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StarWars Episode One: You're Right, George--It Is a Menace

[Chris Orcutt](#)

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A LONG TIME AGO IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY, some nut got the idea that people wanted to hear a story of empires and spaceships and swords made of light and space freaks that resembled Dunkin' Donuts patrons at 2 a.m. And you know what? He was absolutely right.

To date, there have been over 10 million downloads of the [Phantom Menace trailer](#). At first blush, this figure is impressive—it's approximately the entire city of New York, or three times the population of Uruguay—but what it really shows is that several million people have too much time on their hands.

Now don't get me wrong, I love Star Wars, so much that I'm responsible for two or three million of those downloads myself. Things got so out of control a couple months back that I had my friend Jason put up a private FTP site with the two trailers on it for me and acquaintances. Anytime I ran into someone who hadn't been able to download the trailer because it was too busy or they had bandwidth problems, I gave them the FTP address.

The reason I mention this is that I, like a lot of twenty-somethings I'm afraid, am slightly obsessed with Star Wars and have been since I first saw the movie in 1977. When I was eight, my friend, Jeff Manning, and I locked ourselves in the bathroom (where it was pitch dark) and pummelled each other with glow-in-the-dark lightsabers. Years later, near the end of my toy-playing career, we dangled Luke and Han over a makeshift [Pit of Carkoon](#) (the kitchen garbage disposal) by a string. As for what happened to them, let's put it this way: the Force didn't help. Still more of my life was, and continues to be, wrapped up in Star Wars. I was in a theater watching *Return of the Jedi* for the first time when my interest in girls was awakened. Like every red-blooded heterosexual male, after I saw Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) in [that outfit](#), I never looked at women the same way again.

For my birthday in 1997, my wife took me to see *The Empire Strikes Back* at a giant auditorium theater in San Jose, CA—deep in the heart of Lucas Country. I liked seeing it so much on the big screen, that I insisted we get back on line and see it again. So we did.

This slightly unhealthy Star Wars fascination continues. I'm ashamed to admit that "The Empire March" is a regular staple in my car CD changer, and I've read every issue of *Time*, *Premiere*, *Wired*, and the *New Yorker* with articles on the new movie or the Star Wars phenomenon in general. I've taken notes on the locations of [ILM](#) and [Skywalker Ranch](#) for a future trip to the Bay Area. Finally,

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I've found myself skulking around the Internet trying to suck up as much Star Wars news and trivia as I can, the best site by far being theforce.net. (One thing, though: instead of "Your daily dose of Star Wars," the site's motto should be, "Your daily *fix* of Star Wars, you sick *freak!*")

In the last few weeks, as I've contemplated my own festering Star Wars obsession, I've noticed that this Phantom Menace business has consumed a *lot* of people—dare I say all of society?—and surely it's not all healthy.

We've had thousands of grown men and women—allegedly professionals in their fields—play hooky from work and buy tickets to *Meet Joe Black*, just so they could see the 2 minute preview. We've had mothers in fistfights at Toys-R-Us over dwindling supplies of plastic action figures. And then there are the people who have been [counting down](#) and [camping out](#) for months waiting to see the film. If you ask me, it's too much.

All of this Star Wars stuff came to a head last week while I was in Chicago on a business trip. First, on the plane ride out there, the man next to me said he hadn't seen the new trailer yet, so I felt obligated to give him a viewing on my PowerBook. Before I knew it, other first class passengers were peering over their seats and the flight attendants were lining up in the aisle beside my chair. I ended up playing the thing like nine times and didn't get any work done as a result.

Then, when I landed, I needed to get a cab to the hotel and ended up getting a guy who did nothing but talk about the new movie. I arrived at the hotel, frazzled, so I went next door to a convenience store to get a snack and was assaulted by a barrage of *Phantom Menace* characters on the Lay's potato chips display.

Back at the hotel, while waiting for my partners to arrive, I was sitting in the bar, watching CNN, when a story came on about the Star Wars craze and how it was enveloping the country. I left the bar and waited for my partners in the lobby.

During lunch, the conversation somehow strayed to Star Wars, and the guy we were interviewing made the *faux pas* of incorrectly stating how many adopted children George Lucas has (three, as I understand it). Little did our interviewee know that one of our partners, Mark Foster, is not only a heavy-duty closet Star Wars fan, but also consults for Pepsi and conceived and designed the R2-D2 soda coolers that Pepsi put out at the time of the Special Edition series. The Lucas error was quickly corrected, and the interviewee got the job, but the incident cast a pall over the rest of lunch.

I flew home that evening, determined to put Star Wars out of my mind until it comes out on the 19th. Yes, I'm going to buy my tickets a week ahead of time, and yes, my wife and I are taking half-days on opening day so we can be among the first to see it, but I'm not obsessed or anything. You won't see me lining up out there in the rain for the next two weeks, nor will you see me trying to catch George on the *Rosie O'Donnell Show*. My new mantra is this: it's just a movie. Remember that. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go get my Wookiee suit dry-cleaned.

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