

MATT BUSCH : FORCEFULLY DRAWN



Artist and all round nice guy, Matt Busch pictured at *Celebration Japan*, July 2008. Photo by Ian Trussler

WORDS : IAN TRUSSLER

A decade or so ago *Star Wars* celebrity was restricted to mainly actors whom had starred in the movies or perhaps a few high profile crew members.

Now with the advent of the cult of celebrity, that fame has spread far beyond, to all cast and crew and into the expanded universe.

Perhaps one of the biggest celebrities to emerge in the expanded *Star Wars* universe is Artist Matt Busch, helped in no small part by his

exuberant personality and starring role in DK Publishing's dvds and webisodes in the "You Can Draw Star Wars" series.

Matt's work extends way beyond *Star Wars* into other TV and film genres but it is his amazing work within George Lucas' space saga that first brought him to mine and many other people's attention.

Recently at *Celebration Japan* I got to know Matt better, having first met him at *Celebration Europe*, and he kindly agreed to an interview for *Aficionado*.



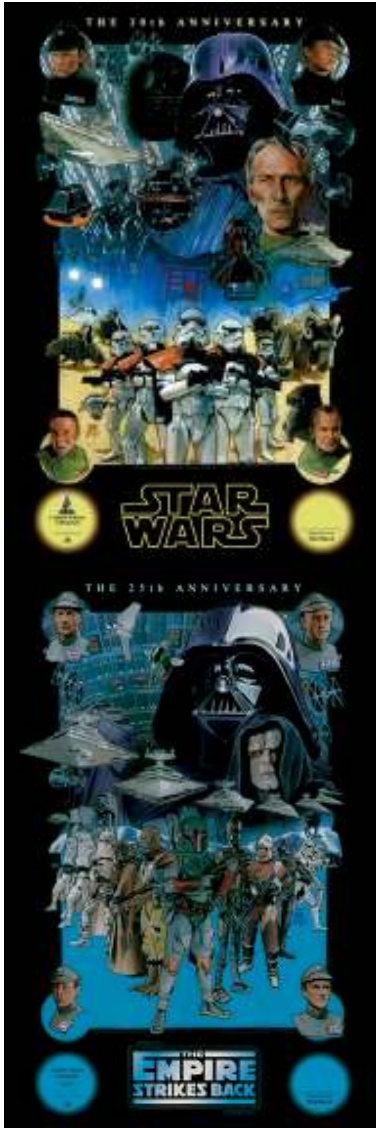
Matt's superb exclusive poster for *Celebration Japan*, featuring a Lucasfilm approved montage that includes the man himself. Matt's favourite own SW piece.

Ian Trussler: When did you first realise you had this great talent for drawing and art?

Matt Busch: I knew I had it in me when I was young, but I didn't completely pursue it until I was 19 or so. I had lots of avenues I was interested in while growing up, so it took me that long to have a focus.

IT: Can you recall when you first saw *Star Wars* and how it made you feel?

MB: Oh Yeah. It changed my life. It was like nothing I or anyone else had ever experienced before, and to see it at 4 years old, it just blew me away!



IT: Can you remember what the first piece of *Star Wars* art you ever drew was?

MB: I think it was a Tie Fighter. I seem to remember drawing those a lot because it was easy to draw stick versions of them!

IT: How did you first become involved in Officially doing art for Lucasfilm?

MB: I started 14 years ago doing small black and white illustrations for one of the *Star Wars* Role-playing game periodicals from West End Games, called the *Star Wars Adventure Journal*. I always did my best and got the work in on time. That led to more work with West End and my credibility brought me more work with other licensees. It spider-webbed everywhere, eventually.

IT: Do you have a lot of free reign with your *Star Wars* pieces or do Lucasfilm dictate what you can or cannot do?

MB: Surprisingly, Lucasfilm are really cool with a lot of things. More-so than most companies out there that hold Hollywood licensed properties. Heck, they let me stick my own face on the recent *Star Wars* poster for Japan!

IT: Do you work from photo reference or do you sometimes meet your subjects? Ever do life subjects?

MB: Sure, it depends on the project. For example, I needed a female Jedi quite a bit in the *You Can Draw Star Wars* book from DK publishing, so I had my friend Rachel Rossilli pose for me – Jedi robes and all.

