

EXCLUSIVE!

"Maybe I can help you.
I am Boba Fett."

INTRODUCING

BOBA FETT

THE *STAR WARS* HOLIDAY SPECIAL WAS NOTABLE FOR INTRODUCING A CHARACTER WHO WAS TO BECOME A KEY PLAYER IN THE *STAR WARS* SAGA, THE ENIGMATIC BOUNTY HUNTER, BOBA FETT. IN AN EXCLUSIVE LOOK BACK, THE HEAD OF NELVANA STUDIOS, THE COMPANY THAT CREATED THE SHORT CARTOON THAT INTRODUCED THE CHARACTER, DISCUSSES THE BIRTH OF A *STAR WARS* ICON.
WORDS: CHRISTOPHER GATES

Gentle Giant's Boba Fett Holiday Special
Animated maquette, released in 2014.

In 1978, Clive Smith was getting worried. Sure, Smith's animation company, Nelvana Studios, had a nice gig producing stock footage for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, but that wasn't enough. "There was a point where we were really desperate to get into the entertainment business," Smith says, "Especially me. I wanted to build the animation studio."

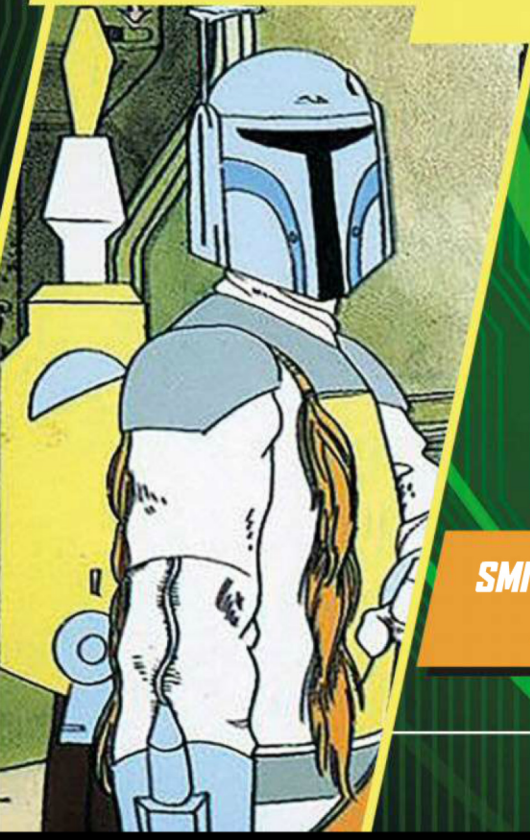
And then, George Lucas called.

Lucas needed someone to produce a ten-minute animated short for Lucasfilm's upcoming *Star Wars Holiday Special*, and he thought that Nelvana might be right for job. The short, titled *The Faithful Wookiee*, would feature a script co-written by Lucas himself, and would introduce audiences to Boba Fett, the villainous bounty hunter who hunts down Han Solo in *The Empire Strikes Back*. It was the opportunity that Smith had been waiting for, but it came with a catch: Smith only had two weeks to finish all of the storyboards and character designs, and he would have to travel to California to get George Lucas' approval in person. "It was pretty stressful," Smith says. Ultimately, the *Star Wars Holiday Special* would

become one of the most mysterious chapters in the franchise's storied history.

By reuniting the cast of *Star Wars* in a two-hour variety show, Lucasfilm hoped to tide fans over until *The Empire Strikes Back* hit screens. It didn't work out that way. The *Star Wars Holiday Special* puzzled viewers and critics alike. And yet, the *Star Wars Holiday Special's* legacy lives on, thanks in part to Clive Smith, Nelvana, and Boba Fett. With Smith at

the helm, *The Faithful Wookiee* is the *Star Wars Holiday Special's* undisputed high point. In the short, Fett preys on Luke's naiveté and endears himself to the crew of the *Millennium Falcon*, only to be exposed by Chewbacca as an Imperial agent shortly before Darth Vader captures them all. It's a great introduction to Fett, and his no-nonsense attitude and casual cruelty have been a staple of the character ever since.



Clive Smith.

