ANDOR ANALYSED

Part 1: The Roots of Rebellion in Star Wars

RED FUTURES

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Contents

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The cover uses an adaptation of “Brick wall with stucco texture” by Tim Mossholder. The fonts are Liberation Sans by Red Hat and Blown Droid by Lylesoft LLC.

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Introducing *Andor Analysed, Part 1: The Roots of Rebellion in Star Wars*

Jamie Woodcock

This collection of essays covers the first season of *Star Wars Andor*, the fourth live-action TV series released since Disney purchased the franchise. This introduction to the collection lays out some of the key issues that make *Andor* worth exploring in the following essays.[1] The main reason for bringing together the collection is that *Andor* surprised many, both existing fans of *Star Wars* and new viewers, with the potential for retelling stories of rebellion and struggle. Following Red Futures' *The Expanse Expanded* collection, these essays focus on *Star Wars* from a new perspective, drawing on critical ideas from the left and Marxism.

While there were plans for multiple seasons, we now know there will be a second and final season leading up to the *Rogue One* film (which also gives the potential for a volume 2 of collective essays). We already know the ending of *Andor* before it even starts. The first season covers the start of the rebellion against the Galactic Empire, focusing on Cassian Andor's journey to become a revolutionary. Andor's story ends after, with his death after stealing the plans for the Death Star.

A new direction

From the first episode, it is clear that *Andor* is a different entry in the franchise. It starts with Cassian shooting two corporate security

guards. Unlike in *Star Wars: Episode IV* and its various versions, there is no confusion about who shot first. The plot follows Cassian as he tries to sell a stolen piece of Imperial technology, becoming further embroiled in the rebellion. Alongside this, the plot follows Syril Karn's attempts to track down Cassian for the murders. Through this, Syril comes into contact with the Imperial Security Bureau (ISB), providing insight into the machinery of oppression and those trying to live under the Empire.

The series takes a much darker tone than any of the other recent entries: *The Mandalorian* (2019-present), *The Book of Boba Fett* (2021-2022), or *Obi-Wan Kenobi* (2022). These lean into the space-Western setting, focusing mainly on the galaxy's edges. There is also less of the Disney-like emphasis of a franchise driven by merchandise sales (see, for example, Grogu or "Baby Yoga"). The closest *Andor* comes to product placement are the Kalashnikov-inspired blaster rifles used by the Aldhani Rebel cell - or the nod to the Death Star in Karn's cereal bowl.

Andor goes in a much more deliberate political direction than the other recent series. Instead of the usual themes of Disney *Star Wars*, it focuses much more on the work of imperialism and the rebellion against it. No lightsabers, force powers, or Jedi superheroes are ready to fight the Empire on behalf of the oppressed. There is a sharp focus on people's daily lives in Star Wars on both sides. As Tony Gilroy, *Andor's* creator, explained in an interview: "If you think about it, most of the beings in the galaxy are not aware of Jedi, and have never seen a lightsaber […] It's like, there's a restaurant and we're in the kitchen. This is what's going on underneath the other stuff."[2] There are scrap metal workers on Ferrix dismantling ships, prison labour, and the secret work of starting a rebellion - both with the organisation of a heist and the manoeuvring of Mon Mothma in the Senate. As Luke Hull,

a production designer, notes, they wanted “to stay away from “familiar” Star Wars territory such as spaceships and deserts, and Tony’s writing put the story into people’s apartments and day-to-day work environments.”[3]

This approach can be seen clearly with Ferrix. The design of the planet started with the people who lived and worked there:

> Tony [Gilroy] wanted a tight-knit community, a culture that was a mix of people with practical skills from all over the galaxy who had gathered here on Ferrix to work in one of the many aspects of the spaceship breaking and salvaging industry. We were looking for something that felt like it had a beating heart at the center, a history and stoicism, somewhere that would actually stand up to the Empire when put under the thumb. We were basically looking for somewhere to create a tinder box to kick-start the revolution and Cassian’s journey to the character he is in *Rogue One*.[4]

By starting with the conditions of people and their struggles against the Empire, the worldbuilding of *Andor* takes on a particular flavour. For example, the wall of workers’ gloves is a clear ‘visual detail that nods to how this culture works with their hands (and gets them dirty).’[5] The story of *Andor* unfolds across the background of different kinds of work, communities, and their struggles.

The role of strikes

Events happening on set and in broader society have also shaped the series. For example, the writer's strike delayed the second series of Andor, providing some overlap between the story in *Andor* and the workers' struggles in making it. Diego Luna, who played Cassian Andor, explained in an interview:

> I am worried for what’s to come, but obviously supporting the strike and supporting the union. It’s quite remarkable what we’ve seen with the writers and what’s happening today with SAG … It gives me hope to see people uniting and understanding the strength again of numbers and fighting as one. That is really an important reminder today of what we as citizens of this world need to be doing, finding solutions and working together to bring them because they’re needed. I really hope that this brings the best of everyone and that soon we can all be back working, in a much more fair and just scenario for everyone.[6]

Similarly, in August 2023, Tony Gilroy and Beau Willimon (the former WGA East President) addressed the Writers Guild picket line in New York. Willimon, who wrote episode 10, “One Way Out”, explained to strikers that “We know what the one way out is: its staying on these streets until we get a deal that’s fair.”[7] They ended on a chant of “One Way Out.” Gilroy then spoke next, arguing that “we are the content. It is our ideas. It’s our ideas that fill the theme parks and the toy stores. It’s our characters on the lunchboxes and the Halloween costumes. … We are the natural resource from which the product is made, and we are tired of being strip-mined.’ He also finished by leading a “One Way Out” chant.

It is, of course, not the first time that a writers’ strike has impacted the plot and content of a TV show. As I have argued in my essay in *The Expanse*, *Deep Space Nine* (*DS9*) featured a unionisation episode (“Bar Association” S4E16) supported by the actors. As Armin Shimerman (who played Quark and was also on the board

of directors of the Screen Actors Guild) explained, ‘people think of this as a comic episode. And it is, of course. But in truth, it's really about union-management problems … Although you don't see it on TV very often, this is something that goes on in America all the time.’[8] There are also similarities between the shift in tone and storyline with *DS9* from the existing *Star Trek* franchise and that of *Andor* and *Star Wars*. *DS9* was marked by the focus on the characters' daily lives, whether with the struggles of Miles O’Brien, Kira Nerys, or others.

Unions and collective struggles

While there are no direct references to labour unions in *Andor*, there are plenty of examples of collective struggles unfolding in and around Ferrix. For example, in episode 3, the people of Ferrix bang metal pots and pans together as the Pre-Mor security land. There are parallels here to The Troubles in Ireland, both with the way a community responds to an occupying force, but also at Maarva’s funeral, which Gilroy has referenced as inspired by IRA funeral processions.[9]

There is a shift in *Andor* with the representation of collective action in *Star Wars*. While not immediately obvious from the films, there are unions in *Star Wars*. For example, although not present in the original trilogy, there are references in *Star Wars Legends* to the Miner’s Union (that attempted to overthrow Tagan Industries and establish workers control), Naboo Moon Mining Union, Orbital Transports Union (involved in a planet-wide strike), Pixelio Puppeteers Union, Sailor’s Union,[10] Corellian Shipbuilders Union, Galactic Podracing Mechanics' Union, Exotic Entertainers’ Union, and Ugnaught Mechanics Union.[11] There are also a wide range of guilds, some of which play a role similar to labour unions. However, one of the “heroes” of rebellion directly opposed unions. For

example, Lando Calrissian, while the Baron Administrator of Cloud City, paid bribes to the Mining Guild so they would not organise ‘his’ workers. Indeed, after EV-9D9 steals the Iopene Princess while escaping Cloud City, Lando’s first concern is that he had ‘the threat of a strike to avert’.[12]

Rather than passing over these details - whether about the working conditions of the Besbin gas miners or the role of independent contractors on the second Death Star (as noted in *Clerks*) - *Andor* focuses in on them. As Tony Gilroy explained:

> If there’s an overall thesis, it’s that I believe human behavior is more powerful than anything, and it sort of leaks like water through a spout, through anything you put it on. It rusts out everybody’s intentions. Whether it’s hitmen and organizations or law firms or huge corporations, or a marriage — what we need, what we’re afraid of, all the things that fuck us up, is more powerful than anything people design, and more powerful than any political system.[13]

These different kinds of human behaviour come through strongly in *Andor*, both with the emerging rebels and the Empire. There are insights into the daily lives of the rank-and-file on both sides.

Rebellion in Andor

Although the series is named *Andor*, the story is not a conventional hero’s journey for Cassian Andor. He is often not at the centre of the action or directing it. Instead, he finds himself at key moments in which other people are rebelling or acting together. There are, after all, plenty of examples of heroes’ journeys in which they singlehandedly lead a revolution against a totalitarian regime. Part

of the appeal of *Andor* is the subversion of the hero's journey. After Andor runs away, the community on Ferrix organises against the Empire's occupation. Maarva provides her own eulogy, calling for a rebellion against the occupation. There are hints of underground organisations, including the Daughters of Ferrix. The rebellion itself is riven with tensions and the need for sacrifice. Luthen's speech to his wavering ISB source, Kino revealing that he cannot swim, as well as Cassian's future death which looms over the series. This is far from a straightforward hero's journey.

On the other side, there are insights into the organisation of the Empire. Instead of Sith Lords running the empire, we get an insight into the day-to-day running of the ISB. This bureaucratic operation has more staff meetings than specular force-grip punishments. There are internal power struggles, with Dedra Meero and Blevin[14] clashing over protocols. Andor gets an inside view of this after being imprisoned on Narkina 5. This part of the story includes a detailed representation of prison labour, something unusual for *Star Wars*. After a summary judgment, Andor joins other prisoners, making parts of the Death Star. Here, the power of the Empire is experienced like a panopticon, as the prisoners are managed through information asymmetry and electrified floors. The architecture of the prison is specifically designed to prevent collective organisation, with surveillance technologies, competition between work teams, and physical separation between groups of prisoners. Despite the challenges, the prisoners find a collective solution, with Kino Loy shifting from supervisor to militant.

While there has been more and less emphasis on politics before, many of these themes have featured in one way or another in *Star Wars*. It is important to remember that the original trilogy was a reflection on Nixon's presidency and the Vietnam War. The stormtroopers are a clear reference to Nazi imagery, and George

Lucas modelled the empire on both British and American imperialism. The original trilogy follows the rebellion but with much more of a focus on Luke Skywalker's journey. Despite their criticism, the prequel films tackle the rise of fascism and collapsing liberal democracy.

Part of the shift in *Andor* is due to Tony Gilroy's interest in historical revolutions. For example, Gilroy explains the heist subplot was inspired by an account of Stalin's bank robbery in 1907.[15] Similarly, for Nemick, Gilory noted that 'we always wanted a Trotsky: the young, naïve radical … If you're going to have Cassian ingesting all of the possible forms of conversion to the Rebellion, we needed a dialectic character.[16] This focus on historical processes of revolution brings a fresh edge to the commentary of *Star Wars* on authoritarianism, empire, and the possibility of rebellion. In taking in these larger social and political processes, it is also able to focus in the economic realities and daily lives of the characters. While there could be more fleshing out of the role of organised workers in the rebellion, the series focuses in on the dirty work on both sides of a revolution. The representation of the rebels themselves is not as clear-cut as in earlier *Star Wars*. It also raises important questions about the social basis of the rebellion - as well as what comes after the downfall of the Empire.

Chapter introductions

In "Cheaper than droids and easier to replace: Work, Labour, Automation and Organisation in Star Wars Andor", Christoffer Bagger discusses the role of industrial labour in revolution, particularly through the Narkina Five prison arc, as well as the struggles on Ferrix. These industrial workplaces are contrasted with the imperial bureaucracy, senate, and emergent rebel networks. The chapter engages with the themes of automation in

Andor, drawing attention to the ongoing importance of human labour in the Empire. Through this, the chapter also reflects on the ongoing struggles of creative workers in Hollywood.

The next chapter, “The Malignant Borders of Empire: The Aldhani and the Act of Cultural Erasure” by Sejuti Bala, focuses on the Empire’s colonisation of Aldhani, making comparisons to the Highland Clearances. The chapter discusses themes of colonialism, reflecting on the experience of North America. This is compared to the Empire’s domination of Ferrix. Across both, the chapter argues that *Andor* highlights those responsible for the Empire’s oppression, without resorting to supernatural villains.

In "Protest Without Music," Rykie Belles discusses watching *Andor* in relation to the death of their father and friend. Reflecting on *Andor* against the backdrop of the fight against the Cop City project, the chapter discusses themes of grief, defiance, and the fight for a better world. Weaving in music and poetry, it explores the role fiction and art can play in galvanising struggles to fight against Empire – both in *Andor* and closer to home.

Eóin Dooley, in "Why Does Andor Feel Different?", explores the distinctiveness of *Andor* within the wider franchise. The chapter discusses the criticisms that have been levelled at *Andor*. It discusses how the materiality of the series makes it stand out, as well as the shift away from the fantasy elements of Star Wars. This provides a new angle to *Andor*, refreshing the ability of Star Wars to offer a critique, particularly in relation to the “franchise fetishism” found in other recent Disney iterations.

In “Caught in the Sad Orbit of a Dead Calamity”, Fabio Fernandes explores the political economy of Star Wars, emphasising how little we learn about how the universe works. In contrast, the chapter

discusses how Andor brings a new focus to this, particularly on Ferrix. With comparison to Wales and working class culture, the discussion opens up the political themes of *Andor*, particularly in contrast to the earlier films. Comparisons are also made to real-world struggles and political ideologies, as well as Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s Crônica de uma Morte Anunciada.

In "It Has to be You," Brian Howard explores the transformation of Cassian Andor, drawing parallels between his evolution and the principles of labour organizing, particularly the methods employed by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930s. Initially portrayed as a self-serving thief, Cassian undergoes a profound change during his imprisonment on Narkina Five, realising the necessity of collective action and the importance of identifying and empowering organic leaders within the working class. Through Cassian's journey, Howard discusses the concept of organic intellectuals and leaders, emphasizing the need for grassroots empowerment rather than reliance on traditional models of leadership. The narrative highlights Cassian's recruitment and development of Kino Loy as a pivotal moment, showcasing the urgency and solidarity required for successful collective action.

Ted Marsden, in “Resistance on Coruscant: Lessons on Setting Fire in Your Own House”, focuses in on Coruscant as the backdrop for the rebellion agains the Empire. Amidst the gleaming towers, revolution is brewing fuelled by clandestine operations and courageous individuals living double lives. The chapter focuses Luthen Rael, Vel Sartha, and Mon Mothma, each contributing unique perspectives and tactics to the resistance effort. Luthen embodies the long-term strategist, willing to sacrifice everything for a future he may never see, while Vel represents the frontline tactician, navigating the complexities of rebellion with resilience and determination. Mon Mothma, a senator turned saboteur,

exemplifies the internal resistance within the Senate. Through their struggles and sacrifices, *Andor* explores the moral ambiguity of revolution, challenging the notion of heroes and villains in a galaxy torn by conflict.

In “Workers’ Playtime: Andor, Nostalgia and Admonitory Retrofuturism”, Fiona Moore explores the concept of retrofuturism in relation to *Andor*. The chapter covers the broader landscape of retrofuturism, including its conservative, critical, and hopeful trends, situating *Andor* within the nostalgic television genre alongside other series like Stranger Things. It argues that *Andor* not only evokes the past in terms of style, but is a form of admonitory retrofuturism, urging viewers to reflect on the past and their own conditions, in order to change them.

In “Brasso’s War”, Aladair Stuart focuses on the character of Brasso in *Andor*. This highlights Brasso’s role as a quiet but significant force for change. Brasso works as a shipbreaker, providing insights into the labour and political economy of *Andor*. He becomes a symbol of resilience and community, embodying both kindness and leadership through his actions. The chapter explores Brasso's relationships, particularly with the droid B2-EMO, showing his compassion and commitment to protecting others. Ultimately, Brasso's role in sparking rebellion on Ferrix becomes a central theme, underscoring his significance in shaping the fight against the Empire alongside Cassian Andor.

In “This is What Revolution Looks Like”, Mike Towill, discusses the process of revolution in *Andor*. The series covers the transition from a covert network to the beginnings of the organised force that will become the Rebel Alliance. Through comparison with examples of historical revolutions – including the role of oppressions, the state, and ideology – the chapter highlights the

complexities of these processes in practice. While the revolutionaries in *Andor* lack ideology, the chapter discusses how the references to the past play an important role, considering how this ambiguity mirrors other historical examples.

RK Upadhya, in “A Tale of Miners and Prisoners: Class Composition and the Roots of Rebellion in Andor”, explores the questions of why people rebel through a reading of *Andor*. Drawing on Workerism and the Black Panthers, the chapter introduces a class composition reading of *Andor*, particularly with the workers on Ferrix. It discusses the way in which this reading can help to make sense of Star Wars, while providing a broader reflection on what it means to be a revolutionary today.

In the final chapter, Py Writ in “Smacking Neoliberalism Over the Head with a Brick: Andor’s Revolution”, discusses the political themes in *Andor*. The chapter notes the way that media often reflects neoliberal ideology, while *Andor* has a clear abolitionist message, particularly in the Narkina Five arc. This critical comparison provides a starting point for a discussion of the difference between the artist and the owner, the “death of the author”, and revolutionary readings of *Andor*.

Each of these essays were written in response to an open call for contributions, which have then been collectively edited into this issue. This special issue is the second Red Futures publication, following *The Expanse Expanded*. We hope this collection can add to the debate and appreciation of *Andor*, particularly during the wait for the second season.

Cheaper than droids and easier to replace: Work, Labour, Automation and Organisation in Star Wars Andor

Christoffer Bagger

Star Wars: Andor in its first season of twelve episodes shows not a single lightsaber, has no one shooting lightning from their fingers, and nobody mastering their personal inhibitions by hearing the ghosts of deceased mentors. Instead, the protagonists of *Andor* are often reluctant working-class rebels, scrambling for resources, and as prone to sectarianism and in-fighting as any meme about the political left will have it. The showrunner Tony Gilroy has even gone on record as drawing on a biography of the Bolshevik revolutionary and dictator Joseph Stalin for inspiration.[17] As quite a few commenters have pointed out, this means that *Andor* is ripe for left-wing and Marxist readings, locating the core of the Star Wars narrative in material and working-class struggles.

The series thus far ends up showing a very industrialized view of the potential for revolution. This is most clearly expressed through the pivotal Narkina Five prison arc episodes and in the final riot on Rix Road in the twelfth episode. In these settings, the oppressive fist of the Galactic Empire (which we are reminded is an industrial economy) finally becomes too much for its subjects, and they collectively revolt.

This contrasts with the other sites of “work” in the series, notably the Imperial bureaucracies, the Senatorial arena of diplomacy, and the back-door dealings of the rebel networks themselves. Here, Imperial officers Syril Karn and Dedra Meero, senator Mon Mothma and rebel fixer Luthen Rael experience isolation and atomization each in their own way.

As such, *Andor* would seem to locate the most potent forces for rebellion squarely within the area of industrial work. However, this is not to say that the series is unsympathetic towards alternative perspectives on oppression, including feminist Marxist perspectives and the oppression of Indigenous communities (see the extended arc on the colonized planet Aldhani in episodes three through six). What is more interesting is that the series arrived in a time where the organized creative labor force of Hollywood were on strike.

On Program: The Narkina Five Arc as Thesis Statement

Critical scholars have long discussed the relationships between prisons and other forms of exploitation in capitalist societies. Some have even gone so far as to suggest that prisons are necessary for the maintenance of industrial capitalism itself.[18] As such, prisoners are often integral to the maintenance of large technological infrastructures.[19] Therefore, perhaps the choice to set the most memorable three-episode arc of *Andor* with the titular character incarcerated on a prison planet is no coincidence. This arc acts like something of a microcosm of the first season of *Andor*, exhibiting the largest scale of organizing within the series. At the same time, the arc is a critique of automation (or rather pseudo-automation) and dehumanization which sets the potential for popular uprising firmly within industrial labor.[20]

This contrasts with the atomization experienced in the other sites of work explicitly shown throughout the series: The bureaucratic world of the Imperial Bureau of Standards as briefly inhabited by foot-soldier-turned-office drone Syril Karn (Kyle Soller), the world of diplomacy as inhabited by senator (and secret subversive) Mon Mothma (Genevieve O'Reilly), and the world of rebel dealings inhabited by the shadowy dealer Luthen Rael (Stellan Skarsgård) and insurrectionists such as Saw Gerrera (Forest Whittaker). As I will return to, these portrayals of labor are also in stark contrast to the realities of organizing in both the current economy at large – and in stark contrast to the concurrent realities outside, which heavily involved workers' disputes with Disney, the company behind *Andor* and the rest of *Star Wars*.

In *Andor'*s prison arc, imprisoned laborers whir about in a setting not unlike the sterile science fiction of George Lucas' earlier work *THX 1138*. Throughout these episodes we see the laborers collaborate (and compete) to construct machine parts at worktables, not knowing why. In a post-credit sequence after the first season's final episode, we learn that what the imprisoned workers have been constructing are parts for the Death Star, the "technological terror" which was to ensure the Empire's subjugation of the Galaxy, and eventually to the death of the titular Andor himself in *Rogue One*.

Cassian Andor's (Diego Luna) induction into the prison factory on Narkina Five is almost a step-by-step walkthrough of what management theorists Fleming and Spicer summarize as the four faces of power – *coercion, manipulation, domination* and *subjectification*.[21] Firstly, he is threatened with *coercion* by the prison guards. Here, the constant threat of deathly electric shocks is repeatedly established as the guards' primary tool for keeping imprisoned people in line. The cinematography is replete with

shots of bare feet pacing across steel floors, reminding the viewers of this constant threat. Secondly, Andor meets his fellow inmate and shop steward Kino Loy (Andy Serkis), who quickly introduces the acceptable and expected boundaries of behavior ("I'm sensing you understand me!"). This is the face of power which Fleming and Spicer call *manipulation*. Andor is also assured that the authority figure he should really be worried about is Loy, and not any of the guards, because "[they] won't be back."

As becomes apparent over the course of the episodes, Loy's commitment to the system is based on internalization of the *domination* enacted by the prison system. By *domination*, Fleming and Spicer mean that the oppressive power structures are meant to be thought of as natural, beyond critique or refutation. Loy is insistent that he has "249 days left on [his] sentence" and he intends to spend them making the well-oiled machine of the prison run smoothly.

Finally, Andor is introduced into his shop crew's worktable and is in part made the object of *subjectification*, the final face of power. By subjectification, Fleming and Spicer mean the effort to "shape [the] sense of self, experiences, and emotions." Loy instructs that Andor "keep it to [him]self" if he is "Losing hope [or his] mind". Here, Andor is faced with the prospect of becoming another cog of the gears of production at Narkina Five and losing all sense of self.

However, this is also where we get the first tiny hint that the prisoners themselves may also exercise a defiant, positive power, a foreshadowing of their final riot and escape. As one of Andor's fellow inmates insistently refers to him as "new guy," another (Melshi) chimes in and insists that they refer to their new coworker by his name. Although small, this is a gesture which shows that the *subjectification* in the prison is not total, at least not to the point of completely erasing the identity of the prisoners.

It must of course be remarked that Andor spends his entire stint in prison under an assumed name (“Keef”), which is all his fellow inmates ever know him by. This is part of a longer pattern of Andor shifting his identity according to his surroundings. Among the heist crew on Aldhani, he was Clem, and on his beachside escape he was Keef Girgo, the name he was arrested under. Even his “real” name of Cassian Andor is an adaptation to his surroundings of Ferrix, as it paints over his Kenari name Kassa. Although not stated outright, the viewer is left to infer that Cassian is adept at shifting according to his environment, a skill perhaps learned due to the trauma of being forced from his home planet. Perhaps this is also why he is able to resist the dehumanization of the prison.

During the prison arc, viewers follow (and likely empathize with) Andor’s frustrated attempts to convince the domineering Loy to help him rebel and escape the prison. He correctly identifies that Loy’s charisma among the prisoners as well as his intimate knowledge of the prison will be the key to a successful escape. However, Loy’s internalized domination by the prison system is simply too strong. As becomes apparent, Loy also feels *manipulated* and *coerced* into only acting in line with prison directives. As he notes, “productivity is encouraged, evaluation is constant.” This may be true on the shop floor he manages, where he describes himself as “play[ing]” against the other floors in a gamified competition of self-exploitation.

However, as Cassian Andor is convinced, outside of measuring productivity and disciplining slackers, surveillance at the prison is severely lackluster. In fact, he is convinced that actual surveillance is non-existent: “Why bother listening to us? We’re nothing to them.” They are simply valuable slave labor because they are, as Andor puts it, “cheaper than droids and easier to replace.”

You Need to Help Each Other: Solidarity and Rebellion

The escape from Narkina Five is perhaps the most extreme case of one of the central theses of the first season, as expressed by Luthen Rael: That the Empire can only be resisted if its subjects become completely aware of its oppressive force, even if that means that this oppression has to be increased. In a telling scene, he notes that “The Empire has been choking us so slowly, we're starting not to notice. The time has come to force their hand.” An incredulous Mon Mothma responds that “People will suffer,” and Luthen assures her “that’s the plan.”

At a first glance, this “forcing of the hand” is what happens to Andor himself throughout the prison arc. Although the character was never friendly towards the Empire, the imprisonment would seem to radicalize him enough to finally become a rebel. However, this is in fact not the case. After his escape, Andor learns that his mother Maarva has died, and that his adopted home planet of Ferrix is under increased Imperial occupation. He then returns to his home, not to start a riot, but to free the last person he cares about (his former fling and trade partner Bix) from Imperial torture.

Luthen’s vision of rebellion lacks any sense of community among the people doing the rebelling. However, this is a central part of both the riot on Ferrix at the first season’s conclusion, and the prison escape itself. On Ferrix, the posthumous speech by Maarva Andor in the twelfth episode emphasizes that Ferrix had been able to ignore the Empire – the “wound that won’t heal at the center of the galaxy” – because the inhabitants “had each other.”

Like Maarva, Kino Loy emphasizes the cooperation necessary during the escape he leads:

> You need to help each other. You see someone who's confused […] you keep them moving until we put this place behind us. There are 5,000 of us. If we can fight half as hard as we've been working, we will be home in no time. One way out!

Crucially, this sense of solidarity is completely absent from the other sites of work presented in the series. It only manifests in the imprisoned conditions of Narkina Five and among workers, retirees, and crooks on Ferrix.

Narkina Five and the ensuing riot and prison break is framed as the result of an industrial system underpinning a fascist state. Notably, this is a fascist state which is heavily dependent upon industrial labour, such as the scrap industry on Ferrix and the factory of Narkina Five.

What is perhaps most striking is that the fascist Empire is as unconcerned with surveilling their enslaved workers as Cassian Andor believes them to be. There is, in fact, no one listening. This differs somewhat from the surveillance associated with imprisoned peoples on Earth.[22]

Contrast this with another worksite in the series: The Imperial Bureau of Standards, where one of the series antagonists and "resident Empire fanboy,"[23] Syril Karn, gets assigned an office job. Where Narkina Five reflects the potentially dehumanizing nature of industrial labour, the Bureau of Standards reflects the potentially dehumanizing labor of white-collar and computer-supported work. Workers are sat in endless grey cubicles, like a futuristic version of something out of *Office Space* or a similar 90s movie about corporate alienation. Crucially, Syril Karn gets busted by the Imperial authorities for using his work computer for unauthorized business (showing his own rebellious streak). This is in stark contrast to the actual lack of surveillance in the prison. It does however reflect the reality of the surveillance of workers and their computer activities in the world of the viewers.[24]

The surveillance of Karn is overseen by the Imperial Security Bureau, an intelligence service personified most often by the ambitious Dedra Meero (Denise Gough). The scenes with the ISB often emphasize intra-office frictions and rivalries between intelligence officers. Meero herself has been argued as an exemplar of the ideology of "White feminism."[25] This is an ideology with a focus on individual accumulation, rather than addressing any structural conditions.[26] Here, Meero is also atomized and individualized, surrounded only by enemies, superiors, and workplace rivals. In line with critiques of white feminism, she lacks the capability (and even interest) to mount any criticisms of the system which oppresses her, even as she uses it to oppress others.

