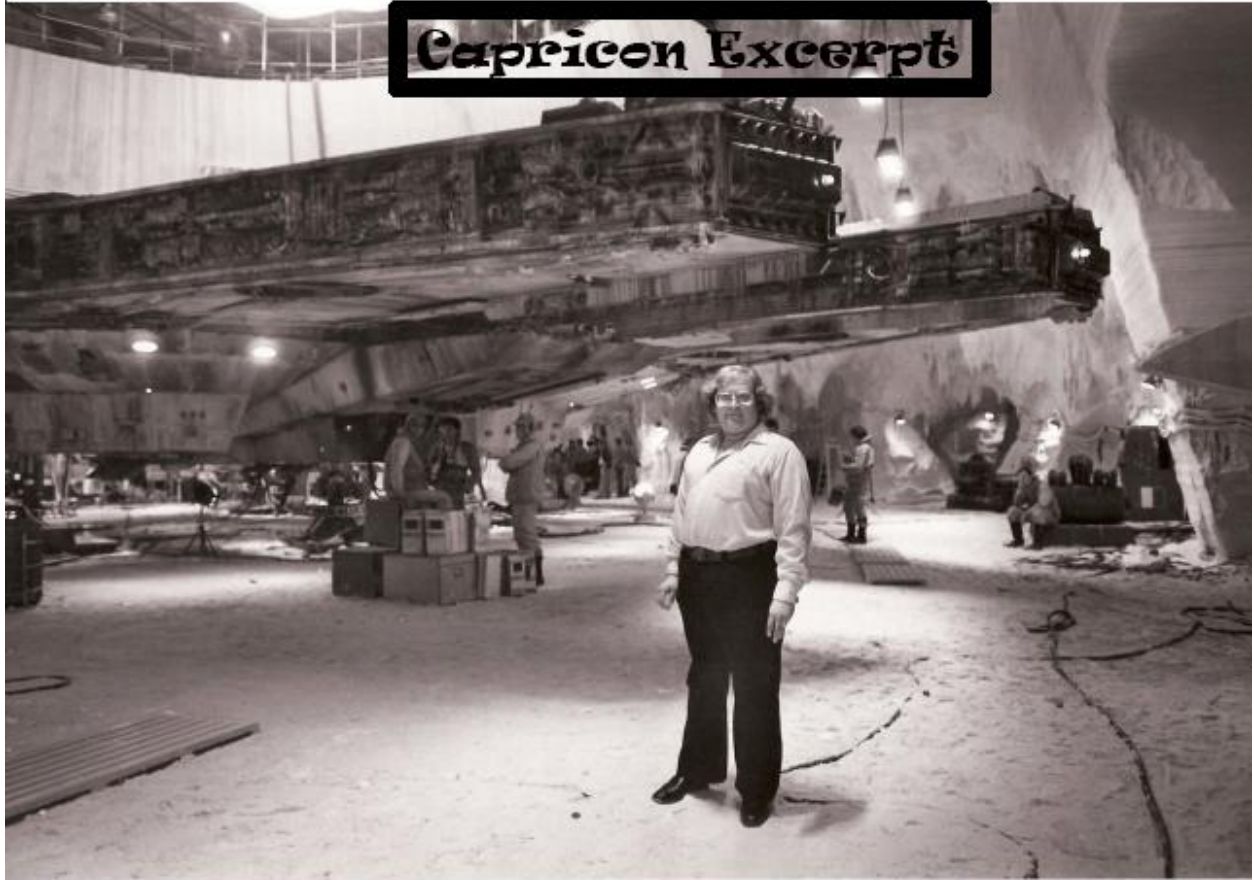


STAR WARS

Memories

My Time in the (Death Star) Trenches

Capricorn Excerpt



Craig Miller

Foreword by Gary Kurtz

This collection of excerpts from “Star Wars Memories” was prepared for distribution to Capricon members.

Copies of the full book are available from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and Walmart.

