

# [Absolutely No Machete Juggling](#)

Rod Hilton's rants about stuff he cares about way too much.

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## [The Star Wars Saga: Introducing Machete Order](#)

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Brace yourselves, what follows is an amazingly long blog post about Star Wars.

I'm not a huge fan of the various modifications made to the original Star Wars trilogy, so it's reasonable to assume I'm not a big fan of the prequel trilogy either. There are many people who dislike the prequel trilogy so much that they don't even consider watching them. On bad days, I'm one of those people, but on good days I see some value in the prequel trilogy, even though I consider them inferior in virtually every way.

For people that couldn't care less about the prequel trilogy, I suggest [Harmy's Despecialized Editions](#). They are 720p blu-ray discs (AVCHD discs actually) that are the result of "Harmy" from [The Original Trilogy forums](#) painstakingly reconstructing the theatrical releases of all three films utilizing a wide variety of video sources as well as custom mattes. Downloading, burning, labeling, and printing cases for these films is one of

the neckbeardiest things I've done (aside from writing this blog post), and I'm extremely glad I did it. When I feel like watching Star Wars for just me, these are the ones I watch. If that's enough for you as well, stop reading now.



Harmy, king of nerds

But what can you do if you *do* wish to involve the prequel trilogy? Maybe you're showing the films to a younger crowd that won't be able to appreciate and enjoy films with distractingly dated special effects. Maybe you don't want to spend the effort to download and burn your own discs, and purchasing the official Blu-rays is fine for you. Maybe you've accepted that the original theatrical editions are no longer considered canon, and you're a nerd that cares about things like that. Hell, maybe you actually **like** the prequels (seriously?).

Whatever your reason, if you are showing someone the official editions of Star Wars for the first time (no [Phantom Edits](#)), you have to make a decision about which order to show the films.

## Two Options

There are two obvious options for watching the Star Wars saga.

- **Release Order** – Watch the films in the order they came out, recreating your experience with the films for someone new to them.
- **Episode Order** – Watch the films in the order [George Lucas intends](#), starting with Episode I and going straight through to Episode VI

There are two critical flaws with both of these orders, unfortunately, that prevent either from being appropriate.

**The problem with Episode Order is that it ruins the surprise that Vader is Luke's father.** If you think that this reveal doesn't matter since it's common knowledge, I suggest you watch the [looks on these kids' faces](#). This reveal is one of the most shocking in film history, and if a newcomer to the series has managed to avoid having it spoiled for them, watching the films in Episode Order would be like watching the ending of *The Sixth Sense* first.

The other problem with Episode Order is that the prequels don't really have a story. They're just background for the real story, which is Luke's attempt to destroy the Empire and save his father. Watching 3 films of backstory is boring if you've never seen the films they're the background to. Hell, that's why George Lucas made *A New Hope* first, he knew if he started with Episode I he'd never be able to complete the series. Starting someone off with Episode I is a surefire way to ensure they don't make it through the entire franchise.



Unfortunately, **Release Order is also an instant failure, and the reason is a single shot.** If you're watching the original trilogy first, then after the Empire is destroyed and everyone is celebrating, Luke looks over at his mentors, Ben Kenobi and Yoda, and suddenly they are joined by... some random creepy looking teenager who needs a haircut. Placing Hayden Christensen in the ending of *Jedi*, since he's not in ANY of the other films, turns an ending that should be celebratory into one that is confusing for the viewer. The fact that Christensen looks like he's undressing someone with his eyes doesn't help.

So neither order really works. What to do?

## An Alternative Suggestion

How can you ensure that a viewing keeps the Vader reveal a surprise, while introducing young Anakin before the end of *Return of the Jedi*?

Simple, watch them in this order: IV, V, I, II, III, VI.

George Lucas believes that *Star Wars* is the story of Anakin Skywalker, but it is not. The prequels, which establish his character, are so poor at being character-driven that, if the series is about Anakin, the entire series is a failure. Anakin is not a relatable character, Luke is.

This alternative order (which a commenter has pointed out is called [Ernst Rister](#) order) inserts the prequel trilogy into the middle, allowing the series to end on the sensible ending point (the destruction of the Empire) while still beginning with Luke's journey.