Another site of labor which the series explores in detail is that of international (or interstellar) diplomacy, in the storyline surrounding senator Mon Mothma. The senator is also under constant surveillance and cannot even confide in her husband or daughter if she wanted to. As scholars like the American sociologist Arlie Russel Hochschild have described in detail, the work of diplomats and ambassadors – and of their spouses in particular – relies on both overt and subtle means of communication.[27] Here, Hochschild stresses the cooperative relationship between diplomats and their spouses as essential for doing the actual work of diplomacy. By contrast, Mon Mothma is isolated and atomized in her diplomatic endeavors. She is surrounded by politicians who are more than willing to ignore the Emperor's transgressions ("[he] says what he means"), her own daughter disapproves of her, and her husband is useless in her diplomatic endeavors and completely ignorant of her

rebel activities. Even her alliance with Luthen Rael is marred by hostility and distrust, rather than aided by open cooperation.

Luthen's own interactions with other rebels do not fare any better. He meets the rebel Saw Gerrara for a small cameo late in the series and suggests broad-scale cooperation between different rebel factions. But Gerrera has nothing but scorn for his fellow rebels, and derides them as "Separatist[s] […] neo-Republican[s] […] sectorists, Human cultists [and] galaxy partitionists". Even among rebels, there is little solidarity to be found.

The final act of popular uprising against the Empire is thus set on the deliberately industrial working-class planet Ferrix. Crucially, this is an uprising which comes about without the intervention of Mothma, Saw Gerrera, or even Andor himself. Even Luthen seems surprised and rattled at the development, despite his confidence that this would be the goal of his plans. "Oppression breeds rebellion" as he notes. In a striking monologue near the end of the series, Luthen admits to a co-conspirator (and perhaps to himself) that his shadow workings have forced him to give up all hints of "kindness, kinship [and] love." A similar sentiment is echoed by co-rebel Cinta in her rejection of her lover Vel. The cause, she says, comes first and as a couple they must settle for whatever is left.

Perhaps this is why Luthen (and by extension Cinta) are unable to figure out the role community and kinship play in making the rebellion happen. As *The Last Jedi,* another *Star Wars* entry, reassures us: Victory is achieved by saving what one loves, not by destroying what one hates.

This is also what makes Cassian's fate at the end of the season at best bittersweet. After having saved Bix, and spirited his remaining found family off to parts unknown, he turns himself in to Luthen, and offers him a simple choice: "Kill me, or take me in." The

triumphant read of it is that his journey of radicalization has been completed. The more tragic read is that Andor has now also sacrificed (or scuttled) all hints of kindness, kinship and love. Only by considering himself as "already dead" (like Kino Loy before him), or at least dead to the people he loves, can he fully commit to the rebellion.

Cheaper than Droids and Easier to Replace? The War of the Stars on Earth

In the galaxy far far away, human labour – at least enslaved human labour - is still a vital component of making the technological power of the Empire material. In the galaxy of the viewer at the time of *Andor*'s release, there is plenty of discussion about the increasing irrelevance of human labour as automation and artificial intelligence increases. However, as scholars have repeatedly pointed out, myths of automation are often overblown, although the effects are often deeply felt.[28]

The purported effects of automation are not just felt in the world of manual labor. Automation through digital technologies has also proven to be a deciding factor in the creative industries in recent years, with the last couple of years especially seeing an increase in worries about generative technologies. At present, the worry for writers is not so much that they will be replaced or automated away, but that generative technologies will be used to worsen their conditions. As Adam Conover, one member of the Writer's Guild of America (WGA) has been quoted as saying, the fear is that studios are going to use a writer's labour to augment generated materials, and "not going to pay you as a writer because you didn't write it — ChatGPT wrote it."[29]

For actors and other on-screen professionals, the fear of replacement might be present as well. As much as *Andor* lends itself handily to Marxist (or other subversive) readings, the fact remains that it is a product owned by the Walt Disney Corporation. This is not just to trivially point out that it is the product of a capitalist economy. The more interesting fact is that *Andor* (and *Star Wars* as such) sits in a portfolio of franchises, which are ultimately built upon creating characters and universes which can be boundless pools of stories.

In recent years, the company's acquisition-heavy strategy under CEO Bob Iger has led it to be the custodian of several mainly live-action franchises such as *Star Wars* and the Marvel Cinematic Universe. According to Iger himself, these were acquired as a "a trove of *compelling characters* and stories that would plug easily into our movie, television, theme-park, and consumer-products businesses."[30] What Iger here confirms is the strategy that individual film and television products can be the used to display "character *assets*,"[31] and that the point then becomes using such characters continually in novel narrative constellations.[32]

The trouble then with such assets is that the characters portraying them may age, die, or demand better contracts, a problem which did not trouble Disney's most well-known animated or illustrated characters.[33]

The *Star Wars* franchise itself is certainly no stranger to trying to reconfigure or displace human labor with new technologies. This even extends to the labor of actors, whom one might be forgiven for thinking were exempt from such automation. The massive production powers surrounding Lucasfilm and Disney have made the films and television series set in the galaxy far, far away ground zero for ground-breaking digital technologies. Famously, this includes the posthumous usage of actor Peter Cushing's likeness

to revive the character of Grand Moff Tarkin in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, the film to which *Andor* is a direct prequel.[34] Not even living actors have been spared digital replacement, as the voices and likenesses for *Star Wars* alumni such as Mark Hamill and James Earl Jones had been digitally recreated in recent Star Wars television appearances.[3536] "More machine now than man," as Obi-Wan Kenobi might have put it.

There perhaps is an unintentional layer of irony in the shop-steward-turned-riot-leader Kino Loy being played by Andy Serkis, who is famed for his performance capture roles, where the physical body of the actor is mixed or overlaid with a digital double, in such films as *King Kong* (2005)*, Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014) and even as Supreme Leader Snoke within *Star Wars* itself. Controversially, Serkis was once disqualified for an Academy Award nod for his star-making role as Gollum in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy due to that performance being not produced via motion-captured performance, but also tweaked by digital artists. It was this latter point which disqualified him in the eyes of the Motion Picture Association.[37] The groundwork is certainly laid to discredit the work of digitally augmented (or replaced) actors in the future.

On Earth, at time of writing, one of the largest industrial disputes in entertainment history seems to have reached a point of agreement. As many outside observers are often surprised to learn, Hollywood remains quite the union town. These unions were born out of conflict in the 1930s Depression and have seen many disputes such as the Blacklisting and Red Scare of the 1950s and the burgeoning of streaming, digital and new media in the 2010s.[38]

The most recent dispute was between the WGA and SAG-AFTRA unions on the one side, and entertainment studios and streamers (often arms of large technology corporations) on the other. One of the largest bones of contention in the strike was the "high-tech

exploitation” done using generative artificial intelligence (AI) and other digital tools to replace the work of writers, actors, and other creative professionals. For actors, this might take the form of studios trying to own their likeness “in perpetuity.”[39] If such efforts were successful, then droids might become very cheap indeed.

The long-term impact of this industrial action is too soon to tell at time of writing. However, the visual and narrative identity of the strike at the time has certainly been one of famous actors joining picket lines and writers speaking about a “culture of solidarity” in Hollywood.[40] While this is far from the revolutionary actions undertaken by the nascent rebellion in *Andor*, it is a reminder that the themes discussed in that series certainly have real-life resonances.

Andor itself was one of the series which halted production during the strike, although the second and final season is now ostensibly underway. The cast list of *Andor* certainly boasts some members who have been vocal about the political economy of cinema, and about the strike in particular. This goes back to at least Stellan Skarsgård’s nearly viral response about the role of franchises and monopolisation in the market development of cinema at the 2020 Gothenburg film festival[41]: “The problem is that we have for decades believed that the market should rule everything, that the rich should get richer [and] *that* is the root of it all.” Diego Luna himself, who serves as executive producer as well as lead actor of the series, has also spoken explicitly about how the themes of *Andor* resonated with the strike: “[The series is] about regular people doing extraordinary things when they understand that it’s about working together [...] yes, of course it’s pertinent.”[42] Only time will tell whether such themes will become more pertinent in the coming episodes of the series.

In *A New Hope*, Darth Vader cautions his fellow imperials against being too proud of the (prison-produced) “technological terror” of the Death Star. It is nothing compared to the power of the Force, as Vader would have it. What *Andor* makes clear is that this technological terror of the Death Star is not just a tool *for* the subjugation of the galaxy by force, it is itself the *result* of the subjugation of another force: The labour Force.

The Malignant Borders of Empire: The Aldhani and the Act of Cultural Erasure

Sejuti Bala

If there's one thing to be said about the political geography of the Empire in *Star Wars*, it is that its presence is arguably onerous, and its reach near-omniscient. Ever since the inception of Star Wars, the looming threat of the Empire has served as the intimidating backdrop to the hero's journey, a near-constant villain whose presence is the amalgamation of a great evil that the hero must defeat at all costs at the end of the story. To this end, Star Wars has never been subtle; from the very beginning it has outfitted its soldiers in the style of Hitler's Germany during World War II, as admitted by George Lucas himself and seen furthermore in the Ewoks battling the Empire with guerilla tactics and winning was a response to American imperialism in Vietnam. We are told that the Empire in *Star Wars* is evil, that it is cruel and unyielding, and to drive home the point, it is tied either aesthetically or allegorically to real-life examples of Empire that history has documented on our side of reality. However, central to the fact is that Star Wars is a space opera— and the Empire, as metaphorical as it may be, merely acts as the backdrop to situate our hero against the story's apparent antagonist, Darth Vader, who becomes the face of the Empire.

While the Emperor Palpatine pulls strings in the shadows, Darth Vader is presented as the formidable and fearsome figurehead on whose capabilities as a force-user the entire might of the Empire seems to hinge. The defeat of the Empire altogether becomes

synonymous with the defeat of Darth Vader alone. Since then, Star Wars has had several off-shoots and spin-offs wherein different components of said galaxy far, far away have been explored through various mediums such as *The Mandaloriian, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Ahsoka* to name a few – and yet, the borders of the Empire have never been quite as terrifyingly regulated and heavily reinforced as they have been in *Andor.*

So what is it about *Andor* that sets it apart in its depiction of the Empire? What is it that makes the Empire of *Andor* not just a backdrop to the Jedi-Sith conflict of a dying Republic, but a character in itself? What is it about the Empire in *Andor* that is so sinister and tangible that it evokes dread without ever calling on any all-powerful force-user figurehead of its own? The answer, of course, is bureaucracy — the iron fist that holds the Empire together — and its tedious but tenacious method of homogenising the galaxy in the name of "liberation" and "eradicating terrorism", one outer ring planet at a time.

When we are first introduced to Cassian Andor, we learn that he is a survivor and a refugee, on a quest to find the sister he lost when he was separated from her on Kenari at the age of six. The narrative makes it a point to note that Kenari is not a word without weight, and asking about Kenari is not without consequences. Flashbacks tell us that it was the location of a hushed-up Republic mining disaster, and adults are notably absent or presumed dead from the same, forcing the older children to raise the younger ones. Their language is not translated for us, and we must gather what the children are saying through context clues — which is an effective tactic employed by the story to make sure that the audience understands that they are intruders here in Kenari, just the Separatist plane that crash-lands, like Maarva and Clem, and the children have not yet been infected with the Imperial tongue.

The wordplay of 'Kenari' as 'canary' - backed up by depictions of a mining disaster that poisoned the air and shades of yellow in the children's clothes - evokes the prototypical warning: a canary in a coal mine. As if on cue, the children's lives are endangered the second a Separatist ship crash-lands on Kenari, and acts as the harbinger of doom for whatever life these children have managed to carve here for themselves. Depending on how you look at it, Cassian is either rescued or kidnapped by Maarva, who happened to be at the crash site with her husband Clem to salvage equipment, and upon seeing Cassian and realising the urgency of time, she makes the decision for him. She takes this boy with her to save him from whatever she assumes the Republic would do to him, would do to the other kids. Would it assimilate them? Kill them? Integrate them into reinforcing the same atrocities on other people that were done to them? Regardless, Maarva fears it, and strives to keep him away from it. It is hard to imagine what life would've awaited Cassian had Maarva not severed him from his family, what this abrupt separation from the other children of his community gave him as much as it robbed him of — and he dedicates quite some time into imagining it, but the lack of leads is not for the lack of trying.

The otherness of communities against the homogenous rule of the Empire is further highlighted when the camera shifts its focus to Ferrix, and the picture Ferrix paints is of red and rust, of working-class grit and grime — there is a flow to things. We are shown how a day begins in Ferrix with a routine awakening, the sounds of a bell being rung in a rhythmic tune, a call that signals both the start of a day as well as the end of one. To the Time Grappler, who does the ringing of the bell, it is almost a ritualistic process, and it conveys both poise and a sense of purpose. This is something he has been doing his entire life, and the community trusts him to honestly designate the duration of their day and the time they

spend working. This intercommunal trust is further baked into how the workers of Ferrix's scrapyard leave the gloves of their workday on the walls because there is no worry of them being stolen. It paints the picture of security, of communal fraternity, a place that likes to keep its head down, keep out of trouble, and diligently gets its work done. It does its best to survive under Imperial rule and possesses a sense of tight-knit togetherness and unity.

Against his superior's direction, Syril Karn attempts to hunt down Cassian on Ferrix but is told at the communication hub that despite being under Pre-Mor jurisdiction, asking questions would yield no results. It's no secret that law enforcement aren't welcome on Ferrix, and the Ferrixians would collectively hinder any corporate officer's attempt to shake them down. "They have their own way of doing things," a Pre-Mor employee warns Karn, who doesn't understand why a display of badged authority wouldn't make a people willing and compliant, due to his rigid wannabe-Imperial ways. Karn's self-proclaimed pride in asserting that "Corporate Tactical Forces are the Empire's first line of defense" comes to an ironic conclusion when he attempts to violently enforce the laws and it results in a massive failure. Karn and his team of corporate henchmen are left stranded and afraid of Ferrix as people around them do not engage with them directly, but start sounding out a call to each other by banging on everyday metal objects around them in a consistent rhythm; a call that seems to pick up pace and gain intensity with every consequent person who hurries to join in on the signal the closing of shops and hunkering down. It builds anticipation and seems to suggest a method of wordless yet communal communication, be it for danger or wariness or simply as an intimidation tactic — it achieves all three, leading Karn's deputy to panic and claim that "we are under siege" as he continues to lose men and the noose around corporate control seems to tighten with every successive beat. It is a failed mission

for corporate officers, and in the chaos of it all, Andor slips out from under Karn's fingers. Syril Karn's inability to gauge the extent of a people's loyalty to their home and kinship to each other not only costs Karn his job, but also the loss of corporate control over Morlana One altogether, succeeded by the Empire using Karn's epic failure to reinforce its borders and do away with corporate jurisdiction altogether in the Morlana sector.

Our first introduction to Aldhani is through Luthen Rael, who assists in Cassian's escape from Ferrix right under Karn's nose, and who informs us that Cassian's expertise is needed on Aldhani for the theft of an Imperial fortune kept there — the quarterly payroll of an entire Imperial sector. We learn from Luthen that the Rebellion desperately needs this money, and the place to get it from best would be the Empire's own reserves. The currency of the Empire still reigns supreme, and one needs to partake in said currency even as they're attempting to do away with said system altogether — its riches is how the Empire maintains control. Afterall, the central compelling thesis of *Andor* is that while 'the Empire' is an abstract concept in the name of which several atrocities are committed, one must not forget those who are instrumental, willing and proactive even, in committing those atrocities. *Andor* strives to give faces and names to the beating heart of bureaucratic oppression so the responsibility of Empire's cruelty is not simply handed over to an abstraction of evil but to those who commit those acts and uphold the pillars of imperialism with their very own hands.

It is hard not to think of the Highland Clearances,where Scottish clans were evicted from their homes in the 18th century and other atrocities committed upon the Gaelic population by the British Empire when one is introduced to Aldhani through vast expanses of rolling green fields. With its lush mountain terrain of the Scottish

Highlands, one must remember that the tribes of the Highlands were seen as "backwards" and more "Irish," and considered a spillover from Gaelic Ireland by those who lived in the lowlands. In *Andor*, we are informed that for centuries, the entire expanse of the land used to be populated by forty thousand native people who were forcibly cleared out when the Empire moved in a little over a decade ago. When Cassian asks in horror if those people were killed, Vel clarifies that no, they had been displaced, forced to move south into "Enterprise Zones" located in the lowlands – which adds to the Highland Clearance parallel, wherein the clansmen had their land taken from them and were forced to become crofters, until those resettlements became overpopulated and they were forced to move again. Centuries upon centuries of lives spent on this same land that was lived on and cared for by their ancestors, and their ancestors and their ancestors in turn — uprooted by a single stroke of Imperial control. Displacement is one of the oldest tricks in the book for colonialism. It is the act of seeing a people as inferior and preemptively deciding that the place would be better off without them interfering in whatever grand endeavours one has for said place. It is the uprooting of history and a loss of culture under duress, for displacement comes hand in hand with racism and capitalism, as seen with the Empire's treatment of native Aldhani.

Vel, who is leading the mission, further tells us about how The Valley of Caves called *Akti Amaugh*, the location where they'll carry out the heist, used to be the Aldhani's sacred valley. She tells us that it is not far from there that thirteen years ago the Empire "liberated" an air base called Alkenzi, and upon discovering the storage properties of the caverns, they decided they had better use for it, irrespective of what it means for the people of Aldhani and what value it might hold to the natural biodiversity of the place. In just thirteen years they not only managed to displace the people whose ancestors had spent centuries on the land that used to be

their ancestral home, but also dammed up their sacred river, *Nasma Klain*, a once mighty river now reduced to a faint trickle. Seeing the Empire deprive the indigenous population of water and other natural resources on Aldhani surely makes the audience wonder what else the Empire did to push the Dhanis to the lowlands. The act of threatening the native population's water supply is, and always has been, an effective tool of colonisation.

The Imperial Commandant Jayhold, who detests Aldhani as a backwater planet that he cannot wait to get off of, remarks to his superior that:

> the Dhanis, they're simple people. They breed a sad combination of traits that make them particularly vulnerable to manipulation. On a practical level, they have a great difficulty holding multiple ideas in their heads simultaneously.

The prejudice of presumed racial superiority is integral to colonialism, as is the act of reinforcing boundaries on the native population. Much like how the Gaelic were dehumanised by the English and described as savages to make the displacement of the population more justified, the same is seen done to the Aldhani people. The argument made by colonialists is that the native population is barbaric, savage and incapable of intellect and therefore it is by their own inferior status, of being "less than" human, that they're naturalistically deserving of subjugation simply because of the way they are. When in reality, the Empire hardly honours treaties made with the native population and is adamant in treating them as second-class citizens, depriving them of rights, depriving them of their personhood and making an example of them. It is also the prejudice of "unclean" and "uncivilised" when Corporal Kimzy is looking out over the valley where the Aldhani are supposed to arrive, and remarks with disgust to the undercover

Gorn, "still enough to smell 'em right? could you imagine this place with a couple of thousand Dhanis?" to which Gorn, the defected official who is instrumental to the heist and whose Aldhani wife was killed by the Empire, face carefully hidden away towards the horizon says "Yes. Yes I can."

Much is the same when noting the North American recounting of its own history of colonialism, where the dominant narrative is not only the complete erasure of Native Americans but also hardly any acknowledgment of their existence at all. In some rare cases, subsets of American colonialism argue that it won parts of land from the Native Americans in the exchange of goods and trades, buying land from them for the price of animal hides and pelt. Native Americans are presented as not intellectual enough to know the value of what they were trading; ergo they gave up the land for tricks and pennies, which North America claimed was fair negotiation tactics on its part. It is a false accounting by every means, not only did the colonising government refuse to uphold their end of signed treaties, but they also threatened the Native American civilisations with guns and armadas, where the choice was to either forfeit your claim to a place that is intrinsic to your culture and your identity, or die. "*Tell him our ghosts have strong hands and long memories*," the Aldhani elder tells Gorn, and later throws the Empire's exchanged pelt into the fire. The Dhanis are aware of the Empire's atrocities against and exploitation of them because, despite what the Empire believes, the Dhanis aren't slow or dimwitted. The contempt and hatred they have for their oppressors is behind a thinly veiled defiance of refusing to talk to the oppressor in their tongue, even as they understand the language the Empire speaks – which is shown when the Aldhani Elder picks up on Gorn's mistranslation to the Commandant, but the Elder doesn't protest it vocally. It brings to mind Nemik: "the

pace of repression outpaces our ability to understand it…It's easier to hide behind forty atrocities than a single incident"

It is always the insistence of the Empire to frame colonisation like it won something by the virtue of its very right-brained cleverness and intellectual prowess, ignoring the roles racism and class struggles play in the acquisition of its "assets" and the people it tramples on in the pursuit of doing so. The act of brutality and the threat of violence hardly make for a situation where a choice is present. "We found the best way to steer them… is to offer alternatives." Jayhold continues, "You put a number of options on the table, and they're so wrapped up in choosing, they fail to notice you've given them nothing they wanted at the start." The Empire employs tactics of handing the colonised several bad deals to choose from — all while non-compliance equals a death sentence. It is always easier to claim it as 'negotiation' when the other person is offered a superficial choice, held at gunpoint to make an almost-meaningless decision. Such a choice is no choice at all. He goes on to state that, "Their deeper problem is pride. The dhanis would rather lose, rather suffer than accept [the deal they're given]." Here it is made abundantly clear that prejudice runs deep, and the Empire interprets any form of resistance as obstinate arrogance and communal identity as nothing but a hindrance to its own ends.

It is here that the story lets us know that this is the last time the Aldhanis will be allowed to travel up to the valley to witness the holy event they have been witnessing for centuries, the *Mak-ani bray Dhani* (the Eye of Aldhani). It is a cosmic event that occurs every three years, and the people of Aldhani hike up all the way to the old stones of *Nasma Brani*, the last remains of their holy temple upon the sacred river in the sacred valley. It is stressed that the Aldhanis consider it an act of pilgrimage and ever since the Empire came down here, they have set up viewing galleries down in the

designated "Enterprise Zone," and lined the path up to the holy temple with "Comfort Units" to discourage the Aldhanis from completing their sacred trek. This emphasises that the strength of the Empire also lies in its slow, calculated patience: "We spent an entire decade promoting an Imperial Viewing Festival down in the Enterprise Zone." Jayhold states proudly, "They'll have that going forward." The Empire chips away until there's nothing left, and one has ceased to be. Not only does the Empire colonise land, but also its people and their way of life; their traditions and customs are replaced by the Empire at the centre. It puppeteers the colonised with the lure of capital and comfort, ultimately nothing but loose pocket change to a galaxy-spanning civilization. When thes lures are taken, the Empire converts the colonised into cheap labour that further annihilates what indigenous culture remains.

"It is their sacred valley is it not?" Jayhold is asked by his supervisor, to which he replies, "Well ultimately they will return won't they Colonel. When you need plenty of arms and legs to build what you've got planned." Slowly, the Empire has not only carved away at Aldhani customs and traditions by restricting movement, it plans to further desecrate sacred sites by building an airbase using the labour of the very people already being marginalised. As such, the Aldhani cease to be human. They cease to be people and become disposable, cheap labour. Bodies that serve at the pleasure of the Empire and as remarked on by Cassian Andor later in the show, "cheaper than droids and easier to replace."

The use of the Eye as the cover for the heist is a mark of the rebels working in tandem with the nature of a place to get a leg-up over the Empire who seek to subjugate it alongside its people. Nemik's sentence rings true: "But they have a fight on their hands, don't they? Our elemental rights are such a simple thing to hold, they will

have to shake the galaxy hard to loosen our grip.” The treatment of a place with the understanding of it, not with the subjugation of it.

Before the Empire’s iron fist clamped down on Ferrix, it showed a heavy population of working-class people, whose personhood however was not reduced to simply their labour. It was the coalition of the community, and even under the Empire’s duress, it continued to foster that sense of care towards the people who inhabit said community but were no longer able to participate in financially benefiting said community. The Empire would see these people as disposable, but we need to learn to see people beyond the labour they provide, which is seen in how Ferrix treats its elders, and even though B2EMO is a droid, Brasso stays with it after Maarva has died, to offer it emotional support. Even on Narkina 5, the glimpse we get of the native people has them remarking that by setting up the factory of prison slave labour, the Empire has poisoned their water, therefore stripping them of their elemental rights. In turn, they help Cassian and Melshi escape, showing that displaced people will always sympathise with others who, like them, have been stripped of their rights and dehumanised by the oppressors.

The Empire thus employs different methods of wiping out a culture, ranging from the obvious murder and genocide to more subtle stealing of land and destruction of traditions. Any of these actions benefit the Empire, resulting in the assimilation of homes and minds into its borders and forcing people to pick a side: cooperation via Imperial labour or resistance via rebellion. It is no surprise that it brings the industrial revolution to Aldhani, for the notion of Empire always goes hand in hand with capitalism, the benefactors of which take pleasure in removing personhood and replacing it instead with imperial productivity. The borders of Empire are like a plague, rotting everything it touches in an attempt to assimilate them into itself. As a byproduct, it creates a milquetoast version of whichever cultural tradition people were forced to give up to save their lives and calls it liberation. Andor draws focus to the faces of those instrumental in reinforcing the malignant borders of the Empire (or just empire), explicitly holding them responsible for hurt and bloodshed without any need for lightsaber-wielding, larger-than-life villains.

Protest Without Music

Rykie Belles

When Cassian Andor's mother died, he sprung his ex-girlfriend from jail and joined the rebellion. When my dad died, I got my tragus pierced and forgot to wash my hair for two weeks.

We are not the same. But this did happen at the same time!

Some Important Dates:

October 19, 2022: My dad died. I was at his left side, sitting on a hospital chair, holding his hand.

November 16, 2022: I watched Episode 11 of *Andor*, "Rix Road," in which Cassian Andor (My Beloved), finds out his mother has died.[43]

September 28, 2023: I got the "your proposal sounds great" email about this essay.

October 8, 2023: my friend Eddie Jeff Cahill, labor organizer and genuine dyed-in-the-wool protest singer, died. I was four hours away and had no idea he was even ill.

October 13, 2023: I sat down to start this essay.

Picture the scene: It's the night before my dad died. Dies. Will die. My partner and I drove the five hours from Atlanta to Savannah as soon as we got the call, and though we arrived well after visiting hours, the night nurses let us in. It's the last time I'll see my dad coherent. My brain doesn't know that yet (I haven't heard the plan from my family), but my body does—some instinct, maybe, or just hearing the way my mom sounded when she said "you need to come down here as soon as you can, today if possible." His hand is calloused and swollen, but it is alive, and it is holding mine.

The night before he died, I spent two or three hours singing to my dad. There was nothing else I could think to do. He couldn't talk around the tube in his throat, and I couldn't talk around the pieces of my heart. When I was a child, he taught me how to read music, how to open my mouth so wide when I sing that I look pretty silly, but sound great. He had a big voice: a bright, brassy tenor with plenty of swagger and a good amount of "*fuck you*" every time he nailed one of the high notes most hobbyists either don't try, or shouldn't.[44] We sang together in church choir, at dinner time prayer, in the car, in a couple of musicals. He made up song parodies, "This is pizza! Pizza night! There ain't no second chance unless you reach and take a bite" "Ride, ride, ride your moose/Gently down the trail/Merrily Merrily Merrily Merrily/Off to get the mail." His guitar sits next to mine; my partner plays his old trumpet. I don't remember a time when there wasn't music in our house.