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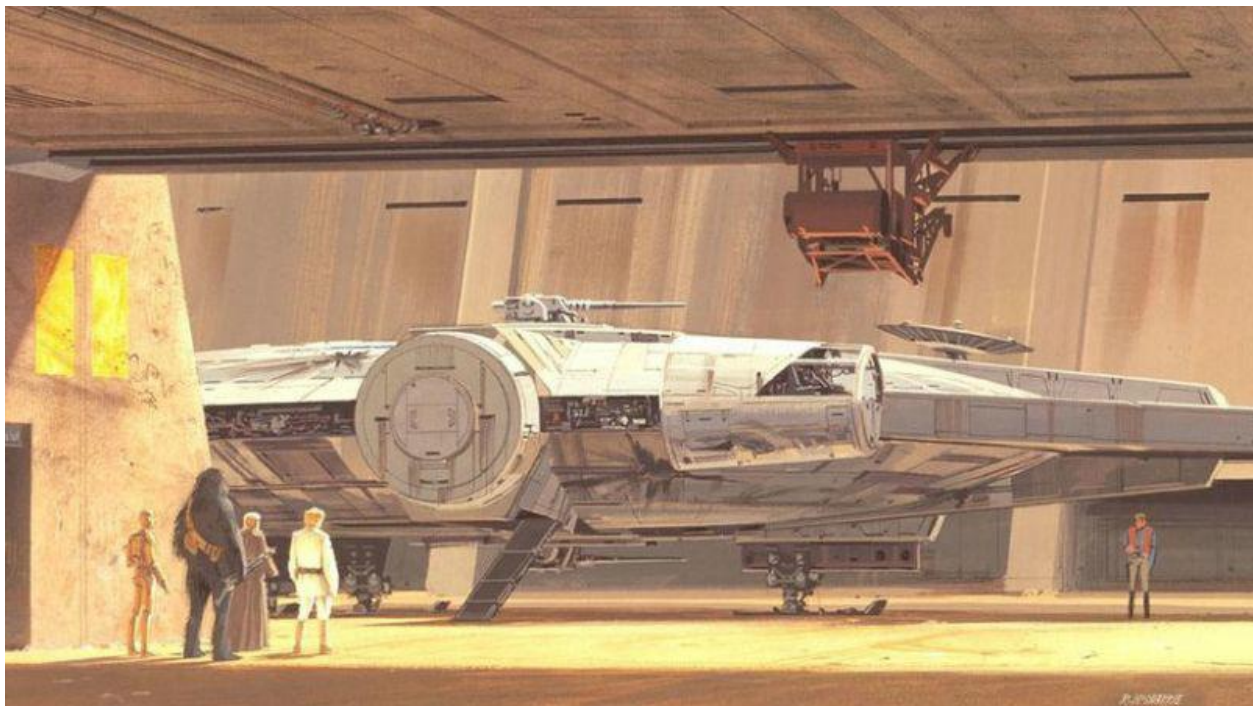
Saying Yes to Star Wars (Fox's Market Research)

It wasn't an easy sell to get a studio to okay production on *Star Wars*. George Lucas had made the extremely successful *American Graffiti* for Universal Studios. He had a three-picture deal with them. *American Graffiti* was the first. They wanted him to make more films for their studio. The whole purpose of a multi-picture deal, of providing on-going office space and services, is because the studio is betting that the films you make will be profitable and they want you to make those movies for them.

They turned *Star Wars* down.

The Readers Report, while generally favorable, included the phrase "Do we have faith that Mr. Lucas can pull this off?". Obviously, Universal didn't.

20th Century-Fox was open to the idea but needed a lot of convincing. This included presentations to their Board making good use of Ralph McQuarrie's concept artwork, to give the executives a sense of what the film would be like.



Ralph McQuarrie Concept Painting for *Star Wars* © Lucasfilm Ltd.

There was a good deal of skepticism from the executives and the studio's Board. Science fiction was not a popular film genre and certainly not one with a box office track record to warrant a major studio putting big bucks into a science fiction film. Or even relatively little bucks, by studio standards.

Fox put its market research department to the task of finding out what the public wanted. Market research is a Good Thing. One of my degrees is in Social Psychology and, in part, that has to do with things like market research. Fox got back good data. But

they were doing research without the proper context. The data was accurate for what and who they asked. They were just asking the wrong questions of the wrong people.

For example, they had their researchers canvassing people walking along Hollywood Boulevard on a weekday afternoon. These were not the sort of people who would be likely to go see this movie. They were going to get a negative before they started.

They showed the people they stopped a list of movie genres – Mystery, Romance, War Movie, Horror Movie, Science Fiction, Comedy, etc. – and asked them to rank them. Which types of film would they most want to see? Science fiction ranked down near the bottom of the list. Well, if the only science fiction movies in the marketplace were things like *The Atomic Brain* and *Mars Needs Women* (two actual 1960s science fiction films), you probably wouldn't rank science fiction films very high either.

