



## 'Return of the Jedi': Looking Back Before Looking Forward

story by Glen Ryan Tadych  
 glen.ryan.tadych@publicnewsonline.com

As *Public News* looks back on the last two weeks, I finally get to dish out my first Star Wars piece with nothing better than a Star Wars Day commemoration.

Now, to avoid any confusion regarding timeliness, I'd like to clarify that I'm recognizing the true Star Wars Day—May 25—as opposed to the other group of Star Wars fans who continually choose to celebrate the late Margaret Thatcher's 1979 electoral victory in the United Kingdom—May 4. I wrote a similar piece last year explaining the difference in significance between the two dates, but as I am now serving a new audience, I'd like to briefly provide the facts once more.

The phrase, "May the Fourth be with you," originally emerged as a congratulatory message not only for Thatcher's general electoral victory in 1979, but also she was the first female British prime minister. Her party bought

an ad in the London Evening News stating, "May the Fourth be with you, Maggie. Congratulations," after the election. Upon Star Wars fans' official recognition of the date in correlation to George Lucas' franchise four years ago, May 4 became a gargantuan commercialized annual celebration profiting

both the franchise, and now The Walt Disney Company.

Myself and many other fans choose not to pair May 4 with such significance, as we

perceive it to be nothing more than a gimmick. For us, May 25—the release date for the original film in 1977—is the true Star Wars Day, and the date which should be universally acknowledged as such.

Of course, in light of such a debate, some out there would probably say, "Who the hell cares?" But the fact of the matter is more people care about this than one would think, asinine as it is, and that's exactly what the nerd culture of the world has to offer.

As we have a new Star Wars film hitting cinemas in December, I feel it's important to touch on the film preceding (chronologically/numerically) *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* before diving into any serious discussion regarding the franchise's future. The prequels have certainly had their day in debates, discussions and being outright bashed, but now is the time for post-Galactic Civil War subject matter. And given the unfair criticism *Return of the Jedi* (1983) often receives, I've elected to focus this commemoration piece on its defense, similar to what I did with *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999) last year.

Personally, I enjoy *Jedi* just as much as the other films. Although it's not my favorite (or the best) of the franchise, as both those titles belong to *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) in my opinion, I still feel *Jedi* is a well-made and satisfying conclusion to the original trilogy. The film has a few issues when compared to its predecessors, but I don't hold it in the same negative light as many other fans. For this piece, I've chosen to examine what I feel are the three key issues have with *Jedi*.



**Han Solo**

One concern, which some might find odd, with viewers as well as the film's creative team was the continued inclusion of Han Solo (Harrison Ford). Of course, it's unfathomable to imagine a film in the original trilogy without the charming and witty space pirate. Han is probably one of the most beloved characters next to Luke and Darth Vader, so why kill him off?

As it turns out, the making-of documentary *Empire of Dreams: The Story of the Star Wars Trilogy* (2004) discloses the fact both Ford and screenwriter Lawrence Kasden wanted to kill off Han as a means of upping the tension.

Ford felt because Han had no family to leave behind, he should sacrifice himself for Luke and Leia, as well as the Rebel Alliance. Kasden felt one of the main characters should meet a tragic end early on in the film so the audience would begin to worry about the fate of everyone else. Lucas was, of course, against this. His reasons are his own, but one can suspect that he simply wanted his heroic trio to make it through to the end and have a happy ending.

Us not losing Han doesn't necessarily hurt

*Jedi*. It just prevents the film from diving into a deeper sanctum of edginess and drama. And quite frankly, I don't know if I would enjoy the film as much as I do had he been killed off, because I'd probably think, "Oh, well Han's not in this one, so that's no fun."

Some fans may be disappointed that Han lived on, but that doesn't automatically make the film terrible, and one shouldn't regard the film as such for that reason either.



**Boba Fett**

A part of the film many fans have an overwhelming grievance with is the death of Mandalorian bounty hunter Boba Fett. Not only was the character killed off in the first act without having even uttered a word, but he was also killed in what fans consider a cheap and lame manner—tumbling down the mouth of the Sarlacc Pit after his jet pack is unexpectedly and unintentionally activated by a blind Han. The result of this untimely demise led to one simple conclusion: *Jedi* sucks.

The death of Boba Fett is a subject for which opinion is polarized unlike any other in Star Wars fandom. Due to his overwhelming popularity following *Empire*, Fett's fate was



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opposed to the point writers felt the need to resurrect him in Star Wars literature (the now non-canon Expanded Universe), giving him a more significant place in the franchise. I, however, find this treatment to be unnecessary and ridiculous, and rendering Jedi awful because a minor character with an awesome outfit died too early is outright absurd.

