; now a surprise book heist. It was shaping up to be a super day.

“Hey,” a voice shouted from a few feet away. Ron Davies, a kid he recognized from math class, stood there holding his novelization. He had opened it to a particular passage and was pointing idly toward it. Next to him, that chubby new kid Marty McAfee was balancing carefully on his tippy-toes and reading over Ron’s shoulder.

“That’s mine,” Theo said, striding over to the pair. This couldn’t be good. The other kids only talked to him if they wanted the cheap, sadistic thrills of mocking him or the answers to a pop quiz.

“Have you read this?” Ron asked as Marty kept reading, every so often losing his balance and falling back onto his heels.

“Yeah,” Theo replied. “Just give it back. Please.”

“No, this part right here.” Ron pushed the book into Theo’s face. “Obi-Wan doesn’t say this in the movie.”

Theo had read the *Return of the Jedi* novelization sixty-seven times since he’d begged his mom to pick it up in the supermarket checkout line last May. He would have squeezed in twice as many readings, but his dad kept hiding it around the house to prevent him from disappearing into it too often. Theo knew the section of which Ron spoke especially well—in the passage detailing Luke’s chat with his mentor Obi-Wan Kenobi on Dagobah after Yoda’s death, Obi-Wan delivered a speech about hurling his former pupil Anakin Skywalker into a pit of lava. Of course Obi-Wan didn’t say that in the movie.

“Of course Obi-Wan didn’t say that in the movie,” Theo said.

“Well, that’s weird,” Marty retorted, standing normally again and pushing his sliding glasses back up his nose with a snuffle. “Why not?”

“George Lucas probably just decided to change it or something,” Ron said. “Maybe he changed his mind.”

“I don’t think George Lucas would change his mind!”

Theo snorted with disgust at their insinuation that George Lucas could ever be wrong about anything. And with that snort, a glob of early winter snot flew from out his nose and straight onto the open page of his book. The three boys stared at the snot for a second, and then Ron stuck out his hand.

“I’m Ron. This is Marty. And that was so cool.”

Chapter 4

On May 19, 1999, at 10:45 a.m. in Chicago’s McClurg Court Theater, Theodore “Hammerhead” Makrakis saw *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* for the first time.

On May 20, 1999, he began writing. For thirty straight hours he wrote, single-spaced, on his mom’s ancient typewriter, until a document was complete—The Phantom Memo. Over the course of forty-two pages, Ham outlined everything that was wrong with *The Phantom Menace*, with George Lucas, and with science fiction in general. In his humble opinion, of course.

The moment it was complete, he brought the memo to the Fortress and read whole passages from it aloud—to Marty, Ron, Toby and any other patron who might have drifted into hearing range of his voice. By June, they were rolling their eyes, and by July, Toby had banned the “blasted mad document” from his store completely.

It didn’t matter—he hung up fliers and sold copies of it at cost from his house. He mailed it to Skywalker Ranch and every executive at Twentieth Century Fox. He posted it on his webpage. The word quickly got out, and when fans read the document, their reaction was nearly universal: Ham was a stark raving lunatic.

On Friday, August 24, 2001, Ham clutched a sweaty copy of this manifesto tightly to his chest as he stepped into the Hyatt Regency Schaumburg’s largest meeting room, which would be serving as the space for most of the con’s major events. Its small stage was adorned with huge cardboard rocketships covered in aluminum foil and thousands of tiny glow-in-the-dark stars pasted to sheets of black poster board. A chain of helium-filled balloons created a makeshift proscenium over the space where a shortish man of about sixty sat on a stool and held the crowd entranced. The man was Gene Carter, a minor figure in the

history of film, but a major figure in the history of fandom—he had appeared as a stormtrooper in all three of the original *Star Wars* films. In his two decades working the convention circuit, his stories had become as legendary as his propensity for alcohol and women. Ham took a seat in the back of the room and listened as Carter spun silken words from bullshit.

“I really hoped George would call me to be in *The Phantom Menace*, maybe as a Jawa or some such nonsense,” he quipped. The crowd, which filled up a solid half of the room, chuckled appreciatively. Many of them had seen Carter speak so often that they could mouth the words of his stories along with him.

“Can you see me in a little Jawa hood, screaming at the top of my lungs? ‘Utini!’” The chuckles became a roar, and he took a sip from his “water” —which most fans knew was really gin and tonic—as the crowd applauded.

“But then I realized, he’s got to be saving me for *Episode II. Attack of the Clones*? Hello? Stormtroopers anyone? That’s got to be his game. So I did approach him at the premiere of the *Star Wars* Special Edition, and he said he’d definitely keep me in mind. My webmaster is out there somewhere...”

A bespectacled kid of fifteen raised his gawky hand.

“There he is! Big hand for Chris Kurtz, everyone. Webmaster to the stars. Great kid. Anyway, he has a petition up you can surf over and sign, asking George Lucas to put me in *Episode II* as a stormtrooper, or clonetrooper, or whatever. So check it out and sign up. It’s at www.genecarter.com and it’s just a great site in general, pictures and stories and you can buy my hats and T-shirts and everything. Great stuff.

“Now that I’ve gotten my plug in, ha ha, I better skeedaddle to sign some autographs. Thanks for having me again this year and enjoy UnCon 2001!”

The crowd erupted into a spontaneous standing ovation for Carter. Ham remained seated in the back of the room, flipping through his memo. This was his big chance.

After a forty-five minute wait in the autograph line, Ham finally reached the front. He slid the memo across the table toward Carter.

“Who should I make this out to, kid?” Carter said, looking up and winking at Ham.

“No one. I mean, it’s not for signing, really.”

“Then what are you here for? There’s a line, you see. I can’t really chat now. Stop by my panel tomorrow and ask your question...”

“I need you to take that.”

“Excuse me?” Carter tried to smile warmly, but it came off as cold and smug.

“You need to take that. It’s a memo. For George Lucas.”

“Is it really?” Carter said, flipping through the tight single-spaced pages. He seemed momentarily in awe of the document. “What is this?”

“It’s about why I thought *The Phantom Menace* sucked, and what’s wrong with *Star Wars* and everything I want to say to him.”

“And you want me to do what with it?”

“Well, you said you see George Lucas sometimes. Take it to him. I think he needs to read it.”

“I’m sure he does, kid.” Carter was through with the game. “I hate to break your heart, because clearly you’ve put some time into this, but I can’t give it to George. What would he do with it?”

“Read it. Figure out what his problem is.” Ham was beginning to flip out a bit now. His face suddenly blushed red and his hands began to tremble as he gestured wildly with them. “I mean, it’s not really for you, it’s for him...”

“Listen, buddy,” Carter said, motioning for Ham to lean in close. Ham bent his head down toward the actor. “George Lucas is a very rich and powerful man. He has buttloads of money. Why would he want to take notes from you?”

“Because I’ve seen all the movies,” Ham said. His voice had lost its pitch control and was veering wildly into ranges only dogs could hear. Ham leaned down on the table and into Carter’s face. “I know *Star Wars*, I’ve watched *Star Wars*, and *The Phantom Menace* isn’t *Star Wars*.”

“Then what is it?”

“It’s shit!” Ham shrieked. He stopped himself--he had to keep composure. He couldn’t flip out. Not when he was so close.

“I cannot take this, kid. I admire your guts, though. Wish I’d had someone like you with me in ‘Nam. You want me to sign it, or not?”

Ham looked at the memo, then looked at Carter. He was shaking the Osco gold pen he used for autographs and flattening out the cover of the document, Ham's document, Ham's dream. Then Ham rolled his eyes and shook his head.

"Make it out to Theo," he muttered, slapping twenty dollars down on the table.

"See, buddy? That wasn't so hard!"

"Fuck you," Ham said. He strode away, carefully nestling the memo in his hands so as not to smear the gold marker signature.

**The Essential Geek #5: The *Star Wars* Holiday Special
From JimHillMedia.com
December 2003**

I have many memories from the line-up for *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace*.

Sitting damp under a trash bag on Ohio Street during a torrential downpour and chatting with my friend who got to see the movie early (bastard). Missing Roger Ebert and his interview team by mere moments. Dragging a massive tarp down the block to a pack of fans desperately in need of protection from the elements. Making new best friends every ten minutes.

But perhaps my strangest memory is waking up in a hotel room after a brief bit of sleep to find my copy of the *Star Wars Holiday Special* playing on the hotel room TV. In a state of absolute exhaustion and adrenaline-fueled mania, it was like visiting someone else's brain to watch an acid trip. Even now, watching it on a full evening of sleep and minus any influencing narcotics, it's an unspeakably odd spectacle.

