

Musings on Star Wars

Episode 3:TLJ - the Nature of the Force

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As a lifelong Star Wars fan, (no recollection of a time that I was not familiar with or a fan of Star Wars), I find myself slightly annoyed by fair weather fans of the franchise. You know, the ones that come out of the woodwork saying whatever new Star Wars thing coming out will be the best thing ever only to join the drain train immediately after its release (realize I am writing this after Episode 8: The Last Jedi was released in theaters).

Like all art, it is beholden to its creators, NOT its consumers. Like all pop art, it rises & Falls on the whims of public opinion. Like all long-standing, multi-generational franchises, it relates to a loyal fan base while attempting to reach a new one, In that spectrum, I would lie lie in the 2nd generation of the fan base. These were my favorite childhood movies and they helped shape my standards for the space opera (read science fiction adventure) genre.

The recent fair weather tide of criticism bent towards The Last Jedi left me typically perturbed. I avoided most of it before enjoying the film myself, choosing to view it with an open heart rather than a critical eye as any genuine fan would. It takes effort to do either, so I consciously choose the open heart approach, giving the production team and cast the benefit of the doubt. I was very entertained by the film (told a friend my face hurt from all the smiling). I genuinely loved it and consider it a valuable member of the series (do NOT ask me which film is my favorite) So, you will not find me joining the tide of criticism from the fair weather detractors. Instead, I want to direct my thoughts towards reasoning why the detractors are misguided in their criticism. I believe there are two keys that the fair weather detractors are missing in their general assessment of the Star Wars universe, particularly as it is portrayed. in the sequels (7:TSA, 8:TLJ)

EU Lives! (kinda)

The expanded universe whatever disappointment a fair weather detractor may say they experience with these films, they pale in comparison to the total and necessary erasure of matured expanded universe. For those unfamiliar with the expanded universe, it primarily spans the extensive novelization of post ROTS (Return of the Sith) events in the Star Wars universe. Most notably starting with the Heir to the Empire trilogy through the Vong wars. The story lines, character development, and events within this collection far surpasses anything possible in a movie series of any length. It was also in this collection that my Star Wars heart lies. I understand and wholly agree with the sequel's development team's decision to classify the Expanded Universe as legends and essentially erase all of that history. There would have been no clear or viable path to reproduce any of those works without producing more extensive and credible criticism than these new works (the sequels) would. Film adaptations of novels are already fraught with peril. Given the scale of expectation placed on the Star Wars franchise, this would have been utter disaster. Instead of dealing with fair weather detractors, the sequel team would have been facing a firing squad composed of long time, heavily vested genuine fans with certainty.

It was a much better decision to let us down firmly and completely with the reclassification of the EU works and a commitment to moving in a fresh direction. This is NOT to say that the Expanded Universe is dead, on the contrary I find that many of the new storyline and technology developments in the sequels are either derived from or a credit to the extensive works done by the Expanded Universe authors. This has been my peace with that decision, that even though those stories could NOT persist, many of these elements could be adopted or revised in the sequels. My thanks to the development team for doing that.

Fair weather detractors miss this point: that although they are not canon, the creative works of the EU are playing a creative role in the sequels. To those detractors, my advice is to pick the brain of a real fan.

The Force Itself (and the nature of said Force)

The 101 on the Force is that it is an energy that is generated by and binds all living things. It has a light side (championed by the Jedi) and a dark side (championed by the Sith). This explanation is the basis for most conversation and creative works related to the Star Wars Universe. It is also powerfully naive.

The 201 on the Force is as follows and lives comfortably alongside the above 101 principles.

1. the Force has a will (Qui-Gonn Episode 1:TPM)
2. the Force is a single, consistent thing, NOT two.
3. the Force is both light and dark, not either. It is essentially a heterogeneous gray (composed of both light and dark aspects that do not mingle well).

People like simplistic good/evil paradigms in their stories. We like the black hat/white hat element of the old westerns. We appreciate the villain entering from stage left (literal meaning of the word sinister) and the hero from stage right ("he's always right, you know"). Because of this, the intense dark and light paradigms of the classic trilogy appealed to a broad fan base and generally persists in

tone and feel for the franchise. The Sith use darks and reds thematically and the Jedi lights and blues/greens. The deeper (201) explanation of the Force shatters this simplicity. The Force is not a light Force and a dark Force, it is both at the same time, hence, anyone that uses the Force has access to both the light and dark sides/aspects of the Force. The Jedi were simply a light side only religious order and the Sith their dark-side counter part. This point brings to light an important tendency of the Force: it offsets extreme expressions of itself. This is why there was a dark side singularity at Yoda's refuge at Dagobah (the cave) as well as at the original Jedi temple (Luke's refuge) - the well. Neither the Sith nor the Jedi embrace the Force in its fullness, they embrace the aspect of their choosing.

Like the Blind man and the Elephant they claim religious superiority on the fringes of their religious subject. Understanding this nature of the Force explains the complex developments of the Star Wars characters that are highly Force sensitive. In trying to adhere to either extreme, they are predictably drawn to the other direction like gravity, likewise, the Masters of either aspect are as blind as they are powerful, supremely skilled at relating to their Force aspect of choice and blind to the rest of it out of trained and willful ignorance. To be fully embraced, the Force necessarily pits the extremists against each other exposing both for their strengths and their weaknesses. This is the core nature of the Star Wars universe itself, a self conflicted universe of co-existent light and dark adherents battling each other in search of an idealistic balance. This is the context of that all Force adherent characters need to be contextualized.

For example:

Yoda: Powerful, Blind to Palpatine's plans.

Palpatine: Mastermind, overconfident.

Anakin: Most powerful, chooses to embrace fear, redeemed through love.

Luke: Child of Anakin, (powerful) idealist, optimist-cannot effectively handle failure, yet accomplishes the near impossible.

Ben: Grandchild of Anakin (powerful) bad relational base (family) enamored by grandfather's legacy (Vader).

These are just a few of the key characters. As you can see, their relationship to the Force stems from their character, not vice versa, and if they choose an extreme, they become both powerful and blind. In this light, perhaps the most powerful Force adept would be one that could resolve light and dark within them requiring a complexity rarely found in any character. I doubt such a solution should ever be pursued. This is , after all Star Wars.

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