

***SAGA***  
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# SAGA JOURNAL

An academic *Star Wars* fan journal

The *Saga Journal* is a monthly on-line academic review dedicated to the in-depth study of the *Star Wars* saga as presented in George Lucas's six-film series. Our goal is to deliver one of the best collections of scholarly essays on the subject that the internet has to offer.

Here at the *Saga Journal*, we believe *Star Wars* is more than just an enjoyable space opera set in a galaxy far, far away. We recognize it as a modern myth, a cultural phenomenon all its own. We want to encourage the literary exploration of all aspects of the story as presented in the Prequel and Original Trilogy films.

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# **The Queen of Naboo and The Lion of Judah: An Historical Parallel**

by lazypadawan

One of the more dramatic moments in *The Phantom Menace* was Queen Amidala's plea to the Galactic Senate to help the conquered planet Naboo. The young monarch demanded the Senate force the Trade Federation to withdraw its forces, but the Senate is soon mired in procedure and accusations that the Queen's allegations are untrue. The Supreme Chancellor loses control of the situation and little is accomplished. The Galactic Senate is rife with corruption and stuck on procedure. The Supreme Chancellor has little moral authority to lead due to an unnamed scandal.

It is a familiar scene to *Star Wars* fans, but few know that a similar incident occurred less than a century ago on our own planet. In 1936, the monarch of a conquered nation appealed not to a Galactic Senate, but to the League of Nations for help (1). That monarch was Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia (1892-1975) (2).

Selassie was born Tafari Makonnen in the Harar province of Ethiopia. Unlike Amidala, he was born into royalty. He claimed to have been a direct descendent of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. His father was governor of Harar and his grandmother was the aunt of Emperor Melenik II. Like Amidala, Tafari assumed his first title at a young age, 13, but assumed his first governorship when he was older and did not finally become Emperor until November 2, 1930 after a great deal of power struggle and intrigue (3). It was then that Tafari adopted his baptismal name, Haile Selassie, just as Padmé Naberrie adopted the name Amidala once she took the throne (4). Selassie had many titles, one of which lives on to this day, the Lion of Judah (5).

*Star Wars* fans know that the pacifist Naboo were no match for the wealthy and heavily-armed Trade Federation, with its battle droids, tanks, and droid starfighters. Amidala was initially captured, then forced to flee the planet. In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia from its colonies in neighboring Eritrea and Somalia. Selassie attempted to fight off the invaders, but the better-armed Italians defeated the Ethiopian army after seven months, and Selassie was forced to flee with his family to Jerusalem (6).

Just as the young queen chose to go to Coruscant, after a detour on Tatooine, to appeal to the Senate, Selassie traveled to Geneva, Switzerland to address the League of Nations in June of 1936. Founded after the end of World War I, the League of Nations was intended to promote diplomacy between countries and avoid the secret alliances that brought several countries into World War I. The League of Nations however, was notoriously ineffective and did little to stop the rise of Nazism and fascism in Europe prior to World War II. It had no military of its own, so its only method of dealing with violations was with sanctions that it could not enforce. League members that did have a military were reluctant to use their own armies, particularly during the pacifist mood of the post-World War I era (7). The League of Nations failed to enforce an embargo on Italian arms and while it condemned the invasion of Ethiopia, no action was taken, not even when chemical weapons had been used on the Ethiopians (8). The Galactic Senate did not have a military at the time of *The Phantom Menace*. It seemed to rely mostly on diplomacy and proclamations in these types of instances, yet aside from the Jedi, it had no way of using force to deal with violations. It also seemed to be reluctant to take any sort of action, especially against the powerful.

Amidala's appeal to the Galactic Senate was interrupted by the Trade Federation's representatives and their allies, who wanted a committee investigation instead of immediate action. Selassie had to endure something similar when the President of the Assembly of the League of Nations announced him: "the large number of Italian journalists in the galleries erupted in loud shouts, whistles and catcalls, stamping their feet and clapping their hands. As it turned out, they had earlier been issued whistles by the Italian foreign minister (and Mussolini's son-in-law) Count Galeazzo Ciano (9)." Although Amidala's address in the film was much shorter than Selassie's, the idea is the same: demanding justice and enforcement of the values the League of Nations – or the Senate – is supposed to uphold. Selassie told the assembly, "I ask the fifty-two nations, who have given the Ethiopian people a promise to help them in their resistance to the aggressor, what are they willing to do for Ethiopia? And the great Powers who have promised the guarantee of collective security to small States on whom weighs the threat that they may one day suffer the fate of Ethiopia, I ask what measures do you intend to take (10)?"

**Although Amidala's address in the film was much shorter than Selassie's, the idea is the same: demanding justice and enforcement of the values the League of Nations – or the Senate – is supposed to uphold.**

Compare that with "I have come before you to resolve this attack on our sovereignty now. I was not elected to watch my people suffer and die while you discuss this...in a committee."

Just as Amidala's pleas were largely unheard and bureaucracy prevented any immediate action against the Trade Federation, the League of Nations imposed ineffectual trade sanctions against Italy (11), while Britain and France actually recognized Italian possession of Ethiopia (12). Italy withdrew from the League of Nations in 1937, as did its allies Germany in 1933 and Japan in 1932, making any kind of action against the Italians impossible (13). Nevertheless, Selassie's speech earned worldwide attention and admiration (14). "The speech is remembered more than the aggression itself (15)."