SMITH ONLY HAD TWO WEEKS TO FINISH ALL OF THE STORYBOARDS AND CHARACTER DESIGNS.

BRINGING BOBA TO LIFE

It's a good script, of course, but it's Smith's animation that really brings *The Faithful Wookiee* to life.

In the early 1960's, Smith attended London's Ealing Art College, alongside future rock stars, Pete Townshend, Freddie Mercury, and The Rolling Stones' Ronnie Wood. There, Smith studied painting and "kinetic art", or sculpture with moving parts. "I liked to see things that were articulated," Smith says. "I loved the idea of things that moved with motions and hinges and stuff like that."

While at Ealing, Smith helped a classmate create an animated short and was immediately smitten with the art form. "It was the process that intrigued me, which was very manual, very physical, and very tactile," Smith says. After graduation, Smith parlayed his brief experience into a gig as an animator at Group 2 Studios, where he

worked on animated series like *The Lone Ranger* (1966-1969) and *The Beatles* (1965-1969). When Group 2 folded, Smith moved to Canada. In 1971, he joined forces with producers Michael Hirsh and Patrick Loubert to found Nelvana Studios.

Initially, Nelvana made ends meet by producing training films for industrial firms, short kids' movies, and "fillers," or videos intended to fill up airtime if scheduled programming ran short. The work didn't sit well with Smith. As a natural storyteller, he was eager to create something with a narrative. In 1977, Smith directed Nelvana's first animated feature, a half-hour CBS special called *A Cosmic Christmas*. The special caught George Lucas's attention, and he contacted Smith shortly thereafter about *The Faithful Wookiee*.

Smith might've had the experience, but getting *The Faithful Wookiee* ready in time wasn't easy. Even for experienced animators, two weeks isn't a lot of time to put together storyboards and character designs. The technology made it harder, too. "Remember, it was pre-digital," Smith says. "Today, storyboard artists do a panel, and they can do several different poses within that panel, and it takes very little effort to do it. We were using pencils and paper, and sticking things on the wall and moving things around."

Lucas sent Smith a script, and Smith got to work. Smith and another animator, Frank Nissen, locked themselves in a boardroom and cranked out hundreds of storyboards. Meanwhile, Nelvana's designers plugged away, rendering the *Star Wars* universe into animation for the very first time. Turning characters like Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, and Princess Leia into cartoons wasn't too difficult; all the animators had to do was look at the original actors for inspiration.

With Boba Fett, a brand new character, it was different. "They sent us a black and white film of an actor in a mock-up of Boba Fett's suit," Smith remembers, but the design wasn't final, and the color scheme hadn't been locked down at that point. As the story goes, Boba Fett's costume was supposed to be sleek and streamlined, like a stormtrooper's. Smith disagreed. To play up Fett's warrior past, Nelvana made the bounty hunter's costume worn and battle-scarred. The rough-hewn nature of the outfit made its way into *The Empire Strikes Back*'s final Boba Fett costume, and has stuck with the character ever since.

And remember, this was 1978. The *Star Wars* aesthetic was still in flux. Aside from the original movie, there wasn't much reference material available. Most licensed efforts of the time, including Alan Dean Foster's novel, *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*, and Marvel's *Star Wars* comic books, don't feel quite like the saga that we now know and love today.

Hasbro's Animated Debut Boba Fett action figure.



(SUDDENLY BOBA WHIRLS AROUND AND FIRES AT THE CREATURE WHO HAS BEEN BOTHERING HIM)

BOBA

Force and threat are the only things that matter to these creatures.

LUKE

I think the animal is only hungry.

(LUKE TAKES SOME FOOD FROM HIS BACKPACK, AND FEEDS THE CREATURE, WHO EATS IT HUNGRILY)

This is all we have here, but you're welcome to it.

BOBA

You are foolish to waste your kindness on a lower-form creature. None of them are worth going hungry for.

LUKE

(There are more provisions on board the Millennium Falcon.)

BOBA

You are of the Rebel Alliance, friend?

LUKE

I am. Will you help me?

BOBA

It will be easy for my creature to find the ship you seek. Follow me, friend.

2 1/2

1 7

OUT?