Effectively, this order keeps the story Luke's tale. Just when Luke is left with the burning question "how did my father become Darth Vader?" we take an extended flashback to explain exactly how. Once we understand how his father turned to the dark side, we go back to the main storyline and see how Luke is able to rescue

him from it and salvage the good in him.



The prequel backstory comes at the perfect time, because *Empire Strikes Back* ends on a huge cliffhanger. Han is in carbonite, Vader is Luke's father, and the Empire has hit the rebellion hard. Delaying the resolution of this cliffhanger makes it all the more satisfying when *Return of the Jedi* is watched.

Narratively, it's just like a movie that starts with a big opening, then fades to "2 years earlier" for most of the movie, until it catches up with the present time and concludes.

## Introducing: Machete Order

Now I'd like to modify this into what I've named **Machete Order** on the off chance that this catches on because I'm a vain asshole.

Next time you want to introduce someone to Star Wars for the first time, watch the films with them in this order: **IV, V, II, III, VI**

Notice something? Yeah, Episode I is gone.



Episodes II and III aren't exactly Shakespeare, but standing next to the complete and utter trainwreck that is Episode I, they sure look like it. At least, III does anyway.

Episode I is a failure on every possible level. [The acting, writing, directing, and special effects are all atrocious, and the movie is just plain boring.](#) Luckily, George Lucas has done everyone a favor by making the content of Episode I completely irrelevant to the rest of the series. Seriously, think about it for a minute. Name as many things as you can that happen in Episode I and actually help flesh out the story in any subse-

quent episode. I can only think of one thing, which I'll mention later.

Every character established in Episode I is either killed or removed before it ends (Darth Maul, Qui-Gon, Chancellor Valorum), unimportant (Nute Gunray, Watto), or established better in a later episode (Mace Windu, Darth Sidious). Does it ever matter that Palpatine had an apprentice before Count Dooku? Nope, Darth Maul is killed by the end of Episode I and never referenced again. You may as well just start with the assumption that Dooku was the only apprentice. Does it ever matter that Obi-Wan was being trained by Qui-Gon? Nope, Obi-Wan is well into training Anakin at the start of Episode II, Qui-Gon is completely irrelevant.

Search your feelings, you know it to be true! Episode I doesn't matter at all. You can start the prequels with Episode II and miss absolutely nothing. The opening crawl of Episode II establishes everything you need to know about the prequels: a bunch of systems want to leave the Republic, they are led by Count Dooku, and Senator Amidala is a senator who is going to vote on whether the Republic is going to create an army. Natalie Portman is called Senator Amidala twice in the first 4 minutes of the movie, so there's no question of who's who.

## What Gets Removed?

Here's some stuff that you no longer have to see as part of your Star Wars viewing experience, thanks to skipping Episode I.



Buh-bye, Binks!

- Virtually no Jar-Jar. Jar-Jar has about 5 lines in Episode II, and zero in Episode III.
- No midichlorians. There is only one reference to midichlorians after Episode I, and in the context it appears to mean something as benign as "DNA."
- No Jake Lloyd. Sorry Jake, your acting is terrible and I never really wanted to see Darth Vader as a little boy.
- No confusing Padme/Queen switcheroo. The whole subplot with Padme and her decoy makes absolutely no sense. It's clear that this was just so people could interact with Padme without knowing she was the Queen, but it's incredibly convoluted and pointless.
- Less confusing master/apprentice relationships. Darth Sidious is training Count Dooku, Obi-Wan is training Anakin. No other trainer/trainee relationships exist to confuse the backstory. Fewer characters to learn about, so the story is more focused.
- Nothing about trade disputes. The "problem" as of Episode II is that a group of systems want to leave

the Republic. This is much easier to understand for a kid than trade disputes.

- No pod racing. Seriously, who gives a shit? An action sequence for the sake of an action sequence and it goes on forever. A huge number of plot holes surrounding gambling and the subsequent freeing of Anakin are removed as well.
- No virgin birth. We simply don't know or care who Anakin's father is, and the subtle implication that it's Palpatine is gone.

But booting Episode I isn't merely about pretending a crappy movie doesn't exist. Viewing Episode II immediately after V and Episode III immediately before VI actually tells the story **better** than including Episode I does.

