

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order

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Genre: 3rd person action-adventure/Metroidvania

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Developer: Respawn Entertainment

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Game Writers: Aaron Contreras, Manny Hagopian, Matt Michnovetz, Megan Fausti, and Chris Avellone

Overview

Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order tells the story of Cal Kestis, a former Jedi Padawan who survived the Great Jedi Purge brought on by then-Chancellor Palpatine's infamous Order 66. Cal has repressed his Force powers in his memory, both because of the pain and loss associated with them, and in order to help him hide from the Empire while breaking down ships for the Scrappers' Guild on the junk world of Bracca. However, when one of his friends suffers a terrible accident, Cal must use his powers in order to save him.

Outed as a Force-user to the ever-watching Empire, Cal is pursued by the Emperor's agents: the Second and Ninth Sisters of the evil Inquisitorious. Capture is imminent, but Cal escapes thanks to some last minute help from another former Jedi, Cere Junda. Along with her friend, a jovial pilot and four-armed Latero named Greez Dritus, Cere helps Cal escape Bracca on their ship (*The Stinger Mantis*) and the three embark on a quest, Inquisitors on their trail, to find a holocron containing a list of all the Force-sensitive children that are spread across the galaxy in hopes of rebuilding the Jedi Order.

Characters

- **Cal Kestis** - A young man traumatized by the violence and betrayal he witnessed during the fall of the Galactic Republic, at the onset of the story Cal is just a guy trying to survive. He has repressed the memories of his Jedi training with his master Jaro Tapal to such an extent that he is unable to use most of his old Force abilities; he suffers from *intense* survivor's guilt. As the story progresses, however, Cal confronts these memories and regains his abilities, putting them to use on the planetary environments of the present

as he learns to have faith in his training and trust in the Force. He is driven on his journey for the holocron by a desire to make up for his perceived failure in protecting and saving his master and the other Jedi during the Purge, and hopes to do so by safeguarding a potential new generation of Jedi from the clutches of the Empire.

- **Cere Junda** - Another former Jedi who had a padawan of her own at the time of Order 66, Cere has cut herself off from the Force ever since she lashed out with the dark side to escape death at the hands of the Empire after failing to save her padawan from capture. She seeks guidance from messages left by her old master Eno Cordova concerning his work researching the ancient Zeffo civilization and their connection to the Force. She has teamed up with Greez Dritus to search the galaxy for Force sensitives and surviving Jedi, and takes Cal under her wing when the two rescue him from the Inquisitors on Bracca.
- **Greez Dritus** - A jocular, gray-skinned, four-armed Latero with mutton chops of long white hair sprouting from his cheeks, Greez feels most comfortable aboard the *Stinger Mantis*. While he always has an eye on self-preservation, Greez is fully committed to helping Cal and Cere search for Cordova's hidden holocron.
- **Jaro Tapal** - Cal's fallen master, Jaro was a stern yet sincere presence, training Cal in the ways of the Force and eventually sacrificing his life to ensure Cal's escape from their comrades-turned-murderous clones. Jaro's final gift to Cal is one he carries in secret at the start of the game: his lightsaber.
- **Eno Cordova** - Cere's former master, Cordova has left recorded holomessages in the memory banks of BD-1 that help guide Cal and the crew to find the holocron containing the list of Force users. Cordova devoted his life in the Jedi Order to studying ancient civilizations, namely the Zeffo, a Force-sensitive species that built structures, temples, and tombs on Bogano, Dathomir, and their eponymous home planet.
- **Nightsister Merrin** - Merrin is one of the only surviving Nightsisters, a group of Force-sensitive witches on Dathomir that harness dark-side magick. Initially hostile to Cal when he comes to Dathomir, distrusting the lightsaber he carries as she says the same type of weapon was used to slay her sisters, she nevertheless comes to his aide when he is attacked by Taron Malicos and joins the Mantis crew when our characters leave Dathomir to open the Vault on Bogano.
- **Saw Garrera** - Saw is the leader of a group of insurgents fighting to free Chieftain Tarfful and the Wookiees of Kashyyyk from their enslavement in the Empire's sap refineries; while Saw is unconcerned with Cal's greater goal of rebuilding the Jedi Order, he is more than happy to have a Jedi's help in freeing the Wookiee chieftain Cordova has told Cal to find.
- **Taron Malicos** - Malicos is a former Jedi that escaped the Purge by hiding out on Dathomir. Over the years the dark side energies present on Dathomir have gained more and more of a hold on Malicos, and he has become corrupted, turning Merrin and the

surviving Nightbrothers against the Jedi, blaming them for the strife in the galaxy.

Malicos attempts to lure Cal to the dark side, and attacks when Cal refuses to join him.

