Star Wars: History Of Creation

“A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away”. These words, following the 20th Century Fox fanfare, were first introduced to audiences in 1977, and would become ingrained in our popular culture. Star Wars, an epic space opera by George Lucas, had been released to audiences that summer, and what followed was unprecedented in the history of film: the rise of an entertainment sensation that completely swept the world. With the upcoming film, “The Rise of Skywalker”, concluding the story that began more than 42 years ago, I felt it appropriate to write about the story of how Star Wars came to be, the many problems it faced, and its lasting impact on society and culture.

The production of Star Wars is notoriously known for its difficulties. Lucas, fresh off directing the coming of age comedy American Graffiti (1973), focused all his energy on writing his idea for a space opera, reminiscent of the Flash Gordon serials he grew up with as a child (Macek III). After many rewrites, he finally had a script prepared to present to studio executives. After being rejected by Universal Pictures and Walt Disney Productions, 20th Century Fox finally made Lucas a deal that would give him the resources needed to bring his film to life.

Although Lucas had the financial backing for his film, Fox executives were breathing down his neck throughout the entirety of the production. Artist Ralph McQuaire was hired by Lucas to begin bring his ideas for characters, sets, props and locations to life (“Behind the Scenes: Star Wars), and John Barry and Roger Christian were brought onto the film as production designers (Signer). Lucas wanted the visuals of the film to represent, in his words, a “used future”. While many of the science fiction films at the time presented futuristic worlds that were clean, shiny and sleek, he wanted grimy, dirty and aged, to represent the normalcy of everyday life in this universe, as nothing is perfectly clean.

George Lucas had founded his own production company, “Lucasfilm Ltd.”, as a way to maintain control over his films. He founded the now-renowned visual effects company Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) in 1975 as an umbrella of his production company, since 20th Century Fox had gotten rid of its own visual effects team (“Empire of Dreams”). While ILM is considered by many to be the premiere visual effects company today, the reality was much different during the production of Star Wars. Blowing half their budget on just four shots out of hundreds they had to create, Lucas deemed them unacceptable, they were forced the complete the remaining shots, which was roughly a year’s worth of work, in just six months (“How Star Wars surprised the world”). As a newly formed company, everything they created was from scratch as they had no previous work to build off of (“A New Hope Production Design”).

Lucas also began the casting process for Star Wars, and wanted unknown actors who audiences weren’t familiar with. For the three main roles. Mark Hamill was chosen for the lead protagonist Luke Skywalker. Carrie Fisher was chosen as the strong, independent Princess Leia, and Harrison Ford, who worked with Lucas previously on American Graffiti, was brought in simply to feed lines to the actors auditioning. Ford’s delivery won over Lucas, who cast him as the swashbuckling, smuggling, anti-hero Han Solo.

Filming of the scenes on Tatooine began in the deserts of Tunisia, where the working conditions

for the cast and crew were miserable to say the least. The Tunisian heat, coupled with the irony that when they began filming scenes in the Sahara, the crew was faced with the largest rainstorm the area had seen in over five decades (“A New Hope Production Design”). Following this, production moved to London at a film studio, where sets for the Death Star and other locations were created.

During production, the cast and crew attempted to make George laugh or smile, as he looked very depressed on set (“Empire of Dreams”), and rightfully so. Fox studio executives were tired of Lucas being constantly behind schedule, and needing more money for the film, and they were ready to pull the plug on production. The stress Lucas was enduring was so heavy, he was diagnosed with hyperextension and exhaustion (Empire of Dreams).

Alan Ladd Jr., the 21st Century Fox chairman who Lucas had persuaded to make the deak to get the movie produced and Lucas’ only supporter within the executives at Fox, notified him that he had only one week to finish filming before Fox ended production. Behind schedule and two million dollars over the budget, and with the deadline just days away, Lucas had to act fast. Dividing his crew into three different units, led by producer Gary Kurtz, production supervisor Robert Watts, and Lucas himself, they managed to complete all the filming by the deadline imposed onto them.

With post-production in full swing, Lucas’ workload wasn’t lighter. After disagreements with his original editor, John Jympson, on what Lucas wanted the film to be, Jympson was fired halfway through production Replacing him were Lucas’ then-wife, Marcia Lucas, Richard Chew and Paul Hirsch. According to Chew, many scenes were played in master shots that flowed into close-up coverage (Empire of Dreams). Jympson’s assembly of the footage was very different from what the final cut of the film looked like, as many scenes were cut in order to improve the pacing of the film.

When it came time to score the film, Lucas’ friend, Steven Speilberg, suggested composer John Williams. Williams had scored Spielberg’s hit movie “Jaws”, and had won an Academy Award for it. Conducting the London Symphony Orchestra, the soundtrack for Star Wars was recorded in less than 2 weeks. The music from Star Wars would go on to become as iconic as Darth Vader’s breathing or the lightsaber, winning Williams many accolades, including the Academy Award for Best Original Score, and be listed by the American Film Institute as the #1 soundtrack of all time.

May 25, 1977 would change cinema history forever. Star Wars was released in less than 32 theatres nationwide. Nevertheless, news of how great the film was spread throughout the country, catapulting Lucas, the cast and crew members into overnight fame. Lucas couldn’t have dreamed of the success Star Wars had, as people waited in long lines all across the country to see this groundbreaking space adventure.

Star Wars received acclaim for its story, its music and visual effects, which were the first of its kind. Considered by many the first modern-day blockbuster, it went on to receive many accolades, including Academy Award wins for Best Art Direction, Best Costume Design, Best Film Editing, Best Original Score, Best Sound and Best Visual Effects.

The success of the film spawned a major franchise, with The Empire Strikes Back (1980) and the Return of the Jedi (1983) completing the “original trilogy”. Three prequels, three sequels,

two standalone films, and a live action television series followed in the decades after. 42 years after its release, the popularity of Star Wars remains at an all time high. The perseverance and determination of George Lucas led to the creation of one of the most beloved and iconic franchises in history.