

Why I Hope "Star Wars" Doesn't Go Gray

Written by Vincent J. Shuta Jr.

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The first three Star Wars movies—Star Wars, The Empire Strikes Back, and Return of the Jedi—forever set our expectations as to what a Star Wars movie should be. There's a feel and a flavor to the original three movies that we look for whenever we hear John Williams' score kick in. It's a futuristic movie with throwback sensibilities.

Yes the heroes are rescuing the princess, but the princess is a bad-ass and part of the team, not an object to be retrieved. It's got classic sword fights but the swords aren't made of steel. It's got WWI dogfights but they're in space.

These movies have samurai and wizards and pirates and side kicks and romance and bravery and humor and everything you'd expect from a classic movie.

So why do people hate the prequels?

They've got a bad-ass queen instead of a princess, same futuristic swords, same dogfights. Same samurai, wizards, side kicks and romance.

Wait...no pirates...were there pirates? I don't remember.

I could probably quote the first three movies to you verbatim. We used to have them playing over and over again in the engineering lab in college.*

I can't even quote you the plot for Attack of the Clones. I don't think I've seen it since it was in the theater.

Why is that?

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It's not that the prequels were bad movies in and of themselves. The over arching plot of government manipulating wars to control people is as important as it was interesting. The settings were fantastic, and truth be told, I think the acting was more than adequate. George Lucas makes everyone in a Star Wars movie jump through hoops with the writing, and I think the actors took a lot of flack for what they had to say rather than how they said it.

Yes you can violently disagree with me on any of these points. But even if I give into your opinion, I don't think any of these things were movie breakers. But I think I do know what did break them.

Star Wars was a tale of redemption. It was a tale of good and evil. It was about pure evil becoming good, and pure good fighting the fall to evil.

That resonates with people. We're all either trying not to fall or trying to come back. If you're in a bad place and you feel you can't be forgiven, well *spoiler alert* here' s Dark freakin' Vader turning back to the light. You're not even trapped in black suit.

If you've ever been on the brink of losing it, while you really want to stay good, you've got Luke. Anyone not had that "Looking at the glove" moment when you realize you have to get your cool back before you go too far? Or is that just me?

Then there's Han. A self-serving criminal who will shoot first and not worry about the questions until he meets a strong willed woman with a cause. Through her he sees a new path and takes it.

Great stuff.

So what do we have in the prequels?

In the prequels we have all that Obi-Wan regretted in the originals. The good guys are largely

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lacking in compassion, and largely self serving. The ones who aren't are swept along with events. The heroes are heroic, but they can't win. The bad guys are playing both sides of the chess game, and the end is a foregone conclusion.

The prequels are brilliant really. They can also match our real life experiences if we choose to look at things from a certain point of view.

But is it a fun point of view?

Do you want to see the movie where good triumphs over evil or where good falls to darkness?

That's why I think on a visceral level people hate the prequels. **

So what does this mean for the new movies?

Well, that kind of depends where they go with them.

The Force Awakens was just Star Wars with a slightly darker flavor to it. Are old heroes aren't doing that well, and that takes away a bit from the stories of the new heroes. Eventually your brain relegates Luke, Leia, Han and Chewie to smaller parts, but this isn't what you'd hoped for them.

But it does still seem to be good vs bad, with either destruction or redemption hanging in the balance for a lot of characters. Finn is the new Solo, trying to overcome a shady past and earn trust. Rey is the new Luke, gifted with powers she can use for good or evil.

For some, "The Force Awakens" might not be the Star Wars movie they wanted, but

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ultimately, unlike the prequels, it felt like a Star Wars movie.

In less than a year, we'll get to see "The Last Jedi," and it seems like they may be embracing a concept from the vast body of work now considered to be "non-cannon." And that is the concept of the Gray Jedi.

The Gray Jedi uses both the light and dark sides of the force. The Gray Jedi is good or evil depending on what said Jedi thinks will get the best outcome. It's Star Wars mixed with Nietzsche. It's the "Will to power" brought to the "Journal of the Whills" as Star Wars was originally titled.

In a world where the only people who are considered evil are those who would claim that an action could be called good or evil, the Gray Jedi will be popular. Today we equate judging actions with judging people, which paints any sort of morality as devoid of compassion.

That topic is a pretty deep dive, and I'm not going to take the plunge here.

My point is, what will happen to the new Star Wars movies if they go there?

My theory is, they're going to lose the "Star Wars" feel. The simplicity will be gone. The good guys vs bad guys let-me-focus-on-how-good-the-popcorn-tastes feeling will be gone. The "I am your father" twist in Empire was powerful because we were so used to a straight road that a sudden massive complication threw us off completely.

It's not going to feel like Star Wars. And then no matter how good it is, some people aren't going to like it.

It's going to feel like an episode of "Babylon 5" or "Star Trek Voyager." Those are great shows, but if you feel like watching Star Wars, don't watch Babylon 5. It's like if you're primed for pizza and then the plans change to fish and chips. Fish and chips are great, but not if you're in the

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mood for pizza.

If they go this route, if they don't keep to the original Star Wars vibe, these are not going to be movies you watch over and over again, memorizing every line. They might be fine movies in their own right. But they're in danger of falling into the same trap as the prequels.

The good news is, you have a say in what is considered cannon in any media you consume. The reader is as much a creator as the writer; the person in the theater controls what is acceptable and what isn't.

If in your mind, Han and Leia lived happily ever after, and "The Force Awakes" is a bunch of crap, then it didn't happen. It's just a story told using those characters that someone put on film.

Read a Star Wars book that doesn't feel right? Heck most of those aren't even official cannon anymore. Just drop it off at Goodwill and forget about it.

The consumer has the final say as to what stories it includes in the cannon we create in our imaginations. You can even like a story without thinking it fits. *Splinter of the Mind's Eye* by Alan Dean Foster is one of my favorite books of all time, but it doesn't fit on several levels.***

One way or another, "Star Wars" is going to go on—probably long after we're all long dead now that Disney has it.

I'm just saying it would be nice if when they make movies with "Star Wars" in the title it would be great if they were Star Wars movies.

If not, I guess we'll take what we can get.

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*Along with The Smokey and The Bandit movies, The Cannonball Run movies, Monty Python and the Holy Grail, and the Hunt For Red October. We had a VCR hooked to an orange and black monitor from a Commodore 64 and an old boom box. That plus a lot of coffee, pizza, Pepsi products and some Jolt Cola for the longer nights and Gavascon for what we did to our stomachs made for good times.

**That and the ending was too short and made no sense whatsoever. If they had done something with the Emperor pulling the life from Padme' to save Darth Vader, that would have been great. As it was, it wasn't.

***The sexual tension between Luke & Leia is so wrong once you know they're brother and sister, but this book predates that revelation.