

***SAGA
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An academic Star Wars fan journal

The Saga Journal is a monthly on-line academic review dedicated to the in-depth study of the *Star Wars* saga as presented in George Lucas's six-film series. Our goal is to deliver one of the best collections of scholarly essays on the subject that the internet has to offer.

Here at the Saga Journal, we believe *Star Wars* is more than just an enjoyable space opera set in a galaxy far, far away. We recognize it as a modern myth, a cultural phenomenon all its own. We want to encourage the literary exploration of all aspects of the story as presented in the Prequel and Original Trilogy films.

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The Making of a Prince: Palpatine as a student of Machiavelli

by Reihla

“In order to become the master, the politician poses as the servant.” – Charles de Gaulle¹

The full story of the *Star Wars* saga’s most powerful villain, Emperor Palpatine, has only just come to light. The Original Trilogy painted him as a powerful figure, with Darth Vader as his second and a whole host of military power at his command. Even so, it gave very little information on the means by which he acquired that exalted station. Only with the completion of the prequel trilogy can we fully understand the dual nature of Palpatine and his alias, Darth Sidious. With the release of *Revenge of the Sith*, we can now be aware of how he came to power and the true nature of his leadership.

When people speak of Palpatine they often use the word “Machiavellian” to describe his manipulations. This paper will explore how applicable that descriptive is using Machiavelli’s most famous literary work, *The Prince*. Scholars agree that *The Prince* is nothing so much as an analysis of the means by which political power is achieved, retained and lost. It is a handbook, of sorts, for rulers who wish to build their own empire. It is my intent to use *The Prince* and other studies of Machiavellian principles to assess whether or not Palpatine has truly earned the Machiavellian label.

A bit about Machiavelli

In the sixteenth century, Italy was a republic comprised of independent city-states. In many ways it was similar to the Galactic Republic, with various leaders jockeying for power and influence. Florence was among these Italian city-states and Niccoló Machiavelli served there as secretary and adviser to the Chancellery. When the Catholic Church – then its own political and military power – defeated the French in 1512 they demanded that the French-allied Florence secede from the republic and bow to the royal rule of the Medici family. Machiavelli, heretofore a servant of the strong republican government, suddenly found himself exiled in the face of the new monarchy. It was from this forced retirement that he wrote his best-known work, *The Prince*.

It was no secret that Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* to gain favor with Lorenzo de Medici, the newly named monarch of Florence. The book – dedicated to Medici – is what many political theorists call “a handbook on how an aspiring dictator might gain and retain power.”² It is ironic that the Medici prince did not find the book favorable and left Machiavelli in exile. Evidently, if Machiavelli’s political philosophies worked for others, they did not work for the man himself.

[I]t could be said that Palpatine embodies the role of a machiavel in Lucas’s epic. He is the epitome of treachery...

The dichotomy of Machiavelli’s attempt to gain favor with the new monarchy so soon after the destruction of his beloved republic is, more than any of his works, the prime example of what makes his name synonymous with duplicity. Renaissance playwrights used his stereotype when they needed a model villain. This character, called a “machiavel,” embodied the negatives of deceptiveness and falsehood. One such character in a play by Christopher Marlowe is quoted as saying, “I count religion but a childish toy, and hold there is no sin but ignorance.”³ That line is just as characteristic of

Machiavelli as it is of Palpatine. In fact, it could be said that Palpatine embodies the role of a machiavel in Lucas's epic. He is the epitome of treachery, and, as we are told many times in the *Revenge of the Sith* novelization, "treachery is the way of the Sith."⁴

Palpatine's rise to power

Early chapters of *The Prince* explain different ways a monarch can come to power – through fortune, through skill, through popularity (election), and through villainy. Palpatine, or his alter ego Darth Sidious, at some point in his quest to place himself in a position of ultimate power, employs each of these methods.

