

THE FORCE AWAKENS PREVIEW

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RETURN OF THE FRANCHISE

A decade after 'Revenge of Sith' closed the book on the prequel trilogy, a new film thrusts the 'Star Wars' saga decades into the future with new heroes, new villains and some of fans' favorite old friends

BY TIMOTHY R. SCHULTE
CTW FEATURES

We could recap how we got here – six monumental films; countless multimedia spinoffs, including books, video games and television series, just to name a few; clothing, costumes, and a culture unto itself; put simply, the most iconic entertainment franchise of all time – but we'll just get right to it: On Dec. 18, "Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens" hits theaters.

And. People. Are. Hyped.

Tickets for the movie went on sale Oct. 19, nearly two months before its release, following the debut of the film's full-length trailer during "Monday Night Football" on ESPN – The Walt Disney Co. owns both ESPN and the "Star Wars" franchise – and immediately set presale records.

Ticket site Fandango said it sold eight times as many first-day tickets as 2012's "The Hunger Games," the previous record holder, including more than \$6.5 million in IMAX sales, also a record.

"This is an extraordinary time for the industry, which experienced

unprecedented ticketing demand last night for 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens,'" Fandango said the following day in a statement. "The enthusiasm for this year's most anticipated movie is out of this world and we expect it to continue all the way to its debut on Dec. 18."

Whether you're a longtime fan of the franchise or a newcomer to the "Star Wars" universe, here's everything you need to know to get ready for the new film.

THE BACKGROUND

The Force awakened in October

2012 when "Star Wars" creator George Lucas sold Lucasfilm Ltd. – including, of course, the entirety of "Star Wars" – to The Walt Disney Co., and Disney in turn announced three new "Star Wars" films. Referred to as the "sequel trilogy," the new films start with this year's "The Force Awakens," followed by currently untitled Episodes VIII and IX in 2017 and 2019, respectively.

J.J. Abrams, who rebooted the "Star Trek" film franchise to enormous box office success, was tapped to direct and co-write the film. Lawrence Kasdan, who co-wrote "The Empire Strikes Back" and "Return of the Jedi,"