

Return of the Jedi

The film this scene is taken from and analyzed is Return of the Jedi, the final chapter in the original Star Wars trilogy. The film was released to the public May 25, 1983. It was directed by Richard Marquand, and the director of photography was Alan Hume. The sound designer was Ben Burtt, and the movie was scored by John Williams. Return of the Jedi is the final movie in the Star Wars trilogy.

The short version of the plot is that Luke Skywalker rescues Han Solo from captivity, and they meet up with the Rebel Alliance with the goal of destroying the Empire's newest Death Star. They learn that Darth Vader and the Emperor himself are overseeing the construction of this Death Star. They attack the Death Star and are successful, thus breaking the leadership of the evil Galactic Empire.

The scene I will be analyzing is the final scene between the Emperor, Luke Skywalker, and Darth Vader. Luke has chosen to fully reject the Dark Side of the Force, and the Emperor begins to kill him. Darth Vader, Luke's father, evil though he is, chooses in that moment to save his son and throws the Emperor to his death.

The scene is a favorite of mine in the whole trilogy, and one of the most emotionally charged. It's a crucial point in the narrative that drastically affects the character arcs of Luke, the Emperor, and Darth Vader. The scene starts with the Emperor declaring Luke will die if he will not be turned towards the dark side. The scenes preceding this one are huge for the character of Luke Skywalker. He stares his

darkest parts in the face and truly realizes the monster he could become should he choose the dark side of the Force. He sees that he could easily become just like his father, Darth Vader. In the scene preceding this one he throws away his lightsaber and rejects the Emperor's tantalizing offer of replacing Darth Vader.

One thing that was quite interesting about this scene, as throughout the scenes preceding this one in the throne room, is the lighting. The lighting heavily emphasizes the blacks, and has lots of shadows throughout the set. Such a setup, I think, was an intentional choice to show that this was not a happy place, a good place. It was a place where evil dwelt. The light has no sort of color to it other than blue. It's very cool, and reflects the tone of the situation that Luke is in in this scene. Luke has chosen good, but at a very high price. The cool colors, other than red, contribute to the effectiveness of this scene. If this scene were lit warmly, it would be very much a joke. The scene does have other colors, but only from the light coming from various panels and the elevator. The lighting choices here are superb. They emphasize the seriousness and darkness of the situation, but isn't distracting to the viewer. By that, I mean no weird shadows or anything to distract the viewers from what is going on. One other point I thought was interesting was the lighting on the Emperor's face. His dark robe helps to reinforce his evil nature.

The other colors from the scene are quite interesting as well. One thing I've noticed is how much red plays a role in the trilogy. It's not necessarily associated only with good or evil, but shows up quite a bit. Only in the case of the lightsaber colors is red completely associated with evil, as it is the choice of Darth Vader's lightsaber. The color red also does a great job emphasizing Emperor Palpatine's decaying and

emaciated facial features. The Emperor is clearly a dying, decrepit old man, and the color red helps emphasize that in this scene as well as the rest of the movie that we see him.

The composition and cinematography of the scene is fantastic. It starts off with a medium shot of the Emperor, who can clearly see that Luke will not turn to the dark side of the Force. The framing of the shots with all 3 of them, however brief, is also well composed. The scene uses close-ups, but not to its detriment. Some movies, I have seen, can overuse closeups to ramp up the intensity of a scene. However, they end up not having the intended effect. The closeups of this scene properly convey what they need to, when they need to. The Emperor's sadistic, borderline sado-masochistic pleasure in killing Luke slowly with his Force Lightning, is very well conveyed in his closeups. Even if I hadn't seen the rest of the movie, it is also evident that Darth Vader is having a huge moral dilemma as he is witnessing the torture and inevitable death of his son. He knows he must choose one or the other, and the intensity of that choice is obvious even with just his helmet on.