10

14

THEN I MUST HURRY & FIND MY FRIEND



A page of the script annotated by Smith, and featuring Boba's fateful meeting with Luke Skywalker.

DRAWING INSPIRATION

In the absence of official reference material, Smith and Nissen took inspiration from the French comic book artist Moebius, who's famous for his psychedelic science-fiction stories. Smith remembers listening to Ennio Morricone's score for *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* as he drew, as well. To Smith, spaghetti westerns and *Star Wars* are a natural pairing. "There's that vastness of the desert, which in *Star Wars* is the vastness of space, and the details of the people within that environment, and how difficult that environment is, and how hard and coarse that is," Smith says.

Two weeks later, Smith packed his bags and lugged four carousels of slides from Toronto to northern California. He arrived at Lucasfilm headquarters early and lined the walls of an empty meeting room with storyboards. Soon, George Lucas and about forty other executives entered and took their seats. Smith began his presentation.

"I start talking, I start clicking through the slides, and telling the story, explaining what's going on in each shot, what the dialogue is, what the action is, what the effects are," Smith says. *The Faithful Wookiee* is only nine minutes long, but the presentation took Smith almost two hours—including one break, so that Smith could drink a glass of water. "Other than the perspiration falling and splashing on the floor from my

THE FAITHFUL WOOKIEE IS ONLY NINE MINUTES LONG, BUT PRESENTING IT TO GEORGE LUCAS TOOK ALMOST TWO HOURS.



Cast

Anthony Daniels
as C-3PO

Carrie Fisher
as Princess Leia Organa

Harrison Ford
as Han Solo

Mark Hamill
as Luke Skywalker

James Earl Jones
as Darth Vader

Don Francks
as Boba Fett

Crew

George Lucas
(Story)

Ben Burt
Sound designer/editor

Jenn de Joux
Video animation

Elizabeth Savel
Video animation



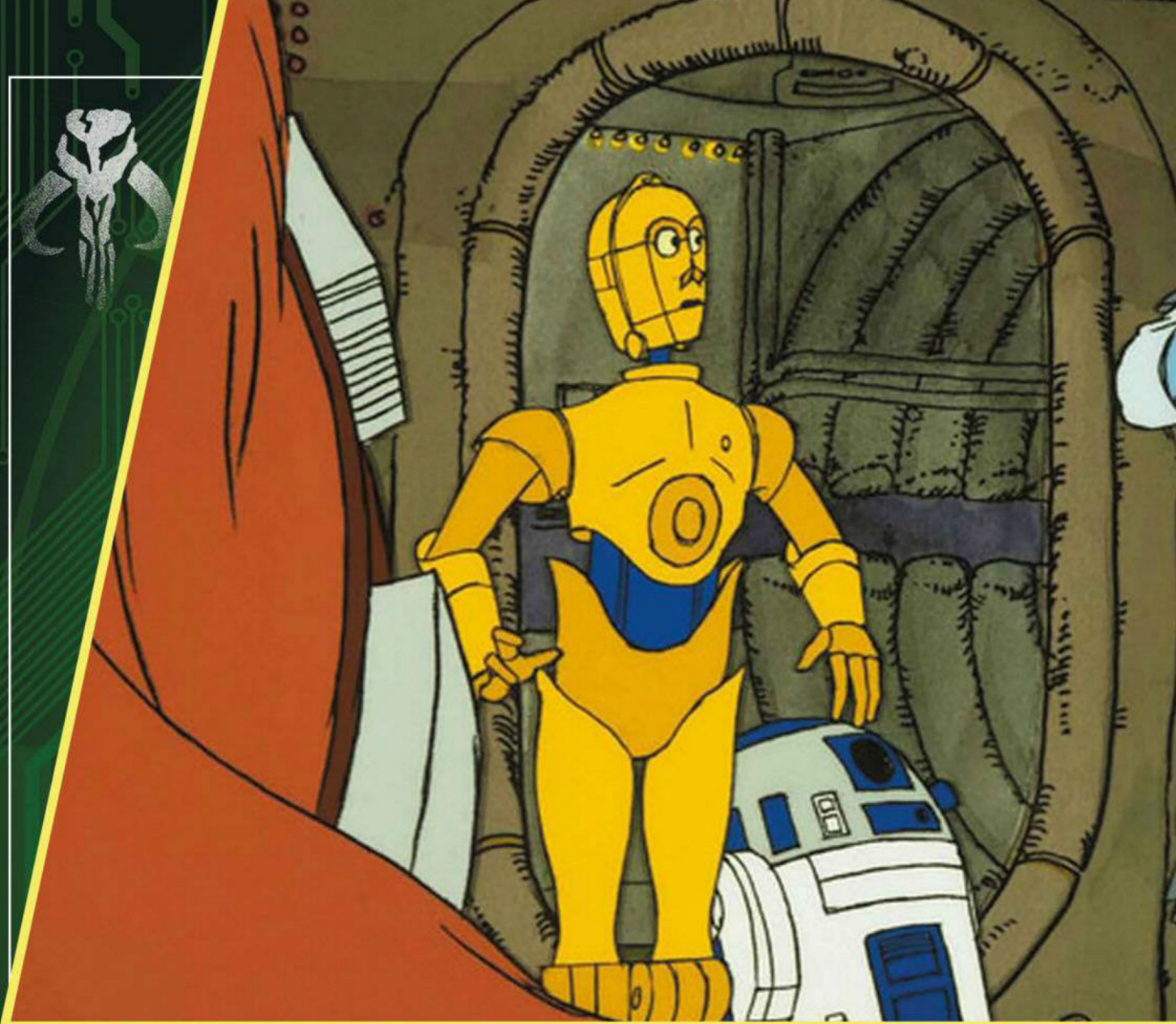
forehead, you could hear a pin drop." Lucas spent the entire presentation fixated on the slide projector. Occasionally, Smith made jokes. Nobody laughed. "You get no feedback at all, you can only imagine that they hate you. What else can you imagine?" Smith says.

