

# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSFORMATION AND CONVERSION PRESENT IN THE STAR WARS NEWLY-ESTABLISHED CANON

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## **Abstract**

The conversion of races in sci-fi fiction of the Star Wars universe usually deals with the distinct change that is the corruption and conversion to the dark side of the Force. While the authors of the expanding Star Wars universe neglect the possibilities of conversion of an individual by culture and race, this phenomenon may be found in the Kenobi novel by John Jackson Miller. This novel bridges the gap in the established newly-found canon of the Star Wars universe between the Star Wars episode three, Revenge of the Sith, and episode four, A New Hope. The Kenobi novel serves not only the purpose of bridging the gap between the established episodes three and four; it also attempts to establish the physical metamorphosis of the main character and the metamorphosis of an individual in order for the individuals to be converted and changed into the supposed antiheroes of the novel, The Tusken Raiders, a race native to Tatooine, counting among the deadliest and unrelenting predators of the planet's barren wastelands. The author establishes several cultural brakes with the traditionally established culture, yet cling to the established conversion process that may be enacted during the time of need when the number of raiders is diminished and the raiders abduct individuals and convert them to Tusken Raiders. While the conversion is not based on a biological level or through the use of science or mysticism, it is rather enforced through brute force offsetting the established forms of conversion in the Star Wars universe.

**Key Words:** Star Wars ,Kenobi ,Conversion, New Canon

## **Abstrakt**

Premena rás v sci-fi fikcii vesmíru Star Wars sa zvyčajne zaoberá výraznou zmenou, ktorou je korupcia a premena na temnú stranu sily. Zatiaľ čo autori rozširujúceho sa vesmíru hviezdnych vojen zanedbávajú možnosti premeny jednotlivca na základe kultúry a rasy, tento jav možno nájsť v románe Kenobi od Johna Jacksona Millera. Tento román preklenuje medzeru v zavedenom novonarodenom kánone vesmíru Star Wars medzi epizódou tri, Pomsta Sithov a epizódou štyri, Nová nádej. Román Kenobi slúži nielen na preklenutie medzery medzi zavedenými epizódami tri a štyri; takisto sa pokúša zaviesť fyzickú premenu hlavnej postavy a metamorfózu jednotlivca, aby sa jednotlivci premenili na predpokladaných antihrdinov románu Tusken Raiders, pôvodní obyvatelia Tatooinu, ktorý patria medzi najsmrteľnejších predátorov z planéty. Autor vytvoril niekoľko kultúrnych prekážok tradičnej kultúry, ale zároveň sa pridrižiava zavedenému procesu konverzie, ktorý môže byť prijatý v čase potreby, keď sa počet Tuskenov zníži. Jednotlivci sú konvertovaní na Tuskenov. Zatiaľ čo konverzia nie je založená na biologickej úrovni alebo pomocou vedy alebo mystiky, je skôr vynútená skrze brutálnu silu, ktorá kompenzuje zavedené formy premeny vo vesmíre Star Wars.

**Kľúčové slová:** Star Wars ,Kenobi ,Premena, Nový Cónon

The focus of this work will be placed on the comparative analysis of the conversion process established in Star Wars canon and Star Wars Legends canon. In the initial stages of the work, the difference between Star Wars canon and Star Wars Legends canon will be established. This will be followed by the analysis of the established process of conversion present in the Star Wars universe. The newly-established conversion process present in the *Kenobi* novel will serve to offset the traditional conversion processes in the Star Wars universe. *Kenobi* was written by author John Jackson Miller and released on August 27, 2013. The novel takes place between the events of Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith and Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope nineteen years before the Battle of Yavin. It is set during the early days of Obi-Wan's exile on Tatooine. The Author John Jackson Miller is an American comic-book writer, novelist, and commentator, whose most notable works are the Knights of the Old Republic and Knight Errant comic series published by Dark Horse Comics relating to the Star Wars universe. These works are notable for their inclusion on both sides of the Star Wars canon and Star Wars Legends canon divide making him the perfect example to analyze the transformation processes within the Star Wars universe and their change.

