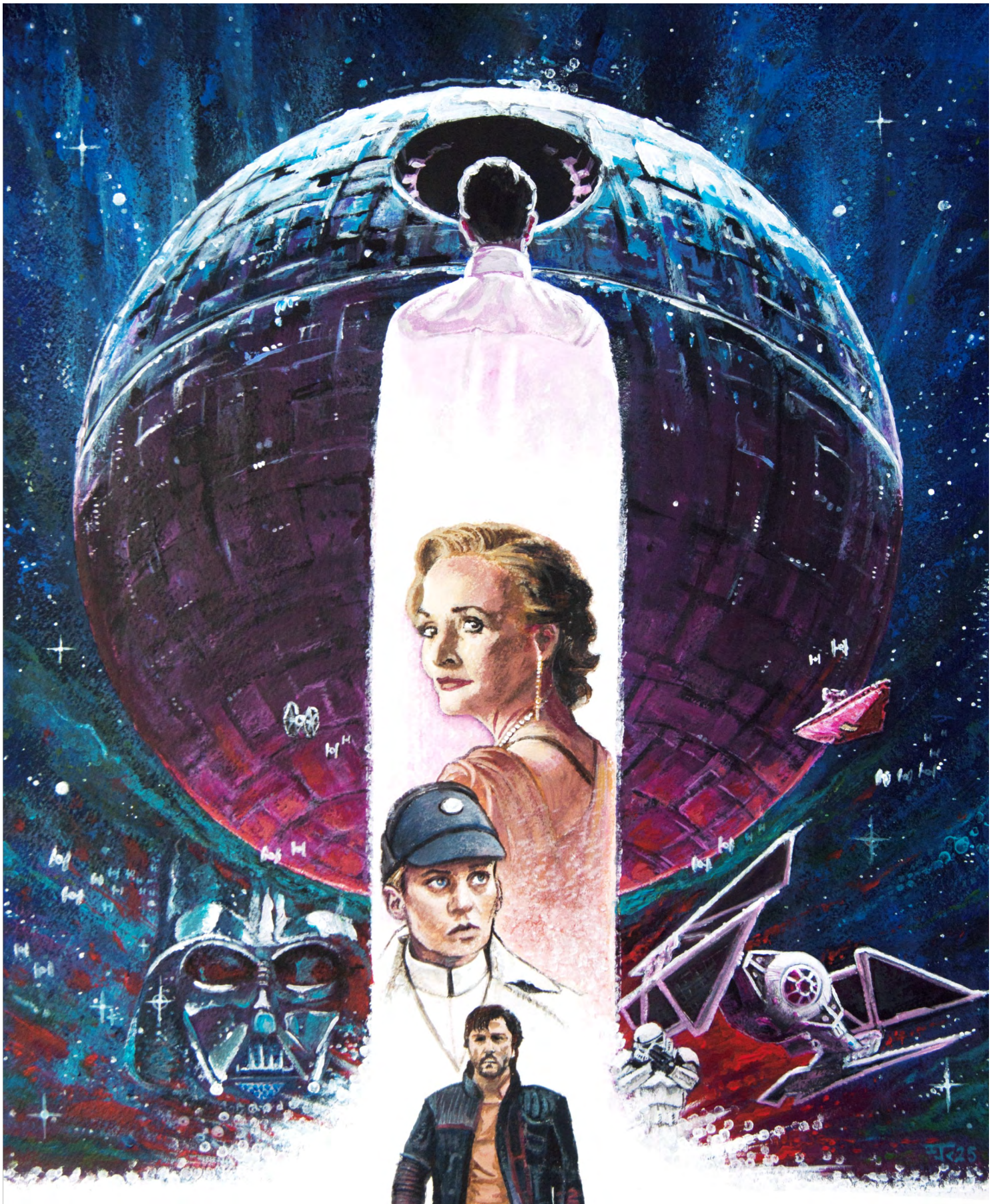

JOURNEY PLANET

Art Credits
Front cover by Iain Clark

Internal Art Credits
Autun Purser: page 9
Simon Adams: page 26
Sara Felix: page 28

Contents:

facebook.com/TeamJourneyPlanet
@teamjourneyplanet
journeyplanetsubmissions@gmail.com

Find our artists online!
Iain Clark: @iainjclark; https://iainjclarkart.com/
Autun Purser: https://www.apillustration.co.uk/
Sara Felix: @sillysarasue
Simon Adams: @simonadams77; https://www.simonadamsart.com/

Editor's Note from Allison Hartman Adams

This issue was meant to come out eons ago, significantly closer to the close of *Andor* Season 2. But if there's one thing *Andor* can teach us it's that plans rarely go as hoped. To our excellent contributors who worked so hard to meet our deadlines, and to our loving readers who have been waiting for this issue's release for months, we send our hearty thanks and apologies. All the standard stumbling blocks stood in our way – family, jobs, illness, and the odd PhD program – but Chris, James, and I are delighted to bring you *Journey Planet* 92: *Andor Season Two*.

As often happens when we discuss our favorite works, we are tempted to point to other artistic endeavors that doubtlessly served as inspiration. George Lucas famously leaned on Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, and we see echoes of Flash Gordon, *The Lord of the Rings*, and Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* throughout the Star Wars universe. In regards to *Andor*, online conversations about Season 2 posited strong connections to Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* or Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

But showrunner and creator Tony Gilroy has been clear: it's all real.

The structural underpinnings of *Andor* are all inspired by historical events, and therein lies its genius. We love *Andor* not just for the acting and writing and blessedly unobtrusive (yet still lustrous) special effects. We love it for the same reason we loved *Episode IV*: It's familiar. More importantly, it's timeless and enduring, outstripping even the films in its ability to connect with audiences. One doesn't need to speak the Star Wars fanilect, know about the Dai Bendu, or have a collection of replica light sabers in the basement. Gilroy's *Andor* is profoundly human and immediately accessible. Even my octogenarian parents loved it, and they stopped paying attention to Star Wars right around the same time Jar Jar Binks came on screen.

It is this familiarity that caused viewers to gape at the television during Season 2, aghast that it somehow was written, acted, and produced *before* Spring of 2025. It feels prescient. It feels like time travel. But really it is simply a keen observation and artistic articulation of the cruelties we inflict on one another, generation after generation, in the name of God, Country, and Party. And of what happens when dictatorial systems fail – when, as Nemik reminds us – the people flood the banks of authority and break tyranny's siege.

We certainly cannot capture everything there is to say about *Andor* in these pages. Indeed, I highly recommend you reread our issue on *Andor* Season 1 (https://www.journeyplanet.org/journey-planet/issue-69-andor) and reflect on both how much our world has changed, how it has remained constant, and how *Andor* elevated the Star Wars franchise forever.

Our issue runs the gamut from reflections on *Andor*'s enduring lessons, to how the story illuminates the Star Wars universe, to good-old-fashioned fan reviews. Our heartfelt thanks go to our excellent contributors: Hannah Strom-Martin, David Ferguson, James Mason, Autun Purser, Peppard Saltine, Brenda Noiseux, and Josh Gauthier. Our stunning art comes to us from Iain Clarke, Autun Purser, Sara Felix, and Simon Adams. Be sure to check out their websites and socials for more of their incredible creative endeavors! We hope you enjoy this issue of *Journey Planet*, and as ever, reach out with comments and suggestions at journeyplanetsubmissions@gmail.com

Rebel Heat: How Andor Brought Sexy Back to Star Wars, by Hannah Strom-Martin

The second season of *Andor* opens with a seduction. Cassian Andor (Diego Luna), comes to steal a TIE-fighter, finds it just as critical to reassure his contact, Niya (Rachelle Diedericks) that she's doing the right thing by defecting from the Empire. Their exchange is thrillingly intimate, with Cassian purring roughly that her choice represents her "coming home to yourself." It's another immortal Tony Gilroy speech – and it's refreshingly prefaced by Niya's cover story: if anyone asks what they're doing, they're flirting. "I like that!" Cassian concurs. Reader, so do I.

Much like the cartoon mouse who took it over, Star Wars is often an obnoxious eunuch of an IP. Its default setting – to hide anything so messy as human desire under layers as thick as Mandalorian armor – is only slightly less annoying than the fact that no one in the galaxy seems to sleep with actual blankets.[1] Don't get me wrong. I'd live on Naboo if I could, but when it comes to sexy, the Emperor stopped wearing pants after *The Empire Strikes Back.*

Han and Leia shacking up on the Falcon aside, never has a property with so many attractive actors in it so disappointed its horny fandom. During the prequel era, a ravishing ad campaign depicted Hayden Christensen and Natalie Portman as space Romeo and Juliet. The posters promised epic romance. What we got was *Attack of the Clones*. In the sequel era, the volcanic chemistry between Adam Driver's Kylo Ren and Daisy Ridley's Rey was criminally squandered by a failure to commit to the bit. Clearly these two were an erotic yin yang destined to reconcile the Force through passionate lovemaking – except, whoops, no they weren't because actual human attraction isn't a thing in latter day Star Wars. Finn's never trying to tell Rey he loves her (or Poe, for that matter) – he's just Force sensitive! A whopping one person ever flirts with Ashoka Tano. Even a baby-oiled, sea-bathing Qimir (Manny Jacinto) couldn't get it on in *The Acolyte*. (Never mind the fact that any living being with a pulse would have chased him across the galaxy just to touch his biceps.)

No, sex in Star Wars is simply not a motivator – not for the characters, not for the creatives. On his press junket for *The Rise of Skywalker,* JJ Abrams tied himself in knots to avoid committing to any kind of sexual interpretation of Rey and Kylo's relationship: "There is as much of a brother-sister thing between Rey and Kylo Ren as there is a romantic thing," Abrams said. "So it's not like literally a sexual, romantic thing, but it's more like they're bound together in this movie in a crazy, spiritual way that, again, felt romantic to me."[2]

Reader, those are…words.

Anyway.

While Disney may want to sanitize human interaction, Tony Gilroy does not, thank the Force. His *Andor* embraces all aspects of humanity, including the part that gets hot between the sheets. This has the effect of heightening the stakes and creating the most human and memorable Star Wars property ever made. Compared with *Andor,* everything else from Lucas Films looks like the storytelling of an emotionally stunted child.

Take a low-hanging example: Cassian and Bix (Adria Arjona), whose love story is pushed to the fore in Season Two. The fact they are lovers is integral to the plot, providing tension and character development that otherwise wouldn't be there. Think how limp this story would be if we don't get scenes like the one where Luthen (Stellan Skarsgård) emotionally blackmails Cassian about Bix's drug use. Luthen has recently visited Bix alone while Cass is out on a mission. Cassian's protection is roused when he finds out, leading to a tense confrontation between him and Luthen. If Cassian and Bix aren't a romantic couple, we'd get considerably less tension out of this scene, which takes on a decidedly less urgent tenor if, say, Luthen merely messed with one of Cassian's platonic friends.

Or, take for example, ISB agent Dedra Meero (Denise Gough) and Empiric book-licker Syril Karn (Kyle Soller), one of the most wonderfully weird couples ever depicted in Star Wars – or anywhere else. Karn's erotic fixation with Dedra makes his ultimate disillusion with the Empire even more devastating. He doesn't just lose his faith in the institution, but his entire concept of the person he's been living with. Their dual betrayals pack a one-two punch that makes Cassian's ultimate dismissal of Syril ("Who are you?") even more gutting. Syril is having the worst day of his life long before Cassian's question melts his ego.

Across *Andor*, the depiction of Actual Adult Relationships™, serves to deepen the realism of the characters. Mon Mothma (Genevieve O'Reilley) and Perrin (Alastair Mackenzie) may be the practitioners of a marital cold war, but their past intimacy bleeds through into delightfully nuanced scenes like the one where Perrin unthinkingly straightens Mon's gown during an argument. That the Mothmas are a married couple adds tension to their interactions with other characters like Mon's old boyfriend, Tay Kolma (Ben Miles) and Runai Sculdun (Rosalind Halstead), the wife of Perrin's friend and rival Davo (Richard Dillane). Indeed, the whole centerpiece of Season Two's first arc is the grand wedding of the Mothmas' daughter, where all these players meet and entangle in a literal dance. Without Mon's previous attachment to Tay, we don't get her own stunning dance as she tries to distance herself from his impending doom.

Finally, one of *Andor*'s more authentic flourishes is its depiction of rebellion itself as sexy. The rebellion's mixture of righteous ideas plus the threat of impending death creates an intoxicating atmosphere for the characters – as indeed, have its real-life counterparts: the French Resistance and the Civil Rights movement. The whole Ghorman arc of parts two and three find a broad swath of characters hooking up between the bomb-making. Wilmon (Muhannad Ben Amor) has a girl in every port – something that was always implied about rakish smugglers like Han Solo, but which is made explicit here. Low and behold, the IP doesn't spontaneously combust – although Wil and his girl Dreena (Ella Pellegrini) just might. In one scene it's implied that they've been making love in plain sight within their rebel bunker which is 1) hot, and 2) a historical fact of the French Resistance upon which their story arc is based. Since the dawn of time, human collectives have contained lovers, and it's refreshing to see that acknowledged here.

That people are brought together by revolution and because of it is never more poignantly dramatized than in the show's depiction of the relationship between Vel (Faye Marsay) and Cinta (Varada Sethu). While there's a legitimate argument to be made that their romance plays into the "Bury Your Gays" story trope, it deserves credit for showing us two very realistic women drawn to one another because of their revolutionary ideals. When Vel eulogizes Cinta as "a warrior," and "a miracle," we instantly understand the depth and intensity of their passion. (The show has an extraordinary ability to imply whole character histories in just a few words.) Their relationship makes Vel's grief all that more impactful and Cinta's death even more devastating than if they'd been written as closeted or "just friends."

Nor does *Andor* shy away from sexual violence. One of the hardest-to-watch scenes involves the attempted rape of Bix by an imperial officer. The scene is visceral and unpleasant – and represents a first for Star Wars that has, up until now, never acknowledged that sexual assault is a common weapon in the arsenal of fascist regimes. Because *Andor* explores all aspects of revolution and oppression, this scene is hardly out-of-line and, unlike some prestige shows (looking at you, *Game of Thrones*), is handled in a non-gratuitous and consequential fashion.

Now that we've established that sex and Star Wars can co-exist, what, pray are we supposed to do with this knowledge? I'm certainly not advocating for Storm Trooper porn or even explicit sex scenes, but *Andor* proves that allowing our characters to grapple with sex actually heightens the stakes of their stories, and provides intriguing grace notes. (And if someone were to pen a tasteful Star War erotic thriller, far be it from me to stop them.) *Andor* sweats and seethes and fascinates because its characters are fully realized beings with weird courtships, strained marriages, youthful lusts, and seductive pitches. Cassian isn't just sexy because he's Diego Luna in a killer coat, but because he marries sex appeal with revolutionary zeal and if Star Wars were to take a page from *Andor* and give its Bothans, Jedi, and tortured Sith lords some similar depth going forward, Reader: I'd like that.

1. Seriously. Watch *Rebels*. Not. One.

2. Zach Sharf, "J.J. Abrams Says Rey and Kylo Ren Have a 'Brother-Sister Thing' in 'Star Wars,'" IndieWire, December 23, 2019.

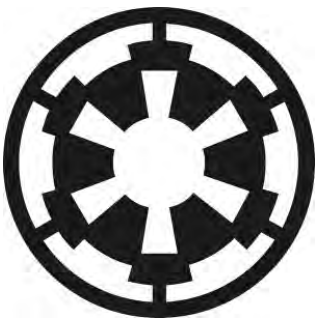
Andor and America by David Ferguson

Growing up I had a different view of the Empire, largely due to the character of Darth Vader. He may have struck terror into the hearts of many young children, but I just saw a character with a cool look and cool entrance music, John Williams' ominous Imperial March. It was not till later that I recognised the…well…dark side of the character and the organisation that he represents. That is one of the things that hits home with the *Andor* series. It portrays the true nature and evil of the Empire. Particularly as it shows how it impacts ordinary citizens, many of whom are just trying to get on with their lives and stay out of the Empire's way. It got me thinking about another story that was doing the same thing – *Judge Dredd: America*.

Similar to Star Wars, I missed some of the nuances of Judge Dredd when I was younger. I just saw a cool looking cop beating up the bad guys. I wasn't alone in missing what was really going on in Judge Dredd. Co-creator John Wagner has lamented in the past that readers have cheered on Dredd, even as they made it clearer that he was a tool of a fascist state. With *America*, he could not have made it more clear. *America* tells the story of a couple of ordinary citizens: Benny, the weak boy that just wants to keep his head down and follow the rules, and America, the child of immigrants, who wonders what has become of the country she was named for. Wagner wanted to tell a story that compared immigrants in Dredd's time to the immigration of the 19th and 20th century and ask what had become of the American Dream.

The story covers a wide span of time as the two grow into adulthood, with many nods to the big events that have occurred in Dredd's long history. Usually Dredd stories are told from his point of view. In *America*, Benny tells the story, and Dredd and the other judges are supporting characters. However, they loom large over the story like bogeymen. Benny notes that he "can't remember when he first became aware of the judges." They were always there. Benny even says that they were used as threats by parents to scare children into going to bed – "sleep or the Judges will come for us" – even though the parents were just as afraid. Dredd notes children or "juves" need to be caught at a young age. He says, "Put the fear of Grud into them right from the start. I like to give them the stare – a long hard look – a look that says: I know you, juvey. I'm keeping a special eye on you."

Benny and America first encounter a judge in childhood, when Benny has been beaten up by some other juves. The judge acts in a threatening manner and treats Benny like a perp. Benny is upset, but America stands up for him, prompting the judge to do a background check on both of them. America sees them as bad guys from that young age, saying, "He was a bad man, Benny." Later, Benny becomes an entertainer, singing jingles, but America gets involved in the pro-democracy movement, racking up time in the cubes (Mega City One's prisons) for crimes such as putting up pro-democracy posters. It is chilling how democracy is painted as a bad word. The two drift apart but run into each other later on by accident. America is now part of a militant pro-democracy group. Benny gets caught in the crossfire of their violent agenda and is shot in the throat, ironically losing his singing voice. However, having no voice means he is able to keep the information he knows from the judges during his interrogation.



America later comes to see him. They rekindle their friendship and she tells him some of the horrors she has faced at the hands of the Justice Department. She asks him for money, which she later reveals will be used to purchase explosives to blow up the Statue of Liberty. Benny argues with her saying, "I … I thought you were all for liberty." She responds, "There is no liberty, not here. The statue's a sick joke." The statue still exists but symbolically it stands in the shadow of a much larger statue of a judge. Although Benny supplies the money, he also informs the judges. The group are all mercilessly gunned down even as they try to surrender. Benny had been promised that they wouldn't hurt America and he tells Dredd that the judges could have easily arrested her. Dredd responds that it

was a demonstration: "You're not the only one in show business."

If we were to look at character comparisons with *Andor*, I see parallels between Mon Mothma and Benny. Mon has a fear of the Empire and tries to work within the system as a senator before realising in the end that it isn't working anymore and she has to leave and work outside it. Benny comes to the same realisation but his change is smaller as he moves from being the singer of jingles to songs with more depth, almost saying that there is nothing to laugh at anymore. Mon is a stronger character of course, but they are both changed through losses and tragedy. Benny can also be seen in the many people in *Andor* who share a willing blindness to the Empire's crimes, who believe the news that they are fed. Some are maybe just afraid to fight and find it easier to believe what they are told: the state will get rid of all the things that scare you. The Justice Department in *Judge Dredd: America* and the Empire in *Andor* are similar. Fascist regimes trying to control their citizens. The order of the system is more important than the freedoms of regular people, ordinary citizens trying to live their lives within ever more restrictive frameworks and trying to avoid the attention of their cruel, uncaring masters.

Judge Dredd: America ends with Judge Dredd's chilling commentary on the American Dream: "So dream on, creep. But just remember – that's all it is. A dream… America is dead. This is the real world." The reality of both worlds are scary places.

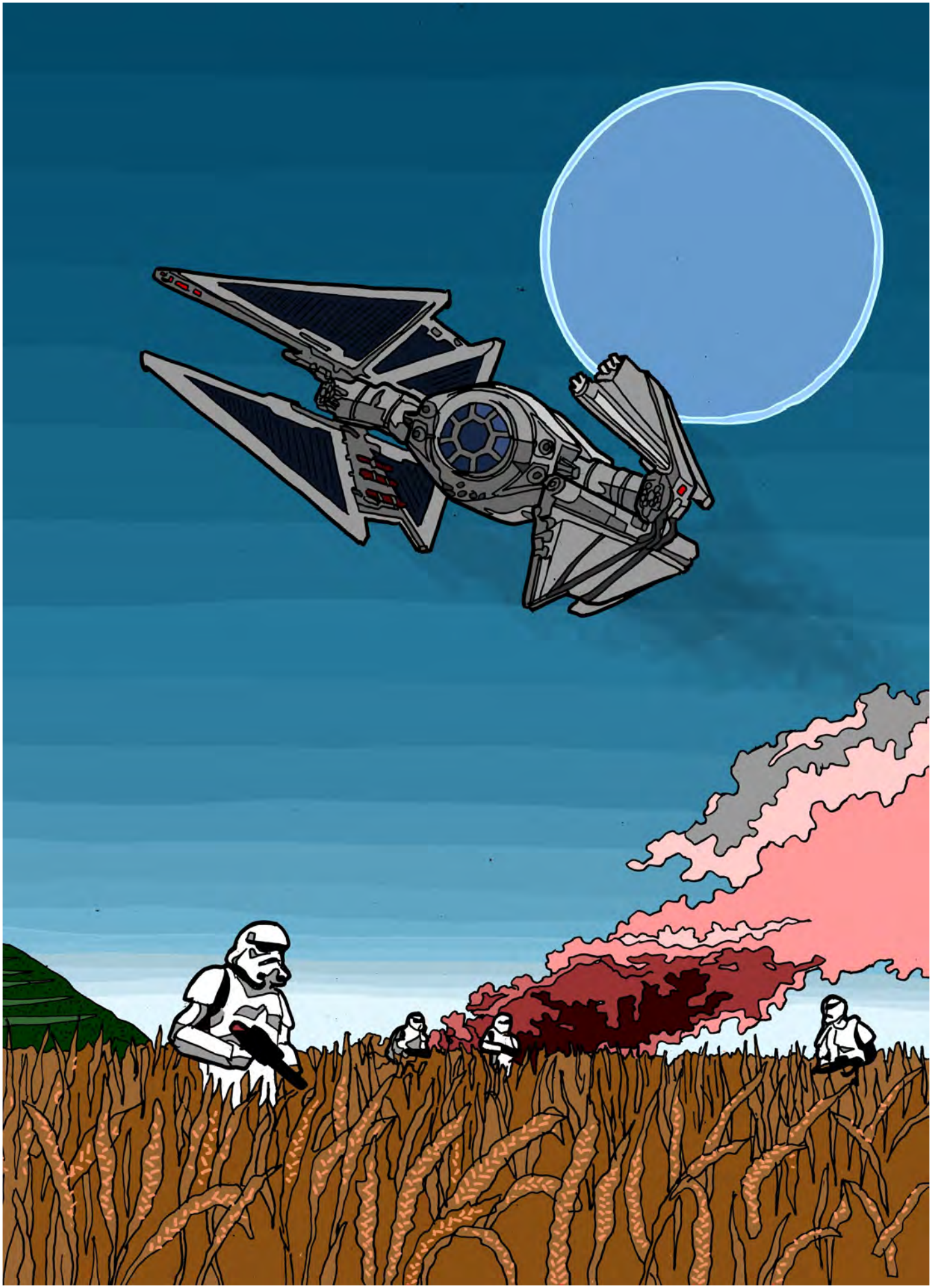
Thoughts on Andor by Autun Purser

On Episode and Story Form:
The 3-episode arc structure I found very satisfying. At present, such shows tend to spend a whole season on an individual arc, so if you are not particularly keen on that story, you must endure 6, 10, 13 or whatever episodes before your heroes escape the predicament they are currently in. With *Andor, you know you only have 3 episodes before the focus will change; the prison won't be forever; dancing and politicking will soon be replaced by more explosions and running about. The three-episode arcs I enjoyed as mini-movies, long enough for characters and situations to develop, to invest in what is going on, but none of them dragged out overall. It reminds me of 'old' Dr Who, when a season was a few episodes in length within a season – this I miss across shows today. One-episode shows, like Twilight Zone or Black Mirror, are great for an idea nugget, but with Andor these nuggets need some further explanation – how and why rich merchants may go against the Empire, or what is it like to try and sort out the wedding of your kid whilst simultaneously going against the state in secret...One episode isn't enough to do justice to these sorts of questions.*

On Easter Eggs:
For me, as a designer, I have always loved the plain aesthetic of the Empire in *Star Wars episodes 4, 5 and 6. Wonderful to see these simple insignia squares, straightforward blasters, and basic caps get more and more airtime as the series progressed. References to equipment and the wider world not shown specifically I also enjoyed, such as the Scout Walker toy, the terrible TV hosts - throwing back to the (rightly?) maligned Holiday Special... haha, those awful early Eurovision hairstyles and sooo much viscose fabrics on the screens, to suck the attention of the progressively more media drip-fed populous...*

The Ending:
As a Daniel Mays fan, it was a shame not to see Tivik, but basically I liked the ending very much – a swift look at the outcomes for most of the surviving cast. I wonder though, what happened to those planet-stranded battling rebels from the first episode?

