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This Blaster Kills Fascists

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Oisín Ó Ceallaigh explores the real-world influences on the Rebellion in Star Wars, the historical context to George Lucas' original films and how Andor provides lessons in fighting fascism in today's world.

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just good storytelling, but great anti-fascist art that reflects the times we live in and gives hope to those struggling against oppression across the world.

If the fantastical nature of the main saga is characterised by the sage, other-worldly wisdom of Jedi Master Yoda, when he says “Do, or do not. There is no try”, then the grounded hopefulness of Andor is characterised by the final passage in Nemik’s manifesto:

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 Empires’ authority and then there will be one too many. One single thing will break the siege.

Remember this: Try.

What *Andor* Isn't

The revolution in *Andor* is, from a socialist perspective, hamstrung by the fact that the rebellion envisioned by Lucas was a revolution to restore the old capitalist order, placing faith in what basically comes down to a western capitalist government. Lucas pays special attention to the reasons why capitalist democracies are susceptible to fascism, through political corruption, alienation of the general population from electoral politics, endless wars, alienation of the working-class through corporate-controlled industry, the creation of political scapegoats. All of these create a vacuum that authoritarian populists can fill, but Lucas' rebellion is still one aimed at restoring the old order rather than fundamentally transform the political or economic foundations that became its undoing.

Andor gives more depth to this idea, showing the rebellion as a popular front containing many ideologies. Those who dreamt beyond a restoration of the capitalist system, anarchists like Saw Garrera, and idealists like Nemik, died in the fight and couldn't influence the direction of the rebellion once it had consolidated itself as a liberal movement. The series is brilliant in showing how a competent fascist regime operates, how rebellions coalesce and people revolt against authority, how empires destroy native cultures, how they use propaganda and state media to distort the truth, but it is ultimately limited by the kind of revolution that follows it, which might honestly be the truest aspect of the series.

Revolutionary movements do get compromised, the intentions behind their inception get lost, radical thinkers die during the fighting, and ideals are compromised in order to maintain power. Perhaps the most relevant lesson is that the efforts of past victories over fascism are not permanent, that they have to be upheld every day by those who continue to struggle.

What Tony Gilroy and the writers behind *Andor* have been able to achieve within the sphere of corporate media is not

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Israeli state, but it also represents the hypocrisy among all capitalist governments and media that support them. The lies over Gaza are the most obvious, but the same dishonesty saturates their framing of *everything* that happens in our world. No government or adjacent state media is free of the shackles of the global capitalist framing of debate, which is why every Israeli war crime must refer back to Hamas, why every transit strike must be questioned over how it will affect people getting to work, and why discussions over welfare must frame poverty as a moral failing rather than a consequence of neoliberal policy decisions.

While the Ghorman genocide is not explicitly about Gaza, it still belongs to it. Gilroy plays coy: in describing his revolutionary series as historical he can present it as apolitical, but he is fully aware of its contemporary relevance. The writing is far more sophisticated than jotting down the actions of Trump's cabinet, or describing the latest Israeli massacre, but Gilroy is undoubtedly aware that the events he's pulling from history, be it Rome or Algeria, are currently relevant, and it's no accident *what* he's picking and how he's framing it. Far more ideas are discussed than what this article can encompass—immigration, the 'banality of evil', the prison-industrial complex (which culminates in one of the greatest prison-breaks ever put to screen), the use of surveillance and of false-flag operations—all of which bear relevance to the geopolitical situation in the world right now. Tragically, perhaps, the most fictitious aspect of this series, is not the Jedi or X-Wing starfighters, but the notion that are any liberal politicians within the establishment, like Senator Mothma, with the courage to openly denounce their government's complicity in genocide!

lion. The massacre on Ghorman is her breaking point, as she sees the Ghorman senator being detained by Imperial security, and offering in response a simplified warning version of Martin Niemöller well-known anti-fascist poem “First They Came”. Mon Mothma decides she must speak out in the face of the obscene rendering of pious tributes to the “Imperial martyrs” of Ghorman, victims of “rebel terrorism” in the Imperial Senate.

