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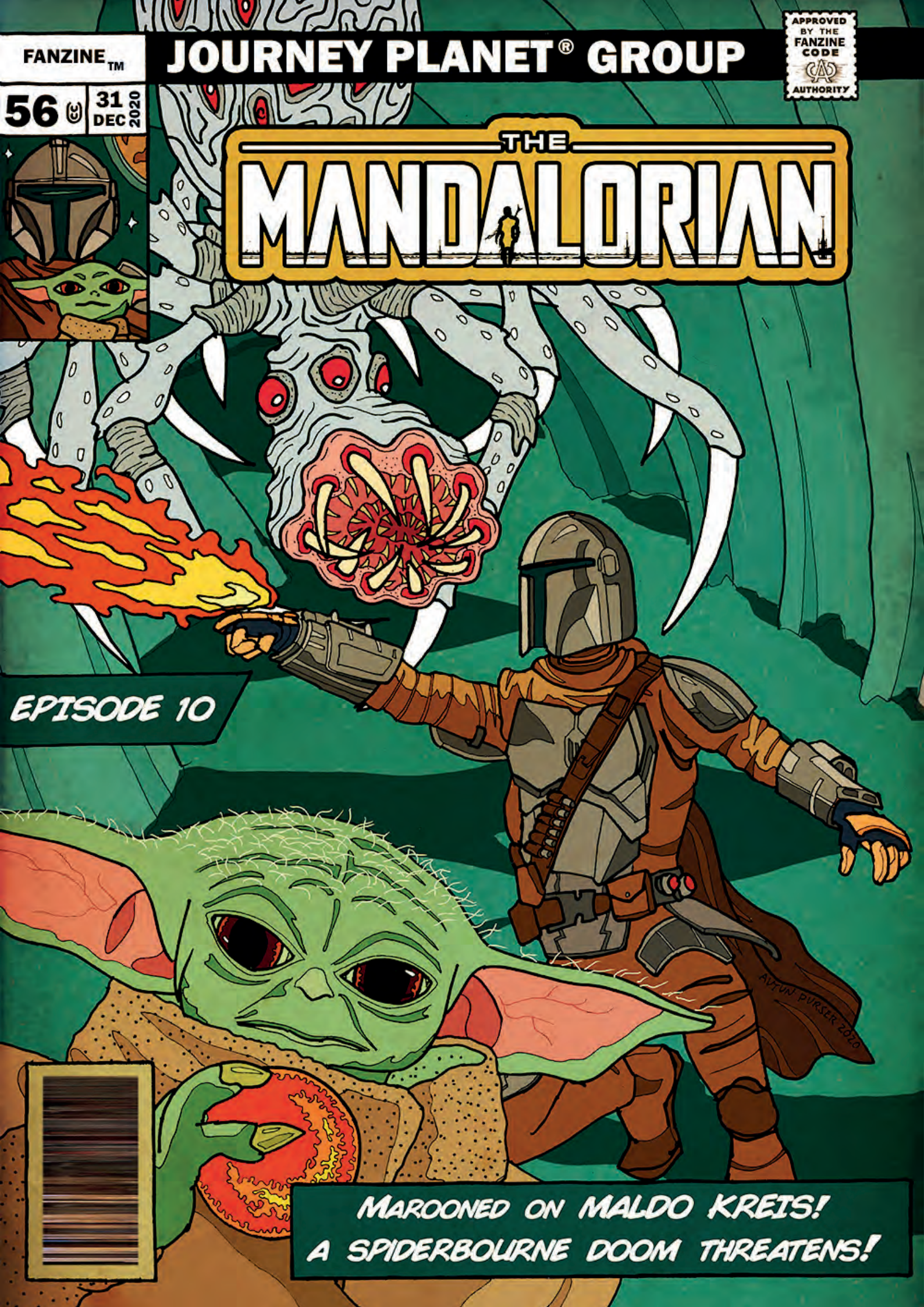
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THE MANDALORIAN

EPISODE 10

MAROONED ON MALDO KREIS!
A SPIDERBOURNE DOOM THREATENS!



Episode LVI

JOURNEY PLANET

ZINE! Journey Planet brings you a second STAR WARS issue as Christmas rages all around us.

We focus on the Star Wars universe after the Battle of Endor. We talk about THE MANDALORIAN, the SEQUEL TRILOGY, and we even mention STAR WARS RESISTANCE before moving swiftly on.

Kick back, grab a cup of DEWBACK SWEAT, and enjoy the SECOND Star Wars issue of JOURNEY PLANET....

**Edited by John Coxon, James Bacon,
Chris Garcia and Alissa McKersie**

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EDITORIAL

BY JOHN COXON

Hello everyone, and welcome to (possibly) the last issue of *Journey Planet* in 2020! I pitched the idea of an issue of *Journey Planet* focusing on the sequel trilogy to James and Chris at the Dublin Worldcon, and then Alissa suggested expanding it to cover *The Mandalorian*, and the result is the zine you hold in your hands! The ground work for this zine was laid earlier in 2020, with a spurt of effort here on 28 December bringing this to you before the end of the Twelve Days of Christmas.

Last time I wrote an editorial in a Star Wars issue of *Journey Planet* the new show, *Star Wars Resistance*, had just been announced, and I was super excited about it, and wrote a big long piece about the *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* novels by Michael A. Stackpole and Aaron Allston. Having watched Season 1; it was good, but it wasn't anything like the novels I'd grown up with, and that made me sad.

Of course, since then, we've had the comic issue in which the name Rogue Squadron is conceived, and it has been announced (alongside All The Star Wars TV Shows) that Patty Jenkins is directing a *Rogue Squadron* movie, so if you'd like to know more about my thoughts about that, you can go and read [my editorial in that previous issue of Journey Planet](#) for my current thoughts on the matter.

Moving to other parts of the Star Wars universe, I think I'm the only person in the world who likes all three of the sequel trilogy movies. My initial reaction to *The Force Awakens* was to go back to the cinema and see it about on about six more occasions¹ and to love the movie more every time. It isn't a lie to say that it completely rekindled my love of Star Wars, after a long period where I had mostly been a bit cool on the franchise.

The Last Jedi and I had a tumultuous relationship. My initial reaction to it was decidedly negative, but on repeat viewings I mellowed quite a lot towards it. I think knowing that the film is going to be a story about failure—and a downer ending—helps a lot with the enjoyment of the movie. Equally, having just read the novelisation of the movie, I do still have some issues

with it. It is, at its core, a film in which most of the issues that come up could have been solved if some of the characters were just better at communicating. And, while that's not an unrealistic thing to happen, it does make for incredibly frustrating viewing.

The Rise of Skywalker is another movie I have a frustrated relationship with. I think Abigail Nussbaum's review explores the flaws in that movie well, but in a footnote she notes that at least some of the flaws are caused by the relative lack of plot advancement in *The Last Jedi*. Some were also undoubtedly caused by the untimely death of Carrie Fisher; the question of how to give Leia a good send-off without actually filming one is a hard one to which I have no compelling answers.

There is much I dislike about *The Rise of Skywalker*. The Force Lightning that engulfs an entire planet. The fleet of Death Stars (because escalation is always great!). But there's also things I love about the movie, and they are in some ways the same things that I love about Abrams' turn with Star Trek: I think that Abrams gets the characters and the world so right, even beyond the plot beats that don't quite land. But of course, next time, Lucasfilm might want to plan the story in advance.

And then we come to *The Mandalorian*, which occupies a fair few of the pages in this zine. It's fair to say that I was lukewarm on the first season; the serial nature of the show has hugely appealed to many, but I found it frustrating that Din Djarin was relatively undynamic and there was no cast of recurring characters to play against him to soften that decision. (Obviously, I loved Grogu.) The last episodes made me reconsider that a little, as they brought back earlier characters and wove them together.

The second season properly started to tell a story, with characters that continued across a plot. The lack of continuity again somewhat frustrated me, but the end of Season 2 makes me hopeful that we'll see a larger cast going into future seasons.

And of course, there was That Ending.

¹ Thanks, Cineworld Unlimited!



EDITORIAL

BY ALISSA MCKERSIE

As a child of Star Wars, I grew up playing it in the backyard with friends. We played a myriad of characters from the Rebels to Ewoks...we made up our own stories. As it turns out, other kids did that too, and some of them grew up to be movie and show makers. I can honestly tell you, I went into the last several movies and *The Mandalorian* with hesitant hopefulness.

I didn't want to have my heart broken. I finally feel like these are the stories we've always wanted, like the journey we have been on (especially with Mando) has been one of lifelong adventure and imagination... from the eyes of someone who grew up playing Star Wars in their back yard with friends.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

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THE MANDALORIAN

BY JAMES MASON

Or “a franchise struck down that came back more powerful than I could have imagined”.

I’m going to start things by being kinda mean to the new sequels but not in a toxic fandom way. I still enjoyed them to a point and they’re technically impressive but after the promising start of *The Force Awakens* we can all admit that things didn’t turn out that great in terms of narrative. *The Last Jedi* took us to unexpected places for some beloved characters and that was brave and also interesting in that things were subverted. The last act of the trilogy then veered back to more conventional expectations but also in ways that narratively made little to no sense. If you need to scour sourcebooks or “Art of” books then your script for the movie isn’t well constructed. I went to see an IMAX marathon of the new trilogy on release and despite finishing up at 2am I wasn’t just tired from it being late, I was worn out from the rollercoaster of quality in Star Wars as a franchise. Then came this show on Disney+:

The Mandalorian.

A show about a bounty hunter set after the events of *Return of the Jedi*. Having a distinctly western vibe and introducing a character that had everyone hyped but ingeniously and very un-Disney-like was kept secret by them foregoing any merchandising until well after “Baby Yoda” took over Star Wars fandom’s mindshare.

The first season was more of a grand experiment in that it was very focused on *The Mandalorian* bounty hunter and his new quarry. And then forging a bond with The Child all the while delving lightly into the history of Mandalorians and their fabled armour that seems to be custom-designed to combat a certain “warrior sorcerer” called Jedi. Echoing *Lone Wolf and Cub* with a wild west frontier vibe. The show with its old school Star Wars vibe of lived in tech and odd alien characters proved to please the fans and in the case of a jaded fan of the series (hint, that’d be me) I started to enjoy watching what was going on in this far away galaxy that I once enjoyed long ago.

The eight episode first season proved to be the main draw to Disney’s ambitious streaming platform and a second season was greenlit and then Jon Favreau and his team of like-minded creators got to work.

From the very first episode the show went from having a few cool Easter eggs to dropping in some major reveals for characters that we likely mused about during drunken fan chats in the pub. It could’ve veered badly into fan service but in the pacing and plot of the show they were there for a decent enough reason. This show won’t be known for its twisty shocking plots but it’ll be remembered for hugely impressive action and visual flair. *The Mandalorian* has a pure cinema aesthetic that rivals its theatrical siblings.

Then came the second season.

Gone was the short story anthology vibe of its debut and suddenly we were getting more than knowing winks and nods to Star Wars mythos. In Season 1, a mere sound effect that maybe, possibly, could be Boba Fett was actually Boba Fett post-*Return of the Jedi*. But, not before they brilliantly feint, by having someone else wearing the armour, after buying it off some Jawas. Then as part of that little plot we get Boba Fett himself turn up to reclaim his father’s armour and when we do, boy oh boy do we see some *John Wick* levels of Boba Fett kicking ass.

Season 2 may also have been a bit more “fetch quest” in nature of moving the plot forward but each side mission/favour to get to the next stage took a new genre riff for each episode. The season premiere was more western and helping out the town from a creature threatening it. Then we got a more intense horror episode on an ice planet and very creepy spiders. The Mandalorian in his search for others of Mandalore then happens across Bo Katan (an important figure in Mandalore’s history) who then lets him know where to find a Jedi called Ahsoka Tano. Both characters from the animated shows and have massive implications for the series and Star Wars as a whole. Ahsoka’s episode, *The Jedi*, is pure Japanese samurai in style and utterly gorgeous in how it was shot and staged.

The sophomore season seemed to have been not so much a slump but a massively ambitious and confident endeavour. The scope widened considerably and so did the bringing in of more known and beloved characters from the original trilogy. If you thought Boba Fett turning up was ballsy, then seeing who makes an appearance in the season finale should melt your mind. Skirting very close to be validly called fan service but each appearance does make sense to the plot and is set up to appear in prior episodes. The plot may not be Christopher Nolan-esque in being intricately constructed but the foundations are solid and with reason.

The new trilogy suffered greatly from not having a real plan for what happened next. The characters weren't developed and some that were downright sidelined despite being set up to be more. The actors were all game and tried their damndest to help overcome the issues of plot and inconsistency but if the spine of the story isn't there then we are going to get a flimsy mess.

The Mandalorian kept the overall plot simple and then through some clever planning and placing of Easter eggs we got to see some genuinely delightful surprises that felt earned. I would disagree with anyone who'd say that Palpatine's return made any shred of sense from what was set up in the first two movies of the sequel trilogy. But when we get that reveal at the end of Season 2 of *The Mandalorian* it's a surprise that does make sense. It does pose the question of how they'll sync up to the future of the new movies but they've got plenty of time to address that.

And I'll be eagerly awaiting to see how they go make that journey. And seeing as Disney+ have greenlit and gone all in on serialised Star Wars we've plenty of shows to look forward to. Lets hope they show the same ambition and care that those behind *The Mandalorian* has shown us so far.



HALLOWEEN AS GATEWAY DRUG: THIS IS THE WAY

BY ANNE, BRIAN AND ROSIE GRAY

This is the story of how we came to make Rosie her own silver-and-purple-style Mandalorian costume at Grayhollow Manor.

Several months before quarantine and lockdowns, Brian had started following a few crafting channels on YouTube. Specifically, crafting for tabletop roleplaying games: how to make ruins, produce attractive “scatter” terrain, constructing inns with playable interiors and exteriors, and the like. YouTube’s algorithms must have had a field day incorporating this whole new genre, as all sorts of new videos started popping up in Brian’s recommendations.

About mid-May, the first cosplay construction video showed up, and for Brian, it hit that sweet spot of “this costume type interests me” crossed with “huh, I think I could do this” and “I bet this would make an awesome Halloween costume... for Rosie. Yep, totally for Rosie.” Which particularly algorithmically tempting presentation are we talking about? Why, Punished Props Academy’s “Let’s Make Foam Helmets! BOBA FETT & THE MANDALORIAN” hour-long walk-through on materials, shaping techniques, and how to appropriately finish and weather Mandalorian-style helmets. Worse yet, the channel creator (Bill Doran, who’s also written a few good introductory texts about creating cosplay elements) included a link to a free PDF with helmet designs for both Boba Fett and Mando. Brian filed this one away for later reference, once Rosie started talking about what to do for Halloween this year.

Fast forward about... oh, two months.

Maybe? Time is wibbly-wobbly in lockdown.

Rosie is shown the video, and exultantly declares that, yes, that is the costume she wants

for Halloween! How in the world do we make it? What materials can we use? And, most importantly, can we get it done in time? (Luckily, the video answers the first two questions in full. The third one... well, we’ll work on it.)

Had she seen the show? Yes! ...well, most of the first season, that is. She refused to watch the last two episodes out of a fondness for Kuiil. And what could we do? She had spoken. Despite some trouble handling tense moments that threatened the future survival of beloved characters, she still had a lot of enthusiasm about Mando.

Construction of the helmet began with printing out the paper pattern, cutting out and then taping the pieces together, and having Rosie try it on. Too big. Second paper prototype. Too small! Third paper prototype: Juuuust right. (Well. Close enough for New Republic work.) Time to switch to foam. Brian had learned that craft stores are now all-in when it comes to cosplay craft foam, so he was able to just go to the store and buy what he needed for construction, along with purple and silver spray paint and some fancy low-damage masking/painter’s tape. Also needed: EVA foam in two thicknesses (2 and 10 mm), contact cement with applicator brush, Plasti-Dip spray primer for foam (if you want the piece to last), a heat gun, a craft knife, and a variety of sandpapers.