What is the *Star Wars Holiday Special*? In a sense, the classic edict holds true: For those who've seen it, no explanation is necessary. For those who haven't, no explanation will suffice. The short version is that in November of 1978, CBS aired a two-hour special featuring the ENTIRE cast of the original *Star Wars* feature film, save Alec Guinness and Peter Cushing. Everyone from Harrison Ford to James Earl Jones and the midget inside R2D2 were in this thing. Also appearing were such seventies TV icons as Bea Arthur, Art Carney and Harvey Korman. Musical entertainment was provided by Diahann Carroll and Jefferson Starship.

Oh, and Carrie Fisher sang too. Poorly.

The long answer is that the *Star Wars Holiday Special* is one of the most abysmal and unintentionally hilarious slices of televised dreck that has ever been produced. Legend has it that George Lucas himself collaborated on the story for the special before moving on to production of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Suffice it to say that his efforts on the *Holiday Special* make the prequels look like *Citizen Kane*.

The “story” has Chewbacca and Han Solo racing to Chewie’s home planet of Kashyyyk (nope, I can’t pronounce it either) so that the Wookiee can celebrate Life Day with his family. Meanwhile, back on Kashyyyk (still can’t pronounce it!), the Chewie family is being hunted by the Empire since their daddy/husband/son is now a wanted member of the Rebel Alliance. Luckily, the Chewie family has Art Carney to help them hide. (Trust me, you’d have a hard time finding them too if, when you tracked them down, a sad old man gamely tried to resurrect old *Honeymooners* bits for you.) Of course, they do end up escaping the bad guys and Chewie makes it home, along with Princess Leia and Luke Skywalker, for a rousing musical number loosely based on the *Star Wars* main theme.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Holiday Special, although if you’ve ever seen it, you probably feel like the special itself seems about 25 years long. At it begins, it seems like a fun enough way to spend two hours, especially when Mark Hamill and Harrison Ford both pop up on screen. It’s like discovering a long-lost *Star Wars* film. Unfortunately, this long-lost film should have stayed lost.

Things first take a turn for the worse when we find ourselves spending interminable minutes in Chewie’s home hanging out with his family. We meet his wife Mala, his son Lumpy, and his father Itchy. (Nope, no typos there. Mala, Lumpy and Itchy. Who woulda thought a guy named Chewbacca would be the one who got lucky when monickers were handed out?) These sequences with the Wookiees feature absolutely NO dialogue save the occasional moan or grunt from the Wookiees in question. They could be fighting; they could be swearing; they could be discussing their daddy’s spice-selling side business for all we know.

Once we’ve spent a good long solid time being lulled into a coma by the mind-numbing spectacle of Wookiees at home

(which comes off surprisingly like an episode of *The Osbournes*, unintelligible grunts and all), for the rest of the special, we pop around between the Wookiees at home and our classic *Star Wars* heroes bounding about the galaxy, with the occasional strange vignette mixed in for the sake of variety.

Harvey Korman appears as a chef on a Wookiee cooking show with something like fifteen thousand arms. Much comedy ensues when his various appendages attempt to do various funny appendageish things. In the special's most surreal moment (and THAT is a tough competition to win), Bea Arthur has a wistful musical number as the bartender of a cantina in Mos Eisley who must kick out her patrons after the Empire closes her club early. Harvey Korman again appears in that "sketch" as a drunkard who can pour booze into the top of his head and has a crush on Bea.

But in terms of sheer strange bald queasy weird badness, the most AWFUL of the TRULY AWFUL moments, it doesn't get any better than Diahann Carroll's guest spot. You see, even Wookiees have sexual needs, even aging grey perverse Wookiees who've fathered heroes of the Rebel Alliance. When Itchy gets, uh, ITCHY, he straps on this virtual reality contraption that allows him to view Diahann Carroll seductively singing a torch song. Before she sings, she coos into the camera, "I am your fantasy. I am your experience. So experience me. I am your pleasure. Enjoy me."

How many therapists have put braces on their kids' teeth just from treating the sad *Star Wars* geeks who had their brains twisted forever by viewing the above atrocity? If the word "Itchy" inspires impotence in you, or even for some unspeakable reason arousal, you too may be a victim. Seek help now.

The *Star Wars Holiday Special* can't really be put into words. Well, it can, but they're just a few short words, like "sucky" and "despicable" and "so very bad it's very good." And yet, it endures in the hearts of geeks everywhere. For fans who were kids when it was released, it's a memory of an unforgettable moment when the characters they loved so much in theaters (before the days of endless replay via home video) actually made an appearance on their TV screens. For fans who were lucky enough to avoid the special when it was first broadcast, it's an unassailable sliver of

kitsch, ripe for all kinds of mockery and the occasional jaw-drop of astonishment.

True *Star Wars* geeks will also note the special for its introduction of a minor character who looms large in the hearts of nerds around the globe, Mr. Boba Fett. Nelvana produced a short cartoon featurette starring the bounty hunter, which appears in the midst of the strangeness as a cartoon that lil' Lumpy is watching and comprises perhaps the only portion of the special that decent folks with decent taste can actually stomach. Is the whole thing worth watching just for the cartoon? Only if you wear Han Solo Underoos to bed.

Of course, now you want to see the special for yourself. Sadly, Lucas has made it clear that the show should never be broadcast again or released on video. Luckily, intrepid video bootleggers have built a cottage industry out of selling dubbed tapes of the special. The best I can recommend is to check out Ebay early and often. A search just now for *Star Wars Holiday Special* dug up ten to fifteen auctions, and you should be able to pick up your own tape for around twenty bucks, tops. You will also have luck visiting the various bootlegger tables at your favorite sci-fi convention.

Above all this holiday season, I'm thankful for the *Star Wars Holiday Special*. Not just that it exists and that I can make fun of it for a thousand words on a website, but because it's around for Christmastime. Any other time of year, this hunk of crap would be virtually unwatchable. But mix together a tape of the special, some good friends, and a keg or two of leaded eggnog, and you've got yourself a party.

Happy Life Day, everyone!

On The Jazz #18: Fuck George Lucas
From *Entertainment Weekly*
February 2004

Fuck George Lucas.

I've practically had to shackle my hands to my desk to keep from typing those words. You don't know how bad I've wanted to lay into that sad, flannel-clad motherfucker since the announcement of *Star Wars* on DVD. (It's coming September 21, in case you haven't heard. Four discs, one with extras, possibly commentaries, only the Not-So-Special Editions. NO original versions of the films.)

You read that right: NO original versions. And that chafed my gourd. But I wasn't going to say anything, because I always talk shit about Lucas, and he's always a bastard.

I could not, however, stay silent any longer when I read this charming quote from Jim Ward, a Lucasfilm VP and the exec producer of the set, in the *New York Post's* writeup on the DVDs:

"We realize there's a lot of debate out there. But this is not a democracy. We love our fans, but this is about art and filmmaking. [George] has decided that the sole version he wants available is this one."

To paraphrase the great Khan Noonien Singh, I cannot help but be chafed. I think any fan of *Star Wars*, or any fan of DVDs or movies or pop culture, should be chafed. Those little loaded words raise all sorts of questions that Lucas himself has ignored for the better part of his prequel-era career.

I guess the first and foremost question is pretty easy. Is the relationship between consumers and the "artist" a democracy? Technically, it's not a democracy. And yet, in a sense, technically it is. When it comes to consuming pop media, we do "vote" on

what we like and don't like. We "vote" with TV ratings, with movie tickets, with purchases at Best Buy. Some of these systems are more flawed than others (do we REALLY get a vote when it comes to TV ratings, or is it just a pack of weird psychopaths in middle America with Nielsen boxes who determine how many quality shows are canceled by November 1 each season?) but we do have a very tangible voice. That voice speaks through our participation, and we participate mostly through spending.

(We also have a voice in the sense that fandom can communicate its opinions via a wide variety of outlets, most prominently the internet. But this is less consequential than money ever could be. More on this later.)

Buying a movie ticket or a DVD is not true "voting" in practice, however, for a couple reasons. First off, there are myriad factors that impact how our "votes" are counted. 100,000 people may buy a DVD set, and that may be viewed as great numbers for one property or crappy numbers for another. A small specialty company could see those sales as a blockbuster; for a megalocorporation, those sales may be a disappointment. Additionally, there may be corporate bullshit involved, or the ego-stroking of an important Hollywood player, or any one of a million reasons why those numbers may be tossed out the window.

Then there's the category where you'd put people like Lucas, folks for whom those numbers are largely meaningless. If you have enough money or enough power or the sheer force of will, it doesn't matter who sees your movies or buys your DVDs or snags your album. You can crank out whatever you want, public be damned.

And that may be all that matters when it comes to this issue, and that's the biggest reason why I hate Lucas; for him, it isn't a democracy, and I'd like to believe that it is. Skywalker Ranch is in fact a monarchy, with King George as the high holy ruler of all us lowly neophytes who clearly don't know what's good for us and need to be spoon-fed the "right" version of the films.