It is the Imperial framing of the debate around the reality of the massacre that gives Mothma’s speech such obvious contemporary relevance—not only to the actions of the Israelis, but of the whole of the global capitalist order. “The distance between what is said and what is known to be true has become an abyss,” she declares. This is a sentiment that any of us subjected to mainstream coverage of Gaza since October 2023 have had to struggle with: outrage and disbelief at the gap between continued acceptance of the Israeli government’s lies and the obvious genocide being played out in the real world.

“When the truth... is ripped from our hands,” Mothma continues, “we become vulnerable to the appetite of whatever monster screams the loudest.” Many people have rightly compared this to the rise of fascism in the US, the “monster” of right-wing populism under Trump that every day desecrates the rights of vulnerable immigrants and the crackdowns on free speech in universities which has seen students and faculty deported for speaking out against US complicity in Israeli war crimes. Senator Mothma continues, “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!”

Getting away with loudly using the term genocide in *Star Wars*, in a speech decrying fascism and the massacre of a civilian population, while that very situation is taking place in Palestine is a testament to political consciousness of the writers of *Andor*. The speech reflects the actions of the rogue

Star Wars has always been political. George Lucas’ 1977 masterpiece and its sequels, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, were all saturated with political allegory and overt themes of rebellion, anti-fascism, and warnings about the dangers of authoritarianism. Lucas ascended the film industry alongside a generation of filmmakers deeply influenced by two movements: the US anti-Vietnam war movement and French New Wave cinema, which rejected the commercial studio system of film production and instead promoted low budget, guerilla-style filmmaking. The movement was also politically radical, producing socialist filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard, who’d participated directly in the May 1968 student/worker protests in France.

This culture of rebellion in cinema deeply influenced Lucas’ work on *Star Wars*. The heavy-handed imagery of the Stormtrooper—named for Hitler’s SA—and the uniformed imperial officers seen throughout the film—evoking the SS—was not lost on anyone at the time. These ideas expanded throughout the original films: in *Return*, he places the fate of the rebellion in the hands of an indigenous, technologically primitive population—the Ewoks, who engage in asymmetrical guerilla warfare against a technologically superior Empire. Lucas later clarified that this was meant as a direct comparison to the American war in Vietnam, a 20-year war which saw the deaths of 2 million civilians, left 5.3 million people permanently wounded, and left the generation born after the war debilitated by birth defects from exposure to Agent Orange, a carcinogen. The Vietnamese triumph over the American invasion is memorialised (and celebrated) in the final victory won at the end of *Return*, which Lucas portrays as the ultimate victory of good over evil.

Lucas attempted to deepen his political commentary when he returned to *Star Wars* from 1999-2005 to make a series of prequels. Their production coincided with the US government’s rush into another unjust war in the Middle East, fuelled by of-

ficial lies and the erosion of what Lucas saw as liberal democratic principles. He underpinned the prequels with criticisms of neo-conservative policy, democratic backsliding, the use of a “patriotic” war against an alien enemy and the manufacture of a national crisis to increase the surveillance power of the state.

Boots on the Ground

When Tony Gilroy (*The Bourne Trilogy*, *Michael Clayton*) took over on writing for *Rogue One* in 2016, he re-situated these initial ideas of rebellion and fascism into a new context. Instead of following a few noble families through an adventure across the stars, in Gilroy’s rendering we see the revolution from the ground up. It was a different side to the rebellion than we had ever seen. It was gritty, tactically similar to real-life liberation movements and it moved out beyond the ultimate ‘good vs. evil’ story Lucas had originally told.

