

CARRIE FISHER

STAR WARS BABE

SHE'S SCI-FI'S PIONEERING ICON: FISHER'S REFLECTIONS ON PRINCESS LEIA, GEORGE LUCAS, DRUGS AND WOMEN'S ROLES.

BY LAURA SCHIFF

The first thing I notice when I enter the Beverly Hills home of actor/screenwriter Carrie Fisher is the strong smell of chocolate. Just in case you're among the three or four people on the planet who haven't seen STAR WARS, let me set you straight:

Carrie Fisher is the actress who played ball-breaking Princess Leia Organa in George Lucas' intergalactic blockbuster trilogy. She's the gal who blasted away at those nasty Stormtroopers without a moment's compunction. She's Luke Skywalker's sister, Darth Vader's daughter, Jabba The Hutt's bikini-clad slave girl. She's the steely-nerved babe who watched her home planet get blown to bits without shedding a single tear. She is, in short, the most celebrated sci-fi heroine of all time. Today, however, Princess Leia is doing battle with a Betty Crocker Easy-Bake

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK. Bespin buds: Carrie Fisher ("Princess Leia") with Billy Dee Williams ("Lando Calrissian"), Harrison Ford ("Han Solo") and Peter Mayhew ("Chewbacca").



Oven. As I live and breathe, the diva with the famous "cheese Danish" hairdo is baking brownies with a precocious five-year-old in the kitchen. Life just doesn't get any more real than this.

As I wait for Fisher to get cleaned up, I take a gander at the living room. There's a large hand painted on the west wall that reminds me of one of those reflexology charts one is apt to see in New Age health books. Beside it hangs an oil painting of a grinning chimpanzee wearing a dress. The decor is an eclectic mix of antiques: cheery Norman Rockwell Americana sits beside Medieval-looking religious icons and Native American pottery. Ceramic angels hang on wires from the high, vaulted ceiling. Stained glass windows, presumably from some Gothic cathedral of yore, are propped up in corners about the room. The effect is one of light and darkness. Innocence and knowledge. Fisher soon enters, dressed in flowing black garb. She seems to



glide across the floor, like Luke Skywalker's Land Cruiser, as she leads me into the den. Here she curls herself up on a soft chair and tells me a story.

"I once saw a personal ad in the paper that said, 'Carrie Fisher type,'" recounts the actress. "That's how this woman was heralding herself. But then the ad said, 'No smoking, no drugging,' and I was like, 'Well, wait a minute, sister! Honey, there are some of those things that have happened!' So I called her and left a message, 'I am Carrie Fisher. Good luck if

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"'You'll never get this bucket of bolts past that blockade!'...It wasn't dialogue! Good dialogue means talking like human speech. George [Lucas] was writing speak from another galaxy."



T: While *THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK*, good guys (Billy Dee Williams, Fisher, Peter Mayhew, Harrison Ford) cruise the Cloud City. L: Fisher making her film debut as Lorna in *SHAMPOO* ('75). The late William Castle played a minor role.

you're my type!"

Fisher laughs with obvious amusement and takes a drag off her Marlboro Light. After all, her drug addiction is certainly no secret. The first child of singer Eddie Fisher and actress Debbie Reynolds, Fisher has spent her entire life under the constant glare of flashbulbs. When she was just two years old, her father abandoned the family to marry newly-widowed Elizabeth Taylor. Scandalized, Debbie Reynolds remarried in 1960, this time to wealthy shoe tycoon Harry Karl. Though he

initially took to fatherhood with enthusiasm, Karl turned to drinking, womanizing, stealing and gambling by the time Fisher was just struggling through puberty. Karl lost all the family's money and Fisher acquired a manic-depressive disorder. "I always wrote because I had a mania," she recalls, "and the outlet for that was writing. So I wrote about an emotional world which was sort of untenable for me at times. I would write reams of bullshit in my journal."

