

## On *Battlefield Defeat* in *Star Wars*.

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Eternal notions of good versus evil are central to science fiction and fantasy. Different creative universes utilize different philosophies which dictate a definition of victory or defeat in the eternal struggle. A definition of *battlefield defeat* between Jedi within a galaxy Far Far Away must be guided by the plot developments which are direct consequences of the battle. A proper definition of defeat allows one to answer a long disputed question of who won the *Skirmish in the Senate* between Darth Sidious and Jedi master Yoda during the final sequences of *Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith*.<sup>1</sup>

In episode 12 of *The Aunt Beru Experience* Ed Berberich hypothesized that Yoda battled to a tie with Darth Sideous.<sup>2</sup> Later in episode 13, Berberich created a definition of defeat within a galaxy Far Far Away allowing him to evidence his hypothesis.<sup>3</sup> Paraphrasing, “A Jedi’s defeat in *Star Wars* can be concluded if and only if a Jedi has either been killed or had an amputation of a limb”, argued Berberich. Therefore, because neither Yoda nor Darth Sidious were killed or dismembered the results of the fight were a draw.

Importantly the Berberich definition is refuted by multiple critical events within the *Star Wars* timeline. When Darth Vader smited Obi-Wan Kenobi during *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* Berberich’s definition would force the conclusion that Obi-Wan lost the battle when in reality he won.<sup>4</sup> “You can’t win, Vader. If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine.” The defeat of Obi-wan released his spirit from its corpse allowing unity with the force. Subsequently Obi-Wan had a significant positive impact upon the fate of the galaxy by guiding the development of Luke Skywalker as a Jedi knight. Thus we can conclude that Obi-Wan won this battle.

In *The Clone Wars: The Lawless* Darth Sideous duels Maul, humiliating him in battle, until he submits to Sideous.<sup>5</sup> Under the Berberich definition of defeat Maul tied Sidious because his body was not damaged. In reality, the result was a crippling loss after which Maul was never the same and was removed from the plot for substantial periods of time. Long after, Maul reappears in *Star Wars Rebels: Twilight of the Apprentice* in which he is found wandering the Sith temple on Malachore in search of a way to avenge and defeat Sidious, further verifying his previous defeat.<sup>6</sup> Thus in the case of Maul, his canonical plot refutes the Berberich definition of defeat. A final refutation of the Berberich definition is in the same episode when the Jedi knight Kanan duels Maul. Berberich would claim that due to the fact that Kanan lost his eyes in a lightsaber thrash, he also lost the battle. In reality, Kanan, despite losing his eyes, fought to a victory and forced the uninjured Maul to flee, providing time for Kanan and Ezra to recover the holocron from the Sith temple on Malachore keeping it out of Maul’s hands. Thus the *Star Wars* canon refutes the definition of battlefield loss defined as loss of life or limb.

As shown above, a correct definition of *battlefield defeat* must be guided by the plot developments which are a consequence of the battle. This definition allows one to resolve inconsistencies in the Berberich Definition. Under this definition Sidious defeats Yoda specifically because the empire was established as a direct result of this battle. A Yoda victory would require the collapse of the empire, and in fact this does happen at the end of *Return of the Jedi*.<sup>7</sup>

An equally important component of describing *battlefield defeat* in Star Wars is assessing the control of territorial advantage. Berberich argued that if one were to put Yoda and Sidious in a room and exclaim “Two men enter, one man leaves.” Yoda will inevitably emerge. This seems irrefutable; however the simplification of battle ignores a significant canonical principle within the Star Wars universe, that of Sokan.<sup>8</sup> In all battles, the environment and one’s placement in space is important for victory. Sokan is the use of the environment to your tactical advantage. Many battles exemplify the importance of Sokan in the Star Wars universe. With respect to Sokan, the “high ground” is specifically defined within canon as being an important advantage for force wielders. “It’s over, Anakin. I have the high ground!”<sup>1</sup> A second, seemingly paradoxical, example of the high ground advantage is shown in both duels between Darth Maul vs. Obi-Wan<sup>9</sup> and General Grievous vs. Obi-Wan.<sup>1</sup> In both cases, Grievous and Maul feel arrogantly cocky about holding the high ground implicitly proving there seems to be an advantage to the position. Due to this overconfidence, both Maul and Grievous underestimate their enemy’s ability to overcome their Sokan, leading to their defeats (In both cases a surprise jumping attack by Obi-Wan overwhelms the adversary).

Thus, guidance by the principle of Sokan allows one to accurately assess defeat of Yoda by Sidious. In the duel, Sidious magnificently gains the higher ground which clearly conveys the advantage of gravity and utilizes this advantage to rapidly hurl whirling senate pods at Yoda, displacing him. True, Yoda is able to catch and throw back one senate pod, but the weight of gravity is clearly displayed on the grimace of Yoda’s face when straining to return the pod. Essentially, due to position, it is easier for Sidious to throw the pods than it is for Yoda to avoid or toss them back uphill against gravity. Sidious sees this, realizes his advantage, and maximizes his tactical position by throwing pod after pod in rapid fire succession causing the fall of Yoda.<sup>1</sup> After a final exchange of force lightning between the two, which could be argued as tie, the explosion of energy pushed both back resulting in the fall of Yoda. Sidious, in contrast, retains his position and thus the advantage of Sokan. Importantly, to incorrectly claim a victory for Yoda in the *Skirmish in the Senate* turns a blind eye to the advantage the dark side has in chaotic situations when things begin to fly. In these situations Jedi are forced to expend energy to save others and restore order like when Darth Tyranus drops a rock on Obi-Wan/Anakin and Yoda ceases fighting to catch it.<sup>10</sup> The important observation is that dark force wielders maximize Sokan by throwing objects. Yoda learns about this disadvantage through defeat.

In conclusion a definition of *battlefield defeat* in Jedi duels based upon loss of life or limb simplifies the definition to the point where it becomes inconsistent with Star Wars Canon. A true definition of *battlefield defeat* therefore must be guided by resulting plot elements and the principles of Sokan.

### References:

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