The heat gun was used to help curve and shape the foam pieces. All pieces were labeled and cut per the pattern, shaped, then glued together (outside, to keep from getting silly on rubber cement fumes). Brian learned that sanding to final shape is best done after the Plasti-Dip primer is applied, to avoid simply shredding the foam. The helmet was then spray



painted silver, the tape was applied to mask the silver, and purple paint was applied on top of the silver to the front mask trim, center, and side pieces. The first attempt at the purple then had to be re-touched due to some dripping paint. Spray paint is like that.

Coming up on Halloween itself, reports were generally that trick-or-treating was canceled, but it slowly dawned on us that Rosie was determined to wear the costume *somewhere*; so we needed to come up with the rest of the costume! Anne dug through old college technical theater supplies and came up with a black turtleneck. Rosie added a black pair of pants and a purple hooded cloak that also once belonged to Anne, as well as a pair of black boots that they currently share. Is there a pattern here? Definitely. Some kids grow up really fast! Rosie is 5'1" and only 10 years old. She is already imagining being taller than her mom.

Then the main thing yet to go was a chest plate. At some point, the Gray Clan will return to complete Rosie's Mandalorian armor costume out of EVA foam (maybe once she stops growing for a while!). But this was not the year for that. So, with about a day to go before the neighborhood socially-distanced trick-or-treating was to commence, Brian grabbed the largest flat piece of cardboard we had, held it up to Rosie, and sketched out shapes for chest and back. With the ever-handy craft knife for carving, and liberal application of both masking tape and spray paint, a Mandalorian-esque facade was created. Hot glue attached some cardboard belt loops on the inside of the armor, and one of Rosie's belts sealed the deal.



We decided against going for the full dark visor insert, given the initial application for Halloween. We wanted Rosie to be able to see where she was going in our neighborhood, which has no street lights. For some arm shiny, Anne produced a silver-lined insulated lunch bag we could sacrifice, as well as some gray foamish fabric. Brian hot-glued together shoulder pauldrons from the fabric and attached them with straps made of inside-out lunch bag pieces.

Rosie reports that the best thing about the costume is that when you have it on you feel like you are a Mandalorian. She also reports the following about the comfort of the helmet: it is mostly comfortable, but could be improved with foam pads on the inside.

The most telling response was that of the other neighborhood kids running around. Shouts of "Is that THE Mandalorian!??!" were heard across several streets, bringing many of the boys running. "Who is that in there? That's cool!" Sadly, most of the local kids are still of the age where Girls Are Icky, so as soon as Rosie announced her presence, all interest was lost. But the initial reaction was so worth it. Almost as good were the adults who turned to Brian and asked how much it cost, then on finding out it was homemade, asked if he could show them how to make it.

And now the cosplay bug is firmly entrenched in the Gray Clan. Thanks, Mando.



WHAT I WANT: A TIRED DAD AND HIS LITTLE GREEN BEAN

BY CAROL CONNOLLY

I quite like Star Wars. By many people's standards I would be considered a huge fan, having watched and read rather a lot of it, but I measure my affection for a story universe by how frustrated I get when it fails to reach its potential, and Star Wars' constant chaotic plot choices only made me roll my eyes rather than want to flip over a table. Until *The Mandalorian* came along. It was something new and exciting, and then it decided not to be that anymore, and I am trying to crush the urge to smash metaphorical plates.

The Mandalorian showed us it was something different 20 minutes into the pilot episode. It started with a classic Western setup; a lone hunter who cares for

nothing except getting paid and moving on to the next job. And 20 minutes into the show, it then showed us that wasn't true. The reason Din's armour and ship are so crappy, the reason he lives hand-to-mouth, is that he chooses to give money away to orphans. From the first episode Din is someone who cares, although initially he is one step removed from the people he is trying to support. The introduction of Grogu to his life means he must change how he cares. As well as providing financial support and physical protection, he must also learn how to provide emotional support to a young child who, we later learn, has been very scared for a very long time. We see Din change from staying mostly silent apart from the rare intimidating one-liner, to someone who holds long one-sided

conversations because that's what a toddler learning how to speak needs. We see him take chances on asking for help, because his child needs a community to thrive. We see him move from believing he acts exclusively as Grogu's bodyguard, to realising that Grogu views him as his parent. And with the end of season two, that story progression is gone.

Parallel with this revolutionary take on male rolemodels, it was clear throughout season two that showrunners Jon Favreau and Dave Filoni also wanted to tell a different set of stories, ones that tied *The Mandalorian* into plotlines from previous Star Wars stories. I can see how that decision has made some dedicated Star Wars fans very happy, but not me. It looks to me that Favreau and Filoni are bored with intertwining Din's story with Grogu's, and would rather move on to the easier territory of people shouting at each other about power and symbols. And that is not something that interests me. I've seen it over and over again, and I am bored by it. I was enjoying a show about people trying very hard to be kind. And now that show is over, and that makes me sad.





THE LAST JEDI: STAR WARS GROWS UP

BY WARREN FREY

Star Wars has always been about family, but for one brief moment it was about more.

Aging Gen-X types such as myself revere the original trilogy, despite its many flaws. Though that same age group derided the prequel trilogy, an entire generation grew up on those films and hold them in a special place in their hearts. The sequel trilogy aims straight for nostalgia and mostly succeeds in bringing back that feeling of Star Wars while introducing a whole new and excellent cast alongside our old favorites.

But only one film actually dares to do something different.

For all the bad acting and pointless eye candy, the prequels do competently flesh out how a democratic republic tumbles into despotism. They're weirdly prescient of our present day troubles, as a grotesque figure spins obvious lies with the help of a foreign power and somehow suckers the galaxy into going along with him.

All well and good, but the prequels ultimately run through a scenario we can't help but know the conclusion to: evil triumphs, but hope remains. How they get there is somewhat interesting but it's also a foregone conclusion.

The Last Jedi doesn't do any of that. What *Jedi* does is take your expectations, chuck most of them into space and make you look at things differently. It makes you think, and that's why it's one of my favorite Star Wars films.

Consider Luke, whose characterization in the film was a lightning rod of controversy for the mom's basement complaint brigade filling the internet with bile and anger. Luke isn't portrayed as the mighty hero they suppose he should be but as a flawed old man filled with regret.

This was absolutely the correct path for him to take.

As a child, Luke was always my favorite character. While Han Solo is the obvious mix of cynicism, dashing good looks and violence, Luke always felt more real to me. It didn't hurt that I grew up in a nothing ever happens backwater city on the Canadian prairies, which is like living on Tatooine but with snow instead of sand and trucks instead of cool space vehicles.

Luke is whiny and immature in the original trilogy but what he has that Han lacks is an arc. He goes from petulant farm boy to galactic saviour and finds out his father is Space Hitler only to redeem him and defeat the Emperor.

A sizeable group of nerds thought this is where Luke's story should stay once he appeared in *The Last Jedi*. They wanted the hero they grew up with, unchanging and ready for battle.

I was the exact opposite. The moment Luke received his lightsaber from Rey and tossed it to one side with a look of disinterest, I was hooked.

I wanted to see what this film would do with Luke and I wasn't disappointed. Instead of having the saviour of the galaxy go through the motions or happily train Rey in the ways of the Force, we meet a depressed man consumed with his failure and waiting to die on an island with only porgs and frog nuns for company.

Luke does eventually go through a redemption arc and saves the galaxy, but the mere idea of Luke experiencing failure enraged internet manbabies to the point of hysteria. How could their hero get anything wrong?

I'll tell you how: time. As someone who saw *A New Hope* at the age of six in a theatre in 1977 and *The Last Jedi* at 46, Luke's story rang true to me in ways nothing has in a Star Wars film for decades. Anyone who gets near the half-century mark will experience triumphs and failures, but more importantly they'll see their perspective shift in way their younger selves couldn't possibly predict.

In short, most people grow up. And for once, a Star Wars film did the same thing.

Luke's not the only character to face hard choices, Rey has to figure out who she is and how she relates to the Force, Finn has to find his place amongst his fellow Rebels, and new (and excellent) addition Rose Tico plants her flag as someone to watch, despite Rise of Skywalker's best efforts to sideline her.



Besides character, *The Last Jedi* isn't afraid to just go for it with story. I like *The Force Awakens* and *The Rise of Skywalker*, but at their heart they rely more on calling back to the previous films than to telling us something new. *The Last Jedi* does the opposite, tossing much of the previous film in the air and giving us the potential at least for interesting new paths to follow as we watch Rey's journey of self-discovery.

Not only does Rey find out her parents were nobodies, she also forges a bond with Kylo Ren unlike anything seen in previous films and makes us question where exactly her destiny lies. Will she turn to the Dark Side? Should she? Can she make Kylo learn the error of his ways before it's too late? I was on the edge of my seat wanting to see what they'd do next as Snoke died and his throne room exploded in violence. For the first time in a long time I had no idea where Star Wars was going and I LIKED it.

Of course, *The Rise of Skywalker* jettisoned all that and decided that Snoke was a clone, Rey was a Palpatine, the Emperor was back for some reason and screw complexity, let's see a space battle. Chewie got his medal, so it wasn't a total loss?

With the Star Wars film franchise resting after a global pandemic essentially destroyed going to the movies, it's up to the small screen to deliver more complexity in a universe in dire need of something more than a multi-trilogy family affair. *The Mandalorian* isn't quite that; it's more of a simple story stripped down to original trilogy essentials but with Peak TV-knowhow thrown into the mix. Let's hope as Disney+ and Lucasfilm explore this new medium they again find the gumption to try something new and take risks so we can still love Star Wars for what it is, not what it once was.

THE RISE OF SKYWALKER

BY ABIGAIL NUSSBAUM

One interesting aspect of our current era of cinematic universes and mega-franchises is that the stories behind the scenes often feel more interesting, and more dramatic, than the ones on screen. I like most MCU movies, but I'd pay a lot more than a movie ticket's price to know the answers to questions such as why Patty Jenkins was fired from *Thor: The Dark World*, or what the creative differences were that led to Ava DuVernay leaving *Black Panther*. And when it comes to Star Wars in the Disney era, these questions feel even more urgent, because the decisions being made are so much more baffling. Is it really possible that one of the hottest IPs of the century, the potential cornerstone of an empire of spin-offs and merchandising opportunities, was written in a method not unlike the party game where everyone writes a sentence in a story, folds the page down, and then hands it to the next person? I'd give a lot for a record of what went on in the meetings where the shape of Disney's Star Wars movies—and particularly the sequel trilogy—was decided on. And frankly, I think such a record would be a great deal more illuminating, not to mention entertaining, than *The Rise of Skywalker*.

From a distance of thirty thousand feet, you could make an argument for how Disney handled the new Star Wars trilogy. Let J.J. Abrams, elevated fanboy extraordinaire, bring the series back to life, combining his obsessive fannishness with his unerring eye for casting and genuine interest in depicting complex, winning female heroes, and thus take the franchise into the twenty-first century without losing sight of what it was. Then bring in Rian Johnson, who has never met a genre convention he didn't immediately want to examine and dismantle, to take the whole thing forward, establishing new parameters for what Star Wars can and should be. Finally, bring Abrams back to soothe fans' hurt feelings and give them the triumphant ending a Star Wars story ultimately needs¹.

Move closer in, however, and the problems with this approach become clearer. Someone should perhaps have remembered what happens when you give Abrams a second crack at a beloved science fiction

¹ Though of course, this was not the original plan. *Rise* was supposed to have been directed by Colin Trevorrow, who as far as I know has yet to establish an identity as a director, and who is still credited on the film's story.

franchise, how his worst fanboy tendencies, his desire to write to the audience rather than the characters, have a history of overwhelming anything resembling coherent or compelling storytelling. Someone should also have remembered that he's a great guy for setup, but simply a disaster at paying it off. Not that Abrams shoulders all the blame here, of course. *The Last Jedi* gets better and richer the longer it has lingered in my mind, but it must be acknowledged that it moves the overall plot of the sequel trilogy not even an inch, and in fact dismantles some of the scaffolding built by *The Force Awakens*, which Abrams was presumably relying on to finish the story. I say again: it is simply bonkers that writers working on different chapters in the same story were allowed to do this to one another. There's been far too much vitriol directed at Kathleen Kennedy, much of it clearly misogynistic, over her stewardship of the franchise under Disney, but it has to be acknowledged that many of her decisions in that capacity have been simply inexplicable.

Not least among those decisions—and another question I would dearly love to have answered is whether it's Kennedy or Abrams who is more at fault here, though ultimately they both shoulder the blame—is how *The Rise of Skywalker* scurries away from nearly all the interesting, progressive choices made by *The Last Jedi*, kowtowing to the hysterical baying of violent, racist so-called fans. These are the people who drove Kelly Marie Tran off social media because they hated Rose so much—for daring to be a woman of color in “their” Star Wars movie. So *The Rise of Skywalker* sidelines Rose in a way that feels openly contemptuous not only of the character, but of the people to whom she meant so much. A main character in *The Last Jedi*, she gets a measly 76 seconds of screentime in *Rise*, and only one character interaction that could conceivably be called meaningful². Along the same lines, fans who have spent the last four years caterwauling about how “unrealistic” it was for Rey to defeat Kylo Ren in lightsaber combat have

² Anyone hoping for friendship between Rey and Rose in this movie will be sorely disappointed. *Rise* isn't quite a Bechdel fail, because Rey develops a bond with Leia, who becomes her Jedi master. But these scenes are limited to leftover lines recorded by Carrie Fisher for *The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi* before her death, and the resulting interactions are thus stilted and strained. And Leia's death means that Rey ends the movie with no female relationships.

gotten their reward in a duel in which he thoroughly trounces her. Even the fact that everyone keeps calling Kylo “Ren”—which is the equivalent of calling Darth Vader “Darth”—feels like a capitulation to an inattentive yet outraged fandom’s inability to grasp that Ren is a title, not a name.

But the more glaring walkbacks in *Rise* cut to the very heart of what *The Last Jedi* was trying to do with Star Wars, and how it was trying to take it forward. Johnson purposefully made Rey the daughter of nobodies, rebelling against the franchise’s obsession with dynasties and with making every Force user the progeny (or ancestor) of another major character. *Rise*, through an incredibly tortured bit of sophistry, not only reveals that she is actually the granddaughter of Emperor Palpatine (whose return as the new trilogy’s ultimate villain was presumably imposed by Jedi’s disinterested killing-off of Supreme Leader Snoke), but that she and Kylo Ren are a “Force dyad” (and that Luke and Leia were one as well), thus cementing the franchise’s preoccupation with a single, convoluted family tree. The fact that Rey adopts the surname “Skywalker” at the film’s end is presumably intended as a wholesome, uplifting moment, but given everything that comes before it—including a kiss between her and Kylo—it also feels more than a bit incestuous.

The Last Jedi seemed to close the book on the matter of Kylo Ren’s capacity for redemption by having him make the active choice to embrace evil and a lust for power, even after Rey helps him free himself from the malign influence of Snoke. But *Rise* not only gives him a second bite at the apple—along the way revealing that Leia, who in *Jedi* pronounced her son “lost”, was always planning to make one last stab at saving him—it completely rewrites his character. In the film’s final scenes, the person on screen is not a repentant Kylo Ren trying to make amends for his many horrific crimes—which include, I will remind you, mass-murder, genocide, and the enslavement of children; I mention this because both the films and the fandom like to pretend that the worst thing Kylo has ever done is kill his father, when really it barely even scratches the top one hundred. Instead, it is Ben Solo that we’re watching, and the film works hard to make him seem human and down to earth—pulling a Han Solo-ish face when he realizes how outnumbered he is as he rushes to Rey’s rescue, breaking out in a relieved smile when she kisses him. It’s notable, though, that he gets virtually no dialogue in these scenes, as if speaking would break the spell and remind us who this character is and what he’s done. And then he dies—which, to be

fair, I find more satisfying than the alternative, but is also clearly a copout, a way of trying to appease Kylo’s haters as well as his fans.