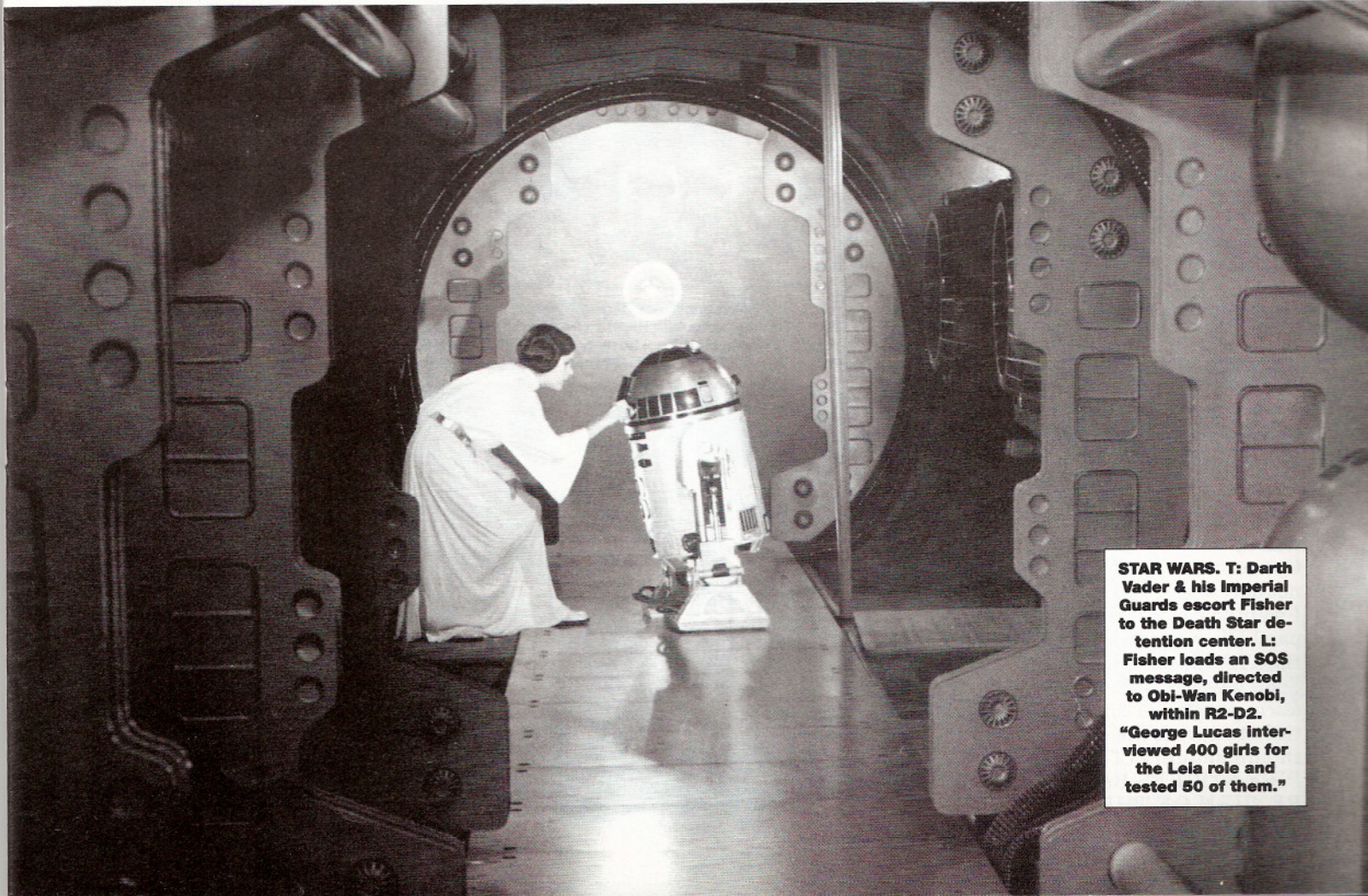
Fisher delayed the start of her secondary education

in order to travel to Las Vegas. Here, she and her brother Todd helped their mother with her nightclub act. Later, the threesome jetted across the country to New York, appearing in the Broadway revival of *Irene*. Finally, around about the time that most girls her age were heading off to college, Fisher grudgingly enrolled in an exclusive London high school called The Central School of Speech And Drama. She soon took time off from her studies to make her feature-film debut as Warren Beatty's young lover in *SHAMPOO*. Talk about playing hooky. Two years later, Fisher quit high school for good in order to accept the groundbreaking role of Princess Leia in *STAR WARS*. "This made for my slight English accent in the film," she explains. "It's hilarious to me now, but it was humiliating to me then."

