

It's Not a Story the Jedi Would Tell You

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Star Wars has always been the best thing ever. When I was very little, I loved *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*. In over a decade since Disney acquired Lucasfilm and *Star Wars*, nothing has reached my high hopes. I strongly believe that *Star Wars* is more than just a few sci-fi movies, it is a money printer for those involved. The franchise is a loveable, outer-space adventure of trust and war, and a parent to many tropes used to this day in filmmaking. Even if you aren't a huge fan, *Star Wars* has changed many things about music composition and brand recognition, forever influencing millions of lives around the world. Kids have begged their parents to dress them up as the heroes and villains of the *Star Wars* universe for half of a century at this point. It appears the object of loving what the license was might be on the decline, however, from a certain point of view. The brand of *Star Wars* has been hampered by poor judgement and a lack of planning. The trademark logo has seen profits diminish significantly, along with the fan satisfaction. Judging by its lack of memorable new characters and their representative decline in toys, posters, and other memorabilia sales.

In a lengthy article from Ben Child, a writer for *The Guardian* and self-proclaimed “[...] Huge fan of the original trilogy,” Disney failed to reach most fan expectations. As inferred several times throughout the writing from Child (2022), the *Star Wars* sequel trilogy was lackluster at its best, and downright disrespectful at its worst. He mentions things such as how one decision at the end of the trilogy removed the purpose of all six of the older *Star Wars* movies and their stories, what skills the latest movie's directors brought to the table, and most simply; “Who's to blame?” Child (2022) chooses to stay fair in his article, not pointing blame in any one direction or at any one person, but he also doesn't hold back when criticizing what choices Disney let the public see. The writer and I do share some similarities, like our enjoyment of the first Disney mainline *Star Wars* movie, although that enjoyment doesn't last for very long

after the movie is over. One thing is for sure, Disney Lucasfilm did not fulfil the hopes that fans and critics alike shared, especially towards the end of their three main movies. I agree with Ben Child, because he brings up many points that I didn't think about before reading his piece.

For those who don't already know, *Star Wars* is a legend of good versus evil, and the second highest grossing movie franchise ever, the first being the Marvel Cinematic Universe with its ever-expanding tally of movies, according to a list done by *CNBC*'s Sarah Whitten (2021). The first release feature film, now known as *Star Wars: A New Hope*, made its debut on July 21st, 1978, and has become a fan favorite for all generations. Its creator, George Lucas, went on to make two more films to finish off his *Original Trilogy*, breaking box office records with each attempt. There was a 16-year gap without a big screen flick after Lucas had claimed to be done directing *Star Wars* movies. The void was filled, however, with dozens of novels and comic books for fans to cling onto, telling other stories of the "Galaxy far, far away." It wouldn't be until 1999 when another box office buster was released, of course directed by none other than Lucas himself. With the rise in technology, the use of practical effects like paintings used as backgrounds, small puppets for characters, and layered film to add explosion effects fell to the wayside. Lucasfilm pioneered the use of computer-generated images in film, blue screens, and one of Lucas's own companies, Industrial Light and Magic. With these advancements, the man of the hour decided to return to the big screen to tell a prequel story, taking place decades before his first three films, setting the stage for how many of his characters all came to be. Many fans did not enjoy the story told by Lucas, as they felt it was all wrong. Fans who once saw George Lucas as a universally beloved hero of action and cinema now blamed him for ruining their favorite fairy tale. When the third installment of Lucas' prequel trilogy finally rolled around in 2005, this opinion would be shared by a large portion of fans claiming that there was too much in

terms of intergalactic politics, or that the main “Good Guys” were not as good as they were made out to be 20 years earlier. In 2012, Lucas sold his monumental company to Disney for a whopping four billion dollars. Disney proceeded to make three standout movies, primarily *The Force Awakens* (*TFA*) telling the future of Lucas’ beloved characters, with gross profits diminishing after each movie’s release. Fans are still left hopeful for Disney Lucasfilm to learn from their mistakes and improve moving forward towards the unclear future of *Star Wars*.

The first major point against Disney’s *Star Wars* from Child (2022), one that is also possibly the most highly contested topic for debate, is the idea that the writers had not formed a plan for the sequel trilogy going into the filming of their first movie. It also happens to be the case that the directors of the three films are also the ones who, purposefully or not, wrote the plot holes, corny jokes, and disappointing character arcs. With this in mind, story inconsistencies start to sound more plausible. Child (2022) emphasizes that there were “[...] Threads left dangling in *The Force Awakens* [that] were never picked up.” He mentions characters that were promising in the beginning, but ultimately became “pointless.” Disheartened by the favorite characters of both old and new fans being turned essentially into background filler pieces, Child (2022) states:

The wonderful thing that has happened to Star Wars in the five years since Johnson’s movie hit cinemas is that there is now so much of it that we can all decide on our own personal canon, while ignoring the episodes we didn’t think were up to scratch.