Still, if you pull back from the disappointment of how *Rise* refuses all the interesting avenues offered it by *Jedi*, there’s something fitting about the whole affair. It’s easy to miss this, because *Rise* is such a busy, over-stuffed movie³, following Rey, Finn, Poe, and Kylo as they criss-cross the galaxy in search of various plot tokens that will lead them to Palpatine’s hideout, where he has amassed a vast fleet armed with planet-killing weapons that will permanently shift the tide of war against the rebellion. But just as he recapitulated *A New Hope* when he made *The Force Awakens*, Abrams follows the general contours of *Return of the Jedi* with this movie. So we have Palpatine as an ultimate villain, a visit to Endor⁴, and a plot that hinges on the unconvincing, last-minute redemption of a dyed-in-the-wool villain and a lot of Force woo-woo. It completes a familiar template: one film that is frothy and fun and raises expectations of a great ride ahead; one film that is darker and more cerebral and makes you think the entire enterprise might actually be saying something as well as being fun to watch; and one film that squanders all that promise by trying to repeat the lighter first chapter, and only succeeds in delivering a mish-mash of tones and an ending that feels cobbled-together and unearned. If you didn’t know better, you’d think Kennedy and Disney had planned it like this from the beginning.

And the truth is, in some respects Abrams outdoes Lucas. This is chiefly down to the fact that Daisy Ridley is an infinitely better actor than Mark Hamill. In her performance as Rey, Ridley is playing essentially the same combination of good-hearted naiveté and reflexive heroism as Hamill’s Luke. But she never fails to find greater depth, and interesting little notes, in her version of the character. Her Rey is matter-of-fact and self-contained, but also vulnerable and querulous and angry. Throughout the film there are moments—when she verbally spars with Poe after he brings the Millennium Falcon back to the resistance base battered; when she sadly but firmly informs Leia that though she wants her blessing to halt her Jedi training and go off in pursuit of Palpatine, she will do it either way; when she shrieks in horror at having seemingly

³ Again, this is partly Johnson’s fault for doing so little heavy lifting on the plot front.

⁴ Though only the briefest glimpse of ewoks, which seems positively cowardly, yet another capitulation to the tastes of fans who are still, thirty-six years later, terrified that someone might think that they enjoy kid stuff.



caused Chewie's death with her Force powers—where Ridley's choices take what should have been trite, over-familiar beats and make them feel human and specific to her character.

Most importantly, Ridley can believably convey anger and darkness. When *The Rise of Skywalker* tells us that Rey's anger at Kylo and Palpatine is putting her in genuine moral peril, it's convincing in a way that it never was for Luke, because Luke never actually seemed that angry at Vader or the Emperor, no matter how much they hurt him or his friends. In the film's climactic scene, Rey attacks Kylo, driven by anger into an undisciplined barrage which he quickly turns to his advantage. She is saved by Leia reaching out to her son in the last minute, staying his hand by reminding him of who he used to be. In that moment, Rey takes advantage of Kylo's distraction and fatally stabs him. There's a part of me that still thinks Kylo's story should have ended there—if nothing else, it would have been wonderfully cathartic for a character to whom the films keep offering second chances he doesn't deserve to think that he's been given another one, only for it to turn out to be a trick by two women who have had all they can stand of his bullshit. But at the same time, Ridley makes it clear that in killing Kylo, Rey has crossed a moral event horizon that she may not be able to live with. When she chooses to save him (through a Force-healing technique that the film introduces a scene or two earlier), it's annoying, but also feels earned—a genuine moral choice that Rey

has to make if she's to remain true to who she is and what she wants to be—in a way that Luke's refusal to kill Vader never did.

By the same token, *Rise* edges a little closer to selling Kylo's "redemption" than *Return* ever did with Vader. Not all the way, to be clear—as I've said, the film has to ignore most of Kylo's sins, and rewrite his personality, for the idea to even come close to seeming plausible (it also trots out Harrison Ford as a Force ghost to offer Kylo unearned absolution, and opine—against all available evidence—that he is strong enough to shoulder the burden of fighting Palpatine). But when Rey saves Kylo's life, it's an act of unearned compassion and greatness of spirit that feels like the sort of thing that might shake an entitled person out of their whiny self-absorption. That Kylo's shock over Rey's choice is what pushes him to renounce the dark side is much more convincing, and more moving, than the idea that Darth Vader is suddenly a good guy because he saved his own son's life.

In the end, though, it's all for nothing. Like *Return of the Jedi* before it, *The Rise of Skywalker* runs aground on the shoals of its fuzzy, poorly-defined conception of what the Force is, what the light and dark sides are, and what, in the end, good and evil are. As he did to Luke, Palpatine insists to Rey that by hating him and acting on that hatred, she is giving herself to the dark side, and that killing him will only cause her to become the new dark lord. The fact that in Rey's case this is emotionally convincing—again, Ridley is



great at conveying Rey's anger and how it edges her closer to darkness—doesn't make the catch-22 of it any less annoying. If you're going to insist that anger and violence in response to evil and injustice can only lead to evil themselves, you need to offer a counter-strategy that is not only convincing, but resonant and thematically satisfying. *Rise*, like *Return*, can only offer lawyerly quibbling, with a side of special-effects extravaganzas. By killing him, Palpatine explains, Rey will be making herself a vessel for the spirits of all the Sith lords who came before them. So Rey, instead, becomes a vessel for all the Jedi. How does she do this? What does it mean? The film doesn't tell us, presumably because it has no idea—it just sounded neat. And then Rey, with the force of the Jedi behind her, kills Palpatine anyway, which is now not a dark and morally corrupting act for... reasons, I suppose⁵.

It's a particular shame because, waiting in the wings, there was a character and a plotline that could have cracked this entire trilogy wide open, made it something special and new and taken the franchise forward, and which instead was completely squandered and ignored. I am talking, of course, of the one new thing *The Force Awakens* brought to the franchise, the idea that stormtroopers are brainwashed child soldiers, and that some of them might choose to rebel. Abrams himself did very little with this idea once he'd introduced it, and Rian Johnson, though obliquely

referencing Finn's past in a storyline that saw him embracing a global morality as well as a personal one, left the broader implications of stormtrooper rebellion untouched. Nevertheless, *The Rise of Skywalker* was perfectly positioned to take this idea forward. Rey can't kill Palpatine without giving in to the dark side? The rebellion can't hope to overcome the enormous fleet he's built? Then why not subvert the people without whom that fleet is so much space junk? Why not use Rey's powers, and Finn's intimate knowledge of the stormtrooper psyche, to reach out to people whom this series has always treated like canon-fodder, despite the fact that we now know they were kidnapped and enslaved? Isn't that the essence of what Rose tried to teach Finn in *The Last Jedi*—winning not by destroying what we hate, but by saving what we love? Wouldn't offering that as an answer to the dilemma Palpatine poses to Rey be infinitely more satisfying than some heretofore-unheard-of Force power?

There's the slightest hint that *Rise* might be moving in this direction when it introduces the character of Jannah (Naomi Ackie), herself a former stormtrooper who rebelled with her entire battalion⁶. But just like Finn, she is completely indifferent to the lives of the stormtroopers who are still under the First Order's sway, enthusiastically joining the rebellion's side in a final battle in which entire ships are destroyed.

⁵ Among other things, this is yet another reminder, after *Frozen II* last month, that a lot of people in Hollywood have watched *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, but none of them have figured out what made it such a great, satisfying story.

⁶ One wonders whether Abrams thinks that introducing Jannah makes up for the appalling misuse of Rose, as if women of color were interchangeable, and anyway there can only be one of them at any given time.

What's more, Jannah is the vector through which the film reveals that she, Finn, and all the other rebelling stormtroopers are Force-sensitive. Fans have been hoping for this revelation about Finn for a while, so at first glance it might seem like a way of elevating the character's importance. But upon further reflection, it's an idea that just gets more and more ugly. If only Force-sensitive stormtroopers are capable of rejecting the First Order's brainwashing, doesn't that make all the others inherently killable? Doesn't it negate the significance of Finn's moral choice? And is that, perhaps, the point? Fans—myself very much included—have been pointing out for a while the perversity of the films focusing on Kylo Ren's putative redemption in the same story in which another character, who was raised with none of the advantages and protections that Ben Solo enjoyed, simply chose—at great personal risk—not to hurt helpless people. But if Finn only

rebelled because the Force compelled him to (Jannah even says “it was like we didn't have a choice” when describing how her battalion refused to slaughter civilians), then he's not actually morally superior, just lucky. And, implicitly, Kylo can't be blamed for all the evil he committed, because he was being pulled to do evil by the Force, just as Finn was pulled to do good.

It's a sterile, offensive take on morality that overwrites what should have been the heart of these movies. But perhaps that choice was inevitable. There's no room for Kylo Ren, after all, in a story about Rey and Finn reaching out to the stormtroopers⁷. And the new Star

⁷ Remember, Kylo has been Supreme Leader since the end of *Jedi*, a period during which, we're told in *Rise*, the First Order has stepped up its campaign of child abductions. So far from being the person who could reach out to the stormtroopers, he's the ultimate cause of their suffering and dehumanization.



Wars movies—at least the ones created by Abrams—remain obsessed with dynasties. Hence this last one’s title, and the revelation of Rey’s ancestry, and her connection with Kylo, which also ties them both to Luke and Leia. A story about Rey using the Force to reach out to the faceless slaves who make up the First Order would have been a different sort of Star Wars—the kind I thought *The Last Jedi* was promising us. It

probably shouldn’t come as a surprise that Abrams and Disney, in their terror of alienating “fans” who can’t stand to see this series change and progress, turned away from that story, and gave us one with a hollow, corroded heart.

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WHAT IS A STAR WAR?

BY HAMISH WALKER

“Good artists copy; great artists steal.”

It’s hard to get away from the above quote when thinking about Star Wars. So much of its whole aesthetic is lifted from a huge range of cultural sources and then blended together. There is something in this cross pollination of imagery that makes it timeless. As the opening crawl says; long ago and faraway; a pop culture myth.

This sense of rearranged familiarity is part of the enduring appeal of the original trilogy. I also think the huge influence of Star Wars on the language of film led to several problems with the sequel trilogy.

The original trilogy lifts from the imagery of Westerns, WWII, Samurai and old adventure serials. The sequel trilogy is lifting from the imagery of Star Wars itself. The cinematic roots of Star Wars have all largely fallen out of favour in mainstream cinema.

So much of *The Force Awakens*, *The Last Jedi* and *The Rise of Skywalker* feels familiar because it is. It’s Star Wars. Just scaled up and far more frantic. I can think of no better example than in *The Rise of Skywalker* where Poe hyperspace skips through more planets than we go to in the whole of *A New Hope*. Each locale is so carefully crafted in the original trilogy, in part due to limitations of the era but also because it’s wasteful to just go places because you can. Nowadays its no effort to craft a world from pixels but that doesn’t mean those worlds feel real or matter to the audience.

There are certainly moments when it seems the sequel trilogy finds its way out of that Star Wars shadow and draws upon something beyond itself. *The Last Jedi*

certainly tries the most, from the opening bombing run on the Dreadnought to Canto Bight channelling every movie casino ever.

Of the Disney movies the one that has the most to say is easily *Rogue One*. I was immediately struck by the use of imagery relating to the Alliance. *Rogue One* is essentially the story of learning to fight for something rather than against something. Visually you can see this in the shorthand used on Jedha and Scarif. Saw Gerrera’s Alliance extremists on Jedha borrow visually from middle eastern insurgents. By the finale the Alliance soldiers are literally WWII GIs storming the beaches.

The Mandalorian understands completely. It is a shameless Western/Samurai mashup with that coat of Star Wars paint. *Lone Wolf and Cub* should file a lawsuit. But it also really cares about these worlds. We spend time on each planet. Much of that time is spent alone with Mando; the blank mask enhances that loneliness. Much like a real baby, The Child’s cute but unintelligible sounds only enhance our isolation.

The narratives of *The Mandalorian* aren’t particularly complicated. But it does add wrinkles to our understanding of the universe. From presenting the Sand People as more than just monstrous savages to the Alliance X-Wing pilots being presented as put-upon intergalactic beat cops, there’s a host of small enjoyments to be had in every episode. Yet all of these fit within our understanding of the Star Wars aesthetic.

It remains to be seen whether *The Mandalorian* can keep stealing from our shared visual heritage to remain fresh and endearing or if it will succumb to the Star Wars.

THE MANDALORIAN PANEL AT STAR WARS CELEBRATION 2019

BY JAMES BACON

I wanted to think about where *The Mandalorian* become tangibly real—more than just something on a screen, but real people bringing together something amazing. As I was lucky enough to get to Star Wars Celebration in 2019, I felt I should share my reportage.

Sitting amongst thousands of other fans, we all wanted to see what *The Mandalorian* was going to be about; what it was going to have to offer; and what footage we might get to see.

The music was Star Wars-style as Kathleen Kennedy, Jon Favreau and Dave Filoni came out onto the stage. Lightsabers were wielded, helmets hoisted high, and the place ignited in cheering and shouting. Kathleen introduced them, said she was excited and exited stage right.

Favreau and Filoni then started what was a very friendly double-act in a way, comfortable with each other, and poking occasional fun, and they spoke about how they met in 2007 when Dave was on the first season of *The Clone Wars* and Jon was mixing *Iron Man* “up at the Ranch”. Jon offered to do a voice; that day George had created a character called Pre Vizsla, and so they got together on that and became friends.

Jon said he had been working on this idea of what would happen when the Empire had fallen and the revolution was successful. Based on history things get messy, and so he wanted to see what would occur and how characters would survive chaos taking over. As he spoke, the audience was enraptured. Jon explained how he loved the cantina and the smugglers, and the scum and villainy. He loved that when he was growing up and now he found it a rich area of involvement. Dave felt this aspect was very unique and fun; and Jon came up with the idea of *The Mandalorian*. They worked on the armour, designed the helmet, and looked back to the roots that had inspired George and the old Westerns and Samurai films. They were

on the scale where it began, with different worlds very separate. Calling on when the Age of the Warrior was going to end, such as the end of the US Civil War.

They discussed the Holiday Special and the rifle that Boba Fett had. They wanted to bring in elements from every aspect and to somehow bring them all together: the original trilogy (Jon’s favourites); Dave’s love of the prequels; the sequels; the Clone Wars; and looking to bring back parts of Legends. At that, the audience went ballistic—it was amazing, and I was stunned. Reaching into the Expanded Universe!

Then they called out Pedro Pascal and put a photo of Mando on the big screen. Pedro took a photo of the audience and was enjoying this a lot; the venue was like a sports stadium going up high. Then they brought out Gina Carano, with her image on the screen in her shock trooper gear.

Finally they introduced “new actor” Carl Weathers. I shit you not, APOLLO CREED himself! And, at 70: lean, strong and fit, looking so good in a suit jacket with such broad shoulders. Everyone started chanting: Apollo! Apollo!

When Pedro was asked what the series was about, he pointed to images and said it was fantasy fulfilment to cheers. He was unsure what he was allowed to say, and so he described the character he plays—Din—as a mysterious lone gunfighter in the outer reaches of the galaxy. Some might say he is with a questionable moral character, in line with some of the best traditions of Westerns and Samurai. And he’s a badass.

Gina introduced Cara Dune, and she talked about being embraced by the Star Wars family. She said that Cara was an ex-rebel shock trooper—not what they fans were reading online—and because it was secret, she is having a bit of trouble reintegrating into society.



