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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.

EDITORIAL TEAM

ami-padme

Keith Palmer

Lady Aeryn

lazypadawan

Matril

Reihla

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“Distressing Damsel”: Padmé Amidala as Fairy Tale Heroine by Lady Aeryn

Star Wars, with its elements of royalty, supernaturally powerful beings, star-crossed romance, and battles against evil, has been labeled by many over the years as a modern-day myth, and modern-day fairy tale. One of its more openly fairy tale-like threads is in the life of prequel heroine and Skywalker matriarch Padmé Amidala.

The term “fairy tale” is often used interchangeably with “myth,” and the two do share similarities. Fairy tale and myth both involve a person thrust outside their normal realm of experience on a journey to fulfill a greater goal, and both illustrate important stages or lessons in a human’s life.¹ However, myth and fairy tale do have significant differences. Fairy tale scholar Marcia Lane describes one thus: “A fairy tale...happens in the past tense, and...is not tied to any specifics. If it happens ‘at the beginning of the world,’ then it is a myth.”² The title card “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away” alone fits Lane’s stipulations: *Star Wars* is set in the past, but not a specific period. Secondly, events affecting the characters of myths are portrayed as highly out of the ordinary in the context of the story, whereas in fairy tales magical events could happen to anyone.³ In several ways, this is the case with *Star Wars*. Things like duels with light swords, beings manipulating objects without touching them, a child as queen of an entire world – while not exactly everyday occurrences – are certainly not unheard of. Third, unlike myths, the hero/heroine of a fairy tale has no magic powers, and is a “mere” mortal who at some point in her journey receives help from figures who do possess “magical” abilities.⁴

Such is the case for Padmé, who, unlike the majority of prequel characters, is not a Jedi and has no significant aptitude for the Force, the source of the “magic” in the *Star Wars* galaxy. She does meet a number of Jedi in her journey, who will provide her aid and – in the case of Anakin Skywalker – romance. Though *Star Wars* is ultimately Anakin’s tale, her own thread is still key in it and a very serviceable rendering of a fairy tale heroine’s story, particularly in the transformation Padmé undergoes.

Many traditional feminine-centric fairy tales have a girl on the verge of puberty as their heroine. These tales typically follow/represent the girl’s transformation to womanhood through the stages of her conflict with an evil figure, often a witch or other hideous creature, who has thrust her on that very journey in an attempt to destroy her.⁵

When describing Padmé as a “fairy tale heroine,” this does *not* mean the swooning, passive ones shown in early Disney films, where Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, and Snow White do little but wait for a prince to save them. These are not the original tales, but a continuation of a trend from 19th century Victorian England, when fairy tales were rewritten to domesticate feisty heroines to demure personas considered more socially acceptable for women in that era. The original versions’ heroines were frequently active agents in escaping her own predicament.⁶ The Queen in *Rumpelstiltskin* uses her wit to escape losing her new baby to the dwarf who demands it in payment for saving her life⁷; Beauty sacrifices herself to the Beast’s captivity to ensure her father’s safety and is the agent of the Beast’s redemption⁸; the German Cinderella (“Aschenputtel”) does not simply mope when not allowed to go to the ball, but finds a way to go anyway.⁹ The role of the prince in these tales is not to swoop in and save the heroine from evil, but to provide the means – if the heroine chooses – to a secure future for her after she faces that evil herself, usually through marriage (and/or the possibility of motherhood).¹⁰