I grill Fisher on a published report that Sissy Spacek had originally been cast as Princess Leia. It's been printed that Fisher was supposed to play the title role in *CARRIE*, Brian DePalma's prom-from-Hell horror film, and that the two actresses had actually swapped scripts.

"What's true is that Brian DePalma was casting *CARRIE* at the same time that George was casting *STAR WARS*," corrects Fisher. "It's the same age girl, so they were double casting. We did the casting at the same time, and they were either going to go with someone really pretty or they were going to go with someone forceful. They went with me and they told me to lose ten pounds. I was 19 at the time and I weighed only like 105. But I was 5'1, so it's legal to weigh 95 and not be called an anorexic, but I wish! I always say I'm a failed anorexic. I wish I was an anorexic." Oh, sure, just what Hollywood needs: another drug-addicted bipolar actress with an eating disorder.

I fire off another question: "At the time *STAR*



STAR WARS. T: Darth Vader & his Imperial Guards escort Fisher to the Death Star detention center. L: Fisher loads an SOS message, directed to Obi-Wan Kenobi, within R2-D2. "George Lucas interviewed 400 girls for the Leia role and tested 50 of them."

WARS was first released, women were playing body bags in movies like SUSPIRIA, RABID, and Christopher Lee's MEATCLEAVER MASSACRE. Then along comes Princess Leia, leader of the Rebel Alliance. Did you have any idea of the impact this role would have on the world?"

"I can see what you mean in retrospect," Fisher replies, "but at the time, I didn't think it was odd. Like Leia, I think I have a very combative personality. I mean, I happen to be 5'1", but I think my voice is very tall. My biggest mistake would be if someone ever tries to steal my purse, and I literally thought that I was as powerful as my voice. I'd be killed. George Lucas cast us for our personality and our ability to clash or not."

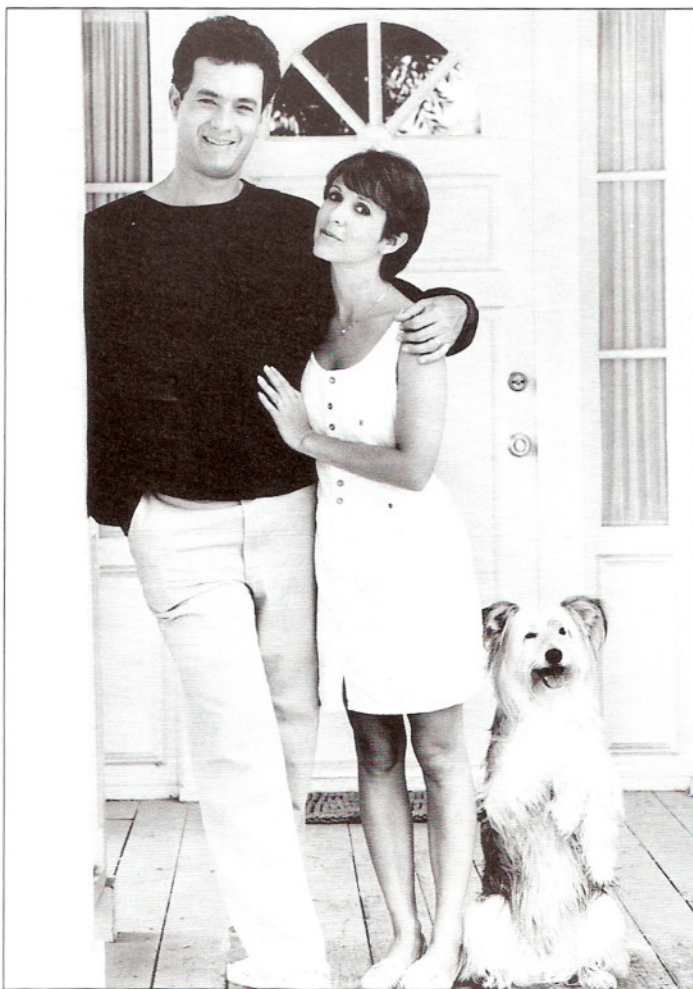
Though Fisher says she felt lucky to land the part, she admits she was unhappy with her scripted dialogue. "You'll never get this bucket of bolts past that blockade," she snarls, quoting from the film. "I mean, it wasn't dialogue, but you can't say that's George's fault. Good dialogue means talking like human speech. George was writing speak