IT: Your latest piece, the *Jedi 25th* Anniversary Poster has a very similar look to the *Empire* Anniversary piece, in that Boba Fett takes centre place. I was surprised you went with this concept, given you had used it before and how little Boba Fett is in the movie. Any reason for this?

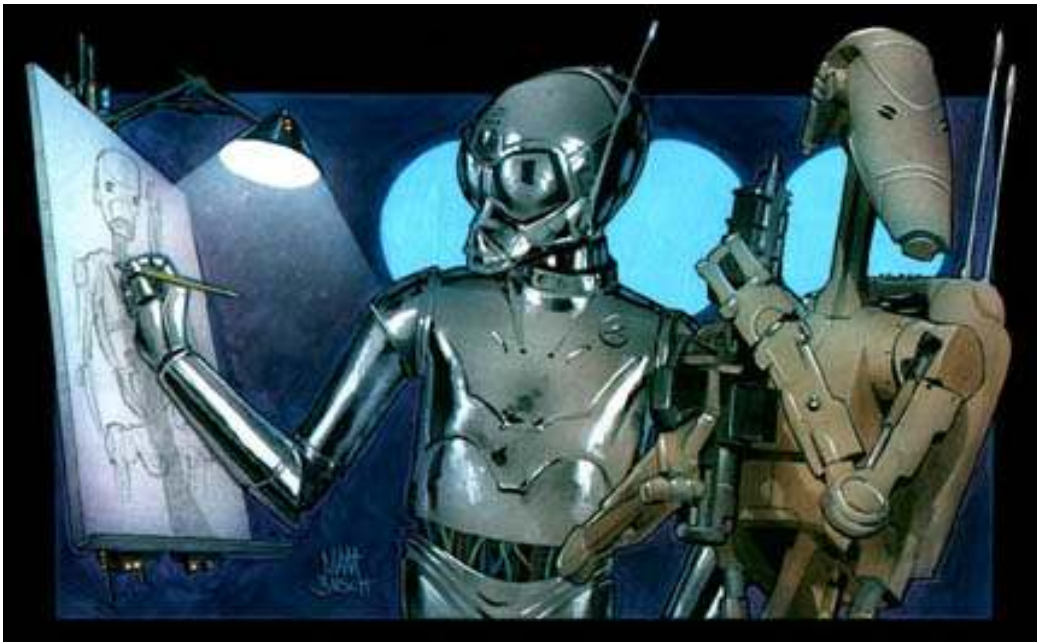
MB: The whole concept with that poster, as well as the *Empire 25th* and *A New Hope 30th* is that



they're villain posters. All villains. So for each poster I set out to have all the bad guys, gals, droids and vehicles I could fit. Part of the design was to have the more important folks larger, but also sometimes the design of the overall poster came into play.

IT: Who's idea was it to re-work the famous "circus" poster from *A New Hope* into a new version for *Revenge of the Sith*, and how did it come about?

MB: StarWarsShop.com wanted to do an exclusive poster with me, but it was really Lucasfilm's Pete Vilmur who came up with the awesome idea. He also art directed it. I came up with a few ideas of what characters you'd see where, but most of its brilliance belongs to Pete.



One of my personal favourites. Death Star Droid brushes up its skills in painting a Federation Battle Droid.

IT: Which is the most difficult *Star Wars* character to draw, personally I think you rarely see very good likenesses of Mark Hamill as Luke?

MB: Threepio is actually the hardest, in my opinion. He's so reflective and to get all the proportions just right, and really have it look like Threepio is very difficult.

IT: What other artists do you admire and why?

MB: The list goes on and on and I know it's the answer everyone hates, but honestly, pretty much every artist you'd find in Artist Alley (at *Star Wars* Celebrations) is my favourite. I draw inspiration from many, many artists of all kinds – even musicians and filmmakers. Beyond that I find inspirations in

nature, like sunsets and trees. I take it all in. If you'd like a name, Dave McKean is my current favourite artist.



Above left: Matt's personal favourite non SW piece, the fantastic IRON MAN. Right: Superb LOST cast montage by Matt.

IT: Is there a movie or television property out there that you would love to work on but haven't yet?

MB: Sure, plenty! I was thinking the other day that I'd love to do a FIFTH ELEMENT comic, showing the further adventures of Corbin Dallas and LeeLoo.