The night before he died, I spent two or three hours singing to my dad. I sang anything that came to my scrambled brain, mostly folk songs: *Coal not Dole*, *The Parting Glass*, *Old Dun Cow*, *When You Get to Heaven (You've Got to Bring a Casserole), Puff the Magic Dragon* (with the extra verse my mom added for me and my sister as kids), *Times They are a'Changin*, *When the River Meets the Sea.* And I sang *Solidarity Forever*. It's a fabulous song, isn't it? The tune is an old one, and a popular one—originally a camp song or a work song that came to be known as either *Say, Brothers, Will You Meet Us* or *Canaan's Happy Shore,* it's also found in *John Brown's Body, The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and my personal favorite, *The Valiant Soldiers/The Marching Song of the First Arkansas*. It strikes the perfect folk song balance between *singable*

and *interesting*, a solid tune that less experienced singers can follow, with tons of room for embellishment and harmony.

And the *lyrics.* Listen to someone sing *“We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old.”* I dare you not to feel something.

Dad loved *Solidarity Forever*. When I sang it for him, his face lit up, he smiled around the tubes. At the first verse, he squeezed my hand in time with “*the union makes us strong*.” He had always been strong. Though illness had robbed him of that, at that moment his grip was as powerful as it had ever been. I knew this was the end, but hope is a strange thing, and when he squeezed my hand, I found a flicker of it. Not that he would get better. But for. ..something.

The night before he died, I spent two or three hours singing to my dad. In the year since then, I have always been singing to my dad.

Singing to my dad is the only way I know how to keep going.

My friend Eddie Jeff, “Jeffie,” died about a year after my dad. They never met, but they would’ve liked each other a lot. Jeffie had a subdued baritone voice, full of the weary fire of a life-long fighter who has never given up and doesn’t plan to start now. He played the guitar like a ballerina dances—so agile and easy-going you don’t notice the miracle of what’s happening unless you know what to look for. We sang together on small ren faire stages, in jam sessions; once, the weekend before Thanksgiving, we performed *Alice’s Restaurant*, and made plans to do it again that we never got to see through. He was the kind of musician who turned the act of making music into an invitation. “Come join me. Let’s make music together.”

When he died, I hadn’t seen Jeffie in a few years. We met at a renaissance festival—he was on the circuit full time and I wasn’t, so we saw each other for about eight weekends a year, with some scattered in-between times. It’s amazing the kind of friendships that can develop like this, though, especially when there’s music involved. When I passed his stage, he would invite me up to sing with him (usually *Fields of Athenry*). When I was having a rough day, when the crowds weren’t biting, when I was ready to cry from exhaustion or imposter syndrome, when my well was dry, I’d sit in his audience for a few minutes and drink in the gift of his music, borrowing some of his courage, his never-ending stubborn hope.

Not incidentally, Jeffie had been a labor organizer and a strike leader. He’s on the *IWW Songs of Solidarity* album from the 80s, as Jeff Cahill. When I mentioned to him, off-hand, that I liked to close out my sets with *Solidarity Forever,* he lit up like a kid on Christmas, and I’d never been so proud of anything in my musical career as I was of his approval.

At my dad’s funeral, I sang *Fiddler’s Green*, a song about the place old sailors go “when they don’t go to hell.” At the same time, 10:00 in the morning, some of my musician friends, Jeffie included, got together to record the same song at the renaissance festival where we’d all played together. There’s a hundred lifetimes of musical skill in that short video. I can pick out the individual players—Terry on the mandolin, Cat’s whistle, of course Susan singing, Bobo’s violin, Gregg’s squeezebox, and if I listen hard, if I watch his hands, I can pick out the intricate beauty of Jeffie’s guitar. I didn’t realize that would be the last time I’d hear him speak to me (“We love you, Rykie”).

Edna St. Vincent Milay wrote the poem I read at Jeffie’s wake, *Dirge Without Music*, in 1928. This poem has haunted me since my dad died. It’s one of her best, with the mixed imagery of death and

life, the anger and pain in every phrase, and the gutpunch of the repeated refrain: "*I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned."* There's something so powerful in standing in facing the inevitable and saying "No." Even when it's happening anyway. Especially when it's happening anyway. I can't stop this, but I will try, and if I fail, still I will shout my refusal to the heavens. No. I do not approve.

At some point I've cycled into acceptance wrt: my dad's death, and Jeffie's too. It doesn't hurt every second anymore. I still suffocate under the cruelty of a universe where we are born only to die, but only a few times a week. Progress! I can't stop death. I can't intimidate the Reaper into fucking off, and I don't have the head for medical research or healthcare, and anyway, while curing disease is among our most noble aspirations, the people trying to cure *death* tend to be megalomaniacal billionaires, and I have a policy against emulating them. Let me be clear: I *hate* death. But, at least at this very second, I accept it.

Picture the scene: It is four weeks to the day since my dad died, and *Andor* Episode 11, *Daughter of Ferrix,* is airing. As a long-time Diego Luna fan, I've been hyped for this series since before it was even announced, and though I can't enjoy *anything* right now, I'll be damned if I'm gonna miss any more of it. I'm sitting on my couch with my partner. An actor I love is portraying a character I love finding out his mother is dead. My partner looks at me, concerned.

I can't move. I can't speak. I can't look away. I'm not sure I can breathe.

Even if I could, I wouldn't. Even if I did, it wouldn't matter.

"More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world"[45]

In addition to the ass-kicking way it handles grief, *Andor* has been praised for its realism, and rightfully so. One of my favorite moments is when a TIE Fighter does a fly-over of the motley band of Aldhani rebels. It's terrifying—the iconic scream of the twin icon engines has never felt so bone-jarringly real. From above, the rebels look like local shepherds. There's no reason for the pilot to get that close, except to terrorize them. To remind them who has the power here. There are a few other Star Wars moments where the Empire seems this overwhelmingly powerful: the Battle of Yavin IV, with the Death Star lurching closer and closer; the Battle of Hoth, with the Alliance literally running for their lives; Jedha, with a wall of destruction blocking out the sky. Against all odds, these moments lead to success—the Death Star is destroyed, the Alliance regroups, Rogue One escapes, the heist crew succeeds.. .despite the terrible cost.

"A terrible cost." That's a great storytelling device, isn't it? We love to see our heroes succeed in the face of unfathomable odds, and killing a few characters is a great way to up the stakes. When it's a minor character, like Dak or Biggs or Nemik, it breaks the hero's heart and spurs them forward. When it's a major character, like Cassian and Jyn, it makes their posthumous victory all the more bittersweet. Ah, catharsis! How wonderful!

I've been thinking about catharsis a lot, i.e. the idea that experiencing strong emotions, like grief or fear, in a safe (fictional) way helps us process and find relief from those emotions. When Cassian Andor dies on a beach at 26 years old,[46] having achieved an impossible goal, I'm sad, but I can also recognize his part in

saving the galaxy, and more to the point I can recognize an incredible ending to an incredible story.

But fiction is not reality. Catharsis requires safety, and my friends, the fight for a better world is fundamentally not safe.

“Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely”[47]

Another Important Date: on January 18, 2023, the Georgia State Patrol shot and killed a young environmental activist who was part of the ongoing protest against Cop City.[48]

Have you heard about Cop City? It entered the collective consciousness of Atlanta, Georgia, a few years ago; if you don’t live here, it’s understandable if you’re not familiar. In brief, our city government wants to spend $90 million to build an 85-acre “training facility” for police in Weelaunee Forest in the southern part of the city.[49] Included in the plans: shooting ranges (how fun for the neighbors), a Black Hawk landing pad (why??) and mock city buildings. For “practice.” Practicing what, I hear you ask? Well, keeping poor and non-white people in line, obviously. It doesn’t seem coincidental that this plan came into being after the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests.

This from a city that calls itself “The City in a Forest” and “The City too Busy to Hate,” and touts its connection to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement of the 50s and 60s. Atlanta has the densest urban tree cover in the United States, tree cover that I have seen decrease alarmingly in the twenty years I’ve lived here, and the mayor and the city council want to continue to throw away our priceless green space. No, not throw it away. Actively

destroy it. This despite overwhelmingly negative constituent response.

“Crowned with lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned”[50]

“Overwhelmingly” is not an exaggeration. Atlanta City Council meeting records were broken twice in 2023: seven hours of public comment in May, and then *sixteen hours* of public comment in June, when temperatures were around 90 F/32 C and constituents waiting to speak to their elected officials were not allowed to bring water. Nearly all of that time was people saying *no*.

Nevertheless, the City Council voted *yes,* and the mayor keeps pushing forward despite all the legal actions his constituents can take. There have been protests and marches and petitions, days of action, community gatherings. The petition to put Cop City to public referendum got twice as many signatures as required. It also, incidentally, got more signatures than *both* candidates got votes in the 2021 mayoral runoff. *Combined*.[51] But all those actions take time. That time has been given to us thanks to the tireless occupation of the site by forest defenders.

For two years, a group of dedicated people have lived in the forest, delayed destruction of the trees, and kept the situation in the public eye, long enough for legal routes to gain a foothold. The only reason Cop City hasn’t been built yet is people willing to break the law in the pursuit of what is right. Among them: Manuel “Tortuguita” Terán, 26 years old, who on January 18, 2023, was shot 57 times by state police for the terrible crime of wanting to save the forest.

At that time I was barely feeding myself, still unable to process anything except my own tremendous grief over my dad, but I remember the Atlanta-area response. The rage. The grief. It’s been

almost a year, and we are still grieving. Catharsis is finite; grief lives as long as we do.

As of this writing, the City of Atlanta still refuses to count the referendum signatures. Despite the many things our city needs, our government keeps pushing forward with an expensive project to create terror under guise of “public safety.” Not to be glib, but have we thought about calling it Death City? Cop Star? Hmm. I’ll work on it.

When I turn in the first draft of this essay, it’ll be almost a year since Tortuguita was murdered in pursuit of a better world. Will the Atlanta city government still be employing the more palatable tactics from the GOP Voter Suppression Handbook to push forward with Cop City?[52] I hope not. I hope that by then the city will *at least* be counting signatures on the referendum petition. I hope that by then someone with an ounce of shame will have shot down the patently absurd RICO charges against protesters and bail fund organizers.[53]

> *There will be times when the struggle seems impossible. I know this already. Alone, unsure, dwarfed by the scale of the enemy.* (Nemik)

“So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind.”[54]

But if that hasn’t happened, the fight will continue.

In Tortuguita’s name, yes, and the ones who came before us and the ones who will come after us. And even if this city is *finally* responding to the people who live here, the fight will still continue, because this fight is everywhere. Nemik talks about this: “*Remember that the frontier of the Rebellion is everywhere. And even the smallest act of insurrection pushes our lines forward.”*

Even if the fight is unwinnable, even if all we’re doing is delaying the inevitable, what choice do we have but to keep going?

Defying the inevitable is all over *Andor* and *Rogue One*. Good characters die raising a metaphorical middle finger to the Imperial war machine, inspiring those who come behind them even though they don’t live to see the end. I love this trope so much, because sometimes being an artist feels…a bit silly.

“Art is meaningful,” yes yes, but seriously? Sometimes “I contributed to a benefit album!” or “come read my anti-fascist poetry!” feels like telling people I poopied in the potty. Congratulations, I guess, but you’re an adult now, shouldn’t you be carrying an adult’s share of the work? I know, I know, from each/to each, but being the guy whose ability is “tells stories” or “sings pretty songs” just feels cheap. Maybe that’s shame from the lingering indoctrination of the capitalist hellscape. Maybe it’s a natural function of the uphill nature of the work, because the work is so fucking hard. It’s exhausting, it’s frustrating, it feels so hopeless—like it’s as inevitable as death that the world will continue to get worse and worse, and nothing we do can change that on any fundamental level, so why bother with songs and stories?

But remember Maarva's funeral parade? The funeral that turned into an insurrection? Remember who led that parade? A goddamned marching band.

I’m not going to suggest that the mass-produced product of a lawful evil media empire is going to change the world, no matter how Diego Luna bats those pretty brown eyes, but I *am* going to suggest that stories like this are *useful tools.* If we find inspiration in them, we should seize that inspiration with both hands. Because the story is a hell of a story, and telling stories is as primal a human

drive as breathing. Stories are how we make sense of the world. Stories are how we fortify ourselves for the fight ahead of us: the fight for survival, for justice, for the small measures of peace and beauty that turn *surviving* into *living*

Not long after my dad died, I got an Aurebesh tattoo on my wrist. It says "Climb," which is a repeated theme in Cassian Andor's story from the moment he climbs out of a space ship on his home planet. Nemik says it before he dies. K-2SO says it before he dies. Somebody in Narkina 5 says it before they (probably) die. And at the end, Cassian falls 50 feet down a tower, and then climbs his way to the top again, and the whole story comes full circle...and then he dies. Just like Nemik. Just like K-2. Just like Jyn, and Bodhi, and Chirrut, and Baze, and Clem, and Kino. The thing is, he was never going to survive. None of them were. None of us are, either. We may get over this next hump, through this next disaster, over this next illness, but sooner or later it's over. Death, my guys, is coming for all of us, and there isn't a damn thing we can do about it.

“So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind”[55]

And I hate this. I *hate* it. On bad days, the inevitability of death makes life feel like a cruel bait-and-switch, some kind of cosmic prank. On really bad days, I struggle to see why I should bother to keep going at all. Sure I'll start to feel better about my dad's death, but then inevitably I will lose someone else. Eventually, whether tomorrow or 70 years from now, I'll lose everyone I love, everyone who brings color and light to my darkest, grayest moments.

There will be times when the struggle seems impossible. I know this already. Alone, unsure, dwarfed by the scale of the enemy.

The system in which we struggle to live, the system created to squeeze every single drop out of us and then discard us, feels just as inevitable, as unstoppable as death. All the marching, voting, leafleting, occupying, direct-actioning we can do, is it ever going to work for *real*? Do we, as a collective, ever get to rest?

And I don't know. Maybe not. Maybe the best efforts we can put forth are nothing but a delaying tactic, and maybe the sun will never rise on a world completely as it should be. But here’s the thing I keep coming back to, the lesson I’ve learned from the stubborn motherfucker[56] who was my dad, and the stubborn ray of sunshine who was Jeffie, and the stubborn blorbo-from-my-shows who is Cassian Goddamned Andor: I will keep fighting anyway, because *fuck you,* that’s why.

The fight will keep going, and there will be music. There will be art. There will be poetry, and love, and fists and bricks and whatever else there needs to be, and by fuck, there will be *music*. Because we are human, and that’s what humans do. Because this work is hard, and it is frightening, and it is dangerous, and it is never-ending, and maybe it’s the job of the guy who sings pretty songs to keep us in time as we march forward. Maybe it’s our *job* to tell the stories of hope and triumph. Maybe it’s our job to give everybody else a little peace, a little rest. A little hope.

That’s why I “climb.” That’s why I got up this morning, despite how very much I would rather not have woken up at all. That’s why I still open my mouth when tears try to lock my jaw shut. If we’re all just shouting into the void, well, *fine*, but I’m still gonna shout. I’m going to stand on both feet and sing as loud as I can, until my voice is gone and my throat is raw, until my lungs collapse, until my heart stops.

We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old.

Remember this: Try.

They think they do what they want, and a lot of times they can,
because they have more power, more money, more everything.

I know.

But I do not approve. *And I am not resigned.*

Fuck the Empire. Cop City will never be built.

Why Does Andor Feel Different?

Eóin Dooley

In the wake of the season finale of *Andor*, a YouTuber by the name of Star Wars Theory opined that while the “acting was great, cinematography was great, [and] the writing was good” the show itself was, ultimately, “forgettable”.[57] The reason for this, as he put it, was owing to small details, such as the presence of “screws in the wall” in the prior episode, and architecture that is “just bricks” rather than smooth stone. To his mind, details such as these were sufficiently different to prior Star Wars media that the series did not sell the illusion of taking place in a galaxy far, far away. It therefore failed as a new entry into the franchise.

Naturally, the fanbase clowned on him. The clip of his livestream was quote-tweeted to hell and back, memes mocking him were circulated around social media, and the full force of Wookieepedia was brought to bear against him, as fans dredged up the many images from previous entries which contained bricks and screws. The phrase ‘bricks and screws’ became a meme unto itself, representing the lacklustre critiques that are often brought up when people try to explain why they don’t like *Andor*.

However, I’d like to contend that Star Wars Theory was correct. Neither in the literal nor intended meaning of any of his words, but I believe there is a charitable reading of what he said that does indeed identify what makes *Andor* different to other instalments in the franchise. Now, I don’t consider *Andor* forgettable. I consider it some of the best science fiction to have come out on television in the last decade, and I think this is precisely because of “bricks and screws”. It is because of its interest in materiality.

Before we get there, let’s back up a little. Is *Andor* really all that different? Perhaps the mere existence of this special collection should act as sufficient evidence, but we should go a bit further. Common analyses of the show make note of its political nature, of how it draws on real-world stories of revolution and resistance to build its plot, but politics, even direct political allegories, are nothing new to Star Wars. While the Aldhani heist finds its parallel in the 1907 Tiflis bank robbery conducted by Stalin, so too did Palpatine’s assumption of emergency powers mirror the 2001 PATRIOT act, and the rebels and Ewoks of the original trilogy were explicitly modelled on the Vietcong, making America the evil Empire. Star Wars has always been political, and *Andor* fits neatly into that model.

We might turn to the show’s use of moral ambiguity, or its darker tone, to contrast it with the simplistic binaries of earlier Star Wars. I think there is some validity to this argument, but it is easily overstated. The original trilogy offered Han Solo and Lando Calrissian as main characters of questionable moral fibre, while the prequels condemned the Jedi, the archetypal good guys of the series, and both trilogies offered main characters struggling with their moral development. This is even more apparent once one goes beyond the main films and encounters, e.g., Grey Jedi, wonderfully exemplified by Kreia in Knights of the Old Republic II. Yes, *Andor* offers us recordings of dying children as a torture device, but we’ve had torture droids and the slaughter of younglings before. We might argue *Andor* is different here by virtue of how well it executed these themes, but I do not think statements of quality alone can provide a particularly interesting or useful form

of analysis. Assessments of literary quality are deeply subjective, and thus only beg further questions.

A better tack is offered by Jon Michaud, in their 2022 New Yorker article on the show. Titled *The Force Is AWOL in Star Wars,*[58] the article notes that the mystical aspects of Star Wars have been scrubbed from the show, with nary a mention of either the Force or the Jedi even where it would be typical of the series to bring them up. I think this touches on the heart of the matter. In addition to this though, Michaud also points out other elements that have been downplayed or removed:

> There are hardly any cute comic-relief characters speaking in bleeps, grunts, or cringey patois. Despite one quirky, lovable robot, the series is notably short on aliens and droids. All the major characters are human, and none hide their face behind a mask à la Darth Vader… the only real romance is low-key and lesbian. And there is a decided lack of interest in paternity, which is as essential to much of "Star Wars" as it is to daytime talk shows.

The absence of these elements is taken to be a kind of critique on Star Wars as a whole — a demonstration of their superfluity if not outright obstruction in good, mature storytelling. I don't particularly agree with Michaud here, as it implies that the prior instalments of Star Wars, or the myriad fans and critics commenting on them, were unserious in some fundamental way. In my view, the influence Star Wars has had on pop culture would belie the notion, and I hope my own analysis of Star Wars above also indicates otherwise. Furthermore, I think *Andor* does include many of these elements where it has the room to do so, to a greater degree than Michaud suggests. We mightn't have a missing father figure, but Cassian was very much concerned with a missing sister. All the same, I would agree with his central statement, and likewise

contend the absence of the Force is key to the discussion when discussing *Andor*'s differences. Yet, I don't think that's the end of the story. Rather, instead of examining what the show has removed, I believe we would be better served by examining what it has added in lieu. In other words, what was it that needed space in the show such that Tony Gilroy had to put the Jedi on the backburner?

The new ingredient, I would argue, is materiality. This is a term with a few different extant definitions, but I am not drawing on any one in particular. When I refer to the term, I do not mean philosophical materialism, i.e. the metaphysical view of the universe as consisting solely of matter. This would be a difficult position to hold within the Star Wars universe. Nor do I mean an interest in objects per se, nor even something as broad as dialectical materialism, which makes claims beyond what I am trying to make here. By materiality, I refer simply to the positioning of objects relative to each other in space and time, how that positioning changes, and how the physical properties of those objects determine the interactions people can have with them. It is the way in which objects reveal and influence the culture of social institutions and the identities of those within. Simply put, it is how logistics relates to people.

When one examines the theme of materiality within *Andor*, the number of examples to explore quickly becomes overwhelming. We could talk about how various demands for resources determine Cassian's journey to become a rebel, right from the large-scale strip mining of Kenari and its apparent industrial accident. We could look at the many appearances of the theme in the Aldhani arc. The planet is special only because of its positioning relative to other planets, which makes it, in Vel Sartha's words, a "perfect hub for distribution", and the heist which follows also relies on a careful

analysis of the relative spacing of military units. Even when Cassian is tested by his fellow rebels, it is by asking him how he would calibrate the weight gauge of a freighter. Not to mention the clear parallel in Mon Mothma's storyline — how both are fundamentally about how to move capital. We could of course also examine it in the prison arc — how the construction of such a colossal engineering project as the Death Star demands labour that is "cheaper and easier to replace than droids" (see Christoffer Bagger's essay in this issue), as well as how the prisoners avail of necessary systems like water pipes and tracks for an elevator to escape. We could, indeed, look to the imagery of the show, though more than the 'bricks and screws' of the finale, I would point to its opening shot, which is of a wire being soldered to the circuit-board of a pipe bomb.

Instead of trying to provide a comprehensive overview however, I would like to hone in on one example. I would like to talk about a navigation unit. Specifically, an Imperial N-S9 Starpath Unit, stolen by Cassian Andor from the Steergard Naval Yard before the events of the show had even started. It is an easily forgettable piece of technology, or at least, I had completely forgotten about it until I rewatched the show for this essay. The function of the device is thematic in-and-of-itself. Per Wookiepedia, it uses "proprietary Imperial signals and frequencies to coordinate and map the relation of a starship to every Imperial asset, whether it was an installation or a vessel, for nine radial parsecs"[59], which is to say it acts as a kind of GPS system for Imperial possessions. However, it is not this function but the way in which the object itself moves around that ties the plot together.

The Starpath Unit has substantial monetary value, which provides Cassian a means of egress from Ferrix. This is doubly important in light of his murders on Morlana One, and he had hidden it in case

of emergencies like this. He has Bix contact Luthen to arrange a sale through the black market. Yet Luthen cannot immediately appear at Ferrix, as there are only certain times in which it is safe for him to arrive. The delay between Bix's message and Luthen's arrival allows for Timm to become suspicious of Cassian and snitch on him to corporate security forces. Once Luthen arrives, the two negotiate over the Starpath's value. As a consequence of their bargaining Luthen learns how Cassian operates and becomes convinced of his usefulness, which is why he takes a risk on him and brings him to Aldhani. We as viewers also learn the Empire's critical weakness is an unjustified belief in their symbolic power, blinding them to the significance of smaller figures such as Cassian, who was able to walk in and take the Starpath.

When Syril Karn and his police force attack, Luthen and Cassian are forced to leave the Starpath Unit behind. Of course, it is not the Unit itself that Luthen was really after, but Cassian, who is needed to act as the pilot of a cargo freighter during the Aldhani heist. Nevertheless, the events on Ferrix soon reach the attention of the Imperial Security Bureau, and, notably, Dedra Meero. Steergard was in the sectors assigned to her, and thus the potential presence of the stolen Unit in Ferrix ostensibly gives her jurisdiction. This leads to her failed jockeying for power. Yet, the Unit's theft, along with others like it, leaves her convinced of a coordinated rebellion. She secretly has all data on avionics thefts compiled so as to identify patterns, but is caught out. She then makes the case that the rebellion will not respect the borders of the Empire and that systems "either change or die". The Morlana Sector is reassigned to her, and thus she is able to connect the Unit to the Steergard base. Her new insight allows her to connect Luthen, who she refers to by the code-name "Axis", to the events on Aldhani. Thus, simply by examining the locations the Starpath Unit has been, how it has

moved, the Empire is able to learn a substantial amount of information about the nascent rebellion.

The above may have read like a summary of the core plot, but this is because of the mechanics of how the narrative works. By tracking this one incidental Unit, both sides of the war are revealed to each other and restructure themselves to match the threat. It is not a supplemental method of storytelling – no additional structure to guide the viewer forward. It is critical to how the plot of *Andor* functions, and its use has ramifications for the show's genre.

According to Canadian academic and prominent science-fiction critic Darko Suvin, science fiction stories operate using two features. The first is what he calls a *novum*, or innovation, which is the dominant feature of the narrative that distinguishes its world from our own world. It's difficult to identify a singular novum in *Andor*, but we might say it is the particular galactic civilisation in which its stories take place, with certain conceits such as hyperspace travel or blaster rifles acting more as incidental elements which enable it. Within the broader Star Wars universe, the Force would no doubt be taken as a novum too. As discussed, we should ignore that for *Andor.*

The second and more important element is *cognitive estrangement*, a phenomenon whereby the careful and logical exploration of a novum, and the alternate reality it supposes, allows a reader to re-examine concepts in the real world with new understanding. This means it's not simply the speculative or irreal aspects of a sci-fi story that makes it so, it's how they are treated. The mere presence of a spaceship or teleporter is not enough to make a story science fiction, rather, the logical entailments of these devices – their *materiality* – must also be explored in the narrative. This definition circumvents some problems the genre has encountered in defining itself, such as whether or not a novum is

strictly scientifically possible. As science has advanced, we've learned that more and more concepts are off the table, but this definition allows us to consider classical stories as still part of the genre. Time-travel may not be physically feasible, but *The Time Machine* is still sci-fi. Importantly however, a fantastical novum may prohibit cognitive estrangement. This is often the case with magic systems, where the rules may not be fully available for analysis or even actively contradictory, and thus a logical exploration is impossible. In such cases, we have fantasy.

What then might Suvin make of a science fantasy like Star Wars? The polite way to put it would be a fantasy story, which dons sci-fi clothes so as to make use of the aesthetics of the genre, but is not itself true science fiction. The more accurate way would be something akin to an abomination unto God and man. Suvin despises fantasy, and considers the fact that the two genres occupy the same shelf in most bookstores to be "a grave disservice and rampantly socio-pathological phenomenon".[60] More specifically, he has said SF's turn to space opera to be an instance of "committing creative suicide".[61] I find Suvin's hyperbole amusing, but he is not alone in his disdain for fantasy. Fellow Marxist critic Fredric Jameson has, for example, observed that fantasy has a "non-historical vision" of the world, where mediaeval ideology is recapitulated in its cosmic struggles between Good and Evil, which only certain great magicians can overcome[62]. Fantasy is taken by Suvin and others to be an essentially regressive genre mode, where it is the villains who upset the status quo and where solutions to problems are magical (i.e. non-cognitive, irrational) in nature. In their view, it entrenches a reactionary view that assures the reader of a moral order in the world, one which will be borne out through symbolic and ethical argument. Palpatine does what he does because he is evil, and because he is evil, someone will eventually toss him down into a big pit. The new mythology of

George Lucas hence cannot be trusted because, in Suvin's words, "myth is diametrically opposed to the cognitive approach".[63]

By contrast, Suvin values cognitive estrangement precisely because it is subversive in nature. A systemic analysis allows for a re-evaluation of the status quo and for potentially progressive social policies to come to the fore. We can actually see shades of this idea within *Andor.* When the Aldhani heist is underway, the Commandant attempts to bluff the rebels by saying the vault requires more than his presence to unlock it. However, because they have studied the lock and know how it works, they know they can break it open. Similarly, when Luthen's ship is accosted by an Imperial cruiser, his understanding of their tractor beams allows him to deploy countermeasures. Conversely, Nemik avoids using Imperial technology precisely because their inner workings are kept secret, and thus cannot be exploited. The rebels must analyse the materials around them in order to be fully effective, and a key point *Andor* repeats is that the Empire's belief in their symbolic authority makes them vulnerable to workers who know the infrastructure. As Luthen put it: "never carry anything you can't control".

This is why *Andor* feels different. It's not that it's darker, or more political, it's that the darkness and politics are grounded in a logical examination of the material components of the Star Wars universe, which consequently shifts its genre from science fantasy to science fiction. The Force, however influential it has been in the series, necessarily presents an aporia – an impasse in logic – that stops this investigation dead in its tracks, owing to its mystical qualities. When it is present, it can supervene on any turn in the narrative and explain it away. This is not to say a Star Wars story could never take the Force seriously and examine it critically (again, shout-out to my beloved Kreia), but if a showrunner wants to tell a

story about the logistics of a rebellion, it is necessary for the Force and related ideas to be sidelined.