I often think of Jay Baruchel's dialogue in *Fanboys* (2009) when discussing Fett, which I feel puts things into perspective perfectly:

"You guys have both got to stop perpetuating this myth that Boba Fett is some kind of badass, alright? What? He has a jetpack! So did The Rocketeer. Really cool! I mean, when it comes time for battle, the man's Michael Bay: All style, no substance."

The fact of the matter is Fett is a two-bit character with only four spoken lines and six and a half minutes of screen time (this does not include the animated segment from the *Star Wars Holiday Special* (1978), or *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (2002)). Yes, he succeeded where other bounty hunters failed in tracking the Millennium Falcon in Empire, and he had an awesome outfit, but that's it. At the end of the day, Fett only got by on his appearance when considering what he actually contributed to the trilogy. Hell, of his four lines, none of them were even in Jedi.

Fett admirers act as if he were Luke Skywalker, or Darth Vader for that matter, and deserved to go out in a blaze of glory. Why should a minor character get such a meaningful exit when so much else has to happen? Jedi isn't about Fett, but about the relationship between Luke and Vader, the fall of the Galactic Empire and Vader's redemption. I don't see how making a huge deal of a random, cool-looking bounty hunter adds to any of that. To say Jedi sucks simply because Fett died too early or not in fulfilling way is just stupid and not fair to the film itself.

Also, to anyone who justifies Fett's significance with random facts from a random EU book about the character: It wasn't in the movies, so it doesn't count. That being said, if the writers decide to include him in the upcoming sequel trilogy, that's a different matter altogether. And while I wouldn't be particularly happy with such a decision, there obviously isn't much I'd be able to do about it.



## Ewoks

This is probably the most significant point in terms of unfair Jedi criticism. I cannot even begin to express how much this complaint irritates the hell out of me. When Jedi bashers insult the film because it was "only made to sell toys" or "teddy bears defeated the Empire," all I hear is narrow-minded ignorance tearing apart a good movie. People my own age weren't even alive when Jedi debuted 32 years ago, so I know when they spew these irrational comments, they're only regurgitating their parents' views or those of older fans without applying critical thinking.

I will admit using Wookies instead Ewoks would have been a more awesome way to go for Jedi's climax, as this was the original intention when Lucas began drafting the story in the early 1970s. But this was also before he

split the story into three parts, effectively making Han's co-pilot a Wookie in fear of Wookies never making an appearance. When Jedi finally came along, the Wookies in the forest battle were substituted with Ewoks.

I don't see the "selling toys" point as a valid argument. It's *Star Wars*, and anything with the Star Wars name will sell itself. The filmmakers wouldn't need to insert "teddy bears" into the movie to make children's merchandise more marketable, so that point really doesn't even make sense. I simply see the Ewoks as being a way to help differentiate Chewbacca from the Endor natives since they were originally going to be Wookies. I can't say I would actually have a problem picking Chewie out from the rest of the bunch, but I can understand that reasoning more than needing to sell toys.

Plus, if you had essentially 200 Chewies assisting the Rebels in battle, the Imperials honestly wouldn't stand much of a chance. The damn thing would be over before it began. We've witnessed Chewie's strength and usefulness in combat situations, and that's just him. So in the context of what's seen in the film, an army of his kind would make the Empire's efforts on the ground a waste of time.

On the subject of the forest battle and Chewie, I'm going to say this: The Ewoks did not defeat the Empire. Such a rationale for denouncing Jedi is even dumber than Fett's death, not to mention inaccurate. Several elements contributed to the Rebels' winning the battle, and while the Ewoks certainly helped, Chewie actually deserves most of the credit.

The Rebels didn't start winning the battle until Chewie commandeered one of the enemy scout walkers. Up until that point, the Empire had supreme firepower and weaponry, and Chewie turned the tables on that disadvantage. It's actually pretty damn clever when you think about it because the whole time you're watching the battle, you're thinking, "Why don't they just take one of the walkers?" What would make the battle stupid is if Chewie hadn't taken such action.

The Ewoks weren't useless though. Their numbers and surprise offensive caused the Imperial troops to break formation, scattering throughout the forest to subdue them, and provided the Rebels the necessary distraction to escape capture; i.e. divide and conquer. Some of the Ewoks' weapons and methods were ineffective, but not all of them. Stoning Stormtroopers from a tree, which is actually somewhat brutal when thinking about it, will certainly do some damage. And before anyone goes, "Yeah, but they're wearing helmets and armor," think about the physical injury football players endure. Regardless whether you're wearing a helmet, blunt trauma to the head is going to hurt, and a stone the size of your head still has the potential to kill you.