The rebels in this film aren’t really anyone of consequence or standing: the main team is composed of ex-religious zealots whose church had been destroyed by the Empire, a couple of thieves turned revolutionaries, and an imperial turncoat sent to deliver information to the rebellion. These are largely conceivable class backgrounds for rebels in any modern revolution: they don’t carry hereditary legacies like Luke Skywalker; many of them aren’t full believers in the dominant religion of the Jedi—the Force—and they joined the rebellion not out of a sense of destiny, but because the fascist machine had stripped them of their rights, taken the people they love, and trampled over their traditions and culture. And their ultimate act of rebellion, the mission they undertake to steal the plans to the Empire’s genocidal super weapon, the Death Star, results in their being annihilated by that very machine. The story of rebellion in *Rogue One* is not a clean triumph: as in real revolutions it

playbook here, with the use of a kept media and flagrant propaganda to vilify the Ghorman people in the eyes of the rest of the world, and using Ghorman rebels as scapegoats to justify the eventual massacre. If this sounds chillingly familiar to what we have seen unfold in Gaza since October 2023, it is intentional. We also see how the Empire bribes and lobbies the Senate into loyalty, so that any opposition voices are seen as aiding terrorism, and anyone opposing state policy are held up as pariahs.

The massacre itself is a horrific spectacle. One cannot watch it without thinking of the invasion of Rafah in May 2024, Derry in 1972, or the Ludlow Massacre in 1914. This was a purposeful decision by Gilroy and his writing team: by drawing from uprisings and massacres throughout history, it becomes all of them. The imagery and disregard for human life displayed is certainly reflective of Israel’s actions in Gaza since the genocide began, but also reflective of countless massacres throughout the 75 year-long occupation of Palestine, and the actions of many authoritarian regimes against colonised peoples throughout history. Ghorman is Gaza, and it is also Warsaw, Derry, Santiago, and Algiers.

Silence is complicity

The most relevant political jab comes in aftermath of the Ghorman massacre. We see how power dictates the narrative, how the propaganda campaign against the people of Ghorman has allowed the Empire to characterise the massacre as an act of terrorism by rebel insurgents against the peaceful Imperial citizens and soldiers stationed there.

We follow a prominent member of the Imperial Senate, Mon Mothma (played by Genevieve O’Reilly) throughout the series as she navigates Imperial high society trying to cover up her secret funnelling of money and resources to the fledgling rebel-

led him down the path of the revolutionary, “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.”

Saw Garrera (played by Forrest Whittaker) is yet another side of this revolution. The character’s name lacks any subtlety, being a mnemonic riff on Argentinian revolutionary Che Guevara, and also inspired by Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L’Ouverture. He leads a group called the Partisans, a guerilla “flying column” type of group who mercilessly strike against the Empire, and who are the most militant of the rebel factions. Saw distrusts everyone, is seen to be paranoid and is a pariah among the consolidating rebels. His ideas closely resemble anarchist thought, distrusting all authority since before the Empire and refusing to compromise with cells that would negotiate or water down the revolution. He denounces other rebel groups, stating “I am the only one with clarity of purpose.” It is ideologically driven rebels, like Saw and Luthen, that end up being sidelined from the official Rebel Alliance’s leadership after it fully forms, instead being led by liberal Senators like Mon Mothma and knights of religious orders like Luke Skywalker, who build on the contributions of early radicals like Luthen and consolidate the rebellion into a popular front to restore the old capitalist Republic.

Ghorman and Gaza

The focal point of the series revolves around the Ghorman Massacre, a plot developed by the Empire to ethnically cleanse an entire planet for the purpose of mining a precious mineral which will destabilise the core of that planet and result in its destruction. We see the Imperial Security Bureau (the Empire’s SS) plan for this at their own version of the Wannsee Conference. Gilroy introduces aspects of the contemporary far-right

is driven forward by the sacrifices of countless revolutionaries who never lived to see the Empire toppled, led only by an intense hope that someday they would achieve liberation.

The Planet Ferrix and Insurgent Belfast

With *Andor*, Gilroy and his writing team go much further than even *Rogue One*. Gilroy stated when writing the series that he “always wanted to talk about revolution”, and that *Star Wars* provided him the canvas to combine and incorporate aspects of social revolution from different periods of history, from Russia in 1917 to Haiti in 1791.