Overall:
To me, this show combined the Star Wars canon with other sci-fi ideas and topics seldom given serious attention by the family-pleasing main products and movies. With streaming, people wanting both can be catered to, which is great. Andor as a character is not dissimilar to Gully Foyle from *The Stars My Destination by Alfred Bester. A vague lowlife is thrown into trouble and builds a deep, overriding resentment and all encompassing aim in wreaking havoc on those who have wronged him. How it is to live inside a totalitarian state is addressed from those who dwell here, not just from the lords, leaders and particularly vitriolic opposers – similar to Nineteen Eighty-Four, Brave new World and We. The show, like history, shows those who rebel against a system will have a tough time of it for many years before they have a chance to start to get the upper hand – if they ever will. The one-sided newscasts from Ghorman are too similar to some we get from the various conflicts in the 21st century to sit easy with the viewer...The inhabitants in Coruscant get as biased a picture of events abroad as most of us do today.*



Friends Everywhere by Allison Hartman Adams

> *"But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother."*

In the closing paragraphs of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, we witness the final stages of Winston Smith's total disintegration. A one-time antifa revolutionary, he waits in the Chestnut Tree Cafe, after a cold and bloodless meeting with his one-time love Julia, thinking about the "longhoped-for bullet" that will, someday soon, enter his brain.

Syril Karn is afforded no such contemplative moment at the end of *Andor*. We see the blaster headshots that bookend Syril's story, the first delivered by Cassian Andor in the Leisure Zone on Morlana One, the second by Carro Rylanz in a Ghorman cafe. Like Winston, Syril believed in something true and good and evergreen, and like Winston, he is broken by that which he loved.

No one is arguing that these two characters fought for the same world. Far from it. Winston sought to tear down fascism, whereas Syril believed in its gloriously ordered and insulating potential. Indeed, these two men operate as photographic negatives of each other. They are inversions of purpose, but effectively aligned when it comes to what fuels their actions: unflinching, manic idealism.

Of course, the worlds this idealism would create never materialize – for Winston because the quest for absolute truth is impossible under Big Brother's unbreakable gaze, and Syril because he cannot understand that the Empire rewards cruel, competitive ambition, not earnest hard work. Both men are blind to reality, both are routinely manipulated by those they love. And both are missing something unique to the Rebellion and implicitly outlawed by the very nature the Empire and INGSOC: community.

In the weeks following the close of *Andor* Season 2, there was quite a bit of handwringing over Syril's inner journey. We viewers – like readers of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – crave resolution, insisting on the palatable ease of trope-fulfillment. We see Winston's senility at the cafe and Syril's too-slow awakening in Palmo Plaza and we think, *But No! It can't end like this!* Where is Katniss Everdeen and her bow or V and his bombs? When does Winston triumph over totalitarianism? Where is Syril's absolution for his role in the murder of an entire civilization? When do they both become the men they – and we – know they could be?

And, perhaps more importantly, we ask if we *should* hope for their redemption – fearing that to do so would amount to pardoning yet another mediocre man's colossal failure.

The glimmer of redemption for Syril comes in the heartbeat before his death. He stands ready to murder Cassian, his five-year obsession, as the Ghorman Massacre rages around them. But Syril hesitates. Attentive viewers notice that dip in the barrel of Syril's blaster, who is struck dumb by the impossibility of Cassian's bewildered question: "Who are you?" Earlier, Carro Rylanz, heartbroken over the demise of his people – and Syril's unwitting betrayal – lashes out demanding, "What kind of being are you?"

We want Syril to answer, but his silence stretches across the mayhem at Palmo Plaza, in which he takes the measure of his life and comes up with…*nothing*. He fills that void with reckless self-loathing that spasms outward in convulsions of violence: against himself, against the woman he loves, and against the man who shattered his vision of Imperial purity.

We are endlessly fascinated with Syril Karn because none of us want to admit how familiar he is. We see ourselves in his delusional efforts to believe that his uninspiring job at the Imperial Bureau of Standards is worth something. Syril's carefully-arranged clone trooper action figures in his childhood bedroom recall Luke Skywalker idly toying with his T-16 Skyhopper model in *Episode IV*. But where Luke's idealism is fed by necessity and hope, Syril's is starved of nourishment by those who seek to manipulate him.

Luke succeeds where Syril and Winston do not because the Rebellion fosters community, while Palpatine's Empire and Big Brother's Party dismantle it.

Syril never fits the Imperial mold – forever alienating others with his cringy sobriety. From Inspector Hyne, who dismisses Syril's concern over the murder of the two Pre-Mor officers as a "regrettable misadventure," to Syril's lackluster, lethargic coworkers, to Eedy Karn, who could keep a child therapist in riches for eternity, to Partagaz who sees him only as a paper doll to be moved around on the stage of conspiracy, Syril has spent his life buffeted by those who do not believe in him. They tell him who to be, how to act, all while insisting on a disappointing, frustrating, and uninspired vision of the Empire.

Except, crucially, Dedra Meero.

Similarly, Winston never swallows the Party ideology because he actually remembers what life was like before Big Brother. Winston doggedly clings to the hope of bringing down the Party from the moment he commits his treasonous thoughts to writing. He is plagued by memories of his dead mother and sister, who haunt him as much as Syril is haunted by Eedy. Winston is frustrated at Julia's prosaic brand of rebellion, irritated that she is simply attempting to survive (and even enjoy) what life she has in Oceania, rather than striving to burn it all down. He loves Julia, but neither of them have a reference point for what love actually is, as Newspeak hinges on the erasure of nuance in language, and the sole object of any love is and must always be Big Brother. Winston, by necessity, lies, obfuscates, avoids. He is disgusted by everyone around him, including himself. All are disappointments.

Except, crucially, O'Brien.

In examining the overlap of Winston and Syril, Dedra Meero becomes both Julia and O'Brien – "the tormentor…the protector…the inquisitor…the friend." Syril and Dedra love each other, but like Winston and Julia, neither have models of healthy love on which to build a relationship. Love for them is lust, ambition, and obsession, and Syril's quest to love/conquer her is tangled in his concept of Dedra as an Imperial ideal. Similarly Winston is obsessed with O'Brien from the start, absolutely *certain* (based only on a shared glance) that O'Brien is a secret revolutionary. He believes that O'Brien truly understands what is good and true and right in the world, what is worth fighting for. For Winston, it is the dissolution of the authoritarian Party; for Syril it is the establishment of the equally authoritarian Empire. Antithetical goals, balanced on the identical delusion – the belief that purity of ideology can make a person above reproach, that this person – Dedra or O'Brien – can be the glittering embodiment of absolute truth.

Seven years prior to the start of Orwell's novel, Winston dreamed of O'Brien telling him that they will "meet in the place where there is no darkness," an imagined promise that propels Winston into writing the seditious diary explicitly for O'Brien, a testament to his rebellious spirit and adoration of this unknown comrade. Within moments of their secret meeting, Winston readily promises O'Brien that he will murder, blackmail, betray, spread disease, and even mutilate children for the Brotherhood. When O'Brien asks Julia and Winston if they are willing to sacrifice their love for the sake of revolution, she immediately says "No." Winston, on the other hand, hesitates under O'Brien's watchful gaze, clearly signifying that Winston's obsession with O'Brien is stronger than his love for Julia. Ironically, the love Winston and Julia share is exactly what Winston has been craving – something that braids together individuals engaged in the creation of a new life, a process that is messy, complicated, and at times hurtful. Both Winston and Syril might *think* that they want what Cassian and Bix have, but, in Winston's true heart, he would rather have the ideal, not the reality. He prefers O'Brien.

Even when O'Brien reveals himself to be an agent of the Party, even after O'Brien tortures and interrogates him, Winston will not surrender his love:

> He opened his eyes and looked up gratefully at O'Brien…He had never loved him so deeply as at this moment, and not merely because he had stopped the pain….O'Brien was a person who could be talked to. Perhaps one did not want to be loved so much as to be understood. O'Brien had tortured him to the edge of lunacy, and in a little while, it was certain, he would send him to his death. It made no difference. In some sense that went deeper than friendship, they were intimates: somewhere or other, although the actual

> words might never be spoken, there was a place where they could meet and talk. O'Brien was looking down at him with an expression which suggested that the same thought might be in his own mind.

I've long held the belief that Winston is delusional from the start – that the whole story is some sort of hallucination and he's been in the Ministry of Love from Page 1. Yes, he's isolated and manipulated, but his stubborn belief that O'Brien is somehow his friend, his "intimate", who wants to bro out with him after this torture session, is not only preposterous, but also a key factor in how easy it is for O'Brien to manipulate Winston to the very end.

Similar devotion can be seen in Syril, whose single-minded adherence to Imperial ideology constructs an imagined version of Dedra Meero to adore. Kyle Soller, who played Syril in the show, puts it best: "Dedra becomes an object of his fixation about power. [Syril] was like, 'Oh my God, you're a member of the ISB, I want to be you, but I also think I want to be with you, and I also kind of want to be inside you?'" Syril and Dedra do have actual affection for each other, but neither are capable of differentiating between unflinching ideology and human love, a flaw that deepens their callous tragedy.

Syril's substitution of reality with idealism propels his obsession with Dedra and drives him to rescue her from the riot after Marva's funeral on Ferrix. Remember, they have had only the briefest of interactions at this point, and she has explicitly told him to back off. But in an act of what he doubtlessly perceives as heroism – but which gives serious incel vibes – Syril drags her to her feet, jams a blaster in her back, tells her to do as he says, and shoves her into an isolated and locked storage room where, presumably, no one can hear her scream. Then, he declares his love:

> I thought I had ruined my life. I thought I was done…Just being in your presence, I…I've realized that life is worth living, I realized that if nothing else, there was justice, and beauty in the galaxy and if I just kept going…Perhaps my deranged belief that there was something better fated for me in the future was a dream worth clinging to.

These manufactured saviors turn out to be completely un-loyal to both Winston and Syril in the end. Dedra deceives Syril, using him to fabricate the "rebels [the Empire] can depend on to do the wrong thing." While Dedra is herself trapped by the Empire, and does show some regret at Syril's ultimate demise, she readily exploits him in service of her superiors' needs. She mourns his death quickly and privately, her faith in the Empire still unshaken. She, like Syril, misses her window for redemption. O'Brien is of course significantly more sadistic, revealing late in the novel that he has been watching Winston's descent into rebellion for years, purposefully letting Winston pursue his own ruin. However, both O'Brien and Dedra know the power they have over their puppets and show only passing regret at the consequences of their actions. Just as Dedra promises Syril that, if he obeys her, they can reclaim their sparkling antiseptic life on Coruscant (complete with awkward dinners with Eedy followed by stilted lights-off kinky sex), O'Brien promises Winston, "You are in my keeping…I shall save you, I shall make you perfect."

These characters' complete isolation is the final component of their failure. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the community is either abolished or shunted off to be inhabited by the Proles. Even the Brotherhood, the purported key to salvation, is in fact an exercise in isolation:

> "You understand," [O'Brien] said, "that you will be fighting in the dark. You will always be in the dark. You will receive orders and you will obey them, without knowing why…When you are finally caught, you will confess….[But] you will not be able to betray more than a handful of unimportant people. Probably you will not even betray me."

In *Andor*, Syril has no one outside Dedra and Eedy. His superiors and coworkers have all disappointed him, save Partagaz who would quickly disavow him, and it is completely intentional that the twinkle of Syril's conversion comes only when his almost-sort-of community in the Ghorman Front is annihilated. If something could "convert" Syril, it would be watching the deaths of the men and women who see him as worthy of genuine friendship and camaraderie. Online commenters have pointed out that Syril is not moved by the massacre on Ferrix because those people are black, brown, and ungovernable in the Empire's eyes, whereas the Ghormans are of "his set." By the end of Season 2, Syril has adopted Ghorman clothing and hair style, and while latent classism/racism in his character may be at play, he also was never meant to be part of the Ferrix community to begin with. But what Syril finds on Ghorman, once he is given a chance, is a home – a purpose.

After Syril attends the Ghorman town hall, Carro Rylanz suggests to him that "maybe [they] can do some good together." Sure, Syril came as an infiltrator, but suddenly, he is "not a tourist." Syril seems genuinely surprised by the passion and heart he witnesses at the town hall, and when Carro says "Till we meet again," Syril replies "Till

then" *in Ghor*. He returns the traditional Ghorman farewell gesture and each person in the room – Syril included – is moved by how natural it feels. Compare this moment to Syril's insistence earlier in the season that, at the Imperial Bureau of Standards (the paragon of the ordinary), "there is a future…for those who dare." In the first, he is surrounded by real people possessed of a lethal love for their home, asking him – Syril Karn – to be part of something true. In the second, he is gearing up for a lifetime career as Dwight K. Schrute, would-be Assistant (to the) Regional Moff.

If nothing else, *Andor* reminds us that community – the kind that sustains – is the province of the Rebellion, not the Empire or Big Brother. Indeed, the success of any totalitarian regime hinges on the obliteration of community. We need only look at this morning's headlines for proof. Whether we're reading about the "continued and inexplicable Ghorman resistance to Imperial norms," Emmanuel Goldstein's command "of a vast shadowy army, an underground network of conspirators dedicated to the overthrow of the State," or how fishermen somehow deserve summary execution via airstrike, the narrative must and always will be, "Us versus Them."

Syril and Winston fail because they are without a community to catch them, rescue them, or even eat with them (save Dedra and Syril's ghoulish fondue dinner). We witness the life that Cassian and the others build on Yavin 4, this utopia that has a place even for Kleya, the most isolationist among them. There is joy in acting on a shared vision and the intersectional efforts of people of different backgrounds with different goals. The Rebellion is made of diversity, and it's no mistake that the communal meal at Kellen's Mina-Rau farm is attended by mostly *undocumented workers* from across the galaxy, each of them contributing to the collective effort of creating a home.

The Rebellion fosters collaboration and camaraderie; the Empire encourages competition. The Rebellion is interconnection. The Empire is isolation. Any who tie themselves to the latter will be used up and cut loose. As Luthen tells Dedra, the Rebellion cannot be conquered because the community that sustains it is too wide-spread. "It's flown away," he says. And unlike Winston and Syril, the Rebels "have friends everywhere."

Dedra and Cyril: The Conflict of Love and Hatred, Ghorman and Empire by James Bacon

I think Denise Gough is incredible. The end of Season One left us with so many questions. Dedra Meero was such an excellent character, an insightful and analytical Machiavellian securocrat, who had come through the ranks. We got to see the Empire at its most diabolical, a systematic authoritarian regime. Gough as Meero gave the viewer an incredible perspective that is utterly vital to everything that we have gotten from *Andor* because we need good villains who are complex and not black and white, who are human even as they act savagely. Gough gives the viewer one of the finest Star Wars Villains. This is very important to appreciate; we have had Vader, the Emperor, and many henchmen (is Maul a henchman?). Thrawn is fascinating and has potential, although we have not really seen enough of him on screen.

But Gough as Dedra nailed it.

I think that Dedra, with her front-line experience giving her the edge of confidence and reserve, balanced with an amazing ability to put forward her analysis of the situation, is driven to work around the barriers to find a way to prove her suspicion that there is a cohesive rebellion building.

Dedra is right.

The resulting drama with her trying to find Axis, thus placing her into the incredible culmination of the first series, the moment of tension and trauma in Ferris, where things do not go as planned, where she is faced with her own death, and was ready to kill, we see the person Dedra thinks is her attacker, is not; it's is Syril, the stalkery Savior.

It was an amazing moment. It was one of the largest questions that fans had at the end of the season.

The way that Kyle Soller plays Syril Karn and Denise Gough portrays Dedra Meero in Season Two, only builds on their amazing work, as does the collective writing, directing, acting of the whole *Andor* Team, where we can see there is a very well thought through story, and the time and pace to tell it.

In Season Two, Gough doesn't just continue to be brilliant, she brings a fresh level of shallowness to her character, an arrogance. She feels she knows better than so many, but she is wrong, and develops her portrayal perhaps because she comes so far in the intervening time, perhaps that there has been unseen yet tangible development between herself and Syril, within the Empire and the Rebellion. That the off-screen occurrences do not leave viewers confused or grasping for answers is brilliant.

Krennick turning up was clever. Ben Mendelsohn did not asphyxiate scenes; he was used very well, and demonstrated the layering of Imperial control and command. When we see that he wants – *demands* – her view on Ghorman, he shows in what regard she and her insights are held, identifying what Krennick needs: "You need a radical insurgency you can count on, you need Ghorman rebels you can depend on to do the wrong thing."

Like a comic artist Steve Dillon once said to me, it is all about the faces. Gough's ability to control her face, to set it in stone, and to act so clinically, projecting feelings, emotion, thought, pleasure, and of course stern strength is phenomenal. The way Gough holds her jaw and lips, it is a presence that presents a formidable visage.

That Syril and Dedra are together is a moment of visual and storytelling pleasure. These two characters are so different, yet bound together in certain characteristics: their dedication, sense of duty and loyalty, although to the Empire, if not always to one another. I was pleased that they were together, but also found the interactions between them to be so complex, not confounding, we all know human partnerships that look unexpected, or odd, but work really well for those people. Dedra and Syril work well for each other. As we get to see, ever so slightly, another side to Dedra in this season, the moment of choice between white and black dress, is brilliant.

Surgical in portrayal and presentation, Dedra wastes no time dealing with Syril's mother, Eedy, played by Kathryn Hunter. Dedra makes it very clear who is in charge, and that creating anxiety for Syril will not be tolerated. It is utterly superb; her care and even love for Syril manifests here as she protects him and subjugates his mother to her. We also find out a little of her past: "My parents were criminals," Dedra explains. "They were arrested when I was three. I was raised in an Imperial Kinder-block."

This was superb! Dedra has been raised by the Empire, a progeny as one might say, for the uniform, homogeneous, obedient, and loyal armies that the colonial dictatorship needs.

It is hard to know the exact timeline here. The Empire began 19 years before the Battle of Yavin (BBY) which is a mark for many fans in Star Wars, and the setting of *Andor* Season Two at this point is about four years BBY. This has given some fans grist for their inconsistency or continuity mill, but one expects that Dedra went from a Kinder Block, into an academy and service, so while it may have been more accurate to say Jugend Block, nowhere as clear as "Kinder," which we immediately understand is the right term, and Clann Gilroy nail the language being used. Dedra was a child, institutionalised at the age of 3, followed by a life in a government orphanage, which Eedy implies would have been tough. Dedra only sees it as a proud positive, as she "had everything" to become the very calculating and cold inhuman machine that she is, emotions neatly and efficiently scrubbed away.

They have achieved an interpersonal relationship and being partners endears them to viewers, somehow overcoming the awkwardness and even oddness between them, and finding that there is something there for one another. It would be wrong to judge whether it is "romantic," per se; they have a romantic interest in one another. There is a unique intimacy to the relationship between the characters – how Dedra touches Syril, how he likes to please her, how he does as she wishes, subtly reflecting Syril's own personal development.

That they are then working together for the Empire is obviously very important to Syril and pleasing for Dedra, even if she has to curtail his enthusiasm a bit. Of course, the depth of difference that this exposes between them is part of their undoing.

I loved how the view of Ghorman is punctuated musically by violins and pianos and visually with people in berets and bakers in toques. There is clearly a European feel to Palmo, and for me it all had a hint of France to it. Of course, we see Syril's love of the field work, for Dedra, for Partagaz, for the Empire.

Syril plays his part for Dedra well. As he tells his mother that her negativity about Ghormans is just propaganda, one gets to question what are Syril's real feelings about this "propaganda"? Does he believe it, or feel it is actually the truth? Is his defensive stance for the Ghormans purely to convince them that he is a potential mole?

I found what term to use for Syril: challenging. Is he a double agent, in the sense that he is tricking the Ghormans into believing he is a mole, when really, he is a spy, as normally the term implies that a spy turns on his own? He's not exactly a double agent. He is an Imperial agent, and is loyal to the Empire. The Ghorman front obviously think that he is a mole, acting as their spy, their agent within the Imperial structure giving them intelligence. He is not, as at the same time he is running intelligence back to Dedra, although while he risks himself, in the line of duty and service to Dedra and the Empire, he's being kept in the dark, not unsurprisingly. And of course, this will be a tactic for spies anyhow – the less they know, the less risk to them and to the overall system.

But there's something especially challenging when this duplicity also exists within a personal relationship with Dedra. He is so committed to the Empire in the early episodes.

Ghorman confounds even Luthen. Dedra is there for a year, and Luthen and Lonni have a conversation about what that might mean, which is fascinating, especially then as we see those who are gathered in Ghorman to object to the Empire:

> Sixteen years ago, Grand Moff Tarkin killed 500 peaceful, unarmed Ghormans in the middle of that plaza. You can imagine how upset we would be to find out there's an imperial military facility rising over the Monument to the Fallen. Ghormans yearn for peace and prosperity.
>
> Elector Carro Rylanz

Syril is skilled as he listens to and responds with a Ghorman gesture and speaks Ghorman "Till then," which obviously impresses the Ghormans.

As Dedra has somehow come to love and care for Syril, we get to see that Syril starts to care somehow for some of the Ghormans. Is he honest when he says that the meeting is passionate? The way that Syril looks at Enza, and the way he is introduced as "an Imperial spy" is really interesting, immediately being introduced to Elector Rylanz, what an incredible play they think, and he has achieved.

After the ISB raids his office (which was unclear whether it was part of the plan) Syril returns to Coruscant and we see him meet Dedra. The kiss that Syril gives Dedra, and her look of mild distaste and disdain, is perfect. Her odd discomfort, how she reads him and knows when he says that have "an hour" he does so with the hint of disappointment. We can see she wants to make him happy, even with the most deadpan direction to "turn out the lights." While he is surprised at Dedra being so professional, so correct, a failing of his, he says, "Can't believe you had me followed" and Deadra says it again, an order this time. There is the hint of pleasure, hint of smile from her as he turns to do so and he watches her intently as he does. It is amazing acting.

Propaganda can manipulate and mislead, and Dedra quite carefully notes to Krennick that it would not suffice in the battle for Ghorman. However, if one is part of the machinery using it, one has to believe that this is the truth, or that it is a deliberate and systematic set of lies to tell a different story. We live in a time when it feels like lies are listened to and believed, which some of us find incredulous, and one assumes others believe without question. It is fascinating how the Gilroy Team have so brilliantly tapped into that question: what is truth and how important it is to control the narrative, to tell the right story? Fact checking doesn't seem to make much difference, but with the onset of AI, one now has to question everything. When we see something like "the first ever Patriot Games, an unprecedented four-day athletic event featuring the greatest high school athletes — one young man and one young woman from each state and territory," we wait until it is reported on trusted networks. There was doubt in my household: was it fakery? Some news agencies obviously delight in being biased and in sharing disinformation that furthers their financial or political agenda. Similarly, we can see that the reports from Ghorman, the ones that we take that Eddy is watching, are biased. The Gilroy Team underscores the importance of a reputable source in *Andor* and here in the moment of 2025. Truth and facts matter, and *Andor* brings that to light.

At this point one believes that Syril is someone who took the Imperial Kool-Aid. It is clear he does not have any doubts about what he is doing, although one wonders if Dedra had been more open and trusting with him if it would have made a difference.

Syril's pleasure at spying on the Ghorman Front and his determination to please her (or is it to please Partagaz?) is clear. When Syril reports to Partagaz, Dedra is clearly on Syril's side, but being more experienced, she is skeptically confident. I think when Partagaz notes how they "are inexperienced and very eager" and we see that there is a plan for outside agitators to be baited.

Syril's determination to do his duty by the Empire is clear. After the meeting with Partagaz, he is proud but looks a bit stunned. He says: "If I say this is the greatest day of my life, does it spoil everything?" This is an awkward moment, and when I watched it, I was not sure what would come next. It looks like Dedra may be nonplussed, but Gough looks down, and there is just a hint of warmth to her mouth, and she replies, "It's good to see you happy."

This is some of the best acting ever. It is like close-up magic; you are there, and see the nuanced and incredible human subtly portrayed as performance. And you feel she means it; she loves him. This is an odd and unusual intimacy and care – they genuinely have something, love for one another, even though it is also enmeshed in deception.

When Partagaz speaks with Dedra, we realise just how deep the intrigue is, though. Even though he is both impressed he is also concerned. He sees Dedra navigating the relationship and balancing that with her duty and the depth of her deception, keeping it away from Syril. "You walk a very narrow path, Dedra," he tells her. "Syril must never know what this is all really about."

"I remind myself constantly, sir," she replies.

There is both a professionalism and mentorship aspect to this engagement. He is obviously quite impressed, but he knows she is in dangerous territory.