Machiavelli's most enduring advice to the prince is when he explains that a leader should appear to have as many virtues as possible while hiding his vices well. Palpatine implemented this advice exceptionally well by adopting a dual identity. As the Sith Lord, Darth Sidious, he was free to exercise options he could not as the Galaxy's most watched politician. Though Palpatine himself engineers a great many events, it was through Sidious that he was always able to control both sides of every conflict.

Power thru fortune

Machiavelli believed that fortune, or luck, played a significant part in the acquiring of any dominion. "Fortune is the arbiter of one half of our actions...she still leaves control of the other half...to us."⁵ Of all influences on Palpatine's upward climb, Fortune seems the most rare. Very little was left to chance except, perhaps, for the role romantic love played in the downfall of Anakin Skywalker. Certainly, as Darth Vader, he proved to be one of Palpatine's greatest weapons, yet no machination of man could have guaranteed that young Anakin would fall in love with Padmé Amidala, much less that she would come to return his affection. The death of Padmé – though it could be argued that he didn't engineer it, it certainly was a vehicle for turning Anakin Skywalker.

Power thru skill

No one could argue that Palpatine wasn't a skilled politician. His ability to manipulate circumstances to suit his own ends is present throughout the saga. The chain of events has a common thread: Palpatine carefully creates every crisis, and then subtly engineers each rescue. Perhaps the greatest example was the means by which he became Supreme Chancellor of the Republic.

As Senator of Naboo, Palpatine manipulated the Galactic Senate to tax trade routes in order to raise funds. As Sidious, he persuaded the Trade Federation to protest the taxation by blockading Naboo. When Supreme Chancellor Valorum sent Jedi to end the blockade, Sidious ordered the Trade Federation to invade Naboo, thus escalating the crisis. When Amidala, Queen of Naboo, came to Coruscant to plead her case to the Senate, Palpatine convinced her that Valorum would not act to save her planet. He then persuaded her to call for a vote of no confidence, the motion that subsequently caused Valorum to be dismissed from office. Sympathy for Naboo resulted in Palpatine then being nomination for and elected to the position of Supreme Chancellor. At the end of the complex manipulation of people and events, Palpatine claimed the prize – the Chancellorship – regardless of the cost to his own planet.

Power thru civil selection/popularity

It also can't be denied that Palpatine was a popular leader. From the moment he was appointed as Supreme Chancellor he gave the outward appearance of a genial man possessed of gentle wisdom and quiet strength. It was precisely this reputation that allowed Palpatine to remain in office during the

Clone Wars. He had cultivated the trust of the people and a majority of the Senate and they repaid it by allowing him to stay in office far longer than the law allowed.

Those who come to power by civil means must always be mindful to maintain the support of the people because such support is crucial in times of adversity. Machiavelli wrote that among other things, “Whoever takes upon him to reform the government of a city, must, if his measures are to be well received and carried out with general approval, preserve at least the semblance of existing methods, so as not to appear to the people to have made any change in the old order of things,”⁶ Palpatine would have done well to remember this once he declared himself Emperor.

Power through villainy

Toward the end of the Clone Wars Palpatine’s methods changed dramatically. Much like Agathocles and Oliverotto, two examples from *The Prince*,⁷ Palpatine switched to killing his strongest opponents. He arranged the execution of the Separatist faction, including Sidious’s own apprentice and almost succeeded in killing all of the Jedi. Unfortunately Palpatine failed to achieve his objective in that he left at least two Jedi very much alive. This oversight would prove a strong contributing factor to his eventual downfall. Secondly, although he covered his crimes well and could not be linked to either massacre, he did not win glory directly from the downfall of his enemies. In Machiavelli’s eyes, achieving glory from victory was the only thing that made a win legitimate. One thing is certain, though. Machiavelli would have admired the fact that Palpatine did not let morality or concern for life limit what he was willing to do to achieve power.