We see the revolution grow through the eyes of Cassian Andor, a representative of the slowly radicalising proletariat during a time when fascism is increasingly touching everything around him. He was born into an indigenous tribe on Kenari—similar in structure to relatively isolated communities on the Amazon—and like many living on the margins of the Amazon today, Cassian witnesses first-hand the exploitation of his home for natural resources, which renders his community’s way of life impossible, and leaves him looking for an opportunity to escape.

The story picks up with him living in an industrial community called Ferrix, with its own distinct culture that clashes with the laws of the corporation that controls it. Many among the community have a disdain for the corporation and the Empire it serves—a distant central power that upholds the system of wage-labour and is completely foreign and disconnected from the people it rules over. The imagery in Ferrix could easily belong to a factory community in Manchester in the 1950s, or a Bavarian mine in Weimar Germany: a tight-knight community, almost anarchic in structure, but oppressively dominated by foreign capital. Taking inspiration from different revolutions, Gilroy draws parallels to the struggle against the British state

in the North of Ireland. In search of Cassian Andor, a suspected 'terrorist' who is on the run for defensively killing two security officers for harassing and trying to rob him, imperial security forces descend on Ferrix, ransacking homes and streets around the community. They interrogate his mother, Marva (played by Fiona Shaw) and indiscriminately harass and line up members of the community. The Imperials quickly find themselves under threat, however, as they hear the loud clanging pans and other pieces of metal in the streets. Here Gilroy borrows directly from the tactics used in working class areas of Belfast when British Army patrols would enter nationalist communities. In Belfast—as on Ferrix—this was used not only as a warning or a distraction, but as an announcement that people were unified and organised against the intimidation of foreign security forces. Marva encapsulates this by telling her captor, "That's what a reckoning sounds like."

We see Ferrix again as they carry out a funeral procession—scenes that, again, Gilroy based on footage of IRA funerals in the streets of Belfast. A riot breaks out when the Imperials block the procession from continuing through the main street, bearing a stark reminder to the funeral of Vol. Lawrence Marley in 1987, when over 3 brutal days the RUC attempted to block Marley's casket from leaving his family home. The tension on Ferrix culminates in a spontaneous revolt against the Empire. Spurred by Marva's speech, the tight-knit mobilised working-class of Ferrix throws itself up against a sterile and alienating regime, which turns in desperation to divide and rule.

What kind of Rebellion?

The core theme of this series is rebellion, the stages that the revolution goes through before we see the alliance take on the Empire in *A New Hope* (1977). In the early stages, despite the imposition of order and military occupation, clashes flare up

spontaneously throughout the world, not as part of a monolithic or well-organised rebellion, but as small local cells, differing in ideology, engage the empire with varying degrees of organisation and success. The thesis of *Andor* is encapsulated in the manifesto written by a character called Nemik. He is an organic intellectual in the way that Antonio Gramsci would describe—not existing independently of class or serving a particular institution, but a product of the growing revolutionary struggle across the world. Nemik characterises the revolution as 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." Nemik is an idealist, and we see that, yes, the revolution is constantly happening; it is not the brainchild of any one group or one belief; many diverse elements contribute to the overall struggle—some consciously, some not.

There are many faces to the revolution, however. Luthen Rael (played by Stellan Skarsgård) is one of the key reasons that the revolution has lasted as long and been as successful as it has been. He is an accelerationist, the organiser of a network of rebel cells that exist apart from each other, but that all rely on his logistics, co-ordination and patience to effectively strike against the empire without being crushed. His character exists for the revolution, not in a romanticised way, but to lay the groundwork for what will become the greater rebellion. He is similar to underground anti-fascist militants like Tito, ruthlessly using the methods of his enemy against them. His speech to his spy within the Imperial Security Bureau, is one of the best written in the series, and parallels the writings of Russian Anarcho-Communist Sergey Nechayev in "The Revolutionary Catechism." When asked what Luthen himself sacrifices for the revolution, he answers, "Calm, kindness, kinship, love. I've given up all chance at inner peace, I've made my mind a sunless space." Luthen then reflects on how far his ideals have