## Why Does This Work Better?



As I mentioned, this creates a lot of tension after the cliffhanger ending of Episode V. It also uses the original trilogy as a framing device for the prequel trilogy. Vader drops this huge bomb that he's Luke's father, then we spend two movies proving he's telling the truth, then we see how it gets resolved. The Star Wars watching experience gets to start with the film that does the best job of establishing the Star Wars universe, Episode IV, and it ends with the most satisfying ending, Episode VI. It also starts the series off with the two strongest films, and allows you to never have to either start or end your viewing experience with a shitty movie. Two films of Luke's story, two films of Anakin's story, then a single film that intertwines and ends both stories.

Beyond this, Episode I establishes Anakin as a cute little kid, totally innocent. But Episode II quickly establishes him as impulsive and power-hungry, which keeps his character consistent with eventually becoming Darth Vader. Obi-Wan never really seems to have any control over Anakin, struggling between treating him as a friend (their very first conversation together in Episode II) and treating him as an apprentice (their second conversation, with Padme). Anakin is never a carefree child yelling "yippee", he's a complex teenager nearly boiling over with rage in almost every scene. It makes much more sense for Anakin to have always been this way.

In the opening of Episode II, Padme refers to Anakin as "that little boy I knew on Tatooine." The two of them look approximately the same age in Episode II, so the viewer can naturally conclude that the two of them were friends as children. This completely hides the totally weird age gap between them from Episode I, and lends a lot of believability to the subsequent romance. Scenes in which they fall for each other seem to build on a childhood friendship that we never see but can assume is there. Since their relationship is the eventual reason for Anakin's fall to the dark side, having it be somewhat believable makes a big difference.



Obi-Wan now always has a beard for the entire duration of the series, and Anakin Skywalker always wears black. Since these two characters are played by different actors (and are the only characters in the series with such a distinction), having them look visually consistent does a great deal toward reinforcing they are the same people.

This order also preserves **both** twists. George Lucas knew that watching the films in Episode Order would remove the Vader twist, so he added the Palpatine twist to compensate. Since we don't really meet the Emperor until Episode VI (you only see him for one scene, in hologram, in V), this order preserves the twist around Palpatine taking over as Emperor. Episode I establishes that Darth Sidious is manipulating the Trade Federation in the opening scene of the film, and it's pretty obvious Sidious is Palpatine. But if you skip Episode I, all we ever see is that Count Dooku is leading a separatist movement, all on his own. Dooku tells Obi-Wan that the Senate is under the control of a Sith lord named "Darth Sidious", but at the end of the movie, after Dooku flees from Geonosis, he meets with his "master", who turns out to be Darth Sidious. This is the first time we realize that the separatist movement is actually being controlled by Sidious, and it's the first time we see him, which doesn't give the audience a chance to realize he's Palpatine (remember, nobody has ever referred to "Emperor Palpatine" by this point in the series).

Machete order also keeps the fact that Luke and Leia are siblings a surprise, it simply moves the surprise to Episode III instead of VI, when Padme announces her daughter's name. This is actually a more effective twist in this context than when Obi-Wan just tells Luke in Return of the Jedi. We get to find out before Luke, and we discover she's carrying twins along with Obi-Wan when the Gynobot tells him. Luke's name is first, so when Padme names the other kid "Leia" it's a pretty shocking reveal. As an added bonus, there are now about 5 hours of film between the discovery that they are siblings and the time they kissed.

**Update:** Den of Geek has also written up an [article highlighting some more things](#) that work better in Machete Order that I didn't mention. I particularly like the extra dimension it gives Yoda.

## What Works Best?

Best of all, this order actually makes a particular tension in Return of the Jedi stronger.

Remember, we see in Episode V that Luke's vision in the cave on Degobah is that he turns into Darth Vader, then we find out Vader is his father. Then we watch Episodes II and III, in which his father turns to the dark side in order to protect his loved ones. After that we go back to VI, where eventually Luke confronts the Emperor.

Remember that we never saw Anakin as a little kid, he's about the same age the first time we see him as Luke

was in Episode VI. Hayden Christensen's incessant whining in Episode II is actually less annoying now, because it's helping to link the character to Luke, who was just as whiny in Episode IV. In other words, because we skipped Episode I, the parallels between Luke and Anakin are much stronger. We've seen Obi-Wan train just the two of them, and never had to see anyone training Obi-Wan himself. The viewer is naturally linking the paths of these two characters together at this point.