IT: I'm sure you have been to Skywalker Ranch, what was the experience like?

MB: Skywalker Ranch and the Presidio are amazing! It's all much larger than I ever could have imagined. Lucasfilm is a giant corporation. Each of Lucas' eight companies are just huge! Thousands of employees. But what amazed me is the homey feel it all has. Even the Presidio, which houses 4 of the companies, is set in an office building environment, but it feels like you're at a friend's house. Very warm and creative atmosphere.

IT: What was the most awesome piece of memorabilia or priceless item you saw, that you would have loved to have sneaked out?

MB: I would have snuck George out so I could move in and take his desk. I have some sweet digs of my own, but running an empire like that would be awesome.



IT: You have become quite a celebrity in recent years, how do you like fame and do you get recognised on the street much?

MB: I don't get recognised that much, so the few and far between times that I do is really fun. I was in Tokyo recently and a few people stopped me on the street and said "Draw Star Wars" That was really cool to be on the other side of the world and hear that.

IT: How easy/difficult is it to make a living out of art?

MB: For me, while the road has been a long uphill climb, I created the career I wanted to have. I love what I do and I refuse to work another day in my life because of it. In retrospect, while it took a lot of effort, it's been

relatively easy. You just take what you want to do and find a way to make it happen. Folks make it out to be so hard, but that's only because it doesn't happen over-night. Bottom line: Never give up!

IT: Have you ever wanted to do movie production design, such as Ralph McQuarrie and Joe Johnston did?

MB: Sure, and I have done a little of that on some movies, including *The Matrix*. I did more of that stuff when I lived in Los Angeles.

IT: Do you think being able to do great art is a truly natural talent or do you really think it is something that anyone can learn?

MB: Anyone can do it. There are two key ingredients. You need the inspiration, and you need the perspiration. You need to have the drive and the want to do it. Mix that with the effort – the practicing over and over, and anyone can do this and more.

IT: You have many tattoos, are they self designed? Is your love of tattoos an extension of your art or do you think you would still have them even if you weren't an artist?

MB: That's hard to say. I got my first when I was 17. Each one represents something – usually a different chapter in my life. I think because I'm an artist, my profession allows me to have some tattoos that are a little more visible. I've designed about half of my tattoos. Most of my ink was done by the legendary Reverend Shawn Payne.



Like many Star Wars fans, Matt is clearly a fan of that other 70's Sci-Fi classic, *Battlestar Galactica*, as shown by this great piece.

IT: Recently you have taken to doing some acting and also directing movies. Where do you see yourself, career wise in say 10 years time?

MB: If it all stays where I'm at, I'm pretty happy. I have more ideas for movies I want to make, books I want to write, comics I want to illustrate, and games I want to create. Hopefully I'll be doing all of that, bigger and better, but I'm in a great position right now, doing all that I love and very comfortable with it.

IT: Now you are getting into film work, what directors/actors do you really admire and why?

MB: My current fave is actually Dave McKean, who happened to be who I mentioned as an artist (he's both an artist and filmmaker). He has such an evocative approach to storytelling – I love it. He knows how to break all the rules in exactly the right place. I would love to take my own works down that road, and expect that some day I will evolve along those lines.

IT: OK back to *Star Wars*, who is your favourite character and why?

MB: Han Solo was always my fave. He's just so slick, yet you see all his flaws too. He's cocky, but hysterical that it bites him in the ass. He's very human.



IT: Favourite *Star Wars* movie?

MB: *Empire*. That one knocked me on my ass the hardest. I was seven years old.

IT: Here's a few fun, quick fire, one word answer style questions.

IT: Leia or Padme?

MB: Leia

IT: Luke or Han?

MB: Han.

IT: Anakin or Obi-Wan?

MB: Anakin.

IT: Prequel or Original Trilogy?

MB: The O.T. baby!

IT: Finally, what is your proudest moment or achievement so far in your career?

MB: I think recently being a featured Special Guest at Comic Con was up there. I never saw that coming and was one of the biggest honors I could imagine having.



Matt and I, photographed at *Celebration Japan*, July 2008. Good times!

Many thanks to Matt Busch for generously giving his time and co-operation with this feature.

If this has peaked your interest in Matt's work, be sure to check out his website at:

www.mattbusch.com

All artwork: Matt Busch.



"Never underestimate the power of the Dark Side"