But the audience didn't hate it. When Smith finished his presentation, George Lucas clapped, and the rest of the audience joined him. Smith received a standing ovation.

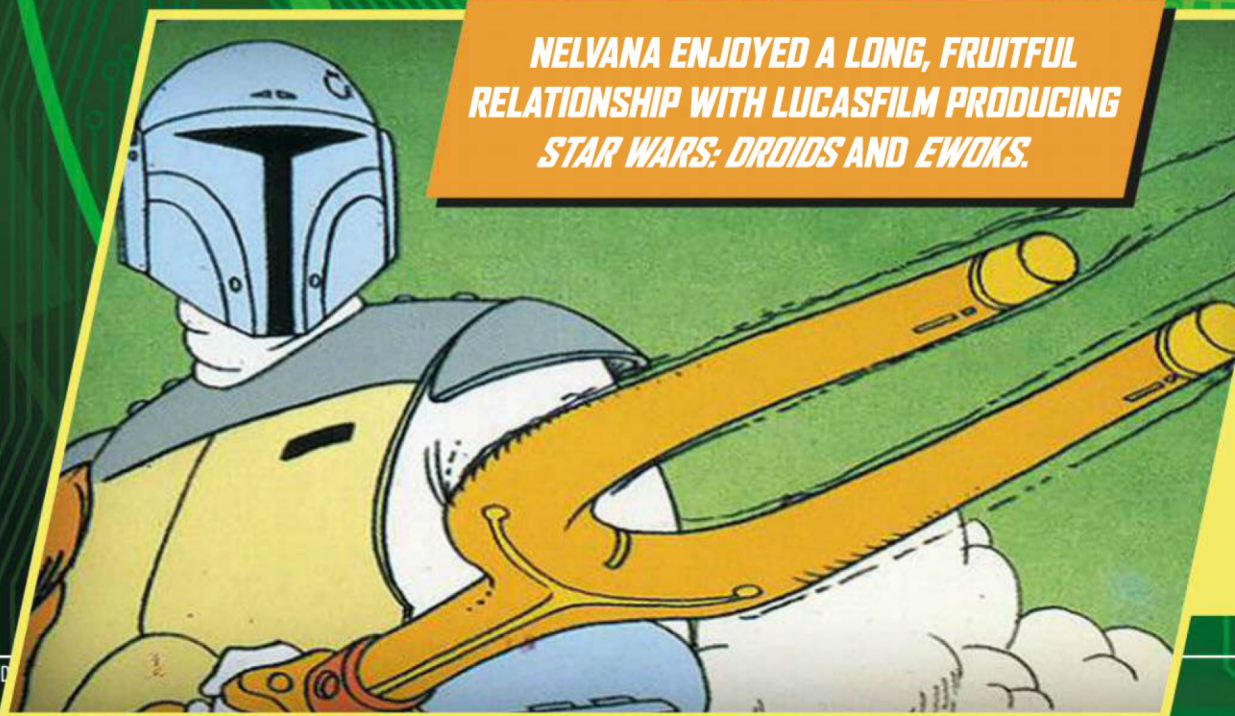
From there, it was smooth sailing. Lucasfilm sent Nelvana the finished voice tracks (featuring Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, and the rest of