The first time we see Luke in Return of the Jedi, he's wearing all-black, just like his father did. He gives R2D2 and C-3PO to Jabba the Hutt, much to their surprise. Luke isn't exactly looking like a clean-cut Jedi like he claims. Then, when he finally enters Jabba's palace, the musical cue sounds a bit like the Imperial March, and the way he enters with the light behind him makes it unclear if he is Luke or Vader. Then, he **force chokes Jabba's guards**, something only Vader has done in the series! Nobody else sees him do this.

When he confronts Jabba, he warns him that he's taking his friends back. He says Jabba can either profit from this, "or be destroyed." Furthermore, he tells Jabba "not to underestimate my power." The last time this phrase was used, it was by Anakin when dueling Obi-Wan. When watching Jedi on its own, Luke just seems a tad arrogant during these scenes. When watching Jedi immediately after watching Revenge of the Sith, the message is clear: **Luke Skywalker is on the path to the Dark Side.**

Why does this matter? Because at the end of Jedi, Luke confronts the Emperor. The Emperor explains that the assault on the new Death Star is a trap and that his friends are going to die, and he keeps taunting Luke, telling him to grab his lightsaber and fight him. The film is trying to create a tension that Luke might embrace the Dark Side, but it was never really believable. However, within the context of him following in his father's footsteps and his father using the power of the dark side to save people, with Luke's friends being killed just outside the Death Star window, this is much more believable.

Shortly after, Luke goes apeshit and beats the hell out of Vader, clearly succumbing to his anger. He overpowers Vader with rage and cuts his arm off, just like Anakin did to Windu in Episode III. Having the very real threat of Luke following in his father's path made clear by watching II and III before VI heightens the tension of this scene, and it actually makes Return of the Jedi better. Yes, watching Revenge of the Sith makes Return of the Jedi a better, more effective film. Considering it's the weakest of the original trilogy films, this improvement is welcome.

## What Doesn't Work Better?

Machete Order isn't perfect. There are a few tiny issues that arise watching the films in this order.

The Kamino sequence is a little confusing. Since the cloners seem to have been "expecting" Kenobi, it leads the viewer to wonder if Episode I showed him creating the clone army or something. hilariously, Episode I doesn't actually explain anything or make this scene less misleading, but the fact that the viewer knows a movie got skipped amplifies the confusion.

Qui-Gon is mentioned once in Episode II and once in Episode III. Luckily, both times he is mentioned, his relationship to the characters is restated, so it works. Dooku explains that Obi-Wan's old master Qui-Gon was once Dooku's apprentice, and then in Episode III Yoda tells Obi-Wan that Qui-Gon has learned to communicate after death. It's alright, just a little weird.

Episodes II and III both talk about Anakin being part of a prophecy which is never really explained (because it was explained in Episode I). This is unfortunate, but on the plus side the last time it's mentioned in Episode III, Yoda says it may have been misinterpreted.



The weakest part of this order is when Anakin returns to Tatooine. We don't know his mother is a slave, and we don't know he built C-3PO. When he has visions of his mother dying and returns, Watto says he sold her. That's not something you expect to hear about a Jedi's mother, so it's a bit jarring. When Anakin goes to the Lars moisture farm, Threepio calls him "the maker" and they act like they know each other, but it's not stated outright that Anakin created Threepio. This definitely draws attention to the fact that one of the films was skipped. This is the one, singular thing made genuinely more confusing by skipping Episode I.

## Give It A Shot

You might be wondering if it's worth skipping II and only watching III, just to establish young Anakin in time for Jedi. I don't recommend this, every character you need to know for Episode III who was introduced in Episode I is reintroduced in Episode II with a quick line of dialogue, but Episode III just assumes you know who everyone is. Ham-handed as it is, Anakin's love for Padme is the ultimate reason for his fall to the dark side, and Episode II has most of that. Additionally, without seeing the Clone Army being created in Episode II, seeing the Jedi fight alongside them in III would be extremely confusing, since they look almost exactly like Stormtroopers in III.

Machete Order doesn't even interfere with canon – everything that happens in Episode I is still canonically compatible with this ordering, we simply don't watch it as part of the main saga.

