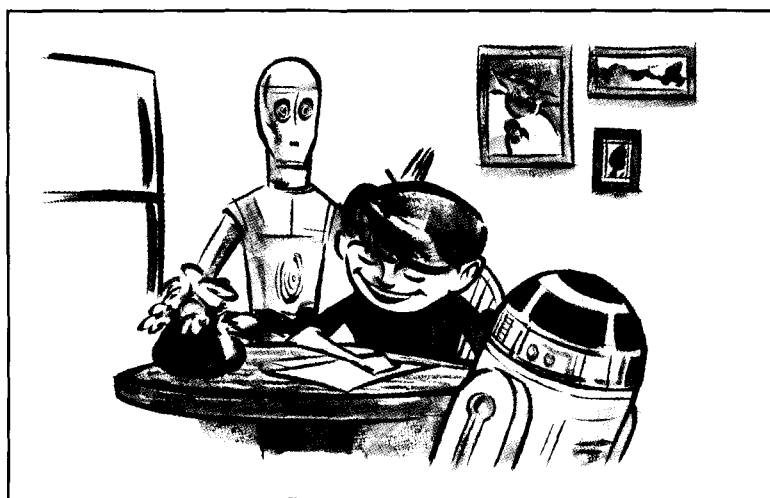


## *Star Trek or Star Wars?*

Two Futures for American Education

by Mary Pride



Darren Gyg

When I was growing up, the nuclear-war nightmare and other end-of-the-world scenarios weighed heavily on filmmakers' minds. From radioactive giant lizards trashing Tokyo to the ironic *Planet of the Apes*, from *On the Beach* to *Dr. Strangelove*, the movies made it clear that our social order was on the edge of extinction.

The *Terminator* series was the last really popular hurrah of this genre. Unlike the earlier films, it strongly made the point that the future is *not* fixed. And unlike other dystopian movies, the series' real hero, John Connor, the young boy destined to organize humanity's overthrow of the machines, rejoiced in an unconventional education. Rejecting schooling as much as possible (we meet him playing hooky), the future savior learned survival skills at his mother's knee.

Somewhere along the way, the public got tired of all this doom and gloom. As the technology to make blockbuster science-fiction epics emerged, a more optimistic view of the future grew up with it. Today, the two most popular science-fiction franchises are the universes of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, which also contain the two most likely futures of education.

*Star Trek* is the future as modern liberals and socialists imagine it (not as it would be if they actually ran it, mind you). Money as a means of exchange has been abolished in the *Star Trek* future—a sure giveaway of its socialist core—although even

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Spock cannot explain how this works. Businessmen are evil and to be mocked—Quark the Ferengi gets no respect from police-state privacy-invading Constable Odo, even when Quark has just saved the Deep Space Nine station. The *Star Trek* “Federation Council” is modeled on the United Nations, and in the *Star Trek* universe, a planet has to have a world government to have its membership application even considered by the Federation. Planetary sovereignty does not really exist—in fact, the plot of an entire *Star Trek* novel revolves around the necessity of saving a known terrorist from the wrath of his planetary authorities. The authorities want to execute the terrorist, but in the world of *Star Trek*, mass-murdering criminals get therapy, not punishment.

Consistent with socialist behavior, careerism comes first in the *Star Trek* universe. Children, spouses, and lovers are routinely abandoned by parents, spouses, and lovers in pursuit of Starfleet careers. A few examples: Kirk and Carol, the lover he impregnated; Janeway and her ever-absent Starfleet dad; Kirk and *his* ever-absent Starfleet dad; Riker and *his* ever-absent Starfleet dad. Even poor pathetic Lieutenant Riley, Kirk's attaché, is left behind by his love so she can pursue Starfleet career ambitions.

The *Star Wars* universe, on the other hand, is organized according to classical liberal and republican principles. The conflict between the Empire and the New Republic was modeled on the conflict between Great Britain and America during the War of Independence, according to *Star Wars* creator George Lucas. Planetary sovereignty is important in the New Republic; violating it could cause other planets to secede—a constant

worry for New Republic warriors and diplomats.

Nothing is more important in the *Star Wars* universe than family and fidelity. Some, though not all, bad guys can be redeemed (e.g., Darth Vader), but redemption includes paying for your evil deeds. Even scum care for their families and recognize debts of honor.

Sadly, in the hands of the less-competent writers of *Star Wars* novels, the distinctive republican features of the New Republic are blurry. (I am not speaking of Timothy Zahn, who should be drafted to write the screenplay for the next movie.) The new *Phantom Menace* movie also strikes some troubling notes—a democratically elected queen? With the wooden face of a marionette and painted like a mime? Artistically speaking, everyone agrees the new movie is loaded with eye candy, but the clever droids-in-a-box army and other such touches cannot make up for the fact that the citizens of Naboo—whose fate is the centerpiece of the movie—are alarmingly absent. How are we supposed to care about the sufferings of people who, as far as we can see, either do not exist or are invisible? With all the money they spent on the special effects, couldn't they have afforded a few extras? And what is with the wooden acting, the repetition of scenes from previous *Star Wars* movies (the good guy blowing up the bad guy's ship from inside, the predictable racing scene, the ending ceremony, *ad nauseam*), the cartoon-like Jar Jar Binks, the unlikely appearances of R2D2 and See-Threepio, the boring revisit of Tatooine, Anakin's "virgin birth," and other elements that had everyone in my family over age nine squirming in our seats?