The dialogue of this scene is among some of my favorite in the series, and works well for this scene. George Lucas is a great writer, not so much of a director. The Emperor's arrogance is on full display here, as in the midst of his dialogue does he not even notice that his right hand man, Darth Vader, is having a huge moral dilemma. The Emperor's strength in the dark side of the Force is also on full display as he electrocutes Luke Skywalker. The Emperor's dialogue, in both its content and delivery, seem almost dark and playful. The Emperor knows he has Luke at his mercy, and can kill him as fast or as short as he wants. His complete attention to destroying the last Jedi in the galaxy,

however, was his downfall. This is probably one of the most powerful scenes in the trilogy for Darth Vader, though he doesn't even have any dialogue. He doesn't utter a word throughout the entire scene. This is due in part to Darth's decimated state, having just been beaten by his son in a duel. In a previous scene Luke had the opportunity to kill him but refrained as that would have been Luke's final descent into the dark side. Darth's communication in this scene is purely through his face. It is no light choice, considering Darth had a hand in the downfall of the old Republic, and has been the Emperor's right hand man for many years. The cries of his son's pain prove to be unbearable to Darth Vader, who ends up choosing Luke by picking up Emperor Palpatine and throwing him to his doom. It's the end of a path only the character of Luke believed was possible. In earlier scenes Luke had tried to reach out to whatever good was left in his father only to fail. One huge point of irony in this scene, at least that I noticed, was one of the Emperor's lines he delivered to Luke, "You have paid the price for your lack of vision." The Emperor's own myopia and lack of vision is on full display here as the scene culminates in his own death at the hands of who was supposed to be his most trusted ally and right hand man.

The message in this scene is quite obvious, but really one quite profound. One must consider the character of Darth Vader in context of Star Wars history. Here was a man who betrayed the entire Old Republic, and assisted the Emperor in enslaving an Empire. In this one scene Darth's internal struggle with his evil nature and good leads him to choose redemption. Maybe not redemption in the eyes of the rest of the galaxy, but definitely redemption in the eyes of his son, Luke. Darth chose family over his own predilection towards evil, a choice that had quite a different outcome when he was

younger. In one fell moment, he chooses love for his son over the entire Empire that he has spent most of his life building and leading. He even chose it over his own health. The Emperor's Force Lightning hits Darth Vader as Darth picks him up over his head, and then Darth throws him to his doom. The shock to Darth, however, ends up being too much to bear. Darth Vader is mostly machine, not man, which is why dying this way, at least in Vader's case, seems quite plausible.

The sound design here in this scene is also quite solid. The main things they had to focus on in this scene was the characters, and Palpatine's force lightning. The sound of Luke's torture through lightning only seem to get more and more intense as the scene continues on. This absolutely contributes to the scene as the Emperor continues killing Luke, the more pained and conflicted Darth Vader becomes. Mark Hamill does a great job here conveying the pain of being electrocuted. The other item of mention here is the sound when the Emperor dies. The wave that is generated from the bottom of the shaft is as much sound as visible. It really makes the viewer believe in the realness of that shockwave. Another fact worth noting is that Ben Burtt, the sound designer, actually received Academy Award nominations for best sound and best sound editing.

The special effects of the scene are impressive. What impresses me most is this isn't an era where CG characters and set pieces could be composited in on a computer. Granted, the technology of the effects industry had come a long way by Return of the Jedi, but still nonetheless impressive. The main effect on display here is the Emperor's force lightning. The effects here do what they are supposed to do- play a role in the story without necessarily distracting the viewer. The Emperor's "force lightning" is the

main reason why Luke is in such dire straits, and is Palpatine's method in killing him. The lightning is a reflector of Palpatine's emotions. As Palpatine continues, the lightning gets more and more intense. The intensity of the Emperor's hate for Luke is reflected in the intensity of the lightning. One other thing worth noting about it is that it seems to reflect the Emperor's love of violence toward his enemies. The lightning is almost more than a visual effect- it is more akin to a waveform of a sound. It wasn't consistent in the scene and reflected what was going on in the character using it. The Emperor's fury over Luke rejecting the dark side, rejecting him, is channeled through his force lightning. The other major effect in the scene is the shockwave released by the Emperor's death. It reinforces the importance killing such a character carries, as well as the power that was inside of him. The death of the Emperor is akin to cutting the head off of a snake. Palpatine was the most powerful Sith in the galaxy. The effects also are in line with the cool color scheme of it all, too.

The score by John Williams is what really gives me chills. Every note, every instrument, contributes to the intensity of the entire scene. The Academy was right to nominate his score for an Academy Award. It's not an overpowering score, but rather one that highlights and intensifies the mood of the scene as you are watching it, like the ebb and flow of a wave.

The scene concludes with Luke holding his newly redeemed father in his arms. Darth Vader falls over, knowing his time is short. There's no clue of it in the scene, and reeks of rampant speculation, but I'd also like to think he collapsed almost in relief that he had finally chosen good over evil after making a lifetime of consistently choosing evil.

This scene is one of the most gripping in the entire series, and holds special significance for anyone who has seen the Star Wars Trilogy.

Sources

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