They showed them a list of titles. *Star Wars*, as a title, ranked pretty low. Not surprising. Out of context, the title isn't very clear. And the associations it had at that time were mostly negative. It was the mid-1970s. The Vietnam War was on everyone's mind. People were tired of what, by then, had become a very unpopular war. They weren't interested in war movies in general (those ranked low on the genre question, too). With a title like *Star Wars*, the assumption back then was it was about the current war.

And people weren't thinking about Star = Space. If anything, they were thinking Star = Hollywood. Was this going to be a film about movie stars in Vietnam? They didn't really know what to think. They only knew they didn't like the sound of it.

The report from the Market Research department was not to make this movie. And if you do make it, absolutely change the title.

I'm a believer in market research. When it's done right. Which this wasn't. But even then, you shouldn't be a slave to it. And fortunately for all of us, Alan Ladd, Jr., then President of 20th Century-Fox, wasn't. Thanks to his courage/taste/whim, it was decided to go forward with *Star Wars*. Despite the market research and the mixed feeling of his Board, he decided to greenlight the movie.

George, Mark, and Harrison Have Lunch

Before *Star Wars* came out, while it was in post-production, the film needed to be looped. Looping is something that happens with pretty much every movie. Dialogue recorded on location and sometimes even on a sound stage isn't always clear. Sometimes the actor's line reading was garbled. Or there was extraneous noise.

So you bring each actor in later to re-record some or all of their lines in a special studio, set up for the clearest possible recording. This is also used when you want or need to replace one actor's voice with another's.

All of these were needed with *Star Wars*, so each actor came in, in turn, to re-record some of their dialogue. This took place at the Glen Glenn Sound Studio on Highland Avenue in Hollywood.

Down the block from the studio was a restaurant called Hampton's Hollywood Café (or more commonly, just "Hampton's"). This was basically an upscale hamburger place. They had salads and other meals but the main draw of the place was their wide variety of burgers. It was somewhat trendy and very New Age-y, with wooden walls and a tree growing up through the restaurant.

And very convenient to the Glen Glenn recording stages.

Each day at lunchtime, George and whichever actor was looping would go to Hampton's for a burger or salad or whatever.

Mark Hamill had been looping for a couple of days and this was his final day. They only needed a couple of hours so he recorded in the morning, they broke for lunch, and Harrison Ford was going to start looping that afternoon.

Harrison met George and Mark at Hampton's for lunch.

Mark had previously told Harrison that neither the film nor George picked up the tab for lunch. It was strictly everyone on their own. (Money was tight on *Star Wars*, the budget having continued to creep higher and higher, but this seems more from George's natural parsimonious ways rather than anything the budget truly necessitated. After all, how much could a few burgers add to the multi-million dollar budget?)

At the end of the meal that day, the waiter put the check down on the table. Harrison reached over and picked it up. He turned to Mark and said "Go ahead. You're done. Go home. Don't worry about this," he said, waving the check.

Mark said, "You sure?" Harrison nodded so Mark said okay and left.

Harrison slowly perused the check, nodding.

“Looks right to me.”

He put the check down in front of George, got up, and headed for the door and the recording studio.

