

Film Review: Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker

20 December 2019 Christopher Machell / Reviews



★☆☆☆☆

Rey (Daisy Ridley) is continuing her force training, now under the tutelage of Leia (a disturbingly reanimated Carrie Fisher). Meanwhile, we are told that Supreme Leader Kylo Ren is consumed with a quest to find the ultimate evil in the galaxy. Forty years and nine episodes in the making, can J.J. Abrams' capper to this trilogy of trilogies finally deliver on the promise of the greatest saga in cinema?

No. The answer, crushingly and definitively, is no – not even close. The critical response to *The Rise of Skywalker* has thus far been Luke-warm, garnering the lowest aggregate scores for a *Star Wars* film since the dreaded days of the prequels. But even these so-so responses do not go far enough, frankly. Abrams' last entry, *The Force Awakens*, was criticised for hewing too closely to the original trilogy, yet it was balanced with a vitality and freshness not seen in the franchise since, well, the original trilogy.

On the other hand, *The Rise of Skywalker*'s total lack of creative vision and bravery is simply breathtaking – falling victim to the worst excesses of Abrams' notorious and vapid 'mystery-box' story structure while pandering to the vilest and stupidest demands of the franchise's Sith-like fanboy hordes. Story spoilers may be sacrosanct in film criticism, but given that Abrams has singularly failed to furnish his film with a story, *The Rise of Skywalker* does not deserve the sanctuary of spoiler-free discussion as cover for its multitudinous sins.

Sitting at the top of the sorry pile is screenwriters Chris Terrio and Abrams' decision to reverse, ignore and generally piss all over everything that made *The Last Jedi* so beautiful. Gone is Luke's ambivalence, replaced by a grinning force-ghost mouthing platitudes. Gone is any semblance of conflict in Kylo Ren – he's evil for a bit, then turns good after a brief chat with the ghost of Han (his cameo itself a crushing reminder of how good these films used to be). And yes, gone too is *The Last Jedi*'s rug-pulling revelation that Rey's parents were nobodies, replaced instead by a plot twist so indescribably stupid, so emotionally and aesthetically ugly, that it could easily have been lifted from the comment section of an incel's YouTube video. It's not even right to call it fan service – that would imply some sense of joy or base satisfaction. The less said about Fisher's pointlessly monstrous resurrection (using repurposed footage from her previous performances), the better.

The chemistry between the principal cast has all but evaporated, sucked down by the vacuum of plot twists and execrable exposition, written presumably with an eye on appeasing the pseudo-critics who whinge when not every detail is laid bare in front of them. The return of Emperor Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid), meanwhile, is a joke, any menace that he once had gone in a nonsensical fugue of clones and Sith spirits. His inevitable demise is as visually spectacular as it is emotionally hollow.

It is shocking, truly shocking, how abjectly *The Rise of Skywalker* fails. Even the prequels, as shoddy as they were, at least offered something approaching a creative vision. *The Rise of Skywalker* offers us nothing but toadying supplication to the worst aspects of fan culture. There is no story to tell here, no characters to care about, no ideas to explore. The film is pure construct, a box built for its own sake, at long last opened with excruciating listlessness, revealing nothing but its own vapid emptiness.

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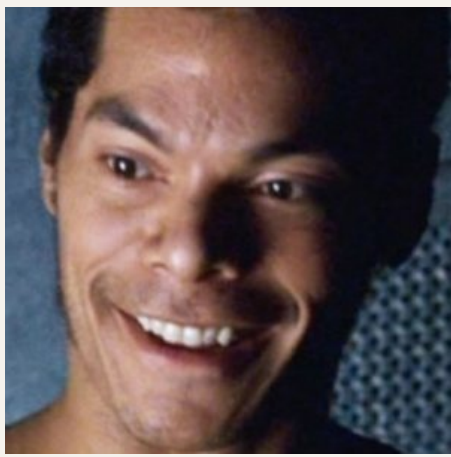
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