We see the personal, as well as the thoughtful, when we see Luthen looking to send Cassian in against Dedra on Ghorman, and really, it is at the behest of Wilmon, who reminds Cassian, that "She killed my father." This draws the threads together neatly so that we again have a conclave of characters centering at one location, Ghorman.

"It's bad luck, Ghorman" says Partagaz to Dedra who listens, although she is slightly rattled by the suddenness of the Ghorman situation. The planet is to end and be strip-mined, the people forcibly deported. It is a grim situation, but not unexpected, and there is a paternalistic aspect now to Partagaz as calms her:

> Dedra. Calmly. Let the image of professional ascendance settle your nerves. A successful conclusion to this problem will reinforce the ISBs position at the emperor's side. You've done excellent work bringing this forward, everyone that matters knows how well you've played this.

We see the most discreet nod, and her lips are solid. I was surprised with her nerves here; is she worried about Syril perhaps? has she let him dive too deeply into the Ghorman Front and become too attached, and now is faced with a much more brutal reality as mining ships are landing? Or is it the pressure of the task at hand? The complexity of one's personal relationship in work matters. It is not easy to navigate at the best of times, but the acting is superb.

Concurrently, Syril is not sure. He goes to Dedra and questions her: "What am I doing here?" She is nearly pleading with him, asking to go home and pack and be ready to leave. "Good things are waiting for us," she says, "we'll be out of here soon, we'll be back in Coruscant. We'll be together, we'll be rewarded for what, what we have accomplished."

And she kisses him hard and says: "Do what I told you."

It is an amazing sequence. He hates that he is not trusted, but I sense she really cares for him, wants him safe, and wants him to know. It is hard, as it is clear that Syril knows that it all may be a ruse. Meanwhile, we see that, to others, it is a transparent situation. On Coruscant, "they have no shame… don't even bother to lie badly anymore… the final humiliation" says the Ghorman Senator to Mon.

It is interesting that Syril goes to see Enza; he genuinely seems to care about her, but she delivers a brilliant slap to the face. This is a wake-up moment perhaps: Syril cannot fix things for the people, the Empire doesn't care that these are good people, his belief in the Empire, his naivete is amazing and so well played.

"The only story that matters is Ghorman aggression. The threats, the inexplicable resistance to Imperial norms." Syril and Dedra have in effect armed the Ghorman Front, and now created the trap, and Rylanz sees it. "I meant you no harm," says Syril as he learns of the mining equipment being dropped over the planet. "What's in our ground? What is that you have you been sent to steal from us" says Rylanz, as the realisation sinks in for Syril that it is not and maybe never was about outside agitators. The slap, the rejection, the emotional turmoil, the realisation of lies, all manifest as he seeks to see Dedra in the last moments of his life.

When Syril confronts Dedra, it is explosive and physically violent. He grabs her which is a surprise to her, but also, she is not panicking, yet. But when he starts to choke her, it is a level of violence that is shocking, as Syril demands the truth. She explains the logic, throws his promotions back in his face. He wishes her good luck and leaves. I was genuinely surprised by his strength of will and the suddenness of the violence against Dedra, but one could see that she was hurt as he walked away. Even then, she still wants him safe and sends her lieutenant to go get him.

A few moments later, an imperial sniper intentionally shoots a soldier, and chaos ensues, descending into a turkey shoot massacre, which while inevitable, is also hard to watch. Dedra goes out on her balcony to oversee and look for Syril. She has given the order, and the tactical teams have "pulled the trigger." Syril is surrounded by this massacre, and he sees it all playing out. He is clearly upset, although one wonders how he was so naive, so lacking in situational and historical awareness of the Empire.

Then when he sees Cassian, it is as if he cannot believe it and then just as we see Cassian get a bead on Dedra, Syril attacks him. It is unclear if Syril knows that Cassian is targeting Dedra, and the fight is so physical, that it creates an incredible moment – the hunter has found his quarry at last. The man who killed the two Corporate Security officers, on Morlana One, in Episode 1 of Season One, is now in front of Syril. His life has been dedicated to finding him, he has entered danger and taken risks to find him, and it has brought him into contact with Dedra.

And Cassian asks "Who are you?" It is an incredible moment. *Who are you?*

Then, fittingly, Rylanz kills Syril. It is a very odd cycle.

And Dedra, we see her, her hand and her breathing, her eyes, one wonders if she knows.

The moment she clutches at her collar, her hand involuntarily shaking, breaking, collapsing, and yet part of her fights and straightens her tunic.

"As hundreds of murdered Ghormans lay in Palma Plaza" we see that it is "murder" and that many parts of the game have played a part. It is a Blood Sacrifice, a warning for some, others a call for action.

While Luthen recognises that "Ghorman would be a remarkable place to turn our way," he had no idea that already Dedra had persuaded Krennick to manipulate the Ghorman Front so that the rebellion creates the catalyst for an incident. "Ghorman massacre or Imperial martyrdom" is an interesting choice, but it is more than that, and later when Luthen says "Think about a planet like Ghorman in rebellion. A planet of wealth and status. And if it goes up in flames? It will burn...very brightly." He also sees the benefit, but no matter how well he can anticipate the ugliness of the situation, I think he is genuinely blindsided by the massacre.

That detail Dedra then gets to confront Luthen, to *win*, as one might say, with the Imperial Star Path device in his own shop is superb. He says to her, "Freedom scares you", and she notes that "You want Chaos, chaos for everyone but you."

We do not miss a beat. Time has passed, Syril is gone, and Dedra continues to follow a very determined yet dangerous path. This time, however, she has overstepped in her plan to arrest Axis. She works around Heert, does it on his day off, which makes one wonder about her own ego. Of course, it does not go to plan, and everything that is already unravelling becomes clearer. Her fall is hard and swift. We had already gotten a hint from Lonni when he spoke to Luthen, that there is so much more. Dedra is an unwitting mole.

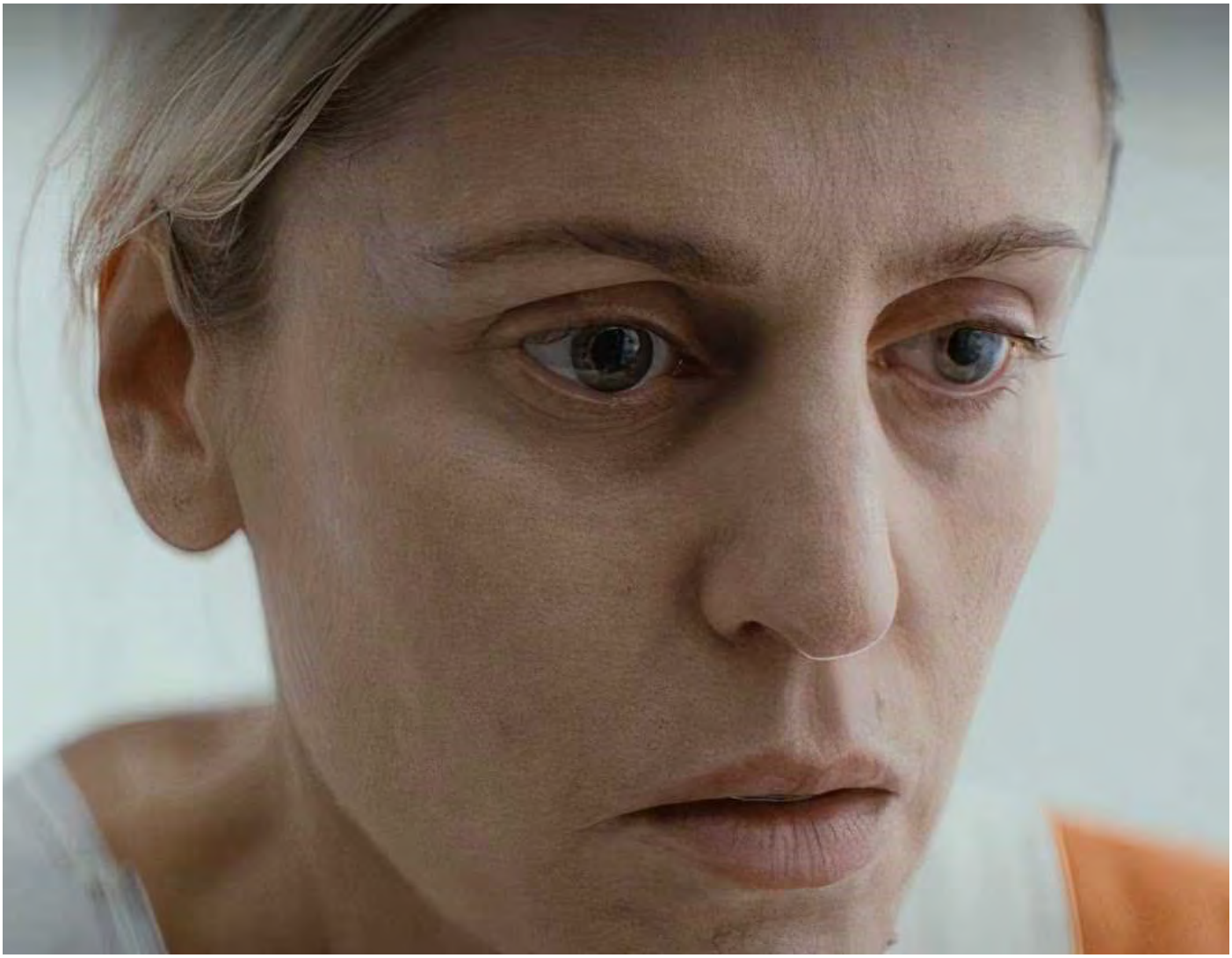
Dedra's arrest triggers her subsequent realisation that the strengths of her character – her hunger to seek answers and follow suspicions – is also a terrible weakness. Dedra's determination is a character flaw in her, using access, she has allowed Lonni to find crucial pieces of information, allowed him to get that to Luthen, and in doing so, Lonni has primed the rebels to attack the Death Star.

That Krennick's people had found Luthen, mirrors the failure of Partagaz getting Klya and Cassian, and how the machinery of authoritarianism can become overburdened and lack dynamism when it is needed (and it really was needed at that moment). Perhaps a flabby and overconfident approach, what might have worked on Corcurant, has been allowed to seep into the bureaucracy.

Dedra could not have seen the consequences of her actions, or maybe she did not calculate them appropriately, blinded by her desire to capture or defeat Axis. It is interesting that even as she sits in a cell, Dedra is still a loyal imperial in trouble. She helps Heert, but she cannot help Partagaz. It is a beautiful moment as we see him listening to Nemick's words, and then, an honourable exit is afforded him.

The scene with Dedra in an Imperial Labor prison, similar to the one that Cassian was in on Narkina 5, and the knowledge at how both soul destroying and hard that is, shows on her face. She realises that a life dedicated to the Empire is for naught. Syril is dead, and Dedra is dead to the Empire – just a machine tool now.

Without doubt, one of the many powerful performances in *Andor* were that of Gough and Soller. They brought a huge amount to the story, and Gough especially gave what I felt was a unique angle to villains in Star Wars.



Mon Mothma: Those First Few Episodes of Season 2 by James Bacon

Mon Mothma is incredibly brave, the voice of reason who works so very hard to preserve a remnant of democracy within an Empire-controlled fascist and brutal world, yet it is the incredible complexity that the Gilroy Clann have crafted and the phenomenal performance Genevieve O'Reilly presented that, in concert with other parts of the story and acting performances, sets *Andor* apart.

As we begin in Season 2, following Cassian stealing a TIE Fighter, we transition to Mon Mothma to witness her unsureness with Tay, followed by her horror at seeing Luthen at her daughter's pre-wedding celebrations. It is interesting how Val and Mon share many elements, including their red hair and fantastic style. Mon is more elegant while Val, with her kneehigh boots and trouser suit; they are both strikingly powerful in different ways.

With Mon, we see the hard decisions that weigh on her internally, grinding at her moral reasoning, her values and standards being eroded for a greater cause, as she enters into a personal war against the Empire.

This continuous grinding down of her character, her sacrificing the important things to her, including her own integrity, is hard to watch due to the powerful acting. As we watch on, and we see that parts of Mon are hollowed out, aspects of her life are contorted and contrived. Those beyond the immediacy of her actions cannot ever know that her character is so darkened by her determined support for the Rebellion. For she must be a figurehead; the Rebel Alliance must have a whole pure idealistic leader untainted.

This in turn allows the viewer to conjure the barely imaginable mental anguish and personal acceptance, crashing like cymbals falling down an escalator as she calculates, contemplates, connives, considers internally. Mon suffers an unimaginable cacophony in her mind, while outwardly, at all times, she is charming, decisive, determined, and deadly.

This is a rebel with conviction that is especially powerful. It is one thing to place oneself in danger and to fight, to go on what one might consider a hopeless, brave, and dutiful mission. It is another equation altogether to know that your own daughter has been sold into marriage, and faces an unknown fate, at the hands of the Empire.

"Don't lecture me on vulnerability. No one's more at risk than I am."

Mon is intrinsically a very good person, but she is angry with the place she finds the galactic society, and she wants freedom from the power of the Emperor and his machinations upon that society. This makes her a rebel, and she behaves like a rebel: she becomes a fighter, in her own messy and untidy way.

Her family becomes embroiled without their knowledge. Perrin, who remains politically agnostic, wanting to enjoy life and not worry about matters which are not impacting him, is fascinating. Their relationship is continually strained, but the scene where Mon implicates him in gambling is especially fascinating. His confusion and denial are genuine and honest, and we see that flex, the ability to create consequences for others, once it benefits the cause.

While Perrin comes across as self centered, and selfish, his is only natural human behavior that is respected and protected in our society. There is a positive sentiment to him during the wedding when he gives his speech about the importance of joy. Except of course, there is no for Tay, Luthen, and Mon. One wonders, does Mon wish to be somehow aligned with Perrin at that moment? She, Val, Klya, and the oth-

ers are the rebels, the insurgents, the terrorists; they are the law breakers, not those who find contentment in the system that surrounds them and encourages them to seek simple joy in life.

Perrin's reminder that "pain…will arrive without summons" rings especially true in this season as Mon becomes more enmeshed in the rebellion, multiplying her troubles. She allows this to happen, which is a beautiful contradiction of her character. Mon wants to fight for the ethical, democratic rules and standards, but she eventually understands that the Rebellion has to fight by whatever means are available to them. She experiences a personal and heartbreaking corruption that occurs in front of us, as we see her contemplate actions she finds abhorrent.

That Genevieve O'Reily can portray so well the pain of giving away inches, when she knows they will be miles, is visible in her face, voice, muscles, and eyes. It is an incredible performance over the two seasons.

We see her childhood friend Tay Kolma, who helped her in her time of need, his marriage is broken down, trying to make contact with Mon. Even when he has a moment with her, it is interrupted as she deals with Leida, who is struggling with Stekan who "is a child" and when Mon says "I'm sorry, so, terribly sorry," her daughter in tears, we know this is not about this immediate moment, but everything.

When Perrin challenges Mon in the second episode about "her lover" Tay, and how he was drinking, it is the look on her face as he says, "he was always weak" that says it all: weakness is a risk, there is always a risk, she is horrified. The intensity of character is unreal, but there is still space to speculate or reflect on Mon's character, because she is so humanly flawed, but with a purpose, and a love. How easily Mon deals with Val's question, "Is Leida happy, is this what she wants?"

Tay has issues, and is concerned about the risk he has taken on, and everyone else is sitting pretty, and "rebel activity have soured my investments" and while there is a chill to the conversation, accompanied by the rise in the music, a deep and sombre sound, and her intonation, "to an old friend," she knows there is an issue.

Leida is such a fascinating aspect to the story, by the end of the first season of *Andor*, we know that Mon is indebted to Davo Sculdon, who is clearly not of the highest integrity, and is happy to help her financially, helping her to hide the funding of the Rebellion. The transactional nature of the arrangement is subtle, an introduction to Stekan, although with the episodes of Season Two, this has grown into an incredible betrothal event. Genevieve O'Reilly really understands this and said:

> "We understand that that's very complicated and she's living with a lot of conflict around that…We also know that it allows us a window into how vital the rebellion is for her, the fact that she would cross that line. I felt sick with complications for Mon Mothma the woman. And Mon Mothma the rebel. And what you have to navigate and swallow."[1]

At its most unsympathetic, we see Mon in *Andor* effectively selling Leida as chattel to protect herself and fund the rebellion. There is a betrayal on a number of levels, as she realises that she has failed to help her daughter develop, realising at the time of the wedding, when it is beyond too late, and her daughter is fully indoctrinated into the traditional Chandrillian ways. Mon's own progressive views, and sadness that she followed that path, neglecting her daughter's education for the sake of rebellion.

That Mon's mother was drunk and she was so angry with her is a powerful maternal message, as Mon warns Leida of everything that is on the other side of the door does not matter, that the wedding can be delayed, even eventually seen as an "act of great bravery."

The moment, the pause, the look on Bronte Carmichael's face, and her reply, "I wish you were drunk" make it such a powerful scene. It is a moment where Mon could have found forgiveness, understanding, or connection with her daughter, and instead, she is pushed further out and away, an acrimonious response, at such an important life moment for her daughter, who utterly shuns her. It is horrible, and brilliant in equal measure.

Again O'Reilly has a clear picture of what is occurring, and she describes the situation brilliantly: "And then what Leida does, to annihilate Mon in that moment…" and how the whole section is "a window into someone else's marriage – dysfunctional marriage – that is also beautiful and ornate. Like glass you know is going to break any minute."

The wedding is one of the most amazing pieces of TV choreography, and of course it is across many episodes, intersliced with action following Bix, Andor, Dedra, all of which is interesting, although can we comparatively set out which was more compelling, especially as there are so many pieces coming together at the wedding, all interacting. The presence of Luthen and Klya is an amazing way to bring all that together, and we see Perrin, Mon, Val, Tay and Davo all lined up welcoming the "unbraided" Ledian and Stekan.

As Mon loses Leida, we see that she gets to a place where she feels she may have also lost a friend. After failing to support or care for Tay's situation, she sees the worst; she never says it, but she must suspect that their relationship has now tarnished. Is he bribing her, is he blackmailing her, or is he desperate? While the look on her face when he explained he had lost his wife may have been the realisation that she placed Tay in this position, and

that she did not care once her needs were satisfied. There is no menace to Tay; he is drunk, a bit disappointed, but he does not actually threaten her. Indeed, he explains that Davos could be helpful about speaking up, and how they would discuss it later on Coruscant.

As Mon walks by Luthen, the music again lowers, sombre, just momentarily, but her demeanour, while masking what is going on, is shown to viewers who can see the subtleties and nuances that O'Reilly portrays.

The conversation between Luthen and Mon as Luthen says "People fail, that our curse" exposes what they are thinking, that there is a number involved, and that this allows them to be vulnerable. "I'm not sure what you are saying," she says to Luthen. "How nice for you," he replies. Mon backs away as the music begins, because she knows exactly what Luthen is saying, and she goes for some drinks. She knows her friend is a dead man.

O'Reilly nailed it when she herself shares the view of the wedding:

> "…you realize by the end that it has been some sort of fresh hell for this woman…. There is joy, there is laughter, there is all that familial ecstasy that is a wedding and then there is in an emotional place where she is the inverse of that, where she's wrestling with some very dark personal choices. I think part of her heart will have atrophied after that wedding.[2]

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As Mon dances, drunk, the end of the episode is sharp.

It is some of the best TV ever and some of the greatest Star Wars we have ever seen – and it is only the end of Episode Three.

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1. Genevieve O'Reilly on Mon Mothma. Amy Richau. Star Wars.com, 8th May 2025.
2. *ibid.*

There's No Crying in Spaceballs by Peppard Saltine

I am going to assume that if you are reading this you have watched *Andor* in its entirety and there will be spoilers.

When *Andor* Season 2 was on the horizon, I swore to the great Sith who have gone before that I would not watch it. I have had a poor history with Star Wars television, often finding myself in a negative space, fist raised, decrying the creative decisions which have brought such expensive dross onto my screen and into my psyche. I find myself torn between the hate watch and the hope for some new, great Star Wars story. I have only had the sense to quit the ones that actually shit on my fond memories of the Star Wars that was (*Obi Wan* for example) because I care about the characters already going into it. Life is too short for watching things you dislike, so I give everything a chance and try to abandon the things that rub me up the wrong way before I start to care. So often all the ingredients are all there, but the recipe produces shit instead of cake. This really can get me worked up. It makes me sad not just for Star Wars, but for media in general.

With that in mind I will say I watched *Andor* Season 1, and have waxed lyrical in the past about all the things which I find wrong with it. I won't bore you. The ideas are fine, the writing is passable but the realization and final product bend the universe almost to breaking point. I would almost argue that it is not set in the Star Wars universe, but a close parallel version of it. A bit like the difference between versions of Batman, (both in comics and on screen), things are recognizable and similar, just not the universe of *New Hope* or *Empire*. One could conceivably argue that that universe is not really today's canon universe anyway and hasn't been since the Clone Wars prequels.

I'll take a moment here to say I really dig the animated offerings; this is where Dave Filoni really shines. I love *Rebels*, a good chunk of *Clone Wars*, and *Bad Batch* is just great stuff. *Visions*, *Resistance*, *Tales of the Empire* and *Tales of the Underworld* less so, but still well worth a watch. For a while there I thought Filoni might be the new hope for the franchise, but I've been less impressed with the live action stuff. I understand that there are many more cooks in the kitchen, and money has more interest when you are producing live action and that dynamic often spoils the work, however most of the issues I have found to be creative decisions rather than money decisions. That said, if you want a good Star Wars story today, watch the animated stuff.

So *Andor* Season 2 rolled round, and despite my pledge, I gave it a go. I hoped the success of Season 1 might have seen the production with more money to spend, and perhaps they would address some of the issues I had. The feel of the piece might be nudged that little bit closer to the universe I so enjoyed. It was nudged, the tiniest degree, but for the main they chose to stay in the universe established in Season 1. I guess, who can fault them for staying true to a tested formula when the other franchise offerings have a lukewarm reception at best. There was definitely more money. That money was spent on sets, costumes and VFX. It didn't really stretch to aliens and droids, but there were more spaceships. Hurrah!

The strength of *Andor* is not illustrating the Star Wars universe; its strength is instead telling a particular story. The writing is good for the most part, and sometimes even great. Sometimes it really is lazy too, though. For me it's something that never really balances out. On one hand it is probably the best told story in live action Star Wars television, on the other it is a WWII spy story shoehorned into Star Wars with a big hamfist full of filthy lucre. What you going to do? Not watch it? Not note the things that were the grit in your oyster, forcing you expel pearls of fanish wisdom? I'm doing my best here not to be a hater. I have the utmost respect for anybody who manages to bring any vision to screen despite the challenges and against the odds. The difficulty in working within the bounds of a franchise the size of Star Wars are not to be underestimated. You can never expect to please every aficionado, indeed it is impossible to do so, for we each have differ-

ent hopes and expectations for the things we enjoy. Often those of us most invested in our fandom of choice run the highest risk of being disappointed and of becoming the most negatively vocal. That is not what is happening here. Truly my investment in Star Wars died in 1999, haha!

So overall, I kinda enjoyed *Andor*. It was inspired to keep each chapter down to just three episodes and then to drop the chapters so close together. There were some stand out moments for me like DJ Droid, Gurney Droid, (honestly I think I loved Gurney Droid and want to watch a cartoon about one of these who goes rogue after the fall of the Empire and has to resort to injuring people just to fulfil its programming to cart about the wounded) and a few other bits and pieces. The acting was sometimes great; Mon Mothma and Dedra were both just perfect. I liked that there was a semblance of message about Gaza and Ukraine, (if you don't believe this just do a Google search on "origin of the word gauze" or "rare earth metals and the future of war" then compare what you learn to the Ghorman storyline in *Andor* and your doubts will be dispelled). I had hoped, (after Season 1), that Luthen Rael would turn out to be a Sith whose interests just happened to align with the resistance at this point in time. Maybe using the conflict to become more powerful in the Sith hierarchy or whatever. I would have found that interesting, you know, the idea of the "evil" guys being on both sides of the war and the idea that sometimes bad actors contribute to good outcomes. I was hoping that Kleya was Luthen's apprentice, too, obviously. That these two Sith hidden in plain sight on Coruscant, fomenting dissatisfaction and might kick off the rebellion was really interesting. Alas, that was not to be. Oh well. Their backstory as told later in Season 2 was fine, if uninspired.

So, I hear you ask, what was it that I did not like? I'll try to keep it brief. Succinct even.