The transformation process established in the Star Wars universe is deceptively simple. To the uninitiated to its intricacies, the change occurs in an instant and reflect the alignments to the light and the dark side of the Force. "... the Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It's an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us; it binds the galaxy together." (Brooks, 2000) The power of the Force could be utilized by individuals who were sensitive to the Force. The ability to effectively utilize the Force required training and study in order to harness an individual's full potential. While Force-sensitive individuals without training were given only minor advantages, a split-second warning, or a bad feeling attributed mostly to good reflexes or intuition. In the Star Wars universe, the Force is inherently tied to a transformation of an ordinary individual to an extraordinary individual with physiological aspects that can but do not have to be visible to the naked eye. Throughout the majority of the canon and legendary canon portions of the Star Wars universe the Force is described as binary, as the dark side and the light side respectively, although the light side is never named as such and is dubbed as simply the Force in the initial stages of development within the Star Wars universe. This is however not true of the later additions in the legend canon, where the Force is given both a grey era where the two opposites meet to create a balance and reflects on the flaws present in beliefs on both sides of the binary. Furthermore, it is present as a current of life energy and power that can be influenced and the dark and light are only the riverbanks and the Force itself is made up of a rainbow - a metaphor used to represent various orders of Force users and believes throughout the established Star Wars universe.

In the initial stages of this paper the division into a new canon and old canon, or rather the division into Star Wars canon and Star Wars Legends canon must be established. Lucasfilm, the creator of the Star Wars universe was acquired by The Walt Disney Company in October 2012, and with a sequel trilogy of films and other works in development, Lucasfilm announced in April 2014 that all previously released expanded universe content would be declared non-canon to the franchise and rebranded as Star Wars Legends canon. While this process sparked initial outrage

among the fanbase, such a step was, in fact, necessary in order to allow the franchise to develop future installments. The expanded universe was spread through 153 novels and countless other works creating an unwieldy setting for a new expansion of the franchise dealing with a new generation of characters and intended for a new generation of an audience while remaining true to the original formula of the initial creators. Additionally, the heroes and villains in the expanded universe grew with every author's addition to the expanded universe in search of a greater threat, more glorious victories, and defeats. Spanning empires with unrivalled ruthlessness or seemingly endless resources and/or numbers on the other side of the spectrum concentrating on the power of an individual with the antagonist being able to drain entire planets of life, or representing a personification of an immoral omniscient creature driven insane to reset the galaxy through war, death, and destruction every five millennia. This continuous build up or a game of top trumps with ever greater threat and challenges proved too powerful and too unwieldy to be presented in the confines of a franchise trying to go back to its original roots.

The Star Wars Legends canon established a myriad of rules and characteristics when it comes to the transformation of an individual when converting to the dark or the light side of the Force. The degree of the transformation can vary depending on how good or evil the characters are. However, the process of transformation or conversion is intricate, slow, and with varying degrees of visibility. This rings especially true when considering the converts to the Light side of the Force, where the effect of the physical transformation can indeed be considered negligible, often presenting itself as a glow surrounding the character and its intensity depends on the ability and effort of the individual. While in the Star Wars Legends canon, the transformation and conversion of the disciples and followers of the dark side was most often presented in draining of the colour of skin, the golden hue to the eyes iris, the appearance of rapid ageing, and dark marks on the body depending on the severity of the fall or frequency of use of the dark side of the Force. The more frequent the use and the more difficult the feat, the heavier an individual or a collective would draw on the Force, and the quicker the onset of the deterioration. Furthermore, the deterioration itself would not only have an early onset depending on the use drain and strain of the individual or group but would progress and the deterioration itself would be more profound causing the visible manifestation of pale and dark spots. The dark side corruption or transformation usually took a more physiological toll on the individual user even on the setting and surroundings as the Force permeates all things. This creates a cause and effect relationship, a spiral of darkness linked to the antagonist of the story in a monochromatic binary of the light and the dark, where the arbitrary concepts of good and evil are easily distinguishable as the former and latter present concepts.

Driven by a simple concept, the power corrupting the Star Wars Legends canon established the dark side, in a manner resembling a strong, and highly addictive narcotic. The dark side would not only affect the mind of the user but the appearance as well. As one immersed oneself deeper within the dark side of the Force, its malevolent power took a toll on the body. Partially established in the Star Wars Legends canon and simultaneously in the new canon, Darth Bane explained that the reason for this physical degradation was because flesh and bone lacked the endurance to channel

the immense power of the dark side indefinitely (Karpyshyn, 2009). Revan also explained that while the light side and Jedi teachings were devoted to preventing physical change through the Force, the dark side changes had to be accepted by the Sith, or they would fail due to their attempts at moderation. In time, the corruption could go beyond mere cosmetic details and directly impair physical abilities (Karpyshyn, 2011). The most profound transformations in the Star Wars Legends canon could be attributed to Darth Nihilus and Abeloth. Nihilus was completely consumed by the dark side both mentally and physically, abandoning every physical and mental connection to humanity. Eventually, he became an aberration of the dark side that existed only to consume life. Abeloth was fully immersed in the twin nexuses of the Force causing her both to become unstable, immortal, and almost all powerful - a physical manifestation of chaos and destruction and desire, an anti-deity to the deified will of the Force. Abeloth is present in *Fate of the Jedi*, a series of novels 2009 -2012 that was the last installment of the Star Wars Legends canon. While nonetheless interesting, the presence of such individuals would prove it difficult to portray in the newly-reborn franchise because of the rhetorical question - Where do we go next? As the newly-reborn franchise would have difficulty coping with such individuals, these stories and plot lines were relegated to legends.