Padmé fits many basic personal traits found in the typical fairy tale heroine. In *The Phantom Menace*, she is queen, handmaid, and peasant, all archetypes of fairy tale heroines. Fairy tale heroines are always ascribed with astounding beauty¹¹, and even in her peasant garb Anakin describes Padmé as one of the “most beautiful creatures in the universe.” She is young, virginal, hard working, and good-hearted. Like pre-Victorian heroines, she is proactive in working against her crises in all three of her films. In *Menace* she initiates the replacement of a Chancellor she believes is not assertive enough in helping her besieged world, and leaves the safety of Coruscant to lead a bold rebellion to free Naboo. In *Attack of the Clones*, she disregards Obi-Wan Kenobi’s plans for finding her would-be assassin as passive and forms another plan to directly draw out her attacker; later she refuses to sit on comparatively safe Tatooine when she realizes Obi-Wan is in danger on Geonosis. Finally in *Revenge of the Sith*, when she recognizes Obi-Wan is going to kill her husband (who has turned to the Dark Side), she again leaves safety to try to warn Anakin and pull him from the Dark Side, in a desperate attempt to preserve the family she knows is slipping away from her. She even rebuffs Anakin’s claims about “saving” her from his nightmares – Padmé is not a damsel who needs her prince to “save” her; all she wants or needs is his love.

The aforementioned evil “witch” figure in *Star Wars* is, of course, Palpatine/Darth Sidious. He is the saga’s ultimate embodiment of wickedness, who orchestrates the events that endanger everyone and forcibly and unintentionally spurs the heroine to her transformation. Which, ultimately (and also unintentionally), will lead to the witch’s demise.¹² The “witch” is often an authority figure in the heroine’s life: stepmother, wicked parent, etc. Either one or both of the heroine’s birth parents are already largely absent in the tale; Padmé has long since separated from hers by the time of *Menace*. Palpatine is the closest to a mentor figure shown for Padmé, whose counsel she seeks to help free Naboo from the Trade Federation, and who shows a (dubiously genuine) paternal concern towards her. In truth, her life serves him no further purpose than helping fulfill his own endgame (becoming Chancellor and, later on, seducing Anakin away from the Jedi). That he is the one responsible for deliberately using and endangering her echoes the common fairy tale theme of a father being complicit in, even directly responsible for, the betrayal of his daughter to a dangerous figure/situation – three of the most prominent being *Beauty and the Beast*, *Rapunzel*, and *Rumpelstiltskin*, all of which had fathers who gave up their daughters to preserve their own lives.¹³

There appears to be no universally defined cycle of steps for a fairy tale’s plot, though the basic plot does seem to share some similarities with the Campbellian Hero’s Journey. The first step in a fairy tale plot is the hero/heroine’s threshold crossing, a thrust from the known into the unknown by the story’s villain. Snow White’s stepmother is murderously jealous of her beauty and forces the girl into the woods; Cinderella loses her wealth when her greedy stepmother forces her into slavery. In this venture that the heroine is forced to fend for herself in an unknown realm, until she is able to confront and defeat the villain. In romantic fairy tales, which Padmé’s story would certainly count as, this is usually the stage where the central character meets their love interest as well. This crossing is believed to represent the first major step of leaving childhood and entering the path to adulthood and sexual maturity.¹⁴ The remaining basic steps include confronting the evil, defeating the evil, and – at least in more modern fairy tales – the happy resolution (which is definitely not required of myths, most of which end tragically), at which point the heroine’s role as adult (be it queen, mother, or both) is firmly cemented.

Padmé’s first shown threshold crossing is spurred by the invasion of Naboo. Knowing she cannot save her world if she is captured, she flees to Coruscant, and, when she realizes no help is coming from the Senate, stages a rebellion to retake her home. Along the way, she finds critical help from “magical” allies, in the form of the Jedi and, of course, Anakin – the one she will eventually marry. Anakin is a slave, not a literal prince, but in proper fairy tale tradition does fall in love with her on first sight (like Cinderella’s prince, he recognizes her beauty even though she wears peasant garb). He also proves

himself of worthy character to one day be a partner for her (as all good princes must do for the heroine to accept them¹⁵) by risking his life to help repair her ship and then helping save her world by defeating the “dragon” holding it captive, the Federation droid control ship. By the end of *Menace*, Padmé is not yet a woman, but is one step closer, having defeated the Federation and reclaimed her rightful throne, the smile she and Anakin share at the parade a reminder of the changes to come for them. *Menace* on its own actually has all the aforementioned basic elements of a fairy tale plot in some form or another and can be seen as an intact tale, a microcosm of the true transformation journey that lies ahead for Padmé – one whose resolution she won’t live to see.