As befits socialists, education in *Star Trek* consists of public schooling, a few private schools, and elitist academies where only a handful get the training they need to attain posts of importance in the Federation. The public schools of the *Star Trek* future have bells ringing to announce classes starting and ending, homework, grades, detention, gyms with bleachers, school libraries, and school bullies. Both Worf (the Klingon raised by humans) and Alexander (his son) are forced to endure years of taunting from their classmates. The Vulcans, usually so logical and intelligent, have public schools too, where in an earlier generation Spock also had to face endless cruelty from his classmates. Even out on the frontier, Keiko O'Brien bravely sets up a one-room school on Deep Space Nine rather than have her handful of students instructed by their parents or mentors. In line with much of today's public schooling, her classes follow no logical, systematic plan. Instead of giving children the "tools of learning"—basic instruction in reading, writing, math, science, and logic—her classes are full of factoids about randomly chosen races and planets, and the field trips are life-threatening.

The sole exception I have been able to find in dozens of *Star Trek* novels and junior novels is Beverly Crusher. Her pre-Starfleet Academy education was a mix of apprenticeship to her herbalist grandmother, tutoring from various adults, and self-study. That book (*Starfleet Academy #10: Loyalties*) was written in 1996, about three years after the homeschooling movement began garnering media attention, and so far is the only *Star Trek* book to admit that children can be educated anywhere other than in formal classrooms.

In contrast, schools below the academy and university level are practically unknown in the *Star Wars* universe. Scanning dozens of books and graphic novels, I found that, while rich kids on Corellia go to school, other children learn from parents, computer programs, droid tutors, mentors, and the world

around them. There are no discernible compulsory attendance or child-labor laws, so "street rats" are free to pick up spare credits legally if they can do the work. Hands-on, on-the-job training appears to be the norm. Nine-year-old Anakin Skywalker, who has never been to school, builds his own protocol droid and Podracer, and while this is precocious, it does not appear unusual to anybody. I am very curious about the "training" (not "schooling") that 14-year-old Amidala received that enabled her to rule a city and then successfully run for queen. I do not have to be curious about the training of other major *Star Wars* characters. Han Solo was self-taught, mostly via the computer on the ship of the Faginesque "trader" who raised him to be a thief. That self-education, plus his real-life experience, was enough to get him through the tough entrance exams for the Imperial Navy Academy. Princess Leia received her diplomatic training via apprenticeship to her foster father, Bail Organa. Wedge Antilles was homeschooled by his parents. Luke Skywalker was brought up on the farm. The huge variety of lesser characters mostly follow in their parents' footsteps, having learned their parents' skills.

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For those who leave home, apprenticeship is still the norm. Jedis take apprentices, not students. So do bounty hunters. Academies and universities (with the notable exception of the Jedi Academy established by Luke Skywalker, which offers informal seminars, no formal classes, and a lot of individual mentoring) are run by the Empire. In *Truce at Bakura*, we are told that promising students are funneled through the centralized universities so they can be indoctrinated in Empire propaganda. Graduates are then funneled into powerful positions in the bureaucracy and regional governments. From this we may infer that government-funded universities are not seen to be altogether a good thing in the *Star Wars* universe.

The military academy on Carida, which Han Solo briefly attended, is where promising students are turned into brain-washed storm troopers. This problem is eliminated when one of Luke's Jedi Academy students does what every right-thinking kid has imagined—he nukes the school (in this case, by blowing up the planet's sun). New Republic leaders feel bad about it, but hey, the kid was under the influence of the Dark Side at the time, and he *said* he was sorry, so what more can you ask?

Another of the Empire's delightful educational gambits, as seen in the book *Jedi Search*, involves the planet Omwat. The Empire selects promising preteen students and crams their brains with information at a staggering rate. They are repeatedly tested, and if a student fails or cracks up, his hometown is destroyed. It is not hard to see the analogy between this and the crushing pressure of the Japanese education system, where children were once taught their greatest honor would be to die for the emperor, and where even now families are shamed if a

child cracks up under the pressure or flunks the all-important pre-university exams.

Here in the real world, we seem to be moving in the direction of *Star Wars*-style educational freedom and out of the *Star Trek* educational straitjacket. About 1.75 million children are currently homeschooled. The movement has grown at a rate of at least 15 percent per year for over ten years now, and shows no sign of fading.

Years ago, people used to ask me, "What about socialization?" or "What about college?" Today, they are more likely to say, "I don't blame you for homeschooling; the public schools aren't safe." Movies like *187* and *Substitute Teacher* are unintentionally great recruiting devices for homeschooling, while the latest round of school shootings sadly underscores the fact that concerns about student and teacher safety are not Hollywood alarmism.

