



**SILVERSCREEN  
PRIMARY  
EDUCATION**

## **1970s Cinema: The Rebirth of Hollywood**

*By Adam Pepper*

### **Session 9**



Welcome to Session 9 of this '1970s Cinema: The Rebirth of Hollywood' course!

Over ten weeks, we will journey through over 30 years of cinema to find the secrets behind some of the most iconic, ground-breaking, popular and culture-changing stories and movies from this, the grooviest of all decades!

#### **Session 9:**

Last week saw film-makers being truly inspired by the work of Stanley Kubrick and Douglas Trumbull in telling epic science fiction stories using cutting edge special effects and revolutionary film-making techniques!

With '2001: A Space Odyssey', the bar had been lifted on fantastical storytelling.

Now, film-makers with stories like these on their minds (Spielberg and Lucas?), could now visualise and realise their science fiction dreams! Whether it be an epic space opera inspired by the Japanese films of Akira Kurosawa and the old 1930s Flash Gordon comic strips, or the idea of alien life existing within our own universe, amongst our own stars, suddenly, these stories could be told with awe and wonder!

And with this new period of 'hopeful' storytelling smashing the box office and winning awards ('Rocky', 'Serpico', etc.), suddenly, cinema audiences were looking for good guys; heroes we could look up to, show to our children and aspire to be like ourselves.

So what if they wore their pants outside of their trousers!

Sure, we still needed Woodward and Bernstein to uncover conspiracies in our governments but, after 'Jaws' monster success, film studios were looking for crowd-pleasing, special effects-laden, fun, bold, colourful blockbusters to sign off on. And, hey, let's get them out in the summer!!

Enter 'Star Wars', directed by (admittedly) still-on-probation director, George Lucas. Lucas dreamed of merchandise deals, sequels, franchises and an expansion of his new film-making company, ILM.

Surely this goofy space opera about 'dogs flying spaceships' wouldn't be the film to smash 'Jaws' box office records?!

#### **Useful information for Session 9:**

##### **ILM**

Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) is an American motion picture visual effects company that was founded on May 26, 1975 by George Lucas. It is a division of the film production company Lucasfilm, which Lucas founded, and was created when he began production on the original *Star Wars*, now the fourth episode of the Skywalker Saga.

ILM originated in Van Nuys, California, then later moved to San Rafael in 1978, and since 2005 it has been based at the Letterman Digital Arts Center in the Presidio of San Francisco. In 2012, The Walt Disney Company acquired ILM as part of its purchase of Lucasfilm. As of 2024, Industrial Light & Magic has won 15 Academy Awards for Best Visual Effects.

Lucas wanted his 1977 film *Star Wars* to include visual effects that had never been seen on film before. After discovering that the in-house effects department at 20th Century Fox was no longer operational, Lucas approached Douglas Trumbull, best known for the effects on *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and *Silent*

*Running* (1972). Trumbull declined as he was already committed to working on Steven Spielberg's film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), but suggested his assistant John Dykstra to Lucas. Dykstra brought together a small team of college students, artists, and engineers and set them up in a warehouse in Van Nuys, California. After seeing the map for the location was zoned as light industrial, Lucas named the group Industrial Light and Magic, which became the Special Visual Effects department on *Star Wars*. Alongside Dykstra, other leading members of the original ILM team were Ken Ralston, Richard Edlund, Dennis Muren, Robert Blalack, Joe Johnston, Phil Tippett, Steve Gawley, Lorne Peterson, and Paul Huston.

In late 1978, when in pre-production for *The Empire Strikes Back*, Lucas reformed most of the team into Industrial Light & Magic in Marin County, California. From here on, the company expanded and has since gone on to produce special effects for over three hundred films, including the entire *Star Wars* saga, the *Indiana Jones* series, and the *Jurassic Park* series.

He contacted Triple-I, known for their early computer effects in movies like *'Westworld'* (1973), *'Futureworld'* (1976), *'Tron'* (1982) and *'The Last Starfighter'* (1984).

They ended up making a computer-generated test of five X-wing fighters flying in formation. He found it to be too expensive and returned to handmade models. Nevertheless, the test had showed him it was possible, and he decided he would create his own computer graphics department instead. As a result, they started investing in Apple and SGI computers.

### **Richard Donner**

Richard Donner (born Richard Donald Schwartzberg; April 24, 1930 – July 5, 2021) was an American filmmaker. Described as "one of Hollywood's most reliable makers of action blockbusters," Donner directed some of the most financially-successful films of the 1970s and 1980s. His 50-year career crossed genres and influenced trends among filmmakers across the world.

Donner began his career in 1957 as a television director. In the 1960s, he directed episodes of the series *The Rifleman*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Fugitive*, *The Twilight Zone*, *The Banana Splits*, and many others. Donner made his film debut with the low-budget aviation drama *X-15* in 1961, but had his critical and commercial breakthrough with the horror film *The Omen* in 1976. He directed the landmark superhero film *Superman* in 1978, which provided an inspiration for the fantasy film genre to eventually gain artistic respectability and commercial dominance. Donner later went on to direct films in the 1980s such as *The Goonies* and *Scrooged*, while reinvigorating the buddy cop film genre with the *Lethal Weapon* series.

Donner and his wife, Lauren, owned a production company, The Donners' Company, which is most successful for producing the *Free Willy* and *X-Men* film franchises. Donner also produced *Tales from the Crypt* and co-wrote several comic books for *Superman* publisher DC Comics. In 2000, Donner received the President's Award from the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films.

### **Films to look out for:**

*Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977)

*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)

*Superman: The Movie* (1978)

*Superman II* (1980)

*Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979)

*Apocalypse Now* (1979)