At the start of *Clones*, Padmé seems to have changed little in the ten years since *Menace*. In many ways she is still the same girl, submerging her personal life under that of her career of serving others. It’s not unreasonable to guess she would’ve continued to if not for the intervention – again – of Palpatine, who initiates another threshold crossing for her where she will, again, be thrust from her normal life and cross paths with her “prince.” He does so in a means to again further his own ends, in this case getting Padmé out of the way as his dominant opposition to creating a Republic army. He orders her to go into hiding from her would-be assassins on Naboo, with Anakin as her guard (perhaps Palpatine has a second agenda of testing Anakin’s loyalties to the Jedi as well, sending him off alone with the woman he loves). Naboo, with its sparkling lakes, deep forests, and rolling green hills, is the opposite of Coruscant, teeming with life and beauty and seems itself right out of a fairy tale. Here, Padmé has already been stripped of her career persona, and what remains is the woman who has been submerged – sleeping – for so long under it, and who now does fall in love with Anakin. Over time she becomes more willing to express her femininity through increasingly revealing hairstyles and attire, eschewing her severe Senatorial style, which concealed her beauty. She *wants* Anakin to see her as a woman, not a formal Queen or Senator.

Padmé’s union with Anakin, like with many fairy tale heroines, is not sealed until she herself is ready to accept him – accept her adulthood.¹⁶ The figure of the prince represents the heroine arriving at sexual maturity; in joining him, the heroine leaves childhood forever and enters a life where she has the possibility to have children of her own. (Their union, of course, results in the birth of Luke and Leia. By arranging the reunion of Padmé and Anakin for his own ends, Palpatine has – again, like many fairy tale villains – unwittingly already set in motion the cycle that will lead to his destruction.) Sometimes this transition is marked in fairy tales by the heroine experiencing a literal death and reawakening before they can meet their prince: this is said to represent the “death” of the virginal maiden the heroine once was, and the awakening of the new woman she has become.¹⁷ Padmé’s own words in her love pledge state outright she has been “dying a little each day” since Anakin returned to her: it is no coincidence that when Padmé does freely declare her love, she and Anakin subsequently cross another threshold from a dark chamber into an area full of light shining on them. Nor is it coincidence this occurs on a world whose name is a variation of the word *genesis*: beginning, birth. The old Padmé has fallen away, and the new one that emerges into the arena after her declaration is a vibrant woman, suffused with life and spark. Like Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, Padmé had been asleep – not due to any outwardly inflicted “curse,” but one she had inflicted herself and that only she could choose to cure.

In *Revenge*, Padmé has reached the height of the feminine cycle, happily married and pregnant, certainly much transformed from the girl she started the prequels as. Though marriage and arriving at sexual maturity is a goal of the fairy tale, it is not itself *the* resolution. Before its heroine can have any truly happy resolution, it is still necessary for the great evil in a fairy tale to be confronted and overcome.¹⁸ The trials of the Queen in *Rumpelstiltskin* did not end when she gave birth to her child, but when she saved that child from forces who threatened to take him from her. Rapunzel had to raise her twins for years alone in the wilderness before she got a happily-ever-after with her prince. To complete her

journey, the heroine must face and overcome the evil threatening her and her family, thereby asserting and cementing her position as rightful queen/wife or mother. Likewise, marriage and motherhood alone do not guarantee Padmé a happy resolution. Unfortunately for her, confronting the great evil face-on is where she stumbles. Upon learning her husband has turned to the Dark Side, she does confront Anakin/Darth Vader, seeking to save him both from death at Obi-Wan's hands and Sidious's grip. She is not successful, but nor is her attempt completely in vain – though she dies and Anakin remains a slave to Sidious, she survives long enough to complete the ultimate feminine act, one that ensures the continuation of her journey regardless of her death: giving birth to their children.