the *Star Wars* cast), and Nelvana's animators brought the storyboards to life. Less than a year later, Boba Fett debuted on television screens around the United States, as part of the *Star Wars Holiday Special's* only official appearance.

Smith made his peace with the *Star Wars Holiday Special's* oddball reputation a long time ago, and is still happy with *The Faithful Wookiee*. "I was proud of the piece, and I know George [Lucas] was," Smith says. "I knew if we had not produced something we were proud of, I would've felt awful."

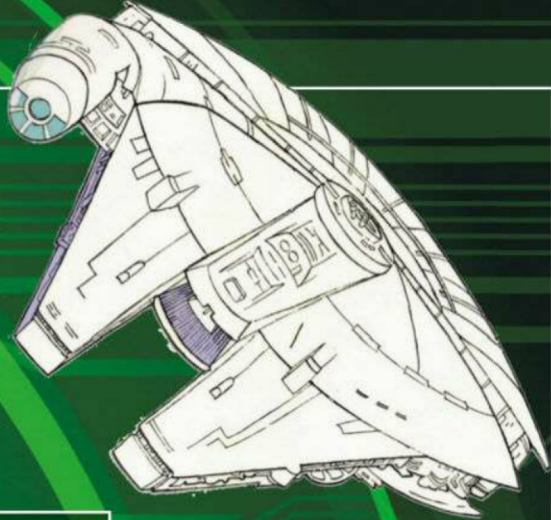


**NELVANA ENJOYED A LONG, FRUITFUL
RELATIONSHIP WITH LUCASFILM PRODUCING
STAR WARS: DROIDS AND EWOOKS.**





An animation cell depicting the Millennium Falcon in flight!



BOBA FETT SOARS

Boba Fett went on to become one of the most popular *Star Wars* characters of all time, and in recent years, action figures and statues based on Fett's appearance in *The Faithful Wookiee* have become popular collector's items.

Meanwhile, Nelvana enjoyed a long, fruitful relationship with Lucasfilm (the studio produced both the *Star Wars: Droids* and the *Ewoks* animated series), and quickly grew into one of the biggest animation companies on the planet. Series like *Babar*, *The Magic School Bus*, *Strawberry Shortcake*, and *Eek! The Cat* all bear the Nelvana logo.

Smith isn't a die-hard *Star Wars* fan—when talking, he struggles to come up with key names and events from the series—and his relationship with the franchise is both more professional and more personal than most people's. When Smith talks about George Lucas, he describes a respected peer and an intense, insightful storyteller. He has similar feelings about the rest of the Lucasfilm staff. "George surrounds himself with people who are just as fantastic as he is," Smith says. "Not only were they brilliantly talented people, but they

were also very approachable and very accessible."

Smith and his partners sold Nelvana in 2000, and Smith left the company in 2001. Since then, he's opened his own company, *Musta Costa Fortune*, and is hard at work on *The Rather Unusual Adventures of Ice Cream Girl and Mr. Licorice*, a full-length feature that will combine live-action with animation. Yet, while it's been almost forty years, Smith appreciates the gravity of his contribution to the *Star Wars* universe. "I feel really privileged to have witnessed and been submerged," he says, "for some period of time in that environment and that world." 🍌