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Bringing Balance to the Force

Movies are one of the most popular entertainment mediums of the modern age. Through their use of writing, acting, music, art, special effects, and many more forms of art they can transport you into a fantastical world or bring historic events to life for people to learn from. The original *Star Wars* trilogy (*A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi*) explores many themes, but the most prominent theme from all three movies is that of redemption. [Scene 44: Vader's Redemption](#) from *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* is one of the final action scenes of the movie and the climax of the original trilogy. The music, acting, and story up until that point are just a few of the things that make this scene one of the most memorable, tense, and satisfying endings to a movie. If you are not familiar with the *Star Wars* movies, a decent amount of context is needed to understand why this scene is so powerful.

Anakin Skywalker was a young Jedi Knight that was naturally stronger in the force than anyone the Jedi Order had tested for force sensitivity. He is the chosen one who will bring balance to the force, as foretold by an ancient Jedi prophecy. As Anakin becomes a teenager, the Jedi Order fails to teach him how to control his negative emotions. As a result, Darth Sidious is able to manipulate Anakin into joining the dark side of the force by promising Anakin the power to keep his pregnant girlfriend, Padme Amidala, from dying. Corrupted by the dark side, Anakin

(now Darth Vader) begins to slaughter any Jedi who survived Darth Sidious' attack on the Jedi Temple. Darth Vader is defeated by his former master, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and left to burn on the shore of a lava lake. Darth Sidious then rescues Vader and gives him his signature black suit, which he cannot survive without due to his injuries. Padme gives birth to twins, Luke Skywalker and Leia Organa, and dies during childbirth.

For the next twenty years, Darth Vader and Darth Sidious rule the galaxy with an iron fist. The Empire is a totalitarian regime that rules with fear. Using a large, planet-killing space station called the Death Star, they are able to keep most planets in line by threatening a planet's destruction if it rebels. This does not stop a rebel alliance from forming, however. Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia, now 19, lead the Rebel Alliance's attack on the Death Star and destroy it. The empire then begins building a second, larger Death Star (Death Star II). The rebellion, now stronger, launches a second attack on the Death Star. As this is happening, Luke is captured by Vader and taken to Darth Sidious' throne room on the Death Star II. Vader and Luke have a lightsaber duel, in which Luke wins. This is where Scene 44 begins.

The scene begins with Luke Skywalker standing over a defeated Darth Vader. Luke refuses to fall to the dark side by killing his father. Sidious, enraged at Luke's refusal to join the dark side, "brutally tortures Luke within an inch of his life" (Outred, Paragraph 3) using force lightning, a dark side power meant to inflict as much pain on the target as possible. Vader stands by his master's side, watching his son writhing in agony and begging Vader to help him. Darth Vader is presented with a choice in that moment; stand by Darth Sidious as he kills his son, or save his son by risking certain death and throwing Sidious down a giant shaft and killing him. As the music builds to a crescendo, the good in Vader wins. He picks up Sidious and throws him down the shaft, absorbing a large amount of force lightning in the process. By killing his master,

Darth Vader brings balance to the force and returns to the light side, becoming Anakin Skywalker again in his final moments and redeeming himself.

As a musician, one of the biggest things that will make or break a scene for me is the soundtrack. A large reason why Scene 44 is so powerful is because of the music John Williams wrote for it. The piece is called [*The Emperor*](#) and it is based around [*The Emperor's motif*](#) that plays when Darth Sidious is on screen. The choir is written to sound like the screams of the damned from the underworld, reflecting the pain Luke is in and the inner turmoil Darth Vader is experiencing. Williams lines the big brass and percussion hits up with Sidious' force lightning, which really makes the viewer feel for Luke and gives Vader's choice a real sense of urgency. As Vader lifts Sidious above his head, [*the force motif*](#) plays, signifying Anakin's return to the light side of the force. After Palpatine dies, the strings begin playing a light, sorrowful melody that is a stark contrast to the dark low brass sound during Luke's pain. The expert composition, instrumentation, and timing from John Williams during this scene give me goosebumps every time I watch it.

Another reason why this scene is so powerful is because it's the culmination of both the light versus dark theme and the theme of redemption that every Star Wars movie has built upon. The entire future of the galaxy depends on this scene. If Luke dies, then the last of the Jedi is dead, letting darkness consume the galaxy. If Vader kills Sidious, then he has brought balance to the force, as there is still one living Jedi. Josh Outred highlights why Vader's choice to save his son and kill his master is so impactful within the context of the story. Vader up until this point, "was perceived throughout the original trilogy as the most evil being in the galaxy, did the most honorable deed, he gave his life to save his son. He abandoned the selfishness and arrogance that

had consumed him for so long, destroying the puppet master he once considered his friend and mentor.” (Outred, Paragraph 3). The intertwining themes, complicated history of the world, and the music that connects it all are what makes this scene an absolute work of art that really connects with me.

Works Cited

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