I should say that I don't think fantasy is necessarily reactionary or non-cognitive. *Game of Thrones*, when it was at its best, had a similar materialist spirit and was happy to explore the importance of troop logistics or feudal economics. The sociologist Zeynep Tufekci made a similar distinction to explain why the finale season of that show was so reviled,[64] only she casts it as sociological vs psychological storytelling rather than materialist vs mystical. It's a close overlap in my view, and it is no coincidence that the best example of sociological television, *The Wire*, also took the position that "all the pieces matter". We may dispense with details when telling a fable, but not when we're trying to say something about the real world. As a recommendation for further reading on this subject, I would point the reader to James Gifford's *A Modernist Fantasy*, which examines strands of modernist and anarchist thinking present in non-Tolkienesque fantasy, something often overlooked by sci-fi critics. It's important to keep a nuanced stance on fantasy in mind when considering what *Andor,* or indeed Star Wars as a whole, could become.

This brings me to the final point of this essay, which is how *Andor* fits alongside its Disney contemporaries. There is a phenomenon, which has become increasingly pronounced over recent entries, that I think encourages the fantasy read of Star Wars. It's not exactly pandering to fans, although it's closely related. Pandering to fans is not necessarily a bad thing, as it's reasonable for any kind of commercial storytelling to try to anticipate what those who enjoy it want and give it to them. No, the phenomenon is what I'll call franchise fetishism, after commodity fetishism. Commodity fetishism is the idea that goods, once they enter the market place and have a price tag put on them, become viewed as having some

inherent value that is separate from the labour that created them. They become standalone objects, abstracted from any social relations. Something similar seems to be occurring in a lot of Disney's Star Wars, where the functions of many objects are to be explained by viewer's feelings about Star Wars, especially nostalgia. As a result, they don't work like material objects.

When Rey discovers the Millennium Falcon on planet Jakku in *Episode VII*, it does not matter that this was described as a hunk of junk thirty years before that event, nor that it's been buried on a scrap planet. It works fine, because it's powered by symbolism. It was a symbol of resistance back then and even if it has been abandoned in a junkyard, it remains a fetish of the franchise. If we contrast Jakku with Ferrix (see RK Upadhya's analysis of Ferrix in this issue) it becomes quite apparent how dissimilar the planets are despite having ostensibly similar roles in the economy. When Palpatine suddenly returns in *Episode IX*, he is able to summon an armada of Star Destroyers from the ether. Who worked on them, for how long, and where they found the materials, are incidental because they are needed to show how evil and powerful Palpatine is. There is also the dagger Rey uses as a map to find the wayfinder, which requires looking at a wrecked Star Destroyer from just the right position, assuming the wreckage hasn't changed at all in the interval. This is done to reinforce Rey's position as a Chosen One in the narrative, a position *Episode VIII* had almost dispensed with. Objects are imbued with an aura that cannot be explained by their physical composition, only as symbols, as fetishes, of Star Wars. The result of this is that the franchise as a whole veers further into fantasy storytelling.

Andor does offer a comment on this, albeit a very ironic one. Tony Gilroy wanted to avoid fan service as much as possible[65], yet the art department snuck in multiple Easter Eggs into Luthen's gallery

unbeknownst to him[66]. This means the environment with the most franchise fetishes is the shop where pretty artefacts are used to distract from the real business of rebellion going on in the backrooms, which aligns remarkably well with the genre discussions we've had so far. In fact, as an aside, we might well read Luthen as a synecdoche for the entire approach Tony Gilroy has taken. The only objects which appear to have sentimental value for the character are a Kyber crystal, a core lightsaber component, which he gives away to Cassian as a security deposit, and something which looks like a lightsaber hilt, found when Saw Guerrara's men search him. If Luthen does turn out to be a Jedi as fans speculate, then perhaps he is one who relinquished the practice in order to orchestrate revolution. Someone who shifted away from the spiritual, to focus on the nuts and bolts of bloodshed. Perhaps he and Tony may yet return to it.

In conclusion, I think there is a clear genre distinction between *Andor* and the rest of Star Wars, one which emphasises attending to the material nature of the universe and thinking through its mechanics without recourse to mysticism. I suspect genre shifts in Star Wars explain the negative or even violent reactions from the fan-base when certain instalments try to buck the trend. There is an expectation of a fantasy story when there may be a science fiction story, and misaligned expectations can create a jarring, dissatisfying experience even where the writing itself is solid. I'd hazard this is what Star Wars Theory, and others like him, reacted to in *Andor*. They did not get their galaxy far, far away. They got bricks and screws. However, I prefer *Andor's* choice here. We might find it disenchanting as viewers to look at, say, the death of Maarva Andor, and know that she will not become a Force ghost like so many other mentor figures. She was a lowly creature, one of the earth in a cold universe, and so she will be cremated and turned into a brick. It seems a crude view of people, to reduce

them to burnt clay, to materials. Perhaps so, but, to my mind, both *Andor* and Maarva deliver more impact that way.

Caught in the Sad Orbit of a Dead Calamity

Fabio Fernandes

1. Star Wars has always been predominantly a universe of contradictory characteristics. Princesses and emperors coexist with apparently democratic parliaments and congresses, but which more closely resemble a kind of Austro-Hungarian Empire with a galactic scope, with intrigues that are much more feudal than Byzantine.

2. This comparison is not a frivolous one; The bureaucracy seen throughout the films (notably in relation to the Empire) leads to an economy of barter and theft on the outskirts (Tatooine, for example) and smuggling (Corellia and the Kessel Run).

3. Throughout the Skywalker saga films, we see little that may constitute an integrated economy in that universe. We have moisture farmers and spice miners (the latter only mentioned, but that in a way hark back to Dune, one of George Lucas's inspirations for the original trilogy), but the only form of apparently legitimate commerce we see in the first three films is the Mos Eisley tavern, seen as an activity, if not illegal, at least operating under the radar, serving a clientele that is not always “decent”. (We could think of Cloud City in *The Empire Strikes Back*, but we are shown nothing in terms of commerce there).

4. This is mirrored throughout the entire saga – for example, in Maz Kanata's tavern in *The Force Awakens*. Described as a “watering hole” by J. J. Abrams, the tavern is located in a castle on the planet Takodana, a forest planet which is neutral territory between First Order and Resistance. Kanata is a former pirate and

smuggler; although we know nothing about the owner of the Mos Eisley tavern, we clearly see that the two taverns differ in virtually no way to an outside observer.[67]

5. There are, of course, other scenarios. Coruscant, for example: because it is the political center of the galaxy (both in the times of the Republic, the Empire and the New Republic) it has a peculiar configuration. As far as we know, it is the only planet in the galaxy that is an ecumenopolis, namely, a world that has its entire surface covered by cities.[68] It's a direct reference to Trantor, from *Foundation*, with echoes of *Metropolis* and maybe Thanagar (from the DC universe), as there are in fact two cities in one: a city high above and another, totally different, down there, among the canyons of the buildings. But Coruscant was never well-explored in the movies or in *Andor* for that matter (even though the Expanded Universe - now Legends - novels, along with the animated series The Clone Wars, covered a lot of territory in that sense) We know much more about what happens at the top of the apartment towers and in the Senate than below. Because it doesn't matter, perhaps?

6. (By the way, who cleans the latrines? Who takes out the trash? Robots? And why are robots always treated with disdain in the saga, even by holier-than-thou Luke? Why has there never been a robot uprising in SW? Because of their restraining bolts? Questions for another article).

7. It would be interesting (and important) to see more non-human forms of economy, like that of the Wookies. But (as far as audiovisual media is concerned) Kashyyyk only appears briefly at the end of the prequel trilogy and in the ill-fated Christmas special (about which we won't talk here). We don't know much about Chewbacca's home planet, other than that it's a tropical forest world, but whose inhabitants have knowledge of weaponry and advanced technology (although they don't seem to use it often).

(As an aside, it’s our understanding that such things constitute merely a matter of convenience for the screenwriters throughout the series).

8. There don't seem to be many examples of legal or even decent work in Star Wars. Or there seemed to be none – until *Andor*. This series offers us other points of view regarding the Star Wars universe. If not contradictory to what we have seen to date, they are certainly complementary, adding to and enriching what has been seen before.

9. In the first scene of the series, we see a bar in the industrial world of Morlana One – and maybe the first really explicit mention of prostitution in Star Wars (important in a universe originally a bit puritan, so to speak, where references had always been veiled before). A man, Cassian Andor, looks for his sister there – and ends up killing two local security guards.

10. Shortly afterwards we also see Cassian Andor's adopted planet, Ferrix, where we see miners and an honest life of citizens subject to the Empire without necessarily being afraid of it, but also not endorsing its presence on their world.

11. A curiosity: *Andor*, in terms of writing, seems to be fruit of a certain British culture and not an American one, in the sense of showing (albeit not very closely) the life and hard work of the miners. When we see the village where Andor's adoptive mother, Maarva, lives, we become well-aware of the poverty of the citizens of Ferrix, a poverty not unlike that which existed in the villages of Wales at the beginning of the 20th century, for example. Since the late 1800, Wales was home of the leading ironworks in Europe, the Wrexham area coal production totalling over 2.5 million tonnes annually. (Maybe it’s important to note that the social effects of industrialisation led to bitter social conflict between the Welsh

workers and English mine owners. During the 1830s there were two armed uprisings, in Merthyr Tydfil in 1831, and the Chartist uprising in Newport in 1839).

12. Andor carries this poverty with him even before Ferrix. Native to Kenari, a world completely devastated by Imperial mining, which killed his parents and those of several other children who manage to survive in a precarious and feral way on the planet, Andor is separated from his sister and taken by Maarva to Ferrix. When we meet him, he is an adult (about twenty years have passed since then) and carries a deep sorrow with him. He doesn't believe in anything, and he has plenty of reasons to do so.

13. Unlike Luke Skywalker, who is a simple, cornfed (or blue milk-fed) moisture farmer in the desert outreaches of Tatooine, Cassian Andor knew pain and suffering from an early age. Luke is white, blond, blue-eyed and well-fed. Andor has darker skin, black hair and eyes, and is very thin. Any comparative analogy between an American from the Corn Belt and a Latino from the periphery of capitalism is not a mere coincidence. If Skywalker is oppressed by the Empire (and he is), Andor is doubly so; in the geopolitics (or should we say *cosmopolitics*?) of the Star Wars universe, he not only has to strive as a person without many resources, but, instead of living in a desert planet since he was a baby, like Luke, Cassian Andor witnessed the slow destruction of a world, survived it by sheer luck when he was adopted and went to live in a poor mining colony. But the violence never lets his side: he still manages to sink deeper into misery by murdering the two security guards.

14. (An important distinction: he kills the first man by accident. Not the second, though).

15. But, even so, he was “caught in the sad orbit of a dead calamity”, as the head of the corporate security in Morlana One

said regarding the killing of the two guards. He is more than willing to conjure an accident because of the huge bureaucracy that the investigation would bring, with no reasonable chance of getting the culprit. (This is the blindspot – one of many blindspots – of the Empire, which ultimately will allow the rebels to win. This does not mean they have an atom of good in them, just that they became lazy).

16. Meanwhile, on the planet where Andor lives, Ferrix, people fight as best they can. Unlike space smugglers like Han Solo, for whom (let's be honest) the daily struggle seems but a game, here the thing gets serious: people are fighting for their lives every day. They can starve or die, and this is what makes *Andor* more convincing than any Star Wars story that has come before What may seem like shady business in other films of the franchise is seen here in another light: as a fight for survival.

17. Cassian Andor, on the other hand, is a hustler and a thief: someone who is after gain, not necessarily illegal or easy. He just wants to survive, but his mother wants him to be in peace, which is another story.

18. "Kenari. Mid Rim. Abandoned after a mining disaster." It's so insignificant that almost no one has heard of it. Mid Rim is also something quite in the middle of the galaxy in terms of importance: mediocre. "Abandoned and considered toxic. Imperial prohibition." "Not the Empire - corporate authority," says the sergeant to the crowd on Ferrix. Meaning: not important enough. Kenari and Ferrix are good enough to be exploited and that's all.

19. When Andor kills the men, he goes briefly to Ferrix but prepares to flee that world forever. But he is forced to run away with Luthen Rael, who sees in the young man the makings of a great resistance fighter. Luthen tells Cassian that they will hang

him "for a bobbin thread or 20 million credits, it makes no difference." But he can do something important against the Empire. Cassian isn't particularly interested. Luthen offers to give him what he wants most.

20.Andor, reluctant at first, but ends up joining the Aldhani a rebel group . A spy himself (and also a merchant, but one of Coruscant's elite, specialising in antiquities), Luthen bets that Andor will eventually understand the importance of fighting the Empire.

21. It's not that Andor doesn't understand this importance; but hungry people with few resources often need to focus on surviving first. (The Skywalker saga, in contrast, smartly focuses on Jedi mysticism and mostly ignores the needs of the galaxy's people. This is a smart move, of course, only in the sense of storytelling).

22. The importance of the struggle, in any case, will be hammered into his head little by little, partly also with the help of the young Nemik, an ideologue who writes a manifesto aligned in a certain way with the Manifesto of the Communist Party, by Marx and Engels, with undertones of Mao and Lenin. In a nutshell, we could say that Nemik could have been a Lenin in the beginning of his education, asking the fundamental question: "what is to be done?" and trying to find a practical answer to it.

23. Also, Maarva herself, upon learning of the attack on the garrison in Aldhani, will be excited to participate in the Rebellion. She doesn't know about Andor's participation in the attack, and Andor can't understand it (yet), but deep down it's just a matter of time. Maarva's radicalization, due in part to Cassian's actions, will turn full circle, helping radicalise Cassian in turn.

25. Finally, Andor's arrest and incarceration at to Narkina 5, where he will be forced to labor under penalty of torture and death, will be the final straw that will make him become a rebel once and for all.

26. Another difference: although the Skywalker saga is evidently told with a sympathetic eye towards the rebels, at the same time it seems to show the rebels and other non-aligned parties as people who act on the fringes of illegality and that this is pretty much immoral, a view usually espoused by right-wing parties in our reality.

27. Another curiosity: the word *villain*, meaning thief, bandit (and huckster, smuggler, and other illegal occupations), used to mean just *villager*, the inhabitant of a village. Who created this deleterious meaning? According to Merriam-Webster: “The landed aristocracy (those at home in villas in the classical Latin sense of the word) dominating medieval society in the days of Middle English had all the power, politically and linguistically, and under their use of the word, the Middle English descendant of *villanus* meaning "villager" - a word styled as *vilain* or *vilein* - developed the meaning "a person of uncouth mind and manners").[69]

28. In our case, the inhabitants of the city where Andor lives are the quintessential villains: uncouth (to Empire’s standards) miners and mechanics against the system from outside, unable at first to come out against it but always against it as a matter of principle. Therefore, not only uncouth but dangerous to the system.

29. In *Andor*, the focus is on humans. Other species are not important, even though many of them are also against the Empire. In other films of the franchise we see inter-species trade, but what matters most of the time are humans. Everything revolves around them, including forms of commerce and supposedly payment. (as seen before with the example of Kashyyyk). Why, exactly, this

xenophobic behavior of sorts – among humans in general, not only in the Empire

30. An interesting example would be the supposed origin of the entire Star Wars universe, proposed by Robert J. Sawyer for a trilogy called Alien Exodus[70] but which was not accepted and ended up becoming fanfiction.[71] This would go some way to explaining, at least in part, if it had actually been developed. But it was not.

31. So where do we stand? Just as, in the prequel trilogy, we see that Padme Amidala is queen by election (a system that was not invented by Lucas, as it existed in our world at different times, such as in the Holy Roman Empire[72]), the creation of that universe sometimes seems to be done by conveniently adding contradictory pieces of information to cater to everyone’s tastes. The financial issue, for instance, is never well explained.

32. And *Andor* doesn't give us all the answers. But it helps to create a more consistent, adult picture, let's say, of the Star Wars universe. But still far from satisfactory.

33. We remember here the joke about the Death Star workers in the film *Clerks*, by Kevin Smith. In that film, Dante Hicks and Randall Graves, two slacker friends who work unbearably bland jobs at a New Jersey convenience store and video rental store sitting next to one another, shoot the breeze talking nerd trivia – among which is the now-infamous tirade about how the rebels killed a lot of innocent contractors aboard the second Death Star. (In Season One of *The Mandalorian*, Cara Dune is questioned by an Imperial officer about the many millions of people the Rebels killed on both battle stations combined, though he gets a bit carried away near the end of his speech, deeming Alderaan's destruction

"a small price to pay to rid the galaxy of terrorism." Then Cara Dune shoots him dead, which is also a small price to pay as well).[73]

34. This running joke gets an even darker twist with the situation that Andor is subjected to when he is imprisoned – and he himself becomes part of the building team of the first Death Star. Andor manages to escape, but only when he enlists his companions in misfortune, showing that unity is strength – something that the Imperial regime knows very well and always seeks to dismantle.

35. In fact, this is *Andor*'s moral – at least what we can glean from its first season, which also features a showdown in its last episode: strength in numbers. It does not necessarily mean that unity brings victory, however.

36. We know where the series is going in relation to the character Cassian Andor, as it is the Star Wars version of the novel *Crônica de uma Morte Anunciada*, by Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Andor is Santiago Nasar (again, perhaps it's no surprise that a Latino actor was chosen for the role), the man who goes to another town in Colombia to see the woman he loves even though he knows the girl's brothers will kill him, a fact that has already happened when the story (told in retrospect) begins.

37. Could Andor also be a kind of Che Guevara (although the reference is already very explicitly coded in the name of the leader Saw Gerrera, played by Forest Whitaker)? Andor's motivation is different (and closer to Che's than Saw Gerrera, who's an anarchist, unlike Che, who was a self-avowed communist) – but in the end everything will lead to a state of revolt. We know, because there will be another season (apparently, from what we know, only in 2025), that Cassian Andor will survive – and that together with Jyn Erso he will gather a ragtag army of sorts to get the plans for the Death Star, a mission from which none will come out alive.

38. Andor dies apparently sad, although knowing that his efforts finally led to something, namely, the effective beginning of the end of the Empire with the destruction of its greatest weapon. It's not a consolation, but it's the closest to real life, with its disappointments and disillusionments, that Star Wars has brought us to date. This is the possible *realpolitik* in this fantasy world. And that's okay. Because the struggle goes on. Always.

It Has to be You

Brian Howard

“Tell them what to do. It HAS to be you Kino. Tell them what to do.”, Cassian Andor, Season 1, Episode 10

Throughout Season One of *Andor*, the protagonist Cassian Andor develops from a womanizing thief just looking out for himself, to a radicalized, aspiring revolutionary. Cassian’s transformation becomes apparent in prison on Narkina 5, as he employs a methodology that is strikingly similar to that used by labor organizers going back to at least the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The CIO was a federation of Communist-led industrial unions that began organizing en masse in the 1930s, like the famous sit-down strikes in Flint in 1936 which formed the United Auto Workers. As a long-time union organizer myself, I identified with the way Cassian didn’t try to be a leader himself, but sought out, recruited, and developed the right person to be that leader.

“They can’t imagine it … that someone like me would ever get inside their house, walk their floors…”, Cassian Andor, Season 1, Episode 1

When we first meet Cassian Andor he is not any kind of revolutionary or organizer. He has no interest in working on anything bigger than himself, except for finding his long-lost sister. We learn more about his backstory when we watch Maarva essentially kidnap him from his home planet, which has been decimated by extraction, becoming his adoptive mother but separating him from his community for what she believes is his own good. This decision is indeed questioned by the show, adding layers of moral complexity to what would traditionally be “good guys.” Trauma is foundational to Cassian’s development, and his response is to live by his own wits and become a master thief. He has no interest in fighting for a cause.

Cassian is confident, somewhat cocky even, though deeply wounded and angry. When Luthen Rael recruits his help to rob an Imperial depot, he does so for money. It’s a job to him—he thinks real freedom means making enough money to be debt-free and indulge in sensual desires. But the real shift happens in Episode 7, the moment he is arrested for simply being at the wrong place at the wrong time.[74] His sham “trial,” followed by being whisked away to some other planet with a prison in the ocean, completely melts away any bravado he might have possessed. As he is put on the factory floor and shown the manual labor he must perform under constant threat of torture, he starts to see that his individual self-reliance cannot serve him here. Diego Luna’s compelling body language shows us Cassian’s palpable terror and complete collapse of ego.

Cassian's exposure to the concept of fighting for something bigger than himself from Maarva, Luthen, and Nemik (a “true believer” in the heist crew who wrote a manifesto) was not enough–the first-hand experience of incarceration forced him to grasp that any previous sense of power was illusory. In the prison, on the factory floor, he finally realized that he and all his fellow prisoners needed each other. THEN the radical concepts he had been exposed to jelled for him. Andor knew he couldn’t do it himself, he needed to recruit people. And he really needed to recruit someone who could lead everyone else. He needed a real leader.

“Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there.”[75]

A fiercely independent working class individual becoming radicalized from direct experience was the major story arc of

proletarian literature popular in the 1930s. Tom Joad's character in *The Grapes of Wrath* is a well-known example (although the purists of proletarian literature would quibble that because Steinbeck was not himself working class, *The Grapes of Wrath* doesn't count). At first, Tom Joad is only concerned with practical matters as they impact him and his family, but he is radicalized after he sees his friend Jim Casy murdered for organizing a strike of fruit-pickers. The novel ends with Tom hitting the road to be an organizer. "I'll be ever'where—wherever you look," he tells his mom in a tear-filled monologue at the end.

Many proletarian novels of the period, like *The Disinherited* by Jack Conroy,[76] had a protagonist with a similar character arc—the stoic man out for himself trying to rise above his depressing conditions only to find that solidarity and collective resistance are the only ways to find actual liberation—with gritty, detailed descriptions of labor and poverty. The depth of understanding and clarity these characters develop comes from "the streets" as we might say these days, not from theory. And though many of them may be introduced to theory at some point–as Andor was when he met Nemik–it's only through direct experience that such theory becomes useful to them.

This aligns with what Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci called the "organic intellectual."[77] Writing from the bowels of prison himself, Gramsci discussed the importance of organic intellectuals to the working class. As opposed to traditional intellectuals who gain recognition via established institutions (usually the academy) and thus usually align with the dominant class, organic intellectuals emerge from within their own class or social group. They become intellectuals because of their ability to process and articulate the needs and desires of their peers, but in a way that challenges them to aspire for more and take action. This happens "organically"

because such individuals are rarely chosen and are often reluctant (at first) to take on the responsibility.

A closely related concept, called "organic leaders," emerged in the organizing methodology of the CIO in the United States in the 1930s. "The CIO believed in 'industrial unionism:' organizing all workers in the same industry regardless of trade or perceived status. This contrasted with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which favored organizing unions craft-specifically and which the CIO had formed under and broken away from."

For CIO organizers, it was important to organize from the bottom up within a workplace. They understood that no matter their background, an organizer is always an outsider, and the key to organizing is empowering the workers to form their own worker-led organization. They knew that in any workplace there are pre-existing networks and cliques of people, and within those networks and cliques there are those who others naturally look to as leaders. Organizers try to recruit those leaders first, because they spur their peers into action.

As a union organizer who was trained in this same CIO tradition, I can attest that this methodology works. In every workplace, every department, every shift, there are those who are just natural leaders. Jane McAlevey describes the CIO-style organizing methodology in detail in her book, *No Shortcuts*.[78] Regarding the organic leader, she wrote, "To connect to rank and file dynamics in the workplace, union organizers use a mechanism called organic leader identification, in which they analyze the workers' pre-existing social groups. This is done among the workers in conversation with them, not apart from them." I try to meet with as many people who will talk to me, and go down the list asking questions about each person they work with, like, "How long have they worked there? If people have a question or issue do they tend to go to this person

for help? Who tends to get birthday cards and pass them around?" or "When someone is sick, who starts a gofundme?"

We don't ask, "Who's the leader?" because most folks default to telling us who they *think* we want to meet—the person who's the loudest or the most combative with management. In my experience, those tend to not be actual organic leaders. Also, organic leaders rarely if ever self-identify. To quote McAlevey again, "Kristen Warner, a contemporary organizer in the CIO tradition, notes, '[Organic leaders are] almost never the workers who most want to talk with us. More often not, [they're] the workers who don't want to talk to us and remain in the background. They have a sense of their value and won't easily step forward, not unless, and until there's a credible reason. That's part of the character that makes them organic leaders.'"[79] This is true in my experience as well. Organic leaders tend to have full lives, and are usually not the ones who are the most opinionated and outspoken at work.

As a personal anecdote, about 12 years ago I was meeting with a group of about 9 or so workers in a coffee shop after their shift. I had met some of them before this and already had a pretty good sense of who their organic leader was, and she was there too. She did the least amount of talking in the group. We went through a typical union organizing conversation: connecting with their issues, telling them how having a union can make a difference, describing the plan to win a union, and getting their commitment. To get this commitment, I asked, "Do you support forming a union with your co-workers?" As soon as I asked this, I witnessed literally every head at the table turn in her direction. As soon as she said, "Yes" then the rest of the table followed suit. Throughout the organizing campaign, in which the employer spread a lot of disinformation and

fear, that department stayed together and strong because she never wavered.

It's necessary to identify, recruit, and develop these organic leaders because organizers can't just waltz into a workplace and start recruiting people. And even if we could, it wouldn't be a best practice because we are outsiders. We want to create a union that stands on its own, run by the workers themselves.

Once we have identified a potential leader, we try to recruit them. We usually do this by getting a one-on-one meeting with them, finding out what particular issues they have, educating them about the union, agitating them to want to make things better, and putting them into action. Organizers then develop leaders by continually challenging them to take on bigger roles, having tighter conversations, and encouraging them to have input in decision-making. But more crucially, when the campaign heats up and the employer goes on the attack–spreading often-effective misinformation and fear–people need to have built a level of deep trust with each other in ways an organizer just can't. A majority of workers may say they support a union at the start of a campaign, but that doesn't mean they will hold out when their managers pull them into meetings and try to browbeat them into not supporting the union. That's when you see the difference between having a robust committee of organic leaders doing the work versus an organizer trying to hold it together themself from outside.

When the employer ratchets up their campaign in the workplace, it isn't just fear of losing their jobs that makes things hard for people—it's the TENSION. Employers are good at making work very, very tense for people and keeping their cortisol levels high. As with fascism on a societal level, when people are anxious and afraid they are less likely to think straight and start believing things that aren't rational. If you don't have organic leaders in place to

help keep people focused on the goal, you will lose them. If workers are about to embark on a scary collective action, you need those leaders to make sure folks follow through.

“How many guards are on each level?” – Cassian Andor, Season 1, Episode 9

Organizing a mass action has similar building blocks whether it’s forming a union or a prison uprising. It starts with leadership. On Narkina 5, Cassian demonstrates this methodology in how he identified, recruited, and developed a leader.

He clearly knows someone has to lead, and he knows it’s not him because he just got there. Fellow prisoner Ruescott Melshi (the character who accompanied him post-breakout and appears in Rogue One) might seem like an obvious choice for someone with lesser organizing instincts. His consciousness is already raised—he’s always speaking up about what’s really going on, what the Empire is up to, the situation they are all really in. But, crucially, people don’t take him too seriously.

This is an error some union organizers make. Either because they don’t know better, or are looking to take shortcuts, they will identify and recruit the people who already support a union and speak out about management. It’s an easy mistake to make because the Melshis of the world will always be willing to meet with you, take your phone calls, and talk to their co-workers. It may work for a while, but if you recruit the wrong person to lead they can damage or destroy your campaign, because when things get scary or difficult, their co-workers will not follow them. The actual leaders are often not initially on board. It takes work to move them. Another thing about organic leaders in the workplace is that management often understands who they are, and will also recruit them. It’s not uncommon to find them in roles like lead or charge, or even middle

management. So it’s not unusual to find organic leaders in those roles.