The new Star Wars canon transformation process progressed along the familiar basic guidelines. The importance of the new Star Wars canon is to set a limitation on the Star Wars Legends canon, that establishes a continuous search for higher stakes and more impressive stories and antagonist to be conquered, saved, or overcome by the protagonist. As a result, the Star Wars Legends canon craved evermore powerful figures that were created, resulting in the Legacy canon producing two aforementioned god-like figures, Nihilus and Abeloth. With a need to muzzle the scope of the universe and return it to the fundamentals that enthralled the previous generation the scope of the power of characters is scaled back. So, it was with the dark and light conversion, corruption, or transformation of an individual. While the new Star Wars canon limited its conversion to the physical changes in appearance limited to the iris colour, pale skin, and appearance of old age. All present in the Sith as a result of the long-term utilization of the Force. Recreation of the universe without the established legendary canon that would prove too cumbersome and unveiled to write into the newly-established stories while at the same time eliminating the too fantastic and powerful element out of this science fiction. With giving the dark side a reclusive and mystical veil that can only be penetrated by a selected few, the physical signs of dark side immersion are discussed by Darths Sidious and Plagueis:

"-Will I eventually be physically transformed? -Into some aged, pale-skinned, raspy-voiced, yellow-eyed monster, you mean. Such as the one you see before you. Surely you are acquainted with the lore: King Ommin of Onderon, Darths Sion, and Nihilus. But whether it will happen to you, I can't say. Know this, though, Sidious, that the power of the dark side does not debilitate the practitioner so much as it debilitates those who lack it. The power of the dark side is an illness no true Sith would ever wish to be cured of." (Luceno, 2012 p.126)

While aesthetics was considered of little importance or only considered important when the public perception of a hiding practiser of the dark side of the Force was in question, steps could be taken

to hide the marks. During the pursuit for ultimate power and domination, these marks could have been born as honorifics of endurance resilience, yet at the same time a silent stoic warning sign to others dissuading even attempts to usurp power.

The conversion to the light side and the dark side of the Force and their effects are an established form of transformation in the Star Wars universe. The Kenobi novel, set out to not only aid the transition between the prequels and the original trilogy, was simultaneous to establishing the new form an image of the lonesome Jedi present in the original trilogy as opposed to the martial might of a collective Jedi Order present in the prequel trilogy. Present in the Kenobi novel is two distinct processes of conversion that can be understood as non-traditional within the confines of the Star Wars universe. One of the unestablished transformation processes stems from a simple need to explain the rapid aging of the main character. The non-traditional physical transformation, the change of the physical appearance of the characters in the established canon accounting for the timeline and appearance distortion in the established canon adherent to Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith and Star Wars: Episode IV, the Kenobi novel was set up to fill these nineteen years in which the character aged severely in appearance. This was achieved in the exchange between Annileen speaking to Kenobi about a famous actor Jellion Broon who came to Tatooine.

“...He survived all right. Showed up in Bestine six months later-looking twenty years older. The suns and the wind ripped him up something awful. It looked like someone'd taken a plastorch to his face. His own agent didn't recognize him, and his studio wanted nothing to do with him." She pointed to the eopie, munching away, its head under the tarp now covering the trough. "Take it from Rooh. Keep your hood on, or you'll dry out like a sack of gormmillet."... (Miller 2014 p.153)

This establishes a rather simple but effective mode of transformation explaining the distortion of appearance in the timeline also, establishing a physiological transformation without the aid of the Force to act as a catalyst. This process represents the shift from the Star Wars Legends canon to the Star Wars newly-established canon, a science fiction more grounded in reality, as opposed to the god-like figures present in the Star Wars legends canon. This can be understood as an attempt of a franchise returning to its roots striving for a more relatable and controlled growth.