The fairy tale journey of Padmé's story continues after her death, which follows a common fairy tale convention: a mother dying in childbirth. Snow White's mother dies in childbirth; Cinderella's dies early in her childhood.¹⁹ Padmé likewise dies after giving birth and her twins are then hidden from the "witch," who would turn them to darkness or kill them. (Palpatine, in classic fairy tale villain tradition, at one point does seek to claim the heroine's child for himself²⁰, like the dwarf in *Rumpelstiltskin* – which in both cases leads to the villain's undoing.) In these cases of the mother dying early it often happens that the mother has left a gift from beyond the grave, which protects her child and can even be the means to defeat the villain. The German Cinderella, for example, did not receive the dress and shoes that enabled her to go to the Prince's ball and escape her wicked stepmother from a fairy godmother, but from a gift-giving tree growing over her mother's grave²¹; as protection when she leaves home the princess in *The Goose Girl* carries a napkin holding three drops of her mother's blood.²² When Padmé speaks her final words about the good she believes is still in Anakin, a newborn Luke is by her side, and he unconsciously echoes those words more than twenty years later. Padmé passes her gifts of compassion and faith on to her son, the gifts that above all else enable Luke, as Padmé's avatar in Episodes IV through VI, to save Anakin and help destroy Palpatine in her stead. (Fairy tales are sometimes said to be stories about the bond between a mother and child²³, which does have truth in this case – while the relationship that directly brings about the "happy ending" of Anakin's redemption is the one between father and child, it is the connection between mother and child that sets the stage for the other relationship.)

Padmé succeeds at last in defeating the evil and completing her journey as woman, wife and mother, even if she is not there to see it. Then again, modern fairy tales all but demand a happy ending for their hero/heroine²⁴, and Anakin himself in his death was restored to his youth, so perhaps it's not outside the realm of speculation that Padmé *did* find her prince again in some hereafter.

Padmé is the walking Sleeping Beauty, her femininity asleep beneath a bristling, thorny wall until she is ready to awaken and meet her Prince. Even in her death she recalls a brutal inverse of the tale – in her casket surrounded by flowers she appears asleep, but now nothing can wake her, and it was her prince who put her that way (though her clasping of Anakin's japor seems to hint she *is* somehow still waiting for him). She is Rapunzel, whose secret meetings with her Prince lead to suffering for them both – each cast out by the Witch into the wild to wander for years alone, until they are reunited and her love heals his grief-induced blindness. She is Beauty/Belle, whose sacrifice and unconditional love lead – indirectly – to a Beast redeeming himself from years of self-imposed torment.

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¹⁶ Gould.

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²¹ SurLaLune Fairy Tales, “Aschenputtel.”

²² SurLaLune Fairy Tales, “The Goose Girl.”

²³ Gould.

²⁴ Wikipedia, “Fairy Tale.”

Star Wars is a Fantasy: A Critical Review

by Matthew Recker

When most people are asked to name their favorite work of science fiction a common answer is *Star Wars*. When asked to name the most popular work of science fiction, the answer is usually once again, *Star Wars*. The irony is that although the title itself suggests science fiction, the story itself is a fantasy. *Star Wars* even starts out with a typical fair tale opening: “A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away.” Drop “galaxy” and replace it with “land” and it’s the opening to countless fairy tales and fantasy stories. *Star Wars* is a tale of a mysterious Force and special people who can control it like magic. It is also a tale of adventure and a quest. Despite the common belief, *Star Wars* is not science fiction, it is fantasy.

In traditional fantasy, magic or some other mystical aspect is present which makes the fantasy world distinctly different from the real world. In her rules of fantasy Holly Lisle states:

In a world with magic, magic is your “gimme” – the one thing about which your reader will unquestioningly suspend disbelief...so if you really want to tell a story that uses faster-than-light spaceships, you need to drop the magic.