Thus Cassian finds Kino Loy, barking orders, driving the prisoners to meet production quotas, yelling at people (especially Melshi) to get in line and stick with the program. He is unlikely to like this hell they are in, but he believes in the system enough to think that if he just does his time, he will be free soon. He just has to work hard and hold his unit together. He may be somewhat of an asshole, but people respect him. They listen to him. Cassian realizes this—he has identified the leader.

Thus begins the recruitment, and Cassian is unrelenting. “How many guards are on each level?” he asks repeatedly, honing in on what he knows Kino knows. He knows that if he can get Kino to break with the answer, he can wedge further.

One night when they are in their cells, Cassian works on him. He asks him if he’s ever thought about escaping, how many shifts he has left, how many guards are on each level. Kino continually tells him to be quiet, to which Cassian says, “You think they care what we say? Nobody’s listening. Nobody. How many guards are on each level? Nobody’s listening. NOBODY’S LISTENING!”

Recruiting the leader doesn’t always happen quickly, but we can’t give up. They are essential to the success of what we are trying to accomplish. For union organizers, it is irresponsible to move a campaign forward without them, and it seems that Cassian knows they can’t escape without Kino. Organizers keep working at it and may have to wait for the right moment, like a co-worker getting fired for unfair reasons, or a change in benefits or scheduling. We have a saying: “The boss is the best organizer.” If we keep working at it and have patience there is sure to be an opportunity to agitate.

And that moment arrives with the disturbing news that something terrible happened on another level. They don't know what yet, but it's clear that things are not what they seem. This is very disturbing to Kino in particular, as his whole world-view depends on his hard work paying off. Here Andy Serkis gives us one of his greatest performances, in which he now has his only source of hope crumbling before him, but he has to maintain the posture of someone in control. The terror in his eyes is unforgettable. When Melshi makes a half-joke about what may have happened, saying "They set them all free," (half a joke because for them death seems like the only way out), Kino completely loses his temper with him, revealing his inner terror. But Cassian reigns him in: "The less they think we know, the better." As opposed to when he first came to Narkina 5, now Cassian is in control, and Kino is deflated.

When fellow prisoner Ulaf—an elderly man with supposedly very few shifts remaining—dies, Kino and Cassian learn the truth from the doctor: the Empire killed an entire level of prisoners because they figured out that they were never getting free. The sentences were lies.

As they walk away Cassain asks again, "How many guards on each level?"

Kino finally answers, "Never more than twelve."

Cassian had successfully recruited him.

"We have a plan. I'd rather die trying to take them down than die giving them what they want. We won't have a better chance. It has to be tomorrow." – Cassian Andor, Season 1, Episode 10.

After an organizer identifies and recruits a leader, the next step is development, an ongoing process. In a union organizing campaign,

this would be giving them a small assignment like talk to three of your co-workers and move them to support the union. Next might be to come to a meeting, then speak at the meeting, then run the meeting, etc. In many ways this can be the hardest part—it's one thing to support a cause, it's another to take action toward it. And just because they are a leader doesn't make them any less afraid. In fact the fear may be greater because they feel the weight of responsibility. The new leader must be challenged and agitated. If a leader starts to waver, I will say something like, "You told me you support the union because you and your co-workers are so disrespected, how is that going to happen if you don't step up? Your co-workers depend on you." These are tough conversations, but we do workers a huge disservice by not having them.

The core principle behind that development is urgency. Employers have so much power, so many ways to undermine collective resistance, and the moment that people are fed up and ready you can't wait. Once the employer gets word of something they will do everything they can to crush it. So you always have to push leaders to act NOW.

After Cassian moved Kino to support an uprising, he still had to push him into action with urgency. Immediately after their conversation with the doctor, Cassian presses upon Kino the need for it to happen immediately. Tomorrow.

The next day they succeed in overpowering the guards and breaking out of their unit. Once they reach the main control center and take over, Cassian moves Kino to make an announcement over the intercom to the entire prison. Kino hesitates. Cassian says, "It has to be you." This was key; Cassian was certainly more than capable of giving a rousing speech to the inmates, but it's not about him, it's about the success of the plan. And the best chance of success is for it to come from an established, organic leader:

Kino Loy. He starts to talk, and Cassian says, “Is that all you’ve got?!” He’s pushing him to do it better, give it his whole heart.

Kino then delivers his “One Way Out” speech, which concludes with a call for collective action and mutual aid: “Right now, the building is ours. You need to run, climb, kill! You need to help each other. You see someone who’s confused, someone who is lost, you get them moving and you keep them moving until we put this place behind us. There are 5,000 of us. If we can fight half as hard as we’ve been working, we will be home in no time. One way out! One way out! One way out!”

Once they reach the opening they have to jump into the ocean and swim to shore. In a moment that makes my eyes water just thinking about it, Cassian looks back at Kino just standing there, and Kino says, “I can’t swim.” He knows he may die there, but he’s already free. No matter what happens now to him and all the other escapees, they are all free now, just by taking the action, acting with urgency, and winning.

Through this experience Cassian now has become an organic intellectual. And a leader. We see that leadership in Episode 12 when he helps folks escape from Ferrix and gives them a plan for where to go and what to do.

Obviously we already knew before the show began that Cassian becomes a rebel leader, but it's important that the show fleshes out exactly how real leaders develop. Just as with proletarian novels and Antonio Gramsci, we need alternative views of leadership to that provided by our liberal bourgeois social order.

Based on news reporting, punditry, movies and television, it’s easy for people to come to other conclusions about what makes a leader. Many think that someone who gives the best speech at a rally, writes a provocative letter to the editor, or has the best “ideas” in the proverbial town square becomes a leader. It’s made to seem like it’s a meritocracy, where only the best can lead. But in real life, especially within the working class, leadership works much differently–even writing a manifesto isn’t sufficient! This holds people back from feeling that they have the agency to act, because folks are waiting for the next Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, or Fidel Castro to lead them, but we already have the leaders we need among us. To build our better world we have to challenge those around us, and ourselves, with urgency.

Resistance on Coruscant: Lessons on Setting Fire in Your Own House

Ted Marsden

Coruscant is the centre of the Star Wars universe. It is a science-fiction fantasy come to life. This *ecumenopolis*, meaning planet-wide city, acts as the undisputed capital of the galaxy. It's a mind-boggling marvel to behold: a city built over every square inch of a planet–so that there is no question who won in the battle of man vs. nature. In appearance, it's like New York City built on top of and beside itself a hundred thousand times over.[80] Coruscant has appeared multiple times in other Star Wars media, but *Andor* gives us one of the most intimate portrayals yet. We see the domestic lives of citizens, their tiny worlds starkly contrasted by the grandeur of the monumental city. Here is a planet that housed the centre of galactic government for millennia: home to the Galactic Senate, the Jedi Order (RIP), millions of gleaming towers, and trillions of citizens. It's no wonder the Emperor has made this his new home. But by the year BBY 5 (five years before The Battle of Yavin, the climactic space battle of *A New Hope)*, all that glitters is not gold. Beneath the shiny exterior of the Emperor's newly minted throneworld, pockets are fomenting. A revolution is coming.

Though *Andor* takes place all across the galaxy, it consistently returns to and focuses on characters that call Coruscant their home, both those fostering the revolution and those fighting it. While the Imperial Security Bureau work day and night to suss out rebel activity, the real revolution is being formed in secret on the very planet they headquarter on. The forthcoming rebellion is not

something that happened spontaneously; it was by precise design, careful planning, and deft leadership. Work that took place right under the Emperor's nose by agents that are forced to live double lives and sacrifice their selves in order to guide the Rebel Alliance into existence. By focusing on three prominent Coruscanti rebels–Luthen Rael, Vel Sartha, and Mon Mothma–*Andor* shows us what it takes to build a revolution in secret.

The road to revolution that *Andor* walks is not as sci-fi as its premise. The show is inspired by our own Earth-based revolutions, as creator of the show Tony Gilroy states: "This is the Russian Revolution. This is the Montagnard. This is the Haitian Revolution. This is the ANC. This is the Irgun Building, Palestine. This is the Continental Congress."[81] These moments in Earth history are examples of when movements worked to overthrow the status quo, where lives were lost and power shifted. But what often gets lost in the mess of history are the people that make them possible and Gilroy designed *Andor* with these individuals in mind: "Every revolution consumes people and glorifies people, and not always the people that did the thing that mattered."[82]

Throughout the series we get to know a variety of characters intimately, including their motivations in risking their lives to stand up to the Empire; from Cinta's cold-blooded desire for revenge, to Nemik's intellectually inspired manifesto, to the selfless desire of Kino Loy to see his fellow inmates be free from their prison cells. There's an emotional vulnerability to each character that helps us understand their motivations. And thus as we watch the series, it's no wonder you might feel yourself also swept up in the revolutionary fervour. *One way out! Down with the Emperor! ¡Viva la Alianza Rebelde!* The characters of *Andor* fictional creations in a fantasy world, but their motivations come from a historically honest place. They were designed to illuminate what makes a political

revolution possible. Whether they know it or not, each character in this show is a revolutionary.

Back on Coruscant, the dynamic of developing revolutionaries comes into sharp contrast with the world that surrounds them. The Empire looms large in day-to-day life on Coruscant: stormtroopers walk the hallways, personal drivers spy on private conversations, communication must be done by cypher and chalk marks or deep in the ugly, industrial heart of the city-planet. Not to mention the ISB and their “healthcare” operations. Nowhere in the galaxy is truly safe from the Empire, but housing resistance operations in the heart of Imperial governance and surveillance is one of the boldest moves in the show. The intelligence of Luthen, bravery of Vel, and subterfuge of Mon all reveal much about themselves, but also the real-world tactics that are used to spark a revolution.

Luthen Rael: Author of History

We don’t know much about Luthen Rael. Where is he from? Why is he on Coruscant? Why does he run an antiques shop? And why does he hate the Empire so deeply? We don’t know and I’m guessing he likes it that way. He is enigmatic in his personal history, but his actions tell us all we need to know about who he is *now* during the events of *Andor*. His agenda is crystal-clear–as he outlines in one of the greatest speeches in televised history–he has dedicated his life to bringing about the downfall of the Empire at the cost of total personal sacrifice. His assertion that he “burns his life for a sunrise he’ll never see” mirrors the ethos of historical resistance fighters–fighting to create a better future they may never get to experience. Cuban revolutionaries in 1960 used the fatalistic rallying cry “Patria o muerte, venceremos" meaning “Homeland or death, we shall overcome.”[83] This slogan acknowledges that the cause they fight for would consume their lives, in either victory or

defeat. Like the Cubans in 1960 and countless other fighters from revolutions past, Luthen is committed to sparking a revolution or die trying.

As a political agent, Luthen is the type of revolutionary we might romanticise when we look back and see the moving pieces fall into place. In success, he might even be remembered as a hero. The winners write the history books after all. But who will the winners be? Luthen sees the Empire’s vision of the future and sees nothing but suffering. He knows there’s a better way, because he is a student of history as his covert Coruscant lifestyle shows us. His shop is lined with weapons, coinage, and other remnants of fallen reigns that show us that he is aware of the ephemeral nature of empires. That history can be changed, that empires can be toppled, that history is shaped by actions, not shrugging centrists or passive subjects. He uses his long-view knowledge of the past to fight against an “inevitable” Imperial dominated future.

But how do you topple an empire? And what motivates Luthen to do it? What are his politics? Is he Separatist? Neo-Republican? Human cultist? None seem to fit. For lack of a specific ideology, during the events of *Andor*, you might call him an accelerationist[84]. He has calculated that in order to dismantle the Empire, he can’t fight them head on–no one can–so he needs to create the conditions of universal resistance. He plans actions which will bait the Empire to respond with the harshest penalties and unreasonable cruelty. He is wielding the predictability of the Empire’s ruthlessness to his advantage: “I’m condemned to use the tools of my enemy to defeat them.” He is a bullfighter, taunting the Empire to charge. In his verbal spar with Saw Gerrera he says, “We need the Empire to help, we need them coming down hard. Oppression breeds rebellion.” For Luthen, he believes–to borrow a popular phrase from Narkina-5–there is only “one way out”. That in

order to motivate citizens on a galactic scale to fight back, he has to make fighting the Empire both personally motivated and the only option. But, “people will suffer,” Mon Mothma reacts with horror when she learns his intentions. Luthen responds, “That’s the plan.”

Vel Sartha: Strategy vs. Tactics

When we first meet Vel Sartha, she is dressed like an Aldhani native coming down the mountain, appearing like what we might expect an Afghan resistance fighter who doubles as a shepherd to look like. But appearances can be deceiving. Like Luthen and her cousin Mon Mothma, she is living a double life. Vel left her privileged life on Chandrila to bring the fight to the Empire, even if that means sleeping on the ground and eating roots for months on end. She’s resilient, ambitious, and disciplined, as Luthen points out. But within this same conversation we learn she's also stubborn and new to leadership. Luthen has played a mentor role and when she complains of her sacrifices, he snaps at her, “You wanted to lead! This is what it comes to.”

Vel, like Luthen, knows she can’t directly control others and must instead rely on her fellow resistance fighters as comrades rather than underlings. Back at the Aldhani basecamp, she runs a tight ship, maintaining discipline and mission focus, but ultimately understands everyone brings their own motivation to this fight. She runs the mission tactically, and the mission provides the framework for this group of unprofessional soldiers to channel their red-hot hatred of the Empire towards a strategically important action. It is with this understanding of her comrades that Vel represents an important mirror to Luthen. Whereas Luthen is leading from the back, strategizing the next move to make or target to hit; Vel is leading from the front, on the ground, executing orders, leading

others, taking the necessary risks to make sure the strategy is a success.

This is how wars are won; as an old maxim goes, “Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy are the noise before defeat.”[85] Luthen dictates strategy while Vel runs tactics, one can’t succeed without the other. Vel, operating as the sergeant, has to work twice as hard as her comrades, as a go-between the higher-up decisions and the on-the-ground forces at work. She is on the frontlines, a vital part of the mission worried about not only her own personal objectives, but everyone else’s as well.

What sets Vel apart from other resistance fighters is her “first-world” roots. Though she is not originally from Coruscant, she clearly feels at home in the wealth and privilege that Mon Mothma resides in. Her origins add to the impact of her role as a resistance fighter. Her conviction to join the fight against the Empire is so strong that it drives her to leave her station, the class she was born into, behind. The Empire as it exists does not threaten her survival - it ultimately protects her privileged lifestyle. Without much effort she would have a comfortable life but Vel sees the injustice in the galaxy around her and chooses a tougher path. She demonstrates that she is brave not only because she picks up a gun and storms a garrison, but also because she is willing to sacrifice the wealth and safety afforded by polite society and embrace the precarity inherent with being a rebel fighter. Vel isn’t a superhuman however. She has doubts, fears, and at times behaves petulantly. Vel is repeatedly shown to be not quite cutthroat enough for Kleya and Luthen. Especially when contrasted with her sometimes-girlfriend, Cinta. Vel shows a human level of stress about the tasks she's required to do, but does them anyway. Despite her life-or-death responsibilities she shows an understandable level of hesitation

about the total sacrifice that a revolution asks of her in this role. Vel shows us that a real revolution asks individuals to leave their world of comfort behind to craft a new uncertain one–one that is hopefully better for all.

Mon Mothma: Locked in the Tower

When we meet Mon Mothma in *Andor*, she is at the end of her rope. As Senator from Chandrila, Mon Mothma has tirelessly advocated for peace and justice in the galaxy but now the galaxy is slipping further and further under the despotic control of Emperor Palpatine. The Senate is nothing more than a facade; acting as either a rubber stamp or token resistance. Mon Mothma had hoped, maybe still hopes, she can be a voice of reason and stop oppression through compromise and due process. But the system is rigged. The Emperor does what he pleases and changes the rules to suit his whims. Though Mon Mothma fulminates against his power, she understands it. “I have learned from Palpatine… I show you the stone in my hand and you miss the knife at your throat.”

Mon Mothma’s power comes from her ability to present herself in a multitude of ways, as any good politician can. She has to be a powerful orator one day and a charming party host the next. She has to say one thing and then do another, making deals in hallways and backrooms, as well as on those weird floating pod things on the Senate floor. Being diplomatic has always been a part of Mon Mothma’s life (she’s been a senator since she was 16!) so when she loses her levers of power, she doesn’t quit fighting–she finds another way.

Mon Mothma takes her resistance from the halls of power to the backchannels provided by Luthen and the spy network they established, where she plays an important role. Revolutions are

messy, but they are also expensive and Mon has become its financier. Coming from a place of privilege and wealth, she has been able to freely provide Luthen with the resources he needs, allowing him to recruit the best and stage missions like the heist at Aldhani. But galactic tensions are flaring and the walls are closing in, so Mon has to resort to the tactics of subterfuge to keep the money flowing and achieve her anti-Imperial goals.

Whether she acknowledges it or not, Mon Mothma is corrupt. But corruption isn't necessarily a bad thing when the government in question is the Empire. Where we might think of corruption as a moustache twirling politician receiving bags of money to build a toxic sewer through an orphanage or some such “evil” idea, I use corruption here meaning to operate in a way counter to one’s stated goal to advance an unstated one. Lying, basically. Mon’s corruption comes from her necessary duplicitousness; her public actions don’t match her private ones. She is a member of the very government she is trying to overthrow. How would her constituents feel if they knew she was knowingly funding a clandestine terrorist network?

Mon’s role as governmental saboteur gives her the edge against the Emperor. Before a revolution solidifies into a mass movement, resistance must form behind the scenes and in secret. Nowhere are those conditions more important than for those who work close to the enemy. When a government is dismantled, hampered, or otherwise thrown into disarray, the resistance within can be as effective as the resistance from the outside. Mon’s insubordination has some historic parallels, most notably that of Wilhelm Canaris from Nazi Germany who was Chief of the Abwehr (the German military-intelligence service). Wilhelm held a prominent position in the Nazi government, until he became disillusioned with Hitler. So he acted on his convictions. During World War II he provided

crucial intelligence to the Allies, engaged in diplomacy for potential peace negotiations, and supported anti-Hitler plots, all while maintaining a facade of loyalty to Hitler. He played a role in keeping Spain from allying with Nazi Germany and gave the Allies advance warning of Operation Barbarossa. Eventually he was arrested in connection with the 20 July plot, an attempt to assassinate Hitler, and he was hanged for his disloyalty. Through the powers of trilogical foresight, we know Mon does not meet the same fate, but the stakes for both her and Wilhelm were the highest.

As alluded to before, these two-faced tactics are a double-edged sword, morally speaking. Like the “good Germans” of Nazi Germany (who, like Wilhelm, opposed the Third Reich while still working for it), what other roles does Mon Mothma play in the Imperial government? What harm does she perpetuate by remaining a senator rather than fighting it with a gun or a knife like Vel and others? We see her heart is in the right place, from the speeches she gives and the bills she advocates for, and even in the anti-Imperial spy network that she helps secretly finance, but ultimately she is *still* a part of the government that oppresses the galaxy.

Mon Mothma shows us that revolution doesn’t just come from outside the palace walls, it comes from within as well. Mon embodies the resistance that Palpatine faces as he tries to erect his autocratic regime. She is alone in a tower fighting on a battlefield that only she can fight on. She is a revolutionary, not from an organisation following orders, but from her own moral compass. By the end of the season, she has come into a new understanding that this private fight is an all-out war. When we see her again in *Rogue One* and later in the Original Trilogy, she is a

full-time wartime leader who understands the costs and weight of the sacrifice she asks of those she leads.

A New Hope

Is it really so hard to believe that Coruscant could be home to the rebellion? That the home of the Emperor would be host to the very players plotting his downfall? Revolutions past have their origins in the centres of power. Paris was the centre of the French Revolution, Petrograd (now Saint Petersburg) was the site of the first strikes of the Russian Revolution, the People Power Revolution in Manila, the Velvet Revolution in Prague; the Mexican, Iranian, Cuban Revolutions all took place in their respective capitals. The fictional galactic capital of Coruscant is no different. Capital cities are often the hub for the political elite, but also for all sorts of folks with different ideas of a better future. The melting pot of any metropolis breeds culture, camaraderie, and passion for a safe and democratic life. A government is no better than the citizens who trust in it, and when that trust is broken–the people will ultimately push back. John Locke sums it up best:

> The power of government is derived from the consent of the governed. Individuals, in a state of nature, come together to form a political society by mutual agreement. They voluntarily create a government to protect their natural rights to life, liberty, and property. If a government violates these rights or acts against the will of the people, it loses its legitimacy, and the people have the right to alter or abolish it.[86]

Though the revolution was designed on Coruscant, it was not the only place it was fought. The careful planning by Luthen, the hard work of Vel, and righteous subterfuge by Mon all lead towards a

more just galaxy. The fantastical setting of Star Wars makes watching the formation of a revolution more exciting and palatable than those in our real world, but *Andor* was crafted to reflect the very real inspirations that create true rebellion.

Throughout history, rebelling has been an important part of human society and often becomes the only weapon the people have to take the power back from a government that oppresses them. In the words of a former Aldhani rebel, “Remember that the frontier of the Rebellion is everywhere. And even the smallest act of insurrection pushes our lines forward.” The words of Nemik’s manifesto ring true in the final episode, because he points out how each act of rebellion is an individual choice. Each citizen of the Empire becomes a revolutionary when they resist its rule. And that resistance is ultimately what inspires countless brave individuals to tear down the walls of the Empire and spark a revolution for a better world and a new hope.

Workers' Playtime: *Andor*, Nostalgia and Admonitory Retrofuturism

Fiona Moore

Andor has frequently been identified by reviewers as an example of retrofuturism.[87] That is to say, it is a series which, aesthetically and/or thematically, evokes past imaginings of the future rather than contemporary ones.[88] Most of the literature on retrofuturism categorises it as either conservative, looking to the SF of past ages as examples of what could have been but which can now not come to pass, as hopeful, using the optimism of past SF to construct a positive imagined future, or as critical, exposing the problematic attitudes reflected in past images of the future and reinterpreting them for later audiences. I would argue that, considered as a retrofuturist text, *Andor* represents another category of retrofuturism: an admonitory genre, which uses its evocation of the past as a warning about the present.

I am Manborg: Retrofuturism and Nostalgia in the Media

Retrofuturism can be broadly defined as the use of past concepts of the future in SF: as Sharp says, it is "a fascination with past visions of the future."[89] Within that, it can take a variety of forms. This includes satires of the past such as 1980s-style SF-horror movie *Manborg.*[90] However, there are also more serious pastiches such as William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's seminal steampunk novel *The Difference Engine,*[91] a novel about a Victorian era with advanced computing written partly in the style of period novels, or

the Duffer Brothers' streaming series *Stranger Things* (2016-present), a non-satirical evocation of 1980s horror series. In all cases, the point is to use the aesthetic of a future which can not now come to pass. As Davidson puts it, "this paradoxical coming together of the future and the past is at the core of the retrofuturist impulse, or the conscious reprisal of disappointed visions of yesterday's tomorrows."[92]

Most critics agree that three distinct trends can be found within retrofuturism, which Davidson summarizes as "conservative, critical and hopeful."[93] Wilson, omitting the critical aspect, notes that retrofuturism can be an inward-looking obsession with the past, or it can be an attempt to remake that past in service to a hopeful future[94] considering both as having particular relevance to Afrofuturism and other reinterpretations of colonial pasts in service to a more positive, decolonised future. The conservative trend is to look to past images of a White, technophilic, middle-class image of the future as a never-realised utopia, a vision of what ought to have been.[95] The critical trend is exemplified by Davidson through William Gibson's short story "The Gernsback Continuum", in which the abovementioned White, technophilic and middle-class utopia is presented as a nightmarish glimpse of a parallel world from which the narrator must dissociate himself to retain his sanity,[96] and in which the utopian dreams of the past are explicitly linked to the dystopia of the 1980s:

> The Thirties dreamed white marble and slipstream chrome… but the rockets on the back of the Gernsback pulps had fallen on London in the dead of night, screaming. After the war, everyone had a car… and the promised superhighway to drive it down, so that the sky itself darkened, and the fumes ate at the marble and pitted the miracle crystal.[97]

Finally, the hopeful trend represents a disappointed hope, but one which is nonetheless positive: “the return to past images of the future has a potentially hopeful function, playing a role in rejuvenating and renewing utopian desire in the contemporary world.”[98] An example can be seen in the film *Tomorrowland*[99] in which the happy utopianism of Walt Disney’s imagined futures is argued to be still within humanity’s grasp if we overcome our worse impulses.

Andor is situated within the genre of nostalgic television. Historically, television calling on the imagery of past eras tends either to be in the form of period pieces, parodies, or evocations. Period pieces, such as *GLOW* (2017-2020) or *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* (2017-2023), are series explicitly set in past eras, and are telling a story within that context but generally using modern conceits, structures and filming techniques rather than attempting to imitate the media of the time in which the story is set. There may be exceptions: for instance *GLOW*, a comedy-drama about a women’s professional wrestling television series in the mid-1980s, has one episode, “The Good Twin”, which is explicitly staged as an episode of the wrestling series in question.[100] Parodies, such as *Manborg* or *Garth Marenghi’s Darkplace* (2004), may be forensic in their detailed use of period tropes, but do so in order to send up or satirise these tropes for an audience familiar with the source material. Finally, evocations use the imagery of the past to construct an imagined society which conveys both strangeness and familiarity to the audience: reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2010), for instance, used 1970s and 1980s-style technology on its futuristic spaceships to this effect.

More recently, however, a new nostalgic trend has developed, whose most famous exemplar is the Netflix series *Stranger Things*: a series set in the past, using the techniques, imagery, and tropes

of the media of that era, but for dramatic storytelling rather than parody. Other examples include Ben Wheatley’s film adaptation of J.G. Ballard’s 1975 novel *High-Rise,*[101] which is explicitly shot in the style of 1970s art films, and the same director’s folk horror *A Field in England*,[102] again shot in the style of 1970s British folk horror films such as *Witchfinder General*[103] or *The Blood on Satan’s Claw,*[104] while being neither a parody nor a period piece (beyond that it is set in the imagined English Civil War common to the genre). One significant trope is that these nostalgic series frequently also address aspects of the original subject matter which later audiences find problematic: improving representation of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ characters, for instance, or *Stranger Things*’ deliberate subversion of the misogyny of 1980s teen romance movies through emphasising the female characters’ ownership of their sexualities and right to choose and refuse partners according to their preferences.

Dances with Banthas: The Star Wars Franchise, Retrofuturism and Nostalgia

The film *Rogue One* and its spinoff series *Andor* are clearly an example of the nostalgic media exemplified by *Stranger Things* in that they make a clear, deliberate attempt not just to situate themselves within the *Star Wars* universe, but to do so through consciously creating the visual text that could have been made in the late 1970s/early 1980s, at the time of the original *Star Wars* trilogy’s genesis. *Rogue One* draws less on the *Star Wars* movies themselves than it does on the film genres which informed them: Hong Kong martial arts movies, British (and, to a lesser extent American) World War II movies and Westerns. As with 1970s SF movies, there is a clear visual indebtedness to the Middle East; there is an evocation of David Lynch’s body horror in the appearance of Saw Gerrera, wheezing into an oxygen mask like a

rebel version of Frank Booth from *Blue Velvet.*[105] The same imagery also suggests WWII-era fighter pilots, films of which were an inspiration for the space combat scenes of *A New Hope*. There is leisurewear and formalwear following the 1970s trends for bright but natural colours and flowing gowns. Felicity Jones, cast as protagonist Jyn Erso, is a medium-sized woman with dark hair and pale skin, an appearance much more fashionable in the 1970s than in the 2010s (evoking the likes of Anne Lockhart, Jane Seymour and, indeed, Carrie Fisher), and the hairstyles and costuming of other characters also evoke 1970s styles.