Founding an Empire

It is an interesting coincidence that Emperor Palpatine founded the same type of monarchy as the Medici prince – one that was formerly a republic. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli describes three methods for maintaining a newly conquered republic. Of these, only one really applies to Palpatine: the method of allowing the current laws to stand while creating allies among the governed. Palpatine allowed the Galactic Senate to remain in existence long after the declaration of a new Empire had made it powerless. Though still professing a love for democracy, he created regional governors to do the actual controlling of the physical territories represented by the Senators.

Whether or not Palpatine was fully corrupt before he became Emperor, is something we can only guess at. The fact that he was a Sith sways us to believe he was. One thing we do know. He was not satisfied with the power he wielded as the Supreme Chancellor of the Republic. Reasons for his dissatisfaction were probably many. It seems safe to assume that he wanted even the non-republic systems to bow to his authority. To accomplish that he had to create a dictatorship that could encompass systems such as those in the outer rim and the disenfranchised Separatist systems – those that didn’t fall under the jurisdiction of the Republic.

Surprisingly enough, it was the power he held as Chancellor that made his place at the heart of the conspiracy so difficult for the Jedi to spot. Mace Windu says outright in the Episode III novelization that Palpatine is “not a suspect because he already rules the galaxy.”⁸

Soldiers and military matters

Without a doubt, Palpatine’s greatest Machiavellian achievement was the building of two separate armies and the engineering of a galactic scale war where these two forces would oppose each other.

In Chapter 12 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli declares that all governments should have good arms in addition to good laws. In addition, he insists that a prince must not “take anything as his profession but war, its institutions and its discipline.”⁹ He felt that both worked in tandem to keep order. As Machiavelli suggests, Palpatine eschews armies of citizens or mercenaries. Instead, he came up with two new types of soldiers, neither of which could Machiavelli ever have imagined.

For the Separatists, he selected allies who could build an incomparable droid army. Mechanical and emotionless, these soldiers executed any command flawlessly and instantly, answering only to their programmed commander. The droid army answered to the Separatist leaders who were under the command of Sidious’ own apprentice, Count Dooku.

For the other side, the Army of the Republic was comprised of clones. Human beings created for the sole purpose of war and genetically engineered for loyalty and obedience. Though these soldiers served the Republic under the command of the Jedi, the hidden surprise was that Palpatine had a failsafe. When the time was right and he personally gave the order, Order 66, these soldiers would turn on and kill their Jedi commanders. The effect was devastating and resulted in the near extinction of the Jedi Order. For Palpatine, it meant the elimination of the largest stumbling block to his Empire.

The fall of an Empire

Machiavelli’s teachings in latter chapters of *The Prince* insist that a despot must avoid being despised and hated. Those currents of emotion among the ruled only lead to revolt from within. Machiavelli was quite specific that internal unrest would lead to conspiracy and attack. Instead, a monarch should strive to be both feared and loved. Failing the accomplishment of both, it is better to be feared than adored.

The lesson of being feared was one Palpatine and those who serve him understood. By the time the Empire had been around for some twenty years we see Palpatine’s loyal officer, Governor Tarkin, telling his officers, “Fear will keep the local systems in line. Fear of this battle station.”

In the end it was not fear that brought about the failure of the Empire. Rather, it was the righteous anger of the people as more and more of their freedoms were taken away. That, coupled with such outrageously cruel acts as the pointless destruction of Alderaan, and the dissolution of the Senate made people more uncomfortable than they were afraid. The climate was ripe for the very thing Machiavelli warns against: revolt from within.

Though Palpatine had showed himself capable of exercising most of Machiavelli’s teachings, he ceased to follow them once he declared himself Emperor. It seemed Sidious never feared losing his power and, thus, did not protect it as fully as he should have. In the end his Empire was weakened and vulnerable, much as he was vulnerable to the very individual who had once given him unwavering loyalty.

Machiavelli explains well why princes lose their thrones. Either they lack military strength, do not have the confidence of those they rule, or they do not have a loyal nobility. Any one single thing or a combination of all could bring about the downfall of the sovereign system. In Palpatine’s case, the Empire was still a strong military force. It was the latter two factors that proved to be his downfall.