Child regards forgetting certain parts of the movies as easy as putting butter on toast, as he thinks there is plenty of story parts that fans should think of as “not real.” These characters were all sidelined in order to push some rosy, augmented, half-baked relationship between two other main characters with a completely wasted potential that wasn’t even planned out or really hinted at, it just happened in order to add romance like the previous two trilogies had done so well. An

earlier article from an experienced editor / writer of film critiques, Adam Chitwood (2021) of *Collider*, states that the director for the first Disney installment in the Skywalker Saga, J.J. Abrams, initially declined the opportunity to direct the film, however it isn't clear if this was out of fear or simply because he just had other plans. Because of this, the creative process started later than it naturally should have, due to the scramble to lock down a director. Even the other director, Rian Johnson, was not free from scrutiny and bad decisions. My favorite quote from Johnson is that of a Tweet he sent out when announcing his new role as a *Star Wars* director, "Dear Lord, please don't let me fuck up." It is often a question of debate whether he truly did tarnish the *Star Wars* name, leaving its parent company Lucasfilm in turmoil or not. Child (2022) pressures this tweet from Rian Johnson, arguing that if he had a plan for what to do, he wouldn't be worried about it not coming together. A quote from *Inside The Magic*'s Kyle Burlingame (2022) spells out such disaster, claiming "Lucasfilm is reportedly scared of messing up and creating another mess like the Sequel Trilogy, which is why all of their next projects have taken additional time to make sure everything is up to their new standards for storytelling." While every piece of art should take as much time as it needs to smooth out its quirks, some don't get the memo. This quote speaks for itself, nothing else needs to be said in order to get the gravity of this message across. After all, Abrams still provided a monumental first step to moving beyond what had been made in the past, having "the unenviable task of introducing brand new characters that fans would want to follow while also servicing fans' desires to see old favorites back on the screen" (Chitwood, 2021). Child (2022) argues that Disney didn't come close to the mark they were supposed to hit in terms of pleasing the fans.

Another point of discussion is that the directors had no idea how to direct a *Star Wars* movie that would work with George Lucas' six original films. This idea sits hand in hand with

the recent *Obi-Wan Kenobi* show, where a lack of foresight and minimal planning makes the direction confusing and often hypocritical of itself. Contrast this Disney with other works they've done, like that of *Rogue One*, *The Mandalorian*, and even the handling of animated *Star Wars* TV shows. These have outstandingly positive reviews, yet the main trilogy doesn't have that shared opinion. One point of evidence for this is the lack of a connection Disney's directors had with the franchise. On top of this, there were supposed to be three different directors for the trilogy, each one directing one movie each. Child (2022) pushes the idea that “[...] The last thing you should do is appoint a guy who clearly saw *Star Wars* in a very different way to rebuild it.” Child (2022) further notes that, rather than inventing the story as it happened and delivering the message to the directors, Lucasfilm could have devised a plan, comparing the creative process behind *Star Wars* to that of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*. Sadly, Child (2022) suggests that Disney voluntarily chose not to delay the release of their third film, *The Rise of Skywalker*, even though its original director backed out of the role. It also goes to show the poor planning that they had, when they could not nail down who was supposed to direct the third film until it came time to shoot what was developed. The final point here may be the most important. Instead of hiring a set of directors that genuinely care about the originality of the other two original trilogies, they decided to allow already comfortable directors to alter a much beloved franchise however they pleased. Because of this, we got directors who countered each other in almost every way. Where one director opted for Rey to be a “nobody,” the other chose to make her the granddaughter to the evil Emperor of the galaxy. Where J.J. Abrams brought the hero Luke Skywalker back to *Star Wars*, Rian Johnson made him a secluded shell of a human who cut himself off from the only thing that made him as strong as he was in the past.