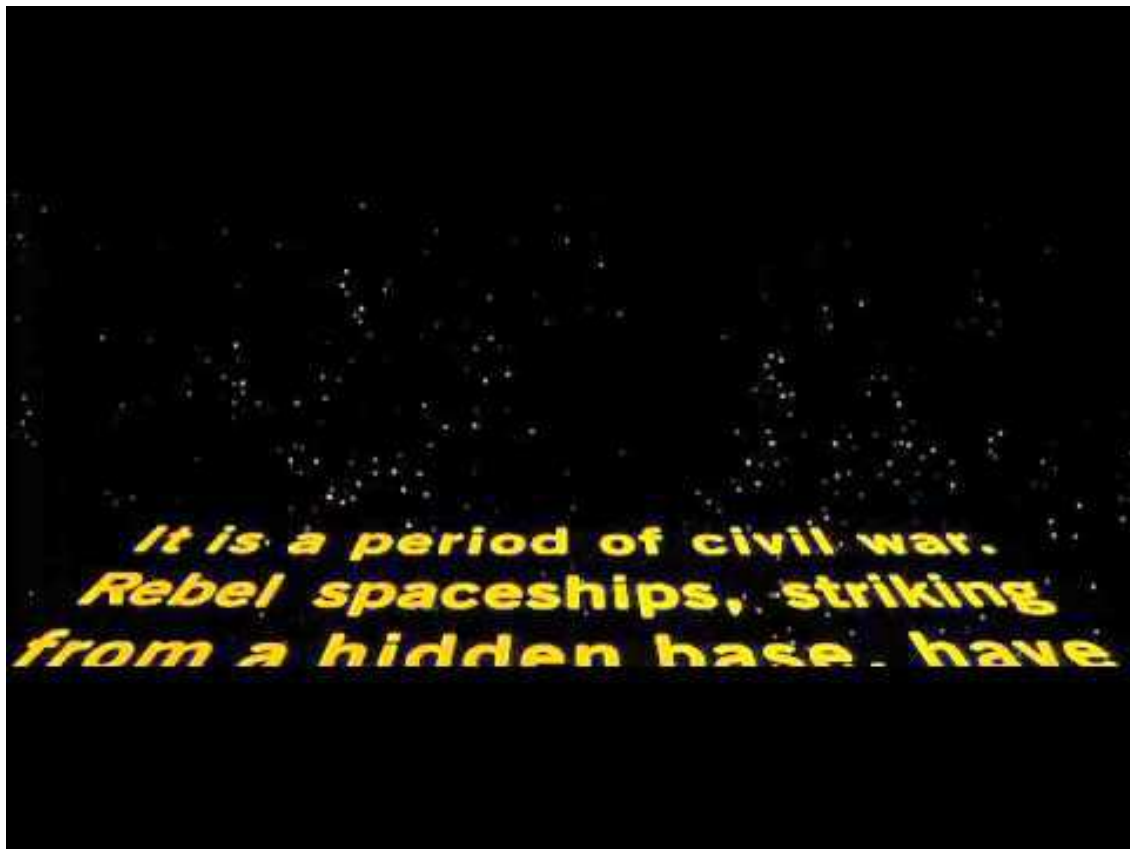
A New Hope

Star Wars opens with a crawl, setting the scene, telling us what has gone before.

“It is a period of civil war, Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire....” For years, *Star Wars* fans have been debating whether or not that crawl started with “Episode IV” or “A New Hope”. Or both.

It didn’t.

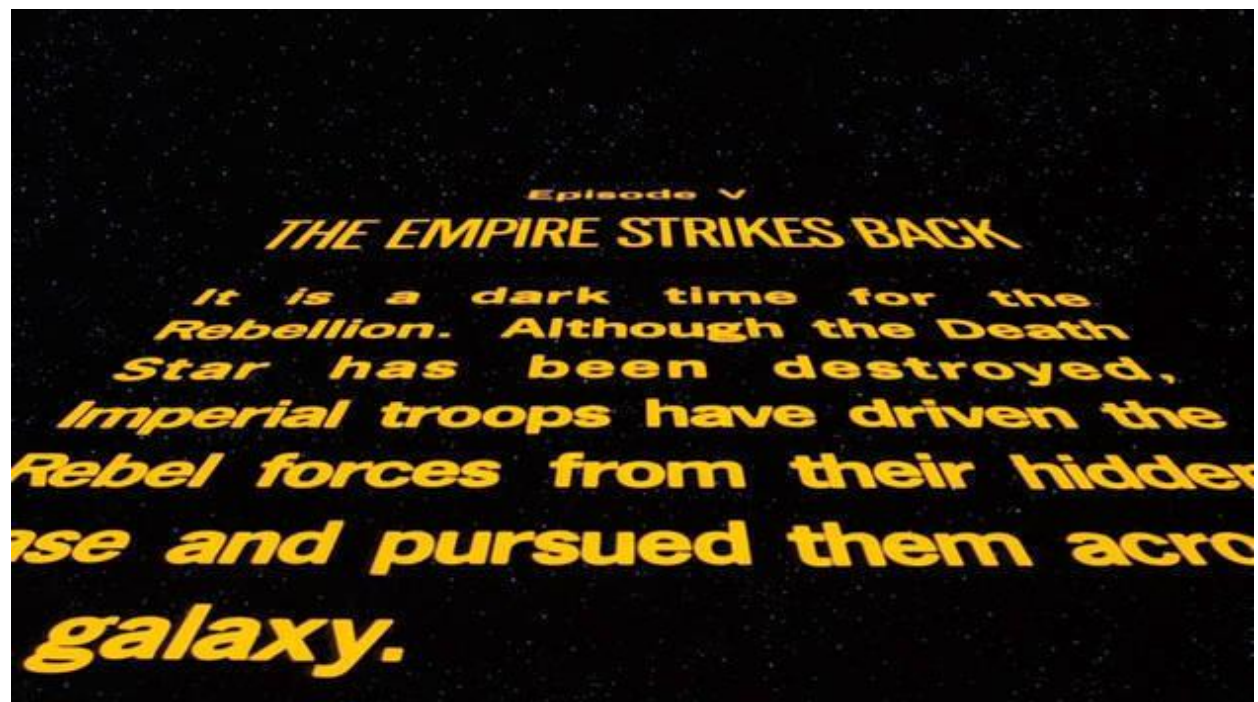
Neither of them. And definitely not both.