from another galaxy, so it was an incredibly imaginative script. When I read it, I not only wanted to do it, but I wanted to play Han Solo's part! His was the best. Harrison [Ford, who played Han Solo] was really good at tinkering with the dialogue. I tinkered with the dialogue in the sequels [THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK and RETURN OF THE JEDI],

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T: Fisher & Tom Hanks as the Petersons in Joe Dante's "warped view of suburban life," THE 'BURBS. B: Trading barbs with Harrison Ford in "the garbage disposal scene. It was fun for 2 hours, then it got hot & boring. Peter Mayhew just fried up in that [Chewbacca] suit." L: In TIME GUARDIAN, a 1987 sci-fi misfire.



but I didn't on the first one. I was too scared they were going to say, 'Oh, she's too fat! Get her out of here!'"

STAR WARS, as any 10-year-old can tell you, went on to become the second highest grossing film of all time. Only one year later, Fisher found herself hosting an episode of SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE. It was while palling around with cast members John Belushi and Chevy Chase that Fisher's fondness for Percodan and LSD began. In regard to her subsequent drug addiction, she was quoted in a 1990 Time article as saying, "My idea was pain reduction and mind expansion, but I ended up with mind reduction and pain expansion." The addiction continued throughout the filming of THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK in 1980. In Harrison Ford's final scene, just before Vader gives Han Solo the deep freeze, Princess Leia fesses up to her affection for the swash-buckling smuggler. Ford was supposed to say, "I love you, too." But he was so perturbed with Fisher for repeatedly forgetting her lines that he instead grumbled, "I know you do." Today the line is a classic.

When John Belushi died of a cocaine overdose in 1982, it began to dawn on Fisher that perhaps this drug thing wasn't all it was cracked up to be. Nevertheless, in 1983, she filmed RETURN OF THE JEDI while still under the influence. She married singer/songwriter Paul Simon that same year, but he divorced her 11 months later when she failed to kick the habit. Fisher made a couple more genre pictures—a TV adaptation of Frankenstein and a Tom Hanks comedy, THE MAN WITH ONE RED SHOE—before overdosing on Percodan in 1985.

Upon her recovery from the Dark Side, Fisher wrote a semi-fictional account of her experiences in the rehab facility. The novel, Postcards from the Edge, became a New York Times best seller. Director Mike Nichols (THE GRADUATE, THE BIRD

“We only did the [chasm crossing] scene once. Mark [Hamill] & I were scared. We were frightened that we’d splat against the wall, and they’d have to bring in Robby Benson & Jodie Foster.”



Fisher sustained her drug habit during *EMPIRE*'s shoot. "My idea was pain reduction and mind expansion. I ended up with mind reduction and pain expansion."

it's like to watch a planet which is my home being blown up. The fact that all I'm looking at is a chalked circle makes it worse. Also, you're under tremendous pressure. It's not just a case of fluffing your lines but that the sets have to be repaired and explosions re-rigged.

STAR WARS II originally was going to be a different story with a different cast. Why the change of mind?

