

Star Wars, space opera film series (created by George Lucas) that became one of the most successful and influential franchises in motion picture history. Begun in the 1970s and '80s and resuscitated at the turn of the 21st century, the Star Wars films continually advanced the field of motion picture special effects and developed into an enormously lucrative merchandising industry.

Lucas's success as a writer and director with *American Graffiti* (1973) gained him the backing of 20th Century Fox, which put up \$9.5 million for the production of the first Star Wars film. The film, directed by Lucas, was in production for four years, with scenes shot in Tunisia and Death Valley, California, and on soundstages in England. When it was released on May 25, 1977, *Star Wars* (later retitled *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*) met with runaway success. A space opera set “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away,” the film centres on Luke Skywalker (played by the then relatively unknown Mark Hamill), a young man who finds himself embroiled in an interplanetary war between an authoritarian empire and rebel forces.