But ultimately, our "votes" may not count in this particular matter because we're not really exerting our opinions, are we? Moriarity put it best on Ain't It Cool:

“If fandom decided that it was a big enough deal to them that they were not getting the original theatrical versions of the films, they could demonstrate their personal displeasure by not buying the box set. And that’ll never happen.”

We may vote by buying, but we buy like morons, and thus, our purchases become meaningless. In a fan climate where folks will drop a couple hundred bucks for a fiberglass tube with a light in it masquerading as a “lightsaber,” is there any doubt we’ll lap up whatever garbage King George tosses into our troughs? Even if it’s not what we really want? None at all.

So technically, the relationship between artist and consumer is in fact a democracy; in practice, it is not. At the very least, we know it isn’t for Lucas.

But wait. There’s more. Let’s yank another portion from Ward’s quote: “...this is about art and filmmaking.”

Is this really a question of “art”? If it were a question of “art,” then one would assume that the decision would be made to release only the Special Editions because they were artistically superior to the Original Editions. Then we get into all kinds of very hazy issues of what makes art, who decides what’s “superior” and what isn’t, and so on.

I think for the sake of argument, we can assume that the opinions of fans do matter in this regard. And I think the fan petition for release of the true OT on DVD speaks volumes. As of this writing, over 52,000 fans want the original films available on DVD as they were released in the late seventies and early eighties. At best, fans want to choose between the Original Editions and the Special Editions as they see fit; at worst, they view the SEs as an artistic failure.

If you buy into the common media line on the DVDs, there’s actually way, way more than 52,000 geeks who want the Original Editions on DVD. Courtesy of The Force.Net, a sampling from the media coverage of the DVD announcement:

From the *San Diego Union Tribune*: “The versions on DVD will only feature the special editions, LucasFilm spokeswoman Lynn Hale said. Many fans of the original movies had hoped the rougher, unaltered films would also be provided.”

From the *Toronto Star*: “The three films will be available only as a collection and will be the special editions only — the versions that were digitally spruced up a few years ago — and not the originals.”

From Fox News: “The DVDs, which are certain to be blockbusters, are also certain to be controversial: Despite pleas from *Star Wars* fanatics all over the world, these DVDs will not contain the original theatrical version of the movies.”

If everyone agreed that the SEs were better, or even if everyone agreed that Lucas has no responsibility to the desires of his fans and that he should be able to do whatever he wants because he’s GEORGE FUCKING LUCAS DAMNIT, then why would most of the media coverage of the DVD release mention that we’re only getting the SEs, and that fans are going to be disappointed? Sure, it’s an easy story hook, but it’s one of those hooks that also happens to be true, based on the petition. At least 52,000 fans want the Original Editions on DVD; probably more.

So if it’s about art, the Original Editions should be released, because the Special Editions haven’t really improved the films in the eyes of anyone but Lucas. Of course, this assumes that the consumers of art have a say in the media we love so much. Lucas would probably argue pretty vehemently that we don’t; he’s King George, remember?

I’d tell him to fuck off. Does the guy who’s watched *A New Hope* once a day every day for the past seven years honestly have no right to feel he has anything vested in the future of these films? How can that be so? What kind of a tyrant would deny this fan his right to purchase whatever version of the films he wanted, or at least to purchase a set that includes both versions of the films? King George, that’s who.

When a movie is released, whether it’s a big movie or a small movie, a popular movie or a flop, there’s a contract implicit with the viewer. The creator has worked hard to bring his vision to the screen, and the audience accepts the work as much as they can. When a movie is as popular and beloved as the original *Star Wars* movies are, there’s a vested interest that fans have in it, a passion they express for it with their costumes and their money and their

time. Lucas has touched people with his work in a profound way, and to me, this means Lucas does owe his fans a voice in the future of these films. Should we be there voting on every angle of every scene that he chooses to shoot for the prequels? Absolutely not. Should it matter whether most of us want the opportunity to purchase these movies as we loved them when we were kids, the way we saw them when we first sat in a theater and were blown away? Fucking right, it should.

Lucas would think that whole idea is bullshit, but fuck him. He's wrong...about a great many things.

But it's not even about art, at the end of this very long day; it's about history. Lucas is practicing a dirty, hubris-tinged version of revisionist history by hewing so stringently to his Special Editions-only line. And as technology improves for home video and releases become more and more accurately described as "archival," Lucas will eventually be able to erase the original movies from film history. Even now, there may be a thriving trade in bootleg discs of the originals as released in theaters back in the day, but it's still not an easy task to track down the classic versions of the Holy Trilogy. That will only get harder each year, until our kids and their kids will be stuck with Greedo shooting first and an abortion of a dance number crammed down the throat of Return of the Jedi.

That's what it's all about, not money or art or "filmmaking." It's about control. King George is obsessed with it, and we're just the nostalgia-drunk stooges who keep letting him have it.

The Essential Geek #20: *The Empire Strikes Back*
From JimHillMedia.com
July 2004

There's a classic story about George Lucas and the opening day of *Star Wars* in 1977. As the film premiered in New York and Los Angeles, he was busy in a dark room mixing foreign language versions of the film. His then-wife Marsha arrived and they decided to have dinner together.

Heading toward the Hamburger Hamlet on Hollywood Boulevard, directly across the street from Grauman's Chinese Theater, they sat in a terrible traffic jam, wondering what could be causing such a disruption. It wasn't until they finally reached the restaurant and glanced across the street that they realized what they were seeing. *Star Wars* was playing, and the lines stretched down the block.

"So we sat in Hamburger Hamlet and watched the giant crowd out there, and then I went back and mixed all night," Lucas told author Dale Pollock for his biography of the filmmaker, *Skylarking*. "It wasn't excitement, it was amazement."

Imagine the pressure, then, of creating the inevitable sequel to *Star Wars*. You have a public clamoring for the latest adventures of Luke, Han and Leia. You have a burgeoning nerddom already scooping up collectibles and discussing the film eagerly at conventions and in fanzines. You have pressure from your collaborators and pressure from the studio. Pretty intimidating stuff.

Somehow, Lucas and his team managed to satisfy just about everyone. In 1977, George Lucas transformed Hollywood and popular culture with *Star Wars*. In 1980, he upped the ante by suggesting a new strategy. He defied just about every convention of popular filmmaking, and he let the bad guys win.

By the time the credits roll, *The Empire Strikes Back* has floored you with the emotional impact of a punch in the gut. Five minutes into the film, Luke Skywalker is attacked by a scary snow monster. Two hours later, Han Solo is on his way to Jabba the Hutt, Leia is mourning the loss of her newfound love, and Luke is coming to terms with four words that would change his life forever (not to mention the loss of his right hand).

On the surface, *Empire* is as fun and fast as *Star Wars*, and is somehow more relentless than the intense original film. The classic chases between the Millennium Falcon and the Imperial fleet move at a breakneck pace, helped along by John Williams' breathless score. Action moves briskly from an ice planet to a swamp planet to the depths of space and finally to a mystical city in the clouds, where our heroes face the ultimate reckoning against the Empire. Even when the film seems to slow, it never stops.

As Han and Leia and the comic relief wing their way hither and yon in their futile efforts to escape evil, Luke finally learns something of substance about the mysterious Force that flows so strongly through him. His sequences with Yoda provide interludes of humor and depth between the frantic chase sequences, and so it's easy to take them for granted as you wait to soar again through space in the Falcon with Star Destroyers hot on your tail.

Watch Yoda and Luke and Artoo more closely next time you see *Empire*; inhale with your brain and take in every detail. Each scene is a minor gem of filmmaking magic, especially in today's CG-drenched age, where Frank Oz's puppetry has been pushed aside and replaced by ones and zeroes. You find yourself quickly and fully invested in a puppet and a robot and a young student struggling to grasp profundities rattled off in a grumpy growl.

Some have called Lucas' notions about the Force little more than pop hokum; others have adopted them as a near-religion. Whatever your own feelings, there's some beautiful and simple ideas there, expressed by the script and the actors with uncommon grace. "Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter..." We could do a lot worse than to live by those words as we shuffle through this world.

Meanwhile, the Falcon soars on, and the dialogue onboard the spacecraft effortlessly fleshes out the characters through classic one-liners, each of them delivered with the anxiousness of that one panicked moment when all seems lost and they're about to be obliterated by their adversaries. There's not a single scene between Han and Leia that doesn't crackle, as screenwriters Lawrence Kasdan and Leigh Brackett cast Han and Leia as an otherworldly Hepburn and Tracy, quipping their way across the galaxy with the Empire's sinister agents in hot pursuit.

But whatever the fun, whatever the quips, whatever the depth of *Empire*, an undercurrent of darkness and desperation runs beneath it all. The desolate opening sequence on Hoth suggests the loneliness and impossibility of the Rebellion's struggle. Throughout, evil is never more than a step behind our heroes. The Falcon never does manage to completely shake the Empire until Han has been frozen in carbonite and Luke has narrowly slipped between Vader's fingers. Even the sequences in which Yoda teaches Luke the ways of the Force are insidiously downbeat—we may learn a lot from the sage Jedi Master, but Luke certainly doesn't seem to.