Because everyone has become fond of these characters. It's the "further adventures of," not a sequel. We start filming at Elstree after Kubrick's *THE SHINING*. We had a joke at one stage that the next film would start as we resumed bows after the presentation of the medals in the first film.

How do you want your

character to develop in *Part II*?

Well, I could marry Luke, but if I married Han, I think that would be more interesting, moreso from the point of view that we were always screaming at each other. I can also say that I never want to wear those hairy ear-phones again. I don't want Leia to be so straight next time. Not helpless or victimized, but the sort of girl who loses her passport on the spacecraft.

When did you see the completed film for the first time?

I watched the scoring in London, but I didn't see all the special effects until a week before it opened in the States. Even though I was so close to it, I could see and feel the magic it produced. I didn't know then that audiences would agree with me. □

In the driver's seat of the Millennium Falcon, with Chewbacca, in *THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK*. "I didn't think [Leia's empowerment] was odd," recalls Fisher.



CAGE) approached Fisher about adapting her novel into a screenplay. While working on the script, Fisher continued to appear in a string of comedies, including *HANNAH AND HER SISTERS*, *AMAZON WOMEN ON THE MOON*, *WHEN HARRY MET SALLY*, and Joe Dante's dark ode to suburbia, *THE 'BURBS*.

"Writing the book had been a breeze for me," Fisher says. "In novel writing, you can go into long descriptive narratives of an emotional sort. That's an organic thing for me to do. I don't think screenwriting's organic. Neither is novel writing, but there are certain areas that I've written stuff that's very specific to my manic depression. But there's no structure to that book, and there's no real story. There's a character. So when I got to the script, I had to make up a story. It had no bearing on that book at all."

The *POSTCARDS* movie is about the antagonistic relationship between a newly-detoxed actress (Meryl Streep) and her overbearing, alcoholic actress mother (Shirley MacLaine). The film has been repeatedly touted as semi-autobiographical, but Fisher swears she has a healthy, loving relationship with Debbie Reynolds.