Carl loved the audience. He loved it. Cast as Greef Karga, he said it was amazingly exciting. Fans shouted out “we love you” and he called back “I love you too”. He described it as an incredible experience—a little insane, even. He said this group of fans was like something out of Star Wars!

Carl told us that Greef was running a group of bounty hunters, as the head of a guild. He has a lot of nefarious people (even if they are good people) working for him and he is looking for someone to go after a product that is very valuable to a client. He finds the Mandalorian, and he sends him out, and the Mandalorian does what needs to be done.

Then Jon introduced a piece of footage.

On the screen we saw Mando walking on a cold planet. A radar or locator beeping, wind whirling, different-sounding music (we got the recorder, and some

bass, but only a hint of it) as he walks into the bar. Then the Lucasfilm logo came up and we got clips from behind the scenes: Scout Troopers, Mando, Imperials, aliens, space bases, a wide-open Western-style town square. Pablo described Mando as something that harks to a medieval knight and noted that we all have our own armour. The reel was a mix of footage and behind the scenes commentary.

As they screening finished, the audience went wild. Dave and Jon spoke of how all the directors were fans of Star Wars, and how there was a lot in there for the fans who have been into Star Wars for 40 years. Jon said a lot of care and detail had gone into it.

They spoke of how they had a scene where they realised that they didn’t have enough stormtroopers. Then, they realised in the production meeting that they did not have enough stormtrooper costumes. But, Dave knew some people who dress as stormtroopers,



so they put a call out on a Thursday or Friday. The call didn't mention why, but people came. Up on the screen came 26 stormtroopers without helmets on with Mando and Dave and Jon. Jon was surprised that many of the 501's costumes were better than some of those filmed in the past. Because the stormtroopers did not know what it was for, they expected a hospital-ity event. They were both a test audience, and totally able to move like stormtroopers, and a lot of fun.

And right there and then, I was like...this is it. This is going to be awesome.

Carl Weathers said the drafted-in stormtroopers worked so hard, and he said he learned from the men and women who were fans. Dave pointed out that many fans yearn to own a screen-used piece, and as they left, they realised that all their armour that day was now screen-used.

They also talked about animatronics, puppetry, and the tech that was used at the beginning of the Star Wars saga. They named the ship, the Razor Crest, which he described as a reflective silver old army-surplus gunship. They wanted one for lighting reference (and Dave wanted one for his desk) and so they had a model made. They talked about doing a shot with the rig and the miniature: suddenly people started popping out of the woodwork asking about "a model". Then, more people would turn up enquiring. Then unexpected people were showing up, and all because it was a cool model. Jon Helms was building one in his garage and it was like a Star Wars club at school.

They showed some footage of various people working on the Razor Crest, including Doug Chiang designing. They showed kit bashing and pieces being 3D printed. John Goodson building it old-school, all in his garage. Hal Hickie researched all the previous Star Wars films, studying the flight paths and how the star fields worked. They showed the Razor Crest flying—it looked amazing—and talked about shooting it on a rig in the basement of ILM.

And yet there was more! They had some unprepared and unfinished—but good enough!—footage. Oh my goodness, it was just so good. They had Mando walk into a cantina and speak to Greef; he seems to be not getting very much for the bounties. We see him walk into a place: there are very rough, battle-scarred stormtroopers there, and there is Werner Herzog with an Imperial medallion. Crikey, it was very intense: it was dark and had that world-weary feeling. There was just the right amount of action, and it was incredible. It was not perfect from a film footage point of view, but it felt so good.

There was more snippets of script and then serious action. The Razor Crest flying, Mando and Cara fighting; The Client and Greef Karga; Moff Gideon; Dr. Pershing; Kuill; and flametroopers.

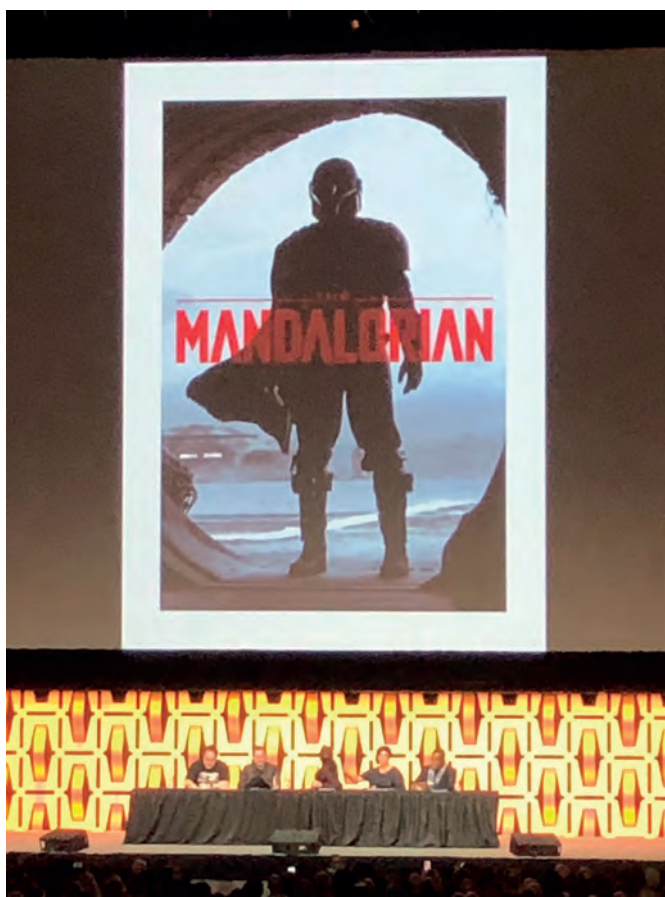
The Client is played by Werner Herzog. It seemed so amazing that this great director and screenwriter is in Star Wars. It all looked amazing and felt incredible.

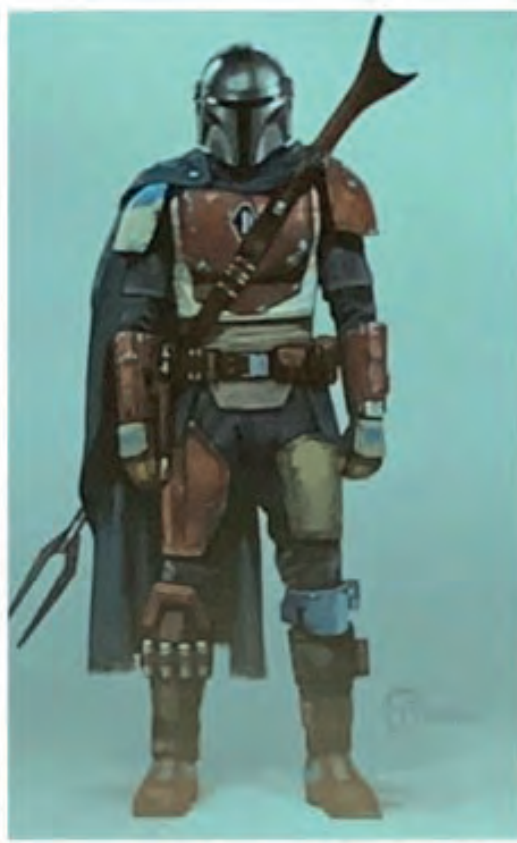
They had talked about where the Mandalorians were during the original trilogy and even the prequels, and they were colouring in the missing parts. Pedro asked Jon for things to watch and to take in to get a feel for the part; he was pointed at Sergio Leone and Akira Kurosawa.

Pedro said that the show was incredible for him. He was born in 1975 and he has a Star Wars imagination.

When he was called in for "Star Wars thing" he went in and saw Jon and Dave and they were surrounded by wall-to-wall images of the story of the series. He did not know what he was wanted to do... So it was a fabulous moment.

Everyone watching, and also those in the two other theatre spaces (where fans were crammed in and watching), got a poster of *The Mandalorian*. I was so excited, so pleased. So hopeful.





This was the same weekend as we saw the *Rise of Skywalker* trailer. Rey breathing heavy; Luke speaking; the TIE Whisper charging; the music building into a crescendo; Lando laughing, piloting the Millennium Falcon; a hand caressing a Battle of Yavin Medal; Rey and Leia hugging. Being told the Saga Comes to an End. People were falling apart, tears, cheers. Billy Dee Williams just stepped out on stage and loved the crowd, as we loved him and how he defended Lando... It was amazing to see him on stage.

This was the same weekend that every time Kelly Marie Tran went near a stage people started chanting her name: this was spontaneous. She walked out onto the Star Wars Celebration Stage for the Star Wars Show live with J.J. Abrams and after the cheering had died down, and they took their seats, the crowd just started chanting her name and punching the air. J.J. put his hand on her shoulder and she stood up to acknowledge and just take it in; there were a lot of people here.

The love for Kelly was only matched by the love for Ahmed Best, who played Jar Jar Binks. So many fans were there who grew up on those prequels and were showing their love. The 20th anniversary of *The Phantom Menace* was so huge. Hearing the laugh of Emperor, followed by Ian McDiarmid coming on stage... There was a lot to compete with.

It was a hugely positive and amazing time. In it all, I just thought—wow—Mando was so good-looking and we hadn't seen anything yet.

Looking back, there were also fans I really like, who commentate on YouTube. Alex and Millie from Star Wars Explained weren't sure about *The Mandalorian*, and the guys from Fanta Tracks were all hyped. It was interesting to see so many opinions and thoughts and guesses. The footage shown was not yet ready, and indeed, you won't find it anywhere now.

That is where we are now, all over again. We have had a massive reveal with the Child, and we have gone through two seasons of a journey with Din and getting Grogu to a safe place. What next? Well it could be more about Mandalorian history with the Darksaber. But what about Thrawn? There is so much to draw upon.

Just as it was last year in April, I cannot wait for next year, and the third season of Mando. I want to see where it goes, what new surprises will be in store. I doubt anyone can predict what will happen with the Child, and when we will see him again.

So now, some 20 months and 16 episodes later, we are all enraptured by *The Mandalorian* in one way or another (or not at all). I do have a number of great friends who have yet to watch it—and that is cool—but they understand my appreciation of it. Dave and Jon did good. They had a lot of help: Rick Famuyiwa, Deborah Chow, Bryce Dallas Howard, Christopher Yost, Taika Waititi, Peyton Reed, Carl Weathers and Robert Rodriguez all had a part to play, as did so many others, but they did pretty damn good.



DARK EMPIRE: THE ORIGINAL NEW TRILOGY

BY DAVID FERGUSON

Long before we saw the new trilogy, and even before we saw the prequel trilogy, there was *Dark Empire*. One of the first Dark Horse Star Wars adaptations, it was considered canon until the Disney acquisition in 2012 and Lucas Films' announcement, in April 2014, that it wasn't and was now under a new "Legends" banner. *Dark Empire I* was a six issue mini-series that hit stands in 1991 and 1992, with *Dark Empire II*, another six issue mini-series arriving in 1994 and 1995, and *Empire's End*, a two issue series, arriving in 1995. Along with arriving before the cinematic version, it is also set earlier in Star Wars chronology, being set just 10 years after the events of the *Return of the Jedi* (*The Force Awakens* is 30 years). The advantage of the comics over film is that there is no special effects budget and the "actors" can be whatever age you choose. Another advantage, at least in this case, is that there is a consistent vision as writer Tom Veitch writes all three volumes. Legendary artist Cam Kennedy draws two volumes with Jim Baikie's art on *Empire's End*, with a style not a million parsecs from Kennedy's. I'll say before I get to plot specifics, I am going to give some of the larger plot points without going into the nitty-gritty, as I'm hoping that this piece gets some people to read the books and I want to leave them with some surprises.

Dark Empire I is largely about the return of the dark forces. Through great struggle the rebel alliance has formed a New Republic but the now the remnants of the Empire have returned and are reclaimed the majority of worlds (similar to *The Force Awakens* except *Dark Empire I* explicitly connects the opposing force to the original Empire and the Emperor almost immediately). On Coruscant (the former Imperial Center), Han Solo, Leia, Chewbacca and C-3PO arrive in the Millennium Falcon to try and rescue Luke and Lando who are holding out against Imperial Forces. They learn that Luke has disappeared, having sensed that the Dark Side is still strong in the former Imperial strong hold. Luke is shocked to discover that the Emperor lives. The circumstances of Palpatine's return in *The Rise Of Skywalker* is seen as a nod to this. The methods of his return are not specifically mentioned in the movie but are covered in the novelisation and are similar. His plans for Rey are also

somewhat similar to his plans in *Dark Empire*. The comic version of the story also makes it clearer that Leia is strong with the force as she meets another Jedi called Vima who senses as much (plus more I won't go into). She still has children with Han Solo, though none of them are called Ben, and it also makes it clear that they are married. It also adds to the back story of Han, who has a run in with someone familiar to us all. We see more about others like Admiral Ackbar as well, as his people and planet are one of the first targets of the Empire. The story focuses on existing characters as opposed to a new generation. Cam Kennedy's art is wonderful here as he captures all the technology and character of the original trilogy. His art merges the gritty art of war comics with a knack for design. There is a simple feel to his work that makes it feel grounded. Writer Tom Veitch's dialogue feels like a continuation of the old too. It is great set up for overall trilogy of series. I felt *The Force Awakens* was the strongest of the new cinematic trilogy and I think the same could be said for *Dark Empire I* and this trilogy.

Dark Empire II covers Luke's quest to restore the Jedi Knights, something that is covered in the cinematic trilogy in conversation and flashbacks but here it is actually shown. The rebels want to press the advantage against the Empire and attack the Emperor's base despite Luke advising them to build up their forces first. Mon Mothma asks Luke to focus on the restoration of the Jedi Order instead. He takes a former Dark Jedi (servants of the Emperor with force abilities), Kam Solusar, with him to Ossus, a former Jedi-populated world destroyed by the Sith. There they find a tribe of force sensitives and end up discovering more about the Jedi. Leia has a quest of her own as she seeks out the Jedi Vima and Han Solo, with the bounty on him increased and Leia again, finds himself with more bounty hunter problems. The Empire has also built yet another super weapon, which I find somewhat similar to the cinematic version (although in this case, I find the cinematic one to be a more impressive concept). This is another strong series. The creative team continues where they left off and Cam Kennedy gets to draw some more iconic stuff. I think this volume is just as strong as volume one and really adds to the Jedi mythology.

Empire's End is probably the weakest of the three series. With only two issues, it doesn't have to space to breathe that the others have and I don't quite enjoy Jim Baikie's art as much as Cam Kennedy's. That isn't a slight on Jim Baikie as Cam Kennedy is a tough act to follow. All that being said, it is a good conclusion for the story and shows a story that consistently builds from the beginning of the trilogy. (I found inconsistency to be a weakness of the cinematic trilogy). *Empire's End's* story mostly covers the Emperor's attempt to obtain Han & Leia's child as the dark

side forces ravage his body, the Emperor's attempts at staving off death being an ongoing theme of the trilogy. *Dark Empire* appears on a number of top ten lists related to the Expanded Universe and is probably the series I'd recommend first to fans of the original trilogy. Cam Kennedy's art is wonderful and the Tom Veitch expands the characters, and the universe, in believable directions. It also leaves you wanting more. Check it out. Try *Crimson Empire* after if you want more!

THE DE-CANONIZATION ACT OF 2014 BY CHRIS GARCIA

Or "as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced".

There was a time when Star Wars was broader than you could possibly imagine. There were families, there were deaths, there were births, and there were Jedi. These things existed in books, video games, comics, audio dramas, toys, and most importantly, in the hearts of Star Wars fans. It didn't quite entirely mesh, but it also didn't fly off like Vader's tie-fighter either. There were dead-ends and grand avenues, but they were all amazing.

