



# Vader's Back!

Final 'Star Wars' film turns to the dark side to win back fans

By VINCENT CIVITILLO

What would you do to save the life of the one you love most? How far would you go? Would you sacrifice everything you hold dear: your friends, your teachings, your soul?

This is the premise of the final installment of the *Star Wars* series, *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, which finds Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) caught between saving the galaxy or the love of his life (Padme Amidala, reprised by Natalie Portman).

After three weaker outings since 1983, writer/director George Lucas has served up a cinematic explosion which

begins and ends in all-out war. Characters die, limbs are lost and hearts are broken, but best of all, the story holds up so that viewers truly care for the tragedies that unfold before them. *Star Wars* has, at last, returned to its darker roots from the days of *The Empire Strikes Back*, only teased upon in *Attack of the Clones*.

Indeed, *Sith* is not for the younger target audience of *The Phantom Menace*. The darker film earns its PG-13 rating through sadistic displays of graphic violence in addition to scenes that depict the murdering of children and the defeat of primary heroes.

However, older viewers capable of stomaching the violence will find that genuinely important themes are



explored as the democracy is ripped apart voluntarily by its people and replaced with a tyrannical dictatorship. The people of the once grand Republic hand over their liberties to the rising emperor in exchange for security during the war that he started; a premise not unfamiliar to those even loosely versed in world history... or current events.

Deeper into the script are questions of fate and morality that pull at the definitions of good and evil within a man. Skywalker finds himself in numerous ethical dilemmas that test his very soul as he puts his passions ahead of his teachings and consequently finds, through his hubris, that the road to Hell truly was paved with the best of intentions. His relationship with mentor Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor of *Moulin Rouge*) deteriorates culminating in the most passionate battle of the franchise as best friends collide and destinies are forged.

Aiding in the film's darker feeling is returning

**THE FORCE IS WITH THEM—(From left to right) Darth Vader looks down on the fiery planet Mustafar; Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) and Padme Amidala (Natalie Portman) embrace as the future becomes grim; Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) prepares to fight his best friend; and Samuel L. Jackson provides his trademark bad-ass style as Jedi Master Mace Windu.**

composer John Williams, who contributes perhaps the most emotional score the series has presented in decades. Selections such as "Battle of the Heroes," "Anakin's Betrayal" and "Anakin vs. Obi-Wan" build on the powerful style of "Duel of the Fates" from the first prequel, but utilize much darker melodies that put the viewer right into the desired mind-set that this is the *Star Wars* universe they have come to love and cherish on the brink of destruction.

Fans will be pleased to see tie-ins with other films in the series (particularly the prequels) where mysteries of the franchise are unveiled for the first time including the origins of Skywalker's virgin birth, explanations of Yoda and Obi-Wan's ability to become one with the Force and, most anticipated of all, the details surrounding the rise of Darth Vader.

On the other hand, some sequences, such as the finale, slow down the pace of the film as they exist exclusively to explain plot points from the other episodes. In addition, die-hards may find that some pieces of the newly-completed puzzle contradict or raise questions about previously established continuity (see Luke and Leia's conversation on Endor in *Return of the Jedi*, for example).

Such petty grievances aside, *Revenge of the Sith* is an emotionally enveloping tragedy—a rarity in theaters these days—a triumph that truly lives up to its own monumental hype. 🗡️