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## Review: 'The Force Awakens'

By James Grant, nsfeatures@news-sentinel.com  
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The Force was definitely calling to local moviegoers.

The much anticipated "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," the seventh film in the Star Wars franchise and the first since 1983 to feature cast members from the original trilogy including Carrie Fisher, Harrison Ford and Mark Hamill, hit U.S. theaters Thursday night including theaters here in Fort Wayne.

Lightsabers of all shapes and sizes graced the hands of several fans as they filled the Carmike 20 Cinemas on Dupont Road dressed as various Star Wars characters.

Father and daughter Brent and Morgan Bracht, who also dressed in costume for the occasion, spent quality time dueling out in the lobby before the show as they waited to go inside the theater.

"It's our thing," Brent Bracht said proudly of his and his daughter's affection for all things Star Wars as his wife sat comfortably inside the theater waiting for them while they played in the lobby.

"We're looking forward to everything; it's Star Wars," Bracht said in anticipation of seeing the film. That feeling of excitement seemed to sum up the atmosphere of the crowd on this premiere night of "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" here in Fort Wayne.

Unless you've been living in a monastery in France or on a deserted island you're no doubt aware of the hype surrounding the latest Star Wars installment.

It's been 10 years since a Star Wars film has graced movie theaters, and to say that this new film has been eagerly awaited is quite an understatement.

Ever since Star Wars creator George Lucas sold the film franchise to Disney in 2012 and word came out that new Star Wars films were on their way, possibly featuring the beloved original cast, fans have been frothing at the mouth while endlessly discussing and debating any crumb of information about what would eventually become "Star Wars: The Force Awakens."

Now, three years after Disney acquired the Star Wars franchise, "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" is finally playing in theaters, and long-time and new fans are able to evaluate what director J.J. Abrams has done with the first Star Wars film to be produced without any involvement from George Lucas.

For those curious if this new film can hold a candle to Star Wars' illustrious past, all I can say is the answer is an unqualified yes.

From the opening moments of the film, which are filled with the majestic and iconic Star Wars theme music, composed and conducted once again by the legendary Oscar-winning John Williams, "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" is an exciting ride through the past and the present of the Stars Wars universe and throughout manages to always hit the right notes.

Speaking as a first-generation fan who, like "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" director Abrams, was an 11-year old who saw the first Star Wars film in theaters in 1977 and was enthralled by every frame, this new film feels like meeting a much-loved old friend.

With no disrespect to George Lucas, the three Star Wars prequels released between 1999 and 2005 that Lucas helmed and directed paled in comparison to the original films released between 1977 and 1983.

The prequels lost most of the magic, mystic, humor and earthy quality that made the first three Star Wars films so appealing.

"Star Wars: The Force Awakens" goes back to the style of the original films, especially the first one, "Star Wars:



By Jim Grant for The News-Sentinel Brent and Morgan Bracht get out their lightsabers in the lobby of Carmike 20 Cinemas on Thursday before the first showing of "Star Wars: The Force Awakens"

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Episode IV - A New Hope" from 1977, and manages to bring back the soul that was drained in the overly CGI and special-effects-laden prequels.

The legacy cast, as they have become known – Fisher, Ford and Hamill - were a joy to see again.

Their performances managed to bely time, especially Ford who picked right up with his Han Solo character as if he had played him yesterday instead of over 30 years ago.

Humor, excitement and heart were in abundance as "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" flew by in what seemed like a much shorter period then its official 2 hour and 16 minutes running time.

A special sigh of relief to me were the stellar performances of the newer cast especially that of Daisy Ridley as Rey and John Boyega as Finn, who were a pleasure to watch.

Ridley's character, a fantastically strong female role, is a real boon to the Star Wars universe and I can't wait to see more performances by her in the future.

Without giving any plot spoilers away, I can say assuredly that if you're a fan of Star Wars I can't imagine how on earth you wouldn't be at the very least entertained by this film if not thrilled.

If you're a first-generation fan it might even generate a tear or two seeing the Han Solo and now General Leia characters embrace or hearing the familiar roar of the Chewbacca character as he co-pilots the Millennium Falcon once again.

I'd have to say that this film ranks in my top three of all the Star Wars films and that thought also seemed to resonate with other audience members.

Shawn and Judy Miles of Fort Wayne and their children, Ben and Jackie, all had glowing things to say about the film as they were walking out of the theater.

"It was exciting and left you waiting for the next one," first-generation Star Wars fan Shawn Miles said as he walked into the lobby.

"I'd come out and say it's the third best behind 'Star Wars: A New Hope' and 'Return of the Jedi.'

"I wanted so much more; it went by so quickly," his wife, Judy, added.

Ben Miles, their 15-year-old son was a little more low-key in his response, but said he thought it was pretty good.

"It was one of the better Star Wars films I've seen," Ben said quietly.

"I thought it was good because it had a lot of surprises," 13-year-old Jackie Miles chimed in.

Whether you're an original fan or have just recently discovered the Star Wars universe do yourself a favor and make some time this Christmas season to see this film.

And if you do, as they say, may the Force be with you.

James Grant works for the Allen County Public Library, is a former librarian for The News-Sentinel and occasionally covers music, film and theater for The News-Sentinel. This column is the personal opinion of the writer and does not necessarily reflect the views or opinion of The News-Sentinel.

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