The beginning was a short story in a Marvel anthology comic: *Pizzazz*. Writer by Archie Goodwin and Roy Thomas, and pencilled by Hall of Famer Howard Chaykin, it was a story that took place after the Battle of Yavin. Luke and Leia head to Yavin 4 to deal with an Empire flare-up. It was a really good little story, and one that was one of the earliest to explore the extent of the Star Wars universe.

Then, there was *Splinter in the Mind's Eye*.

Okay, okay, I don't like Alan Dean Foster's writing. He's an okay dude, but really, most of his work ain't for me. This, on the other hand, absolutely is my bag, baby. It's a great story, apparently based around Foster getting a look at early versions of the original movie's script. There's Darth Vader, Luke and Leia on an adventure, a mud wrestling scene, and most importantly, Darth losing an arm.

Splinter was quickly made non-canon, but it never went away. Like *The Star Wars Holiday Special*, it was just ignored for ages. I'm sure that would have worked fine for decades, until Disney got involved.

If you're a nerd born in the mid-1970s, you probably remember the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*. I never played it, but you better believe that I owned and read the hell out of it. There was some material out there

when they released it in 1987. They basically coalesced everything that had been published and put to screen at the time so they could create a more full universe. This was the turning point, because everyone started to realise that this was a major expansive world, and that there was money in mining it. After that, Lucasfilm really started their program of expanded material.

There were dozens of novels by some of the best writers in SF's orbit. There was Timothy Zahn who created so much great stuff. The Thrawn novels that he created really bumped everything into over-drive. They sold ridiculously well. Dark Horse bought the Star Wars license, stealing it out from under Marvel who had it since 1977, and they really dug in and put out a lot of great comics. Tom Veitch was great, at the absolute peak of his talents, and Cam Kennedy was really strong too. One of the best of all Star Wars comics.

For these stories, they had to create a new villainous crew, because they eventually had to defeat the Empire, right? The New Jedi Order worked to do that, and it was amazing. These were a series of novels that were so incredible, and ultimately they took a lot of risks. Most importantly, they killed off characters. Chewbacca was the one that got to the most readers. His death was... well, it's difficult to talk about even this many years later. They killed off Anakin Solo. They had explored the birth and lives of Leia and Han's family, and of Luke's family. This was a big deal, and it was a redefinition of the Star Wars Universe.

Then the prequels.

Basically, Lucas had said that no one could work in the pre-Star Wars stuff, and though there were a few drops here and there, he was creating the prequelverse, which more or less sucked.

There was so much material, and while it didn't always fit perfectly into the Universe, it was always of the spirit. There were so many things that they explored. The *Ewoks* TV series and movies and *Droids* cartoon. *The Clone Wars*, which I've heard described as the best Star Wars material not created for the big screen. The audio dramas like *Tales from the Mos Eisley Cantina* and *Rebel Mission to Ord Mantell* that were so great, and worth another listen. All of this stuff was clean and clear, and all the video games, including the amazing *Star Wars: Dark Forces*, happened to bring new depths to the entire Universe.

After a while, it became obvious that Lucasfilm needed to reign everything in. The Disney deal was huge, but more importantly, there was the need to make more movies. Lucasfilm launched the Star Wars Legends line, which was what all the re-prints of those books, comics, and everything else was considered a part of. The official canon was revised and everything that ended up on the screen, and everything after 2014 was automatically in that canon. Now, a few things aren't, exactly, and a few things from before then are seen as a part, but mostly, it was 2014 that saw the reorganization. Even Star Tours, the greatest ride ever based around a movie, was re-worked to fit in with the new officially-sanctioned universe.

The problem is, people have been creating secondary material, fanwork, within those Expanded Universe worlds. Short films like *Troops* come to mind, and those books like *Splinter in the Mind's Eye* and the original Thrawn novels, are amazing ways to get deeper into the Star Wars work. If you've never experienced *Shadow of the Empire*, go and do that! It's amazing.

What I miss the most is the material that goes a long ways away from the movies. *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Dawn of the Jedi* are super-cool, and they feel so much fresher than the stuff that was wedged in-between the movies, in the nooks and crannies. I love things like *Rogue Squadron* and *Lost Tribe of the Sith* which 100% feels like the cleanest of the work that is no longer considered canon.

This all brings me back to watching Episode III. I was watching and was hoping that they'd do something cool; I was hoping they'd kill off Yoda.

WHAT!?!?!?

Yes, I was hoping that they'd kill off Yoda and force us to reconsider the entire universe. That's what the Expanded Universe/Legends stuff did. We had to reconsider everything we'd experienced before in light of this new material. Read *Splinter in the Mind's Eye* today and what you're experiencing is a great story that uses the beautiful world, and perhaps it's a multi-verse idea. In many ways, this material is fanwork that happens to be professionally published, and like fanwork, I think the love comes through as much as the plot, characters, or settings. That's a major part of why I love the Legends stuff, and why I'm so bummed it's not official.

TEUTONIA TO TATOOINE (WITH TWO BULLETS)

BY GARY LLOYD

Post World War II in the Federal Republic of Germany a powerful urge for refreshed national identity manifested itself just as radically within artistic and cultural fields as it had in commerce, education, industry and politics. Artists in all disciplines explored fresh means and methods of expression with the hope of proclaiming a new, modern and forward-looking Germany freed from its recent past.

In the German film world revolutionary directors like Werner Herzog (who plays “The Client” in *The Mandalorian*), Wim Wenders, and Edgar Reitz pushed boundaries attempting to find new cinematic languages and looked to new literature, new poetry, fine art, performance art, contemporary dance, modern life and all kinds of brand new German music, from rock to experimental to orchestral, for inspiration - and for new forms of collaboration.

One particular group of musicians, from Cologne, drew considerable attention from film directors, a band who were a catalyst in the cultural shift in the country in the 1960s and 70s, a hybrid rock band with a very complex background, a band on a mission to find a new true rock and roll which had no roots in the blues and yet was somehow still distinctly German, a band that also aimed to thrive in the presence of other art forms. The band members included an ex-free jazz drummer who was an expert in drumming traditions from all across the world but who longed to find the beat again, a Japanese pre-punk wild-man, and two ex-students of pioneering composer, maverick genius and father of 20th century music Karlheinz Stockhausen. This band was CAN.

What the filmmakers saw in CAN was a skill et far from those of traditional film soundtrack composers rooted in the Romantic era of orchestral music, theirs was a skill set with much more in common with the improvised-to-screen works of Miles Davis for Louis Malle (*Lift To The Scaffold*), the electronic explorations of Bebe & Louis Barron (*Forbidden Planet* of course) and the tape-based techniques of *Musique Concrete*.

What does all this have to do with *The Mandalorian* though?

CAN were a new model as far as soundtrack composers were concerned because their collective capabilities were so extraordinarily broad and their musical techniques so elastic. Able to compose for the orchestra, or for rock, electronic, or any other kinds of instruments, all able to read music or improvise (usually rock, pop and jazz musicians would not be able to read music, and orchestral musicians usually wouldn't be capable of improvising - though this has become less and less true with each decade since the 60s so a lot of modern younger musicians are quite polymath, which is very useful!) CAN could work with sets of rules in play, in effect to work algorithmically, or they could be wildly, crazily spontaneous. Other strong factors to distinguish CAN included the fact that they owned their own studio - a converted cinema - which was highly unusual for the time, and they knew how to squeeze the best out of it. They were all producers of music too, in the sense of the use of studio technologies and using the studio as an instrument.

Historical connections too were strong in the members of the band, in particular band member Irmin Schmidt, who had been training to become a conductor prior to forming CAN, and who had spent time in New York enriching his musical knowledge meeting with composers La Monte Young, Terry Riley and Steve Reich, three of the founding fathers of Minimalism at its most profound process-based end (unlike Philip Glass's version of Minimalism which is manifested in a fashion which incorporates many tropes of Romantic era orchestral music, which goes some way to explain his easy adoption also as a film composer from very early in his career). Irmin also understood cinema and knew how to discuss work with directors, and had quickly become practiced in this. Irmin too might well have been the first musician to start life in the world of strictly orchestral music to jump out of that world with ambitions to join the world of experimental rock and enter the counter-culture too. He understood the force of the counter-culture, that without it the wider culture is unfed, it's like the moon: no moon, no tide, and if there's no tide, there's no life.

Styles—in any art form—are essentially just special cases of linked usually already-existing techniques - but techniques are born of process, the real heavy-lifting hard work in any art form, and processes are very

basic building blocks, the most basic in fact, and existing processes can even be explored to useful ends. Try figuring out what techniques sit behind the styles of art forms you admire and attempt to draw them back to processes; this is actually fun and often really hard! It's also a lovely challenge to decode creative choices, within singular art forms but especially when several art forms have collided, as they do in theatre, dance or in cinema.

To *The Mandalorian* soundtrack then...

In looking for what would work best for the series the decoding perhaps went a bit like this:

Placing absolute canon Star Wars themes in the series would probably have been deemed not a good idea. Those themes are for "full meal" feature films, singular events rather than sliced episodes, a regular sequence of connected "light lunches", and refer to specifics in the canon; those characters, those situations and events, using the leitmotif technique which has its roots in early cinema and still thrives today; so culturally shouldn't be used to refer to anything in this new series, and besides that leitmotif melodies can become very dull if overused, it can pull the viewer out of engagement, so it's not always ideal to use leitmotif in a series. Similarly BIG soundtracks, big scores, also wouldn't seem right in what appears to be a smaller cast almost chamber work as a piece of television. It's also a fan piece at heart, chock full of references, so to add to that a further layer of cultural baggage in music might just be too much, causing a collapse under the weight of its own over-familiarity. The series must add up in all quarters as serviceable to all ages, which couldn't be a larger demand frankly. It's easy to imagine the danger of every single stylish aspect of this franchise being over-used in every prequel, sequel, spin-off and side project, simply totalling up as a sum of its parts, a corny pastiche (sincerest apologies), a dull Star Wars Bingo with a point for every Star Wars trope when it appears.

A television series can be scored with many different approaches, for example, astonishingly, *The Simpsons* has a bespoke orchestral (plus whatever else is needed) score for every single episode, whilst the television adaptation of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* was graced with a part-box of sixty 'beds' and 'stings' of music by Brian Eno to be used in any situation deemed appropriate to task, plus in both cases these shows had their own gorgeous glorious theme tunes of course: original to their core, not reminiscent of any other theme tunes, the most essential and elusive theme tune quality. Catchy but not too much, catchy of the wrong kind quickly becomes annoying.

So how then, with all these aspects considered, were all of these problems avoided?

Ludwig Goransson was cast well. In the first place, choose the right composer for the job, but Ludwig is also a successful record producer. This doesn't just mean that he knows how to use a mixing desk, it means he really understands short-form communication, how to create music that lasts, that doesn't tire the ear in composition or sonic content.

A soundtrack composer faces a "hell" of suggestions, from director and music editor, film editor and others in production - it's part of the job and often the fun - and it's very plain to hear in the score for *The Mandalorian* what was thrown into the bag of stylistic swatches that Ludwig has embraced without tripping over the associated weight of those clues.

So we hear references to Ennio Morricone's music for the Sergio Leone "Spaghetti Westerns" in gesture and instrumentation, the jaw harp, the guitar, a hint of a stand-off; we hear, as in most Westerns though more sparingly and thoughtfully here, Aaron Copland, the most musically quoted and stylistically exploited composer in the medium of the Western, who originally wrote much of the work that is quoted in Westerns for the choreographer - in the burgeoning medium of contemporary dance - Martha Graham; we hear Giorgio Moroder pulsing simple synths with basic super-effective outboard motor rhythms and subtle spacial differences in their placings, and we hear polymetric influences of the Minimalists fed into these when extra rhythmic synths join in with different measures within the musical bar, metric multiplications and divisions creating useful interplay; we hear Wendy Carlos with her lovely warm and fizzy delightful electronic tones brought right to the fore, full focus crackling lightning; Mica Levi and hard-to-identify oozing tones we believe were once real instruments but are now simply other and alien; we hear the French band Air in bright light clocking ticking percussions placed at different distances in reverb from all other elements, a nice touch to quote these able French producer/musicians famous not only as a great band and producers to other artists, but also for their work for director Sofia Coppola, and sounding like storytellers, always. These great ingredients are quoted by Ludwig and deftly handled, they don't overshadow or break the spell, they glide into mind sweetly and are welcomed, and we aren't troubled by being reminded of other music that is great, and this is a skilful trick not easily judged.

Ludwig possesses a great knack for nuanced work in this score. This work for *The Mandalorian*, like CAN but not sounding at all like CAN, is based in the main in simple melodic cells, not full-blown melodies, and often whatever instruments are in play only play one or two notes, are often collectively just playing rhythmic parts or parts where all instruments have equal weight - not many concerti moments in the score at all, and leitmotif is a rare element in the score too, often heard as more of a simple tonal gesture, more like a scent. We don't over-analyse a soundtrack of this kind - it just happens and though we notice it and its original qualities, it still propels us along satisfactorily, happily.

Strangely phase composition is missing in the palette of technique, perhaps because though phase is a highly useful device in film composition, pushing material along at different bar lengths or beat counts or passage lengths like Steve Reich or Terry Riley can be hard to understand, hard to catch, especially on a first listen, which kind of breaks a central rule of soundtrack composition - to work straight away, out of the trap. All phase techniques are difficult to master as well and mucking about with them and hoping for the best whilst against the clock is probably a bit foolhardy. "Just footsteps" is safer.

His tone palette is excellently exotic. Audio processing too, a lot of delays (even phased here sometimes) and reverbs, and Eventide H3000-style blurs trailing from instruments and challenging the diatonic positions of tones. Modelling synths creating near-acoustic believability in tone, classic hardware synths, recorders of several sizes and what sound like ocarinas often doing a sort of impression of the polyphonic singing of the Aka and Baka pygmies, the Mellotron - the original tape-loop based sampler heard at the start of Strawberry Fields by The Beatles - burbling or crooning away, the Fender Rhodes electric piano providing an analogue bell-tone warmer than a standard synth could and sweeter than a real bell, and samples of on-set noises put to effective use as percussion loops.

Most exotic of all, spotted in a short video interview with Ludwig about *The Mandalorian* soundtrack, and providing incredibly complex and hard-to-identify noises, chirps, chirrups, slides and 30th Century Scott Walker-like punctuations, is the Roland GR500 guitar synthesizer, a delightfully wonky and unpredictable device that comprises of a normal-looking guitar and a separate suitcase-sized box of waveforms, filters, oscillators, and other normal synth paraphernalia originally designed as a new kind of synth - the paraphonic - but modulated entirely by the guitar.

The GR500 was first released as a device by Roland in 1977 in a beautiful echo: it's as old as Star Wars.

Ludwig has made the most of his tone palette without over-shadowing usefulness, utility, in the score, it's never gimmicky.

Ludwig's theme music for the show, appearing each time at the end of the episode, over the credits and their beautifully rendered seemingly hand-drawn episode tableaux bringing to mind *Captain Scarlet* (the drawings that is, not the theme!) will grow and grow and fulfil its association with the show, well judged and not jarringly a million miles away from the centrally less-melodic content of the majority of the non-diatonic soundtrack for *The Mandalorian* and brings your thirty or forty minutes to a satisfying close.

Ludwig has composed a lot of really imaginative film music, he has a very solid career and a stack of well-deserved success already behind him and we can be sure we'll be hearing from him a lot more in the future. In *The Mandalorian* he's created a largely process-based stylistically referenced aesthetic, perhaps we'd call it something like Hollywood Electro-Minimalism and we'd all know what that meant.

To sew up where we started...

CAN's swan song was, appropriately enough, their small but perfect contribution in 1991 to the soundtrack for Wim Wender's sprawling near-future science fiction epic *Until The End Of The World*, though all the members had or still have fantastic solo careers. Irmin Schmidt in particular really flourished as a film composer, and even composed an opera based on Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* in 1998 aided by the Liverpool musician and theramin player Jono Podmore.

