

‘Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker’ gives great visuals, takes no chances

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 141 minutes

The latest trilogy of *Star Wars* films has had a storied and contentious path, with many loving the new chapters and others disparaging the series. In particular, the previous installment, which some fans said dispensed with story elements that they held most dear. For this reviewer, the franchise sequels have served as enjoyable if insubstantial popcorn entertainment. The latest chapter is *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*, which attempts to revise some recently added elements, link itself back to the original trilogy, and provide a stirring franchise finale.

It begins with the familiar scrawl that tells us about the First Order’s ever-growing power, the weakening of the Resistance and an even more powerful and deadly foe now amassing an incredible force to take control over the entire galaxy. Naturally, Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) makes contact with the mysterious figure and appears happy to have the assistance. Concerned and desperate to seek out this new evil power, Rey (Daisy Ridley), Finn (John Boyega), Poe (Oscar Isaac), and Chewbacca (Joonas Suotamo) attempt to locate a lost “wayfinder” (which is essentially a space compass) that will lead them to their greatest enemy, as well as a final and decisive battle. Along the way, Rey also discovers the identity of her parents and her true lineage.

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This movie looks great as it bounces from world to world and the characters seek out that all-important trinket. Impressive sights include the leads flying through a floating asteroidal ice deposit, as well as an attempt to get to the wreckage of a space station sitting in a tumultuous ocean with hundred-foot waves. It all looks incredible, and the visuals are further assisted by elaborately choreographed action scenes as the heroes are chased by Kylo Ren and engage in light-saber duels. While the events feel a little too familiar, the climax involving another epic space battle, features plenty of eye-popping visual effects. On a technical level, this movie is aces and many will enjoy the fast pace as they are taken from world to world.

However, some of the problems that this reviewer has had with previous films are still present. For much of the film, Rey is once again an unstoppable force. So much so that viewers will feel little in the way of tension as she and her cadre take on their compass-finding activities. Villains should always be intimidating and as clever, if not more so, than the protagonists.

However, the First Order generals and stormtroopers aren't a threat, serving as mere cannon-fodder for the leads to take down (sometimes without breaking a sweat). This is especially true during a raid on a Star Destroyer whose armed forces seem entirely inept. The movie does correct the issue by re-introducing its not-so-secret villain in the final act. This figure is a force to be reckoned with. However, it makes one wonder why the production team waited until the last 30 minutes of the entire series to bring this element to the forefront.

There are many jokes and attempts at humor that also fall completely flat. And the movie relies heavily on nostalgia to elicit an emotional reaction. That's to be expected to some degree, but at times these moments feel very forced. Lines from the original trilogy are reworked by returning characters and the movie rushes to try and wedge every *Star Wars* character of the past into the finish.

And while Rey's and Kylo Ren's stories are adequately wrapped up, it becomes very clear by the close of the chapter that the filmmakers never really figured out exactly what to do with some of the supporting characters, including Finn.

Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker is a perfectly decent and enjoyable sci-fi action movie with great images. And it's a bit harsh to play the comparison game with earlier chapters that remain iconic to viewers of a certain age. Still, while entertaining in the moment and providing a striking backdrop here and there, this series has always felt unwilling to take any real chances, good or bad. And when it has, it has stepped back and altered course to expected destinations, content

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to reference and repeat elements from the originals. And perhaps that’s why my reaction to the recent sequels is ultimately tepid enjoyment instead of thrills and fevered excitement.

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