But dodging a bullet is not the main reason more and more families homeschool. We are searching for something *more* for our children and ourselves: A better education, tailored to our child's abilities. An education that honors God, instead of ignoring or insulting Him. Courses most schools no longer teach—Latin, Renaissance painting techniques, etiquette. Hands-on learning projects that draw the entire family together. The opportunity for work or volunteering that meets the child's interests, as opposed to politically correct "community service." The chance to get out in the real world, instead of sitting at a desk eight hours a day. Kids who respect and honor their parents.

Homeschoolers do not have to get all their learning at home or from parents. Educational software, adult mentors, the library, the piano teacher, Internet newsgroups, online academies, websites, 4-H, church groups, the YMCA, and more are all grist for our mill. The real world beckons.

We still live in a society where government rigorously controls childhood. Social workers prowl everywhere, and most

people still send their kids to school. Most children are not legally allowed to work. (One important exception: At any age you can work in your parent's business or on your parent's farm, which is one reason so many homeschooling families have started their own businesses.) In the past, an American street kid could get a legal job sweeping out a store in exchange for food and a place to sleep, but not today. Child-labor laws aside, no store owner would hire him for fear of legal liability.

For the kids of tomorrow to have the educational freedom of the street scum in a *Star Wars* movie, much change is still needed. The diploma-granting university system continues to have a virtual monopoly on entrance to good-paying jobs, and it is becoming more difficult to enter or graduate from such an institution without offering a pinch of incense to the caesar of political correctness. Apprenticeship, outside of a few carefully guarded union jobs, is not widely recognized as a valid educational method. Child-labor laws make it difficult for kids to learn a trade without formal schooling, and the plague of lawyers and bureaucrats make informal learning and work arrangements difficult.

But then, homeschooling itself was difficult only ten years ago and barely legal 15 years ago. With steady effort, we now have thousands of educational products to choose from, huge conferences to attend, and dozens of books to instruct us. Homeschool support groups are found from coast to coast, and homeschool magazines are on the newsstands. Research continues to show homeschooled children doing significantly better on standardized tests than their public-school peers, and in every issue of my magazine you will find success stories of homeschooled children winning competitions, creating impressive projects, or receiving some other form of recognition for outstanding work.

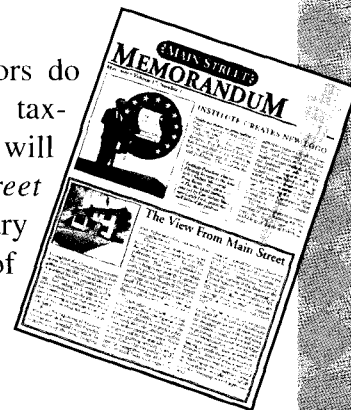
Fifteen years ago, who would have imagined all this? Fifteen years from now, how much further might we have gone? Punch it, Chewie!

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# My Son, the Sociopath

The Education of a No-Man

by Andrei Navrozov



Darren Gygi

A few years ago, before my son was born, I spent a weekend in the Hamptons at the country house of a moderately hip American investment banker. There were about 20 of us to dinner that evening, with all the usual cosmopolitan strains amply represented. Boring and predictable as the whole business was, by about two o'clock in the morning wine and cognac were doing to the conversation what Harvard and Wall Street can never do on their own, and I was deep in a meaningful discussion with a German. By way of social definition, I should mention that the man was in his 40's, a member of the Knickerbocker in New York, and had the heiress to a reasonably important industrial fortune for a wife.

I tested the water by saying something mildly original about Hitler, whereupon your usual guest at a Hamptons dinner party would have moved at least one chair away. Nothing. The German even nodded assent. Then I said something inflammatory about the unification of the Fatherland being a Soviet ploy. Again, nothing. I was almost beginning to think the man had a brain. We spoke about life in London, and then he asked me if I was planning to have children. Just one, I said. If it is a boy, would I send him to school in England? I replied that, boy or girl, I had no intention of sending my child to school. He asked why.

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I began answering him. He took off his tie. I went on with my answer. He took off his jacket and put it over the back of his chair. He undid his cuff links and began rolling up his sleeves, and suddenly I looked up and saw that his face had become blue, as if engorged with venous blood. He was shaking with hatred. A few minutes later, he called for the hostess, who was German, and told her that he would pack his bags and leave the house at once as he found it impossible to spend the night under the same roof with the barbarian. I remember that it took the rest of the guests until dawn to placate him, while I was left alone at the dinner table with my glass of brandy and a half-guilty, half-sarcastic smile.

I can now admit that my presentation on the subject of homeschooling had not been so innocently improvised as I later made it out to be, when making my excuses to the host and hostess the following morning, but had in fact been honed, tempered, and made lethal like some barbarian tool of war in hundreds of similar conversations with equally excitable men and women over the course of a lifetime. It was the Germans, moreover, who had invariably managed to distinguish themselves by the uncontrollable force of their reactions, as though the mere verbal proclamation of a parent's right to incubate a sociopath in the privacy of the home were an actual crime without an historic parallel, far more barbaric or heinous than any of Hitler's. After all, those crimes were committed in the name of