Andor, visually and conceptually, follows *Rogue One*'s lead in drawing on 1970s and early 1980s visual and narrative trends, whether consciously or through osmosis. The early sequences on Kenari evoke the trope of a (relatively) low-technology person or group drawn into a world of spaceships; there is a particular, presumably coincidential, visual resemblance to the *Doctor Who* serial *Full Circle.*[106] The Ferrix storyline, through its evocation of the Irish Troubles, recalls British films such as *The Long Good Friday*, a story involving gangsters, corruption and Irish terrorism,[107] or *Pink Floyd-- The Wall*, a British rock opera about fascism and the tyranny of everyday life.[108] Maarva does literally wind up as, in the words of the title song, another brick in the wall, and the fact that her doing so is an act of rebellion rather than conformity is a clever subversion of a famous line. The Aldhani heist also shows clear references to British 1970s resistance drama *Blake's 7* (1977-81), with its group of seven individuals with complex and contradictory motivations and backgrounds planning, and successfully accomplishing, a terrorist attack on the facilities of a colonising spacefaring Empire, while also giving us a not-unsympathetic look at the individuals on the other side who are caught up in the action. The prison sequences on Narkina 5 evoke George Lucas' own *THX 1138*[109] and male-led institutional dramas such as *One Flew Over The Cuckoos' Nest,*[110] and the imagery of Syril's life as an office drudge in the Bureau of Standards on Coruscant is clearly drawn from the films of Jacques Tati, principally *Playtime*.[111] While one can make the case that media of other periods are also evoked in the series, there is an evident centering of Andor's retrofuturistic aesthetic on the later 20th century and particularly the 1970s.

It should be underlined that this kind of nostalgia is not inherently an aspect of *Star Wars* prequel series. While it is certainly also true for *The Mandalorian* and, more problematically, *The Book of Boba Fett* (of which more below), both of which draw visually and thematically on the Westerns of the 1960s and 1970s as well as other media of the period such as the manga series *Lone Wolf and Cub*[112] and its cinematic adaptation *Shogun Assassin*,[113] it is less true for *Obi-Wan* (2021) and *Solo: A Star Wars Story.*[114] *Ahsoka* (2023), furthermore, is only nostalgic inasmuch as it forms part of the *Star Wars* universe and visual style; otherwise, it is very much a series of the 2020s. It is difficult, for instance, to identify earlier visual and thematic references in *Ahsoka* that have not previously appeared in *The Clone Wars* or *The Rebels* in the same way that it is possible to identify visual and thematic references in *The Book of Boba Fett* that did not appear in the Original Trilogy. This is therefore a conscious artistic choice on the part of the makers of *Andor*, and not something they were obliged to do to fit in with the overall series aesthetic.

Furthermore, the use of nostalgia in *Star Wars* series does not always successfully develop a unified visual and conceptual theme. *The Book of Boba Fett*, a spinoff of space Western *The Mandalorian*, has attracted more criticism than its parent series, despite the fact that both reference similar 1970s Western texts. In particular, one element which has come in for a lot of criticism, the

inclusion of the “mods”, scooter-riding teenagers who sport robotic body modifications as a kind of futuristic take on tattoos, is in fact a very clear reference to the 1970s subgenre of movies about 1950s teen gangs, including *Quadrophenia,*[115] which focused on more metaphorical Mods riding more conventional scooters. The other 1970s trend which particularly influences this series is the exploration of Native American culture from the point of view of non-Indigenous people connected with Indigenous communities, such as revisionist Western *Soldier Blue*[116] or biker film *Billy Jack,*[117] and yet, despite the series being led by an Indigenous actor, this has also come in for criticism.[118]

However, the reason why *The Book of Boba Fett*’s evocation of 1970s media failed to appeal in the same way as it did in *The Mandalorian* is that the chosen genres are ones which do not have resonance for contemporary audiences, or else which have a disconnect with the wider political and social themes of the series. The Western taken from the point of view of Indigenous characters is a less well-known genre today than the “spaghetti Westerns” referenced in *The Mandalorian*, and arguably it is a genre that would be more problematic in the modern context of discussion of Native and settler identities. It is also a fair point that, whatever its casting, *The Book of Boba Fett* features a non-Indigenous character becoming “adopted” into Indigenous culture and becoming one of its leaders, along the lines of the influential but much-criticised Western *Dances with Wolves,*[119] which is again a message that is less likely to resonate with audiences in the 2020s. While the Mods may be firmly based in a known 1970s film subgenre, it’s not one with particular connections to the Western genre, and so, even though stories about vehicle-based youth subcultures are a staple of *Star Wars*, they fail to connect with the audiences.

If *Andor* is a retrofuturistic *Star Wars* series where the retrofuturism does work, the question then becomes, why does it work, and does it connect more with the nostalgic, critical or optimistic forms of retrofuturism?

Another Brick In The Wall: Andor as Admonitory Retrofuture

In terms of where *Andor* fits the typology of retrofuturistic texts discussed above, I would note that it has elements, or could be interpreted within, all three of the paradigms discussed in the literature review. While the story is certainly not looking to an imagined utopian past in and of itself, it is worth noting that there is a reactionary cadre of *Star Wars* fans for whom the appeal of prequel-era series is to evoke the straight-White-male-led, patriarchal sensibilities of the original. Although *Andor*’s protagonist is Mexican, it’s perhaps not insignificant that the spinoff of a female-led adventure story, *Rogue One*, focuses on a conventionally handsome male secondary character rather than on Jyn Erso herself. *Andor*’s initial story arc is male-centred, containing only two named female characters, Bix and Maarva, who are seen through the lens of their relationship with Andor more than as individuals. Maarva herself could be initially seen as a white-saviour figure, rescuing young Kassa from his “primitive” original planet. Later, Syril’s mother very much fits the “nagging older woman” stereotype, and Mon Mothma could be seen as a reactionary criticism of liberal politicians, feebly trying to “do good” while fearing to act with genuine conviction.

However, as the series goes on, the stories of female, to say nothing of non-White and queer characters, become centred. Maarva becomes the driver of the rebellion on Ferrix, and Mon Mothma uses her do-gooder image as a blind for her material

support of the Rebellion. The storylines involving Dedra Meero's struggle to be taken seriously as a rare female officer in the Imperial Security Bureau, and Mon Mothma's troubled relationship with her daughter, also subtly critique the patriarchal ideology of the Empire and, in Mon Mothma's case, its constituent parts (since her Chandrilan culture predates the Empire). The prison storyline is an explicit parallel to the US "prison-industrial complex", in which prisoners, frequently serving disproportionately harsh sentences, are used as cheap labour, a situation which, in reality, affects African-American men significantly more than other groups;[120] by having the same thing happen to Andor, the series encourages its viewers into sympathy with, rather than "othering," the victims of this system. The portrayal of the resistance in *Andor* also subverts the conservative trope whereby a good (usually White, usually male) hero arises to defeat an unambiguously evil figure, with characters' motives for participation often being complicated or less-than-pure, and with the morally questionable figure of Luthen at its centre. All of this makes it difficult to see *Andor* entirely as a conservative text.

While the hopeful paradigm is more subtextual, given that happy endings are clearly not forthcoming for many (if indeed any) of the characters, the fact that the series is a prequel to the Original Trilogy means that most viewers know that the characters' actions will ultimately lead to the destruction of the Empire and the establishment of the new Republic for which they are working. However, the fact that *Andor* is also a prequel to *Rogue One* means the audience knows the price the protagonist will eventually pay to bring about a hope he will never himself enjoy; the fact that we know the later fates of only three of the characters in the series (Andor, Mon Mothma and Melshi), does not give us much optimism about what will happen to the rest of them. *Andor* is also thus a problematic hopeful text.

Andor's best fit is therefore, arguably, the "critical" paradigm more than the "reactionary" or "hopeful" ones. The time period it evokes, the late 1970s, is one when a lot of SF media were engaged in critiques of the status quo. Furthermore, the series it evokes are all, to a greater or lesser extent, critical ones: *Blake's 7, 1990*, *THX 1148,* and the others discussed above are the most obvious, but even the comedic *Playtime* is a satire on the loss of humanity under conditions of modernity,[121] in which, unlike his earlier work, Tati situates salvation not in a nostalgic past but in a gleeful future of happy anarchy. *Doctor Who: Full Circle* gives us a relatively blissful primitive society who are led to the world-shattering discovery that the origin story they believe about themselves is a lie. *Andor* itself, therefore, is using its retrofuturist elements as a way of criticising the time period in which it was made—the 2020s--using the visual and narrative tools of a similarly critical era—the 1970s.

Furthermore, there is a narrative fit between the retro-future being evoked, and the critique of the present. The recent revival in popularity in *Blake's 7* on its release on the streaming service BritBox shows that a narrative of a doomed rebellion against a conformist, implicitly far-right and certainly xenophobic and colonialist, government have resonance with British audiences in the 2020s. The dystopian visions of Britain as portrayed in *The Wall* and *The Long Good Friday* are again relevant, as the country endures economic hardship and a far-right government whose actions in triggering Brexit threaten to revive the Irish Troubles. The contrast between the Mothma family's luxurious lifestyle on Coruscant and the labourers living in dusty prefabs and broken spaceships on Ferrix also evokes the gap between rich and poor in the present day, and, as noted, the prison drama sequence is also in line with American critiques of the so-called "prison-industrial complex."[122] *Andor* succeeds where *The Book of Boba Fett* fails,

because of the links between the retrofuture being evoked, its ideological concerns, and those of the present-day viewing audience.

I would argue, however, that *Andor* goes beyond the critical into a slightly different type of retrofuture, which I will call the *admonitory* retrofuture. This is retrofuturism not simply as criticism, but as warning. In this case, by evoking a past period with resonances to the present, the document holds a mirror up to the present and warns current viewers to consider their own behaviour and choices in light of the story being told.

We can see this admonitory role most clearly in the episode “One Way Out,” in which Kino Loy’s faith in the system is finally broken: his belief that, once he has served his sentence, he will be able to return to society, is shattered, and instead he heads up a violent prison revolt. While the storyline, as noted, is an obvious critique of the forced use of imprisoned labour—with the revelation that the Empire is randomly imprisoning vulnerable citizens simply because it needs a source of cheap labour—it has wider implications, which are echoed in the climactic sequence on Ferrix. Throughout *Andor*, we are shown a political and economic system with uncomfortable echoes of our own: far-right governments, opaque bureaucracies, huge wealth gaps, patriarchal social systems and unchallenged colonial exploitation, with a resistance whose members’ motives may be less than honourable and whose leaders are not particularly likeable. *Andor*’s protagonist is not a Jedi warrior or even a farmboy dreaming of a call to adventure: he is an ordinary working-class man living in a broken-down vehicle who is radicalised due to his experiences of poverty and oppression, and also through simple bad luck. The message is clearly not to encourage viewers to look nostalgically to the past or hopefully to an imagined future, but to their own situation.

Through evoking a familiar past, *Andor* encourages viewers to criticise themselves and their own circumstances and actions. Rather than imagining ourselves as heroic Jedi fighting evil Emperors and their minions, instead we are asked to imagine ourselves as the people of that very Empire itself: people who are, willingly or not, knowingly or not, complicit in the Empire’s crimes, and whose resistance, even for relatively privileged individuals like Mon Mothma and Vel Sartha, is inherently limited. *Andor* encourages us to question the very system we are in, and also to ask if our own acts of resistance against oppression are really effective, while at the same time offering us the reassurance that small acts of resistance do eventually add up to lasting social change.

Conclusion

In sum, then, *Andor* is noteworthy as a retrofuturistic text in two ways. Firstly, it is a key example of an emerging new type of retrofuturistic telefantasy: a series which tries not only to evoke the past but to produce new media in the style of earlier generations, without parody or imitation. Secondly, and more crucially, it illustrates another aspect of retrofuturism: as well as being reactionary, hopeful and critical, retrofuturism can also be admonitory: to encourage its audiences to draw parallels between their own eras and past eras, and to draw uncomfortable conclusions as to where this might lead. By evoking a period of chaos and criticism which led to the destructive neoliberal order in which we presently find ourselves, *Andor* encourages us to make better choices this time around.

Brasso’s War

Alasdair Stuart

Andor is a series simultaneously steeped in *Star Wars* lore and relentlessly focused on rebelling against it. Andor himself is just one of a half dozen characters who would be straight-forward heroes in other shows but don’t have that kind of luck or moral certainty here. refutes the Light Side/Dark Side dichotomy the Jedi and Sith cling to. Exploring the early Rebels' willingness to compromise their personal morals for a wider cause makes the series thrum with constant, barely suppressed tension. That tension also functions as a lens, allowing the series to focus all the way down on individual rebellions. There is a meta-fictional joke to be acknowledged here too: the series most concerned with bucking expectations is also the most regimented in structure. Four arcs, each three episodes long and each featuring at least one character who directly alters Andor's life and worldview. In this essay, we will look at one of the quietest and arguably most important characters: Brasso. More specifically, on how his path mirrors Cassian Andor's and how his form of revolution is quieter, but at least as important.

Before starting the essay, I want to make a structural note and then a personal note. Each section of the essay is marked by a quote from the series. Only one is delivered by Brasso himself, but all of them speak to his path across the show and his evolution as a rebel.

And now the personal: representation for people of size is something I've become more and more passionate about over the last few years. Actors of any gender who are above a certain physical size, whether in weight, build, or height, seem perpetually

faced with a choice between being thugs, comic relief, or if they're tremendously lucky: comic relief thugs. Joplin Sibtain, who plays Brasso, is a physically large man who the character seems to have been written for and it has paid dividends at every level. Sibtain, and Brasso, are as clever as they are large and the dichotomy between the two gives them their own shadows to move between, just like Andor's carefully cultivated anonymity.

“Make yourself useful!”

Brasso works as a shipbreaker, a man paid to tear apart and strip mine dead starships. The sociological implications of this are fascinating. In the real world, shipbreaking is viewed as an intensely dangerous form of work, predmoninantly carrier out in the global south. In reality there are two wildly different methodologies for the same job, depending on where you stand on the economic food chain. In the global north, shipbreaking is done in dry docks with tremendous care taken to inventory toxic materials and break ships down with care and precision. In the developing world, the job has traditionally been the best of a range of terrible economic prospects with horrific social and health consequences. That gap has closed somewhat in recent years but as Rousmaniere and Raj argue, there are still vast problems:

> There are six workdays in the week. By 5:30 in the morning the men are up. They work from 7 AM until noon with a 15-minute break. There is a one-hour lunch period. Work runs again from 1 PM until about 7 PM with one 15-minute break.
>
> Since about 2003, notably after the rise of international and domestic awareness of the OEH conditions in Alang, every worker in these yards has been required to enroll in a three-day safety and risk-management training course,

> conducted under the aegis of GMB and paid for either by the worker or by his employer. The course is officially mandatory but many workers appear not to have taken it.[123]

Brasso's work at the yard on Ferrix seems to fall somewhere between the two real world extremes - but even then that is thematically appropriate. The world he grew up on is at the bottom of the Imperial food pile and the wrecks he breaks are a stark demonstration of that. This is where the Old Republic goes to die, a trash heap for the Empire with Brasso, Cassian, Maarva and the rest picking over what is left. It is the ideal resource for Andor, a planet sized used car lot with the keys in every ignition. But it is also a job that renders down those who do it.[124]

Brasso's subsumption into the constant grind of work is embodied the first time we see him. The show cleverly sets up the “big hero” moment of the shift gates opening on Ferrix as the shipbreakers go off to work, expecting us to see Brasso front and centre. We don't. He is a face in the crowd, a man made unique only by the specific gloves he picks out and the fact he is expected to clean up Cassian Andor's mess again. This scene, Brasso's first in the show, tells us three vital things about the man. The first is that he is clearly respected but is not a leader. The second is that he is as both at home in the shadows as Andor and, in some ways, much better at basic deception. Brasso is far from happy about being asked to lie for Andor but he does it, building on the story he has been given. He makes himself useful, in the exact way a colleague yells at him to do. The third is the direction he is travelling. Andor is doing everything he can to get off Ferrix. Brasso is doing everything he can to protect Ferrix. A big man with a hard job, resilient, reliable, and invisible. There are countless billions of Brasso's under the boot of the Empire,, each one looking after

themselves and their friends as best they can. They're the smallest cogs in the biggest of machines, the exact sort of rebellion Cassian would go on to ferment in the third episode of the show and its closing arc.

The first arc culminates in the show’s introduction of crowd-pleasing explosions and cathartic rage. It contains a pair of shots I have not been able to stop thinking about. The first closes episode 2, *'That Would Be Me'.* Cassian Andor striding down one of the shipbreaking yards towards the camera, full of purpose and leaving his world behind. The second is roughly halfway through episode 3 '*Reckoning*'. It is almost exactly the same shot, only this time it is Brasso walking away from the Pre-Mor corporate shuttle. At the time we do not register it in any way other than the emotional. This stoic, pragmatic big man is the last one off the line because someone has make sure everyone else gets off the line. But a few moments later when the shuttle takes off the pilot discovers it has been tethered to a nearby crane. Brasso is at war too, it is just no one has noticed him yet and that is exactly how he wants it. Just like Andor, and like Luthen Rael, Brasso knows exactly who he is and what he is prepared to sacrifice. He just chooses not to do that with an audience. It is a quiet rebellion to be sure, the exact sort of small rebellion Jennifer Roy describes:

> Ferrix's smaller rebellious acts illustrate Andor's focus on the everyday individuals affected by the Empire and their corporate extensions.[125]

But, it is also a deeply effective one.

It also speaks to Brasso's emotional and social intelligence. When Bix Caleen is wanted for questioning by the Empire and spotted in the crowd, Brasso literally puts his body between his friend and harm. More importantly, he puts the perception the Empire have of

him between his friend and harm, weaponising assumptions and perceptions in a non-violent way. He also does this without any knowledge of whether it will work. It is the only thing he can do in the moment. Singular action in the protection of a community that subtly echoes the closing moments of *Rogue One* where each soldier lives just long enough to get the information they are dying for to the next one in line.

> Remember that the frontier of the Rebellions is everywhere. And even the smallest act of insurrection pushes our lines forward.

Brasso has a clear sense of community. He also demonstrates a fundamental kindness that transcends species barriers too. There is a lot to be written about the fascinating relationship the *Star Wars* universe has with the concept of digital sentience. Much of that relationship is intensely troubling, with droids somewhere between indentured slaves and second-class citizens. That discrimination is not a universal constant, and in ‘Daughter of Ferrix’, the eleventh episode of the season, we see that through Brasso's interactions with B2-EMO. We learn of Maarva Andor's death through the little droid's shaking lens and it’s clear he can barely process his grief. It’s also clear that no one seems to particular care about B and their need for care. Except Brasso. As the episode progresses, he is the one who gives B2 something to do, processing his own grief by helping someone else. My favourite moment in the show comes later that episode as Brasso tries to get B2 to leave home for the last time. He fails, and ultimately agrees to stay with B2 for the night. It is a lovely scene, and one that speaks to, as much of this does, the fundamental kindness and community-facing nature of Brasso. He helps. Whether it is a biological or digital creature is irrelevant.

> Tell him none of this was his fault. It was already burning, he was just the first spark of the fire. Tell him, he knows everything he needs to know and feels everything he needs to feel. And when the day comes and those two pull together, he will be an unstoppable force for good. Tell him I love him more than anything he could ever do wrong.

Brasso embodies, for me, the ideal best expressed by American novelist Cormac McCarthy of ‘Carrying the fire.’[126]McCarthy's staggering post-apocalyptic novel, *The Road*, has one character repeatedly use this phrase. It reads a few ways but fundamentally is about the idea of inherent goodness, and kindness. A flame to be kindled and a torch to be navigated by, regardless of how hard the journey is. Especially if the journey is arduous. There’s one quote in particular that could be applicable to Andor and Brasso both:

> “You have to carry the fire."
>
> “I don't know how to."
>
> “Yes, you do."

In this moment, Brasso is carrying the fire, embodying Maarva but also much more. He is a leader whose authority is gained through persistence and consistency. He is a surrogate parent, a sibling. The embodiment of a community he leads by his presence within it, not at its head. A rebel, covering the one direction Cassian cannot look, even as Cassian does the same for him. They even close the series doing each other's work. Cassian ensures that Bix, Brasso, Jezz and B2 can escape. Brasso leads the charge in Ferrix's rebellion, as Maarva's funeral becomes the birth of rebellion in the community. The image of the big man wielding the brick made of Maarva's remains as a weapon of liberation is one of the most powerful in a series thick with metaphor. Maarva is no

longer just a brick in the wall, but a weapon to empower her community. Ferrix is no longer a place built on the bones of its predecessors, but a forge where rebels are made, a community standing up as one to push back against the Empire. Cassian lights the fire, and carries the flame but it is Brasso, and the people he unites, that keep it burning.

This is What Revolution Looks Like

Mike Towill

Partly seen through the eyes and interactions of its title character, *Andor* plots the evolution of a loose covert network of anti-imperialists, to the organised military of the Rebel Alliance, and the beginnings of the Galactic Civil War.

This movement, the proto-Rebellion of *Andor*'s season 1, lacks the publicity, symbolism, and romantic call-to-arms that would later draw enthusiastic Luke Skywalkers or reluctant Han Solos into its fight. *Andor* shows how the preconditions for such a resistance are created - what causes vast numbers of ordinary people take up arms against a regime with the coercive power of the Empire?

This fostering of revolution is one of *Ando*r's central themes and its believable portrayal helps make the show so compelling. In this chapter we will examine the characteristics of Andor's revolution based on the modern study of revolution and social movements, identifying the parallels between Andor and revolutions in history. We'll look how oppression, state actions, and ideology affect revolutions, and how they're represented in Andor.

Andor's Revolution in Context

We know that the acts of resistance in Andor Season 1 will culminate in the Rebel Alliance (along with splinter groups), and the Galactic Civil War. Eventually the power vacuum after the Battle of Endor will help the Alliance overthrow the Empire as the

Galaxy's dominant power and form the New Republic, a representative democracy.

In human history, revolutions that fit this template are non-existent. Violent, popular opposition to authoritarian rule, in the form of the Rebel Alliance's guerrilla warfare strategy, have rarely, if ever, led to a successful democratic revolution. The most striking example is that of the FSLN and the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution, which led, albeit after a subsequent decade of civil war with US-backed Contra rebels, to a Nicaraguan democracy – with peaceful transitions of power and a stronger civil society.[127] In recent years Nicaragua has sadly fallen back towards increasing authoritarianism.[128] [129]

Remarkably in recent history, successful democratic revolutions have been largely *non-violent*. The 1986 'People Power' Revolution in the Philippines, 1989 'Autumn of Nations' in the Soviet Eastern Bloc, and the successful 2011 Arab Spring Revolutions in Tunisia, and – initially – Egypt, are testament to the power of civil disobedience. Peaceful resistance is mentioned in Star Wars canon, such as the Ghorman Massacre. But such actions are apparently futile against the coercive power of the Empire and overall loyalty of its military. Most democratic revolutions in history have hinged on the military's disobedience or defection. Partial defections of Syria's military – with some commanders remaining loyal – resulted not in revolution but a brutal civil war. Democratic factions became only part of a vast ongoing conflict, involving foreign powers supporting numerous ethnic and religious groups with different aims and allegiances.

The eventual revolution in Star Wars is, to a degree, a *social* revolution as much as a democratic one – with societal changes such as the fundamental restructuring of Galactic administration and hierarchies, granting of political rights, and emancipation of

enslaved species. The Rebellion's strategy of guerilla warfare – and aspects such as retreating to space outside the Empire's influence and continuing to struggle despite setbacks – are similar to Castro's M-26-7 movement and the CCP's decades long struggle in China.

Of course, the actions of the formal Rebel Alliance predate, by some years, the events of Andor. Andor portrays the beginnings of two characteristics common to all revolutions:[130] [131]

1) Mass mobilisation, caused by frustration among large sections of the population. Frustration can be the result of economic deprivation, but also caused by brutal oppression, which we see in Andor.

2) A shared narrative of justified resistance, allying disaffected elites and others in positions of power with the suffering population. This can be a formal ideology, but most effective are narratives that are broad and inclusive – drawing on memories of a better past or a powerful indictment of the evils of the ruling regime.[132]

Oppression and the State

"Oppression breeds rebellion" as Luthen repeats so often. He's right, oppression does breed rebellion – except when it doesn't. Throughout history, regimes often held such coercive power that those oppressed recognised resistance to be hopeless – and their plight reinforced by cultural norms and religious justifications. As Trotsky put it – "the mere existence of privations is not enough to cause an insurrection; if it were, the masses would be always in revolt."

Even in modern times, targeted persecution of minorities faced little opposition if the wider population tolerated it – or encouraged it. Liberal democracies are not immune – with the 'Tyranny of the Majority' a concern of Early Modern pioneers in democracy.[133] But modern, established democracies with codified human rights usually have mechanisms to reduce state minority oppression, whether through legal action to enforce constitutional rights, or through social movements that influence, or become co-opted by, political parties.[134] Studies have shown that for developed nations, this democratic 'safety valve' has led to significantly less internal violence than authoritarian regimes.[135] [136] However, despite this capacity for internal reform, liberal democracies have been complicit in supporting oppression abroad. Arms sales to oppressive regimes, and the use of torture in off-shore counter-terrorism efforts, are examples of democracies failing to uphold their domestic principles in foreign relations, and echo the atrocities committed by the Galactic Republic during the Clone Wars.[137]

But obviously, the Empire is not a constitutional democracy but a totalitarian regime. With its slowly increasing coercive power and largely compliant population, Luthen's "The Empire is choking us so slowly we're starting not to notice" shows his powerful conception of a process unfolding much like that of Nazi Germany. The post war reflections of a German philologist, recorded in Milton Mayer's *They Thought They Were Free*, echoes the 'choking us slowly' process Luthen sees:

> You see, one doesn't see exactly where or how to move… Each act, each occasion, is worse than the last, but only a little worse. You wait for the next and the next. You wait for one great shocking occasion, thinking that others, when

such a shock comes, will join with you in resisting somehow … you speak privately to your colleagues, some of whom certainly feel as you do; but what do they say? They say, ‘It’s not so bad’ or ‘You’re seeing things’ or ‘You’re an alarmist.’ And you are an alarmist. You are saying that this must lead to this, and you can’t prove it … the one great shocking occasion, when tens or hundreds or thousands will join with you, never comes. In between come all the hundreds of little steps, some of them imperceptible, each of them preparing you not to be shocked by the next. Step C is not so much worse than Step B, and, if you did not make a stand at Step B, why should you at Step C? And so on...

And one day, too late, your principles, if you were ever sensible of them, all rush in upon you. The burden of self-deception has grown too heavy, and some minor incident, in my case my little boy, hardly more than a baby, saying ‘Jew swine,’ collapses it all at once, and you see that everything, everything, has changed and changed completely under your nose. The world you live in—your nation, your people—is not the world you were born in at all.

Now you live in a world of hate and fear, and the people who hate and fear do not even know it themselves; when everyone is transformed, no one is transformed … You see what you are, what you have done, or, more accurately, what you haven’t done (for that was all that was required of most of us: that we do nothing).[138]

It's this incremental, internalised type of oppression Luthen is so wary of. Mayer never names the author, and recent work by historians suggests that the disclosure of atrocities wasn’t quite as subtle as the author describes.[139] Still, the guilt is palpable, and it’s worth noting that the Empire’s High Human, speciesist ideology coexisted with xenophobic prejudice in the human majority population – more dark parallels with Nazi Germany.[140]

In contrast, in “Oppression breeds rebellion”, Luthen is referring to sudden, new forms of oppression, which is indiscriminate and far beyond what the population accepts as justified. Indiscriminate oppression may elicit sympathy with its victims in the broader populace, and when it punishes individuals regardless of their sentiment towards the regime, anti-regime sentiment can build across society, with hatred of the regime uniting social groups. Widespread anger over state oppression was a significant factor in collapse of Batista regime in Cuba, and the Shah’s rule in 1979 Iran.[141] As Cassian observes in Narkina 5: “Power doesn’t panic”.

The process of sudden oppression unifying social divisions unfolds, on a micro-level, in the Narkina 5 arc. Kino, as a shift manager, has a stake in the prison regime continuing just long enough so that he can walk free – as he makes very clear when inducting Cassian:

“You’re mine now…productivity is encouraged, evaluation is constant…the point of this conversation is you understand one thing most clearly. I have 249 days left of my sentence. I have a free hand in how I run this room. I’m used to being in the top three.