I didn't like the distinct lack of alien and droid characters, I really didn't like that the aliens who did speak were almost all bad guys. Same as Season 1. Par for the course and all that. The resemblance of the Ghorman underground to the French Resistance was a bit of a hammer in the face. I expected them to break out the baguettes and croissants any moment. Not that Star Wars has ever been subtle with its political allegory, but come on. I hated the security camera stuff in the hospital. Lazy, lazy writing. Mainstream story telling device transposed onto the Star Wars universe and a really bad fit. I guess that's why all the security droids are out of work. Is this supposed to be the same imperial technology as we see in the Death Star? A few security cameras would have come in handy there, no? I also disliked the video message from Bix to Cassian. I mean please, a hologram effect done half well is like an afternoon's work in After Effects, tops. Done well it costs what? Maybe an afternoon on a second unit in a blackout studio and a day, maybe two in VFX? Maybe? Instead we get an on-screen video call message? What? Have you ever seen an on screen video message in Star Wars? It didn't grate quite as much in the interactions between Dedra and Syril, but I really would have liked those to be holograms too, I know the hologram costs are mounting now, but in the scheme of things. It still costs less than a single scene from a Chandrilan wedding. And while I'm picking nits, there is television in Star Wars now? What? You can drop me off here, this is my stop, I think you have gone too far. I suppose those two headed ESPN style fellows at the pod race in the first prequel movie kinda introduced something like television to Star Wars, (I hated it then, I still hate it now), but at least it was kinda a hologram and felt like a local broadcast thing. Bix watching TV in the safe house was a step too far for me, and pretty pointless too.

Oh well! It's all fun and games until someone loses their suspension of disbelief.

Andor Season 2 by James Mason

Did a show that got off to a flying start stick the landing?

There's been plenty of shows that, when they arrive, they soar and sear themselves into the public zeitgeist.

Game of Thrones was such a show – but the landing? Divisive to be sure. Most would say it didn't end too well and in a lot of ways tarnished the potential legacy of the series.

Andor's first season was very well received by those that watched it. The viewing numbers aren't stellar, but the writing and production quality is top-notch. Not quite the runaway hit that Disney would like, but it has a passionate and appreciative fanbase.

Season 1 let us see the first small (but not inconsequential) spark that lights up the fires of Rebellion. Season 2 starts with the Rebellion very much disjointed and not cohesive in their actions against the Empire. Cassian barely escapes with a prototype Tie Fighter and then lands at the rendezvous where he meets inept criminal types who are just joining the Rebels as they're not the Empire. We also have the welcome addition and return of Director Krennic, who, in pursuit of his pet Death Star project, needs raw materials that can only be found on a trade planet (Ghorman) that has financial influence. The strip mining required to gather the materials would essentially destroy the planet, so the Empire settles on the plan to create a false flag incident that will pit the rest of the galaxy against this small planet, giving them military jurisdiction to do what they wish.

Syril Karn is on Ghorman to expose a burgeoning resistance there, but he's unaware that he's being played by his partner Dedra to initiate the false flag op. Dedra's delicious sneering makes for a scene-stealing villain but never chews said scenery. Both Syril and Dedra are ambitious, arrogant and filled with a sense of smug superiority they use to justify why they're right in what they do. Not once do they entertain that the resistance gathering momentum is down to the Empire's fascistic ways and their ruthless rule. It's just the mob being chaotic and needing "order" imposed on them no matter how inhumane and costly to life this rule is applied.

What makes *Andor,* and in particular Season 2, is you see the human cost of being part of the Rebellion and the sacrifices made not just in lives, but in mental impact. Alongside this, we witness the Empire's stripping away of humanity amongst its ranks just to survive and in order to enact the rule of the Emperor (who is mentioned but never seen but is still a presence that's feared – feared and hated).

When it began, Star Wars pretty much only had Leia as the strong, willful, and smart female character. Mon Mothma was of importance but you never got to see her show her metal. *Andor* doesn't have her as a strong leader and founder of the resistance. Her journey to the person we see in the films feels natural and plausible. You get to see her try to protect her family and the cost it takes for her to stand up to the tyranny the galaxy is facing.

Andor Season 2 gives us other many female characters and their impact and presence never feels perfunctory in trying to appease some agenda. Bix has the toughest journey, both in the first season and while dealing with what happened to them, then has further trauma put upon her. She does get to face some of their fears head on and get some catharsis and closure.

Stellan Skarsgård is great as the dual persona of pretentious and shallow art dealer and the deeply dark rebel. His impact on Cassian Andor on his slow but inevitable journey to the ruthless person we see in *Rogue One* feels genuine and adds so much more depth to him.

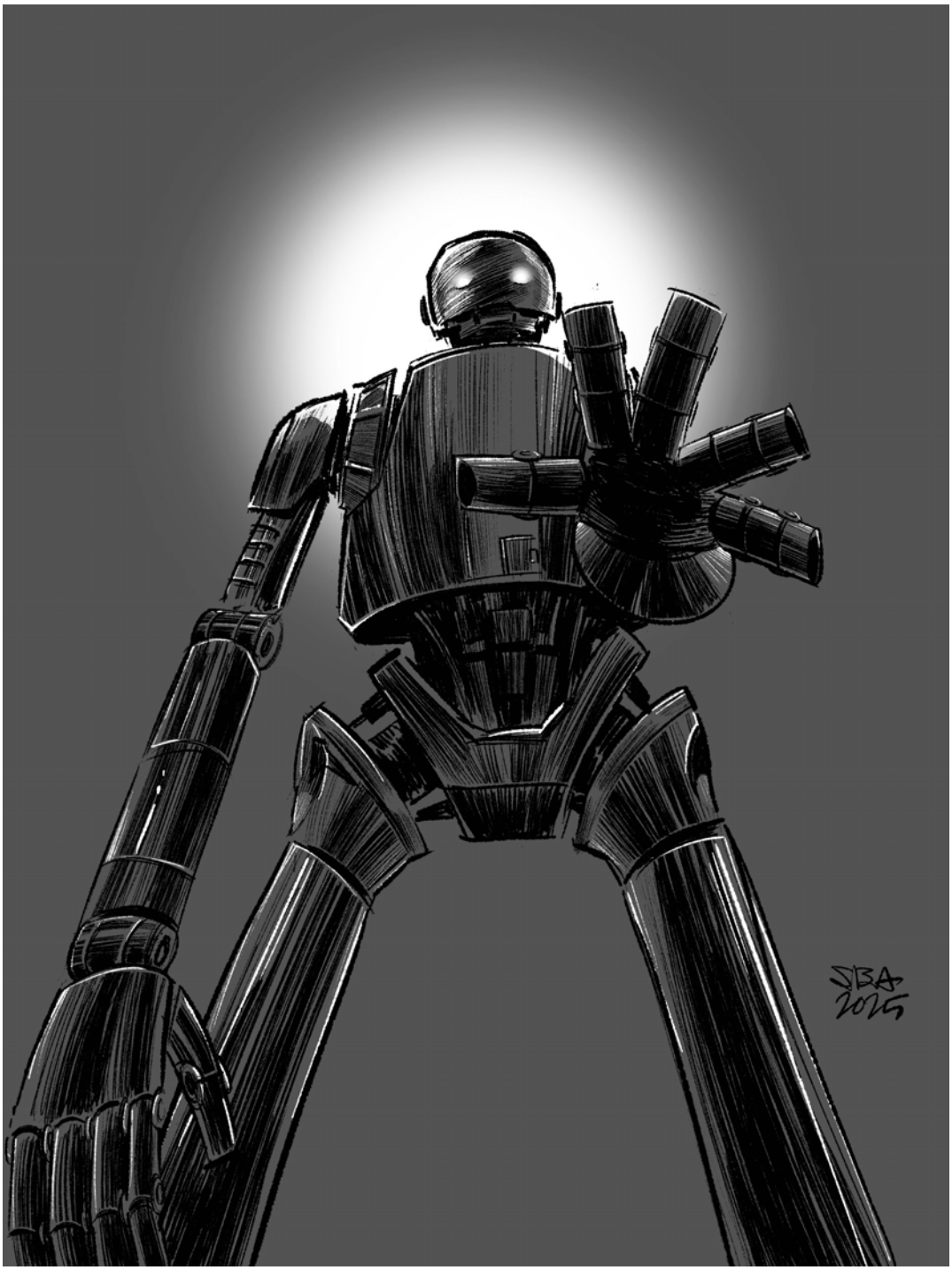
The standout and likely fan favorite would be Elizabeth Dulau as Kleya. In Season 1, she seemed more like an assistant to Luthen but in Season 2 we get to see just how much she factors into any decision he makes and the influence she wields. Kleya gets to show just how capable and adept at infiltration and exfiltration she is during the hospital episode.

Honorable mentions in the impressive female characters would be Vel and Cinta whose tragically doomed relationship is well earned when it gets cut short.

The pacing may not be to a lot of Star Wars fans' taste, but in terms of building up to any of the standout moments, it all feels earned. And for the most part even the slower moments work towards selling the importance of the bigger ones. This is further enhanced by the show having stellar production values and being exceptionally well directed, focusing on character and then having well visualised and briskly paced action sequences. This show in 4k looks and sounds better than some cinema releases. But it also cost as much as some of them.

I'm a big fan of *Rogue One,* as I felt it bridged not just the prequels to the original trilogy, but also Disney Star Wars to the George Lucas Star Wars. *Andor* then makes that bridge wider, richer and far more an enjoyable journey to go on.

So did *Andor* stick the landing? Well it makes you want to watch *Rogue One* pretty much right after the final episode. That feels like it succeeded in its brief, which was to show how the rebellion went from a small spark and fired up a galaxy.



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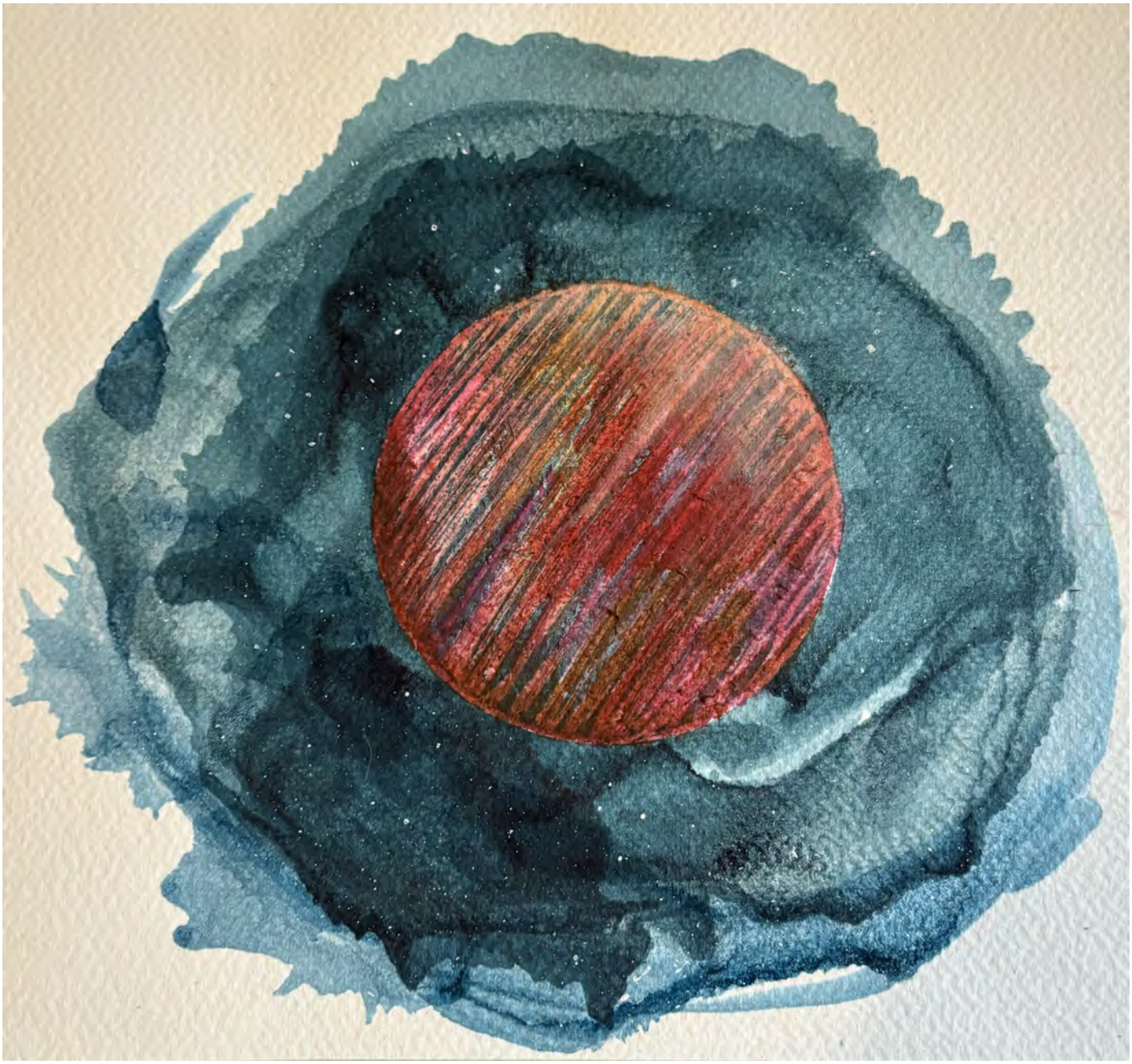

Ghorman and Accents by James Bacon

Ghorman provoked a lot of thought for me. While aspects of the rebellion in Season 1 of *Andor* made me think of the Irish rebellion, I think the setting of Ghorman gave a new sense of place.

Ghorman resonated; it felt like somewhere new, yet also somewhere familiar. It reminded me of having been to a number of European countries, there was something that felt experienced. I leaned into feeling French influences, clothing, the styles, the haute couture, and the feel of the cafe that Cassian and Val sit in at differing times, and the language, as well of course as the music. One might be tempted to feel an Austrian, or even Swiss aspect to it, but I felt the music was more French. The language was a bit French, even if accents were not, and that got me thinking. It was all a bit French.

There is a potential parallel that can be drawn between an invaded and occupied France and an invaded Ghor, there is an "ah-ha" moment as one considers the French Resistance against the Nazis which, I felt, was a natural place to go to. But I was wondering about the suppressed sacrifice, the martyrdom that no one sees, and also the colonial power. Because what the Empire wants is to exploit the material, the resources of Ghorman, and that is incredibly imperialistic. France was an imperial power, as was Austria, when it was the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and while the Germans did invade France, the Resistance was much more like the Rebellion overall, rather than what was happening on Ghor.

I realised that there was something about the news reportage that is portraying things immediately differently. It made me think of the Paris massacre of 1961, mostly as I had mentally settled on Ghor feeling French. This BBC article on the matter, helps understanding:

> How a massacre of Algerians in Paris was covered up
> 17 October 2021 By Ahmed Rouaba
>
> …30,000 Algerians had taken to the streets of Paris in a peaceful protest against a curfew, and calling for independence nearly seven years into the war against French rule in North Africa, which had occasionally spilled onto the streets of the French capital.

On 17 October 1961, the police killed at least 100 protesters, some of whom were thrown into the River Seine, making it one of the darkest pages of France's chequered colonial history...

The government of the day censored the news, destroyed many of the archives and prevented journalists from investigating the story. Contemporary news bulletins reported three deaths, which included a French national. It was not covered in the international press.

Brigitte Laîné, said in 1999 that some official documents survived revealing the extent of the killings. "There were a lot of bodies. Some with the skulls crushed, others with shotguns wounds."

The precise number of those killed has never been confirmed but some historians believe that between 200 and 300 Algerians died that day.

At the time President Charles de Gaulle was in advanced negotiations with Algeria's National Liberation Front (FLN) to end the war and agree to independence. The war ended five months later and independence followed in July 1962.

The immediate suppression of those protesting and the changing of the narrative is obviously a close parallel to what occurred in *Andor*.

I also realised that the Algerian War was possibly also an influence – so the Front de libération nationale (Algérie) war against the French, rather than the Germans in World War II.

I also forgot that Algeria had iron ore – and the Société de l'Ouenza exploited it, although the Algerian War was a very different example of colonial hostilities with incredible brutality. Algeria, a country that the colonial power of France had felt was subsumed into their nation, more of an extra state than a country, but like many colonialists, they saw the indigenous population as a lower form of humanity, who they were there to civilise.

On the 8th of May 1945, there was a demand for self determination, this was as some of you will note, the end of World War II, a scuffle developed into a massacre in Sétif. Today what we know as the Sétif, Guelma and Kherrata massacres and how many were killed is still disputed.

5,000 Algerians paraded in Sétif to celebrate the victory, some holding banners which the police did not take kindly to. When they tried to remove them, scuffles broke out, and shots were fired and protestors and police were shot. It is unclear who fired. This situation inflamed upset; there were riots, and spontaneous attacks, and some colonists, up to 100, were attacked and killed. The retribution was considerable.

French authorities at the time said just over 1,000 people were killed. The Algerian Government claims 45,000. Historians can vary wildly between these numbers. It was a disaster, but both French historian Charles-Robert Ageron and British historian Alistair Horne reckoned around 6,000 people were killed, so we have found a consensus.

Lots of people died. How was this reported at the time…

It is important sometimes to be reminded of the colonial powers of the 20th century, that they were not just Britain, but also Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Japan, and that they were brutal subjugations.

I am reminded of Roger Casement, who as a British official, investigated the treatment of people in forced rubber labour camps at the hands of the Belgians, in Congo, and then in Peru, in the Putumayo region, presenting a clear anti-colonial argument and stance. He went on to fight for Irish Freedom. He would have had a very posh British accent, indeed, something even more classical, given his upbringing and education, than the BBC voice or received pronunciation.

We know that many of the actors that George Lucas used were British or living in Britain at the time of filming *Star Wars* in the late 1970s. When one looks at the Conference Room meeting on the Death Star, we have Grand Moff Tarkin, played by Peter Cushing with such a distinctive and polished accent. General Tagge, played by Don Henderson, says to Tarkin, "The Rebellion will continue to gain a support in the Imperial Senate as long" before being interrupted. Chief Moradmin Bast was played by Leslie Schofield, he warned Tarkin *later*, "We've analyzed their attack, sir, and there is a danger. Should I have your ship standing by." Chief Siward Cass was played by Patrick Jordan, who told

Tarkin later that "Our scout ships have reached Dantooine. They found the remains of a Rebel base, but they estimate that it has been deserted for some time. They are now conducting an extensive search of the surrounding systems." All those accents were crisp English.

Ian Selby played General Hurst Romodi, Charlie Gray played General Trench Molock, and Robert Clarke played Col. Wullf Yularen all in non-speaking parts in that conference room.

Later other senior imperials would include Admiral Ozzell played by Micheal Sheard, who was a fan favourite, and Captain Piett, played by Kenneth Colley.

The man who said "Don't try to frighten us with your sorcerer's ways, Lord Vader. Your sad devotion to that ancient religion has not helped you conjure up the stolen data tapes, or given you clairvoyance enough to find the Rebels's hidden fort" before being Force-choked was General Mottie, played by Richard LeParmentier. He was an American actor who lived in England, and so we get that American accent, as we do with William Hootkins who played Porkins, although Biggs, played by Garrick Hagon, may sound American, Hagon was born in London and is Canadian British.

Dedra Meero, played by Denise Gough, who is Irish, worked on her accent and received training to ensure that she had the English Imperial accent that permeates the Imperial Ranks. Lieutenant Supervisor Blevin played by Ben Bailey Smith, also known as Doc Brown, was perfect with his accent. Capt Lagret was portrayed by Michael Jenn, Jung Lonni was played by Robert Emms, Jacob James Beswick played Heert and Major Lio Partagaz played by Anton Lesser, capping off the excellent clear English Accent Brigade.

This is important now: while English accents are frequently associated with villainy, or villains, there is a beautiful synchronicity to it, from a historical perspective and the colonial aspect – the Empire, it all works very nicely.

Another Good Guy With a Gun by Brenda Noiseux

In *Andor* Season 2 episode 6, we witness the evolution of Ghorman activists into revolutionaries. As the Ghormans undertake a heist with the aid of Luthen's Axis network rebels, the newbie revolutionaries are specifically told they will not be carrying blasters on the mission.

Vel warns them: "We're here because you've never done anything like this. I can't stress this enough. You're all going to need to respect the chain of command. Cinta and I will have blasters. Nobody else. And I mean nobody." Solid instructions by the only seasoned rebels in the room.

But there's always someone who just won't listen. Here, it's Samm, a passionate young Ghorman man, who's eager to fight for Ghorman.

In what could easily be a throwaway moment, *Andor* instead turns the good guy with a gun trope on its head. While on watch during the heist, Samm gets into a confrontation with fellow citizen, Lezine. The sheer brilliance of it being Lezine is that in Season 2 episode 4, Lezine makes a public speech at a town hall criticizing the Empire, warning that "They'll make a prison of Palmo before they're done. Mark my words." Samm should instantly recognize that Lezine is on the same side, and honestly, Lezine probably would have engaged in this heist if he had known about it. Instead of the bad guy with a gun (the Empire), or a potential bad guy (someone who might side with the Empire), he's a known quantity; he's another good guy.

In a moment where Samm is full of adrenaline, it's only the challenge to his authority that sets off the irreversible chain of events. There's no actual threat to the fledgling Ghorman revolution if Lezine walked down that street or saw the heist. There's no actual threat to Samm's person when Samm pulls the blaster, and all of us collectively gasp knowing it will not end well.

We don't know the exact reason he disobeys the very direct order from Vel and ends up with a blaster. Was he convinced he needed to protect himself? Was he romanticizing the role of a rebel? Did he have an issue with perceived outsiders telling him what to do? Was it a way to feel powerful when feeling so powerless against the encroaching Empire? All of the above? And more? Highly likely, as *Andor* relishes in giving us complex characters. Even seemingly side characters are fully realized. Deciding to bring that blaster raised the stakes unnecessarily and Samm will have to live with the consequences.

It's no secret that *Andor* holds up a mirror to many of the issues we're tackling today; it's honestly one of the reasons I love it so much. It allows us to examine the very human aspects and root causes while distancing ourselves from harsh realities and consequences in the real world, deftly shifting the narrative on this thread of gun violence in short, powerful moments.

Strength by James Bacon

There is a very clear strength to be found from Family in the *Andor* TV series, and there are a number of women who define what it is to be strong, powerful, passionate, in their fight for freedom, love and justice.

The series starts when Cassian is looking for his sister. As I look back, it is interesting that he never found her, he never got that moment. It was such an unexpected and unusual setting, it felt more *Bladerunner* than *Star Wars* and I thought, well it starts here, so will it end with him finding his sister.

We learn how it was Maarva and Clem who "find" Cassian and become his mother and father, and then how Clem's was a pointless death, an unfair execution, hung in the town square. Cassian wields the same gun that Clem had, and while he is far from perfect, he does live by many of the things that Maarva stands for and speaks to. Cassian in many ways is in the Vanguard against the Empire and his mother's loss, and her sentiments and forgiveness are so important.

Bix's part is some of the hardest Star Wars we have seen. She truly loves Cassian, but goes through a horrendous ordeal, watches her friend get betrayed, fights, gets tortured and yet never gives up. Bix was the link to Luthen, a supporter of the Rebellion, part of Rael's Network. Even after she escapes, she suffers and has to fight an imperial officer who is attacking her, and then loses friends. Bix of course wants to be herself, to escape out of the funk she is in, and when he sees her, Cassian's reaction is so meaningful. Cassian, fails to find his sister, his mother, in Marva dies, but for the cause, and while Cass really did physically save Bix from the horrific torture of Gorst, Bix is left with the nightmares and trauma.

Cassian is somewhat patronising in the way that he somehow both feels he must save the women he loves (so a white night type) and then also equally fails to do so. We learn that it is by their own hand, by their own choice, that these women enter the fray on their terms.

"You can't protect me" says Bix to Cassian as they eat and speak while in the apartment on Corscurant. "I'm not Maarva, I'm not your sister. I can handle it," challenging him in regard to killing an Imperial who saw her face and then Bix says, "I want to win, we have to."

This is a real moment; if it is war, it is total war. It is Bix who points this out, as she deals with her trauma, the suffering that she lives with. It is up to Bix to alleviate her own issues, when there is a type of revenge, or avenging of what has happened, somehow trying to wash away the tainted mind filled with hauntedness,

"It will only feel like forever," says Bix to Ghorst when she exacts her revenge, and his fear is awesome and she walks out shooting one Imperial as she does so. When she meets Cassian after, she is herself, with him by her side, but not doing it for her. We see the Naval facility explode, Gorst dealt with by Bix in the manner he dealt with her. Bix finds her own freedom, and then is joined by Cassian at her side, she does it herself.

Bix is even fully aware of his weaknesses, and her strength, for the Rebellion, and she understands how important Cassian is. There are the moments where she says "He'll be there when you need him," and she knows it, but I think the time with the Force Healer is especially poignant. She recognises something in Cassian, and she thanks him. That is a stunning moment, for we know that Force Users do have abilities, and there is a wisdom to this woman. Of course, we all know the ingenious conceived deceit that runs through *Andor*, we all know how it ends, and yet the moment when Bix explains why she leaves continues to be powerful:

> My love. You're sleeping now. You look so peaceful. I want to be brave. But I can't. If I was brave I would stay and do this in person. But I know you and you'd just talk me around, and I've been thinking about this too long to let that happen.
>
> I have to leave. I have to go away.
>
> I'm not sure where, or for how long. I just know that I can't stay here with you now.
>
> You believe what you said. It is a choice. It just can't be me. I can't be the reason you leave here. If you ever gave this up for me? I'd never forgive myself.
>
> We have to win. We have to beat them. And I believe you have purpose in making that happen. I need to believe that.
>
> So, I'm choosing for the both of us. I'm choosing the Rebellion.
>
> And when it's done, when it's over. And we've won, we can do all the things we ever wanted. Everything we know we've missed.