In a work of fantasy the reader is allowed to take things for granted, but the writer must be careful to not overstep the limitation of the gullibility of the reader. In *Star Wars*, the “gimme” is the Force. The audience has very little information on how the Force works, only that it is found within every living being, but only a few people can control and shape their will into the Force. The Force is magic only by a different name, but it has the same mysterious elements of magic, and it asks the audience to “suspend belief” for the short period of time it takes to view the movie.

If magic, or the Force, is the only “gimme” then a writer must not leave everything as a mystery and some things will be explained. This is where *Star Wars* seems like science fiction. In the movies the characters all have technology that is superior to our own. Scientists are not even sure that all of it is possible, but this is also built into Lisle’s rules on fantasy:

If your magicians have been working successfully for more than a few years, they will have surely developed corollaries to the steam engine, the telephone, the television, the radio, the electric iron and the toaster, the automobile, computers, the electric guitar, and the flush commode. They should not still be farking around with turning straw into gold. They probably won’t wear goofy pointed hats, either, though of course they can if you insist.

Most traditional fantasy is set in times long before any of the readers were born, in worlds far away. *Star Wars* is no exception, the only major difference is that their evolutionary clock has been set many times ahead of ours. The *Star Wars* galaxy has been united for many years. The Empire ruled the entire galaxy for a couple decades, but before the Empire the galaxy was united under the Old Republic which was in place for hundreds of years. Clearly this galaxy has been possessed of a high intellectual ability for thousands of years, in all that time they would have created things we could only dream about and it is foolhardy to expect them to not have developed a very advanced system of travel, communication, and day-to-day life in all that time. Asking the audience to believe that would be harder than getting them to believe a system of magic exists.

Even though some of the technology is easily integrated into the story of *Star Wars* with current science and possible futuristic science fact, there are still the Jedi tools and devices which have the aura of mysticism about them. In the entire series, this is chiefly the lightsaber. The lightsaber is a blade made out of focused light similar to a laser, except this blade cuts through any and everything. The process for creating a lightsaber is not mentioned in the movies, but in Steve Perry's *Shadows of the Empire*, which is an interlude between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, the reader sees a Lucas-sanctioned book with Luke creating his own lightsaber. He learns that although the parts used for the lightsaber could be scrounged up by anybody, only a Jedi could properly assemble them. Also, a major part of piecing together a blade is meditation on the blade to fuse everything properly and make it work. So even though there is science behind it, ultimately the way it works is by the use of the Force; magic.

The prequel movies also have some Jedi devices not seen in the original trilogy. Some examples include the midichlorian device which measures a Jedi's midichlorian count, which *The Phantom Menace* seems to claim is the source of Jedi power. We also see Obi Wan's ship that seems to tie into his Force power by special headgear that he wears. Finally, we see a three-dimensional representation of the galaxy that is stored in a small orb. Whether these are truly Jedi devices that only work by the manipulation of the Force or just more *Star Wars* technology not used before remains to be seen. But the idea is that although much of the science and technology is explained, the mystery of the Force creeps into the technical side of *Star Wars*.

Another important aspect of the fantasy genre is the hero. The hero has some type of connection to the mysterious power in the fantasy world. Either they actively partake in it, or they try to flee from those who use it for ill. Luke Skywalker is the hero of *Star Wars*. Luke is not skilled with the Force, but he learns. Philip Martin says this about character creation in his rules of fantasy writing:

Make your hero an orphan. Harry Potter, Dorothy in Oz and Taran in Lloyd Alexander's Prydain series are all orphans... The purpose of all the orphans in the fantasy world is to allow young protagonists to venture out entirely on their own, to discover the limits of their powers, and to overcome trials without parents to hold them back.

When making fantasy the creator only gets one "gimme" so he cannot give a child parents who would unabatedly let their child go traipsing off around the galaxy without their oversight. There are ways around this, but most make a virtual orphan. Harry Potter is a true orphan, but he has family that raises him, though they could not care less about his well being, which is one way to make a virtual orphan; have the parents hate the child so much that the child leaves and they do not care and their hate in fact only serves to fuel the hero.