You will want to keep that happening. Losing hope, your mind, keep it to yourself. Don't ever slow up my line."

As the arc progresses, Kino refuses to even engage when Cassian asks about possibilities of escape. Until, of course, the terrible realization that no one in the prison complex will leave the building alive – unless the prisoners collectively overthrow the regime themselves.

Regimes that are seen to respond disproportionately to minor crimes or demonstrations may drive those with anti-regime sentiment into more radical actions. Accounts by IRA members cite the repressive actions against peaceful demonstrations from the late 1960s as the beginning of their disillusionment with the political process and moderate nationalist parties, instead turning towards the paramilitary IRA.[142] We see a similar process of oppression driving radicalization on Ferrix.

The only Imperial seemingly aware of the danger posed by the sudden escalation of oppression is Dedra, but strangely only at the galactic level – she thoughtlessly allows Salman Paak to be publicly hanged in Ferrix Square, further fuelling Ferrix's sense of injustice. The act was unnecessary, and in the end, counterproductive for the purpose of capturing Cassian, with Wilmon's act of vengeance in the form of a pipe bomb escalating the chaos amid Maarva's funeral riot, at the precise time when a calmer crowd would have made finding Cassian easier.

Maarva is another Ferrix character radicalised by Imperial oppression. Already haunted by the early Empire's execution of her husband, she finds the mere presence of Imperial security on Ferrix detestable. She also becomes so emboldened by the Aldhani heist that she commits to staying in Ferrix "for the Rebellion" – in a heartbreaking moment for both her and Cassian.

Her subsequent attempts at direct action are adorably naïve, but it's her powerful funeral speech that hits the Empire hardest.

Symbolic acts of defiance have so often been a catalyst for resistance. Open challenges to the status quo have the effect of turning subconscious or accepted feelings of injustice into motivations to act. From Rosa Park's refusal to give up her seat on a segregated bus, to Martin Luther nailing his 'Ninety-five Theses' on a Wurttemberg church door, such actions have snowballed into huge challenges to those authorities invested in maintaining the existing order.

Thematically, Maava's speech is a call to arms. However, perhaps more overlooked is the confession, and warning, of the dangers of indifference and inaction towards evil: "I've been turning away from the truth I wanted not to face … We let it grow, and now it's here … I'll tell you this, if I could do it again, I'd wake up early and be fighting those bastards from the start.". There's a resemblance to Martin Niemöller's poignant confession:

> First they came for the Communists, and I did
> not speak out
> – because I was not a Communist.
> Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out
> – because I was not a socialist.
> Then they came for the trade unionists, and I
> did not speak out
> – because I was not a trade unionist.
> Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out
> – because I was not a Jew.
> Then they came for me
> – and there was no one left to speak for me.

Ideology

On the surface, Season 1 of Andor seems to downplay the role of ideology in revolution. The brief voiceover of an extract of Nemik's manifesto that Cassian listens to in Rix Road largely emphasises the *fight* against oppression, but there is no mention of the kind of society he envisions after the Empire. We know there was much more to his manifesto, alluded to in the Aldhani arc:

> Skeen: "I'd like to hear what Clem believes."
>
> Cassian: "I know what I'm against. Everything else will have to wait."
>
> Nemik: "You're my ideal reader."

It is difficult to establish Nemik's political beliefs from own words. He is clearly anti-authoritarian, speaking of "freedom, independence, justice" but without further elaboration. He heavily emphasises 'natural' freedom, an idea central to Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke and Rousseau - "Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains" as Rousseau states. Some point towards Nemik's distrust of Imperial technology, and his respect for the right of repair, as evidence of anti-capitalist thought, but I find this a stretch. He views the reliance on Imperial technology as a means of control and enforcing conformity, as he makes clear to Cassian when extolling the virtues of an old navigational device:

> …once you've mastered it, you're free. We've grown reliant on Imperial tech and we've made ourselves vulnerable. There's a growing list of things […] they've pushed us to forget, things like freedom.

Nemik's attitude here reflects resentment toward authoritarian states' control on consumer technologies, a modern example being the restrictions on global internet access imposed by the PRC. Luthen is also aware of this, as he states to Cassian - "Rule number one, never carry anything you don't control."

Andor does include some historical parallels of capitalist exploitation. The Empire's coercion of native Dhanis from the highlands to an 'Enterprise Zone' reflects the British Enclosure Acts, beginning in the 17th century, driving much of the rural population into industrial towns, with the subsequent increase in available labour driving the Industrial Revolution in Britain. The mining disaster on Kenari reflects the ecological damage caused by 20th century phosphate mining on the Pacific Islands of Banaba and Nauru. However, we see no specifically anti-capitalist sentiment expressed by any of the protagonists in Andor, and I think this is most likely a choice made by the writers. Most people can relate to Andor's graphic and realistic depiction of authoritarian oppression, but an overt anti-capitalist framing may have been a turn off for some viewers – and Disney executives.

Aside from Cassian and the survivors of the Aldhani heist, it seems no one else knew of Nemik's manifesto or its contents. A season 2 sub-plot, where Cassian disseminates the full manifesto under the radar of the Empire, could add some more realism to the development of the Rebellion, and would be comparable to how the circulation of dissident texts has undermined authoritarian regimes in history – for instance the influence of Solzhenitsyn's writing had on dissident groups in the Soviet Union.[143]

However, the dissemination of formal ideology is not essential to revolutions, especially when the concept of liberty is already formed in the minds of the population. Revolutionaries have often connected their struggle to idealised versions of the past – French

revolutionaries such as Maximilien Robespierre and Louis de Saint-Just often harked back to the virtues of the Roman Republic, and Castro invoked the legacy of Cuban independence hero José Martí in his own fight against the Batista regime and US influence in Cuba.[144] [145] One of the most symbolic acts during the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe was the ‘Baltic Way’, a 690-kilometre (430-mile) human chain of two million people joining hands between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, to mark the 50th Anniversary of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the secret agreement between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany that permitted Soviet annexation of the Baltic states.[146]

It is interesting how the memory of a more liberal past is represented in Andor. In the flashback of Andor’s adoptive father execution by Clone Troopers, it was the first year of the Empire, yet there were shouts from the crowd of “Long live the Republic”, indicating that the population of Ferrix fully understood the reality of the political transformation of the Republic into the Empire. Maarva’s funeral speech briefly alludes to a better past – “There is a wound that won't heal at the center of the galaxy […] We let it grow, and now it's here.” – and we’ve already seen Nemik’s awareness of a past being forgotten. Luthen mentions “an equation I wrote 15 years ago”, which coincides with the date of the Empire’s formation, and Tay Kolma asserts to Mothma that he’d “done more than grow weary of the Empire”. It makes sense that the anti-Imperial sentiment of older characters in Mothma, Luthen, Kolma and Maarva would include more awareness of liberties lost, whereas the motivations of younger protagonists such as Cinta and Lieutenant Gorn result from injustices experienced first-hand.

Under Mothma’s leadership, we can see this evocation of a better past in the official title of the Rebel Alliance - ‘The Alliance to Restore the Republic’. But memory of the past is subjective. Given

the Old Republic ended in the aftermath of a civil war, the restoration of the previous status quo would not have held universal appeal, so I think the Alliance’s formal title is a poor choice of words. Alas, this canonized title long predates the Prequel Trilogy, first appearing in a 1977 novelization written by George Lucas himself, so in this light we can forgive Mothma here.

It is perhaps the lack of formal ideology that keeps Andor – and the Rebel Alliance – true to history. Some of the most effective revolutionaries have kept their future intentions vague and downplayed aspects that would alienate different social groups. Before overthrowing the Batista regime, Castro was able to portray himself as a moderate nationalist with democratic ideals.[147] [148] Similarly, Ayatollah Khomeini downplayed the most divisive elements of his ideology – anti-communism and the creation of an Islamic State – before he took power.[149] Instead, the Andor shows how shared oppression unites people in resistance, and the Rebel Alliance later used a symbolic phrase to invoke the memory of a “more civilized aged” worth fighting for:

> “May the force be with you”

A Tale of Miners and Prisoners: Class Composition and the Roots of Rebellion in *Andor*

RK Upadhya

What drives people to rebel? And what can revolutionaries do to facilitate this process? These are key questions that all would-be revolutionaries must ask themselves. And surprisingly, these questions are also at the center of *Andor*, helping make it one of the most interesting and politically-charged pieces of *Star Wars* media since George Lucas's prequel trilogy, and their clumsy-but-creative critiques of the Bush administration and the War on Terror. Throughout the show, characters navigate individuals, factions, and communities whose loyalties and motivations are uncertain – but which must be won. The locations have a materiality to them which influences and shapes the politics of their residents; the main planet, Ferrix, is not defined by an arbitrary geographic feature ("snowy planet", "salty planet"...), but rather by its position in the Empire's productive and logistical apparatus as a major industrial salvage zone (see Dooley's essay). In other words, *Andor* is a story that feels tailor-made for a Marxist analysis of production, labor, and class, and the changes that have taken place over the 20th and 21st centuries in the dynamics of capitalist exploitation, imperial violence, working-class struggle, and revolutionary strategy.

In the classical Marxist formulation, capitalism is a system that has unique feedback loops that enables it to develop industrial capacity

with unprecedented scope and speed. This development relies on the ever-growing expansion of resource extraction, a labor force to carry out the work of mass production, and markets that can distribute produced commodities to a growing population of consumers. But in turn, the expansion – and disciplining – of industrial labor also creates the social force that can overcome capitalism and harness its productive capacities for actual human flourishing, rather than growth for growth's sake.

Marx and Engels saw revolution right around the corner – a reasonable hope, given the massive upheavals that engulfed Europe and the US in the mid-19th century. But in fact, socialist revolution did not emerge within capitalism's heartlands. Instead, the first successful working-class anti-capitalist revolution took place in 1917, in the Russian Empire and its underdeveloped and largely agrarian economy, where the predicted agent of revolutionary change – the industrial worker – was a small minority. Nonetheless, revolutionaries worldwide expected (and in the case of the Russians, desperately hoped) that this would be followed immediately by a revolution in Germany, a highly developed capitalist society. But several attempted uprisings ended in tragic and bloody failure, and Germany instead saw the rise of the most brutal regime in human history. The next significant anti-capitalist revolution took place in 1949 in China – and here too, the industrial proletariat took a backseat to peasants and other exploited classes, whom Mao Zedong identified as crucial social forces for revolutionary struggle in his classic 1926 analysis.[150] Henceforth, a key project of the most dynamic currents of Marxism was to rethink class and revolutionary strategy. They moved away from the expectation that a particular kind of industrial worker would inherently lead socialist struggle, and instead re-examined and unveiled the heterogeneous and dynamic nature of capital and

class, and searched for revolutionary subjectivity across the whole of society, in all its nooks and crannies.

This heterogeneity of class and radicalism is clearly visible in *Andor*. Broadly speaking, nearly all of the characters are ordinary, working-class people. But they occupy different positions with respect to the productive, logistical, and repressive apparatuses of the Empire, which in turn influences their political orientation and their capacity for different forms of resistance. There are what can be cast as prototypical industrial workers, but also indigenous communities, informal laborers, criminals, slaves, merchants, and bureaucrats – all of whom occupy different positions of importance in different schools of Marxist theory and practice.

Alquati on Ferrix…

In the West, some of the most dynamic efforts to reinvigorate Marxism were made under the umbrella of what is generally called Autonomism, which consisted of various currents that broke from official Communist Party orthodoxies in the decades that followed World War II. Of these, *operaismo* – Italian "workerism" – is of special interest.

The militants of Italian workerism, such as Mario Tronti and Romano Alquati, developed their praxis around "workers' inquiry," a framework and method for investigating the actual lived experiences of the working class, and for analyzing how these experiences differed across various sectors and changed in step with the massive structural transformations of postwar capitalism.[151] This foundation on inquiry was based on an understanding that resistance and rebelliousness by workers would itself precipitate changes in the structure of capitalism, which in turn would lead to a reorganization of the working class, and new terrains for organizing resistance. Capitalism, in other words, was a

fundamentally dynamic system that was dialectically locked with class struggle itself.

The goal of workers' inquiry was to understand class composition – the ways in which the working class was divided, organized, and socialized at a given point in history. *Operaists* divided this into two aspects: technical composition and political composition. Technical composition was the manner in which capital organized and managed workers, by means of the labor process, the technologies used, the types of skills required, and disciplinary techniques. Political composition was how workers struggled against capital and developed forms of self-organization on the shop floor – in other words, the methods of overt class struggle. Technical composition tends to inform political composition, but in a manner influenced by wider factors of culture and society outside of work.

This simple but effective framework re-established Marxism onto a firm material and empirical foundation, allowing for deeper analysis of various workplaces and labor forces – and most importantly their resistance to capital. Workers' inquiry and class composition analysis has outlasted its founding movement; even today, Marxists continue to use its simple but effective tools to understand different job sites and class fractions, from tech workers to call center operators to gig workers.[152] In *Andor*, both the industrial salvage yards of Ferrix and the totalitarian prison factory of Narkina 5 are readily analyzed via the workerist framework. Both of these settings are sites of rebellion that are internal to the Empire; that is, the rebels were subjects of the Empire and part of its productive apparatus. They were organized by the Empire for its own ends – but these same processes facilitated the workers' autonomy and the means of their rebellion.

Ferrix, in particular, lends itself to an *operaist* interpretation. The salvage workers of Ferrix are cast as prototypical industrial

workers, albeit ones who are not producing new commodities, but salvaging old ones. Their daily routine is one of dismantling various industrial systems in order to unearth the value still within – a regimen most akin to mining. Indeed, the images of them clocking in and out together, lugging along their hammers and hardhats, is evocative of miners in the coal fields of Appalachia, South Wales, or Shanxi. This specificity is important, because the nuances of the labor process illustrate how resistance fomented among their ranks and made particular tactics possible – aka, how the technical composition of the Ferrix workers influenced their emergent political composition. Even prior to overt rebellion, Ferrix appears to have a thriving black market, made possible by the large amount of industrial systems passing through the area and the high level of technical knowledge of its workers, who can recognize valuable systems, repair and restore devices, and smuggle illegal commodities. The title character himself, Cassian Andor, is not a formal worker but a bandit and a smuggler, whose livelihood depends on this black market and his various contacts and accomplices among the skilled salvage workers.

The specifics of skills and tools also plays a role when resistance heats up. When a corporate security team enters the town in their hunt for Cassian in Episode 3, they are met with immediate hostility that veers into a form of guerrilla violence. An existing decentralized alarm system is used to alert the town, sending everybody out of the streets and into their homes. There are no street signs, confounding the security team and undermining whatever tactical manoeuvers they had planned. A handful of workers use the close proximity of the security team's landing ship to their industrial equipment to sabotage the vessel, tying it down to a piece of salvage and causing it to crash. Similarly, when tensions boil over in the season finale into a full-scale riot, the pivotal escalation occurs when a powerful bomb is thrown into the

ranks of the security forces – an attack made possible by the workers' access to, and knowledge of, explosive materials.

All of this underscores the similarity between the Ferrix salvage workers and real-world miners: the labor unrest that rocked mining colonies across the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, for example, saw extensive use of mining tools being used against police, corporate security, and even the military.[153] Dynamite in particular played a key role; normally used for brute-force excavation, American workers readily repurposed their stocks to blow up bridges, trains, police stations, warehouses, and even their own mining sites. These dynamics, whether in the salvage yards of Ferrix or the mining colonies of Colorado, are relatively simple – but are nonetheless representative of how the technical composition of a labor force can give them unique advantages and knowledge during confrontations with the forces of state and capital.

Equally important to technical composition, however, is social composition: the way in which culture and social ties form the basis to organize resistance.[154] Ferrix's society does not solely consist of workers, and the workers themselves are not only workers, but friends, family, and lovers, who have a life outside of their job, which reinforces feelings of trust, kinship, and camaraderie between the population – and a feeling of unity against meddlesome outsiders.

Throughout the show, there is continual representation of strong local traditions; in the last arc, a key plot element is the practice of cremating the dead into bricks that are used for the town's buildings, as well as the traditional funeral march with a full orchestral routine. The funeral ends up being used not only to honor a recently deceased elder, but to also engage in an act of protest, which quickly explodes into an insurrection. In the real

world, this is evocative of how funerals can become politically charged, particularly in the Middle East, which has seen repeated cases of escalating protests, deaths, and funeral marches that turn into even larger protests – a powerful means of synthesizing the deeply emotional and spiritual dimensions of death and mourning, with political resistance.

The origins of the salvage yards of Ferrix and its culture are unclear – was there a pre-existing society that was then subsumed into the salvage industry, or were the workers brought in from other planets and cultures, and eventually formed their own tight-knit culture with their own traditions? Either way, this culture proves to be a crucial ingredient in facilitating the rebelliousness of the town – but importantly, is also mostly external to the productive process itself, and something that capital tends to seek to disrupt. Looking again to a real-life analogue, the mining towns of Appalachia had a similar close-knit and relatively egalitarian social structure, typically descending from the self-reliant mountain cultures of Scots-Irish settlers – and who, during the Civil War, tended to side with the anti-slavery Union against the lowland planter-slaver class and their rigid hierarchical society.

….and Newton, Too

Italian workerists, like other heterodox Marxists in Europe in the ‘60s and ‘70s, were largely concerned with analyzing the class composition of highly industrialized societies. But of course, capitalism does not only consist of high-tech industry, but encompasses all aspects and all levels of technology, development, and exploitation. Capitalism has also always been a global system, with divisions and hierarchies across regions and nations. Thus, concurrent to the workerism were other intellectual currents that dealt with the nature of imperialism, class, and politics

at the periphery of capital accumulation. The insights of these frameworks, largely rooted in the Marxisms of the Third World and the Global South, can be synthesized with that of more core-focused Marxism, and develop an even more rigorous and complete analysis of *Andor*.

One important task is to nuance the analysis of class composition in *Andor*, and to properly situate the labor forces and worksites that are shown. Despite the overtly industrial character of Ferrix and Narkina 5, those sites and other terrains of struggle in fact take place at the margins of the Empire and its productive, logistical, and repressive apparatuses – with the notable exception of the storyline taking place on Coruscant, which centered the aristocratic classes. The salvage yards of Ferrix are not tightly controlled factories, but part of a “Free Trade Zone” where the workers appear to have a high amount of autonomy. The forced labor camps of Narkina 5 are on the other end of the spectrum, where workers have no autonomy whatsoever, and are squeezed for every drop of productivity they have, until death. Aldhani, a logistics hub and distribution center, is still in the middle of a colonization process, where the local indigenous population is undergoing dispossession and displacement into industrial work (see Bala’s essay in this issue). But throughout these spaces, one class fraction in particular is consistently prominent: the lumpenproletariat.

In Marx’s time, the lumpenproletariat – the underclass, the most marginalized and oppressed, who subsisted outside of wage-labor and industrial production – were considered unstable, anti-social, dangerously amenable to reactionary ideologies, and unable to develop the consciousness and discipline necessary to fight for a socialist revolution. But Third World Marxists reconsidered this. The potential, and even the importance, of the lumpen to revolutionary struggle was first seriously articulated by the

psychologist and anti-imperialist revolutionary Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he observed that the lumpen population was completely independent from the colonial system, consistently antagonistic with it (unlike intellectuals and even industrial workers), and thus willing to commit to the uncompromising and violent struggle needed for anti-colonial revolution.[155]

Fanon's ideas were enthusiastically taken up and expanded upon in the US by the Black Panther Party in the late 1960s. Similar to the work of the Italian *operaists*, this was based not on abstract theorization, but on careful observations of events, and through organic connections to the experiences and politics of working-class communities. Both the Party's founders, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, had migrated to California in their childhoods as part of a massive wave of Black migration from the agricultural South to the industrial centers of the North and West. But by the '60s, Black communities found themselves warehoused in ghettos, with large swathes of the population excluded from industrial jobs and pushed to the periphery of the productive circuits of capital. Thus, Black youth formed an increasingly sizable and restive population of lumpenproletariat, subsisting off of black market economies and developing intense antagonism with police forces and capital and empire writ large. It was this population that the Black Panther Party based itself in.[156]

The title character of *Andor* is himself clearly part of a lumpen underclass. His homeworld, Kenari, appears to be almost entirely uninhabited; the planet was used for Imperial mining operations until a major industrial accident killed a large number of workers and critically undermined operations, leading to its permanent abandonment. Cassian was part of a community of adolescents and children whose parents were presumably workers killed in the accident, and who were then forced into a kind of lumpen-

indigenous existence, subsisting through foraging and piracy. Later on, despite his adoption by Clem and Maarva, two salvage workers from Ferrix, Cassian remains embedded in a lumpen existence. Rather than enter into relatively stable employment on Ferrix, he continues a peripheral existence as a bandit and smuggler, travelling the frontier, pilfering valuable equipment from Imperial ships and bases, and doing the occasional stint in an Imperial prison. Notably, however, the skills required for this illicit economy are still tied up with licit labor; Cassian learned the skills required for illegal salvage and sales from his adoptive parents and other Ferrix proletariats, all of whom dabble to some degree in the black market. Andor's extensive contacts among the Ferrix workforce, and their stalwart defense of him against security forces, highlight the blurred lines between legal and illegal, formal and informal, proletarian and lumpen.

The class composition of Ferrix reflects the experience of Black workers in the American North and West in the post-WW2 period, but also extends to the modern phenomena of slums and slum economies across the Global South, where globalization has proceeded lock-step with a general collapse of clear distinctions between formal and informal labor. In the mega-slums of Caracas, Delhi, and Lagos, workers – most of whom were displaced from the agrarian countryside, similar to *Andor's* Aldhani – shift between different forms of worksites and juggle different jobs, sometimes simultaneously: from small workshops supplying parts to multinational auto companies, to platform work chauffeuring the middle class, to petty crime and drug trafficking. This form of stagnant and precarious labor has become so dominant across the world, that even non-Marxist journalists and academics are now considering the idea that global development efforts under capitalism have largely failed.[157]

Aside from Ferrix, the clearest examination of lumpenproletarian composition is on Narkina 5. As with Ferrix, class lines are blurred; the subjects are prisoners, many of whom were drawn from the galaxy's underclass, but who are now violently disciplined into becoming forced industrial workers. The technical composition of the prison laborers of Narkina 5 is thus one of extreme discipline and rote, deskilled tasks. The Empire exercises near-total control, killing dissidents at whim, even while manipulating certain prisoners to be enforcers. Still, there are small gaps in the Empire's system of repression, brought about by their own arrogance; as Cassian remarks to Kino in the sleeping quarters, in an effort to sow dissent: "Do you really think they care enough to listen?" Despite the brutal violence the Empire is willing to inflict on its prisoners, its ambivalence on the potential for more complicated schemes lets the germ of resistance and organization take root.

Nonetheless, unlike most other terrains of struggle, the technical composition of prison camps very nearly over-determines the political composition of prisoner resistance. Even though there is an opening for a small cell of rebels to form and spark a wider insurrection, ultimately the inability to communicate quickly and reliably between different floors, buildings, or even work groups in the same room, undermines any possibility of developing political and social structures like that of Ferrix. The only possible expression of politics can be a violent, localized, short-term rebellion.

Narkina 5 is thus representative of the most extreme forms of prison systems – while also reminding us that even under such harrowing conditions, resistance is never unviable. In the neoliberal era, prisons in the US emerged as a form of managing the crisis of deindustrialization and surplus population, helping warehouse the rebellious and racialized urban poor who had driven the social unrest of the '60s and '70s and filled the ranks of revolutionary

organizations like the Black Panther Party.[158] But this merely displaced the crisis; the era of mass incarceration saw repeated prison riots and the emergence of numerous prison gangs, some even with a semblance of the radical politics of the earlier era. An even more extreme case of prisons is the Nazi concentration camp system, which were crucial for the Nazi war effort, and whose system of violent totalitarianism was even more cruel and sadistic than Narkina 5. But even here, resistance was a permanent feature. Uprisings in concentration camps typically faced the same end as the Narkina 5 rebellion – a violent re-establishment of order, with the majority of rebels re-captured and likely executed – but they nonetheless broke out over and over again.[159]

From Resistance to Revolution

The Narkina 5 rebellion highlights a key aspect of revolutionary Marxism: that regardless of how complete and total the domination of capital seems, there is always some form of resistance taking place. The workerist intellectual Romano Alquati called this the "invisible organization" that spontaneously emerges during the course of day-to-day resistance against the ever-changing structures of exploitation and repression.[160] Such resistance is typically non-ideological, and mostly concerned with short-term and local concerns. At the microscopic level, it may seem trivial: a spontaneous slow-down of an assembly line in response to an overbearing foreman, calling in sick to sabotage an unpleasant food franchise owner, vandalizing a police surveillance camera. But these actions, often individualized, are precisely the beginnings of what can become an "invisible organization" of resistance, and the basis of popular solidarity and militant practices – in other words, a political composition.

In *Andor*, the leading revolutionary figure at first appears to be Luthen, who serves as the insurrectionary (or perhaps rather, *focoist*) archetype, coordinating acts of sabotage, robbery, and violence against different points of the Empire, hoping to spark a wider conflagration. But by the season's end, it is clear that it is not Luthen, but Nemik – a young, idealistic cadre, who perishes during the course of the Aldhani heist – who has the clearest sense of how to think about rebellion. His manifesto contains what is essentially a slogan of *operaismo*: acknowledging that "there will be times when the struggle seems impossible….alone, unsure, dwarfed by the scale of the enemy", he goes on to emphasize the constant – if unseen – presence of struggle:

> Freedom is a pure idea. It occurs spontaneously and without instruction. Random acts of insurrection are occurring constantly throughout the galaxy. There are whole armies, battalions that have no idea that they've already enlisted in the cause…the frontier of the Rebellion is everywhere.

It is not clear whether Luthen ever read Nemik's manifesto, but one can imagine these words reverberating in his mind as he watched the people of Ferrix riot against Imperial stormtroopers – a possibility that never entered into his grand schemes. And indeed, neither did the Narkina 5 rebellion. This is not to say that Luthen is irrelevant; on the contrary, his machinations were consciously designed to provoke such events in the first place. Rather, this underscores the fact that even for those whose entire life is devoted to revolution, major moments of unrest – let alone day-to-day acts of resistance – can come as a surprise, if they are even noticed in the first place.

What, then, is the task of a revolutionary? Nemik's vision is ultimately that widespread and spontaneous acts of rebellion will

eventually "flood the banks of the Empire's authority" and that finally, "one single thing will break the siege." This is perhaps too idealistic and optimistic. The entire decade of the 2010s saw unprecedented levels of mass protests and civil unrest across the world, largely driven by spontaneous outbursts of unorganized urban masses; but the typical result was the retrenchment of local regimes and global empires, rather than their end.[161] In *Andor*, the two major acts of rebellion are both met with brutal, overwhelming force and the short-term defeat of the insurgents.

But we also know that in the *Star Wars* universe itself, a formal revolutionary organization eventually coalesces: the Rebel Alliance. The next step, then – and what will presumably be the subject of the second season of *Andor* – will be the process of building this organization out of the raw materials of resistance, the disparate terrains of struggle, and the various class compositions that were portrayed in the first season. One powerful way to think about this is via the framework of "articulation," a process by which revolutionaries help connect different compositions who are engaging in dissent, struggle, and rebellion, and thus broadening their horizons, sharing skills and knowledge, and coordinating their attacks. As theorized by Salar Mohandesi:

> If composition refers to the way that individuals come together as social forces, articulation refers to the ways that social forces combine into forms of unity. And if composition is a daunting process, articulation poses an even greater challenge. Harmonizing a multitude of interests, experiences, backgrounds, and objectives over a sustained period, building unity while taking into account real differences is incredibly difficult work, which is why articulation of this kind is quite rare, and doesn't often last for long. But when it happens, the articulated unity

> substantially increases its capacity to realize transformational change.[162]

A more empirical version of this framework, and one that draws back on the legacy of revolutionary anti-imperialism, can be found in the trajectory of the Black Panther Party and Huey Newton's theory of "intercommunalism." The Panthers originally started as a Black nationalist organization and sought to compose a movement rooted in the Black lumpenproletariat that would fight for national liberation. But very quickly, they realized that a Black nation alone could not face off against the American empire – only an international movement, one that articulated all the different compositions of anti-imperialist movements and nations into a single front, could defeat imperialism. This underpinned the Panthers' efforts to not only forge connections with revolutionary movements across the world, but also with the organizations and networks of other oppressed communities within the US as well – a veritable Rebel Alliance of the 1970s.[163]

This is also the concluding point at the climax of *Andor*, made by Maarva in her posthumous speech at her funeral: that the insularity of the people of Ferrix, and the comfort they found in their traditions and with each other, meant that they had allowed the Empire to grow and swallow up other societies, until it finally came for them. As mentioned earlier, the social composition of Ferrix was a key determinant of their ability to resist – but to truly rebel, the next step must be to push beyond the limits of their own composition, and to articulate a wider movement along with other compositions of other societies, planets, and class fractions.

