

So, about those Star Wars Blu-ray changes... and faith

Two weeks ago, the Star Wars: The Complete Saga was released on Blu-ray DVD. All six live action movies, from 1977's "A New Hope" to 2005's Revenge of the Sith, have been included. During the last 14 years, Star Wars creator George Lucas has tinkered with the films during various re-releases of the films, from adding updated special effects to extending sequences. When he released the original trilogy, "A New Hope," "The Empire Strikes Back," and "Return of the Jedi" back in 1997, he was clearly getting his effects team ramped up for the prequel trilogy of films that would follow over the next eight years. In the geek world, of which I might be resident No. 1, some of the changes are regarded as annoying. But, Geek Nation is all up in arms about a recent change in Return of the Jedi's Blu-ray edition. More on this in a moment. Or, in about 1,000 words. I have mostly blown Lucas' alterations off as innocuous because I love what he created so much that I can't be mad at him. But, he tests that love a little too much sometimes. Of all the alterations, none gets my dander up more than one specific one in "Empire Strikes Back," when Luke Skywalker is holding on for dear life in Cloud City's Bespin World. Vanquished and de-handed by Darth Vader, Luke is dangling on the edge of an abyss. But, Vader is not done with him. "There is no escape," Vader warns. "Don't make me destroy you. Luke, you don't yet realize your importance. You have only begun to discover your power. Join me and I will complete your training. With our combined strength, we can end this destructive conflict and bring order to the galaxy." "I'll never join you," Luke responds. "If you only knew the power of the dark side," Vader says as he reaches out, trying to grab the whole world with his fist. "Obi-Wan never told you what happened to your father." Luke is seething. He recalls a conversation with Obi-Wan Kenobi in the Jedi master's hut where the old man said Darth Vader betrayed Anakin Skywalker. Luke looks disgusted and says, "He told me enough! He told me you killed him!" "No," Vader says before dropping the biggest bomb in cinema history. "I am your father." Luke screams in agony, letting out a tortured, guttural yell. "That's not true," he said, on the edge of tears. "That's impossible!" Vader pushes Luke further, telling him to search his feelings. Luke spent a childhood asking questions about a father that had been murdered by a friend. Everything he's

ever known has been a lie. If Vader is his father, then what dwells inside in Luke too? Vader then tells Luke that the Emperor has foreseen that young Skywalker can destroy him. Vader goes a step further and offers Luke the opportunity to rule the galaxy together after killing the Emperor. Luke has nowhere to go. He can walk off that plank, accept Vader's offer and convert to the dark side of the force. Would he follow his father and be seduced by the quick and easy path? He's got no other options, right? So, Luke looks down, looks at the father he's always wanted to know, sees all the evil and power offered, and willingly, silently falls. In that moment, it's an act of faith. He believes in something bigger than himself. He let's go. It's a moment of growth for Luke, who has been a whiny, cocky guy living off the fact that he blew up the Death Star three years ago. He's getting into that Uncle Rico territory where he's talking about '82 and states. And, now Luke's humbled and he realizes this fight for the survival of the galaxy isn't about him. Go back and look at Empire and skip to this scene. Luke's decision to fall is incredibly moving and he miraculously lands on a platform and eventually down a tunnel where he uses the force to call out to his sister that he's been kind of crushing on and is ultimately rescued. Luke survives on faith. Think of this scene like Jesus in the desert when he rejected all of the devil's temptations. Like Vader to Luke, Satan offers everything to Jesus, with the condition that he submits to him. When the 1997 version was released, Lucas inserted a scream into Luke's fall. Above all else, it was jarring because that's not congruent with the character at that moment. It always amazed me how Lucas could misunderstand a character so much that he needed to share it with the world. Worst of all, it's a character he created and, at least for Empire, wrote an outline for before someone more talented at dialogue came in and wrote the script. This whole topic surfaced because Lucas has tampered with Return of the Jedi's climactic scene when Vader stands between his master and his son. Vader, as we learned in the prequels, loved controlling things he loved more than he actually loved them. He never trained himself to let go. For the next 20 years, he was in the service of the Emperor, a man he personally helped put into power, and was a lonely, twisted, bitter mess of a man. He acted out in violence because he had an absence of love. In Jedi, we begin to see Vader begin to dream again. When he's first confronted by Luke on the moon of Endor, Vader is offered the chance to run away from the Emperor and join Luke. Vader, for a moment, thinks of it and then submits to his evil master's will. He feels like he's in too deep. Luke doesn't confront Vader

looking for a fight. He's there to see if he can find his father and get him out of this mess. At the end of Jedi, Luke has a reluctant lightsaber duel with Vader. He, rather easily, defeats his father and chops off his hand in the process. Note to Skywalkers: don't get used to hands. You'll barely have use of them. Even the robotic ones. This was preceded by a brief moment of Luke being overcome with anger. Vader threatened to convert Princess Leia to the dark side if Luke wouldn't. After beating Vader within an inch of his life, Luke looks at the black glove covering his own hand and then sees his father's missing hand as well. What is the difference between them? Inner peace. The Emperor is most pleased with how much Luke destroyed Vader and encourages him to finish the job and become his apprentice. Luke refuses and once again surrenders to something bigger than himself by tossing his lightsaber. He's defenseless and doesn't care. "I'm a Jedi, like my father before me," Luke says. The Emperor spends the next three minutes shooting lightning bolts at Luke. A battered Vader ambles over to the Emperor and watches. Luke yells out, "Father, please!" Vader looks at him and then the Emperor. Lightning illuminates something beyond Vader's cold, black visage and we watch the battle between Anakin Skywalker and Darth Vader take place. He says nothing, but everything is happening. We root for Anakin to find himself and shake off his self-imposed shackles. And he does it by picking up the Emperor and throwing him into a bottomless pit. He does so without saying a word and shoulders the pain of the lightning bolts. His son's pain becomes his own and you can see his skeleton outline. The bolts are short-circuited his robotic workings. He makes the ultimate sacrifice. As St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary." Sometimes actions speak louder than words. When Luke tries to take his father out of harm's way, he's allowed the opportunity to remove Vader's mask and see Anakin Skywalker, a defeated old man. Luke says he has to save him. Pride overwhelms Anakin as he prepares for his last breath and looks at his son. Love. At last. "You already have, Luke. Tell your sister you were right about me. You were right." Wait a second, did dad just commit the No. 1 mistake of parenting? Giving permission to your kid to brag to one of your other kids is bad form, Anakin. The problem I have with these changes is that Lucas is messing with the soul of the saga. And, yes, there is soul amongst all the Ewoks, lightsabers and X-Wing fighters. There might be a whole generation of kids who don't even know what existed before. They don't know any different. But, they should. Heroism in the face of evil requires the

selflessness and fearlessness display by Luke Skywalker. And doing the right thing sometimes means you don't tell everyone about it. Everyone can come back from the brink... even Darth Vader.

P.S. I know I'm a geek.