No moment is more bleak, more impassioned and more desperate than when Artoo finally opens the hatch that will lead Leia and Lando and the rest out to the waiting Falcon at Cloud City. Williams' bittersweet romantic theme for Han and Leia swells, Artoo unleashes a cloud of smoke that provides an uncertain haze, and Leia blasts angrily at the stormtroopers hot on their tail. The look on her face tells us that she has no idea that she'll ever see the man she loves again.

It's a crushing moment, and honestly, has a big summer event movie ever managed to crush you emotionally the way *Empire* can? Even when you know that *Return of the Jedi* will come along next and make everything okay, it still has an undeniable impact. It's still that punch in the gut.

As a sequel, *Empire* did the impossible. It raised every possible stake in the *Star Wars* series. The characters and story gain unexpected new dimensions that echo both backward to the original *Star Wars* and forward into *Return of the Jedi*. That makes *Empire* the heart of the original trilogy.

Taken on its own terms, *The Empire Strikes Back* is as sweeping as *Gone With the Wind*, as sharp as *The Philadelphia Story*, and perhaps the most simply imaginative sci-fi film ever. The Rebellion may have lost this one, but in the end, it was geeks the world over who won.

***Star Wars* on DVD: It Is GOOD**
From *Entertainment Weekly*
September 2004

Time for a truce, George.

A break in the hostilities. A warming of the Cold War between us. Detente, if you will.

I have gone on record as hating you, George Lucas. I have said “Fuck you” on this wacky internet of ours countless times. The mere mention of your name makes my blood boil, and I have a sneaking feeling that within months, my heart will pump bile for you again.

But today, I am at peace. I am happy. I feel loved.

Star Wars is on DVD, and it is GOOD.

I can't be the only geek out there who confronted this day with a bit of dread. We've all read about the weird, stupid, rampant changes he's inflicted upon his masterpiece yet again. Hayden in *Jedi*, Ian McDiarmid in *Empire*, Han AND Greedo somehow both shooting first. Dunno about you, but hearing about it has been enough to make my skin crawl.

So I popped these discs in with a healthy dose of fear, expecting to feel very angry very quick. Like the day I watched *The Phantom Menace* on my newly-purchased VHS copy and realized how bad the movie sucked. Or the time I watched the *Episode II* making-of featurette on the last video boxed set and realized it was yet another waste of my time, offering no new information or insights whatsoever and tacked onto a product just to move units. Or the day I read on TheForce.Net about the possibility that Yoda may FART in *Episode III*.

Oh, I've been plenty pissed at you, Georgie boy. Plenty dreading these DVDs, and fully prepared to hate your guts for the thousandth time.

Imagine my surprise when I realized this is a fantastic DVD set.

First, the films themselves. They look SPECTACULAR. They not only look like they were filmed yesterday, they make me feel like I have never seen them before. Yes, they look that good. Whoever did this restoration job should win an Oscar, an Emmy, a Grammy, the presidency and the Nobel Peace Prize.

And sure, the changes suck...but they don't suck that bad. I hate Hayden's annoying-ass shitty acting mug in my *Return of the Jedi* and I always will. Lucas says it's cause you change to when you were the most good when you die, or some such crap. If that's true, then why is Ben a decrepit wrinkly old geezer for eternity, and Anakin gets to be a stone cold hottie? Obi-Wan holds shit together for a couple decades and then springs back into action to resurrect the Jedi, all while Anakin is busy strangling people and blowing up planets and generally being nasty, and ANAKIN gets the better break? How the fuck is that fair? Then you have Luke Skywalker, gazing benevolently on his Jedi forefathers, and looking at the young Anakin like he knows who he is. HE'S NEVER SEEN HIM BEFORE! He thinks his dad is the pasty Sebastian Shaw! How exactly does this make any sense whatsoever, George? What the fuck is your problem, asshole? Why do you have to fuck with my childhood, you sad chubby mother--

I digress.

Everything else pretty much works for me, and if it doesn't work, it's not that big a deal. The Greedo/Han scene isn't better, but it isn't worse. Jabba supposedly looks better, but I don't care; I've never cared much about that scene. You get to see Gungans shouting "Wesa free!" in the closing moments of *Jedi*, which is annoying...but by that time, after forty-five minutes of duel and space battle and Ewok crap, you're kinda numb regardless.

Then there's the other biggie, the Ian McDiarmid in *Empire* with fancy new dialogue change, and I am shocked to admit that this actually makes the movie SLIGHTLY BETTER. It adds a small layer of ambiguity into the Vader/Emperor relationship, underlines Vader's drive to betray the Emperor and turn Luke to the Dark Side so they can become the new Sith, and it does in fact create a nice little tie between the OT and the prequels. If only the prequels didn't suck infected donkey dick, that'd be a

real triumph. As it is, the scene feels good, looks good, and makes sense. Color me stunned.

Of course, I knew I'd like the movies, because they're the original *Star Wars*, and Lucas can tinker with them all he wants, and they'll still largely kick my ass. What about the bonus disc, the extras? Does Lucasfilm offer anything worthwhile on this DVD edition, or is it clear they're sitting on the good shit for the next re-release in 2007?

For my money, the set delivers. Let's start with just the menu screens. Each one is a great animation that draws from one of the classic moments in the Trilogy. You'll be reminded of the menus for the prequel DVDs, which looked cool even as they led you to shitty films. This time, the cool menus lead you to great films. Sweet.

I've not yet had time to dig into the commentary tracks, but I have plowed through the entire fourth disc of extras. The centerpiece, of course, is *Empire of Dreams*, the new 150-minute documentary on the making of the *Star Wars* trilogy. It tackles that topic with a depth and honesty that I never expected in a million parsecs. Lucasfilm pumps out so much worthless talking-head bullshit that it seemed logical to expect more of the same for this release. However, the doc is full of great anecdotes, both from the established players you'd expect and the more obscure behind-the-scenes talents.

There's also excruciatingly brief glimpses of deleted scenes, alternate takes, and bloopers. The cynic in me is already getting heated up AGAIN that this amazing material didn't float to the surface for this DVD release, because that cynic knows for a fact that it's just being stashed beneath Lucas' ass for inclusion on the NEXT release, which I will buy because I am a sad mothertrucker.

But I'm happy, remember? So the cynic shuts the fuck up, and the doey-eyed optimist grins like a bastard.

Anyway. The doc rocks. So do the featurettes, which pack a lot of substance into their fifteen minutes of fame. The only one I could have done without was the "George Lucas changed my life" compilation from other filmmakers, and that's only because they dare to include shitbags like Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich alongside Ridley Scott and John Singleton, with not enough of Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson. In other words, I

don't care what shitty filmmakers think of *Star Wars*; I care what good filmmakers think of it.

Perhaps the section that tickled my geek heart the most was the trailers and commercials. I'm a sucker for this kind of stuff, and I've had a decrepit VHS dub-from-a-dub-from-a-dub with most of these trailers on it for years. It's still great to have them cleaned up and on DVD, although the completist dweeb in me can't help but note the absence of the *Empire/Jedi* special edition trailer that ran before the *Star Wars* Special Edition release. (Yeah, I know. The completist dweeb in me deserves to have his ass kicked.) That small oversight aside, it's a pretty complete archive, including a big batch of commercials I'd never even seen before. Again, I am a junkie for this stuff, so perhaps you're not as excited to see a late-seventies *Star Wars* commercial presented on grainy old film stock with cheesy voiceover. I myself was enchanted.

And the still galleries! Oh, bestill my nerdy heart. The poster gallery features some very interesting international variations on the classic posters we've all seen. The production stills not only offer pics most *Star Wars* obsessives have never seen before, they annotate the entire package with short descriptions of what and who you're looking at in each image. Usually, I click robotically through a stills gallery on a DVD, since I often don't know the significance of what I'm seeing. With this gallery, I was happy to spend time with it, since I knew what I was looking at. It's a small touch that really enhances the experience.

About the only true complaint I'll offer is that the video game shit has no place on my archival, precious DVD set. I want to respect and honor and savor the original *Star Wars* films without having a Lucasarts sales pitch shoved in my face. It would've been a lot more classy to include the game demos and featurettes on a separate promo disc, or not offer them at all. But whatever. Asking for Lucas to respect his fans is like asking...I don't know, someone shitty to do something they're not going to do.

Bitterness approaches. The tide is turning. And yet, these DVDs are great.

I'd better go watch these puppies again if I have any hope of savoring this sunny outlook I've got going for George Lucas and

the *Star Wars* franchise. Otherwise, I might just go on hating him forever, and all us *Star Wars* nerds know what hate leads to.

That's right. My foot up his ass.

