



# The Science of Star Wars: An Astrophysicist's Independent Examination of Space Travel, Aliens, Planets, and Robots as Portrayed in the Star Wars Films and Books

By Jeanne Cavelos

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Could the science fiction of *Star Wars* be the actual science of tomorrow?

- How close are we to creating robots that look and act like R2-D2 and C-3PO?
- Can we access a "force" with our minds to move objects and communicate telepathically with each other?
- How might spaceships like the *Millennium Falcon* make the exhilarating jump into hyperspace?
- What kind of environment could spawn a Wookiee?
- Could a single blast from the Death Star destroy an entire planet?
- Could light sabers possibly be built, and if so, how would they work?
- Do *Star Wars* aliens look like "real" aliens might?
- What would living on a desert planet like Tatooine be like?
- Why does Darth Vader require an artificial respirator?

Discover the answers to these and many other fascinating questions of physics, astronomy, biology and more, as a noted scientist and *Star Wars* enthusiast explores *The Science of Star Wars*.

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Jeanne Cavelos says, "*Star Wars* fueled my interest in space exploration and the possibility of alien life," leading her to a career in astrophysics. While these movies have inspired her, she admits that may not have been their intention.

In creating the part science fiction/part fantasy/part myth that is *Star Wars*, George Lucas did not seek to create a futuristic universe that agreed perfectly with our current understanding of science.... How realistic, how possible, is this galaxy far, far away?

The answer when *A New Hope* first came out was "not at all." But a strange thing has happened in the years since *Star Wars* first came out. Science is beginning to catch up with George Lucas.

Cavelos looks at Lucas's planets, aliens, droids, technology, and Force with both rationality and affection. The droids R2-D2 and C-3PO, among others, become more interesting and almost credible after her consideration.

The element of *Star Wars* that is most true to science is the sense of wonder it calls forth, which has very little to do with how close it is to a possible future. Or, as Steve Grand, director of the Cyberlife Institute, said to Cavelos: "I never try to let scientific implausibility get in the way of a good story!" --*Mary Ellen Curtin*

#### From Publishers Weekly

The opening in May of the new *Star Wars* film has hardcore fans in a frenzy. Timed to release with *The Phantom Menace*, this book follows in the tradition of *The Physics of Star Trek* and Cavelos's own *The Science of the X-Files*. The author examines five major areas: planetary environments, aliens, droids, space ships and weapons, and the Force in sufficient detail to satisfy even knowledgeable fans. Take Luke's desert home world, Tatooine. When *Star Wars* first came out, scientists doubted the existence of planets in other solar systems, but since 1995 several have been found. Could a planet form around a binary star? Yes, but due to gravitational forces only if the stars were very far apart or very close, so as Luke gazes out at his two suns setting, he sees an accurate portrayal of a binary system. Most of the *Star Wars* aliens fare equally well. The Wookies' keen sense of smell, for example, would give them an alternative means of communication so that they might need to vocalize only with grunts and howls. Can the Force be with you? Physicist David Bohm posited a quantum potential force that would interpenetrate and bind together everything in the universe, but only Yoda knows if we can direct it with our minds. Cavelos's engaging style makes this book a treat, with no science background necessary. (May) FYI: *The Science of the X-Files* has been nominated for a 1998 Bram Stoker Award in the Nonfiction category.  
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#### From School Library Journal

YA-Cavelos, an astrophysicist, mathematician, writer, and teacher, examines the science

behind George Lucas's popular series of movies, comparing his fictional universe with the universe as we currently understand it. She points out that in the two decades since the debut of *Star Wars: A New Hope*, science has come much closer to making Lucas's vision a reality. Rapid interstellar travel is theoretically possible. Extraterrestrial life is apparently more abundant than previously thought. Robots seem to need emotions to learn and interact effectively with humans. There may even be dare we say it?-a Force. The writing is clear and geared toward readers with "no particular science background" although some is necessary. The author lightens the jargon with humor, and her examples for scientific principals and phenomena are apt. For example, Schrodinger's paradox is illustrated not by a cat in a box, but by Princess Leia in a cell. This book will appeal to the many fans of the films.

*Susan Salpini, Purcellville Library, VA*

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### **From reader reviews:**

#### **William McNally:**

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#### **Peter Delaune:**

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**Stella Neal:**

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