And...

Werner Herzog's fate at the end of the first series of *The Mandalorian* resonates very strangely with an incident that occurred whilst Werner was being interviewed by British film journalist Mark Kermode for the BBC in 2006. You can see the relevant clip from this interview online very easily by searching their two names together.

The only spoiler in respect of both is that there is a bullet in each.



[Signature]
OASISWINDS-

IS THIS THE WAY?

BY KEN MARSDEN

On May 1982, my dad took myself and my younger brother to see the *Star Wars* and *Empire Strikes Back* double-bill at the Classic Cinema in Harold's Cross, Dublin. This was to be one of those life changing experiences that opened a doorway to something so incredible and enjoyable that I still smile when I think about that day. Which amazingly, is still a vivid memory even though I was only six years old! I'm sure many Star Wars fans would have a similar story.

Over the years since then it's safe to say that Star Wars has been in or around my life in some way or another. These days I'm happy to be a regular punter; no longer too worried about having the latest new release limited edition gizmo or stumping for midnight tickets to premieres. That's not to say I don't care what direction Star Wars takes.

Since Disney took hold of the reins (and the budget) it's been more than interesting, to say the least. There have been many detractors; some appear to be just anti-Mouse and won't even consider the efforts, others just don't like the direction it's taken (outside of their imagination and possibly, their preference for the Expanded Universe offerings). I think maybe when I was younger I would have been more invested, concerned, and critical of some of the movies released under the Disney banner; but now, I honestly think they are good and worthy. Sure, there's bits that are baffling and annoying; the space horses charging and the flying Leia made me cringe a bit, and *Solo* didn't blow the doors off, but look at *Rogue One*; that is clearly one of the best of all time. Up there with *Empire*, I reckon. And they're infinitely better than the prequels.

So, with the added excitement and trepidation of a Star Wars foray into TV land it wasn't without some reservation I signed up for Disney+. I needed to see *The Mandalorian*.

To be entirely honest, I was hesitant. I didn't want Star Wars to go the route of Star Trek. Ok, so Trek was a TV series first. But I don't really rate Trek or any of its many spin-offs. Sure, I appreciate the attraction and understand it's good TV, but it just ain't my bag. I've tried.

So, how is *The Mandalorian*? It's good, isn't it! I mean, the stories are great. They move along at a nice clip and they're bite-sized, so you don't have to set aside an entire evening to watch it. But the main attraction here is that it's fresh.

You do not need to be a Star Wars fanatic to enjoy *The Mandalorian*. If you've never seen another Star Wars movie *The Mandalorian* is still very much accessible. It's safe to say that Jon Favreau chose to build this series on a foundation of Star Wars lore and tradition, accuracy, honesty, and incredible detail. Many will know that George Lucas took inspiration for *Star Wars* from the Saturday cinema matinees of the mid 20th century. By employing the same basic structure to each episode, *The Mandalorian* takes the form of one of these weekly serials. It was refreshing and exciting to have to wait a week for the next instalment, rather than main-lining the whole series in one hit; a new normal these days where watching online serials is concerned. And then there's the content! Oh, where to start...

You can tell immediately that this series is created by fans. Without Googling, I can tell that Favreau had Kenner Star Wars toys. Like many fans who also collected (and still do) the first line of Star Wars toys, *The Mandalorian* has shone the spotlight on many characters, beings, vehicles, and gadgets that the original movies and subsequent prequels and sequels either only vaguely touched on or ignored altogether. There's the Imperial Troop Transporter; as a toy it was, and still is, very easy to obtain. Strangely absent from the original movies, it gets fantastic coverage in Chapter 12: "The Siege". Then there's the Sand People. One of the first plastic figures released in 1978 the Tusken, or Sand Person, has featured in a few movies where Tatooine is the backdrop. I've always felt the Sand People got a bum deal; not helped at all by their abduction of Shmi Skywalker/Lars in *Attack of the Clones*. In *The Mandalorian* they are revealed to be a dangerous but honourable race who are happy to go about their business but won't take any crap from outsiders. I think they've been served well here and have finally had some kind of vindication. There's also decent screen-time for Jawas, Quarren, Aqualish, Ugnaught, Rodian, IG-series assassin droids, and some others I've probably missed I'm sure.

There's gadgets aplenty too; the rocket firing backpack finally gets to fire its rockets. The original Stormtrooper blaster, the SE-14, finally gets to prove itself in battle. The E-Web Heavy Repeating Blaster, first seen in the hands of some unfortunate Snow Troopers in *Empire*, gets a regular run out in *The Mandalorian*. And quite right too; it's a formidable weapon!

All of these little details give *The Mandalorian* a structure that the story can then be folded around. And details are not limited to the visual; the sound effects are so on point too. Everything from blaster fire to engine noise is perfect and ties in seamlessly with the original movies from the 70s and 80s.

Obviously, we need to mention Boba Fett finally getting the long overdue live-action coverage he deserves. *The Mandalorian* officially puts to bed any "did-he-didn't-he" survive the Sarlaac questions. A fan favourite, Fett only ever clocked up six minutes of actual screentime. But as mentioned in another SF classic made around the same time as *Empire*; "The light that burns twice as bright only burns half as long". In the years since his plummet into the belly of the Sarlaac, Fett has taken on a legendary and mystical reputation, making appearances in numerous novels, comics, and cartoons. This was a fabulous reintroduction to film, and at times I wished I was watching his own show instead of *The Mandalorian*. I couldn't get enough of him, or his iconic ship, Slave 1, so I was awestruck when the post credit scene rolled on the final episode and we were promised further Fett escapades next Christmas.

One of the more refreshing aspects of the show is the absence of any jargon or clunky explanations surrounding The Force. Despite the Child's obvious Jedi talents, anything Jedi related is thankfully limited. We see things from the "normal" folks' perspective and we're not caught up again in any quasi-religious quest that has been done over and over a few times now. Ahsoka makes an appearance, and Luke, and thrilling as those scenes were, they were brief.

So, with all that covered, here's the gripe. Not a big gripe, and not aimed at the series itself, but at the merchandising. It is now clearly beyond the means of many to afford the official merchandise. Those of you who are familiar with the LEGO Star Wars line will know what I mean. When I was a kid in the 80s, a Star Wars figure cost £2.49 at their peak. It wasn't cheap, but neither was it unattainable. You could save your pocket money. I am concerned that Hasbro and

other licenced manufacturers are marketing their toys towards the older collector and excluding the younger fans who actually want to play with the toys. A brief look at eBay or the Hasbro website will tell you all you need to know. New Star Wars figures retail between £15 and £20, if you're lucky. This has led to a deluge of fakes and if the price looks cheap I can tell you that the product is too. Currently, on Facebook there is an advert that pops up from time to time flouting their Mando helmet. It looks good in the ad, the website page is fairly clean, but at £30 is it too good to be true? Unfortunately, it is.

The only affordable decent replica helmet out there is the Black Series range at £120. Not too cheap at all.

But that's my only whinge about *The Mandalorian*, and as I've said it doesn't really pertain to the series itself.

So, where is *The Mandalorian* going next? I have a suspicion we'll see him head off with Bo-Katan and friends to retake the throne on Mandalore. He is now the accidental bearer of the Darksaber, obtained from Moff Gideon, and as such now has a claim to the throne. It will be interesting to see how this plays out with Bo-Katan as she was determined to get the sabre and her only way now to do that is to beat Din Djarin in combat. A tricky situation you'll agree.

We've probably seen the last of Grogu, at least for now anyway. Maybe further down the road in a different series he'll pop up again.

And speaking of thrones; it looks as though Boba Fett has taken over the large void left by one Jabba the Hutt! You'll remember that Jabba was strangled and blown to smithereens on his luxury sail barge in *Return of the Jedi*. In the final episode post credit clip we see Fett and Shand blast their way into Jabba's palace. Sitting on the late Jabba's throne is his old right hand man, the Twi'lek Bib Fortuna. He barely gets out a nervous hello before Fett ends his story arc with a swift blaster bolt to the chest. We will have to see where this all goes in the *The Book of Boba Fett* next Christmas, but it's safe to say that people are excited. And it's probably a good bet that Din Djarin hasn't seen the last of Boba Fett either.

THOUGHTS ON THE MANDALORIAN

BY JOURNEY PLANET CONTRIBUTORS

WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED ABOUT THE MANDALORIAN?

Michelle Mendes Vazquez wrote that for her, “the nostalgia of stepping into that universe [is] like being reunited with a familiar place, but we’re getting to experience it through the lives of new characters”. and Marguerite Smith wrote that the show “helped build out the sense of the day-to-day challenges and the true edges of the Republic’s reach”, both of which were thoughts echoed by Collin Wilcox, Alex Heltzer, and Tony Parker, who praised the step away from the Skywalker dynasty. The episodic format was praised by Linda Wales and Andrew Wales who also noted that “It feels like a mini Hollywood movie landing each Friday”. Speaking of high production values, Jennifer Kloenne and Paul Finley both called out the use and making of special effects as a particular highlight of the show. Finally, Victor D’Agostino II wrote that “Favreau and Filoni...built stronger character bonds and evolved relationships”, and the opportunities for characters were also picked up by other respondents.

WHAT HAS SURPRISED YOU?

There was a clear majority answer to this, with Collin Wilcox, Victor D’Agostino II, Paul Finley, Marguerite Smith, and Jennifer Kloenne all highlighting the character appearance in the final episode of the season as a particular shock for them (and you will note, reader, that we don’t spoil it for you here!). Other characters that took people by surprise were Boba Fett and Ahsoka Tano, both of which caused comment. Michelle Mendes Vazquez took a slightly different tack, writing “that very first episode...seeing someone who looked like Master Yoda! I knew at that moment I was going to love the show”; your editor suspects that most people were similarly taken aback by that revelation!

Tony Parker and Andrew Wales both focused on the production itself, with Tony mentioning “the level at which it has been able to execute” and Andrew delving into “how grown-up it feels”. Linda Wales wrote that she was surprised at the “lengths Mando has to go to

in order to protect the baby”, and Marguerite Smith wrote, “I was surprised that Din Djarin was willing to take his helmet off multiple times. It shows how important he felt the reason to be, I suppose, although I wonder how much was also the fact that he met other Mandalorians with a different belief structure. I’m still deciding whether it surprised me more that he was willing to show that vulnerability in front of his enemies or in front of his allies.”

WHAT ARE YOU PLEASED ABOUT?

The Child—Grogu—was the focus of Jennifer Kloenne’s and Michelle Mendes Vazquez’s comments, with Michelle writing “It’s hard to look at him and not feel joy”. Marguerite Smith said that she was pleased we hadn’t seen Grogu “wield the Force through fear and darkness”. The format of the show was praised, with Collin Wilcox saying “I feel like every time I watch a new episode, it’s a different story and a new piece of the puzzle” and Victor D’Agostino II also noted that “each story is individual yet cohesive”.

Michelle Mendes Vazquez and Paul Finley were both also keen on the character development, and Michelle was inspired by “seeing a bunch of badass women working together in the final episode”. Linda Wales liked seeing Moff Gideon’s downfall. The exploration of the corners of Star Wars also drew people’s praise, with Alex Heltzer enjoying “the culture of Mandalorians” and “the Darksaber and...the lore associated with it”. Andrew Wales came at this from a different angle, saying “I feel a bit unclean about the boatload of fan service we’ve seen, but honestly, deep down, I love it.”

WHAT LET YOU DOWN?

Victor D’Agostino II, Michelle Mendes Vazquez, Paul Finley, Jennifer Kloenne, and Andrew Wales didn’t really have anything to say on this question, but the rest of our commentators had some gripes. Several focused on the end of the second season; Linda Wales thought the ending was sad. Collin Wilcox was disappointed by Din removing his helmet, writing “I know

he's not technically a born Mandalorian but I felt that he should have stuck with the code he grew up with." Marguerite was a little disappointed by the cameo in the last episode: "not everything needs to tie into the films, or into major characters, for it to be interesting."

Tony Parker writes that "The Jawas... feel tacked on, and are the only empty characters in the series. They seem to only exist for a path for the hero to find the dragon." Alex Heltzer "was disappointed that they killed off...IG-11 at the end of the first season."

WHERE DO YOU THINK SEASON 3 IS GOING TO GO?

The tricky problem of what to do now that Grogu and Din aren't together reared its head in this question. Jennifer Kloenne wondered whether "maybe the [third] season is 10 years in the future and they cross paths again"? Paul Finlay says that he hopes "we'll have some follow through on Grogu's training and experiences with Luke" and this was echoed by Linda Wales, Alex Heltzer, and Marguerite Smith. Andrew Wales, however, wrote "I think we're done with the main Grogu arc. That's not to say we won't see him again (of course we will), but I think Mando needs new adventures. The focus is almost certainly going to be related to the reclaiming of Mandalore." Victor D'Agostino II, Michelle Mendes Vazquez, Alex Heltzer and Marguerite Smith all agreed that the reclaiming of Mandalore and the ownership of the Darksaber would be a key thread.

Marguerite Smith wrote that the third thread would be "there will be the path of Din Djarin himself and how he will be drawn into both of the other two"; Collin Wilcox and Andrew Wales both expect to see more bounty hunting. Paul Finley expects that "they'll keep using Luke sparingly, both to heighten his specialness, and also to keep the cost down", and also speculated on whether the show might "connect back to the ending of Rebels...discovering Ezra Bridger's fate." Finally, Andrew Wales says "I don't think we're done with crossovers either. Expect cameos from Chewbacca, Jar Jar, and Ewoks. You read it here first."

WHAT COOL MERCHANDISE OR CRAFTING HAVE YOU SEEN?

According to our commentators, Grogu appears on or manifests in T-shirts, pyjamas, wrapping paper, action figures, diapers, talking dolls, soft toys, blankets,

knitted and [crocheted](#) and [cross-stitched](#) things, [stickers](#), sculptures, [planters](#), [wood art](#), [travel posters](#), [movie posters](#), and [stained glass](#). Collin Wilcox "got a talking Grogu doll for Christmas"; Linda Wales has "a blanket with an embroidered Grogu [and] a knitted hanging [Grogu]"; and Paul Finley owns a "Baby Yoda T-shirt".

Other elements of the show are also mentioned, with Victor D'Agostino II calling attention to "an explosion of Din & Boba cosplay armor" and getting himself a helmet from [CyberCraftRU on Etsy](#). Tony Parker mentions [the HasLab Razor Crest](#).

Andrew Wales says "I was amazed at how Disney (of all organisations) missed the merch boat last Christmas...the most creative stuff is on Etsy right now", and Paul Finley concurs. Andrew follows up: "Just search for 'Mandalorian' and treat yourself to something!"

WHAT'S A QUESTION YOU WOULD ASK?

Tony Parker wrote, "I'd be curious what other original characters people would like to make and base shows/books off of, and their stories. It's a massive universe, and so many stories to tell." Marguerite Smith has questions about "the lifecycle of The Child and Yoda" and wonders about why Grogu isn't speaking yet and how he might learn to speak; if you're interested in this question, [Marguerite links to a Slate article that goes into this](#). Andrew Wales wonders "if we're almost at a time when there's an almost constant barrage of fresh Star Wars content. If we get to that point, will it be too much? Of course I don't know, but wow, it's going to be fun finding out." We can't answer these questions in this issue, but if you have thoughts please write us and let us know!

Thanks to those that contributed to this article: Victor D'Agostino II (Culver City, California, USA); Paul Finley (Mesa, Arizona, USA); Alex Heltzer (Chicago, Illinois, USA); Jennifer Kloenne (Phoenix, Arizona, USA); Michelle Mendes Vazquez (Scottsdale, Arizona, USA); Tony Parker (Portland, Oregon, USA); Marguerite Smith (Dublin, Ireland); Andrew Wales (Maidenhead, UK); Linda Wales (Sheffield, UK); Collin Wilcox (Phoenix, Arizona, USA).