I've tried clearing my brain out and watching the films in this order and it makes the overall experience vastly more enjoyable. If you find someone who has never seen any Star Wars movies, try showing them the films in this order and post a comment explaining any particular points of confusion they had while watching. My

hunch is there won't be many, if any at all.

## Update

I recently discovered my college-aged brother-in-law's girlfriend had never seen any Star Wars films and wanted to watch them all over winter break. Armed with the new Blu-rays, we all went about watching them, and I showed them in Machete Order. It actually works even better than I originally anticipated – it's almost as if this is somehow the intended order. There's a great pattern here, taking the viewer on a series of emotional ups and downs. IV ends with a victory that seems to have some sinister undertones, then V is dark and unresolved with a cliffhanger, II ends with victory with sinister undertones, then III is dark and unresolved with a cliffhanger again. It works incredibly well, and when III ended everyone demanded we immediately watch VI to see how everything gets tied up.

Perhaps most importantly, the flaws with Machete Order seem to not be problematic at all. When Anakin returned to Tatooine in II, the conversation with Watto immediately indicated to her that Anakin's mother was a slave. She asked why Anakin never went back to free her after becoming a Jedi, but Episode I doesn't really provide an answer to that.

The thing she had the most trouble with was when Leia and Luke are talking in ROTJ, and she talks about how she remembers her mother, her "real mother" (so Leia clearly knows she's adopted). With a few movies between III and VI, one might forget about this line, but watching VI right after III made her stop and ask "wait, what? How does she remember her mother?" She found herself similarly bothered by R2D2 having a jetpack in the prequels but not the other films, and all I could tell her was "yeah, it bugs me too."

I asked her if she found Jar-Jar annoying and she asked "who's Jar Jar?" – Mission accomplished.

## Watching Episode I

Episode I has some redeemable moments, such as the tension in the final duel after Qui-Gon is killed, and for some reason people seem to really enjoy the pod race (I hated it). Arguably, Episode II is worse than I.

The reason to remove I isn't *just* that it's bad, it's that the overall story arc of the saga, which is Luke's discovery of his Jedi lineage, his training to be the last of the Jedi, his temptation at following the path of Anakin, and ultimately his overcoming that temptation and redeeming his father, is told BETTER by including II and III, whereas I serves to distract from this main arc.

As such, some people may want to watch Episode I after all. As some commenters have pointed out, there *is* still a place to watch Episode I with this order. The ideal place is after the "main saga" of IV, V, II, III, VI is complete. Not immediately after, but like "okay, Star Wars is over, but there's some other stuff you can watch that takes place in the same galaxy with some of the same people."

Similar to the Animatrix, which can be watched at any time after the first one, the collection of Episode I, the Clone Wars cartoon series, the Clone Wars CGI series, a number of video games, and the Clone Wars movie can all be presented as part of a collection of "extra stuff, made for kids". In this context, Episode I can be contextualized as a standalone prequel to the main saga.

It's not part of the main viewing, but more like an expanded universe kind of thing, like playing a video game

or reading a Star Wars comic book or novel. I think this is a pretty good idea if you really really want to include Episode I. Personally I don't think I'll be doing this, as I really don't like the pod race or even Darth Maul, but the option is there.

494 comments



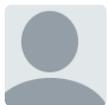
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Sully · 2 years ago

This one post is why the Internet was invented. I thank you.

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darktwistedjojo → Sully · 2 years ago

its pretty awesome! but you guys should try this order:

IV V VI

216 ^ | 45 ▾ · Reply · Share ›



Noreply → darktwistedjojo · 2 years ago

Asked and answered, councilor, move on.

55 ^ | 2 ▾ · Reply · Share ›



doctorr → Noreply · 2 years ago

No he didn't. Sure, early on in the article he acknowledges that all the ALL of the "prequels" are horrible, but then he goes on to write way too much about why one should watch them in a certain order, if for some reason one would ever want to submit themselves to something that boring and horrible. He suggests that maybe they are being presented to some kid who can't appreciate special effects unless they are made by computers or something, but that's a pretty weak justification. I have no idea why anyone would think the first prequel is any worse or better than the other two. They all suck and never need to be watched again. By anyone. For any reason.

14 ^ | 51 ▾ · Reply · Share ›



guinness → doctorr · 2 years ago

The author told you when to stop reading. If all you want is the original