***Clone Wars* Sneak Peek**
From *Entertainment Weekly*
March 2005

I did catch a sneak preview of the debut episode of the next season of *Clone Wars*. However, I had to suffer through Mark Hamill to do it.

Was it worth it? That's the first real question. Was the forty minutes of watching a pasty, slightly bitter has-been pace a stage and answer *Star Wars* questions through gritted teeth worth the twelve-odd minutes of animated glory that followed a few hours later? Did the greatness of the Genndy Tartakovsky-crafted short outweigh the lameness of Luke Skywalker stumping for his direct-to-DVD "mockumentary" about the comic book industry, a project in which I am as uninterested as I have ever been about anything in my entire life?

I can only say this: I nearly fell asleep during Mark Hamill's appearance. NEARLY. FELL. ASLEEP. At a con. In a room packed with nerds.

I did not, however, fall asleep during "Chapter 21" of *Clone Wars*, a good sign. I did smile often and laugh at the coolness of it all, two more good signs. And I am now very excited about the upcoming run of *Clone Wars* episodes, which is perhaps the best sign of all.

As you might expect, "Chapter 21" picks up right where "Chapter 20" left off, with a daring rescue by a fiercely-painted Republic gunship of Ki-Adi Mundi and several other Jedi who were mercilessly attacked by the terrifying General Grievous. From there, the episode dives into some juicy character business, including the knighting of Anakin Skywalker, a clandestine meeting between secret lovers Anakin and Padme, and even an eerie dream sequence in which a Jake Lloyd-era Anakin is

depicted with Qui-Gon Jinn facing a cave much like the one Luke entered on Dagobah in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

The other real question is a simple one: Is *Clone Wars* still good, and is it *Star Wars*, and is it good *Star Wars*?

That's a really good question. The animated series isn't a full product of Lucas' brain, although he has had some input, so it's not technically *Star Wars* canon, to the best of my knowledge. It's also animated for the small screen, and thus it lacks the scope and impact of any big-screen *Star Wars* adventure.

But there's been a sense all along, through the shorter episodes of the first season of *Clone Wars* and now already in the first chapter of the second season, that Tartakovsky understands what makes *Star Wars Star Wars* better than Lucas himself. Maybe it's because they have so little time to work with, but the *Clone Wars* team craft some truly fun, exciting action sequences, packed with the kind of details that made *Samurai Jack* so cool. These bad boys MOVE, and again, they have to, but I also think they want to. They want to capture the breathtaking momentum of the classic sequences from the original trilogy of films, and avoid the plodding dullness of some of the modern *Star Wars* action sequences. (11 minutes of chasing Zam Wessell through Coruscant? Why, George, why?)

There are also the small moments, which in their execution are more uniquely Tartakovsky but in their emotional content fall more in line with the best moments of the classic films. When we first see Anakin making his way to meet Padme in "Chapter 21," we have no idea where he's going; he's a hooded dark figure moving through the streets of Coruscant. Tartakovsky uses close-ups and pacing to great effect in establishing that this part of town is strange and more than a little seedy. Instantly, because we know the path Anakin will tread, we suspect the worst. Instead, a thin arm grabs him from an alley, and he's reunited with his lover.

It's a short sequence, but it's packed with character and mood. It's very thoughtfully done, and not just in its style, but in its substance as well. It says that the creative team knows these characters, cares about them, and wants us to care about them too.

I haven't felt that in *Star Wars* on the big screen since *Return of the Jedi*, and that's why I'll be tuning in for each new episode of *Clone Wars*, and also rushing out next Tuesday to pick up my

DVD of the first season. Because Clone Wars is better *Star Wars* than *Star Wars* at this point, almost better than *Star Wars* deserves, and it'll get me more excited for *Episode III* than any of the other goddamn prequels ever could.

Star Wars: Episode III — Revenge of the Sith
From *Entertainment Weekly*
May 2005

I have had seven hours of sleep over the last two days. I flew from LA to Chicago for a visit of about 24 hours, just to see *Revenge of the Sith* with my dad, my college pals, and the good nerds of Chicago Force. I am staring down six hours of wasting time pretending to “work” when all I want to do is curl up in a fetalesque ball and sleep.

For all those reasons, it feels strange to write a “review” of *Sith* right now. Given my mental state, I’m not sure you should really read it. I cannot say for certain how much my feelings are influenced by my exhaustion, my warm fuzzies for my extended geek family, and my desperate desire (still unabated after *The Phantom Menace* and *Attack of the Clones*. STILL!) to see one more new great *Star Wars* movie before the end of the world.

I am legitimately unsure about *Sith*, if only because I went in with such high fears and low expectations that my good feelings about it are suspicious to me. I keep thinking I must be crazy, tired, or both, because it just doesn’t seem possible.

Could this really be a GOOD *Star Wars* prequel? Can it really be that George Lucas, the diabolical recipient of my bile-infected disgust over the past six years of horseshit bullplop, may have made a film that does not largely suck the proverbial donkey balls?

Yes...I think it can.

After my first viewing, at least, *Revenge of the Sith* feels like Lucas finally got it right. It may very well be what the prequels always should have been: Not a retread of the original trilogy, but films with their own brand of energy and life that still feel in some way like *Star Wars*. The man stumbles, as he is wont to do,

but there is also artistry, craftsmanship, and forethought evident in *Sith*. His mistakes and flaws are not those of a writer/director who you come to believe is just doing a shitty job because they don't know any better; they're poor decisions by someone who's making a lot of great decisions alongside the shitty ones, so you can actually judge the whole as opposed to tossing it all into the trash compactor.

In that sense, *Sith* engages the audience, actually touches them, by trying to give them a movie that delivers what they want in a way that also honors Lucas' own vision. It's true popular art of a kind Lucas has not made since the last *Indiana Jones* movie.

Until now, there was always the sense that the prequels were delivered from on high by a man who has completely bought the hype (his own hype!) that made him equal parts creative genius, technological visionary, and pop prophet. It wasn't like we were getting fun movies; it was more like we were getting the Ten Commandments. They were pronouncements of "story" that were nigh impossible to connect with, not just because they were bad, but because they were offered with such a smug certainty of success and acceptance. "This is *Star Wars*," Lucas seemed to be saying, "and you will like it, because I have made it. As it is written, so it shall be. Amen."

Sith doesn't feel that way. Instead, it feels like George Lucas just went out and made a fucking movie. It rarely comes off as things we need to know because Lucas said so. Instead, it feels like a yarn he wants to tell us because he thinks we might like it.

Based solely on that feeling, on the warmth and dynamic energy that seemed to go into making *Sith*, I tend to like it lots. That shit doesn't even have anything to do with the film itself; I just feel so relieved that I'm not being talked down to by Lucas that a great deal is forgiven. Which of course gets back to my desperate fanboy desire for this film to be good, even after I have been shat upon by Lucas twice already, and how that desire may or may not grant this review a complete lack of legitimacy.

If the above lacks weight, consider this, then: Many of the fuck-ups in the first two prequels are NOT present in *Sith*. The movie actually improves on its predecessors in some areas. For one thing, everyone involved on the acting end really chomps into their roles this time around, which helps a LOT in selling

clunky dialogue, meaning I noticed far less of it because it wasn't rendered in a wooden, lifeless style, thus calling attention to itself.

The writing is sometimes shitty, and sometimes not; the rumored polish by Tom Stoppard seems like not at all a rumor, although clunkers sneak by frequently. But like the best moments of the original trilogy, the entire enterprise buys into its own significance, meaning that the actors and direction and FX and cinematography and probably even the dude from craft services all perform with the conviction that the story is worth telling, the characters are worth caring about, and the worlds are worth seeing. That conviction was completely absent from episodes one and two, but it was the foundation upon which the original trilogy became legendary, and it's back at last in *Sith*.

It's tough for me to articulate, and I'm not sure I've gotten it right, but here's one easy example: Ewan MacGregor. In *The Phantom Menace*, he was given little to do, and seemed largely wooden and bored. In *Attack of the Clones*, he had lots more to do, but since the story required Obi-Wan to be a starchy Jedi, Ewan held back.

Sith finally gives us an Obi-Wan that we can unabashedly love, and that's thanks totally to MacGregor's performance. We get a glimpse of what this character could have been for all three prequels: A cross between Qui-Gon Jinn and Han Solo. He's got confidence and a bit of a decidedly un-Jedi swagger, but there's also a deep and rich emotional center. It's exactly the kind of character you'd have expected the Obi-Wan of *A New Hope* to be in his youth.

Obviously *Sith* gives MacGregor more to chew on than the previous films, and he responds to that, but it's also a leap of faith for the actor. He gives this performance all the gusto and charm he can summon, something he didn't do in the previous prequels. That same leap on the part of everyone involved in *Sith* is evident in nearly every frame of this film.

