

## This Day in History... May 25, 1977

### First *Star Wars* Movie

On May 25, 1977, the first *Star Wars* film was released. Since then, *Star Wars* has grown into one of the most successful franchises in entertainment history, earning more than \$10 billion at the global box office and expanding into television, books, games, toys, and theme-park attractions.

In 1971, writer and director George Lucas sought to produce a film adaptation of the comic serial *Flash Gordon*, but he couldn't get the rights. Lucas then decided he would invent his own. To find inspiration, he researched what had originally inspired Alex Raymond to write *Flash Gordon*. This led him to the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs (*John Carter of Mars*) and Edwin Arnold (*Gulliver on Mars*).

In addition to these sources, Lucas found contemporary inspiration, stating "It was really about the Vietnam War, and that was the period where Nixon was trying to run for a [second] term, which got me to thinking historically about how do democracies get turned into dictatorships?" Lucas began writing in 1973 and pitched the idea to several studios, but they didn't think science fiction would sell. He eventually reached a deal with 20th Century Fox and would write four different screenplays before filming began in March of 1976. He also continued to tweak the story as filming progressed.

Lucas wanted the sets to look used, as opposed to the sleek, clean space sets in most science fiction. To achieve this look and to save money, they used a lot of scrap pieces. Lucas also started his own visual effects company, Industrial Light and Magic, to produce the film's pioneering effects.

The film premiered on May 25, 1977, in just 32 theaters. But it quickly broke box office records and became one of the first blockbuster films. The studio also worked to get it into more theaters as soon as possible. *Star Wars* became one of the most financially successful films of all time, becoming the highest-earning film in North America just six months after it was released.

Lucas had written the film as part of a trilogy, and its success meant he could continue his story. After the first film was released, two others followed at three-year intervals. And 16 years after the release of the third film, Lucas produced another trilogy giving fans the background story behind how the Jedi Anakin Skywalker became the notorious Darth Vader. Another trilogy was introduced in 2015, concluding in 2019. Additional films, television series, and games have also continued the story over the years. As of 2026, *Star Wars* has earned 37 Academy Award nominations and won 10 Oscars as well as many other awards and accolades.

In March 2007, the USPS announced the issue of a sheet of 15 stamps honoring the 30th anniversary of *Star Wars*. To generate interest in the new stamps, they also replaced 400 mail collection boxes with ones painted to resemble R2-D2, a robot from the film. A special website on the boxes directed fans to enter the Jedi Shipping and Mailing Master Challenge, with a grand prize of a trip to a special *Star Wars* celebration.

To unveil these special stamps, R2-D2, Darth Vader, and the Imperial stormtroopers joined USPS executive David Failor at Grauman's Chinese Theater in Los Angeles, on March 28, 2007. At the event, the Postal Service announced that the public would be able to vote for its favorite stamp character, which would then be made into a single stamp.

To create something as impressive as the movie, the Postal Service called on veteran *Star Wars* poster artist, Drew Struzan – Stephen Spielberg's proclaimed "favorite movie artist!". As one of the original movie-poster artists for the first *Star Wars* film, Struzan earned fame and recognition for the work on that film. He created a movie-poster-like sheet featuring 15 characters and space vehicles for the first US *Star Wars* stamps.

The stamps were issued at the Los Angeles Convention Center on May 25, 2007 – the 30th anniversary of the release of the film that started it all. At the First Day Ceremony, the USPS also announced the winner of the contest – Yoda. The Yoda stamps were issued on October 25, 2007, at the opening of the American Stamp Dealers Association Mega Stamp Show in New York City.



*Yoda's face is loosely based on that of scientist Albert Einstein.*

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