THE MANDALORIAN

BY JACQ MONAHAN

The Mandalorian has a name. It is Din Djarin. Yet he is never called anything but Mandalorian or the abbreviated: Mando. His birthplace and armor define him.

The Child that is in his care has a name, but it is not to be discovered until Season 2, Episode 5. However, an unfortunate offshoot of this is that many viewers were left to their own imagination to name the Child. This led to the grave misnomer of...Baby Yoda (gasp)!

“That is NOT Baby Yoda!” I interject, whether in written word or in slightly shrieky know-it-all proclamation. No one seems to listen. I down another Darth Collins (vodka, lemon juice, simple syrup, club soda, straw to make Darth Vader noises).

The Mandalorian series takes place after the events of *Return of the Jedi*, which in turn takes place after *Empire Strikes Back*, which is when the nearly 900-year-old Yoda meets and mentors Luke Skywalker.

In the present-day *The Mandalorian* series, Yoda would be a Force ghost, hovering perhaps back in a swamp somewhere on Dagobah, spouting iconic wisdom like, “Do. Or do not. There is no try.” Or “When gone am I, the last of the Jedi will you be.” Okay, to be fair, Yoda said that last statement just once, and on his deathbed, another reason that The Child CAN’T POSSIBLY BE Baby Yoda. He is not yet verbal, likes shiny orbs, and craves tadpole embryo. Good Lord, people, what more proof do you need?!

I somewhat annoyingly correct people who swoon over Baby Yoda that he is a baby Yoda species, as yet unnamed (the species, not The Child). The fight goes on, mitigated slightly by The Child (finally) divulging telepathically the name Grogu to Jedi Ahsoka Tano on the forest planet Corvus.

Rant over, point made. I haven’t convinced anyone, I know, but it feels good to make a case. My other (non-Star Wars) crusade is to stop the notion that Prince Harry is James Hewitt’s son. James Hewitt did not meet Diana until Harry was two years old. End of story. Prince Harry is a Windsor. The Child’s name is Grogu.

That being said, the first season of *The Mandalorian* was an enjoyable, zig-zagging quest, taking the viewer from point A to point...of no return, it seemed. Our “Mando” Din is intercepted, attacked, and betrayed during his assignment. The whispering Werner Herzog is full of gravitas and faux goodwill. The development of The Child’s considerable power, combined with visits to familiar territories, characters, and even space vehicles (Tatooine, Mynocks, X-Wing Fighters) make the series both iconic *and* brand new. You recognize the neighborhood, but you’re unsure which house will burst into flames, hold a wild party, or need law enforcement called onto the scene.





The second season continues the Mandalorian's quest to deliver The Child, continuing the detours and interceptions that stymie The Child's deliverance. Everyone wants something from Din, whether it's protection, assistance with a dangerous task, or The Child itself. There are Jawas, Tusken Raiders, Mon Calamari, and the appearance of Boba Fett. There's a carnivorous sand dragon. We get to see Pablo Pascal's face once more. The poor guy is masked 99% of the time, and it's good to have proof that the actor actually inhabits his Beskar fortress. Note: He's also the villain in the new Wonder Woman 1984. Fortunately, he's got his impenetrable suit to hide behind in the aftermath. (Yes, I've seen it, and that's all I'll say.)

I do appreciate a conflicted Mandalorian. Din begins as a humorless, one-Way bounty hunter, until his little green cargo proves that something can pierce his armor: a surprising, protective devotion to The Child. Perhaps not so much a humanizing effect as much as a relatable one.

I also appreciate the strong female characters populating the galaxy. New Republic Marshal Cara Dune, assassin/mercenary Fennec Shand, Mandalorian

Bo-Katan Fryze, and the aforementioned Jedi Ahsoka Tano redirect the male gaze into combat instead of cleavage. Refreshing, indeed.

In order for there to be a Season 3, Grogu must fall out of Jedi hands once more. He's not going away, folks, being the biggest merchandising draw of them all. I predict that he will summon Din with his ever-increasing Force-sensitive mind, and somehow the two embark on yet another multi-planet quest that has them taking the most circuitous, blaster-laden route back to safety.

Grogu's increasing skills will supply the surprises, and Din, the Mandalorian will find another reason to take off his mask. There will be guest stars galore, and the best episodes will be helmed by Jon Favreau and Dave Filoni.

I would love to see both Yoda and Grogu meet in the third season, although I do not expect that it will clear up anything to the timeline-challenged viewers who want to immortalize the Jedi master with a "Baby" in front of his name. Sigh.



LEGO RAZOR CREST BUILD

BY JAMES BACON

I have not built a LEGO set from scratch for a while. Although I consider myself a fan—having six LEGO sets in the living room—it feels like a couple of years since I last built a set. Even then it was a Millennium Falcon, from a few years previous, that my pal Stef got for Emma.

I do love Star Wars LEGO, and remember vividly buying the X-Wing and Millennium Falcon in 1999 and loving them a lot. It's amazing to see how many versions and editions of these popular fictional craft now exist, including a Christmas one! As it is, I was dead keen on the Razor Crest and so it was arranged as a Christmas gift.

The box is big, and notably heavy; there feels like a lot of LEGO in here. The end flaps are sealed with tape, allowing one access; for a moment I wondered if it would flip open like LEGO boxes once did, but no: this is so that one can reseal the box in a cereal box style of way.

Bags of LEGO fall out of the box, and an instruction tome! Over 200 pages of instructions, in a booklet that is smaller than I expected, but thicker. The bags are numbered and the instructions explain that one does the bags one number at a time. This is thought through well. There is also an image of a brick separator, but it is St Stephen's Day, and I shall not be venturing out... but then—amongst the bricks—is such a separator! It proves to be the tool of the day, Emma being especially impressed with it.

There are six phases to the build. To be honest, Phases 2 and 3 really put shape to it, but what is most impressive is the use of LEGO Technic bricks and pins and how they added such structural integrity. This is a double-deck model with wings; the way pins go through three bricks, and how they are so cleverly worked, was amazing to see.

With each phase, one gets some mini-figures. Din has a black head with no markings, a bit like stormtroopers once were, I think. Indeed—upon checking—the part is 3626b Black Minifigure Head (Plain), and has



been issued with 57 minifigures, including Darth Vader, Boba Fett, a load of Clone Troopers, and so on. We did wonder if this was because initially, we did not see Din's face. Anyhow, adding excitement as we progress.

There seemed to be a lot of new bricks: ones that do really clever things, like ensure that a join is made. So, I conducted an investigation on Bricklink, which lists all 999 parts individually and has a cross reference. This showed that apart from the minifigures, the stickers, and some bricks which are new in what they call bluish-grey, really the only new part is the canopy, distinct to the Razor Crest.

These details were, of course, unknown as we built it. We were able to marvel at the parts known as "brackets" and "Black Technic, Pin 3L with Friction Ridges Lengthwise and Stop Bush" and "3 pin connectors" all interwoven so strongly to create what feels like a robust LEGO set. Indeed the outer walls, despite my expectations, are not structural at all. To allow extra play, they are hinged; one can open up the Razor Crest, unload extra torpedoes, extract bounties in carbon, put Din to bed, generally play with it.

I have to say, the instructions felt really well done, it was a terrific amount of fun to build it with someone, finding parts for each other and doing either side, while Emma was adept at figuring out the opposite side builds, based on what she saw. It was a really nice and fun afternoon.

The Child, Baby Yoda, or Grogu (depending on what you favour) is TINY! He sits on just one stud, and his head is rubber as opposed to plastic; he looks so amazing. We readjusted the cockpit a bit and placed him right up the front, looking out.

Overall, this was a fun thing to do. It was a £99 purchase, which is a substantial amount. But as an iconic space ship from the first two seasons of *The Mandalorian*, and one that is sentimental, it is also now a lovely display item.

Dr Emma J. King (who was most recently studying Space Engineering) said, "It's quite good fun! We definitely did not have a boring Boxing Day, that's for sure. We spent three or four hours building. It was lovely building together and using teamwork. Sometimes in order to make it faster I'd flip the instructions mentally and build the mirror image parts simultaneously. It reminded me of doing jigsaw puzzles on Boxing Day, except this had instructions (so you don't have to guess) and the bits fit together, which is so much better. It's also a time for mindfulness; one is focused and concentrated and relaxed, enjoying the odd chocolate biscuit and fully absorbed in the process."

In order to give some perspective, I took a photo with one of the many styles of Tardis that James Shields (Master Builder) has made, the Millennium Falcon and my own British Rail Class 332¹.

¹ Again, made by James Shields. Poignantly, it goes out of regular service on 28 December 2020 (today, at the time of writing).



TATOOINE

BY CHRISTINE BURNHAM

We visited the Star Wars site on Sunday 22nd April 2012 we were staying in Tozeur near Chott El-Jerid.

The set was built by George Lucas for the first Star Wars film, depicting Tatooine. It is now a tourist attraction in the desert.

As it is in the middle of a desert, it doesn't have a local name as far as I can see. We drove to it in a four-wheel drive vehicle as normal ones aren't up to it. I remember it being very hot and quite eerie, the heat made many mirages, you can understand how it was chosen for the film.



HEDGE SCOUT

HedgeScout is a cosplayer who cosplays a range of different characters, and thanks to her for letting us reprint some of her cosplays in this part of the zine!

If you want to follow HedgeScout on social media, you can find her on Instagram: <https://instagram.com/hedgescout/> and on Facebook: <https://facebook.com/HedgeScout/>





THE MANDALORIAN: A PERSONAL OVERVIEW

BY JAMES BACON

As I watched the Mandalorian, in November 2019, I felt good. It was an enjoyable first episode drawing on a classic bar fight scene, then the mention of Life Day, and the strange way Mando did not like droids, and of course the fragility of life, Mando's pulse rifle, which I knew was from the Christmas Special animated segment and then the carbonite. All of it just felt right.

Navarro felt right, and Carl Weathers as Greef Karga was spot on. The droid eye that popped out at Mando when he goes to the imperial stronghold, and then Werner Herzog as The Client, who was so well played, and he made mention of the great purge of Mandalore, something that I knew of from Season 4 of rebels, when Bo Katan leads an uprising against the Imperial occupation. This hints that the revolution went badly and, given the timeline, it makes sense that we see few Mandalorians in the original trilogy. The Beskar looked great, as did the ice cream maker, the troopers shoddy and worn, how I had imagined them post Return of the Jedi.

The TV series continued so well, and each episode gave me more as we followed Din, who was so beholden to a particular set of beliefs, as espoused by the Mandalorians that, one assumes, saved him and brought him into the fold, where nothing is more important to a Mandalorian than their helmet and armour. The fact that he forgoes a sigil is indicative of the quandary that is faced by him personally in his encounter with The Child. I assume the group that had rescued him as a 'foundling', from the separatist Battle Droids, had instilled in him that level of social responsibility that sees him sharing his bounty with the other foundlings through the good offices of The Armourer, who seemed to have a special position in the hidden and underground Mandalorian society.

This was brilliantly brought to a head the moment when he faces the moral question of what to do about the Child, who saved him, and yet who he willingly handed over to The Client. You could see and feel a personal fight that he was experiencing and the moment he turns back to fight for the life of this adorable being was brilliant.

Who and what Din and a Mandalorian are, are key to this journey. It continues to be challenged and challenged hard. By this stage 'This is the way' and 'I have spoken' were phrases everyone was using and the child was a rapid phenomena, with no merchandise. I loved that.

Of course the moment when many Mandalorians arrived to save Din and the Child was great fun. It was unclear to me if Din aimed correctly, or if it was a lucky shot when he hit Greef Karga in the Beskar. This rally, though, was later a bitter taste, the repercussions stacked in fallen armour.

Cara Dune was such a great character, and while Baby Yoda had endeared himself to so many, and I admit, I love him too, it was moments like when the Loth Cat growled at him that made me smile wide. The Classic Seven Samurai story, of fighters being hired to protect the village being rampaged, was good fun. While the source is clear, the work of Akira Kurosawa has long influenced film and TV and I recalled the 'Bounty Hunters' episode of Clone Wars, which was also similar.

Mos Eisley was so familiar but yet so different, and I thought it was astute, how much the world of Star Wars had changed, and how the empire, which was now gone, had perhaps had a financial impact, and the Cantina was a pale and dull, subdued shadow of its former self.

These side bar tasks, be it finding the Egg of the Mudhorn or hunting down Fennec Shand, all continually added a little bit, especially relationship and character wise, and the bond between Mando and Child was wonderful. But as we learned more about Din, other little elements of the story were progressed; were the sound of spurs from the person reducing Fennec the same sound as Boba Fett? One could speculate, though I was too excited to speculate too much. I watched these episodes repeatedly, and they made me wonder, would we see Omera from Sorgan, who obviously could well handle a blaster, later?

The gang on Ran's station, Mayfeld, Burg, Zero and what I thought was a brilliantly played Xi'an all seemed so treacherous and deadly, although the quip from

Mayfield about not being a stormtrooper, indicating he could shoot, was class. The whole time, I was with my heart in my throat, worried that they would find or steal the child. I was shitting myself. Then when some X-wings showed up, with Dave Filoni, and I knew that must be fellow directors, Deborah Chow and Rick Famuyiwa. The starship that was preparing to take off looked so good, we saw it for a few seconds.

The Reckoning was a great episode, brining Mando back to Greef, a common enemy. He calls upon Cara, who educates us, 'most of them carry a life sentence' in regard to her transgressions in the eyes of the Republic, which was exciting. And the moment when the child looks at Cara tooling up from the hatch, choosing her weapons and then tries to change the course of the Razor Crest, did he want them not to fight? Then bringing in Kuill, identifying Cara as a trooper with her own past, and then IG-11 who with patience and affirmation reinforced the droid's development and watched its personality grow, to become one that will protect. Reflecting, for me, what was occurring to Din. 'Droids are not good or bad, they are reflections of those who imprint them' and then the child starts to force choke Cara as she is in an arm wrestle with Din. That was chilling. I was like, OMG, Deborah Chow you have directed this to perfection, she knew that a Force Choke was so dark, so sinister and yet the force heal, revealing to all as he saves Greef from the poisonous dragon creatures.

The moment that we see The Client slain, and Moff Gideon take control, was superb with so many troopers, and Death Troopers. Then we also see an Imperial Troop Transporter turn up, it was pretty serious. That transport, based on the toy from 1979, that I always thought was more of a figure holder than anything, had also been in Rebels and now is in live action. That began as one of those 'just off screen' toys, the first that had not been on screen, designed by Mark Boudreaux from Hasbro.

And then, as Moff Gideon appears, and explains that 'It means more to me than you will ever know', we see the Scout Troopers bearing down on Kuill. He is too busy to answer Mando, and then, he is dead. The it fades to black and the music is slightly more sombre, more brass and heavier, and we lose a great character.

The interaction between the two Scout Troopers, not being able to shoot, blaming the gun, and then punching the child, and the reaction. The radio comms was so entertaining, and it seemed so real, and then the IG-11 droid, brutal in its devotion to the Child.

That Mandalorian is seen as a creed was very interesting at this stage as we learn so much from Moff Gideon, who was an ISB officer during the purge, and about the Mando who was saved by Death Watch Mandalorians, led by Pre Vizsla. As IG-11 guns down the Stormtroopers, the joy and pleasure of The Child is nice to see, but unnerving.

The escape, like everything, was convoluted, and so we see the Mando get his signet from the Armourer. Even as Cara Dune quips that she does not do the child thing, we see Mando informed that he is as the child's father, until the child passed to, as he says, to a race of enemy sorcerers. And then the loss of IG-11 who confronts Din with his own sadness at his loss, his sacrifice for the child, a droid, a thing Mando hated.