I'll find you.

I can barely watch that. It kills me every time. It is one of those moments, perhaps it is because someone I care for has called me "My Love" and so there is a personal resonance, or I know that I have slept as a lover has looked at me. There is the sacrifice that she is making; she loves him so hard, but loves who he has to be and needs to be just as much. It is incredible.

Bix makes this incredible sacrifice, and we don't truly understand it until the end. But her preparedness to sever her partnership with Cassian so that he will continue on his journey unfettered and unrestrained by their relationship despite her love for him is enormous.

There is a further sacrifice, an unimaginable one. Bix steps away, and in doing so her pregnancy is not known to Cassian. That must have been terribly hard, especially as the importance of family of Maarva and Clem to Cassian is so strong. So as a woman she sacrifices her love for the rebellion, as a mother, she sacrifices her baby's father. This is so much more. It is a level of preparedness to fight and allow fighting at all costs that is astonishing.

If Cassian had been aware, would his lack of strength and determination, a juxtaposition to Mon Mothma who effectively sacrifices her child, have crippled him and his attempt to continue the fight, which he must win, with Jyn?

When we see Bix then at the end there is a sense of hope that she has a baby. We don't hear a name but I did wonder if she would name the baby after his sister. We assume it is Cassian's child with her, and so in a sense, the importance of the mother starts with Maarva and ends with Bix, the importance of hope and life and existence is top and tailed, and we see the future, born free, thanks to love, and even though Cassian was never aware, the baby's father fought for their freedom, as did their mother. The baby as the symbol of hope is strong here, the cycle of the next generation.

We had seen when Bix and Val speak that they, like Cassian and others, have their own views: "We're not Luthen's puppets any more, we're not a bunch of maniacs running around Aldhani. We're building a real army."

Val and Cinta, Val and Mon, women who are fighting and living and who care for one another, and there is a tearing apart of normalcy. Relationships are damaged but there is a strength that we see between Cinta and Val. It is a romantic connection paired with the focus on Rebellion, and it is no surprise that love occurs during times of shared stress and fighting, that there is solace and comfort in one another. But for Val to lose Cinta the way she did was horrible, such an ending is so damn sad, just as they have moments to find one another again.

Vel: I told Luthen that I would only take this assignment if you were on it.
Cinta: You're the only reason I'm here. I had an accident. I told him not to tell you. I knew you'd worry.
Vel: What happened?
Cinta: I'll tell you about it someday. It's been a long year. I had to rest up for a while. Quite a while. I had time to think.
Vel: Wish I'd known.
Cinta: I thought about you.

After Cinta's death, Vel's primary emotion for Samm, who pulled the trigger is not anger – it is disgust, demanding that the depth of the error be understood:

She was a warrior.
She was everything that you have daydreamed about.
She was a blooded, fearless warrior
whose loss will be mourned in ways
that you will never understand.
She was a miracle.

Kleya was a surprise in the second season. While we see her, and the respect that operatives who work for Luthen hold her in, and understand her competence, we never truly realise just how important she is. When Kleya hears Sculdon learning that he has purchased a fake, we see the music of sobriety, indicating a seriousness of the matter. Later, when Kleya speaks to Lonni, so she can get into the bug in Sculdon's collection is amazing – her strength, her determination and of course at the same time we see Mon cares for Val and Val of course cares for Cinta, and this is another part of the complexities of the story, their relationships.

> *Luthen*: We should have killed Krennic when we were up there.
> *Kleya*: That's the spirit.

Then we see Klya, as Luthen learns from Lonni that there is a super weapon and we then flashback, and see Sgt. Lear, a younger Rael Luthen, from Klya's perspective inside a ship, and we hear a massacre outside, people lined up against a wall, and we know that Klaya's family are gone, and she even asks:

> *Kleya*: Am I your daughter now?
> *Luthen*: When it's useful.
> *Kleya*: I have to think about that.
> *Luthen*: We'll be whoever we have to. It won't always be up to us. I'm Luthen now. You're Kleya. Everything else is up for grabs. I didn't mean to upset you.
> *Kleya:* I'm not upset. Just hungry.
> *Luthen:* Let's eat.

I think that, while there must have been some hatred for Luthen as an Imperial soldier, part of the system or even one of the soldiers that killed her parents, family, friends, that there is a bonding that occurs between Luthen and Kleya. I think that she comes to love him, and he is dutiful to her. He is her family. She is a child fighter, she lies, and is fiercely clever. Her hatred drives her, and Luthen sees that:

> *Kleya:* When do we start fighting back?...
> *Luthen:* All you know now is how much you hate. You bank that. You hide that. You keep it alive until you know what to do with it.

Then we see them, eating somewhere and there are "Fifty. Maybe more." imperials, and it is unclear exactly what is going to occur. This was explained by Tom Bissell to be Naboo, as that was the planet the Emperor came from.[1] Then we see the conversation between Luthen and Klaya and then the explosion, as they kill imperials, and commit an act of "terrorsim." Their life together was never truly shown, but we see sufficient to know that there is an incredible focus that they share. Elizabeth Dulau spoke about playing Kleya Marki in *Andor* and explained:

> She's had to become hardened. To achieve what her and Luthen are trying to pull off, she's had to sacrifice so much for that. And I remember talking to Tony Gilroy right at the start — before shooting Season 2 — talking about her character. And he would say: the rebellion is her entire life. It is her *raison d'etre*. She wakes up in the morning and she's thinking about that. She goes to work and she waits her entire day. Everything she does goes into trying to achieve that end goal of building this rebellion with Luthen. So she can't afford to have friendships because they will eventually sort of weaken her or create these vulnerabilities.

> Whilst she's this incredibly hard character, on the flip side, she's still human. She still has a heart. She's just had to build this incredibly tough case around it.[2]

So many in *Andor* have lost family, Wilmon, whose father was killed but who trained him so well, Saw who lost his sister, and now sees Rhydo, the narcotic like fuel as his sister, Lonni who wanted escape with his Family, who was killed by Luthen a callous and hard act, Leida and Mon, lost to one another, we see family is important and a key element to the series, and this of course makes sense, as stories that involve family can be important, and if anything the stories ahead, be it that of Jyn and Galen Erso, or Luke, Leia and Anakin Skywalker, are of family, and that emotional and human connection is important.

Kleya's dedication to her family, to Luthen, was powerful, as is his dedication to her. One is left wondering who is actually in charge: is it Luthen, or Kleya? Is it a partnership, a family business as one might say? It is strange, that family is what we make it, when it matters, when we need it, there can be an incredible cohesiveness, an understanding and co-operativeness, and commitment that is impressive to be part of. Luthen and Klaya are family, fucked up, but a clear minded family with a common purpose and goal.

And then of course, Klya has to kill Luthen.

One sees her love for him and the Rebellion. She knows she must kill him, to finish the task that he began, and she knows that she must get word to the Rebellion, and get this super weapon stopped. When she succeeds, Luthen succeeds, and they further the rebellion massively.

Elizabeth Dulau noted:

> I mean that's what sci-fi is all about. The point of sci-fi is that we're supposed to be able to see ourselves within it. We're supposed to be able to take our world and set it in a galaxy far, far away, and by doing that, we're supposed to get perspective on ourselves in these characters. So it feels really important, for me, to do this. It feels important, and it feels like such an honour to humanise these incredibly mythical stories.[3]

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_xBKfcPULg
2. "The rebellion is her entire life": Elizabeth Dulau on playing Kleya Marki in 'Andor' Season 2
By Azrin Tan 28 April 2025 Singaopore Vogue https://vogue.sg/elizabeth-dulau-kleya-marki-andor-season-2/
3. "The rebellion is her entire life": Elizabeth Dulau on playing Kleya Marki in 'Andor' Season 2
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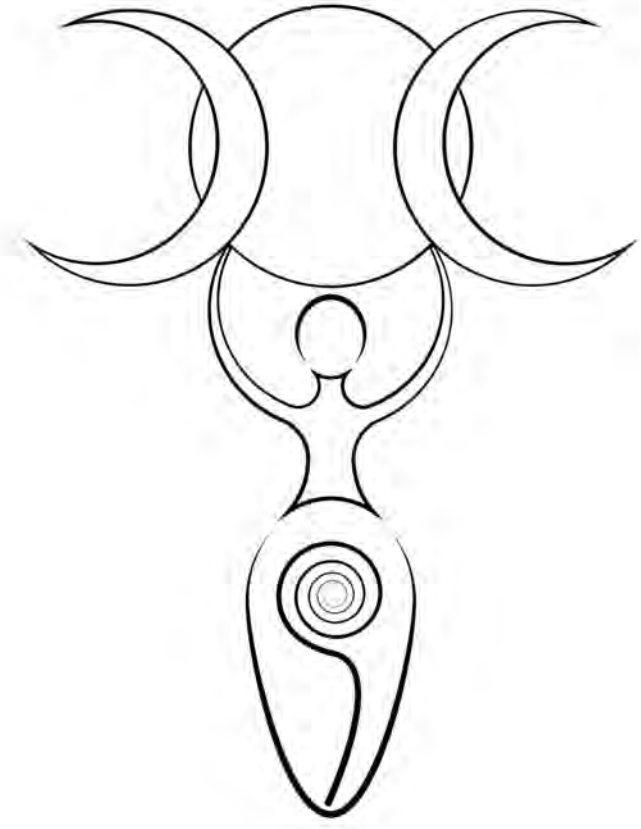
Not-Maidens and Truth-Tellers: The Trope-Breaking Women of Andor, by Allison Hartman Adams

In 1977, Roger Ebert explained that the unique joy of *Star Wars: A New Hope* lies in the intrinsic familiarity of the characters, who are, he wrote, "more interesting for us than all the intergalactic hardware" the movie has to offer. We recognize the alcoholics at the Mos Eisley Cantina, the farm boy, the rogue, the warrior princess, and the evil wizard overlord. Where Star Wars sometimes goes wrong is when it relies too much on the intergalactic hardware (special effects) rather than good, solid storytelling told through familiar tropish characters we love.

Andor is in a unique position. We have (finally) moved into an era of Star Wars storytelling where, in order for the franchise to avoid self-parody, the tropish must be replaced by the human. That is, Star Wars writers must upend the tropes, mutate them, scrape off the peeling shellac that has preserved them in our collective memories. Re-make them.

One of the most crucial is how Star Wars treats women as it relates to audience expectations. There is an abundance of commentary on women in Star Wars, but many of these expectations are steeped in our understanding of women's roles, which are often linked to a bastardization of the neopaganism Maiden/Mother/Crone archetype. Neopagan beliefs argue for the interconnectedness of these three identities, suggesting that women morph into various iterations at different times in their lives, even circling back and beginning the cycle again. Over the ages, this triad has become infinitely malleable by everyone from faithful practitioners of Wicca to weekend essential oil sales ladies.



These archetypes play out in fables and fairy tales, but more recently they have been harnessed by filmmakers in the lucrative tradition of Joseph Campbell's monomyth and have subsequently become not just archetypes, but filmmaking musts. The Maiden is the youthful, inexperienced, idealistic dreamer who represents the possibilities of tomorrow. In Hollywood storytelling, she is also the sexually available option for the hero, often vulnerable and in need of saving. The Mother is the life-giver, the nurturer, the loving creator, who in modern storytelling is generally: 1) supremely self-sacrificing and completely devoted to her

children; 2) entirely absent/dead in order to provide motivation for the protagonist; or 3) the abusive step-mother who psychologically manipulates the protagonist and usually ends up with the modern equivalent of being forced to dance in red-hot iron shoes until she dies. The Crone is the holder of the culture's stories and possessor of wisdom, and in modern storytelling if often vilified as the wicked witch or evil queen, or becomes the remote, beneficent, and mysterious oracle. In both cases she is artificially and intentionally isolated from the community, reflecting modern day preoccupation with keeping death as far away from us as possible.

As society secularizes, fractures, and polarizes, we look to ancient teachings for evidence of human interconnectedness. Popular online discussions strive earnestly to legitimize this powerful Maiden/Mother/Crone trinity, writing at great length of their ancient and far-flung roots: the Norns, Urd, Verdandi, and Skuld, in Norse mythology, the Hindu Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Parvati, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos the Greek Fates, and even the prophet Mór-ríoghan, whose curious tête-à-tête with Cú Chulainn eventually brings about his downfall. Western culture has long been obsessed with the ancient, from revival periods in architecture across the centuries, to bewitching wanderings into half-baked old-school occultism, to the 21st century manosphere browbeating young men into embracing the ancestral lifestyle by eating raw liver.

There's a catch, however.

The Maiden/Mother/Crone archetype was, like Victoria's Secret, made up by a dude. And not that long ago.

Robert Graves, in his 1948 *The White Goddess*, drew together elements of mythology from many cultures to create what neopaganism and western literature alike has codified into the Maiden/Mother/Crone archetypes. His research was later accelerated by psychologists such as Carl Jung and Erich Neumann. Graves' archetype builds on Sigmund Freud's analysis of the "ancient theme" in storytelling, which he explains in his 1913 "The Theme of the Three Caskets":

> We might argue that what is represented here are the three inevitable relations that a man has with a woman – the woman who bears him, the woman who is his mate and the woman who destroys him; or that they are the three forms taken by the figure of the mother in the course of man's life – the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more.

Sidebar #1: As someone writing a doctoral thesis on how Freud irrevocably cocked up much of 20th century literary analysis through his inexplicable influence, screw you, Sigmund.

In Freud's vision, as well as Campbell's and Graves', the woman exists relative to a man. She is defined by him and his needs for a mate, mother, or nemesis. Graves linked this vision to three phases of the moon (waxing crescent for the Maiden; whole for the Mother; waning crescent for the Crone). But as neopagan and feminist scholars have pointed out, there the moon has more than three phases, and a woman has more than three roles.

In recent years, a popular modern addition to the Maiden/Mother/Crone trinity is a fourth role in which a woman, past childbearing age but still not old enough to take on the mantle of the Crone, embraces a liberated self, begins taking risks again, begins speaking often unpopular truths. It's no surprise that this role has emerged in just the past few years, as 21st century women who have built on the successes of their mothers and grandmothers have carved out a new space for themselves, one in which their voices, careers, and evolutions exist *despite* the pressure to adhere to the traditional nuclear (patriarchal) family structure. The most common name online for this fourth woman is the Queen, but, quite frankly, this is a garbage title, as it carries with it all the same bullshit of the hierarchical patriarchy that many women have been seeking to reform for generations. The other three women can be *any* woman; the Queen is a *royal* woman, existing in a top-down artificial power structure that perpetuates injustice and inequality. The blog *So Just Be* challenges both the three-identity woman and the Queen title in their 2021 article "Maiden, Mother, Crone? Womanhood in the Modern World", instead naming her the "Wild Woman." But the Wild Woman still gives me pause, as it implies a departure from the patriarchal structure rather than a complete redefinition of it.

Scholars and Wiccans will argue over this for decades, I am sure, but what is of most interest here is not the granular definition of this fourth role, but of how pervasive the original three are in Hollywood storytelling and how much *Andor* blends and subverts them. Campbell's monomyth began as a convoluted academic treatise on storytelling patterns across the ages, was utterly dismissed by contemporary scholars and folklorists, and was then resuscitated by Hollywood, most famously by George Lucas. Graves' Maiden/Mother/Crone archetype's journey is no different.

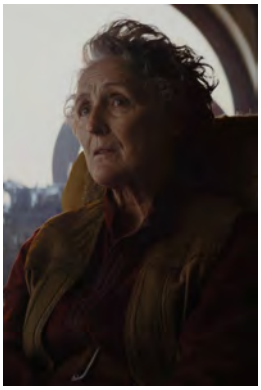
Today, in *Andor*, we have an addition to the Star Wars universe that tosses these tropes out the airlock and instead invents women who are grounded in reality, proving (yet again for those asleep in the back) that women will forever resist being shoe-horned into roles men create for them.

Bix Caleen, the Not-Maiden: Surface-level dust-jacket summaries might slot her into the Maiden role, as she is Cassian Andor's love interest. However, Bix is neither inexperienced nor a dreamer – nor, despite the continued efforts of the viewers, Cassian, and all the other men in her life, is she vulnerable. She is competent, accomplished, and savvy as owner of her family's salvage yard on Ferrix. She is the original lynchpin of the burgeoning Rebellion on Ferrix, one of the few who proto-rebels actually gets facetime with Luthen in Season 1. She makes it very clear from the jump that she needs neither Timm nor Cassian, recasting Timm's role as the jealous would-be boyfriend into a narrative convenience rather than a marker of Bix's sexual availability (we need *someone* to be motivated to betray Cassian to the Empire). When Cassian saves her from brutal interrogation at Dr. Gorst's hands, he does so because *Ferrix* means *family*. These two have a shared history, but they are not sleeping together. Cassian is crossing his bridge into rebellion, and he would risk just as much for Wil or Marva. Indeed, *Andor* pulls off something not often seen in filmmaking: Cassian and Bix's relationship could have remained platonic through the close of the series and it still would have worked. The same is true of Cassian and Jyn in *Rogue One*. While the internet fantasizes about a torrid love affair between those two, it simply does not happen on screen, and Cassian Andor's final words are not declarations of love or a demand for female attention, but an assurance to Jyn that her father would have been proud of her. When it comes to both Bix and Jyn, romance is secondary to the Rebellion. As Vel reminds Mon, the "Rebellion comes first. We take what's left," a message the women seem to understand a lot earlier than Cassian does.

Indeed, it is any attempt to rescue Bix that makes everything worse. Bix's mental health crisis was marginally manageable while she was on Mina-Rau, where she had a community and a job to give her focus. The isolation that Luthen and Cassian insist on is meant to feel uncomfortable for the viewer. We read those Coruscant scenes as *wrong* somehow, not because Bix is such a colossal failure, but because she's suffering, and the required isolation of Luthen's plans (and apparent prohibitions from making friends with the owner at the local bodega) compound her illness. Bix craves action, community, and competency, and the men in her life deny her all three in the name of safety. She resents Cassian for "protecting" her by killing the imperial guard who saw her face, and she resents Luthen's reluctance to give her another job while she is suffering from both drug use and PTSD. By this time, Bix has shown the viewer that she can handle whatever the *Andor* writers (sadistic fucks that they are) throw at her, not because she skates across the top of tragedy and hardship, or is saved in the nick of time by her lovin' man, but because she – like other humans – gets caught, goes under, swims hard, and still survives. A prime example is Lieutenant Krole's assault on Mina-Rau. He propositions her, she says no, he doesn't listen, and she beats him to death for it. (*Sidebar #2: shout out to Episode 3 writer Tony Gilroy for giving Bix the opportunity to use the word "rape" without hiding behind euphemism, shameful looks, or the passive voice. Seriously – pay attention to the sentence structures we use to talk about rape in the 21st century, and you'll see why this was so important*).

Ultimately, Bix's darkest moments are triggered when people don't take her seriously – whether Cassian, Luthen, or Lieutenant Krole. Her return to herself is marked by murdering Dr. Gorst, most visible in her subtle smirk as she walks away from the explosion. Getting rid of Gorst deserves a bit more attention than it gets, to be honest, considering the number of rebels Bix saves by obliterating both Gorst and his instruments. In that moment, Cassian walks *behind* her, not next to her or before her. He is her sidekick here; this is the story of her recovery, and Cassian has finally gotten out of the way.

By the end, Bix has frustrated viewers and Cassian once again by removing herself from the drama entirely. She becomes the speaker of difficult realities – the Truth-Teller like Maarva and Mon – for Cassian. Bix understands that Cassian has a larger role to play, and it is obvious that he cannot do that while she is around. In her goodbye video message to Cassian, she tells him, "I'm choosing for the both of us. I choose the Rebellion." In light of the show's final shot, one wonders: is she choosing for herself and Cassian, or for herself and their unborn baby? (Tony Gilroy has confirmed that Bix knew she was pregnant when she left.) While this final shot does lean heavily on the image of the Mother in the MMC triad, it is a world of Bix's own making. She is not the Mother *because* of the man, defined by him, as Freud might have it. She has chosen motherhood and a life of purpose back on Mina-Rau. She has created her own salvation independent of the hero.



Maarva Andor, the Battle Crone: Maarva is another character that mutates familiar definitions of tropes. Maarva is Warrior, Mother, and Crone, but most importantly, another Truth-Teller. Her role in the Daughters of Ferrix establishes her as an integral part of the community, arguably making her one of the characters that fits the ancient Crone ideals most closely. It is only in modern storytelling that the Crone has been isolated as a way of controlling and "othering" female autonomy and influence through vilification and alienation. Cassian again shows a well-intentioned but ultimately misguided old-fashioned sensibility by attempting to save Maarva, even though she explicitly tells him she needs no saving. By the end of Season 1, Maarva becomes the Truth-Teller in her funeral speech in which she encourages her community on Ferrix to fight the Empire.

Eedy Karn, the Wicked Mother: Eedy is perhaps the character that most easily fits into a modern MMC category, clearly filling the role of the demented Mother figure whose identity is so wrapped up in outward appearances that she mistakes vicarious ambition for maternal love. While not as scary as Mrs. Bates, nor so vain as Mother Gothel, Eedy's (possible) salvation occurs because she is put in her place *before* the close of the series. It is only when she encounters Dedra – a not-mother, not-maiden who is clearly stronger than herself – that Eedy is forced to experiment with the Proud Mother identity, possibly opening the door for her to experience actual human affection for Syril. While she reverts back to her razor-tongued self while he's on Ghorman, it is still notable that when she hears of Syril's death, she is shown weeping and surrounded by friends, not alone, coldly ignoring yet another of her son's failures. Crucially, we never get to see Eedy sharing the company of anyone other than Syril or Dedra, and the only other person in Eedy's life is the mysterious (and absent) Uncle Harlo. But when Eedy is forced to confront the loss of her only child, along with the years of past cruelty to him and the years of her future loneliness, she is surrounded by other women. She has become the Crone, no longer the Mother, and has the choice of whether to transform her own failures into wisdom to be shared, or fold in on herself in another of *Andor's* repeated lessons about the poisonous nature of isolationism.

Kleya Marki, Vel Sartha, and Cinta Kaz, the Warriors: These three exist entirely outside the Maiden/Mother/Crone triad. They do not fit the fourth "Queen" or "Wild Woman" role either – that woman who is past motherhood (metaphorical or otherwise) and free to be her wild queeny self. This might be why they are some of the most compelling characters on screen and inspire buckets and buckets of online conversation. They are Warriors like Maarva was, pragmatic like Bix, and we can hope that they will live long enough to become Crone-like leaders of the Rebellion (except, sadly, Cinta). Their relationships with the male characters are completely practical and solely in service of the greater good. They defy definition, the only exception being the writers' truly thoughtless blunder into the Bury Your Gays trope as it relates to Cinta's death. I am pleased, however, that Kleya gets the opportunity in the final season to see what the Rebellion has built on Yavin, to see her place in that struggle, as Cassian promised. In the final moments of the final episode, she watches the community come together, and she smiles.

Dedra Meero, the Iron Lady:

The Iron Lady is most closely related to the Wild Woman in the MMC triad-turned-quartet, but not because she has evolved through the traditional stages, but because the markers of those roles are present in her character only as unholy inversions. The Iron Lady exists in relation to the male presence in the story, and she cannot fit into the original triad because she has stripped herself of anything "female" in order to win the boys' game. Dedra-as-Maiden: all potential (either sexual, maternal, or ideological) is absorbed entirely by her dedication to the Empire. She is the object of sexual desire for Syril, but sexual gratification and human affection appears to be an afterthought for her. Dedra-as-Mother: As she was raised in an Imperial kinder-block, Dedra has no reference point for motherly affection. She, as she says, "didn't know what [she] was missing." She humiliates Edey in an act that reads as affection for Syril only because he has willingly substituted one diabolically cruel mother figure for another. Moreover, Dedra does not operate as a mentor to anyone in the show; she does not nurture or guide, even in a professional sense. As an inversion of the Mother, she keeps all that energy for her own professional ambitions. Dedra-as-Crone: The Empire would use her up long before she ever got the opportunity to become the keeper of institutional knowledge and wisdom. Did any of us really expect that "Supreme Commander" would ever precede Dedra Meero's name? While highranking women do exist in the Extended Universe Galactic Empire, they are few and far between. Everyone – except Dedra – knew how her story would end.