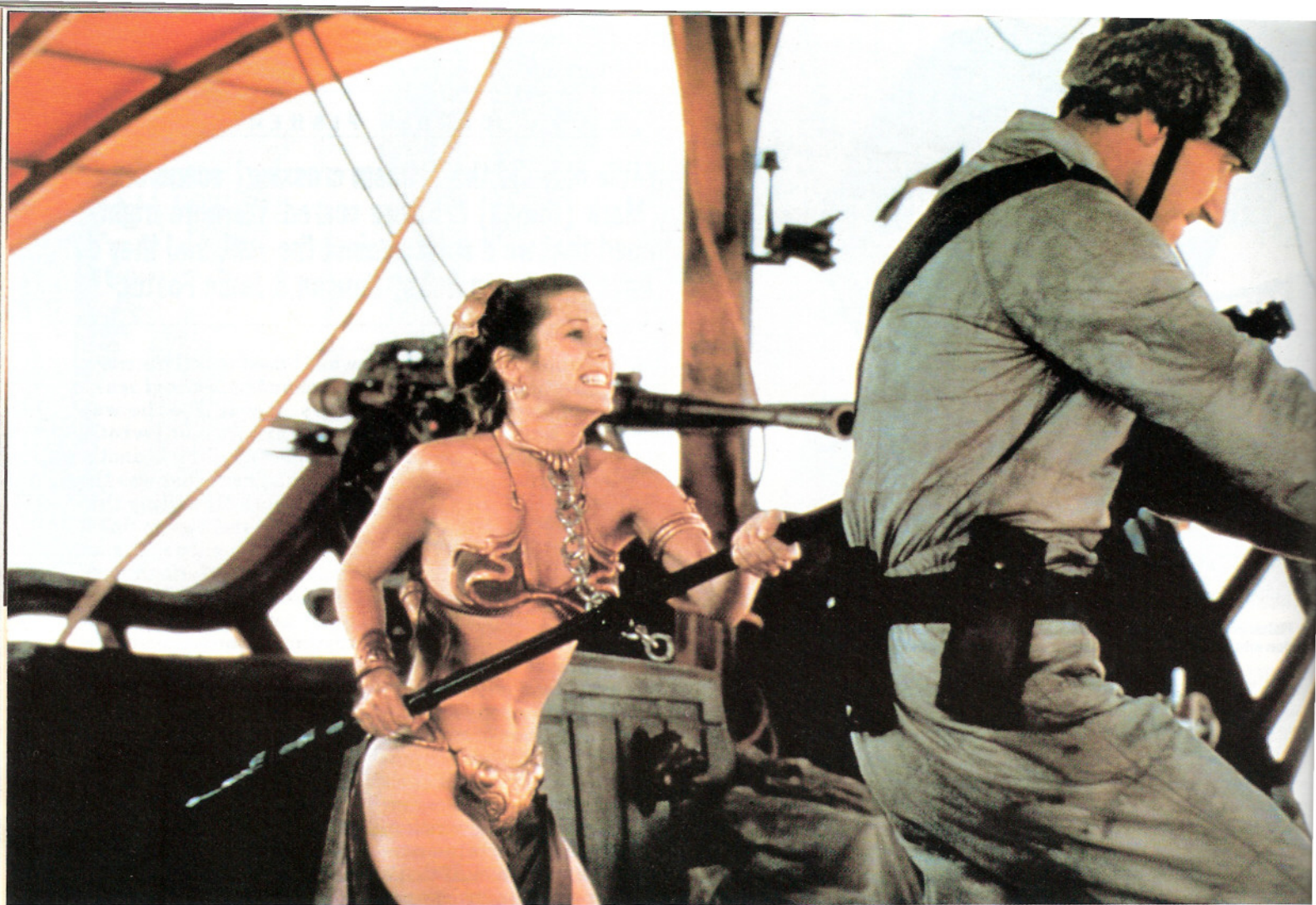
Soon after the film's critically acclaimed release in 1990, director Steven Spielberg asked Fisher to punch-up Tinkerbell's dialogue in his *Peter Pan* sequel, *HOOK*. "I never understood what rewriting was," Fisher says, "but when I read *HOOK*, I realized Steven was right. Tinkerbell sounded like sort of a brat. So I wrote it more true to Peter Pan. Steven and I shared

what I used to call *the secret handshake of shared sensibility*. It was like the way that Paul [Simon] wrote, 'One man's ceiling is another man's floor.' That was the [metaphorical] writing that I adored—and Steven Spielberg has this, too. It's an enormously esoteric thing to have in common if you are in love with words and the rhythm of words. Really terrific directors—in addition to being great craftsmen, in addition to loving a good story—can sit there and they can get the best out of a writer."

It was while working on *HOOK* that George Lucas

Fisher showed more than her comic panache in *UNDER THE RAINBOW* (1981), a flashback to *OZ* that fizzled.





Fisher makes a transition from slave girl to stormer in RETURN OF THE JEDI (1983). "Like Princess Leia, I think I have a very combative personality," says Fisher.

asked Fisher to write a television episode of THE INDIANA JONES CHRONICLES. "George is incredibly visual," Fisher says. "There's different kinds of ways of expressing yourself, and George has an extraordinary visual conception. I have my metaphors. They're visual, but they're still verbal. So when it comes to

writing dialogue, George and I disagreed."

This particular episode happened to find young Indy losing his virginity to the famous WWI spy Mata Hari. "In the love scene," explains Fisher, "George wanted to say stuff like, 'Your eyes are shining as brightly as the emeralds in your necklace.' And I said,

'George, people don't talk like that.' Subsequently, there was more said that was hilarious and insulting to both of us. We had those little boxes where you could push a button and they said, 'Fuck you, eat shit, you're an asshole.' And we just were pushing those and pushing those at each other, and that's how it kind of dis-

integrated. I finally got my way but then he rewrote me, I think. George is George. Both he and Steven are very, very clear about what they want. In a way, Steven's like a child; he really enjoys himself. Steven is so much fun to work around. But, in a way, I think they're both like that. They both love myth and they

L: STAR WARS director George Lucas tutors Fisher and Mark Hamill on "chasm crossing. It was 30 feet, and what is so annoying is that ultimately you can't even see that it's me!" says the actress. R: Fisher & Ford, reunited for EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (formerly STAR WARS II), dodge an Imperial attack on Hoth.



love entertaining children. They both have this extraordinary delight. They both love motion pictures and they love information of different sorts. They take risks."

