



A Star Wars Story

A long time ago – not in a galaxy far, far away, but right here on Earth – a little boy stared up in wonder at the big screen at the incredible story that George Lucas put up there: *Star Wars*. In hindsight, one can perhaps see some of the cracks in that original story, but for that little boy it offered the belief that there is something greater than the individual self – something that even death cannot defeat – and that anyone, no matter how low and base their origins, can aspire to greatness. That was a powerful message that he could not yet articulate, but it inspired him nonetheless.

This belief strengthened with the second and third films released, despite the Ewoks – one of Lucas' commercial indulgences. It survived the introduction of Jar Jar Binks in the second trilogy, the most risible of all creations, because the films started to explore more of the background of that original political philosophy and to pose important moral questions.

I was sceptical when a third trilogy was launched with the portentous title, *The Force Awakens*. That film did tend to trip itself up with the amount of self-referencing that went on. It was trying to appeal to two separate generations and I felt it suffered because of that. Maybe it was time for my generation of original Star Wars fans to step aside, our battle done, to leave Star Wars for the younger generation.

I did go to see the spin-off *Rogue One* purely out of curiosity; how did the Rebels get those vital blueprints? The film brought in an entirely new set of characters that fitted seamlessly into the Lucas universe and – more importantly – it brought back the unifying political philosophy and placed it centre stage.

It was also a character-led story; despite the explosions, laser-fire and other special effects. Its characters were not born to greatness – far from it – but they became great. The awesome personal sacrifices they made displayed their importance; yet in the original Star Wars film they were only referenced, namelessly, in a single line. The story was beautifully and artfully told, the tension was maintained, even though you knew they would succeed in the end. History is littered with such 'hidden figures.'

My enthusiasm for the franchise lifted by *Rogue One*, I eagerly awaited the release of *The Last Jedi*.

I could talk about the amazing set-pieces, the balletic fight-sequences, both human and machine, the nice moments of humour and some more of those self-references. However, what was most exciting was the development of the key characters introduced in the previous film. Through their individual journeys of self-discovery, in the context of some truly momentous challenges, they face difficult choices, on which, perhaps, the fate of the universe rests. It is not so much what they get right, but what they get wrong and yet, their failures are crucial in their own personal development and in the fates of others. (It is hard here to avoid slipping into Yoda-speech. Try I must.)

I came away from the film, my head whirling with the ideas presented before me – the moral conundrums that got my synapses spinning. What choices would I have made? I don't have the answers to many of the questions, but that is what makes it even more exciting. I look forward to the next instalment with bated breath.

Such stories have the power to move one emotionally and to fill an eager mind with inspiring ideas. Of course, not everyone will be so touched by one single story, they need other stories, told in a different fashion, to effect change in them. Through our literature, our art, our human endeavour and through the silver screen, these stories will continue to be told.

The little boy who looked up at the screen with wonder, all those years ago, became the man who still looks up at the screen with wonder and probably, always will.

May the Force be with you.

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Image: Time Inc. U.K.