Unlike the Warriors in the series, Dedra is almost exclusively defined by the men in her life because she is explicitly trying to survive in a sexist system, which tracks with the Empire's 1940s-era Nazi roots. All of Dedra Meero's associates at the ISB are men, from her mentor Partagaz and Krennic, to enemies like Supervisors Blevin and Heert, to her lover Syril Karn. The women she spends time with are Bix, who she tortures, and Eedy, who she dominates. Dedra has no time for the interconnectedness of the female roles in the MMC, either the modern or the ancient. The first would hold her back, because they are predicated on patriarchy making the rules. The second, where women are part of an ever-renewing cycle of community, is wholly alien to her. Tellingly, TVTropes.org has this to say about the Iron Lady (emphasis added):

> The reason usually given for [her cold strength] is that women seeking positions of power, *both in reality and in fiction*, are faced with two unfortunate truths:
>
> That they need to give the appearance of toughness, ruthlessness, and coldness in order to get past other people's masculine-tinted expectations of leadership,
>
> That in the circles such women travel in, they actually need to be tough, ruthless, and cold. The ones who aren't are left by the wayside.
>
> Thus, female leaders are generally portrayed as trying to demonstrate their iron will at all times. Indeed, they have to lest they lose all credibility.

Ultimately, whether she is an inversion of the MMC triad or a failed Warrior, Dedra Meero can never become the Truth-Teller because she has built her identity around a system that accepts only a solitary truth: complete imperial supremacy. Any deviation from that will obliterate her credibility with the men she seeks to impress. Dedra therefore has no willingness (or capacity) to recognize uncomfortable truths, even as they apply to her own actions. This ideological ossification leads to one of the most tragic moments of the series: her interview with Director Krennic, when Dedra realizes that her single-minded loyalty to the Empire will not save her. She will die forgotten in Narkina 5, broken and unloved. She will never be Maarva, Cinta, or any of the Rebellion, because the would-be community Dedra gave herself to does not actually value her, her contributions, or her life. The MMC triad exists as a part of a community – and community, with all its messy loyalties, is anathema to the Empire.

Mon Mothma, the Truth-Teller: For a woman who's involved in a secret rebellious fundraising scheme, where one stray word can get people killed, Mon speaks the truth an awful lot. We viewers are lucky to get to see her in a full range of scenes, both in her highly controlled moments when she is playing her careful charade, and in her moments when she speaks out.

Indeed, Mon seems to partially fill so many of the tropes – and none – all with a smile on her face. She is not the Warrior like her cousin Vel, but she is on the front lines of one of the arguably most important battles of the Rebellion: the finances. She is not a successful Mother because she fails Leida so cruelly; yet Mon is Mother to the Rebellion. She is married, so she is not the Maiden, but she is still positioned as the object of desire, even if that is based on other characters' interpretations rather than reality (Tay's flirtations are a great cover for financial subterfuge). She certainly isn't the Crone, as she is still so embroiled in the action, not removed by society to play the role of oracle on Temple Island.

Mon is positioned to do what others can't, what Dasi Oran, the Ghorman senator, desperately needs her to do: speak the truth. Sure, most others can see the truth of what's happening, but they are all silent – by necessity, circumstance, or design. It is her silence that frustrates her allies and the viewers, but we know deep down that she must remain so or she is ruined. She is closest to the modern addition of the Queen or Wild Woman in that she is past childbearing age and still has quite a lot to do (also she has buckets of money and power). But, as discussed, those archetype additions are still limiting. Mon is bigger than them, and she grows into this role as the series concludes. Note that a significant portion of this fanzine is about Mon Mothma. She really is something; a particular success for the series, and a credit to the male writers for capturing something that defies definition.

A while back, I had an interesting conversation with a colleague about the evolution of the MMC triad.

"Where's the rage?" she asked me. "When do we women get to be angry? When do we get to tell the truth?"

I think about my colleague when writing about Mon Mothma. While Mon is used to wrapping her emotions in cloth-of-gold and smiling through the rage, I think she still feels it – at herself, her family, and the world. She spends the whole series *not* saying what she's really thinking, which accounts for the spectacular impact of her words once finally spoken. Her superpower is in her timing. She is the Truth-Teller in the Senate, and once she starts speaking, she becomes the leader the Rebellion needed. Her final words to Bail Organa in the closing episode are no accident:

"You need to hear us out."

Speeches, Manifestos, and Unblinking Eyes: The Importance of Bearing Witness by Josh Gauthier

A quiet but powerful moment in *Andor* Season 2 finds Imperial Major Partagaz listening to a portion of Nemik's rebellion manifesto from Season 1: "Just keeps spreading, doesn't it?" Partagaz asks another officer.

I won't go so far as to call it a change of heart — he's a pretty fierce force of imperial power throughout the show — but the moment is tinged with regret and resignation as he finds himself used up and with nowhere to turn mere moments before his death by his own hand, one more piece of Imperial control crumbling in the face of rebellion. It feels important, hearing Nemik's words again as Season 2 comes to a close. Among everything else, the final episode shows the work of our heroes beginning to pay off while key antagonists find themselves swallowed by an authoritarian system that allows no room for failure. "There will be times when the struggle seems impossible," Nemik tells a hurting galaxy before offering the reminder that "even the smallest act of insurrection pushes our lines forward." This is a point that *Andor* consistently makes clear. The Rebellion succeeds especially because of the small actions of average people who refuse to stop fighting. In similar fashion, the machine of Empire only moves when those within continue to do their parts to prop up the façade of total control. *Andor* shines a light on these small, often unrecognized acts, which nevertheless shape the direction in which the galaxy is headed.

After *Andor* Season 2, Episode 9 aired, I saw a comment online asking why Senator Mon Mothma felt the need to give a speech that would put a target directly on her back while seemingly doing nothing to alter the course of Imperial action. She fled for her life; the Empire marched on. This raises a question that I think runs throughout *Andor*, and ultimately one that sits at the core of any outnumbered rebellion: What can any one person do in the face of impossible odds?

The fight against totalitarian rule is never going to be won in a single instance. The *Andor* writers know this, as do the characters. When Senator Mothma rises to call out Emperor Palpatine by name, the goal is not to abruptly shift the balance of power. Of course it wouldn't be that simple. What she does instead, is put a crack in the idea that the Empire is the arbiter of truth. Her speech comes after the massacre on Ghorman, as the official narrative vilifies the Ghorman rebels and celebrates the valiant Imperial soldiers who lost their lives. In the aftermath, the Ghormans are dead or scattered and anyone who was not present on the planet itself has no reason to disbelieve the official reports.

Until Mon rises to speak.

"The distance between what is said and what is known to be true has become an abyss," she declares, the first voice of open dissent in a political space publicly united against a vague enemy lurking beyond the ramparts of security. "Of all the things at risk, the loss of an objective reality is perhaps the most dangerous," she continues. "The death of truth is the ultimate victory of evil." We witness the power of narrative in the extended campaign that the Imperials wage to first destabilize and then destroy Ghorman. It is not a fight won with weapons, but with public opinion. With Ghorman painted as the enemy, the broader public will not find themselves moved to Ghorman's

defense. And this is exactly what occurs. Citizens half-watch the latest headlines about violent rebellions over their breakfast. Government officials refuse to endanger their careers in support of a people who are now identified as the enemy. Even Syril, caught up in his love for Imperial rules and order, does not realize the scope and cost of the propaganda surrounding him until it is too late. It is in the death of truth, that the Empire is able to carry out genocide and declare itself virtuous for the act.

This is why Senator Mothma's speech is so important. There are no Ghormans left who can speak on the scale available to her. With so many of those innocent voices lost to screams and then silence in Ghorman Plaza, that senate speech refuses to let them be forgotten. It is also a blow struck directly at the heart of the Empire. Elsewhere in the season, a passing comment sees citizens doubting that Emperor Palpatine is even aware of what Imperial officers are doing in his name. They chalk it up to isolated evil and miss the fact that the Empire is unified in its desire for control. It is possible that Senator Mothma's refusal to stay silent was the first time many within the Empire heard anyone directly challenge Palpatine's authority. But that spark, once lit, may go on to burn much more brightly. Her speech didn't have to turn the tide in a single day. In choosing to take a stand for the fallen Ghorman people, Senator Mothma's speech confronts a complacent galaxy with a simple question: "What if the comfort and security you've sacrificed so many rights to achieve, is all a lie?"

This speech is an important one, and as Mon Mothma goes on to be a key leader in the Rebellion, it shows a woman willing to use her power and privilege in pursuit of change. She sacrifices a life of comforts in order to fight an evil that, if left unopposed, will consume them all. In many ways, it harkens back to Maarva's speech at the end of Season 1. In that case, discontent on Ferrix was already building, but surrounded by impossible Imperial power, it took a rallying cry for citizens to launch into action. Both speeches urge everyday people to recognize that evil thrives when it remains unopposed. In speaking truth and moving people toward resistance, the lines of Rebellion keep moving forward.

But it would be remiss not to recognize that every person does not hold such power. *Andor* is full of these everyday individuals who wield seemingly little to no influence. What does resistance look like when one is not a senator, a community leader, an officer? What does it mean to speak, even if no one is listening?

In Episode 10, we witness scenes from Kleya and Luthen's past, leading up to their efforts to form the budding Rebellion. There are many revelations held within these flashbacks, but there is key moment which, at a glance, does not hold major significance for the larger story. While bartering antiques in a market, the day is interrupted by a progression of soldiers and prisoners passing through the crowd. One shopkeeper explains to Luthen that a sniper killed a soldier recently, and since then, the Imperials "keep finding people who did it." This simple phrase, along with shouts from the crowd defending the innocence of the prisoners, feels strikingly familiar to the Ghorman massacre that will follow in years to come. Under the guise of law and order, the Empire gives itself permission to carry out atrocities with impunity.

As the prisoners are marched toward a public execution, Luthen rapidly concludes his business and aims to leave. "We're leaving," he says. It's a simple decision, tangled in the contradictions of an immensely complex character. Kleya however, does not so much look at him as she responds, "I'm not." Her gaze never leaves the prisoners. We already know by this point that she has escaped horrific violence of her own. She has yet to commit acts of violence, but she has survived them. There is no surprise in her expression as she watches the executions. She stands stiff, determined, and does not turn away until it is over.

When she later confronts Luthen, feeling like they are doing nothing to fight back, he directs her to hold onto the hatred that she feels for the Empire and their violence. There will come a day when they are ready to unleash it. Their differing views on how and when to act are a larger source of tension, but it is important to recognize Kleya's determination to bear witness to the injustice. In the moment, she is powerless to change anything, but in her refusal to leave, the murder of innocent people will not be lost or forgotten. The memory of such things will follow her and fuel her in the fight to come.

It is not only the direct acts of resistance which matter. Be it Luke Skywalker crossing lightsabers with Darth Vader or Cassian Andor and Jyn Erso stealing the plans to the Death Star, these decisive moments of victory are a key part of the Empire's eventual downfall. But those moments do not arrive without the smaller ones. Mon Mothma raising her voice in defense of the Ghorman people who can no longer speak themselves. Kleya refusing to avert her eyes from the violent injustice of Imperial control. A bellhop who opens a hotel door during a massacre. A military officer who lets a secret slip at a necessary moment. An everyday citizen who turns off the official broadcast, looks out the window, and dares to wonder if there is a better future within reach.

In Season 1, Nemik wrote his manifesto huddled in the wild, part of a small band of rebels daring to fight without any guarantee that others would join them. Years later, that manifesto helped keep the unkillable idea of hope alive across the galaxy, despite Imperial efforts to snuff it out.

The writing in *Andor* shows its brilliance in so many poignant moments. But watching in 2025, it feels frighteningly relevant in ways that I wish we did not now need to reckon with. In the face of tumultuous times, I've heard many people wondering what any one of us can do to stem the tide of harm. We're struggling to pay bills, hold no

significant positions of power, lack the platforms necessary to enact widespread change. So often, the struggle seems impossible.

I know this question especially hangs over creative folks. As writers, painters, dreamers—what do our little creations matter in the face of unending violence? The world feels like it's crumbling, and I'm writing a silly story about dragons. I think this is why Mon Mothma's speech remains so important. I think we should pay attention to Kleya's refusal to avert her eyes. In the present, we are facing our own loss of objective reality. Competing narratives make it near impossible to address deeper problems while we're left debating basic facts. Ideological divides turn friends and loved ones into strangers. In the midst of such turmoil, it becomes necessary to bear witness.

A rise in authoritarianism, genocides across the globe, official narratives conflicting with reality, and the crumbling of liberty. Most of us are not Luke Skywalker. Most are not even Cassian Andor. Some of us may hold enough influence to reach a wider audience, able to rouse people to consciousness and stir them to actions through impassioned speech. In other moments, we may simply be young Kleya. The unfortunate truth is that there are times when we simply cannot do anything to avert tragedy. People will suffer or die, but in that moment, we can refuse to turn away. We can refuse to let the injustice of those crimes fade into obscurity or be remade into virtue. We can refuse to let those in power isolate us from each other.

Andor captures the simple truth that everyday people are vital to resistance against evil. And evil only succeeds if there are enough individuals willing to keep their heads down and keep the wheels of empire turning. For the writers, the artists, look at this moment right now. *Star Wars* began nearly 50 years ago. It wasn't a manifesto. It was a science fiction film. And now, we're here in 2025, still being moved by these worlds characters. Countless stories have grown from that first one. More creative voices have been inspired. Art, in its own way, is often resistance. Whether it be beautiful escapism or infused with harsh reality, art is hope. It tells stories that might otherwise be forgotten. It speaks truth. And it helps hold the tide of evil at bay.

So what do we do? We keep posting on social media and donating to established organizations and protesting and having hard conversations with the people around us. We ensure that truth does not end up on the wrong side of an impassable chasm. We maintain the memories of those killed by injustice. We ensure that the lies of the authoritarian Empire do not go unchallenged, that they are not used to permit atrocities. When there is nothing else to do, we refuse to avert our eyes. We bear witness. And we let knowledge of the truth drive our desire for change. No one of us alone is responsible for fixing everything. But when enough people refuse to stay silent, refuse to look away, it becomes like Major Partagaz says:

"It just keeps spreading, doesn't it?"

The Speeches of Andor, with Commentary by Allison Hartman Adams and James Bacon

The importance of good speeches cannot be underestimated. Traditionally, they're used in literature for plot advancement, character development, and theme reinforcement, among other advantages. But speeches and monologues do something special in *Andor*. They, in the hands of the brilliant writers and actors, elevate the story to something more than just another iteration of Star Wars. Many of the characters have been described as Shakespearean – and for good reason. These moments, scattered across the series, reframe the events on the screen, reminding the reader that the struggle is universal and the characters are ourselves. One might wonder if the significance has been lost – perhaps to the sound bite, to the shortened clip or vid, or TikTok.

Andor delivered a lot of things, and Season Two has allowed us to look back at some of the key moments, some of the best script writing. We have collected these words below, adding editorial commentary on the impact of each moment. It is important to note that even though the overarching story was meant to be longer, it still feels like this second series was given the time and space to develop the characters and create a satisfactory ending to the story. A large part of the success were the actors' compelling performances.

We contemplate together, in honest reflection, just how amazing and incredible humanity can be, particularly the partnerships between writers and actors, who co-operatively find something poignant together. This special relationship delivers what we have today in *Andor*, and while there are still unanswered questions and unexplored stories, we can still appreciate what the Gilroy Team did together.

As we consider the landscape, like two suns setting, one must admit that we are lucky to have found such a layered and nuanced story. The narrative is, of course, made of many moving parts, often going in different directions, but it always offers a depth and complexity that we can then figure out for ourselves and still appreciate together.

It is clear that while the significance of individuality cannot be denied, and there cannot always be agreement, there is a satisfaction and assuredness, in the respect and awe that the situation is held in, while finding a level of appreciation for the perception and perspectives that must of course vary.

The beauty, the brilliance of the writing, from the minds of Tony Gilroy, Dan Gilroy, Beau Willimon, and Tom Bissel, spoken by some of the most brilliant actors we have today, is truly something special.

"There comes a time" – Syril Karn (S1E2)

> Thank you for being here. There comes a time when the... the risk of doing nothing becomes the greatest risk of all. This is one of those decisive moments, and I can't imagine a team I'd rather share it with than all of you. There's no room for doubt on the path to...Success...And, uh, justice. Best of luck to us all.

AHA: *Lord save us, this was one of the most catastrophically cringy moments in Season 1. What is it about someone failing so pathetically that makes us want to rescue him? It's like the impulse to kick the puppy suddenly tips into self-loathing pity, and we want just a single sympathetic Preox-Morlana Corpo to give Syril a nod of solidarity. Or maybe Syril will say*

something that finally gets through – something inspiring that will show his true talents, positioning him as a real threat to the burgeoning Rebellion. But of course, Tony Gilroy never meant Syril to be a true threat – only a massive tool.

JB: *This is a hilarious moment, as we see the earnestness of Syril, his sad belief that is so out of kilter with reality, his keen effort matched with a shocking inexperience, his lack of people skills, inability to read the room, and no situational awareness. He misjudges what is needed, which is of course indicative of how the whole mission will go.That he feels he has to say much at all, let alone attempting to inspire the men, is grimly awkward and sets the scene brilliantly, as we see the subsequent actions mirror this initial failing.*

"We are healthcare providers"– Major Partagaz (S1E4)

> *Major Partagaz:* I open the question to the room. What do we do in this building? Why are we here? Anyone?
>
> *Dedra Meero:* We're here to further security objectives by collecting intelligence, providing useful analysis, and conducting effective covert action, sir.
>
> *Major Partagaz:* Very good, Dedra. That is verbatim from the ISB mission statement... and wrong. Security is an illusion. You want security? Call the Navy. Launch a regiment of troopers.
>
> We are healthcare providers. We treat sickness. We identify symptoms. We locate germs, whether they arise from within or have come from the outside. The longer we wait to identify a disorder, the harder it is to treat the disease.

JB: *Partagaz is the patriarchal leader of the ISB, a Major, so the ranked officer. He is both clearly in authority, demanding high standards, while seemingly having a desire to get the best out of the room, to extract the power of the brains at his disposal, and to mentor the people he is master of. This explains both his thinking, which is both brilliant and sinister. This also reminds everyone in the ISB conference room what they are for. For instance, when Lonni explains that they are making a mistake by arresting too many people, Partagaz welcomes the openness. There is a counter intuitive element here: one would expect there are Imperial rules to follow (we can look to, say, Mick Herron's Slough House series, which shows rigid Moscow/ London rules, and consider that everyone at the ISB likely has been trained to follow similar structures). Working for the Empire demands that one is ready for attack from anywhere, that everyone hates you, it is not paranoia if it is real, so - Watch your back - and ISB Rules are about the internecine way the organisation operates, where your own colleagues want your job, and can leverage and maneuver to get it, if you mess up, and so - Cover your Arse- who can you blame. (with apologies to Mick Herron for stealing Jackson Lamb's lines)*

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AHA: *Like the Ministry of Enlightenment's machinations at the secret meeting at Maltheen Divide (S2E1) this scene immediately reminded me of George Orwell's 1946 essay "Politics and the English Language." Orwell's primary goal is to encourage people to say what they mean, and not get tangled up in clever-sounding language. He excoriates the use of flowery, misleading, or over-wrought phrasing, both because the writer is simply making themselves look silly, and because such behavior is a tool of deceit and oppression. "Political language," he writes, "is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." He's not wrong. Once upon a time, "enhanced interrogation" was just "torture" and "alternative facts" were "lies." Now…no one remembers. Partagaz's doublespeak here insulates the ISB employees from their grim purpose by casting their work as noble and honorable. Of course we're meant to scoff at this; we*

know this is simply writer Beau Willimon showing us how deluded the ISB is. We are chilled by the implications: the Empire will convince the galaxy of their moral superiority using Partagaz's same linguistic tactics. But what is truly chilling is that each and every one of us is deeply skilled in this same strategy. The boundaries of hyperbole mean nothing in the social media landscape, where the lying-words we use help us pretend we're believing the right thing.

"One Way Out" – Kino Loy (S1E10)

> Wherever you are right now, get up, stop the work. Get out of your cells, take charge and start climbing! They don't have enough guards and they know it. If we wait until they figure that out, it'll be too late. We will never have a better chance than this and I would rather die trying to take them down than giving them what they want. We know they fried a hundred men on Level Two. We know that they are making up our sentences as we go along. We know that no one outside here knows what's happening. Now we know that when they say we are being released, we are being transferred to some other prison to go and die and that ends today!
>
> There is one way out! Right now! The building is ours! You need to run, climb, kill! You need to help each other! You see someone who's confused, someone who is lost, you get them moving and you keep them moving until we put this place behind us! There are five thousand of us. If we can fight half as hard as we've been working, we will be home in no time.
>
> One way out! One way out! One way out!

AHA: *What strikes me most about this moment is that Kino recommends helping those who are confused or lost. Of course, this is in an effort to keep the momentum moving – if too many people elect to stand still, the break-out will fail. But this simple instruction underscores the sense of connection these men feel, now that they have the chance to see it. This theme of community and connection (and how the Empire undermines it) is crucial to the success of the show.*

JB: *Kino had done what he was meant to: he had followed the systematic instructions, worked hard, got others to work hard. But he is not a KAPO, he is not in a better position, or receiving more favourable circumstances, he is a team leader who cares for his team. The realisation that he has been lied to, that the rules and the standards that he understands are really a deception, unleashes a powerful man who is already the leader of prisoners, hard at the best of times. It is a passionate speech full of honesty; he* wants *everyone to get out.*

"A sunrise I'll never see." – Luthen Rael (S1E10)

> Calm. Kindness. Kinship. Love. I've given up all chance at inner peace. I've made my mind a sunless space. I share my dreams with ghosts. I wake up every day to an equation I wrote 15 years ago from which there's only one conclusion: I'm damned for what I do. My anger, my ego, my unwillingness to yield, my eagerness to fight, they've set me on a path from which there is no escape. I yearned to be a savior against injustice without contemplating the cost and by the time I looked down there was no longer any ground beneath my feet. What is my sacrifice? I'm condemned to use the tools of my enemy to defeat them.
>
> I burn my decency for someone else's future. I burn my life to make a sunrise that I know I'll never see. And the ego that started this fight will never have a mirror or an audience or the light of gratitude. So what do I sacrifice? Everything!

JB*: Except there are those who appreciate and know his sacrifice. There is Cassian, and there is Wilmon, and there is Bix, and there is Kleya. This speech was right for that moment, but as we see in the incredibly powerful episode,* ***"Make it Stop,"*** *Kleya was key to where Luthen went; their relationship, like so many, was complex. It is fair that at this time, Luthen believes this, and in many regards, he is forgotten. Cassian's part in Mon's escape is erased, and replaced by Gold Squadron; repeatedly, we see Wilmon and Cassian stand up to Luthen being put down. One hopes that in the history within the world, Luthen is remembered – "both sides of him" as Cassian says.*

AHA: *Another barnstormer. Beau Willimon's metaphorical writing makes this efficient 166-word speech one of the most powerful of the show. Here we understand why Luthen is the way he is – we catch a brief glimpse of his moral compass that achieves true north through nefarious acts rather than Jedi-like morality. He is an indecent, unsavory person, and the audience is (finally) given permission to root for him and weep at his death.*

"Nemik's Manifesto" – Karis Nemik (S1E12)

> There will be times when the struggle seems impossible. I know this already. Alone. Unsure. Dwarfed by the scale of the enemy…
>
> Remember this: Freedom is a pure idea. It occurs spontaneously and without instruction. Random acts of insurrection are occurring constantly throughout the galaxy. There are whole armies — battalions — that have no idea that they've already enlisted in the cause. Remember that the frontier of the Rebellion is everywhere. And even the smallest act of insurrection pushes our lines forward. And then remember this: The Imperial need for control is so desperate because it is so unnatural. Tyranny requires constant effort. It breaks, it leaks. Authority is brittle. Oppression is the mask of fear. Remember that. And know this: The day will come when all these skirmishes and battles — these moments of defiance will have flooded the banks of the Empire's authority. And then there will be one too many. One single thing will break the siege.
>
> Remember this. Try.

AHA: *There are so many reasons why this is everyone's favorite speech, and not the least of which is Gilroy's alchemic blend of emotional impact and brevity. But for me, what works best is the contrast between the ecologically organic images of a spontaneous resistance and the synthetic, laboriously-manufactured Imperial control. The Empire is, as Nemik says, "brittle" – as if it were rusted, weathered, and worn out – an insightful contrast to the weighty and antiseptic physical structures populating the imperial landscape. There's hope in reminders that the "Rebellion is everywhere," that people are engaging in it without even knowing, but it's the Empire's* brittleness, *the kind that you can imagine crumbling under your fingertips, that I find the most reassuring.*

JB: *Everything that Karis Nemik says is gold. There is so much thought and effort placed into the manifesto, one has to wonder if Tony Gilroy and the team just sat and listened to great speeches, read some amazing manifestos and read speeches of the likes of James Connolly, and felt inspired to give us Nemik's Manifesto, that we hear again at the end of the series, as we see Partagaz listening to it. The words are well crafted – even their snippets offer sufficient inspiration to viewers. That the manifesto has spread throughout the galaxy is a delight.*

"Tell Him" – Brasso (S1E12)

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

JB: *This is a very heartfelt and important message being shared. It feels very natural, the words of a caring mother, who knows that self loathing and blame or worse are consequences from this. For Cassian, who already has lost so much at the hands of others, to feel the blame for this loss would be a massive guilt. Maarva connects to Cassian through Brasso; her hope is not only to unburden him, but to encourage and even empower him to be a force for change and good. While the situation is fraught, the message is loaded both with forgiveness, absolution and, of course, hope and belief – she clearly believes in Cassian.*

AHA: *Star Wars is littered with messages and messengers, and Andor capitalizes on this habit to communicate some of the most important character development of the show. Here Brasso delivers to a remorseful Cassian the final words from his adoptive mother Maarva. As a mother, I struggle with this scene. It simultaneously imagines the inevitable and the*

impossible to bear. Episode writer Tony Gilroy's masterful writing also coalesces the resolution of Cassian's emotional growth around Maarva's death. His mother absolves him of guilt, both for his misdeeds and for not being an attentive-enough son, and foreshadows his eventual role in the Rebellion. She walks right up to – but does not cross into – the Chosen One narrative. Maarva's liberation catapults Cassian into the next chapter with renewed resolve. Her choice to stay on Ferrix hastens her own death; in essence, she chooses to remove herself from the list of Cassian's emotional liabilities, a move echoed in Bix's actions at the end of Season 2.