Is it perfect, akin to *The Empire Strikes Back*? No freaking way. Let's face it: This is *Star Wars*. Did anyone actually believe Lucas would reinvent the filmmaking wheel? I sure didn't. All he needed to do is to make a good movie of the kind that *Star Wars* is, which to me is swashbuckling and melodramatic space opera. With *Revenge of the Sith*, he's done that. There's no pretension here, no snooze-inducing scenes of characters talking endlessly in a

stilted and archaic style. Scenes don't just end out of nowhere and dialogue rarely clatters to the ground with a thud. Big FX set pieces seem to represent something more than just a glorified show reel for the wizards at ILM.

Basically, everyone at long fucking last seems to GIVE A SHIT about *Star Wars* again, from Lucas on down, and the effect is noticeable in this film.

Lucas also pays off on his own ballsy prequel premise without a flinch, and that's to end this trilogy of films on a massive down note, although it's one tempered by hope. He has the guts to make things bleak, to offer no real release, to fulfill the full promise of Anakin Skywalker's inevitable journey to the dark side of the Force. In the same way that *The Empire Strikes Back* showed huge cajones by actually daring to conclude with one hero in carbonite and another one with a robotic arm and a scary new daddy, *Sith* goes forth with a pitch-black finale that never panders or relents.

There's more. There will always be more. It's *Star Wars*. But I keep coming back to one particular moment in the Anakin/Obi-Wan duel, not a particularly spectacular or ass-kicking moment, just a moment.

In this unremarkable moment, I nearly cried. I almost lost my shit because it struck me that after decades of an obsession bordering on insanity, after a movie that broke my heart and one that just tromped on it a little, and after pretty much giving up on ever seeing anything good from George Lucas ever again, I was really watching a new *STAR WARS* movie. It was not just a piece of shit with the *Star Wars* name on it. It had many of the flaws and weaknesses that are part and parcel of *Star Wars* when it is not perfect, which is all the time, except for *Empire*. Yet in spite of the problems, *Sith* felt like goddamned fucking kick-ass good *STAR WARS*.

I shit you not. I mean it. It did, and it does.

So thanks, George, for making one last *Star Wars* episode for me, a 28-year-old manchild who just wanted to go into a movie theater and feel like you knew why I liked your movies so much in the first place. I think you get it now, at long last, and all I can say is that it's about fucking time.

The Rebel Fleet/End Title
From Pop Geek
August 2006

Weird morning today—found a live roach in our bedroom, some stupid accident on the interstate sent hordes of traffic onto the tiny backwoods road that is my main conduit to the magycale cityee known as Jamlando, the coffee didn't really pick me up.

Made me melancholy. So as I often do, I turned to music to regulate my mood, and the goddamned shuffle ended up pulling in some pretty dour stuff, including the big end credits suite from *The Empire Strikes Back*.

And it hit me—that fucking movie has been fucking with my mood for years. Every time I think of it, it makes me sad; Han's in carbonite, Leia's missing her man, Luke's got a robotic arm and a half-robotic daddy. Their only hope is a scoundrel who just betrayed them and is going off to find Han, in Han's ship, with Han's buddy, WEARING HAN'S OLD CLOTHES. Creepy.

Star Wars IS who I am, more or less. Geek tropes come and go but those damned movies keep dragging me back in. It's an essential component of my DNA...and MAN, is *Empire* a melancholy movie.

It's like Nick Hornby wrote in *High Fidelity*, only a little different: Which came first, the movie or the misery? Was there always a Han in carbonite lurking around my mood and the movie just reinforced it, or did this fucking flick shove this wistful bittersweetness into my brain?

This, my friends, is why I need therapy.

Fake George Lucas Intros *Grok* 1
From *Grok: An Alert Nerd Zine*
April 2008

Hi everybody!

Boy, I bet you're as surprised to be reading this as I am to be typing this! When I got the "E-Mail" asking me to write this fake introduction to the debut issue of *Grok: An Alert Nerd Zine*, I didn't even know what Alert Nerd was! Also, I did not know I had an E-Mail address!

See, every morning, my assistant Monroe (who is VERY good, by the way—hey buddy, he's transcribing this right now, HA!) brings in a stack of paperwork for me to read and sign. I had noticed the odd little funky phrases at the tops of some of them, with the weird @'s all over the place and the ".com" thingees. But I just assumed it was his typing shorthand or something. Hey! It takes all kinds.

Come to find out, I have an E-Mail account, with which to send E-Mails, to other people with E-Mails! And these E-mails are sent to people through some device known as the InterNet. I'll admit—I'm not so square that I haven't heard of the InterNet. Why, just the other day, when I asked Monroe where he found that funny video of the dog on the skateboard (HA!), he said, "YouTube," and I said, "What are you talking about," and he said, "You know, the InterNet." And then I pretended I knew what he was talking about, even though I felt very old and confused.

All I really know now about the InterNet is that it has E-mail and funny videos of dogs on skateboards, and you can't get to it from the dashboard of a '57 Thunderbird. Don't bother—I already tried it!

Wow, computers are really something, aren't they? Apparently I pay millions of dollars annually to a bunch of nerds in a building someplace who use computers to make Jabba the Hutt and Yoda and stuff. This blew me away! What happened to the puppets and the models? I gotta get out of this office more often.

Oh, this is kinda funny...I sent Steven a funny E-mail I was sent that had this picture of a cat in it, and on the picture, it said, "Use the Force, Kitty," which about made me spit Sprite through my nose. He wrote back and was like, "LOL," which made me feel old and confused again. Monroe tells me it stands for "laughing out loud." Why not just type that? I don't get things sometimes.

Many happy returns, suckers!

Your pal,
Fake George Lucas

Fake George Lucas Intros *Grok 2*
From *Grok: An Alert Nerd Zine*
September 2008

Hey, bitches.

I wish I was a little more enthusiastic, but really, I'm just godawful NERVOUS these days. You know how it is when you have a new movie coming out...or actually, you probably don't know. You've probably never made a movie in your life!

Well, I have, and it is so hard! It's way harder than marriage, as my wife would attest—

Oh, sorry. EX-wife. Marcia left me, apparently...gosh, over twenty years ago?! I was too busy making movies to even notice!

The only good thing is that this is just another one of those *Star Wars* kinds of movies, so it's a little easier. I come out sometimes at places, and I stand in front of peoples, and they yell superloud because they like me lots. Then I say something about Force something and Jedi other something and there's lots of thirtysomething dudes who paid a couple thousand dollars to buy plastic costumes that look like what I made sometimes. Then I make some money.

What I'm REALLY nervous about are some of the other movies I'm working on. You know, the ones that aren't *Star Wars*.

When I finished the last of the movies that are like *Star Wars*, the one before this new one like *Star Wars*, I said to everyone in the reporter thing that I would be making some tiny, little movies for myself. Artsy kinda stuff. Just like the ones I studied in that school where they teach of the movies.

(I'm really sorry—my English isn't working good today. It's like how I went when I felt like this and I was writing that movie word thing for the *Phantom Menace* movie thing. Awkward!)

Here's a few ideas I have for movies that are not like *Star Wars*:

--A fella wakes up, goes to work. When he's at work, he gets like really bad poops, like violent poops. Only we don't see his poops—we just see his empty desk and we hear people talking about him behind his back while he's gone. Then there's a MURDER.

--There's this hooker, see, only she's super NICE. And she goes out to meet this dude to get paid to have sex, only they fall totally in LOVE! And there's a Roy Orbison song. Then there's a MURDER.

--First, there's a MURDER. Then, I don't know what.

Which of these ideas of movies do you like the best? Write in and let me know! The one with the most votes will get a prize! I'll turn it into something like *Star Wars* for you!

Toodles,
Fake George Lucas

***Clone Wars* Shocker: It's Not That Shitty**
From Alert Nerd
October 2008

So I watched a few episodes of *Clone Wars* this weekend. That's the half-hour cartoon show spun off the least-successful film in *Star Wars* history.

It wasn't nearly as bad as I thought it would be. It's nowhere near great, but it's fun and harmless. In fact...I kinda liked it.

It may just be that I happened to pick a particularly good week to start watching; over at io9, Graeme McMillan gave pretty high marks to this past Friday's episode, "Destroy Malevolence." That was the second episode I watched; I also checked out the preceding episode, "Shadow of Malevolence."

Graeme sorta nails the upside to *Clone Wars* in his review; in its best moments, it's a sort of "greatest hits" compilation of the more swashbuckle bits from the *Star Wars* films. "Destroy Malevolence" featured a rescue of Padme on board General Grievous' flagship; in pacing and tone, it reminded me of the last bit of *Star Wars* I legitimately thought felt like true *Star Wars*, the rescue of Palpatine from Grievous' flagship in *Revenge of the Sith*.