Selassie spent the next few years in exile in Britain unsuccessfully trying to bring attention to Ethiopia's plight. He suffered personal tragedy as family members were incarcerated and died. However, Italy's entry in the war on the side of Germany in 1940 helped turn the tide (16). Britain entered into an alliance with Selassie, just as Amidala entered into an alliance with the Gungans and informally, with her two Jedi protectors and young Anakin Skywalker. Both exiled monarchs returned to drive out the invaders along with their new allies. Selassie re-entered Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on May 5, 1941 and fighting ended in 1942; quite a bit longer than it took for Amidala and her allies to defeat the Trade Federation (17).

In the grander scheme of galactic politics, the invasion of Naboo and the subsequent defeat of the Trade Federation were small events. Of course they later on had greater implications for the galaxy, but at the time, no one knew how far reaching those events would be. Amidala was a heroine to the Naboo and she forged a permanent partnership between the humans and the Gungans. Even though the invasion of Ethiopia was a pretext to the Axis powers staking out their regions of domination, Italy was still the weakest of the Axis nations: "the Allies never viewed (Italy) as much more than a nuisance (18)." Nevertheless, Selassie was a hero worldwide, especially to the people of Africa. "To the Ethiopians, it was as much a moral victory as a military one (19)."

Selassie reigned longer afterwards than the elected Queen of Naboo, deposed by a Marxist coup in 1974 and then dying on August 28, 1975 – some believed he had been killed in his sleep (20). However,

Selassie's legend lives on. His heroism during World War II caused some to believe he was God incarnate, the followers of which came to be known as Rastafarians (the former Tafari Makonnen was known as "Ras Tafari" before taking the throne) (21). Selassie himself was a lifelong Ethiopian Orthodox Christian and never professed any divine origin (22).

The League of Nations' handling of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia is remembered as one of that body's greatest failures. Most of its failures in fact, were related to the aggression of the Axis powers in the 1930s. The League was plagued by a small membership with many nations entering then withdrawing, its Eurocentric outlook, the mistrust of the European center-right, and the non-participation of the United States. The League was whittled down to a skeleton staff at the beginning of World War II, when it was clear it failed in its mission to prevent war. A few of its agencies survived as part of the subsequent United Nations (23). The Galactic Senate's failures also preceded its eventual demise. The Senate was eventually brought under control of the Empire, its status reduced to a powerless body until it was eliminated completely during the time of *A New Hope*.

One cannot definitively prove George Lucas was inspired by Selassie's story while creating this particular story arc for *The Phantom Menace*, but the parallels are at times uncanny. Both Emperor Selassie and Queen Amidala could be summed up with this: "Even when the foe is truly formidable, courage has a psychological side that has little to do with combat or physical victory. One may seem defeated materially without being defeated morally (24)." The Lion of Judah displayed great courage in the face of impossible odds and indifference, as did a young queen he may have inadvertently inspired decades after his death.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Selassie, Haile. "Appeal to the League of Nations," June 1936.

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia.com, "Haile Selassie I."

<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia.com, "Haile Selassie I."

<sup>4</sup> Wikipedia.com, "Haile Selassie I."

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia.com, "Haile Selassie I."

<sup>6</sup> Cutri, Mike. "Haile Selassie." May 1, 1996. <http://history.acusd.edu/gen/text/selassie.html>

<sup>7</sup> Wikipedia.com. "League of Nations."

<sup>8</sup> Cutri, Mike.

<sup>9</sup> Wikipedia.com, "Haile Selassie I."

<sup>10</sup> Selassie, Haile.

<sup>11</sup> *Imperial Ethiopia*. "Reflections on Haile Selassie." <http://www.imperialethiopia.org/selassie.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Cutri, Mike.

<sup>13</sup> Wikipedia.com. "League of Nations."

<sup>14</sup> Wikipedia.com. "Haile Selassie I."

<sup>15</sup> *Imperial Ethiopia.*

<sup>16</sup> Cutri, Mike.

<sup>17</sup> Cutri, Mike.

<sup>18</sup> *Imperial Ethiopia.*

<sup>19</sup> *Imperial Ethiopia.*

<sup>20</sup> Wikipedia.com. "Haile Selassie I."

<sup>21</sup> Wikipedia.com. "Haile Selassie I."

<sup>22</sup> Wikipedia.com. "League of Nations."

<sup>23</sup> *Imperial Ethiopia.*

## “Outside” Essays

The *Saga Journal* brings together academic *Star Wars* works from all over, including those archived or published elsewhere. The listings below will take you to *Star Wars* essays available at other journals and/or websites.

### **“It’s aimed at kids – the kid in everybody”:** George Lucas, *Star Wars* and Children’s Entertainment, by Peter Krämer

Examines *Star Wars*’ status as a “children’s” film, and how its success impacted children and family entertainment in the movie industry.

Available at <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/film/journal/articles/its-aimed-at-kids.htm>

Published in Yvonne Tasker (ed.), *Action and Adventure Cinema*, London: Routledge, 2004, and by *Scope*.

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