

# STAR WARS



The most magnificent toy ever invented for grown men to express their fantasies, project their nightmares and dreams, and to indulge their whimsies and desires, is the modern picture medium. And with the aid of computers and modern cinema film technology, fantasy can become fact, and fact become fantasy.

*Star Wars* is an expression of the boyhood fantasy life of film director George Lucas and his craze for *Flash Gordon* and all the great mysteries and adventures in books, magazines and the movies. What makes *Star Wars* different to all the other science fiction films, is that it all seems so realistic. It almost seems as though the cinema audience has been transported into an unknown galaxy thousands of light years from Earth.

The film itself stars a galaxy of stars, such as Alec Guinness, Peter Cushing, Harrison Ford and Mark Hamill. It's a high energy movie uniting the hardware of contemporary space adventures with the romantic fantasies of sword and sorcery. A tale of heroes and villains, where love and goodness triumph over evil.

*Star Wars* follows a young man, Luke Skywalker, through exotic worlds uniquely different from our own. Leaving the small arid planet of Tatooine, Luke plunges into an extraordinary inter-galactic search for the kidnapped Rebel Princess Leia from the planet Alderaan. Luke is joined in this adventure by Ben Kenobi, the last of the Jedi Knights who were the guardians of peace and justice in the old days before the dark times came to the galaxy; Han Solo, the dashing, cynical captain of the Millennium Falcon, a Corellian pirate starship; Chewbacca, a Wookiee, a race of tall anthropoids with quasi-monkey faces and large blue eyes; and the robots, See-Threepio (C-3PO) and Artoo-Detoo (R2-D2).

This odd band of adventurers battle Grand Moff Tarkin, the evil Governor of the Imperial Outland regions, and Darth Vader, the malevolent Dark Lord of the Sith, who employs his extrasensory powers to aid Governor Tarkin in the destruction of the rebellion against the Galactic Empire. In the battle of Yavin,

Luke engages in a terrifying climactic space battle over the huge man-made planet destroyer, Death Star.

At an American press conference, the film's writer/Director George Lucas explained why he thinks his film is different and more realistic.

"The trouble with the future in most futuristic movies is that it always looks new and clean and shiny. What is required for true credibility is a used future. The Apollo capsules were instructive in that regard. By the time the Astronauts returned from the moon, you had the impression the capsules were littered with weightless candy wrappers and old Tang jars, no more exotic than the family station wagon. And although *Star Wars* has no points of reference to Earth time or space, with which we are familiar, and it is not about the future but some galactic past or some extra-temporal present, it is a decidedly inhabited and used time and place. We don't explain everything. All the hardware is taken for granted."

Filming for the space epic

began in March 1976, when a film production unit and the cast descended the sleepy little oasis town of Tozeur in Southern Tunisia. The film had required a dry, arid desert landscape with limitless horizons. Tunisia was found to be the perfect location to represent the planet of Tatooine.

A production crew worked for eight weeks to turn the desert and towns into another planet. Filming then began on the Chotte el Djerid not too far from Tozeur. Chotte means Salt Lake in Arabic. It was an arid, dried-up wasteland dotted with an occasional palm tree; a bare smooth desert reflecting the sun's rays from its myriad streaks of white salt. It's a place of mirages, where it is difficult to distinguish the real from the unreal. So in other words, an ideal setting for a film like *Star Wars*.

The first sequences of *Star Wars* take place on Tatooine, a planet in another galaxy. The homestead where the young hero, Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), lives is a huge hole in the ground leading to a series of caves.

Other locations used include the sand dunes of the Tunisian desert a few miles outside Nefta, and Matmata, an unusual town where nearly all the inhabitants live in small underground homes.

After two and a half week's filming in Tunisia, the *Star Wars* crew and cast moved to the EMI Elstree Studios in Borehamwood, England for