Similarly, "Shadow of Malevolence" aped the classic "blow up the big bad ships" sequences from *A New Hope* and *Return of the Jedi*, complete with holographic diagrams, anxious innocents biting their nails while they watch the action from afar, and one of those fucking AWESOME "fly every damn thing at the camera" shots, which I will admit brought a bit of a tingle.

And I know they're just pandering, but I'm old and sad and so pandering works on me: Every other scene seemed to bring some bit of dialogue, action, or camera shot that was an "homage" to the films. From the now-typical "I've got a bad feeling about this" to a climactic hero shot of all the main

characters to close out an episode, it's full of little tricks designed to make you think you're watching great *Star Wars*. You're not, but again: Old, sad, easily pandered to. At this point, nostalgia is a primary motivator for much of the entertainment I consume.

I've seen lots of complaining about the lame jokes and the annoying young padawan Ahsoka, but they didn't bother me much; it's really no worse than the gags featured on any other adventure cartoon, including such sacred cows as *Batman: The Animated Series* and *Justice League*. It's not like every other cartoon aimed at ten-year-old boys rivals the Algonquin round table.

The worst you can say about *Clone Wars* is that it often feels flat, and I'm not speaking of the quality of the animation, which excels at space battles but still fails miserably at depicting expressive, attractive animated characters. There's frequently a generic sameness to the dialogue, plotting, and characterizations, which was more noticeable in "Shadow of Malevolence." It felt exactly like what it is: A 22-minute commercial for toys.

Let's be clear: *Clone Wars* will add nothing of value, substance, or meaning to your life, even if you are a *Star Wars* fan. In many ways, this show (like most of the prequels) bears no resemblance to the incandescence of the original trilogy. Those are great movies; everything since has been merchandising and tech demo reels masquerading as "entertainment."

And yet, *Clone Wars* entertained me. Since I know I can't ask for much more from George Lucas anymore, I'll take what I can get.

Jingle Bell Grok: Blame Bea Arthur
From Alert Nerd
December 2008

Alert Nerdian Jeff put out a call to our good pal Fake George Lucas for a contribution to our Jingle Bell Grok holiday feature. As always, we received a poorly-faxed note a short while later, sent from a Kinko's in Marin County, CA. Our thanks to Fake George Lucas for his time and talent...okay, just the time.

I was fucking Bea Arthur.

There, I said it. The BIG SECRET is out. Gawd, you people! Vultures! Leeches! Dianogas!

And yet...and yet, it's time for you to know this, o people, my people. You have wondered for so long—you have watched in confusion every holiday season on abruptly-terminated YouTube links and bootleg VHS dubs, you have discussed it in hushed tones at conventions and with your minister, you have written the Lumpy/Mala slashfic that has fueled many a lonely night at the Ranch.

Now, the truth can be told—in fact, it was just told. I just told you.

I made the *Star Wars* Holiday Special because I was fucking Bea Arthur.

Not “I was (fucking) Bea Arthur,” as if to suggest that I used to BE the actual Bea, and had some sort of aggressive (well, maybe not SO aggressive) surgery and hormone treatment to transform myself into the heaving hunk of manhood you now behold every time somebody gives Stevie Spielberg another goddamned award.

No, “fucking” is the operative word. It always is.

We met in early 1978, when I was first flush with my *Star Wars* money and on one of my frequent “sabbaticals” from my wife Marsha. I think she was probably boning her karate instructor at the time—or she would be soon, anyway.

I was living what I’d later term my “Lost Memorial Day Weekend,” in which I killed many of the brain cells I later could have used to transform the *Episode I* script from a steaming pile of fetid dog shit into a reasonably coherent film. Those days, I spent a lot of time at the Friars Club in LA, wearing an ascot and lounge jacket and slamming Harvey Wallbangers at 11 in the morning while Marty Allen tried to shove a bowl of beer nuts into my underpants.

Bea walked into the bar, a ray of dirty sunshine, the kind that barely makes it through your filthy windshield after a long road trip. It was love at third sight...maybe fourth. Love at seventh Harvey Wallbanger.

We kissed; we made love in the coat check; she whispered into my ear, “Let’s do this again sometime, sailor.”

“I’m not a sailor,” I replied. “I directed *Star Wars*.”

She grabbed my balls tight. This was not a love squeeze. This was ambition.

“Write me a role,” she growled into my ear. “Send me to space. Make me a toy.”

Six weeks later, two junkies masquerading as “producers” showed up at my office and asked me how I felt about doing something on CBS for the holidays.

“Sure,” I replied. “Write a part for Bea Arthur and you can take that duffel bag full of money. No, not that one. The one with the *Happy Days* logo stenciled on the side.”

Oddly enough, we only ever met in that coat room, more times than I could count, over just seven months. Our last time, she seemed distant; clearly, she had read the script. After shooting on the special, we never spoke again. The next thing I knew, I was being blamed for twenty minutes of Wookiee “dialogue” and Harvey Korman in drag.

Don’t blame me, people. Blame my groin, blame the Friars Club, blame the moon.

Most of all, blame Bea Arthur. If we’d never fucked, the *Star Wars Holiday Special* would never have come to be...and neither

would Hayden Christensen. That's a conversation I really need to have someday.

Holiday Toodles,
Fake George Lucas

Fake George Lucas Intros *Grok 3*
From *Grok: An Alert Nerd Zine*
December 2008

Hey ya!

Remember that song, that “Hey, Ya” song? It was so popular way back when.

I remember when I first heard that song, I had the BESTEST idea. I was gonna do a modern update of my smash film about the 1950s, only make it about the 1980s and focus on the growing rap and hip-hop movement in New York City. It was gonna be called *American Graffiti, Y’all*.

I even called my assistant and said to him, “Assistant, I can never remember your name. What’s your name again?”

“Elliot,” he says.

“Was that your name last time I called?”

“No. This is my first day,” says Elmer. “You fired Alexander because he didn’t know all the words to the ‘Yub-Nub’ song.”

“Do you know all the words to it, Ethan?”

“It’s Elliot. ‘Yub-nub, eee chop yub nub, toe meet toe pee chee keene, g’noop dock fling oh ah...”

“I get it. Hey, who sings that song?”

“The Ewoks, sir.”

“No, Emeril! Not that song! You’re fired.”

And then I hung up, cause I was pretty upset. I don’t know what he was smoking, but it wasn’t nicotine, because nicotine makes you feel good and act smarter. My doctor told me so.

So I went to the Best Buy and I asked for the CD and I bought it, and then I called my friend Stevie Spielberg, and he asked his assistant (who always has HIS shit together, which is like TOTALLY UNFAIR, why does he get all the good ones???) to get me the guy who does “Hey Ya.”

I called him, but he wasn't there, so I left a voicemail. Here's what I said.

“Hey, ya! No, seriously, this is George, and I make movies and I was hoping I could make this one with you. It's called *American Graffiti Y'all* and I'd like to make your song the theme song. It may have to have new words, like maybe Ewok words, like 'Yub nub' instead of 'Hey Ya.' I can pay you in Indiana Jones action figures; no one bought that shit. Listen, I have a few—”

And that's when his message cut off. I hope he calls soon!

What will happen to me when I die?

Toodles,

Fake George Lucas

Four-Color Critiques #7: Alan Moore and Dengar's Best Man
From Alert Nerd
February 2009

Hearing that Alan Moore once wrote *Star Wars* stories was like hearing about a long-lost collaboration between Dylan, McCartney, Lennon, Jagger, and Pat Boone. It blew my fragile little mind.

So yes, that's the shocker, if you didn't know already—over the course of late 1981 and much of 1982, Moore had a handful of short comics stories published in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back Monthly*, produced by Marvel UK. I believe one of them represents his first published collaboration with Alan Davis, but I could be wrong on that.

Today, the prospect of Alan Moore dipping his wrinkly toes into the Lucasfilm sandbox would be occasion for much marketing fanfare, tantamount to Spielberg directing a prequel or Georgie boy himself penning a sequel to *Watchmen*. (I can't even imagine what such a thing would constitute.)

Back then, Moore was a newbie starting in comics, and Marvel UK had a hungry maw to feed each month with stories from a galaxy far, far away, and so these stories were born.

Reading them today, they're remarkable not really as Alan Moore stories, but as *Star Wars* stories. Which is shocking to me—surely, even as a baby writer, Alan Moore had the power to turn the very *Star Wars* universe upon its ear and depict raucous sex scenes between Leia and a Jawa, or the dark secret truth behind Chewie's blood oath with Han Solo?

Not so much. They're clever little UK sci-fi shorts, very much in the mold of the same type of stories Moore and others

wrote for *2000AD*. They're surprisingly esoteric, even for UK sci-fi; "Tilotny Throws A Shape" is about some kind of strange space spirit who transports a pack of stormtroopers 8,000 years into the past after turning Princess Leia's heart into a diamond. (SPOILER: Another spirit appears and changes it back.)