What is to be done, then, is for revolutionaries to facilitate a process of connecting different groupings of rebels and renegades, to help synthesize different class compositions, and enable them to form a powerful, coordinated whole that will be capable of fully

overcoming capital and empire. By season's end, Cassian Andor has developed the *Star Wars* version of class consciousness, buoyed by the courageous acts of defiance and rebellion of his friends, family, and comrades. Now, his mission shall be to connect the different outbursts of anti-Imperial rage, and articulate the Rebel Alliance. May the Force – and Marx, Alquati, and Newton – be with him.

Smacking Neoliberalism Over the Head with a Brick: *Andor's* Revolution

Py Writ

I stayed up until midnight to watch *Andor*'s three-episode premiere, like I do with all Star Wars shows, expecting anything ranging from disappointment to mild enjoyment. Despite being a Star Wars fan, my pessimism came from Disney's handling of mainstream Star Wars. Aside from *Rogue One*, which I thought was genuinely great — the best Disney Star Wars movie — I was only holding out a bit of hope. But the trailers for *Andor* looked far different from the other shows. "Help me Cassian Andor, you're my only hope!"

The main thing I was excited for was the tone: it looked serious, ready to reckon properly with a character whose introduction in *Rogue One* included the murder of an ally to protect Rebel secrets. And then I watched *Andor*'s first episode, and I was awed by the absolute mastery of the craft of storytelling in the first scenes: the significance of a person with a conspicuous Mexican accent getting harassed, asked if he swam there, by police, and then killing them, was not lost on me. With Season 1's conclusion, I want to explore the politics behind most mainstream neoliberal media, contrast it with the abolitionism that makes *Andor* uniquely radical, and reconcile that with Disney's ownership of the show. Don't make me regret this, Season 2.

Now, you're probably aware that Star Wars is and always has been political. The originals began with several real-world political allegories: "Stormtroopers" and Nazi Brownshirts, the Empire as

America, etc.[164] The prequels have more prominent politics, much to audiences' dislike (but I think they sucked for reasons other than being about politics and much hate is misplaced). Politics were also present in *The Clone Wars* (two-thirds Lucas): trade, humanitarian aid, etc. More generally, all art is political; an artist necessarily must incorporate something of themselves and their beliefs into their work. Even labeling something "apolitical" is a political statement. Creators of a work determine whether their politics is accidentally or intentionally reflected in their art.

Lucas clearly started by trying to inject anti-imperial ideas into Star Wars, but he eventually sold out to Disney, which is not interested in anti-anything. For example, when one rogue writer for *Rogue One* tweeted anti-Trump sentiments and related the Empire and the US, Disney CEO Bob Iger reacted with "I have no reaction to [this] story at all" and asserted that *Rogue One* was not "in any way, a political film. There are no political statements in it, at all."[165] I don't entirely blame Lucas for selling, especially if he felt out of things to say, but, predictably, megacorporation ownership began the era of "apolitical" Star Wars.

Disney's control of Star Wars affects the Star Wars franchise just like Disney's control over other "intellectual property" affects other franchises, such as Marvel. The Marvel Cinematic Universe is the driving force behind creating the "superhero" film genre, a genre that largely refuses to engage with the political process, instead featuring unrealistic existential threats and superhuman powers with no real-world parallels. Sure, gods should not be restricted by our political process when defending half of all existence, I guess. But "defending" is the key: superheroes defend the status quo; rarely, if ever, fighting the actual Western power structures perpetuating injustices they should theoretically oppose. There's more to be said about character power creep mirroring real

militarism, baked-in American military propaganda, cultural appropriation vs. appreciation vs. representation, etc., but for length reasons I'll only discuss one more Marvel-specific thing: the Marvel villain problem.

The saying goes that a hero is only as good as their villain, and many Marvel stories suffer from a particularly bad archetype of villain that I'll call the "Hungry Terrorist." These villains are products of an unjust system, which should highlight the system, not the person, as the main problem to be beaten. However, Disney makes the Hungry Terrorist irrationally vengeful to re-center the story on their individual defeat, instead of systemic elimination of conditions for their existence. Example from *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*: answer to starvation due to inequitable distribution of resources across borders? Explode people. From the *Black Panther* movies: answer to the effects of systemic, historical racism? White genocide. (My flippancy reflects the depth of thought put into these crappy stories.) The heroes' solutions (give senators a stern talking-to and Bay Area real estate investment, respectively) are not equally radical in a different/opposite direction, especially compared to the heroes' powers. Marvel/Disney, intentionally or not, highlights that it is the villains' radicality that makes them inherently villainous.

Disney is not unique in this; all major corporations don't want radical change because they sit atop the neoliberal status quo. So let's talk about what neoliberalism is and how it manifests in storytelling.

Economic liberalism (for my fellow Americans, I'm talking "liberal" as in "free market," not as in "Democratic Party") was a major factor in the Great Depression (1929 to 1939), shaking faith in late-19th-century laissez-faire economics.[166] Extremely over-simplified, "stop economic downturns from killing millions via government

policy" was a common sentiment. In America, for example, we got some (extremely) diet socialism under President Roosevelt (1933 to 1945). Among other things, he created jobs by investing heavily in public works (New Deal) and somewhat prevented banks from directly gambling with people's money (Glass-Steagall). But a notable non-left-wing response to the Great Depression was Nazism, supported by wealthy capitalists in early attempts to co-opt or stem the rising tide of leftist thought via scapegoating various groups like Jewish people for capitalism's failings.

The bloody end to Nazi Germany indicated that the bourgeoisie would need a different counter-revolutionary response to leftism, and thus neoliberalism was born in the late 20th century. A bunch of white men had gotten together to found the Chicago school of economics in the mid-1940s, funded via think-tank by another rich white guy scared by government economic oversight. This early Chicago school was not yet the neoliberal powerhouse it would become; for example, one of its members believed in some industries' nationalizations and elimination of corporate monopolies, blaming them for the Depression (he was almost… based).[167] But eventually noted/hated economist Milton Friedman would pull monetarism out of his ass, blaming monetary supply contraction for the Depression (and not, y'know, capitalism's inherent boom-bust cycle) and finally settling on a not-explicitly-racist explanation that could allow capitalism to persist.

Friedman's shit was so shiny that Reagan and Thatcher both wanted him as an advisor. The primary faces of neoliberalism in the 1980s and 90s, both were known for what would come to characterize Western neoliberal economic policy: privatization, deregulation, and austerity, seasoned to suit their respective constituents' palates with racism, homophobia, illegal arms dealing, etc. Thatcher's TINA ("there is no alternative")[168] outlines what

Mark Fisher would call capitalist realism[169] succinctly: the sense that capitalism is the only viable system and the impossibility of imagining alternatives. Fisher claims neoliberals have established capitalist realism, and Thatcher's apocryphal declaration that her greatest achievement was New Labour (the neoliberal reinvention of the main British left-wing party)[170] supports this, for example.

Here is where we should shift away from "neoliberalism" as only meaning the specific economic policies and toward "neoliberalism" as a general refusal to consider the possibility of broken systems and only a focus on individuals within existing systems. (Again, Thatcher provides an illustrative example of such refusal: "...there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families.")[171] This distinction between economic policy and generic political thought pattern is necessary because modern neoliberals may not call themselves "neoliberal" or have strong feelings about, say, the privatization of railroads, but are still neoliberal in attitude/action.[172]

Not caring about railroad privatization doesn't mean that neoliberals ignore everything; most acknowledge systemic problems like racism or sexism.[173] But the lack of political imagination means that Reagan's trickle-down economics is copied into non-systemic "solutions" like neoliberal "anti"-racism and feminism: racism is solved by black presidents and sexism is solved by female prime ministers (or female ISB agents, as *Andor* critiques[174]). Personnel change at the top will trickle down into social progress for the bottom. Societal problems arise from staffing, not system.

Such political small-mindedness is a major factor in other neoliberal characteristics that are not immediately linkable to specific neoliberal economic policies. Proposing non-systemic solutions to systemic problems often flattens activism/agitation into

just its optics as respectability politics and electoralism become important ways of silencing/ridiculing radicals who advocate for real systemic change. In the US, working within the two-party system means trying to marshall leftists behind milquetoast candidates like the Clintons or Biden because if the Republicans are team bad guys, the Dems must be team good guys. "The risk of doing nothing becomes the greatest risk of all" (Syril Karn) only when it comes to voting/campaign donations, not protesting/boycotting/etc.

This explains the neoliberal fixation on convenient political opponents like Trump in the US, criticized as much for his policies as for his presentation. He's a fantastic bad guy, the face of everything wrong with the bad team. Neoliberal critique of Trump's policies will often disappear when such policies are a Democratic president's policies, and neoliberal critique of Trump's presentation will include his hateful words and sexual abuse, yes, but also often takes the form of body-shaming or fat jokes.

With all this in mind, the neoliberalism in the MCU is fairly evident owing to its setting in the real world, but we can see it in Star Wars if we apply some critical thought. The prequels' (and *The Clone Wars*) stories are often about special superhumans waging a counter-revolutionary war, ignoring the Separatist citizens' General Grievance, so to speak: the corrupt Republic's marginalization of the poorer Outer Rim. Jedi enforce the neoliberal status quo as police and military, a role questioned mostly in the context of pragmatism vs. idealism and not establishment vs. anti-establishment. Lucas's trilogy is at least trying to be radical, keeping neoliberal elements like individualized "Hero's Journey" storytelling conventions but telling a story about positive revolution instead.

With the exception of *Andor* (and arguably *Rogue One*), the spin-off shows, *Solo*, and the sequels are largely obsessed with Star Wars' aesthetic/small details over Star Wars' anti-fascist DNA (see Dooley's essay on fetishism and materiality). Don't get me wrong, there are very bright spots throughout, but as larger stories they often fall short of any specific messaging. This is most apparent in the sequels, a trilogy substituting copy-pasted story beats, hastily farted-out Star Destroyers from a Fortnite tie-in event, and noncommittal diversity for originality, themes, and principles. (*The Last Jedi* is mostly spared from being shit on by having intentional messaging and fresh ideas, and any criticisms I have are more about execution. That's a whole different essay though.)

Neoliberal stories will necessarily feel similar and unimaginative. Stories that feature only one systemic outcome will be repetitive, but repetition is seen as good. Deviation is unwanted risk. Disney's massive wealth from its market dominance could finance whatever it wanted, but the institutional shareholders to which Disney is ultimately beholden do not want anything but consistent stock growth. So instead of using their vast resources to take artistic risks, megacorporations pump out massive quantities of content, leading to the corporate inception of the multiverse. Franchise enjoyment has been made nigh-impossible without the required reading, and stories can't end because there must be spin-off or sequel potential. Disney weaves charismatic/popular/talented/attractive actors, profit-proven story beats, neoliberal "diversity," and abused VFX teams[175] into their messy webs of neverending half-stories with generic, watered-down messages designed to cause minimal offense.

Minimizing offense to maximize shallow appeal ridicules radicalism while praising something like the shitty representation of a half-second, easily-censored[176] gay kiss in *The Rise of Skywalker*. But

this is one of many places where *Andor* refuses to play by neoliberal rules: Vel and Cinta's sapphic relationship is treated as seriously as any other; a relationship that happens to be queer rather than a tokenized marketing opportunity. *Andor* doesn't flatten eroticism into objectification, like most other Star Wars visual media, or sanitize it. For example, early in the show Bix shows up late at Timm's place because she wants to *fuck*, not for post-marital only-implied-by-a-pregnancy sex. This is a realistic portrayal of normal human relationships. And these moments aren't used for pornographic shock value either; kid's-show canonically-14-year-old Ahsoka Tano shows more skin than any character in *Andor*.

There is so much more that is so refreshingly un-neoliberal about *Andor* that I would love to rave about, but for the sake of length I'll set most of it aside (and you can find most of it in the other essays). Instead, I'll remind you of *Andor*'s story with some abolitionist editorializing as I see fit, so that we can finally get to my main points.

Immediately, Cassian accidentally kills a cop harassing him in a scene paralleling the harassment people of color face at the hands of real cops. He's left with a dilemma: will cops be honest when honesty reflects their abuse of power and absolves a disenfranchised person? Cassian answers no, prompting Syril Karn's pursuit, a storyline straight out of a cop show that would portray Syril as its hard-working, responsible, determined, bureaucracy-restrained protagonist. Syril's pursuit is foiled by corporate incompetence and Ferrix's communal solidarity in the face of the cops. But Cassian's no radical yet, and following his escape he works for someone who just so happens to be a committed revolutionary stealing money from an Imperial payroll. This storyline is straight out of a history book this time: showrunner

Gilroy explained the arc's inspiration was Stalin/Lenin's organization of a bank heist to fund the Russian revolution.[177] At the same time, the Imperial military replaces the corporate security force, serving the same role of law enforcement but with more men and better funding.

Spending time with Marx-like theorist Nemik has clearly changed Cassian, demonstrated when he immediately guns down a previous version of himself (Skeen) that would've stolen the Rebellion's funds, then accepts Nemik's manifesto. He's disturbed he would've once taken Skeen's deal but still isn't a committed revolutionary, choosing instead to vacation in space Florida after failing to convince his mother, who he inadvertently helped radicalize, to follow him. He's clearly not happy though, especially when he gets arrested and sentenced in a plot contrivance that actually mirrors the many arbitrary sentencings of real people of color.

The prison guards introduce him and us to a sci-fi imagination of the technological surveillance inmates experience as part of the prison panopticon. We watch him slave away building what is revealed to be military equipment while he tries to radicalize Kino Loy, the fellow prisoner-turned-slavemaster. He finally succeeds when Kino learns of the perpetual incarceration that parallels the high rates of recidivism of real punitive carceral systems, leading to Kino's iconic "never more than twelve." In death, elderly inmate Ulaf enables the prison break, not simply of the individual main characters but the entire prison collectively. This theme of collective rebellion continues to the season's end as Maarva briefly becomes the titular "Andor" in the show's last episode, calling for radical action against the Empire. Brasso takes this to heart, smacking a soldier over the head with Maarva's brick. But it's not just Brasso; Ferrix collectively rises up, and Cassian himself heeds

Maarva's call, eliciting Luthen's widest genuine smile by officially joining the Rebellion.

The prison abolition movement starts from most of the same facts depicted in *Andor*. Both understand how people end up in prison: the corporate control over life that forces people into extra-legal subsistence, the unevenly enforced "law and order" and the unfair sentencing that actually results in incarceration, and the by-design infinite carcerality that manifests in real life as passed-down[178] criminality. The movement seeks to fight the actual horrors of prison not by making conditions better or more equal but instead by abolishing prison entirely.[179]

Cassian's journey demonstrates the importance and horror of prison labor, which depends on policing to grow its labor force. For example, my American readers are probably familiar with the 13th Amendment, which prohibited slavery, "except as punishment for crime,"[180] reflecting the ways the institution of our "justice" system evolved from the institution of chattel slavery. This explicit exception allows a prison to reduce operating costs by using its slave labor force to administer itself,[181] as in *Andor*. A government-owned corporation called Unicor uses prison labor to produce (among other things) military equipment or missile components on contracts for Raytheon and the US Army.[182] I could go on but I trust you've got the point: prison labor is a special brand of inhumane and exploitative.

The show also highlights something crucial to abolition: prison, police, and military are not discrete and not exclusive to the state. All three branches in various countries buy from the same companies[183] and exchange tactics and information,[184] depending on each other for continued existence. And corporations trade force to and from each other and governments.[185] *Andor* highlights that on a basic level, it doesn't matter much to someone if the gun

in their face is state- or privately owned. Abolitionism isn't a public/private issue (in fact, 93% of US prisoners aren't held in private prisons[186]) or a uniquely American issue[187]; nationalizing our prison industry or banning private armed forces won't lead to meaningful change. Recent chants of "NYPD, KKK, IDF, they're all the same"[188] and stickers equating the KKK, IDF, and Atlanta Police Department (APD)[189] are real-life examples of this understanding of such blending and inter-dependence.

Obviously, some of what I've described isn't present in *Andor*. For example, it doesn't depict a prison-less utopia where robust welfare, paid for not by oil or centuries of good relations with the imperial West, makes crime unnecessary. But *Andor* presents the majority of the foundations of abolitionism, followed by calling for action against both prisons and the system they serve. Well-known radical Angela Davis, in her seminal work *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, describes "the ideological work the prison performs:" it lets neoliberals disengage with "the problems of our society… [it is] a black hole into which the detritus of contemporary capitalism is deposited."[190] *Andor* refuses to use prison as a mere setting where crooks go that our heroes, who are not crooks, rightfully escape. The show instead delves directly into the black hole and yanks the "detritus" from the Empire's grasp. And this is why I am calling *Andor* abolitionist media.

Hmm, can I just do that? Like, why not say *The Birth of a Nation* is anti-racist media? Well, bad-faith strawman I made up to transition my essay, the obvious answer is that *Andor* has many elements of abolitionism in it already, as I've explained. But it's true that I put my own spin on describing the show's events and drew from many other sources. Disney itself certainly isn't putting out supplemental material calling for real-life revolutionary action and connecting it to *Andor*, unless I've been missing out. And hey wait, didn't I mention

in one of my overly long footnotes that neoliberals "separate the art from the artist?" Isn't that basically what I'm doing? Does *Andor* get to be special simply by being that fucking good?

So I think a couple distinctions are necessary here: a distinction between "artist" and "owner" and one between "separate art from artist" and "death of the author," which are often used interchangeably. This is my last and perhaps most easily actionable point.

I won't summarize too heavily basic Marxist critique of alienated labor, but essentially Gilroy, Luna, etc. are the artists, while Disney, the faceless megacorporate pseudo-monopoly, is the owner of *Andor*/Star Wars. This is very much a hierarchical relationship that necessitates artistic compromise, either directly via studio feedback[191] or indirectly via mere studio existence guiding creative choices.[192] This means that while the artist is not the owner, the owner may be an artist to some degree. Also, it's likely Disney, not Gilroy, who would sue my ass if I told you to pirate *Andor*,[193] since the owner, not the artist, controls the intellectual property.

So in examining "owner" vs. "artist" I want to separate *Andor*'s proprietary and artistic existences, which means going against the neoliberal idea that consumer choice is the only choice we have, that all we can do is vote with our wallets. My positive review of the art is **not** also an endorsement of the product. I can (uh, theoretically) enjoy *Andor* while not giving Disney money.

The common rebuttal to piracy[194] is "don't creatives deserve to get paid?" In my ideal world, if monetary compensation existed at all it would be nearly irrelevant, but I recognize that's not where we live today. Artists can't eat fantasies of socialism. But Disney, the owner that would receive the vast majority of my payment to watch *Andor*, doesn't need to eat. It was in fact an active participant in trying to

starve out the very artists that do need to eat[195] (see Bagger's essay for a longer discussion of the most recent Hollywood strike). So paying Disney for *Andor* is at best unhelpful to its artists and at worst actively counterproductive. (If I could directly pay the creators, I would [and do, when possible!])

Now, onto the next distinction. Often, "separate the art from the artist" is a moral palliative justifying excessively unethical/unthinking consumption. It usually means "I like the art, so I'll buy the product. End of story." No thought is given to who or what you're funding, good or bad.

"Death of the author" is a more intentional, explicitly revolutionary separation of art from artist. It's relevant because we can't ignore Disney's creative influence on the show, even if we can avoid giving it money. "Death of the author" as a phrase comes from an essay by French philosopher Roland Barthes, and the subsequent conflation of the phrase with the consumptive absolution in the previous paragraph could be an interesting example of the death of the author. But Barthes's essay was not originally about excusing purchases: he writes of the "tyrannical cent[ering]" of the author in literature, which limits critique to mere discovery and explanation of authorial intent. He describes the refusal to assign ultimate (authorial) meaning to a text as "revolutionary," concluding his essay with "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author."[196]

And indeed I intend for my reading of *Andor* to be revolutionary. *Andor*'s abolitionism hasn't only been handed to me; I'm making it myself in the way I engage with the show and take the messaging I've gathered out into the world. In much the same way *Andor* centers the Star Wars story on the common people, the birth of the reader/death of the author centers meaning-making on the common people. Dead authors include Gilroy, Luna, etc., as much as Disney: I'm not trying to argue that Gilroy himself is an abolitionist, and it doesn't matter much (to be clear, I'm also not saying he's a capitalist shill). We, the audience, can draw abolitionist conclusions from *Andor* easily (more easily than most mainstream media) whether Disney, Gilroy, etc. want us to or not.

So I hope that as many Star Wars fans, and non-fans, as possible watch *Andor*. Then, let the leftism flow through you! Connect what you see on screen to what you see in the news, in the workplace, in the streets, in apartments. Abolition is not just a Marxist cause, it is a feminist, race, disability rights, education, environmental, anti-imperial, mental health, etc. issue. It isn't only about resisting prisons, it's about resisting neoliberal violence and coercion, its power and control. Get out there and join a tenant union, start a copwatch program, something even slightly transgressive. Hell, even sharing copyrighted media for free is a start! (No one in my college classes ever paid for a textbook.) Take Barthes's work a little further: we can't passively wait for the death of megacorporations as authors of our fictional and real stories, we must get out there and kill them together.

Endnotes

Introducing Andor Analysed, Part 1: The Roots of Rebellion in Star Wars

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Cheaper than droids and easier to replace: Work, Labour, Automation and Organisation in Star Wars Andor

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Why Does Andor Feel Different?

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It Has to be You

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[84] I use the term "accelerationist" here in a more general political sense, rather than towards a specific ideology. Accelerationism generally refers to a political theory that suggests that pushing certain processes, such as economic or technological developments, to their extreme limits will destabilise existing systems and lead to significant social changes or outcomes.

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The bizarre 2009 Swiss Minaret Referendum, proposing an amendment to the Swiss constitution that banned mosque minarets, passed with 31% of eligible voters. The rather unique, flawed nature of Swiss Direct Democracy gives primacy to these referendum results above all other institutions, and its federal judiciary has very limited powers. As such, attempts to repeal the law with the valid claim it violates freedom of religion have failed. Switzerland has stopped building minarets. See: Lorenz Langer, “Panacea or Pathetic Fallacy? The Swiss Ban on Minarets”, Vanderbilt Law Review, 43.4, (2010), pp. 863-951.

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A Tale of Miners and Prisoners: Class Composition and the Roots of Rebellion in Andor

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[169] Mark Fisher, Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative? (Winchester: Zer0 Books, 2022), p. 1.

[170] Andy McSmith, Ben Chu, and Richard Garner, "Margaret Thatcher's Legacy", Independent, 2013, independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/margaret-thatcher-s-legacy-spilt-milk-new-labour-and-the-big-bang-she-changed-everything-8564541.html

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[172] Labeling someone "neoliberal," like labeling Andor "Star Wars," is not really relevant. What matters is one's actions/the show's content. And just like the originals have neoliberal elements, while trying to fight the imperialist status quo, someone can do or think neoliberal and non-neoliberal things.

[173] "Neoliberal" is distinct from "apolitical" but the two are closely linked. Neoliberals are often apolitical or only aesthetically political in daily life. Imagine buying Harry Potter merchandise because they can "separate the art from the artist" (apolitical) while driving a hybrid Prius with an "I'm With Her" bumper sticker (aesthetically political).

[174] Max Miller, "Andor's Denise Gough Highlights The Complications Of Cheering For Her Character, Looper, 2022, looper.com/969670/andors-denise-gough-highlights-the-complications-of-cheering-for-her-character

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[177] Joshua Meyer, "The Real Life Robbery That Inspired Andor's Big Heist Storyline", SlashFilm, 2022, slashfilm.com/1097109/the-real-life-robbery-that-inspired-andors-big-heist-storyline

[178] Daniel P. Mears and Sonja E. Siennick, "Young Adult Outcomes and the Life-Course Penalties of Parental Incarceration", Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 53.1 (2015) pp. 3–35.

[179] This is not to say abolition is opposed to reform, just that reform is not the end goal. For example, Nordic prison (and welfare, which is how you actually reduce crime) systems are far better than the rest of the world, but even they still have a way to go. They also exist in the context of oil, NATO, etc.

[180] Constitution of the United States, "Thirteenth Amendment", Constitution of the United States, constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-13/

[181] ACLU, "Captive Labor", ACLU, 2022, aclu.org/publications/captive-labor-exploitation-incarcerated-workers

[182] Noah Shachtman, "Army Recruits Prisoners to Make Body Armor", Wired, 2011, wired.com/2011/03/prisoners-body-armor

[183] See Microsoft's Domain Awareness System for the NYPD, its "Offender 360" for prisons, and its Integrated Visual Augmentation System for the US military. Microsoft is only one example, in no way unique among tech companies or companies in general.

[184] See Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange and its connections to Cop City. Cop City is discussed in Belles's essay.

[185] Companies buying from states: banana company overthrows Guatemalan government using CIA. States buying from companies: CIA pays for mercenaries in Afghanistan. Companies buying from companies: Oil company hires mercenaries to protect Dakota Access Pipeline. And these are only American examples!

[186] Wendy Sawyer and Peter Wagner, "Mass Incarceration", Prison Policy Iniative, 2023, prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2023.html

[187] Although America in particular blurs lines between prison, police, and military with its jingoistic self-declaration as the world's police combined with its uniquely outsized defense budget. Its globally located military works internationally as its police work domestically: take flimsy excuses to wreak violent havoc at great financial and human expense and claim improvement, usually in service to the status quo. Its torture and illegal holding of prisoners of its "War on Terror," or its border patrols and immigrant detention centers, are more examples that tie the three together.

[188] Shannon Stapleton, "Hundreds of Pro-Palestinian protestors arrested after blocking NYC bridges, tunnel", AOL, 2024, aol.com/news/pro-palestinian-protesters-block-york-171009306.html

[189] Fergie Chambers, "From comrades back in Atlanta", X, 2024, x.com/jccfergie/status/1745548576896299459

[190] Angela Y. Davis, Are Prisons Obsolete? (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), p. 16.

[191] Originally Maarva said "fuck." Release the special edition "fuck" cut!

[192] Although Gilroy didn't feel much pressure, which is why the show fucks so hard.

[193] Which I would never endorse. Somehow these random links snuck in here though: uBlock Origin, MullvadVPN, qBitTorrent, and 1337x.to. DM me @py_writ if you've got questions.

[194] Note here I'm talking about pirating from large companies.

[195] Dominic Patten, "Hollywood Studios' WGA Strike Endgame Is To Let Writers Go Broke Before Resuming Talks In Fall", Deadline, 2023, deadline.com/2023/07/writers-strike-hollywood-studios-deal-fight-wga-actors-1235434335

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Previous Issue: *The Expanse Expanded*

Edited by Jamie Woodcock

This collection was the result of an open call for submissions aiming to discuss *The Expanse* from multiple angles and approaches. We have brought together a collection that reflects on both the series and books, as well as the roleplaying game. With contributions from Lauren Bender, John Bultena, Mary B. Smith, Horst Trenkwill-Eiser, Heather Clitheroe, Mark A. McCutcheon, Davide Mana, Grigor (John) Velkovsky, John Roselli, Marcin Stolarz, and edited by Jamie Woodcock.

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