- **The Ninth Sister** - A female Dowutin, the imposing Ninth Sister formerly known as Masana Tide works with the Second Sister to find and either capture or kill Force sensitives and former Jedi. Sardonic and quick witted, Tide attacks Cal on Kashyyyk near the top of the Origin Tree.
- **The Second Sister** - Cal's nemesis is actually Trilla Suduri, Cere's former Padawan. Hungry for revenge against her former master, Trilla also hopes to turn Cal to the dark side, and most of all wants the holocron he searches for in order to turn *all* potential Jedi to the dark side.
- **BD-1** - A spunky, spritely, and endearing bipedal droid that rides around on Cal's back, jumping off to scan or interact with the environment, and dispensing healing stims to Cal when he needs them. He also plays back Master Cordova's messages for Cal as he explores the tombs of the Zeffo and passes Cordova's tests.

Breakdown

When Jedi: Fallen Order begins, Cal is working to break apart a *Venator*-class Republic cruiser with his friend and colleague Prauf, an Abednedo. As the two come across a Jedi starfighter crashed onto the exterior of the cruiser Prauf recalls the Jedi, and how they "couldn't all have been traitors" ironically not realizing that one is standing right in front of him. Cal brushes his hand across the Jedi crest, hinting at his heritage and his Force ability of psychometry, or being able to sense the history of objects by touching them.. The two continue to work, an Imperial probe droid observing from overhead, but a hovering crane suddenly fails and the piece of ship they are standing on tips dangerously, sending Cal and Prauf sliding down towards the jaws of the Ibdis Maw. Cal is able to grab onto a hanging cable to keep himself from falling, but Prauf is not so lucky, and continues to fall towards the monster lurking below. With the probe droid looking on, Cal reaches out with the Force and grabs Prauf, saving him from certain death. This is the incident that launches Cal into the rest of the story. The two attempt to lay low afterward, trying to blend in and remain in the "normal world" of their scrapper jobs on Bracca, but this does not last long: soon the Empire's troops arrive with two Inquisitors, dark side force users in service of Darth Vader that have been tasked with hunting down any Jedi that survived Order 66. The Second Sister lines up Cal and Prauf with other scrappers and threatens to kill them all if the reported Force-user does not make themselves known. Prauf tries to stall the Inquisitors, giving a speech about how the Empire views them all as expendable. The Second Sister confirms this when she ignites her lightsaber and stabs the blade through Prauf's chest. Cal tries to escape, but is pursued until he is confronted in single combat by the Second Sister. He holds her off as long as he can, but she eventually gets the upper hand. Just when it appears she will best Cal and win the duel, he is saved by Cere and Greez appearing in the *Mantis*. They occupy the Second Sister with the ships cannons while Cal jumps aboard.

When playing the game the first time, Cere and Greez's entrance felt abrupt and slightly forced as a *deus ex machina* that allows Cal to escape the Inquisitors' clutches and get started on his journey before having to introduce new characters. However, later on in the game this plot point becomes more plausible when it is revealed that the Second Sister is actually Cere's former padawan Trilla, so it would make sense that Cere and Greez could have been following her when they discovered Cal. From Bracca, the *Mantis* crew heads to the planet Bogano where they find an ancient structure called the Vault, which Cere hopes that Cal can open, seeing as his connection to the force is intact. She also tells him that there's "someone she thinks he should meet along the way. On his way to the Vault, Cal encounters BD-1, another member of the *Mantis* crew, and tells him he thinks he's looking for a Jedi. BD leads him to the Vault, where it plays a recording of Cere's former master Eno Cordova. Cordova explains that he left a series of encrypted recordings in BD's memory to help a worthy successor obtain the contents of the vault: a holocron containing a list of all the Force-sensitive children in the galaxy. Cordova also explains that whoever is now accessing the recordings must prove themselves worthy of the holocron by passing a series of tests Cordova has created. He tells Cal of the ancient race that built the Vault and other structures on Bogano, called the Zeffo, and suggests that he continue his search for answers about the Vault and how to open it there. In the classic three-act structure, this serves as the first act break, as now Cal has accepted his quest and has taken steps into the larger unknown in order to complete it.

The crew makes their way to the Zeffo homeworld (which shares their name). There they learn that during their time in the galaxy, the Zeffo made contact with the Wookiee homeworld of Kashyyyk, and Cordova's message states that his old friend Chieftain Tarfful may have more information on the Zeffo. So the crew hops back on the *Mantis* and jumps to Kashyyyk.

On Kashyyyk Cal encounters Saw Gerrera and his Partisans, a group of freedom fighters using salvaged Republic equipment to fight the Empire. Here on Kashyyyk, they are fighting to free Wookiees that have been enslaved and forced to toil in factories refining the sap of their sacred wroshyr trees as the Empire destroys their ancestral forests. Saw tells Cal that he has not been in contact with Tarfful, and that he might have been captured by the Empire. Cal agrees to help the Partisans infiltrate the Imperial base and the group attacks. Cal does not find Tarfful imprisoned there, however, and decides to return to Zeffo, hoping to find more answers there.