The moment Moff Gideon gets himself out of the crashed Tie Fighter, with the Dark Sabre, I was astonished, it was another connection.

Yet what this whole first season had done, and did so well, was to challenge Din, Cara the loner, Greef Karga self-centred and only interested in himself, and created relationships, loyalties, reflections on what these people have been and, most importantly, was the wonderful relationship between the child and Mando. Difficult for him as it was, at times, and interesting how naive or unaware Din was of Jedi lore, and the force, it was wonderful to behold.

Yet between these two astonishingly brilliant episodes, was the release of The Rise of Skywalker. And I was so relieved, so pleased, there was more Star Wars than this film. Do not get me wrong, I love Finn and Rey and General Organa, and Poe and Rose, but the end would not be an end of the Saga. There was so little after Return of the Jedi, a darkness, a quiet, and then Droids and Ewoks were so shockingly rubbish, and the Caravan of catastrophe, it was all so lame. Star Wars just ebbed away, disappeared, just when I wanted more. It was a lonely time. Rewatching the same three videos, paused so skilfully when recording to avoid the ads, until the quality was visibly deteriorating.

So with Deborah Chow's "The Reckoning" coming just before, with a teaser for the film, and then following the film Taika Waititi's "Redemption", and a whole second season to look forward to, I just did not feel the hollowing out that I had somewhat feared with the end of what would be known as the Skywalker Saga.

There was the Darksaber.

Season 2. I could not wait for it.

Yet I had no idea what was coming. The few Star Wars commentators I enjoy are loath to speculate too much, a couple do the 'this is what I hope for' thing, but what I had been most impressed with was how so many, including some who had real doubts about The Mandalorian from the time of Celebration, recognised it for what it was - terrific TV and great entertainment.

If Star Wars was a western, well it was a John Ford one, and if Mando was a western, well it was Sergio Leone and it felt gritty as we met the armour of Boba Fett.

The whole element of Boba Fett's armour, and Cobb Vanth from the books, was really interesting. The action between Cobb and Din was positive, and the significance of the armour in many regards was, as the Mando realised, that actually, in many ways, Cobb was deserving of the armour. I thought Frog Lady was brilliant, the poor creature, wondering about her missing eggs, and the unmanageability of The Child, mixed in with the horror story of the Ice Spiders, which looked stunning, and then seeing a Frog Lady meet her mate, and their affection and love, was perfect.

The moment we see Bo Katan removing her helmet, and played by Katie Sackoff, who played her voice in Rebels. Katie looked so good as this character, and then the compelling and somewhat "what the hell" moment, where Bo basically schools Din on how there are other ways. That opened up so much that I knew must be true, but had yet to be said and of course, Bo Katan herself, determined to seek the freedom of Mandalore.

One of my favourite moments was when Din and The Child are alone in the Razor Crest and he is trying to get the child to fix the red and blue wire, and it is hilarious, as he explains so clearly and still the child gets electrocuted. As he talks, he still hides his face from the child, as he drinks, and then they drink together.

The Bacta or Clone Tank, powered by lava, everyone's favourite power source, scientists of the cloning ilk talking about blood transfusions from the Child and a high "M-count" and then Black and Red Stormtroopers. I was speculating hard, so hard. This was fun, but also leading somewhere. Now were the Dark Troopers Clones, Robots, or something else. Would they be Dark Empire Dark Troopers from the 1995 comic Dark Empire II, with Troopers powered by the Dark Side? Or would they be Dark Forces Dark Troopers, Robots that

were in the Doom based first person shooter computer game also from 1995? I was not sure. I had no idea. I loved it.

Then to see more time given to Din and the Child, a good ninety seconds as they fly to Corvus, their interaction, building that relationship all the time.

To see the return of Ashoka Tano was amazing. I say return, but for me she was a pre A New Hope, and this was a number of years later, so this was no longer the snips I had first met, in The Clone Wars. Yet was she a Jedi, as far as I know she is not a Jedi, she had walked away from that, but her appearance led to so much, the fight between Ashoka and Din was exactly as I imagined Jedi and Mandalorian would fight. I loved the interesting situation at Calodan and then the fight with Elsbeth played by Diana Lee Inosanto, who's martial arts skills really showed through, and then Lang, played by Michael Biehn, the war weary, battle hardened merc, who didn't know when his luck was done for, was amazing. I was not at all ready for the mention of Thrawn. Was he next to show up?

Then came 'The Tragedy', and the first few minutes gutted me. The chat between Din and The Child, it felt like a parting was coming, it was so poignant. This Bounty Hunter looking on at the child playing with the ball from the control lever, and then calling him Groggu, and enjoying how he looked up, and playing with the ball. Din's encouragement and then excitement as he uses the force to get the ball.

Yet this also showed an aspect of the Child, one that was always prevalent throughout the whole series. The Child was seeing and encountering dreadful situations. Groggu was displaced, and with a Mob, and even when the Child stopped a Mudhorn killing him, Din took him and handed him over for scientific testing to clone scientists working for Imperial Revenants. Ambushes, violence, killings surround the Child. I thought the moment when Din did a deal for his rocket pack for the child, gave his word, and then killed the bandit, showed a duplicitous deal as he broke his word. The look I saw from the child was horror at that death in exchange for his rescue. The child often widened its eyes, or, as in the first episode, closed the floating cot, but the horror that it saw and felt was horrendous.

So as Din explained, in such a heart-wrenching way, that he has to agree to go with a Jedi, and how he agreed to take Groggu back to his own kind and that was what he needed to do, ending with a 'you understand right' - I had to hit pause, I was so sad. Of course when I

re-watched it and then they had to 'travel the last stretch with the windows down' and the Child's ears fluttering as they jetted towards the seeing stone on the Jedi Temple on Tython.

The Sound of Slave 1. Fennec and Fett. 'I don't want your armour, I want my armour' was perfect. I love how The Mandalorian allows time for good dialogue, for good exposition weaving in and out of the story. Fett smashing the armour with his gaffi stick, was incredible, this was great action, and bits of white plastic flying everywhere was as good as flying blood. Once in his armour, and armed with his weapons, Fett is brutal in his brilliance, but to watch him do so well and then see the Razor Crest blown to smithereens..., crikey, this was not going well and then Dark Troopers. Droids.

And so totally unexpected, at least something I had never expected, Boba Fett and Fennec Shand would now be part of the dirty dozen, the magnificent seven, the rag tag bunch like Josey Wales group, picked up and brought along out of loyalty, respect or well debt.

And then we see the real tragedy, Grogu is flinging about Storm troopers and then using the force choke, something that instilled fear when Darth Vader used it on Admiral Motti and others. This Sith skill uses the power of the dark side to painfully strangle a victim, and here we see an innocent child, one who has done no harm, using it against its captors, to the pleasure of Moff Gideon. That is truly the tragedy of this episode, the child has seen so much death, so much fighting and brutality over him, that one wonders by now if he is pained, tortured and even damaged and this is pure anger, or defence.

The Believer, well we see Din make a big compromise, wearing Transport Trooper armour, and then taking off his helmet, but what we also see is other layers of armour as Mayfield, who was afraid of being recognised by Valen Hess, yet he actually has such a hard level of vengeance for Hess and operation Cinder in Burnin Konn. Richard Brake played Hess so well, his patronising 'boys' and drawl was just, well it felt like a level of condescending that was winding up Mayfield, who was remembering his division, his mates, and their families.

Then the message from Mando to Moff Gideon, so threatening, so sinister and yet determined and caring, repeating what Moff Gideon had said himself to Mando while on Navaro.

The interaction between Bo, Mando, Boba Fett and Koska Reeves is fascinating, and the fight between Fett and Reeves fabulous, and the quip by Bo, 'don't you mean doner' brilliant, as another group is formed to take on and rescue the child.

Cara, Fennac, Bo and Koska shooting their way onto the Light Cruiser is amazing, and then the tension as Mando blasts the Dark Troopers out into space. Now I had not reckoned that Bo actually needed to fight Gideon to get the Dark Sabre, and the cleverness of Gideon is shown, as the Mando holds the Dark Sabre. Giancarlo Esposito is such an exquisite villain and his accent, so clear cut, snapped, and eloquently calm.

The flyby of an X-wing, that distinctive sound, well, who flies an X-wing, Luke obviously, but also Leia. I did not decide it was Luke, but watched on. 'One X-wing, great, we're saved' says Cara and I just adored that.

The GREEN lightsaber, the hooded cloak, the belt, the gloved single hand, it all said one thing, the music rising, and Gideon trying to kill himself as Grogu lays a hand on the CCTV screen showing the utter power and violence of a Jedi at the height of their powers, the face fully obscured as they laid waste to the Dark Troopers and then, before the reveal, the trust between Mando and The Child, Mando knowing this is the person for Grogu.

Then the music, going from the Mando guitar shifting into strings of the classic John Williams music, the strings that pull so hard at the heart as the greatest Jedi of all raises his hood, and then the moment of chance, that Din says 'he doesn't want to go with you' which really, although Luke said he needed permission, was that Din did not want to be parted from him, and so Luke assuages and confirms that he will protect him.

'I'll see you again, I promise' said Mando, and we see Mando's face as he tells Grogu 'Don't be afraid' and just as the tears want to well up and emotion overcomes, well a good old tin can astromech droid shows, it is a momentary smile, that can not overcome the raw emotional outpouring as Din and Grogu separate.

Favreau and Filoni said they were fans, and they said it was going to be a good story, and they were as good as their word, and this was only the end of the second season.

EDITORIAL

BY JAMES BACON

With only two seasons done, Mandalorian is without doubt one of my favourite TV series ever, up there now with Game of Thrones, BSG, Rebels, Band of Brothers, Colditz, 1990 and so on.

When I watched all nine seasons of Game of Thrones in quick succession last year, it was commented on that I knew or could read where the story was going, I did not realise that, and would make comments or quips, and predict it so well. I could never predict and I loved watching others try a bit, or do wish fulfilment, and I enjoyed the speculation from positive people, but also loved how favourite commentators would correct themselves. One episode Alex Damon from Star Wars Explained was unhappy, and I was like - he'll come around, and like the best reviewers, and commentators, he was happy to reflect later and realise, that a given episode had a part to play, and it all was fitting together.

Who knew that Fett and Fennec would become part of the rag tag bunch who would rescue Grogu along with Cara and Bo Katan and Koska Reeves. Who knew that Fetts Armour would show up on Tatooine and Slave 1, and a mention of Thrawn and so many other little connections, while weaving an incredibly original and different story, the Story of Din and Grogu, and that story is not ended yet.

The Dark Sabre moment in the last episode of Season one was amazing, Gideon was great but this was just, such a thing, and it opened up connecting to the Mandalorian lore as told in other parts of the Star Wars world.

The thing I missed. You know what I really have missed, celebrating Mandalorian with other fans in person. There is nothing like Star Wars Fandom, those fans who gather and dress and cavort and clamour at conventions. These guys are amazing. I watched on in 2019 and watched a Vadar and Stormtroopers in the deepest wilds of Hampshire, helping to raise money for a 5 year old with a tumour in his skull, and I bet they would have chatted about Mando now, their kindness amazing.

Celebration, was cancelled, and I was so mindful of how warm and nice everyone was, and how the fandom, my fandom was caring and good, The World of internet trolls, and various platforms is not one I subscribe to, I spend any online time going to fans who discuss positively what is going on, and don't bother with the negativity, it is such a waste of time, and then meeting real people, then I know this is the way. I attended my first Star Wars convention 26 years ago, and I met amazing people and in 2019 I met more and made more friends.

I did wonder if Ezra (Rebels) would show up as the mention of Thrawn would tie into that notion. In many ways this ending leaves lots of questions going forward, and I often harbour that fear that it will be rubbish, Star Wars has had ups.. and downs. My immediate concern was that Mando was actually finished and we would be getting the Book of Boba Fett. Part of me worried that - that might be season 3, could it be stand alone, it's unclear, and with the child safe now with LS where does Mando go. Maybe off with Bo Katan.

All these questions and more, but the end of Season 2 was such a wonderfully emotional and beautiful parting, it was great, how TV can make one feel so touched, was unreal. Many fans found different aspects touching, Luke was huge for many, for me it was Din and Grogu.

Heart breaking. Damn the brilliance of Filoni and Fevreau.

I think the strength of Mando is that there is so much subtlety, so many references and elements that catch the eye, and so many ways to interpret the scenes, that it gives it a vibrance and genuineness that other shows do not have. I have found many opinions about the same 30 seconds, and it is noticeable. I like that, a lot, and I also like the fans who reflect and consider. There is so much in the TV series, and luckily, I can also say to great friends, who are not Star Wars Fans, that this is worth a watch.

I am exceptionally grateful to all our contributors, 2020 has been a hard year for many, and in many ways an utterly dreadful year, and the losses and suffering incredibly difficult.

Work has been busy and good for me, my weekly Covid Tests all negative, and there has been success against the challenge and I have helped steward trainee train drivers into the career they aspire to. It is amazing having one of the best jobs in the world, being a Train Driver, and then being able to instruct, train and help others become that too.

So I am very grateful to our contributors. We, the editors of this issue had a whole different plan, a Post ROTJ issue, that might overlap with The Mandalorian, but this year, we have seen so many schedules upset, and as Mando came to an end, I just felt that people had something to say, something to share, and we pivoted hard to a Mando issue, and that was about a week ago. Madness.

And yet, we have so much, Autumn with the cover, so many artists coming forward and allowing us to use their work, and so many fans happy to write and share their views, and Gary Lyod sending me his article at 2am and all under a fabulous pressure. I am now twenty four minutes over due with this for instance!

And everyone has been brilliant, so to all our contributors to this issue and all our contributors and brilliant Co-editors this year, thanks for your understanding and thank you for your patience, we love your excitement and joy and appreciate your time and efforts, and love hearing what you have to say.

I am hopeful for 2021. More fanzines, as we look to King Arthur, Tim Powers, Craft during Covid and the American War in Vietnam. Hopefully. I hope. We hope.

I am especially looking forward to seeing fans, will we have conventions and when will they be, I do not know, but I do miss them and I look forward to more Mando, more Star Wars and more great things that people enjoy. We need enjoyment.



IMAGE CREDITS

A huge thank-you to all the artists that provided art to this zine, and all the artists who make excellent artworks under Creative Commons licenses. The stylised cover by Auton Purser is joined by a selection of art from a number of professionals and fans, including 2000AD artist Patrick Goddard, Marvel Artist Ryan Brown, Star Wars cards artist Col-Art and Hugo and Chesley nominee Sara Felix. We also got to share a number of artists' work from DeviantArt. We are very grateful to Col Art as he is working over the season with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, in a voluntary capacity.

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2-3: Star field by aajohan on DeviantArt: <http://aajohan.deviantart.com/art/Stars-86894028>

5: Photo by Alissa McKersie

6-7: The Mandalorian and The Child by Col Art

9: The Mandlorian by Patrick Goddard

10-11: Photos by Anne, Brian and Rosie Gray

12: Baby Yoda by AlonsoEspinoza on DeviantArt: <https://www.deviantart.com/alonsoespinoza/art/Baby-Yoda-828791328>

13: Boba Fett by Ryan Brown

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18-19: Star wars the rise of skywalker Rey vs Kylo Ren WW by Flashlyght on DeviantArt: <https://www.deviantart.com/flashlyght/art/Star-wars-the-rise-of-skywalker-Rey-vs-Kylo-Ren-WW-828443822>

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40-42: Photos by James Bacon

43: Photos by Christine Burnham

44-45: Seaside photos by Simon Crockett, selfies by HedgeScout (Joanne Alexander)

51: Mando by Sara Felix