

KEY POINT

In order to be trusted by readers, reviews need to strike a balance between being too positive and being overly critical.

immersive Involving.

epochal Helping to define a new era.

incandescent Filled with light from within.

▼ FROM A REVIEW OF *STAR WARS: EPISODE VII* BY MARK KERMODE IN *THE GUARDIAN*

The action takes place some years after the events of *Return of the Jedi*, and involves scavenger Rey (Daisy Ridley) teaming up with renegade 'First Order' Stormtrooper Finn (John Boyega) and globular droid BB-8. The opening scroll sets up an ongoing battle between the forces of good and evil and lays the groundwork for a quasi-mythical quest that will reunite friends old and new, and allow a grizzled Harrison Ford to deliver the line: 'Chewie, we're home...'

That sense of coming home runs throughout *The Force Awakens*, director JJ Abrams taking the series back to its roots while giving it a rocket-fuelled, 21st-century twist... The film feels very physical, scenes of dog-fighting TIE fighters and a relaunched Millennium Falcon crashing through trees possessing the kind of heft so sorely lacking from George Lucas's over-digitised prequels. The battle scenes are breathtakingly **immersive**... but also impressively joyous – the sight of a fleet of X-wings hurtling toward us over watery terrain brought a lump to my throat and a tear to my eye – just one of several occasions when I found myself welling up with unexpected emotion...

Having co-written the series's previous high-water mark, *The Empire Strikes Back*, Lawrence Kasdan here shares credits with Abrams and Michael Arndt on a screenplay... which subtly realigns its gender dynamics with Rey's proudly punchy, post-Hunger Games heroine. The spectre of Vader may live on in Adam Driver's Kylo Ren, but it's Rey in whom the film's true force resides, likeable newcomer Daisy Ridley carrying the heavily-mantled weight of the new series with aplomb. Plaudits, too, to John Boyega, who brings credibility and humour to the almost accidentally heroic role of Finn...

What's most striking about *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* is the fact that it has real heart and soul... Abrams breathes new life into Lucas's **epochal** creations in a manner that deftly looks back to the future. And it's a future that works. Watching the film in a packed auditorium with an audience almost **incandescent** with expectation, I found myself listening to a chorus of spontaneous gasps, cheers, laughs, whoops and even occasional cries of anguish.

What's really surprising is that many of them were coming from me.