Opening

Crawl for *Star Wars* in 1977 © Lucasfilm Ltd.

For the 1981 re-release of *Star Wars*, “Episode IV” and “A New Hope” were added, so the film now matched the format of the opening crawl of the sequel.



Opening Crawl for *The Empire Strikes Back* © Lucasfilm Ltd.

Those phrases have been in place ever since.

But in 1977, they weren't there.

12 Parsecs

Part of my job included occasionally meeting with George and asking about topics fans had on their minds and getting his responses. So I could respond appropriately when I would get asked during appearances or interviews. And one of the most talked about scenes in *Star Wars* is the one where Luke and Obi-Wan first meet Han Solo and Chewbacca.

You know the scene I'm talking about. It takes place in the Cantina, that most wretched hive of scum and villainy in the most wretched hive of scum and villainy, Mos Eisley Spaceport.

HAN SOLO

You've never heard of the Millennium Falcon?

OBI-WAN

Should I have?

HAN SOLO

It's the ship that made the Kessel Run in less than 12 parsecs.

I told George that people were saying that he screwed up, using "parsec" as if it was a measurement of time instead of a measure of distance.

I suggested a science fictional explanation might be these ships must "warp" space in some way to travel such vast distances. So maybe in the *Star Wars* universe, it was some sort of measurement of the way they warp or fold space.

George replied "I didn't make a mistake. Han Solo made the mistake." He said Chewie's the navigator and knows the science behind what they do. Han is a great pilot but kind of a blowhard. He doesn't really know what he's talking about when it comes to the science of these things.

And if you watch the scene closely, you can see Obi-Wan realizing that.

When Han says “less than 12 parsecs”, the scene cuts to Obi-Wan. He doesn’t look impressed. He sort of rolls his eyes.



Han Solo talks speed © Lucasfilm Ltd.

You can see for yourself next time you watch the film. Or you can see a clip of the scene on YouTube.

The Truckers in Numero Uno

It was September or October of 1977. *Star Wars* had been in theaters for a few months. A few of us from Lucasfilm decided to go out for a late lunch and we ended up at a Numero Uno pizza place on Ventura Boulevard in North Hollywood.

We were seated at a table in the back room of the restaurant. The only other people seated in this section, a couple tables away from us, were four long haul truckers, likewise having lunch.

This back room had a bar and its own cash register. The restaurant's manager decided that, this late in the day, they only needed to have one register open, the one up front, and so would total out the one in this section.

It was an *electronic* cash register. The kind capable of keep track of sales, which waiter placed which orders, etc. Quite advanced for 1977. Because this was new technology, they were designed to make noises. To make sure you were aware of how modern and powerful a tool this was. So as it did its electronic calculations, the cash register started beeping and booping.

One of the truckers pointed at the cash register and said to his friends, "Hey! It's R2-D2!" and they all laughed.

At that point I knew *Star Wars* had taken over the world. Everyone knew *Star Wars*.

(I told this story once and got called out for decrying truckers as being "the great unwashed". I profess no knowledge as to the general hygiene of the average trucker, but as to whether an average trucker – back in 1977 – would likely hear a sound and think first of a specific robot in a science fiction movie, I believe I'm on safe ground to say that wouldn't be expected behavior. Until *Star Wars*.)