

The Skywalker saga concludes with a return of the fan service

 By [Charles Siboto](#)

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The wait is over. Episode IX of Star Wars is here with *The Rise of Skywalker* to bring the sequel trilogy to an end.

As per usual, expectations are high. The last instalment, *The Last Jedi* was a hit with critics and more of a miss with the hard-core fan base. The first entry, *The Force Awakens* was JJ Abrams' beautiful love letter to the original trilogy and its strength was that it managed to set up a story for a new generation of characters and, at the same time, pay homage to the ones that came before.



Star Wars: The Last Jedi is a worthy follow up

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It captured that magic of *Star Wars* perfectly and set the stage for this story to go into uncharted territory. Rian Johnson came in and shook things up with *The Last Jedi*. He came in and took *Star Wars* into that uncharted territory. His addition to the saga can be summed up by Luke's words in the film: "This is not going to go the way you think."

He told a story that subverted fan theories and the fans were not impressed and complained that '*Star Wars* isn't *Star Wars* anymore'. Abrams, thus, ended up with the terrible job of having to tell a good story and make the fans happy, all while having to tie up this trilogy in a neat bow in *The Rise of Skywalker*.



Return of the fan service

Abrams is a fan, through and through. You just have to look at most of the films he's directed over the years; most of them are rather great homages to the culture. In this film, he opts to try and please the fans.



JJ Abrams' love letter to Star Wars

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The Rise of Skywalker spends a large portion of its time retconning the parts of *The Last Jedi* that the fans didn't like. The result is quite awkward and feels like a scene where one parent has told the children that they can't have any sweets and then the other parent comes crashing into the room and says that they can.

This is something that hurts the story and, I think, that even the hard-core fans will dislike because the pandering feels unnatural and forced (pun intended). It's also sad that when you look back at this trilogy you will see a house divided because *The Rise of Skywalker* didn't dare to forge ahead with what was set up in the previous film.



A fascinating aside here is how modern storytelling is affected by fans and what they want. Storytelling never happens in a vacuum but now it feels like the fans are sitting in the room with creators and dictating what they want. Rian Johnson came out in an interview last week to speak on the influence of fandoms on the process of making something. His take is that it is a mistake to pander to fans because even if you give them exactly what they want it takes away from being able to delight and shock them with something unexpected.

An enjoyable experience

All of this aside, *The Rise of Skywalker* is an enjoyable experience and has moments that will genuinely give you goosebumps. Most of these moments coming from how astoundingly beautiful it is and how John Williams' legendary score complements the story beats.



One thing that the sequel trilogy can own and be proud of is Rey's theme, it's truly spectacular, right up there with Vader's theme, "The Imperial March". I especially love the visuals linked to the Dark Side. Everything about the Dark Side is spectacularly menacing. The return of an old evil has some powerful moments (and some flat ones). Adam Driver's Kylo Ren is one of the great additions to the franchise and he is the standout character here once again.

All the good guys are back for the last ride and the big three, Rey, Finn and Poe all have their time to shine. Rey is the Light Side to Kylo Ren's Dark Side and their characters play off each other well. Daisy Ridley is a joy to watch as Rey. Oscar Isaac and John Boyega have amazing chemistry as Poe and Finn.



Familiar faces make an appearance with archive footage used for the late Carrie Fisher's Leia Organa, Mark Hamill as Luke Skywalker, Harrison Ford as Han Solo and Billy Dee Williams as Lando Calrissian. All of the supporting characters from the previous two instalments are also here for the adventure and they've squeezed in some new ones. This makes for a bit of a bloated story and the film tackles this by having breakneck pacing!

Honestly, blink and you'll miss it. Hardcore fans might not be too bothered with the information overload but for the casual viewer, it can be disorientating. Again, it's like they reacted to the legitimate complaint that *The Last Jedi* was quite slow by speeding everything up here.

JJ Abrams and his team go out of their way to try and tie up every single loose end from all of the preceding films and even the other *Star Wars* properties. This is a commendable effort but in some places unnecessary and introduces more confusion.

This year, we saw *Game of Thrones* come to a truly dissatisfying end and *Avengers: Endgame* managed to nail an ending just right. *The Rise of Skywalker* falls right in the middle. It's like they saw the mistakes that *Game of Thrones* made and decided to make some of the same ones but to a lesser degree and they saw what *Endgame* did right and do that but not to the full extent.

ABOUT CHARLES SIBOTO

Charles Siboto is a delightful, youngish person. He firmly believes that kindness matters and cannot abide people who are asshats.

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