"Fight the Empire" – Maarva Andor (S1E12)

My name is Maarva Karasi Andor. I'm honored to stand before you, honored to be a Daughter of Ferrix, and honored to be worthy of the Stone. How strange...Feel as if I can see it.

I was six, I think, the first time I touched a Funerary Stone. Heard our music. Felt our history. Holding my sister's hand as we walked all the way from Fountain Square…Where you stand now, I've been more times than I can remember. I always wanted to be lifted. I was always eager, always waiting to be inspired. I remember every time it happened, every time the dead lifted me with their truth.

And now I'm dead. And I yearn to lift you. Not because I want to shine or even be remembered. It's because I want you to go on. I want Ferrix to continue. In my waning hours, that's what comforts me most. But I fear for you. We've been sleeping. We've had each other and Ferrix. Our work. Our days. We had each other and they left us alone. We kept the trade lanes open and they left us alone. We took their money and ignored them. We kept their engines churning, and the moment they pulled away, we forgot them. Because we had each other. We had Ferrix.

But we were sleeping. I've been sleeping. I've been turning away from a truth I wanted not to face. There is a wound that won't heal at the center of the galaxy. There is a darkness reaching like rust into everything around us. We let it grow, and now it's here. It's here and it's not visiting anymore, it wants to stay. The Empire is a disease that thrives in darkness. It is never more alive than when we sleep. It's easy for the dead to tell you to fight. And maybe it's true, maybe fighting's useless. Perhaps it's too late.

But I'll tell you this, if I could do it again, I'd wake up early and be fighting these bastards from the start. Fight the Empire!

AHA: *So much has already been said about this moment in the series. But the best thing? In Fiona Shaw's original recording of the speech, she says "Fuck the Empire!" I'd love to see that version.*

JB: *I have watched this episode and this speech a number of times. Marva was her own woman, and her husband was taken from her. She brought up Cassian as well as she could, and she, even in death, confronts the Empire that is now imposing on her and her community's lives. It is a powerful and strong speech that I enjoy watching. I was not aware of the "Fuck the Empire" element, which is superb.*

"Cassian's Speech to Niya" – Cassian Andor (S2E1)

This makes it worth it. This. Right now. Being with you. Being here at the moment you step into the circle. Look at me. You made this decision long ago. The Empire cannot win. You'll never feel right unless you're doing what you can to stop them. You're coming home to yourself. You've become more than your fear. Let that protect you.

JB*: I thought that Rachelle Diedricks was superb as Niya in these moments, as we see Cassian deploy a level of empathy and understanding as well as situational awareness, to help them both keep their cover. He genuinely wants to see her succeed and to join the fight, while her own fear, apprehension, commitment and sacrifice are clear.*

AHA: *Let's be honest: this is the kind of thing I have pinned to my wall, right next to the Bene Gesserit's "Litany Against Fear."*

"Sagrona Teema Solom" -– Perrin Fertha (S2E2)

> As the father of the Intended Maiden, it is my Chandrilan duty to greet you: Sagrona. To toast your health: Sagrona Teema. And, in our very old, ritualistic, and insanely economic fashion, it is also my duty to share just a single, truthful insight: Sagrona Teema Solom.
>
> Leida. My sweet Leida. Stekan. Pain will find you. Trouble and disagreement will arrive without summons. There's no choice in this, there's no effort required; you simply stand still and the galaxy will deliver a daily basket of fresh anxieties to your door, without fail. But my Solom — my Solom Seyna — the Elders know what I'm talking about, right?
>
> My hope — my hope — my hope is that you learn to reach past this constant cloud of sadness. Pleasure. Gaiety. Amusement. These are the hidden things. The music buried beneath all that noise. Joy. Joy! Joy. Joy has no wind at its back. Joy will not announce its arrival. You need to listen for it, and be mindful of how fleeting and delicate it can be.
>
> But search out these treasures. A moment of pleasing sensation, the memory of laughter and good company, the comfort of a fine meal. And for me. For me, right now, it's this smile that I can't hide as I see these two young people sharing our greatest tradition…Sagrona!

AHA: *I'm a sucker for hallowed traditions, so this speech was a challenge for me. Perrin is warm, funny, and doing a bang-up job as father of the bride. This speech* feels *right, until you remember how outdated and restrictive Chandrillan customs are. The speech is a lot like the braid-cutting ceremony – it appears lovely at first, steeped in story and ancient custom, meaningful and heartfelt. And then Perrin gives Stekan his knife, telling him to do with it as he pleases, heavily implying that Stekan has the right to murder his bride Leida. She bares her throat, and Stekan cuts her braid* toward her *(dumbass), the point of the knife a hair's breadth from her skin. There's no promise that she's going to survive the wedding, and there is no reciprocal gesture of absolute trust. I hate this scene. The speech similarly obscures ugliness with a manufactured, glossy veneer. It is all quite sweet on the surface, but the advice that a father is giving the happy couple on their wedding day is not to work hard for each other, not to sacrifice for each other, not even to do what's moral. Instead? Have fun. Overindulge. Forget to think of bad things. Pay no attention to anything that's going on outside your home. The pain of others is not your province.*

JB: *The thoughts that come to mind as I try to read the reaction that this creates in Mon Mothma is one of the best aspects of this speech. Does she hate it, is she tolerating it, does she wish for the joyful world and life that is so far removed from her reality that Perrin speaks to, or is she scoffing at his naivety, or is she upset that as she watches Leida enter this arrangement? Ostensibly, Perrin just wants his daughter to enjoy her life. It is fascinating that he is handing her over, like the chattel that Sculdon bought from Mon, and there is an "Unbraiding," a symbolistic cutting of ties, one assumes from the parental family to the betrothed husband. Mon is so fiercely busy ensuring that her daughter and everyone else's daughter in the room, and in the galaxy, can enjoy their lives, free of the Empire, that she has neglected to consider her own daughter's freedom. One wonders about Perrin, who in the TV series works to stay aloof from real matters, self centered and uninterested in the plight of others, although we do not truly know as that is sadly never developed. I am reminded of what Leia will say to Governor Tarkin "The more you tighten your grip, Tarkin, the more star systems will slip through your fingers." Leida did not slip through Mon's fingers, but was handed away.*

"This game ends now" – Deedra Mero (S2E3)

Eedy Karn: You'll toughen him up.

Dedra Meero: ...I have a different plan in mind. But when I say "plan," that makes it sound optional, which is not the impression you should be taking away.

This game ends now. You want Syril in your life? You will think before you speak. I'll make sure he visits, twice a month. I'll make sure he calls you. I will guarantee a level of engagement, but it will be inversely proportional to the volume of anxiety you generate in our lives.

Eedy Karn: Quite a mouthful.

Dedra Meero: I'm not done. You can spare me the Uncle Harlo testimonials. I've had a look at his ISB criminal files, and that is not a story you want to be advertising.

JB: *Dedra at her clinical and cold calculated best, and we see that she works to ensure that Syril's wellbeing, the anxiety his mother induces, is ended. She is both protective of him, demonstrating again, the weird yet amazing emotion that they hold for one another in this odd relationship, that works for them.*

AHA: *Both immediate and delayed gratification here. Eedy is humiliated, and Dedra shows a glimmer of human emotion through her protectiveness of Syril. But the real impact of this scene is not just in the moment, but later when we see Eedy weeping while watching the news reports of the Ghorman Massacre. Her pain, which is* real *despite two seasons of being the worst mother on record, would ring hollow without this moment in which Dedra deflates Eedy's self-importance and irrevocably wrests her son away from her. In her effort to make him great, Eedy instead shaped Syril into a frightened, fragile creature, and she only realizes this months after this awkward dinner, when she witnesses the news reports of the massacre from her far-away safe haven on Coruscant.*

"We are the Rhydo." – Saw Gerrera (S2E5)

Remember this. Remember this moment! This perfect night. You think I'm crazy? Yes, I am. Revolution is not for the sane.

Look at us. Unloved. Hunted. Cannon fodder. We'll all be dead before the Republic is back, and yet, here we are…Where are you, boy? You're here! You're not with Luthen, you're here. You're right here and you're ready to fight! We're the rhydo, kid. We're the fuel. We're the thing that explodes when there's too much friction in the air.

AHA: *I'm not sure about this scene. I was sad to see that Wil is forever going to be altered by the rhydo. I don't like seeing him as the fuel for the Rebellion's engine. But that's by design. Since 1977, we've been trained to see those who fought for the Rebellion as individuals with purpose. It's the job of the Empire to lead tens of thousands faceless soldiers to their deaths, whereas the Rebellion gets the charismatic, hopeful leaders. The Rebellion gets the Luke Skywalkers and the Reys – anyone can be a hero. But there's no reason to think that the Rebellion doesn't have its cannon fodder too, just as it has its feckless mercenaries and bumbling fools.*

JB: *I love this speech. It is foreshadowed by, "I was younger than you are now. I was a prisoner. They made a work camp in the jungle. No droids, no beasts, just men and cargo. Onderon jungle. Real jungle" where we hear about Saw's youth, and then he says "because I understand it. Because she's my sister rhydo, and she loves me! That itch, that burn... You feel how badly she wants to explode?" and then continues on with the speech. Saw's actions, unfortunately, killed his sister. His sister was Steela Gerrera, who we saw in* The Clone Wars *cartoons. She was an insurgent leader, with Saw on their home planet of Onderon. The King of Onderon Sanjay Rash was corrupt and supported by the Separatists. Steela sent a message to the Jedi seeking support, and this saw Anakin Skywalker himself, Ahsoka Tano, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Rex off to Oderan to train the Rebels in fighting techniques. There is an interesting connection between Ashoka and Saw, who is impetuous, and not as skilled as Steela. In a democratic decision, Steela is made leader of the group.*

The Rebels rescue their rightful king, set up a base but are attacked by Droid Gunships. Hondo Ohnaka supplies rocket launchers and the battle is turned. Unfortunately Saw fires a rocket at the final gunship, hits it and it crashes near Steela, blasting her off a cliff, and even though she gets a hand hold, and there was an attempt to save Steela, Ashoka using the Force, she falls and dies. This gives the whole speech a different feeling to me, as Saw seeks solace, and elevation, from his sister, Rhydo.

"She was a warrior" – Vel Sartha (S2E6)

> I'm not going to say "remember this," because I don't have to. This is on you now. This is like skin. You're taking her with you wherever you go for the rest of your useless life. Don't you look away from me. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. She was a warrior. She was everything that you have daydreamed about. She was a blooded, fearless warrior whose loss will be mourned in ways that you will never understand. She was a miracle. And you... To die like this because of you... Some whining, simpering, foolish child. Don't you dare cry. You'll make up for this forever.

JB: *I thought this was so sad, a recognition of loss, and a really important moment. That Cinta was killed in such a pointless way, and in a manner that was clearly preventable, and one that Val had even cautioned against, is absolutely heart breaking. The moment when the two of them might have found something, again, might have been able to come together, is stolen. In a way she is right: self pity and tears are nothing compared to the guilt of killing someone, and it needed to be said about Cinta, for she was a rebel warrior who had fought hard and deserved recognition.*

AHA: *I'm happy that Vel gets this speech. She has precious few lines, and all of them razor-sharp. It's good that the writers allowed her such a powerful moment, especially after the incredibly dubious move to shove Vel and Cinta into the "Bury Your Gays" trope. It was the least they could do for her.*

"This is Palmo One" – Dreena (S2E8)

> Dreena, over radio: Palmo One. This is Palmo One. This is the voice of Ghorman. This is Palmo One making an emergency broadcast on all open channels. This is Palmo One! This is Palmo One. We are under siege. We're being slaughtered. The Imperial murder of Ghorman has begun. There are hundreds of bodies this moment. As I say these words, hundreds of murdered Ghormans lay dead in Palmo Plaza. Thousands more on the streets. More every minute. We're being destroyed! This is Ghorman reaching for any open channel that can hear me! If you can... If you can hear me... If you believe in truth, if you have any faith left in truth, please, please mark this message and pass it forward. This is murder! The Empire built this fire. They made this fire and led us to the slaughter. Now they expect us to die without knowing why. The conspiracy we've feared is real! It's here today! Imperial ships are already landing across...

AHA: *An explosion and a man's cry of "No!" interrupts Dreena's broadcast, but she keeps calling for someone to help them over a dead line. In this moment, the camera is focused on Carro Rylanz as he sits on the floor of his twillery listening to the TIE fighters thrumming overhead. He weeps, accepting the end of his world. Acceptance – hard on the heels of disbelief – is the narrative note at the end of this episode. Cassian accepts that Wil is not returning with him, Ferrix's motto "Stone and Sky" the only thing left to say. Drenna will stay at the radio until all hope is lost and even longer than that. Wil will stay beside her. The last broadcast of the Free Hungarian Radio before Soviet tanks took Budapest, ending the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, sounds a lot like Dreena's message. So does Poland's final broadcast in 1939 as the German troops rolled into Warsaw. After several obsessive repeated listens, these broadcasts begin to blend together for me, the anthems in the background, "Himnusz" and "Mazurek Dąbrowskiego" indistinguishable from "Gambol dum Ghor." And that's the point, really. The people of Warsaw and Budapest and Palmo saw the end coming and spent their last few minutes of unrestricted speech to tell the world what was happening. They have accepted their deaths; all that remains is to see if anyone will listen.*

JB: *The plaintive broadcast, trying to get the word out, is anyone even listening, does anyone care. The warning – is it heeded, or is it always too little, too late? I was sure that Wimon and Drenna would be two more victims of the storyline, broken, and lost, lost like so many relationships, torn asunder by death and violence. I was secretly delighted that someone in the story would have a positive outcome, the romantic in my heart always hoping for that happily-ever-after scene. So many of them fall in this story, so many good people, with so much, and for whom there is so much love, fall, fall silent, suddenly, alone and then gone, like the end of the broadcast.*

It will be no time at all before we see Cassian Andor join the fallen, with his newest compatriot, his newest comrade in arms, Jyn Erso.

"I Choose the Rebellion" – Bix Caleen (S2E9)

My love. You're sleeping now. You look so peaceful. I want to be brave. But I can't. If I was brave I would stay and do this in person. But I know you and you'd just talk me around, and I've been thinking about this too long to let that happen.

I have to leave. I have to go away.

I'm not sure where, or for how long. I just know that I can't stay here with you now.

You believe what you said. It is a choice. It just can't be me. I can't be the reason you leave here. If you ever gave this up for me? I'd never forgive myself.

We have to win. We have to beat them. And I believe you have purpose in making that happen. I need to believe that.

So, I'm choosing for the both of us. I'm choosing the Rebellion.

And when it's done, when it's over. And we've won, we can do all the things we ever wanted. Everything we know we've missed.

I'll find you.

Editors: *James comments at some length on this speech in his piece "Strength" on page 25. We recommend that you read that in full.*

"Mon Mothma's Senate Speech" – Mon Mothma (S2E9)

Fellow Senators, Friends, Colleagues, Allies, Adversaries. I stand before you this morning with a heavy heart. I've spent my life in this chamber. I came here as a child. And as I look around me now, I realize I have almost no memories that pre-date my arrival and few bonds of affection that cleave so tightly. Through these many years, I believe I've served my constituents honorably and upheld our Code Of Conduct. This chamber is a cauldron of opinions and we've certainly all had our patience and tempers tested in pursuit of our ideals. Disagree as we might, I'm hopeful that those of you who know me will vouch for my credibility in the days to come.

I stand this morning with a difficult message. I believe we are in crisis. The distance between what is said and what is known to be true has become an abyss. Of all the things at risk, the loss of an objective reality is perhaps the most dangerous. The death of truth is the ultimate victory of evil. When truth leaves us, when we let it slip away, when it is ripped from our hands, we become vulnerable to the appetite of whatever monster screams the loudest.

This chamber's hold on the truth was finally lost on the Ghorman Plaza. What took place yesterday – What happened yesterday on Ghorman was unprovoked genocide! Yes! – Genocide! – And that truth has been exiled from this chamber! And the monster screaming the loudest? The monster we've helped create? The monster who will come for us all soon enough…is Emperor Palpatine!

JB: *This is the third Mon Mothma speech of the moment when Mon exits her senatorial position and leaves for the rebellion that I have heard. It is the most well-crafted and, as Allison points out, built beautifully. In* Rebels*, we saw a different speech broadcast. It was shorter, blunter, but part of a cartoon that ran for a lot less time and it gets straight to the point. There is little build up, but then it is a different story:*

I name the Emperor himself for ordering the brutal attacks on the people of Gorman. The peaceful world is one of countless systems helpless against his oppressive rule. This massacre is proof that our self-appointed Emperor is little more than a lying executioner imposing his tyranny under the pretense of security. We cannot allow this evil to stand.

As per the film, Mon Mothma's is rescued by "Gold Squadron," as mentioned to Cassian, and in Rebels*, Gold Squadron is assisted by Herra, Ezra, Zeb, and Chopper in* The Ghost*. Mon makes her speech as she journeys, and is actually in* The Ghost *and she says:*

This is Senator Mon Mothma.

I've been called a traitor for speaking out against a corrupt Galactic Senate, a senate manipulated by the Sinister tactics of the emperor for too long, I've watched the heavy hand of the Empire strangle our liberties, stifling our freedoms in the name of ensuring our safety no longer, despite Imperial threats, despite the Emperor himself.

I have no fear as I take new action. For I am not alone. Beginning today, we stand together as allies. I hereby resign from the Senate to fight for you, not from the distant halls of politics, but from the front lines, we will not rest until we bring an end to the Empire, until we restore our Republic. Are you with me?

It is interesting how speeches serve purposes, how they progress the narrative, how they can influence and impact people. This is brilliantly done in Andor*, and one must look to the writing and directing, as well as delivery. We were gifted with some amazing craftwork.*

AHA: *What I enjoy most about this speech is its careful rhetorical strategies. So many of these come naturally to all of us, but understanding these techniques can make us all better writers and savvier consumers of other people's ideas. Mon begins with "a heavy heart," an attention-getter during a time when everyone in the Senate is desperately trying to pretend all is well. She builds her credibility by reminding the audience not only that she has been present in the chamber since childhood, but also that her "bonds of affection cleave [her] so tightly" to this space, serving as a reminder to the listener that she is not an impartial, unaffected observer. Many in the audience would have a similar history. She builds common ground with the audience by acknowledging the struggles and disagreements they've had, and reminds them of their (and her) higher purpose in "pursuit of [their] ideals." This is particularly effective as most members present* want *to be doing the right thing, even if they are swayed by the political currents of the time. After this, she pivots to her "difficult message." She does not dive directly into her final claim; to do so now would alienate the more doubtful members of the audience – but she instead makes the broader statement that she believes they are in "crisis," and that the "death of truth is the ultimate victory of evil." The vagueness of these statements is intentional; she wants everyone listening to be able to agree, even if they have different ideas of what "the death of truth" means. At this point she still hasn't revealed the target of her argument, and subsequently she has not lost the imperial-leaning audience members. Anyone listening is probably still on board, and they have likely already imagined their version of "monster" she blames. Here – and not before – can Mon risk everything by delivering her claim, and with it, blame and the end of her career. She has built common ground with her listeners, reminded them of her credentials and their shared idealism, and introduced a vague evil that any one of them can see. Now she presents the ultimate iteration of the danger they fear: "This chamber's hold on the truth was finally lost on the Ghorman Plaza. What took place yesterday – What happened yesterday on Ghorman was unprovoked genocide!" She could not have led with this statement; she would have lost most of her listeners. But when she pivots to her accusation, Mon can't stop; this cascading momentum brings her to the statement – "The monster…is Emperor Palpatine" – that will see her expelled from the chamber and finally "welcome[d] to the Rebellion." Listen next time some politician makes a speech. It's likely to follow a similar pattern. And like any superpower, the leveraging of words can be used for good or ill.*

"May I have a moment to collect my thoughts" – Major Partagast (S2E12)

Partagaz listens to Nemik's manifesto in an ISB conference room, shortly before his death by suicide:

> *Recording*: There will be times when the struggle seems impossible. I know this already. Alone, unsure, dwarfed by the scale of the enemy. Remember this, freedom is a pure idea. It occurs spontaneously and without instruction. Random acts of insurrection are occurring constantly throughout the galaxy. There are whole armies, battalions that have no idea that they've already enlisted in the cause. Remember that the frontier of the Rebellion is everywhere. And even the smallest act of insurrection pushes our lines forward. And then remember this. The Imperial need for control is so desperate because it is so unnatural. Tyranny requires constant effort. It breaks, it leaks. Authority is brittle. Oppression is the mask of fear.
>
> *Major Partagaz*: I'm assuming you've heard it before.
>
> *Captain Supervisor Lagret*: Bits and pieces.
>
> *Major Partagaz*: Just keeps spreading, doesn't it? It's been hard to contain. Who do you think it is?
>
> *Captain Supervisor Lagret*: I'm afraid they're waiting for you, sir. I told them I'd bring you down.
>
> *Major Partagaz*: May I have a moment to collect my thoughts?

AHA: *In this final episode, we see the threads of the Rogue One story braiding together. This scene happens almost exactly two thirds of the way through the episode, so that the end of Act II can show these threads weaving together to become Partagaz's noose. Just before this, Cassian has delivered his news that the ISB energy project is actually a cover for some sort of weapon, that there's a connection between the Ghorman massacre, the khyber mining on Jedha, and a research scientist named Galen Erso. The council does not believe him because the news came from Luthen Rael, distrusted even in death because of his inability to collaborate. Angry, Cassian echoes Luthen's "A Sunrise I'll Never See" speech, not because the writers didn't do a good enough job the first time, but because we're meant to see that Cassian is the only one in the room – other than Mon – that understands what's at stake. Later, Cassian and Vel toast to those they've lost along the way (too many to name). Their list is significant: Luthen – "Just this once" – Gorn, Nemik, Taramyn, Cinta, the Ghormans, Ferrix, "Your Mother" Maarva, the Dhanis, and finally Aldhani. The writers, knowing that Partagaz's scene comes shortly after this, are subtly reminding the reader where the characters have been. Nemik is named again, as is the planet where we first heard the Manifesto, and where the boy lost his life. Cassian mentioned that he's heard others "claim they were there when it happened." Aldhani, and the heist Luthen's team pulled there, has become mythologized in Rebel lore. Cassian reminds Vel, and the audience, that "none of [them] would exist without [Luthen]." What he really means is that the* Rebellion *wouldn't exist.*

What follows is fitting. We see Kleya, the last living remnant of Axis, leave the infirmary in a daze, Nemik's Manifesto as her soundtrack. In these moments leading up to Partagaz's death, we don't see the bureaucratic, elite members of the Rebel Council – we see the people who actually did the work.

When the camera finally transitions to the ISB board room, the Manifesto serving as the auditory link, Partagaz appears…what? Euphoric? Overwhelmed? Anton Lesser's performance here is astonishingly complex. His face is unreadable. He notices Legret's entrance, but does not turn off the treasonous recording. His voice wavers when he speaks. He looks unsteady – old, weak, and shaking. His power has all bled away; Legret does not even bother to answer his questions. Contrast this scene with what comes before and what comes after – the momentum of the Rebellion is unstoppable, as Nemick tells us. Even with the in-fighting and the unraveling of our favorite characters' lives, the Rebellion has taken on a power of its own through sacrifice and love for those they will never meet.

In the end, Luthen was right all along.

***JB:** I was delighted that we had this return to Nemick's Manifesto, and it is clear that Partagaz had heard it before, and was listening to it again at this terminus moment, reflecting on it, his fate surely known, not for being traitorous, or for being an enemy, but because he was a loyal Imperial who had failed, and so is defeated. He has failed to halt the virus, failed to cure the illness, failed to surgically remove the malignancy, and so there is nothing left for him, except an inhumane thankless response to failure, to be disposed of, put down. In this we see it is even better for him that death is to be at his own hand.*

Tony Gilroy, in an interview with StarWars.com, Dan Brooks, November 25, 2022

> One of our happiest, proudest things in the show is when Diego is listening back to [Nemik's] manifesto. He opens Nemik's manifesto that night before the funeral. And Nemik is, in the manifesto, saying, "We're going to win because oppression is unnatural, and freedom is a natural [thing]." And he has a whole big speech about how acts of rebellion are springing up all across the galaxy. All the people that are out there trying to make a rebellion, and they're all atomized and spread apart. And so the show is really about watching this thing coalesce, and in the end we will coalesce into Yavin. The consequences of that are good and bad for the people who've contributed the most to making it happen.