Perhaps the most disturbing tale is "The Pandora Effect," in which Han, Leia, and Chewie innocuously stumble upon an interstellar death cult that worships an evil demon. These folks, known as "the Five," give off a vibe like Sir Miles and the Outer Church in Morrison's *Invisibles*—sick, twisted, sadistic fucks. And they're the bad guys in a *Star Wars* story! They seriously make Vader look like Gandhi.

And that's what's still shocking, coming up on thirty years after these stories were originally published—you can look at the reckless creativity even in these nasty little shorts and compare it to the *Star Wars* stories of today, and you can watch the fossilization of imagination taking place before your very eyes.

I guess that's not really news, but seeing it underlined so pointedly still brings me pause. Examine any of the major media properties—jesus, they're even known as "major media properties" now—and their modern stories define the term "safe." When someone like Grant Morrison is given free rein to tinker with an iconic franchise like Batman, it's jarring, but also refreshing; you get to see him actually break the toys. Sure, they'll be fixed eventually, possibly by Morrison himself before he finishes his work on the character, but still—they're broken! Bruce Wayne is "dead"! Someone else will be Batman, maybe for a few months, or a year tops! ANARCHY REIGNS!

Star Wars, though...man. *Star Wars*. The *Star Wars* "expanded universe." It's the most egregious example of a dead living thing in the geek pantheon; new books, comics, toys, and on and on, hitting shelves on a near-daily basis, and yet the last real "creativity" happened probably twenty-plus years ago? Maybe? *Return of the Jedi*? The prequels? Plenty of creations, sure, but all under the iron bootheel of Lucas, and even then, only furtive glimpses along the fringe—Obi-Wan allowed to be a badass in *Attack of the Clones*, Padme given some actual scenes to play in *Revenge of the Sith*.

Back in the day, you could create work as part of a larger media empire and it could still be strange and obscure. In its way,

Alan Moore's work in *Star Wars* was fringe, too, just like Alan Dean Thomas writing *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*, or Roy Thomas and Carmine Infantino going batshit crazy in the US *Star Wars* comic, or even the goddamned *Holiday Special*—say what you will about it, for it is shitty, but damn if it's not busting at the seams with ideas. The Wookiees live on a tree planet? There's an armored bounty hunter out to snare Luke Skywalker? Diahann Carroll is a masturbatory fantasy in a long time ago and a galaxy far, far away? YES PLEASE.

We pay our money and buy our tickets and our comics and our two-disc special editions, and man some of it is so great, and some of it's just fun escapism, but I have to constantly remind myself: It's all PRODUCT, plain and simple. The most creative person on the most creative day of their creative life cannot really CHANGE the *Star Wars* universe. Grant Morrison cannot really KILL Batman. The money machine can never stop churning, and so we get mostly antiseptic storytelling that sells action figures and beach towels and underpants. Even when it's brilliant, that's all it is.

I'd love to see Alan Moore attempt a *Star Wars* story today—he'd probably fly over to Marin County on his own dime and strangle Lucas with his bare hands. And maybe he should; maybe a few of these corporate properties need to get good and DEAD before anything interesting can happen again.

But then, that's the way the mainstream Oreo-brand cookie crumbles, isn't it? If you want the pure good stuff, to find out where the Next Big Thing is lurking, or even just something small and wonderful, you head for the fringe. Tiny "vanity" publishers; indie filmmakers; bands churning out mp3s for a select audience of netheads who may fill the bathroom of a tiny club someday.

Wasn't there a time when you could take chances in the mainstream, though? And wasn't that time approximately 1970-1979? And isn't it a shame that today, a movie like *Watchmen* is "a risk," when it's actually just a big-budget action thriller based on one of the most recognizable original concepts in the history of comics? How is that a "risk," really?

I blame it on Dengar. Maybe you haven't heard the story—about how Dengar discovered Boba Fett in the Pit of Carkoon on Tatooine, still alive after his encounter with the Sarlacc, and

was so happy to see the bastard that he asked him to be BEST MAN IN HIS WEDDING.

That's right. Dengar got married, and the one person in the entire galaxy who just happened to be his best man is not only a character we have already met, but one of the most inexplicably popular characters in the *Star Wars* universe—Boba fucking Fett.

Why do they even bother to call it the “Expanded Universe”? It's a shrinking universe, if anything, ready to implode upon itself when Luke Skywalker finally meets up with Dengar and his wife and they travel to Dagobah to live in Yoda's hut with their pet alien, E.T.

Our entire creative universe, the stuff we all love and geek out over, seems to be constantly shrinking too. Everything has to relate to everything else; ideas rarely if ever EXPLODE anymore, wholly original, totally new and fresh. There is nothing new under the sun, true, but I thought it was the job of genre entertainment to help us forget that. Instead, we get too much corporate product, and not enough alien spirits turning our hearts into diamonds.

Epilogue: Daddy's Little Ewok

For the longest time, I had a canned response whenever the subject of my as-yet-unborn children would come up.

"They won't even know Star Trek exists until they're in their twenties," I'd insist. "*Star Wars*? They'll see it when they're old enough to vote. My kids will grow up in a geek-free environment, and they'll play football and lead cheers, and become Homecoming Kings and Queens. You know, unlike their father."

Then, of course, I actually had a kid, and it took me all of three weeks before I couldn't help myself, and I let the womp rat out of the bag.

"Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away, there was a boy named Luke Skywalker," I whispered to my newborn daughter, during one of the rare moments when she was in my arms, awake, and not screaming. I told her the whole damn story of *Star Wars*, like she was hearing a bedtime story.

Now she's almost two, and she's got a Luke Skywalker figure that she flies around the house and calls "Super Luke," and she also got her paws on my Krypto toy which she calls "Super Dog," and every once in a while, I point at Batman and she knows who he is.

So there goes that plan.

Pon farr is sometimes known as "the blood fever," or as Wikipedia puts it, "Vulcan males go into heat every seven years...becoming violent, and finally dying if they do not mate with someone with whom they are empathically bonded."

This seems a fair description of parenting to me, inasmuch as everything you feel is more than you ever thought you could feel—truly, the blood fever.

If you want to know purest terror, watch helplessly as your kid falls from the upper level of a jungle gym at a neighborhood playground. I already can't bear the thought of my daughter leaving the house without me or her mother, because she'll either fall off more playground equipment, or meet up with some brat who won't share his toys, requiring me to find that brat and slap him around because HOW DARE YOU DENY MY CHILD ANYTHING SHE WANTS YOU HEARTLESS LITTLE SON OF A LITERAL BITCH.

Then there's the "gaga" moments, where you find yourself just staring at this perfect creation, glassy-eyed and grinning, maybe glancing over to the mother of said creation to share a moment of, "Wow, our genes are way more awesome than either of us will ever be."

It's that fever, for better or worse, that put Luke Skywalker in her tiny hands, and drove me one afternoon to even put *Star Wars* on the TV, even though she was less than a year old at the time, just to see if she'd show any interest. (She didn't.)

There's a strange impulse I've noticed amongst geeks, and it's this: We all sorta want the people we love to love the things we love. Even when we marry non-geeks and come from non-geek parentage, when our siblings know William Shatner as only "that old guy from that legal show," we persist in the delusion that we can convert these sensible, normal people into frothing nerdy maniacs like ourselves.

When I first started noticing girls, I would pronounce oddball requirements for hooking up with Young Matt Springer; there was a time when I imagined my dream woman would know all the words to "American Pie," like I do. (I'm not really making that up, as much as I wish I were.) In college, I sat down beaming with pride to watch "City on the Edge of Forever" with my girlfriend, knowing it would send her careening into my arms for baptism as a born-again Trekkie. When she didn't instantly fall for Trek, I assumed it was something wrong with her.

Now I know it was something wrong with me—this need for the people I care about to share my joys. It's an innocent thing, in most cases, and it's even kind of touching, because it

demonstrates how much you love someone, that you want them to be so deeply involved in your own passions. At the same time, it's also an asshole thing to do, more than a little self-centered and narcissistic.

It's a little weird to admit it, but that's really deep down why I want my daughter to watch *Star Wars* with me and read comics someday: I want her to love what I love, as much as I love it, and then maybe find her own things to love.

And if she doesn't become a geek? That's probably for the best. She can leave her old man to read old comic books on Saturday nights while she hits the town with her friends, and I can fashion a homemade Batman costume to wear when I leave the house a few hours later, to break in through bedroom windows and threaten all the guys at her high school with castration if they go anywhere near my daughter.

What's likely is that she will join the ungeeky ranks of most of my family and friends— my sisters, who know more about *Days of Our Lives* than they ever will about the DC universe; my mother-in-law, who gamely went to see *Superman Returns* with me and didn't even complain when she liked it more than I did; and my wife, who calls my toys "*Star Wars* Barbies" sometimes.

Maybe that's the real definition of "pon farr": Loving someone unconditionally, even if they don't know all the words to "American Pie." Sounds about right to me.