Back on Zeffo, Cal is attacked by the Second Sister while exploring the tomb of the sage Miktrull. During the confrontation the Second Sister throws Cal across the room and is about to deliver a killing blow when BD activates a laser gate that cuts Cal off from the Second Sister. The Sister then reveals that she is in fact Trilla Suduri, Cere's former padawan. She tells Cal that she was captured by the Empire because Cere told them where she was hiding while enduring excruciating torture. She taunts Cal before retiring from the field, saying that he can never trust Cere because she will do the same to him. Cal explores the tomb further and discovers that he needs a device called an Atrium in order to open the Vault on Bogano. Before he can return to the *Mantis*, however, Cal is knocked unconscious and captured by a bounty hunter.

Upon awakening Cal is forced to fight in the gladiatorial pits of crime lord Sorc Tormo until Cere and Greez break up the party, crashing through barriers to land right in the pit itself and extract Cal. As the *Mantis* flies away, Greez apologizes to Cal, as it was his gambling debts to Tormo that got Cal captured in the first place. Cal confronts Cere about what Trilla told him, but before the argument can spiral out of control they are interrupted by an incoming transmission from Kashyyyk: one of Gerra's lieutenants tells them that they've found Tarfful and that he's willing to meet with them, so the crew sets course for Kashyyyk.

When Cal meets with Tarfful the Wookiee tells him to search for answers at the top of the massive Origin Tree. Cal climbs to the top and discovers another recording of Cordova that tells him that an Astrium can be found on Dathomir. The crew flies there, but Cal is immediately confronted by a Nightsister named Merrin, who blames the Jedi for the massacre of her people. Merrin impedes Cal's progress in finding the Astrium, and he experiences a flashback to the moment his master Jaro sacrificed himself to save Cal during the Purge. What appears to be Jaro's spirit but is more likely a manifestation of Cal's subconscious and dark side feelings attacks him and cause him to break his master's lightsaber. This is when we see Cal at his lowest point, completely broken down and discouraged, having just broken the one remaining connection he had to his master. He is approached by a mysterious wanderer who is revealed to be former Jedi Taron Malicos. Malicos survived the Purge by hiding on Dathomir, and he offers to teach Cal the ways of Dathomir's dark magicks, to the protest of Merrin. Cal refuses Malicos and retreats to the *Mantis* when Merrin attacks him. He shows Cere his lightsaber and tells her what happened. She admits to him that she was captured trying to save Trilla, and that it was too late: when Trilla was presented to Cere as an Inquisitor, corrupted and turned to the dark side. Cere lashed out with the darkness herself, killing everyone present except Trilla and then escaping. This is why she has cut herself off from the Force. She gives Cal her lightsaber, and tells him they will use it and parts from Jaro's to build Cal his own new lightsaber.

The three travel to the planet Ilum, where Jedi used to journey to find the kyber crystals that power their lightsabers. Cal fights through Imperials and claims his own kyber crystal, using it to construct a new saber. The crew returns to Dathomir, where Cal confronts Jaro's spirit again and defeats it, having worked through the shame of his perceived failure and the guilt of being unable to save his master and fellow Jedi. Malicos attempts to lure Cal to the dark side a final time, and when Cal refuses him he attacks. Nightsister Merrin joins Cal in fighting Malicos, realizing that the fallen Jedi has been manipulating her and the Nightbrothers and turning them against members of his former order. The two defeat Malicos, and with Merrin's help Cal retrieves the Astrium from the tomb of Zeffo sage Kujut. Merrin agrees to join the crew of the *Mantis*, and the crew heads back to Bogano to open the Vault. Once they do they finally obtain the holocron, only to lose it again moments later when Trilla attacks and steals it from them. During another duel with Cal, Trilla loses her lightsaber into the hands of Cal, who inadvertently uses his psychometry ability and sees some of the tortures Trilla was put through to make her what she is. Trilla escapes with the holocron back to the Fortress Inquisitorius on the planet Nur.

Back on the *Mantis*, Cere reassumes her title of Jedi Master and uses Trilla's captured saber to knight Cal, officially recognizing him as a member of the Jedi Order. The crew then travels to Nur to sneak into the fortress and recover the holocron. Cal duels Trilla once more, defeating her and taking back the holocron. Cere tries to talk to Trilla, to tell her that she's sorry for what she did, but is cut short when Darth Vader appears from behind, killing Trilla with the Force for losing the holocron. Cal attempts to face Vader, but flees when it is clear he's too powerful. He and Cere make it back to the *Mantis* alive, but just barely.