Since first taking pen to paper for Spielberg and Lucas, Fisher has rewritten over 20 scripts, including *LETHAL WEAPON 3*, *OUTBREAK* and *THE RIVER WILD*, as well as films as diverse as *SISTER ACT* and *THE MIRROR HAS TWO FACES*. She says that her jobs can come to her "any way in the world," but especially through her friends and agents. Today she's one of the highest paid script doctors in Hollywood.

"If I'm brought in on anything other than romantic comedies, it's generally to punch up the female or love scenes," she says. "There's usually those types of scenes in most movies. Generally, in being a script doctor, you respect the fact that somebody else did the hardest part of this. Which is, they came up with the story and characters and they wrote a movie. And what you're brought on to do is maintain the style of that movie, maybe give them some more jokes. This is in the best of all possible worlds. And that's a polish, you know? Make some of the scenes a little bit better. But, you know the three biggest lies? *I love you, one size fits all, and just a two-week polish.*"

In addition to *POSTCARDS* and her ongoing script doctoring work, Fisher has written two other novels. *Surrender the Pink*—the title refers to female genitalia—was published in 1990 and became another best-seller. In a fictional sense, it deals with the author's relationship with Paul Simon. Spielberg and Demi Moore were initially attached to the screen adaptation, but Fisher still hasn't found the time to write a second draft. This is due, in large part, to that precocious five-year-old in Fisher's kitchen. The little darling runs into the den at

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The beautiful Fisher has survived a drug problem & family turbulence. *B*: Cast in "Reckless Youth," a mock VD documentary tagged to the end credits of *AMAZON WOMEN ON THE MOON* (critic Leonard Maltin describes it as the "best" of the film's burlesque). *F*: An uncredited cameo as *AUSTIN POWERS'* therapist.



this moment to offer her mother a big chocolate-covered kiss. Then she bangs on the piano a bit, passes some gas, says excuse me to the nice reporter, and tears out of the room. "That's what happens," smiles Fisher apologetically.

Fisher became a mother in 1993. At the time, she was dating ex-CAA agent Bryan Lourd. After their daughter Billie was born, Lourd announced he was leaving them for another man, but the two are still close friends, currently sharing parenting duties. Fisher's third novel, *Delusions of Grandma*, was published in 1993. "It's about the disintegration of a screenwriter's relationship and exploring the roots of her family."

I ask her, "Do you think it's possible for an ambitious, strong woman to have a successful romantic relationship in Hollywood?" I ask her.

"Not easily, no," she says, bursting my bubble. "Not in Hollywood. You have to be with somebody who isn't threatened at all by being Mr. Fisher or Mr. Whomever. Men can bring their wives on the movie set, or with them on location, but women real-



ly can't bring their husbands. Ultimately, the men get emasculated, perhaps without even knowing that that's what's occurred."

"So what would you say is the greatest challenge that women face in this town?" I ask.

"It's a man's world," Fisher tells me. "Women don't get paid as much, we aren't expected to have as much

longevity. The greatest asset for a woman in this town is still her looks. It's like we burn out when we get a little long in the tubes, as they say. The qualities that make a woman good at her job, and the qualities that are necessary to push her hard in her field in Hollywood, are qualities that would make her not that attractive for a relationship. I mean, it's still thought that if a woman marries a powerful man, it's just as successful a move as if she wins a Pulitzer. You can be with someone who wins a Pulitzer, or you can win one yourself, and it's about the same thing. I don't personally think that's true—I'd rather win the Pulitzer. But it's something that I've noticed. I know a woman who won a Pulitzer and she's not as satisfied as the women I know who are in relationships with very powerful men. I think it's an immense ac-

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"I wanted to play Han Solo's part. Harrison Ford was really good at tinkering with dialogue. I tinkered with dialogue in the sequels but not the first. I was scared they'd say, 'She's too fat.'"