Luke, however, is a true orphan. At least the audience thinks he is until *The Empire Strikes Back*. Even then though, he is an orphan because his father is dead, the man known as Darth Vader only shares the body of Anakin Skywalker. As far as Luke knows, his parents are dead and have been all his life. He is raised by his Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru on Tatooine. He finds out that he could be a Jedi and fight against the evil of the galaxy, but his ties to home (even though they are not his true parents) and his dedication to his aunt and uncle force him to turn the offer down. He cannot leave them high and dry and just go running around the galaxy. Lucas takes care of that by killing his aunt and uncle and freeing Luke up. Luke had always hated the desert world of Tatooine and now he was finally freed to leave and never look back so he takes Obi Wan up on his offer, thus starting his adventure.

The adventure is the excitement of *Star Wars*, it is the focal point of most fantasy and ultimately expresses the moral of the entire story. In his rules for fantasy Philip Martin states:

The Hero's Quest is a classic form of journey that pervades many fantasy stories. The hero leaves home, passes through a portal, has a series of trials and acquires wisdom, friends and magical powers, and then returns home, changed forever.

Luke's journey is a "Hero's Quest" that changes him forever. He started out as a timid boy and when the story is over he is a strong, steadfast hero and savior of the galaxy. Through his trials against Darth Vader and the Emperor and his training with Yoda, Luke becomes a man, barely recognizable from when he started. His quest is to learn the ways of the Force and ultimately free the galaxy from the stranglehold of the cruel self-proclaimed Emperor Palpatine. The lesson learnt is that against adversity and hardship faith, love and good morals will triumph.

Luke's faith is not unwavering, though. When he confronts Lord Vader and Emperor Palpatine in *Return of the Jedi*, Luke succumbs to the temptation and briefly treads on the Dark Side of the Force. But as Philip Martin so eloquently states, "In the end, a heart of gold trumps all." Luke realizes he is using the Dark Side of the Force and he pulls himself back to the Light and is prepared to die. His love for his father prevents him from killing him and pulls Anakin Skywalker back to the Light as well. When Anakin wakes up and sees his son being tortured he kills the Emperor himself and the galaxy is saved. As with most fantasy the "heart of gold" wins against all evil, and Luke has that "heart of gold." Even though the end of *Harry Potter* is not known, most of the individual novels end with the pure heart of a child, Harry Potter, stopping incredibly evil forces. Harry is willing to sacrifice himself for his friends and that love of an innocent child is the key. The pure heart is a very common and widely used theme in fantasy.

The key to fantasy is the teaching of morals to adults and children alike. In her reflection on modern fantasy, Connie Rockman (a librarian) states:

One of the best ways for children to tackle the question of evil is through allegory and metaphor. Concepts that are too scary to contemplate in real life can be understood – or at least considered – through fantasy.

Harry Potter seems to be teaching that heritage and lineage are not important. Destiny is not important. It is the choices made that define who someone is, not where he comes from or what he knows. Choices are key. In *Star Wars*, the main lesson taught is that people are evil, but people are also good. The two forces of good and evil are always struggling but goodness and purity always win out. Faith and love are the most important and powerful forces, and can be wielded by anyone (that applies to *Harry Potter* as well).

In conclusion, *Star Wars* is one of the most recognizable works of popular culture and is often associated with science fiction. However, if the casual viewer digs a little deeper and examines the story of *Star Wars* he will see that though there is some hard and realistic science, the movie is a fantasy tale involving mysterious powers (i.e., the Force) and heroes that must learn to control and harness these powers while they journey physically and metaphorically in search of their destiny. Even some of the technology is only explainable by the mysteries of the Force and thus *Star Wars* cannot truly be science fiction. The mysticism of *Star Wars* does not allow it to be science fiction.

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Recommendation

Weapons of Peace and War

Title: *Shimmering Sword: Samurai, Western, and Star Wars Sword Fighting*

Author: Nick Jamilla

Publisher: NBK Publishing

ISBN: 0-9718796-0-5

Copyright: 2002



Reviewed by Reihla.