Wondering what to do with the holocron, Cal remembers Jaro's advice to "trust in the Force *alone*" and decides that they would only be endangering the children by identifying them or gathering them together, and that they should leave their fates up to the will of the Force. Cal ignites his lightsaber, destroying the holocron and its contents, and the *Mantis* crew shoots off into hyperspace.

Strongest Element

I think that the strongest element of this game is the way the narrative is constructed around Cal's repressed memories. First of all, psychological trauma is a very important and relevant topic that not many games deal with, especially Star Wars games, so I thought making it central to the structure of the narrative was a strong choice in and of itself. Furthermore, this structure provided a logical scenario for the game: seeing as Cal used to be a padawan, it would not make sense for him to know nothing about the Force or how to use it at the start of the game. However, players must be introduced to and taught how to use each new skill as they become relevant for gameplay. The explanation that Cal has repressed those memories after surviving the Jedi Purge is entirely plausible and actually so probable that it's surprising it's taken this long to be represented like this. I think this solution is an interesting example of narrative and gameplay serving each other's needs at the same time.

Unsuccessful Element

I felt that the weakest moment in the story was the section in Sorc Tormo's gladiator fighting pit. While combat is always fun and the location was a new one in the game, the sequence did not seem to add much to the development of the narrative. If the level was removed and the *Mantis* crew got the message about Tarfful while still on Zeffo, the story would not change. The level mainly serves to justify the appearance of many teams of bounty hunters in the post-game trying to kill Cal that have been sent by the Haxion Brood, the organization headed by Tormo, and while the inclusion of these bounty hunter opponents is appreciated, the level they stem from seems to be able to operate independently from the rest of the story, and would have seemed stronger as a segment if it was more intertwined with the overall narrative.

Highlight

The story moment that impacted me the most while playing the game was the flashback sequence when Cal witnesses the beginning of Order 66. This moment in Star Wars history has been represented many times since its first depiction in 2005's *Revenge of the Sith*, but there is

something so up close and visceral about this particular experience that sets it apart from other examples. Additionally, the fact that Jaro appeared throughout the story through flashbacks as a way to teach the player new Force powers kept him present in the story and continually increased player attachment to him as a mentor, even though players already know what's coming. Players know that Jaro is dead from the beginning, and the fact that seeing it is still so powerful is a testament to the quality of this sequence and its importance to the story, serving as Cal's low point before the start of the third act and climax.

Critical Reception

The critical reception of this game has been very positive so far, with the game holding a 9/10 on Steam and Google reporting that 94% of its users like it. According to Dan Stapleton at IGN, which also gave the game a 9/10, "Jedi: Fallen Order makes up for a lot of lost time. A strong cast sells a dark story while keeping things fun and loyal to Star Wars lore, and fast, challenging combat mixes with energetic platforming, decent puzzles, and diverse locations to explore for an all-around amazing game". Phil Hornshaw of GameSpot said that Jedi: Fallen Order had "a story that finds humanity in the Force and in its characters," and gave the game a score of 80%, which is more closely in line with Metacritic's aggregate score of an 81%.

Lessons

- The first lesson I think this game teaches is that narrative and gameplay are both improved when they are used to serve and enhance each other as opposed to only using one to serve the other or vice versa. The strongest points of this story and the most meaningful parts of the player experience came when the goals of these two different things were made to work in concert instead of independently.
- That being said, there were definitely some narrative moments in the game that seemed to come almost out of nowhere, such as Cere and Greez's introduction or Cal's abduction by the Huntsman. These are the moments that feel the least like the narrative and gameplay elements are working together, and further tying the fortunes of these concepts to one another could keep this from happening in future titles.
- Finally, I think a final positive lesson to take from Jedi: Fallen Order is that restraint and balance can be just as entertaining as hacking and slashing. Many 3rd person action-adventure games fall into the category of button mashers, but this is not one of them. The combat style feels realistic, and this is another way that gameplay is successfully interwoven with narrative: players learn and improve at using the combat system as Cal does, their confidence in their abilities grows as Cal's does, leading to an integration that feels very rewarding to the player.

Summation

Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order is a game that seems like a straightforward adventure tale on the surface, but a look behind the curtain shows some interesting ideas ripe for further analysis. The non-linear nature of including flashbacks throughout a narrative feels perfectly at home in

the Star Wars galaxy, itself being a non-linear story. These flashbacks work in parallel with the present story, helping the player to build attachments and relationships with characters before tearing them away in a moment the player knows is coming the whole time, but still delivers the tragic emotional weight of the events of the story. The game goes further, tackling the trauma Cal has endured because of these experiences, and rather than being a forgettable part of his backstory, these memories are an integral part of his internal conflict with himself, his relationship and conflict with Cere, and the overall goal of the story. I came out of this game having deeply enjoyed, ready to start a new play-through, and feeling like a newly minted Jedi.