***JB:** Tony Gilroy explains what he liked about this very important scene, and the realisation that comes to Cassian is an intellectual development. He has seen and experienced the authoritarianism and tyranny of the Empire on a number of levels, and now, his mother is dead.*

Yet he has defeated the monolithic inhumanity, he has taken from them, he has escaped prison, and here we see he is reflecting on what he is doing, for his actions are not without meaning.

I wonder if Tony had already planned the Manifesto. The exact same words would return and be heard by Partagaz, and what the meaning for this character would be as he faces his end, defeated. For viewers, it is a reminder of the thoughtful hope and intelligent response that has been spread to many ready to defeat the evil that the Empire represents in this TV series, but which manifests in our own real world in so many ways and on so many levels.

AHA: Rogue One *had been my favorite of the Star Wars franchise before* Andor *because it was about the genesis of the Rebellion. It's no wonder that* Andor *has replaced it as my favorite, not because of some failing of* Rogue One*, but because of the beauty of Tony Gilroy's vision when given time and space to develop. It's unsurprising that Cassian listening to Nemik's Manifesto is a point of pride for the Gilroy Team, and yes, James, it absolutely is a call to those who resist evil in our own world. But the point of the show is also that that evil is not nearly as black-and-white as we want it to be. Early praise of the show pointed out that* Andor *portrays Imperial bookkeepers and pencil-pushers who just want to go to work and bring home a paycheck. There's no Darth Vader (save Krennic) in this series – the bad guys are all swept up in the Empire's unstoppable machine. They are each painfully human, separated from Cassian and Mon and Vel simply by a difference of opinion of how the world should work.*

I had an interesting conversation several years ago with a politically conservative family member. By the end we realized that we both wanted the same things: safe schools, a decent wage for workers, healthy citizens, and so on. The difference came only in the ways we each think those things should be achieved. And the differences are vast*. That's why Syril Karn's character is so important to the show: he is the embodiment of this complexity – we believe many of the same things, we just disagree on how to get there. Note that Dedra and Partagaz have to actively lie to Syril to get him to participate in their plan.*

I think Nemik's Manifesto works so well because Gilroy is a student of rebellions everywhere, across history, made up of real people who just want to live their lives, but, because of circumstances beyond their control, have to set everything aside to do what's right. Those people are everywhere in Andor*, and it is the ones who intentionally act to hurt others, to destroy civilizations, annihilate certain populations, and show utter disregard for others' basic human rights that get their comeuppance. In the real world, that's not always the way it works, as the evildoers generally have enough money to redact all the evidence that'll put them in prison.*

But as the French Revolution taught us, eventually, there will be plenty of guillotines to go around.

Mon Mothma: Rebel Leader by James Bacon

Mon Mothma was portrayed by Carloline Blaikston in *Return of the Jedi*, and it was a very thoughtful and serene presentation of an elegant leader of the Rebellion. Mon seemed pure, simple, plainly dressed, beautiful, with a hairstyle that seemed to telegraph both maturity and focus, encompassing a vision of a leader of high standard, representing a united rebellion against an utter evil.

The art of *Andor* is that we know now that she was not that plain at all, and instead an incredibly stylish aristocratic politician, a wealthy woman, born into privilege, whose fashion was beautiful and impressive. Seeing Mon Mothma's journey in the episodes of *Andor*, that of a leader seeing where they must go, to get to *Return of the Jedi*, is incredible. It is quite the juxtaposition.

In many regards Genevieve O'Reilly is the perfect Mon Mothma for *Andor*, although she had appeared briefly in *Revenge of the Sith* and returned to the role for *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* and episodes of *Star Wars Rebels*, which she voiced.

We see Mon in Season 3 of *Rebels,* in Episode18 "Secret Cargo" with Zeb, Herra and Ezra when they help Gold Squadron. Indeed, Mon makes a broadcast from the Ghost.

In *Rebels* Season Four, in the two-part episode "In the Name of the Rebellion," we see Mon speaking to Saw Gerrera:

> *Mon Mothma*: So long as our allies in the Senate have hope of a peaceful resolution to this conflict, I will not risk...
>
> *Saw Gerrera*: If you continue to allow this war to be fought on the Empire's terms, not yours, you are going to lose.
>
> *Mon Mothma*: I will not be lectured on military strategy by a man who has proven himself a criminal.
>
> *Saw Gerrera*: The Empire considers both of us criminals. At least I act like one.
>
> *Mon Mothma*: You target civilians! Kill those who surrender! Break every rule of engagement! If we degrade ourselves to the Empire's level, what will we become?
>
> *Saw Gerrera*: There she is! That's the leader the Rebellion needs! Where is that fire? That passion when your people need it most? I hope, Senator, after you've lost, and the Empire reigns over the galaxy unopposed, you will find some comfort in the knowledge that you fought according to the rules.

This is the same person who was funding Luthen, and the rebellion that he was executing, one where even allies were vulnerable to his plans. Mon's stance offers an unexpected set of complexities. Mon Mothma is the arbiter of the line, the ethical standards, and her actions. Does Mon cross those lines herself, or is she silently complicit in what Luthen does? What happened to Kreegor and his men?

Factionalisation is a part of rebellion and war. Orwell's experience in Spain, which he shared in *Homage To Catalonia*, demonstrates the fractured nature of the Republican side of the Civil War. He fought with the anti-Stalinist Marxist POUM, and his recollections and insight of the war helps one understand just how shattered one side can be as one tries to keep track of the organisations that are allied or falling out.

Mon wants to have solidarity; indeed, she is a very neat operator as a politician. Bringing people together is one of her skills, so one would expect that she would and could work hard to keep the Rebellion together. Yet her words were a reflection on her own past, on her own actions. When she said to Saw, "You target civilians! Kill those who surrender! Break every rule of engagement! If we degrade ourselves to the Empire's

level, what will we become?" one is left to wonder if Tay was a murdered civilian? What of Anto Kreegyr, a betrayed allied, used as a piece in a larger game, sacrificed by Luthen?

There is a wonderful moment back in Season One, when we learn from Saw just how fragmented those who fight against the Empire are. But of course, we also see that one part will feed the other to the Empire to protect themselves. Saw says to Luthen, "Kreegyr's a separatist. Maya Pei's a neo-Republican. The Ghorman front. The Partisan alliance? Sectorists. Human cultists? Galaxy partitionists. They're lost! All of them, lost!"

I have spoken before how Saw sees the war for what it is, and knows how brutal it is and must be. But I think part of the brilliance of the *Andor* TV series is that they know it needs to show how difficult and challenging a rebellion really is, how there are traitors around every corner, that there are spies, commandos, special operatives, assassins. It is dark, nasty, unpleasant but within that, it is also comprehensible that there needs to be a sense of right over wrong.

It is interesting that in *Rebels* we see a number of times where Mon Mothma helps, or does not help, the Rebels team. In "Zero Hour", we see that when Ezra asks Mon Mothma for reinforcements, she turns him down. One can wonder if it is a self-prophesied defeat that then occurs. Ezra sees this as Thrawn planning everything; there is an oddness to it.

There is an ideology of Mon that comes across strongly. She is always seeking consensus with "the council" which often feels like she is lumbered with democracy. In *Rebels* we see that Herra and the team want support freeing Lothal, but Mon sticks with the "Council" and in *Rogue One*, we also see how the Council overrules Jyn.

Mon has much to navigate, and when one is a figurehead against an authoritarian dictatorship, it cannot appear to be as bad as the oppressors. This is a challenge across levels of political engagement; dirty tricks, lies, and propaganda are used by those who desire power at any cost, and wish to subvert and impute corruption. It is always hard.

"It doesn't matter to you" said Cassian to Luthen, when he saw the futility of the Ghormans' fighting against the Empire, worried as he was that it would go up in flames. "It will burn very brightly" says Luthen, as he immediately works to deploy another asset to Ghorman. Yet it is clear Mon may not realise just how deeply into that plot Luthen is.

This speaks to just how well O'Reilly plays the parts where she is unaware and estranged from the goings on, as concurrently she works fervently fighting for Ghor politically, using diplomacy, while it is clear that Luthen's actions and encouragement contribute to what he could clearly see would be a potential blood sacrifice that would energise opposition to the Empire.

When the Ghorman Senator said: "I came here to thank you Mon, your constant courage, the brave face you put to the world, I have done a poor job letting you know how much I admire your grace and energy," I think he spoke for many, for she had fought for them all. Then, "Yavin needs your leadership," says Bail Organa to Mon, as we see the Ghorman Senator taken away by Stormtroopers.

Mon is upset with Luthen, her anger at him, that he does not care for her, is excellent, and then her anger at what she sees as a betrayal by Erskin Semaj, who was just following orders, because in many ways, the Military Leadership of the rebellion, was Luthen and Klaya, while Mon was the political leadership, and we can see that it was expedient and wise to protect Mon, for Luthen knows her true value, not as another asset, but as a leader for the next moment.

Mon's anger at Erskin Semaj, her frustrations, venting, sacking him, and his words, how it was an honour for him, resonate, a soldier doing his duty, one who we note continues to fulfill it, then her superb delivery of the speech, there is just so many moving parts, and one feels that tension and stress.

The moment with Cassian shots Jung's spy in Bail Organa's group, is a shock to Mon, and then as she seeks escape with Cassian, the method in which he kills her driver, getting her to give his name, and shooting him, her reaction, when she sees bloodshed and violence up close, the shock and reaction is amazing, but it puts into context her removal from the realities of the violence that she has helped.

These are elements that create depth and layering to the character, one who has fought for years for the Rebellion in her own way, and at much cost. I love when Perrin says to Mon during the investiture dinner sequence, that "its tough squeezing a whole year's worth of insincerity into three nights" and she says with a sigh "you'll figure it out" which is as ever delivered in a clear and loaded manner.

Watching Mon, O'Reilly play Mon, and play out her story, is wonderful, it's the slow erosion of identity, family, and self. All the time, in an impeccable Armour - underneath the calm swan like creature we have the legs working so hard, just avoiding panic by flapping her wings, there is a gentle charismatic and royalesque poise about her

Her emotions are somehow, often kept in check, matched to an ability to perform, instantaneously as required. Perrin seems to just want to enjoy life, seems to want to avoid responsibility for the galactic society around him, a metaphor for people in high society who perhaps only care for themselves, there is little to him that supports Mon, or the broader situation.

There are some real questions around freedom, as klya says to Cassian, they are fighting to make their own choices, and what are we free to do, what is forced by the empire, and what is traditional, or expected. In Andor, we see that community aspects, and traditions come into sharp conflict with the monolithic Empire, which exerts control when it feels the need to, this is especially seen on Aldani, but the imposition on Ferrix, the situation on Kenari and of course the impending destruction of Gorman, by the neatly uniform Empire, and their industrial and military tools, so we can include the Corporate Security that Syril emanate from is frightening.

The internal conflict for Mon with her own doubtfulness over traditions, and the traditionalist approach her daughter has taken, is challenging, and we also have Val, who has thrown away any yoke of traditionalism, these two women are important to Mon, and they are like either ends of what it is to be Chandrillain. That Mon's schism, with leida, is one that is left unresolved, only left open speculation and thoughtfulness.

This was added to, by Tom Bissell on Backstory Magazine who spoke about Perrin and Mon meeting in Chandrilla after the speech:

> "That was gonna be an interesting moment. Tony [Gilroy] performed it - Perrin just saying, 'I knew what you were up to. This whole time. They talked to me, every week they'd interrogate me, I never said a word. You didn't trust me. You could've trusted me.' And the heartbreak she would feel in that moment, of this guy that she'd pushed out could've been reliable. The double heartbreak of her walking away from her life, thinking she's dropping this deadbeat husband who never supported her, and then the double dagger stab... But that's head canon, that didn't happen."

This is very insightful, albeit it was never part of the actual TV show. I expect that we will find that books or comics may feature characters at some stage, and we will see them again, of course, I would love to see Leida appear later as a strong character, following in the footsteps of her mother, one can hope.

There is a video of Genievev of Reilly at an event being asked about Leida. O'Reilly was asked about Leida and Mon and what she thought Leida's reaction to Mon's speech might have been and what their relationship might have been. One can see that O'Reilly has to think about this, and she is thoughtful in her delivery:

> I think Leida made it very clear when Mon offered her an out when she said to her, she said. I wish you were drunk like that was like that was such a stab.
>
> But she used her own agency and she chose her power, right? I feel like Lita chose her path. I love that Tony wrote this. It was different to Mons, but you can see it was her choice. I think it's a deeply fractured relationship. I'm not sure what that was after that. It would have been…
>
> whatever it was, I think it was heartbreaking.

Everything has changed for Mon. There is no cape, there is a simple short haircut, the focus is on the work of rebellion. Her escape narrative is invented, the history is immediately rewritten, Cassian and Meshie's bravery is not "logged".

The internal challenge for Mon is incredible, but Genevive O'Reilly captures this, interprets the pain for the viewer, she is an utter hero, but in so many ways, is there is more similarities with Saw than he would think, full of flaws, and imperfect, but it must be hidden, the skeletons of her marriage, of her daughter's individuality and freedom of choice, and her friend Tay, must remain clossested.

One needs a moral compass, the Stature of Justice with a Blindfold, a founder who has standards and impeccable ones at that, a person who stands not only for righteousness, as a symbol of what is good and this must manifest in their actions and decisions, this presents a challenging character, especially as we now have a history that is difficult, and shows that she made some horrendous decisions, and one must wonder if the hatred she has for Saw, is beautifully back filled by the hatred she has for her own actions in Andor.

To be a pinnacle, to be on the plinth, it is so easy to be knocked down, but an Alliance needs a listener, a politician, a diplomat as well as military leaders, and compromise is a vital part of that

Enditorial by James Bacon

Part 1: Andor, the Ending

I feel about *Andor* like I felt about *Return of the Jedi*: there is an ending, and then a hollow emptiness, a loss, a sadness, that there is now no more.

Andor goes straight into *Rogue One*, and I watched *Rogue One* after I watched *Andor*, and then I soon went into the rest of Star Wars. There is so little time between everything that happens in Episode 12 of *Andor*, the Battle of Yavin, and the destruction of the Death Star.

It is an amazing job, done well. Tony Gilroy and his team did such an amazing piece of work; it was fabulous. Yet with Episode 12, the story was completed, the consequences known, the future already foretold.

There is so much that we can take from *Andor*, the whole concept, the fight against the tyrannical Empire, the megalomaniac murderous Palpatine, his hordes of homogenous despotic enforcers and killers. It is all so well done, and leaves the viewer in a place where thoughts come easily. I was not so much compelled, as addicted to its brilliance.

At this moment as 2025 comes to an end, it feels like the significance of *Andor* may have been lost on many, at a time when it speaks so clearly to others, who see messaging rush by, warnings that are meant to be telegraphed as boundaries being crossed. It feels like we are in a time when Nemick's Manifesto resonates strongly, as actions, statements, lies, corruption erode truth and fear is common. It feels like we are of a time when the meaning of the Manifesto should be cherished, what little of it we have, for there is so much to it that one can take to heart.

We watch *Andor* and wonder how cognisant Tony Gilroy was of the world about him, that had not yet occurred, but would come to pass.

> There will be times when the struggle seems impossible.
>
> I know this already. Alone, unsure, dwarfed by the scale of the enemy.
>
> Remember this. Freedom is a pure idea. It occurs spontaneously and without instruction. Random acts of insurrection are occurring constantly throughout the galaxy. There are whole armies, battalions that have no idea that they've already enlisted in the cause.
>
> Remember that the frontier of the Rebellion is everywhere. And even the smallest act of insurrection pushes our lines forward. And then remember this. The Imperial need for control is so desperate because it is so unnatural. Tyranny requires constant effort. It breaks, it leaks. Authority is brittle. Oppression is the mask of fear. Remember that.
>
> And know this, the day will come when all these skirmishes and battles, these moments of defiance will have flooded the banks of the Empire's authority and then there will be one too many. One single thing will break the siege. Remember this. Try.
>
> Tony Gilroy

George Lucas reflected with James Cameron, that the rebels in Star Wars were like the Vietnamese fighting against the USA. There are so many influences on the look and style of the Empire. John Mollo, an expert in military uniforms, designed the distinctive yet clearly descendent uniforms of authoritarianism, all greys and black and white.

Andor is an incredible example of art imitating life, or one might wonder, if life is right now imitating art, or repeating history. We are fortunate to have had *Andor*, which has offered a very clear and vivid portrayal of the fight against Imperial brutality, systematic unfairness, and violent tyranny.

Do we turn to our phones to see what narrative the algorithms feed us today, insidious in their ability to poloraise and manipulate, placing the shameful journalists who peddle lies and bias in the ha'ppeny place, as the machines churn out what we want to see and hear, while lies are uttered and brutality meted out?

Andor if nothing else, must make us reflect on the encroachment on freedoms, fear the losses, the suffering, the sacrifice.

We are not who we are when we started - Luthen

The political and rebellion intrigue are amazing, but it is a sum of all parts: the story, the writing, the acting, the editing, the direction, the effects, the props, all the art, and creativeness coming together well. The level of emotional investment is astonishing, one feels drawn into it, feelings captured and then compelled to experience the sadness and the hope.

There are very few people left standing, so much bravery and so many forgotten. This is the thing about insurgencies, especially ones that are repeatedly crushed: we don't get to know the history, for it is written by the winners, and winners will engage in a cleansing operation, washing away the inequities, ensuring that the narrative sounds right for those who are left to listen, desiring to hear what they need.

The tapestry of *Andor* is weaved so tightly together, intertwining lives in such amazing ways, and revealing relationships, causing surprise right to the end. Sgt Lear and the young girl, both hiding from a massacre – is it the My Lai massacre or some other real incident that is the inspiration? – that brings them together, and forges them into one, the trauma tooling them into a weapon against the Empire. Who was it that was determined to challenge the Empire, was it Luthen, or was it Klaya? The bloody mindedness of Luthen, of Saw, Klaya as she kills the man, who she possibly loved and hated in equal measure, and once wondered if he was her father, is palpable and horrific, for fighting is dreadful – the stock against the shoulder the instantaneousness of the trigger and of death.

I love how so many characters cross paths, such as Syril and Andor even though, at the end, Andor has absolutely no idea who Syril is. The "Who are you?" line is on par with Kino Loy's "I can't swim." There's this expectation of a glorious wild-west showdown between them, but Syril is truly insignificant compared to Cassian.

Luthen, despite his dubious ethics and morals, and his ability to bend things for the cause, is redeemed. I'm grateful for that, as he was a really strong character, and they wrote him elegantly enough at the end that his demise was painful. It is amazing how few people survive.

Willman from Ferrix and Drena Ghorman, Mon and Val. So many are lost to the cause, to the fight. While we see Perrin and Sculdon's wife and Dedra in prison and of course, Bix. Bix saves herself and her child – standing at the end, her strength of mother courage and a representation of the vitality and importance of motherhood, something that we saw through Marva, Mon, and Klaya and something that was broken for Syril and lacking for Dedra.

A Note from Chris

I've still not seen any *Andor*, but it's clearly a statement on politics today as much as it is a rollicking sci-fi adventure. And we need a lot more fo that, not because it'll change anybody's mind on anything, media doesn't really do that much (even *Triumph of the Will* and *Birth of a Nation* did little to change minds; they just gave terrible people the justification for being terrible) but they serve the purpose of documenting the times in which we live today for future generations who will judge us.

And rightfully harshly.

Watch *Casablanca* and you'll see and come to understand a lot of what was being felt. The actions were not real, those sort of things were incredibly rare, but the attitudes, the ideas, the archetypes were all real. Today, it, as much as any History Channel documentary, it expresses that 1) the Nazis were bad 2) people were living the way that they could manage in weird times 3) that there are vultures, vultures everywhere.

Someday, I'll get around to watching it (and *Rogue One*, and *The Mandalorian*, and on and on and on) but as of now, I know that it's effective art out there in the world.

Happy New Year, and to all, a good night!!!

Enditorial Part 2: Fandom

I was delighted to hear how many bids there are announced at the Swedish Smofcon, for the future World Science Fiction Convention, and the calendar looks good and healthy

2026 Los Angeles in the USA
2027 Montreal in Canada
2028 bidding Nuremberg Germany, Brisbane Australia and Kigali in Rwanda
2029 bid for Dublin in Ireland
2030 bid for Edmonton in Canada
2031 bid for Texas in the USA
2032 bid for Nantes in France
2033 No bids… yet
2034 Bid for Glasgow in Scotland
2035 Bid for Poland

And there was news that Prague is a potential venue, fans interested, and I should mention that one of the finest fans I know asked me recently to look and reflect on a convention centre in an Asian capital that was only stunning and eminently suitable.

Does this calendar now represent a shift away from North America for Worldcons, as more bids come from other parts of the world?

This lineup is solid and pleasing, and I am delighted that there is to be a Lisbon and Belfast Smofcon. We need the thoughtful connection that such gatherings for connrunners can offer, the opportunities and collective learnings. It is also good to see that Portugal, Croatia and Bulgaria plan to or hope to host Eurocons, and I secretly hope that these fandoms grow and aspire to continue to bring such celebrations to their countries. I look forward to the German Eurocon in 2026.

It is noticeable that many fans outside of the USA are not planning on traveling to the Los Angeles Worldcon. That team no doubt will focus on getting more locals to their convention, and there is a huge hinterland for them to appeal to. This situation should not be conflated with the problem facing conventions.

There is something lacking in some parts of fandom, a clear failing by fans who are or have been in leadership positions to look to a future beyond themselves. There is no preparation for the future. It is an unexpected point of failure, we know that some hard working fans can find recruiting and delegating hard, but we need sustainability and succession planning. This comes from recruitment, empowerment, encouragement, energising others to become leaders, and to allow them the space to lead.

Fandom and conventions should be sanctuaries at this time, places where codes of conduct ensure there is no hatred, where progressive thinking is merged with respectful and thoughtful actions and accommodations. This is a time of potential growth, but that needs energy and enthusiasm.

A question that now needs to be asked of all Worldcons and Smofcons is who has the leadership team brought on for the first time, who are the fans being mentored, trained, given the space to develop and grow? There is an appalling stagnation that a lack of succession has brought about in some parts and we need to ask "Who is going to replace you?" directly of teams, so that they reflect on it and look for solutions for issues in recruitment and succession planning.

Conventions need to help fans who need help, especially the marginalised voices, with funding, with support, with a can-do outreach approach. We cannot rely on forms and systems and machines, we must and we need to look beyond the venue's walls, and see who can be asked, welcomed, who is not represented and should be. It is time to leverage the fannish good will and funding to not only open the doors, but sign-post them, and help fans in the way they need to be helped, to find them. Leaders need to lead.

While leaders need to lead, they also then step away, and allow the next group of fans to get on with their plans, it is hard to see new directions or even mistakes repeated, but that is also OK, and part of the learning for new con-runners, as they bring their ideas and concepts to the events.

Vincent Docherty noted one time about politicians that

> there is a reason that they have set limits and times in power, that generally do not go over ten years, as after that, it becomes hard for them to relinquish power, while by then they are surrounded by people who want to please them.
>
> It's to do with the system: even those of good intent can become institutionalised after about a decade as they end up in an echo chamber, and it becomes all about them, and their indispensable role.

I think it is apparent now that we need to see fan leaders especially in the USA following the successful European examples of sustainability. How many future leaders have been nurtured, as we look forward to the prospect of a new bid-chair, one with over a decade of experience coming from Loncon 3 in 2014, leading a bid to see the Worldcon return to Glasgow, in 2034.

`That is legacy, that is development and growth, that is the shaking of the shackles of stagnation. The number of new fans involved with Glasgow 2024, all looking to the future is astonishing, just as we saw Dublin 2019, and Loncon in 2014. There has been a fostering of activity and a desire to be involved, and we need that from all Worldcons; we need them to recruit and delegate as we move forward.

We also need as a community to be ready to welcome in the new countries and continents, and recognise that there will be challenges and differences as the Worldcon adjusts to fit new found settings and fandoms, adapting to the facilities available and the capabilities at hand.

I have great faith, and high hopes, and these continue. That Calendar is so exciting, I cannot wait to see what the chairs who I know, who I have experienced working with, bring their ideas to their events, be it Sara Felix in Texas, Olav Rokne and Amanda Wakaruk in Edmonton, Meg McDonald to Glasgow. It is all very exciting. The whole calendar is an amazing prospect.

Added to that, it is so exciting to see the Dublin 2029 Worldcon Bid team grow, the likes of John, and Tommy and Amanda, and many others encouraged by co-chairs Brian and Marguerite, in this vital hard work, truly super stuff.

Communicate, direct, coach, support, delegate. Trust.

The Seven E's (and one I) of chairing™

Effectively recruit, Excite, Encourage, Empower, Enable, Enjoy, Educate and Imagine.