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Recommendation

Pictures of *Star Wars*

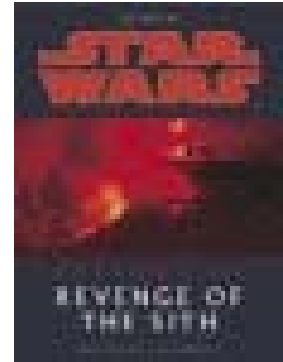
Title: The Art of *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*

Author: J.W. Rinzler

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Reviewed by lazypadawan.

Every *Star Wars* fan should own a set of the movies...and a set of the Art Of books. From the great conceptual art created for the classic trilogy by the legendary Ralph McQuarrie and Joe Johnston to the wonderful prequel art by Doug Chiang, Iain McCaig, Ryan Church, Erik Tiemens, etc., these books gave fans the chance to see the evolution of places, things, and inhabitants of the galaxy far, far away. Fans could also wonder at what might have been with pieces that did not make it into the films. In any case, the art helped make that fantasy universe just that much more believable, with a rich culture that inspired beautiful works.

This Art Of book works as a companion piece to *The Making of Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, which was written by the same author. It focuses on the production's art department, which got underway in mid-2002 shortly after *Attack of the Clones* was released. At this point, George Lucas did not have a script but had ideas of places, events, and new characters. It's fascinating to see the artists try and influence the story, which ought to surprise those who envision Lucas as a creative megalomaniac. Ian McCaig in particular had interesting ideas on what should become of Padmé in the film. In one drawing, she is doubled over in pain because carrying two babies strong in the Force was too much for her and Yoda stands by her, helpless. In another series of paintings, McCaig had the idea that Padmé tries to kill Anakin with a dagger after he has turned to the Dark Side, out of love. Once Lucas pitches an idea to his artists, he gives them a remarkable amount of free reign, as one could see with the wild variety of concept art created for General Grievous.

The art department wields perhaps more influence over the look and feel of this film than any other aspect of the production. Their work is seen in the sets, the animatics and visual effects, the props, and the costumes. The media they use vary from pencils to computer graphics. The artists themselves are talented and hard-working; at their busiest they were often working six days a week, even working all night. Despite all of that work, only a small fraction makes it into the final cut.

A great deal of that work however, is published in this book and in *The Making Of...* book. All of it is gorgeous, especially the digital paintings of Naboo and Mustafar. One can also see in detail various set pieces.

The only drawback is that unlike the other Art Of books, this one does not have a complete film script. Otherwise, it's a must-have for your coffee table whether it's the paperback edition or the pricier hardcover.

Discovering *Star Wars*

Arathen

I first saw *Star Wars* around the age of 8. I remember being in my grandmother's house, with my brother and dad. I thought it was weird, but sort of interesting, maybe. Later, my older brother got some of the toys and we played *Star Wars*. That's what really got me into it, and when I saw it later I understood it better. I loved playing *Star Wars* because I could be so creative; from what I remember, I nearly always made up a new character, always a good guy Jedi. It was loads of fun, even though my brother overpowered me mercilessly. Anyways, that is what I loved about *Star Wars* – the Jedi. I loved Yoda, still do. Obi-Wan was nice, and Luke was always my favorite character. For a long time ROTJ was my favorite of the movies. I loved the end fight scene so much! I loved the ideas about good and evil and how you can change (i.e., Vader).

So, naturally, having liked these characters, I loved Episode 1, saw it on opening day! I loved the Jedi, especially the idea of the Council. I enjoyed Episode 2 a lot, but I LOVED EPISODE 3! Gosh, I cried, it was so well done! Anyways, I love *Star Wars*. After being almost the same age as Ani when Episode 1 came out, I've grown and matured as each movie was released, which may be part of why I love it, I've grown up with it. Interesting, eh?

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