

In 'Solo' stumble, a crossroads for Disney's 'Star Wars'

By JAKE COYLE Associated Press

NEW YORK — The reaches of the galaxy far, far away might not be quite as vast as previously thought.

In a box-office blip that echoed through the multiplexes, 'Solo: A Star Wars Story' didn't fare well over the Memorial Day weekend, amassing an estimated \$103 million in ticket sales from Thursday night to Monday.

'Solo,' which switched directors mid-production, cost more than \$250 million to make, and it was expected to debut with around \$150 million. For the first time, the 'Star Wars' juggernaut was humbled at the box office.

The opening marked the worst debut in the franchise's history and Disney's stock slid 2.5 percent in trading Tuesday.

No one yet needs to run panicked through the streets yelling 'Save the Wookies!' But for the first time since Disney acquired Lucasfilm in 2012 for \$4.05 billion, the profit potential within George Lucas' space saga no longer appears limitless.

Instead of opening up a new Han Solo trilogy, the disappointing arrival of 'Solo' only intensified the questions bubbling around one of the movies' biggest properties. Is there a filmmaker beside J.J. Abrams that can win over both diehards and new fans? How slavish should subsequent sequels



Jonathan Olley/Lucasfilm/Associated Press

Alden Ehrenreich and Jonnas Suotamo in a scene from 'Solo: A Star Wars Story.'

and spinoffs be to the originals? Is there anyone in China who cares a lick about lightsabers?

'I think they knew they had a problem a long time ago,'

said Jeff Bock, senior box office analyst for Exhibitor Relations. 'What, 75 percent of the directors are fired and don't finish the film? You've

got internal problems.'

Those problems came to a head on 'Solo,' where filmmakers Phil Lord and Christopher Miller were replaced during shooting by Ron Howard, who steered the film in a less irreverent comic direction that stayed closer to the script co-written by Lawrence Kasdan, the veteran 'Star Wars' scribe of 'The Empire Strikes Back' and 'Return of the Jedi.'

Once envisioned as a western-style prequel romp, 'Solo' became an existential battle over the tone of 'Star Wars,' as Lucasfilm struggled to find a balance between old and new.

Up next is Episode IX, which J.J. Abrams has taken the helm on after Colin Trevorrow was jettisoned. But after that film, which in December 2019 will close out the third 'Star Wars' trilogy, a fleet of sequels and spinoffs are planned.

'Last Jedi' writer-director Rian Johnson is developing another trilogy in the main line of films. 'Game of Thrones' creators D.B. Weiss and David Benioff will write and produce a separate batch of 'Star Wars' films. Jon Favreau is writing and executive producing a live-action series for Disney's upcoming streaming platform. James Mangold ('Logan') is to write and direct a Boba Fett film. Rumors have long swirled about an Obi-Wan Kenobi spinoff.

TV SCHEDULE Evening listings FRIDAY—SUNDAY

Table with columns for time slots (6 PM, 6:30, 7 PM, 7:30, 8 PM, 8:30, 9 PM, 9:30, 10 PM, 10:30, 11 PM, 11:30) and rows for various TV channels (KATU, KOMO, KING, KOIN, KIRO, KGW, KRCW, KOPB, KPVT, KPXD, KCQP, TBS, KZJO, ESPN, ESPN2, NICK, DISN, FAM, FMC, LIFE, ROOT, FS1, SPIKE, HIST, A&E, TLC, DISC, NGE0, TNT, AMC, USA, FOOD, HGTV, FX, CNN, FNC, CNBC, BRAV, TCM, SYFY, RFD).

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