Child (2022) also follows the timeline of Disney's sequel trilogy, mentioning that the first movie began sprinting out of the gate with unique new characters and somewhat new planets, and swiftly devolved into copy and pasting ideas and even whole scenes from previous movies in the saga. Even on the financial side, the third movie made only half the amount of money as the first. Child (2022) assesses that "The future of Star Wars looked pretty bright to me, post [TFA], with the saga's slate wiped clean [...]" but that was all thrown away after the two-year gap in between episodes *VII* and *VIII*. Even George Lucas himself, the original creator of *Star Wars*, said that the movies were not up to par for what fans had been expecting. In an article from *CBR*, Edgar Ortiz (2022) places an impactful quote from the Father of *Star Wars*, "Lucas had expressed to Iger that 'there's nothing new' and that 'there weren't enough visual or technical leaps forward.'" This quote will be touched on again later. I couldn't agree more with the words of Child, I remember that I saw *TFA* within a month of its release back in 2015, and I was pleasantly surprised by the flick's ability to draw my eyes. I just wish that the directors could have kept that up throughout the other two movies, that way I wouldn't notice the stunning flaws of the latter two movies.

As we get into the latter portion of this essay, it is important for me to recognize Child's point that the directors did not have the skills, the time, or the combined brain power to weed out poor ideas from the scripts and screenplays. So many ideas that seemed to be pointless or otherwise unnecessary found their way onto the big screen, and they all stuck out like a sore thumb to audiences who were paying attention for more than 11 seconds at a time, including myself. A respected movie critic, Ethan Anderton (2019) from *Slash Film*, notes that during the time of *The Rise of Skywalker*'s principal photography, its director J.J. Abrams was reluctant to let the film's editors work their magic. This practice has become common when a movie is on as

tight of a schedule as this film was, just six months. Principal photography, in this case, being the term for the initial filming of a movie, where the cast enter the lives of their characters and give action to their scripts, making plans come to fruition. Anderton (2019) also notes that, “Editing on set can also make it easy to see what's working and what isn't when it's all cut together. Being able to pick up shots while the sets and actors are still in place is significantly easier than waiting to see what they need in the editing room.” Going back to a quote from earlier, where Ortiz (2021) says, “Lucas had expressed to Iger that ‘there's nothing new’ and that ‘there weren't enough visual or technical leaps forward.’” Focus needs to be drawn to where Lucas says, “technical leaps forward.” The man was comparing films in the late 2010's to films from the late 1970's, and he still said there weren't enough advancements in the mechanics behind Disney's trilogy. It becomes increasingly clear how ill-equipped the entire creative team were to create as impactful a story as George Lucas had originally done nearly 50 years ago. Keep in mind, Lucas created an entire galaxy and all its planets, inhabitants, and events from scratch to tell the story he wanted to tell. With the sequel trilogy, Disney failed to do any of those things. Jakku, Disney's first new planet, was another desert planet exactly like Tatooine, that came 50 years before it. Ajan-Kloss, a jungle planet not unlike Yavin-4 and Endor from George Lucas's own mind, and Hosnian Prime, a planet far too similar to Coruscant decades before it, just to name a few more.

If *Episode VII* was my story to tell, and I had to stick with the same people that Disney chose, I would have made Luke Skywalker; the son of the chosen one and the man responsible for rebuilding the Jedi of old, a “gray Jedi.” I wouldn't go far enough to claim that he cuts himself off from the force and make him a recluse on an unknown planet, rather I would choose to say that after successfully creating a new Jedi order, Luke allows himself to see both the light

and the dark side, balancing himself between the two, similar to, but to a further extent of Qui-Gon Jinn refusing to become a member of the Jedi Council in the prequels, therefore going against some of the choices they make. Next, most obviously, Finn would be my main character. I think the story would be the same throughout it, except for Finn being the character given the call to action, and not Rey. I also would not have our main character fly the Millenium Falcon, the prized ship of Han Solo. I would make Finn find a junk ship, or maybe an old TIE Fighter that can barely fly, since he has experience with that kind of imperial technology.

There is no changing the fact that Disney threw away some of the most pivotal names in their big-ticket money machine and every idea that the great George Lucas gave them during the acquisition of Lucasfilm. Now, this is not to say that Disney hasn't gotten a single thing right, personally I love *The Mandalorian*, both as a series and as a character in and of himself. I also enjoyed seeing two of my favorite characters of all time, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Qui-Gon Jinn, share the screen together once again, while having both original actors put their respective character's boots back on; although personally I hope for the last time. Whether it's hard to believe or not, *Star Wars* has been indefinitely tarnished as a brand and as an entity, leaving a sour taste in the mouth of everyone who was hopeful for a true return to form. Regardless of if you've never heard the infamous title before, or if you are just like me and can't get enough of it, the permanent change from the *Star Wars* of the past to that of the future is one that will affect the lives of many, even if that just means that *Star Wars* is no longer a well of iconic quotes we fall in love with. We can only hope that when the inevitable episodes *X*, *XI*, and *XII* come out, that they will be life changing to kids of their era, just as the prequels were life changing for me.

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