T: Fisher as one of Jabba the Hutt's harem in RETURN OF THE JEDI. Jennifer Aniston slipped into the abbreviated togs for a fantasy sequence in FRIENDS. B: Warning, warning, Oedipal alert! Leia (Fisher) comforts Luke (Hamill) in their short-lived STAR WARS liaison. L: With a 'tude in THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK.



complishment for women to have both a successful career and a successful relationship. I think the only person I know who's done both is Meryl Streep."

Fisher's latest book, due out "about two years ago," has also taken a back seat to her motherhood responsibilities. Tentatively called *Holding Hands Through Plate Glass Win-*

dows, the novel deals partly with mental disorders. There are other undertakings that have also been put on hold or otherwise delayed. Around the time that Billie was born, Fisher sold a TV pilot called ESME'S LITTLE NAP, which she'd written as a starring vehicle for her mother. She says it never aired because it didn't test well. Then there's CHRISTMAS IN VEGAS, a screenplay that originated as a short story about a 15-year-old girl who goes to Las Vegas with her friends and becomes embroiled with the Mafia. "It was supposed to be in *Postcards* the book, and then it never was," says Fisher. "Then I signed a deal with Disney to do it as a screenplay, but I never really did it because the person I was working with wanted me to really write about my childhood in Las Vegas. At that time, I didn't really know how to do that without it being so autobiographical where you'd go insane. I'd like to go back and do it some day." Fisher rolls her eyes. "Being a writer is a perfect job for a high school dropout. I have homework for the rest of my life."

Fisher, now 43, says she's deliberately trying to take it easier in an effort to eradicate some of the stress in her life. About a year ago, she was hospitalized for an episode of manic depression unlike any she'd ever experienced before. "I think it was just the pressure cooker of having had a child and working for five years. I just want to take all these jobs and I tend to get overworked. I'm my mother's daughter, who literally is *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*. She literally will go on stage with a broken ankle."

Fisher tells me that she has no plans to return to acting any time soon. And directing? No, thank you. "I know Penny Marshall too well, and it seems to put a lot of pressure on her," she



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Fisher, as an aspiring Playboy Bunny, meets "Hef" in a *LAVERNE & SHIRLEY* episode. She also served as Presenter in the *CARRIE ON HOLLYWOOD* series ('95).

says of her long-time friend, who helmed *BIG* and *A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN*. "She doesn't make it look like the most fun gig in the world. Plus, with a kid and everything—I can't stand getting up at those hours! That's why acting is so unappealing. That and not being able to be ten pounds overweight."

And what about recent Tinseltown reports that Fisher is rewriting George Lucas' script for the new *STAR WARS: EPISODE I—THE PHANTOM MENACE*? In this case, at least, the doctor is out. Says Fisher, "As his friend, I read the script, but I did not sit and tinker with it." She slyly adds, "I wouldn't say if I did, because

he's not [signatory to] the [Writers] Guild [and] they'd come after me." Though sworn to absolute secrecy, Fisher is at liberty to reveal that "the robots get a lot of the comedy" in the new script for the prequel.

So what *is* Carrie Fisher working on these days? Currently she's writing a feature film for Disney called *THREE*

OLD BROADS, about a triad of aging actresses who do not get along. "I still plan to do books," she says, "and I can see how I might be able to schedule the time out. You know, where I would write scripts during the day and I could write a novel or whatever at night. On the weekend I would be able to parent." Brownies, anyone?

RETURN OF THE JEDI. L: Entering Jabba's palace, Luke is bewildered by Leia's captivity (not to mention the brevity of her attire). R: Leia mans a laser canon on Jabba's barge. The princess was turned into a ('98) limited edition doll: clad in harem threads & paired with R2-D2, it was accessible only through FAO Schwarz.