The other non-traditional transformation present in the Kenobi novel is the transformation and conversion of the Tusken Raiders, in which an individual can be transformed to become a member of another race or culture, however, without any biological or mystical manipulation but rather through pain and suffering. The Tusken raiders commonly referred to as the Sand people were natives of Tatooine living in the harsh and barren environment. That is reflected in their depiction and culture." Sand people lived with sores every day. At birth, every Tusken infant was swaddled tightly in bandages. ... they quickly became acquainted with the price the coverings exacted on the body. ...Numberless in a lifetime, sores simply had to be endured." (Miller, 2014 p.56) Tusken Raiders were originally created as a culture that understood only strength, might, pain, suffering, and hardship, a deceptively primitive society on a backwater planet in a Universe filled with many extraordinary individuals again commits to the grounding of the franchise with the focus on the more personal and individual experience in the grand narrative of the Star Wars universe.

“...K'Sheek had been slow to learn ... the human abductee had thought her wrappings were something that could be changed for cleanliness or comfort. She was wrong. Sand People added to their birth wrap as they grew, each new patch a testament to their defiance and survival. If a pebble got into the wrappings, it was simply layered over. The carbuncle it caused became a reminder of the past.... A'Yark understood that defeat was just another sore Sand People lived with. Defeats had to be felt, each and every one-and remembered. “(Miller, 2014 p.60)

The conversion process of Tusken Raiders is described both in retrospect and in vivid details in the Kenobi novel. In the time of need, the Tusken Raiders would abduct individuals in order to bolster their numbers, assign them basic tasks in exchange for essential supplies for life as well as protection from the harsh environment which is, in the eyes of the Tusken raiders, a fair exchange. Yet the brutal existence for a convertee more often than not resulting in suicide or death the example of this can be seen in the final chapters of the novel where Orrin Gault, one of the main characters, is taken.

“...The sky shimmered for some reason, a brilliant whorl at the end of a tunnel. ... And then he heard his breath. Something was over his mouth, something metallic, clacking against his broken teeth when he opened wide. ... He saw his legs, now, bandaged. He felt the gloves on his fingertips. He felt the shroud on his face, and the metallic eyepieces against his eyelids. ..."You gives us water," A'Yark said. "And you will be fed." ..."You will be fed. And we moves you when we move. And you will live-while we have water." ... No. ...Orrin thought it, but didn't say it. For no was a word, and hearing his voice through the mouthpiece would confirm what he knew: that he was now one of them. A Sand Person. He resolved never to speak again. They had tied a guard massiff to him, to make sure he didn't try to drag himself away, but there seemed no danger of that. A'Yark doubted he would live much longer. But he'd gotten the vaporator working in his hours on the bier, and that was all that was important. Alone among clans this season, A'Yark's people would drink and grow mightier. “(Miller, 2014 p. 365)

The harshness of the Tusken raiders collective reflects the environment that is not concerned with the survival of the individual but the survival as such. The harshness present in their daily life is reflected in their indifference to death that is an everyday constant presence like the proverbial sword of Damocles hanging over them; therefore, there is no need to worry, the only need is to survive by any means necessary. Their harshness and barbaric nature seemingly without much culture beyond survival are further reflected in their speech that is short, not precise or refined. All-purpose build and honed to a finetuned weapon that can strike not only at the flesh and the body but also at the mind and the spirit, this demeanour allows the Tusken Raiders to break the individual in order to make him subservient and therefore useful tool for survival. Such conversion is similar to the dark side corruption where only the strong can endure while the weak are killed. The Tusken conversion process is devoid of herbs and mysticism reflecting the harshness of reality in which the rules are as simple, as can be - you do what you are told or you die. This can be understood as further reflection on the turn of the franchise towards a more grounded individual perspective on the science fiction universe of Star Wars.

The Kenobi novel represents a breaking point in the established transformations and conversion processes in the Star Wars universe, especially when considering the divide between

the Star Wars canon and Star Wars Legends canon. Not only does it break from the traditional corruption conversion and fall to the dark side, but it established not one but two new transformations and conversion processes. The physiological changes are a necessity in order to account for the timeline appearance discrepancy, the other provides further evidence that the Star Wars universe is moving away from the mystical and focusing on the reality of an individual present in the Star Wars universe, while simultaneously hindering the Jedi to leave a backdoor open for further exploits and growth of power because of its reluctance to focus on the power of the Force. While the newly-established Star Wars canon is in its formative years, the full scope can in time prove grander than the Star Wars Legends canon, yet a visible shift is present in the works produced in the newly established canon. The prerogative is to make it marketable and relatable not more fantastic, greater in scope. However, that is a presupposition for the future.

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