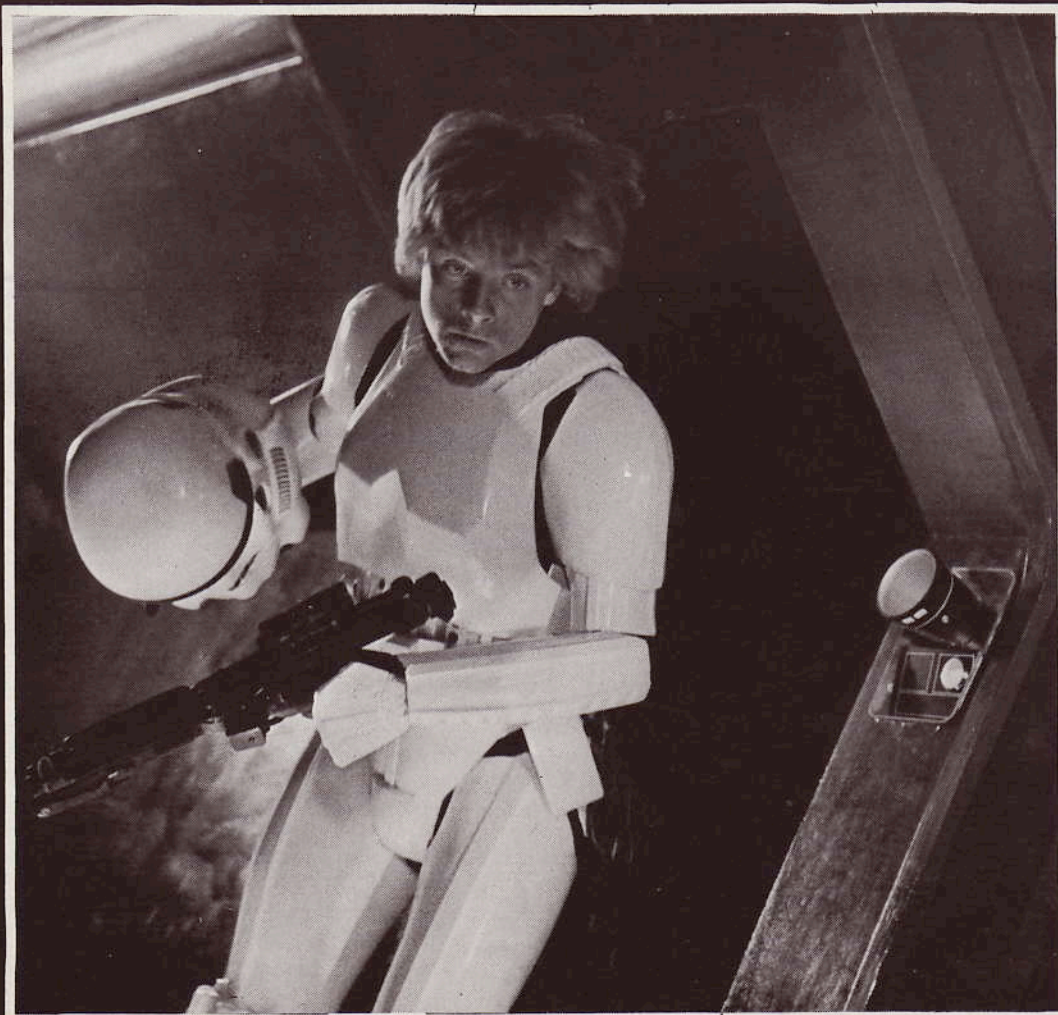
15 weeks of filming the futuristic interior shooting of the satellite sequences.

Then a whole year was spent on post-production work in Los Angeles, including the completion of the innovative special effects. There are a total of three hundred and sixty separate special effects shot in the film.

Because the original script called for a large number of miniature and optical effects, a complete in-house effects shop was set up, involving 75 people working in two shifts. Special cameras and models had to be made to create some of the spectacular scenes.

The film features more than a dozen robots, but the two major ones are C-3PO, known as Threepio, and R2-D2, called Artoo. Threepio was the one robot designed by a group of artists. The job of making the other robots work fell to John Stears who

Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) prepares to counter-attack the Imperial stormtroopers in the Death Star detention area







Upon their arrival at Mos Eisley Spaceport, where they hope to charter a spacecraft to Alderaan, Ben Kenobi (Alec Guinness), Luke (Mark Hamill) and the two robots, Artoo-Detoo and Threepio, are intercepted by Imperial stormtroopers.

devised the production and mechanical special effects. Besides the dozen robots he built for *Star Wars*, he also came up with light sabers, land vehicles and a myriad of explosions.

At the Elstree Film Studios it took all nine sound stages to house the 30 sets of other planets, starships, caves, control rooms, cantinas, and

the vast network of sinister corridors on the evil, man-made Death Star. For the enormous rebel hanger sequence filled with a squadron of X-wing and Y-wing fighters, the set was so huge that it had to be filmed on the largest sound stage in Europe, located at Shepperton Studios, in Middlesex, some 20 miles away.

From the technical point of view, *Star Wars* will go down in cinema history for its spectacular special effects. It is probably better than the film 2001, but it also succeeds on its story. It doesn't pretend to be real, set at some specific time and point in the Universe. It is simply a development of fairy tale logic. But it is fantasy that will make you wonder,

where fantasy ends, and 'real life' begins.

*Star Wars* opens at the Dominion Theatre, Leicester Square, London on December 27th.