As both an avid *Star Wars* fan and as a medieval re-enactor who participates in full-contact sword combat I was eager to read *Shimmering Sword: Samurai, Western, and Star Wars Sword Fighting* by Nick Jamilla. Given my interests, I particularly enjoyed the sections on the history of swordsmanship, especially the recap of the arms and armor employed by swordsmen through the ages. However, *Shimmering Sword* is not a scholarly work. The author readily admits this. Instead, it appears to be an excellent overview of swordsmanship and a discussion on how it might relate to *Star Wars* in general and the Jedi Order in particular.

Though the topic of swordsmanship in this book is never intentionally oversimplified, it is easily readable by the layman who knows little or nothing about it or about martial arts. I believe it is this characteristic, combined with the author's own obvious affection for *Star Wars*, which will make the book enjoyable for most fans who have ever wondered just how accurate the sword combat is in most *Star Wars* films. The author is well-spoken on both *Star Wars* and his chosen fields (aikido, kendo and fencing). For the die-hard *Star Wars* fans, his references to the films aren't elementary either. He expects the reader to have at least a basic – and in some cases an in-depth – knowledge of the saga.

Any reader should keep in mind that this book was written prior to the release of *Episode II: Attack of the Clones* and *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*. As such, it gives no detailed discussions of either film, only a bit of speculation on what those two films might contain. I read on the internet that the author was planning on publishing a second edition of *Shimmering Sword* after the release of *Clones* and *Revenge*, but to date I've found no evidence that such a revised book was ever completed.

One word of caution. Jamilla does not appear to subscribe to the “*Star Wars* as a Modern Myth” theory that so many academically oriented fans follow. Rather, he explains the epic saga as a descriptive of spiritual awakening, a look at the human condition, and an exploration of the polar extremes of good and evil.

Jamilla handles the matter of Jedi philosophy with particular sensitivity. He is obviously concerned with questions such as whether or not the Jedi are warriors or sages, and whether or not they are more similar to a military or a religious order. At one point he quotes one of Obi-Wan's tenets, the line where the Jedi master tells Luke “you must do what you feel is right, of course...” Jamilla goes on to infer that for a swordsman, this is the most important thing, knowing and understanding what they feel is right. He even references Qui-Gon Jinn to drive the point home. It is only one of many interesting points made about parallels in the philosophies of real-world swordsmen and Jedi.

Jamilla has an interesting perspective on the paradox that teaching people swordfighting encourages them to solve problems by means of combat. He seems to understand, as the Jedi did, that simply because you know how to use a sword it is not imperative that you do so to solve every problem. In fact, it is easy to grasp from his writing that there are alternatives to fighting and that they should be employed when the option exists.

If you prefer less about philosophy and more about sword combat in general this book offers plenty of that. If what you want is a more detailed and expert analysis of the sword combat found in both Prequel and Original Trilogy movies, you won't be disappointed either. In fact, one of my favorite sections of the book was a discussion of the differences between Peter Diamond's style (he choreographed the sword fighting in the Original Trilogy) and Nick Gillard's methods for *Episode I* lightsaber combat. It was quite refreshing to read a perspective that respects the creative decisions George Lucas made when selecting who would choreograph sword combat in the films.

The author freely admits, and does not apologize for, the fact that his views and perspectives on swordsmanship aren't run-of-the-mill and that they strongly influence his interpretations of lightsaber combat and the Jedi Order. He also states up-front that he compares Jedi techniques to Japanese swordsmanship because that is his area of expertise. He invites the reader to make their own interpretations – based on their own knowledge and experience – while reading the book.

As the title indicates, *Shimmering Sword* is an exploration of lightsaber combat and the Jedi philosophy, and a comparison/contrast between those ideas and real world swordfighting techniques and philosophies. If you have an interest in sword fighting and in *Star Wars*, I definitely recommend reading this book.

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www.sagajournal.com
editorialteam@sagajournal.com