

Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker—All the gimmicks to rake in the revenue

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Directed by J. J. Abrams; screenplay by J. J. Abrams and Chris Terrio

December 20 saw the release of *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*, which is being billed as the ninth and final film in the *Star Wars* “Skywalker Saga,” the episodic film series that George Lucas began in 1977. Since Disney purchased Lucasfilm in 2012 for \$4.05 billion, the studio has released five feature films, including a trilogy of films that has now concluded with *Skywalker*.

The film opens with Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) visiting a dark planet to confront Emperor Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid), the main villain of George Lucas’s first six films, who has been resurrected 30 years after his death and threatens to take revenge on the galaxy with a hidden armada of naval ships, each of which is mounted with a planet-destroying super weapon.

Following the events of *The Last Jedi* (2017), Kylo Ren is now the Supreme Leader of the “First Order,” an imperial military organization seeking to overthrow the galaxy, and it is revealed that this was actually a machination of the hidden Palpatine who is now issuing his “Final Order.” Palpatine promises Kylo unlimited power if he can bring the young girl Rey (Daisy Ridley), the protagonist of the story, to him.

Rey, meanwhile, a powerful light-side Force user and leader of the Resistance, sets out with her comrades to find Palpatine’s hidden fleet so they can destroy it before it destroys the galaxy. They engage on a wild-goose chase to locate artifacts that will show them the way, and inadvertently come up against Kylo Ren and his cronies. Kylo reveals to Rey the truth about her family, which has been kept a mystery until now—i.e., that her parents were the children of Emperor Palpatine and that she herself is the villain’s granddaughter.

Kylo Ren, who is actually Ben Solo, the only son of

Han Solo (Harrison Ford) and Leia Organa (Carrie Fisher), two of the protagonists from the earlier films, has a moment of enlightenment where he speaks to the specter of his dead father (whom he murdered in *The Force Awakens* [2015]). In a mirror image of the conversation they held prior to the earlier patricidal event, Han convinces Ben to abandon his dark path and take up the fight for the light. Of course, Ben joins Rey and helps the Resistance defeat Palpatine and the Final Order.

This is sophomoric stuff. Aside from certain specific details, for example, who is the offspring of whom, the film is highly predictable. Director J. J. Abrams stated in many interviews prior to the film’s release that he was seeking to give not only an end to this new trilogy, but an end to all of the episodic films released over the last 42 years. *The Rise of Skywalker* is therefore chock full of reused dialogue and visual motifs from the previous eight films and uses parallels to extremes.

The dialogue between Han and Ben is virtually identical to their lines in *The Force Awakens*, with a few words switched around to bring Ben back to the light. Palpatine is also killed by Rey in a way that mirrors a scene from *Revenge of the Sith* (2005) where he is nearly defeated. The filmmakers may feel it was clever to include so many rhyming beats in their latest opus, but the result is a film that is thoroughly lacking in substance and merely a parody of the source material, which was already vapid in the first place.

As with all of the *Star Wars* films, the bevy of actors and artists involved in *The Rise of Skywalker* are creative and talented. If one were to single out the cinematography, the sound design or even the acting alone, one could find positive things to say about this film. This makes it all the more shameful that such talent must be spent to further the financial interests of

Disney rather than making worthwhile, meaningful art.

George Lucas's original *Star Wars* trilogy, released between 1977 and 1983, was designed to be a morality tale (with quasi-mystical nods to Joseph Campbell and C.G. Jung) inspired by adventure serials of the early and mid-twentieth century. Lucas has publicly stated on many occasions that *Star Wars* was made for 12-year-olds. His *Star Wars* prequel trilogy, released between 1999 and 2005, was designed to build on those motifs, setting out to create a modern mythology for young people (as well as earn a great deal of money along the way).

When Lucas sold his production company and the *Star Wars* brand to Disney in 2012, he initially planned to stay on as a creative consultant, to help create a new era of *Star Wars* films. However, it became clear over the years that Lucas and Disney did not agree on the direction his films should go. Lucas wanted to continue to craft his adolescent mythology with new stories, while Disney was primarily interested in creating films that depended more on nostalgia and copying the original films in a retro fashion, appealing to the pocketbooks of the former 12-year-olds of earlier periods who are now parents and even grandparents themselves.

In his new book, *The Ride of a Lifetime: Lessons Learned from 15 Years as CEO* (2019), Disney CEO Bob Iger discusses the deals he carried out to swallow up studios and large media giants and create an entertainment monopoly under the Disney brand. Those absorbed include Pixar in 2006 (\$7.4 billion), Marvel Entertainment in 2009 (\$4.24 billion), Lucasfilm in 2012 (\$4.05 billion) and, most recently, 21st Century Fox in 2019 (\$71.3 billion).

After spending so much cash to acquire these properties, Disney and Iger were determined to organize new products that could bring in the largest amounts possible, and this meant creating nostalgic films, cinematic lowest common denominators, they believed would appeal to the emotions of fans who wished to relive their childhoods. They had no intention of gambling on the semi-artistic decisions of this or that writer or director, whether he or she might be the creator of the brand in question or not.

The Rise of Skywalker, which has become the third and concluding film in this new trilogy of episodic *Star Wars* films, was initially to be written and directed by

Colin Trevorrow (*Jurassic World*). However, after witnessing the reaction to *The Last Jedi* (directed by Rian Johnson), the previous entry in the trilogy, which took more artistic liberties and did not sit well with many of the franchise's fans, as well as the lower box-office numbers for *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (Ron Howard), Disney executives apparently decided to change direction and end the "Skywalker Saga." They announced they would cease releasing one motion picture every year, and this also meant replacing Trevorrow with Abrams, who wrote and directed Disney's first entry into the *Star Wars* universe to great financial success.

At this point, Disney's plan is to hold off on releasing a new *Star Wars* film until 2022, focusing instead on creating new streaming television series for their new Disney Plus platform. They have already released the first few episodes of *The Mandalorian*, which will be reviewed here on the WSWS in the near future. They also have two other live-action series in production to be released over the next two years.



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