Besides, a Stormtrooper's "armor" is essentially just a military uniform. Luke even describes it this way in the original film. Off the top of my head, I can't even think of a moment in the original trilogy where a Stormtrooper's attire is even referred to as "armor." So I really don't know where the notion that Stormtroopers are invulnerable to anything and everything comes from, especially given the fact they're always killed with ease (often as a result of their own actions), and don't have accuracy worth a damn. Militarily speaking, Stormtroopers are pretty worthless, so the Ewoks being able to take them on shouldn't come as much of a shock.

Regarding the walkers, the Ewoks' traps used against them aren't that far-fetched either. The swinging logs could totally crush a scout walker's hollow head—as was demonstrated in episode 208 of *MythBusters*—and unless the vehicle is made out of vibranium, I

see no reason why this device wouldn't work given the right set of circumstances.

The rolling log trap was another ingenious feat of the Ewoks, and strategically similar to how the rebels brought down an AT-AT in Empire. A scout walker seems like it would be difficult to maneuver through rugged terrain considering it's basically a giant box balanced on two thin legs. I can only imagine attempting to drive one over a stream of logs wouldn't end too well.

The Ewoks are certainly included in Jedi for comic effect, but they do serve a purpose,

and when one breaks down the forest battle, it isn't hard to see the Ewoks aren't 100 percent ridiculous, or that Chewie is ultimately the real hero.

Jedi may not be better than its two predecessors, but it does a fine job wrapping up the trilogy and keeping the space fantasy atmosphere alive. It's a good movie, and naysayers' arguments for what drags the movie down only diminish the film's true quality and legacy. Fans should appreciate Jedi for what it is, and use the film as a catalyst to gear up for *Force Awakens* in December.

## NEW FILMS THIS WEEK & NEXT



SPY

### May 29

#### San Andreas

PG-13 114 min Action | Drama | Thriller In the aftermath of a massive earthquake in California, a rescue-chopper pilot makes a dangerous journey across the state in order to rescue his estranged daughter.

Director: Brad Peyton

Stars: Dwayne Johnson, Alexandra Daddario, Carla Gugino, Colton Haynes

A prequel set before the haunting of the Lambert family that reveals how gifted psychic Elise Rainier reluctantly agrees to use her ability to contact the dead in order to help a teenage girl who has been targeted by a dangerous supernatural entity.

Director: Leigh Whannell

Stars: Dermot Mulroney, Stefanie Scott, Angus Sampson, Leigh Whannell

### Aloha

#### PG-13 102 min Comedy | Drama | Romance

A celebrated military contractor returns to the site of his greatest career triumphs and re-connects with a long-ago love while unexpectedly falling for the hard-charging Air Force watchdog assigned to him.

Director: Cameron Crowe

Stars: Emma Stone, Rachel McAdams, Bradley Cooper, John Krasinski

### Love & Mercy

#### PG-13 120 min Biography | Drama | Music

In the 1960s, Beach Boys leader Brian Wilson struggles with emerging psychosis as he attempts to craft his avant-garde pop masterpiece. In the 1980s, he is a broken, confused man under the 24-hour watch of shady therapist Dr. Eugene Landy.

Director: Bill Pohlad

Stars: Elizabeth Banks, John Cusack, Paul Dano, Paul Giamatti

### June 5

#### Entourage

#### R Comedy

Movie star Vincent Chase, together with his boys Eric, Turtle, and Johnny, are back - and back in business with super agent-turned-studio head Ari Gold.

Director: Doug Ellin

Stars: Adrian Grenier, Jeremy Piven, Kevin Connolly, Jerry Ferrara

### Testament of Youth

#### PG-13 129 min Biography | Drama | History | War

A British woman recalls coming of age during World War I.

Director: James Kent

Stars: Alicia Vikander, Taron Egerton, Colin Morgan, Dominic West

### Spy

#### R 120 min Action | Comedy

A desk-bound CIA analyst volunteers to go undercover to infiltrate the world of a deadly arms dealer, and prevent diabolical global disaster.

Director: Paul Feig

Stars: Jude Law, Raad Rawi, Melissa McCarthy, Jessica Chaffin

### Insidious: Chapter 3

#### Certificate PG-13 97 min Horror

### A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence

#### PG-13 101 min Comedy | Drama

A story centered on a pair of traveling salesmen who peddle novelty items.

Director: Roy Andersson

Stars: Holger Andersson, Nils Westblom, Viktor Gyllenberg, Lotti Törnros