

Animating a Resistance to Trump: Some Thoughts on Star Wars Rebels

The Star Wars series is one of the biggest cash cows in human history. The absurdity of its storylines is only matched by the lunacy of its fan subculture. In any objective analysis, it is a children's cereal box pastiche of kitsch, pedestrian borrowings from Buddhism and the myths of King Arthur combined with an obvious homage to the Golden Age of science fiction pulp serial magazines like *Buck Rogers* or the *Lensman* stories by "Doc" E.E. Smith. How can anyone over the age of 5 possibly be drawn into such fare?

By now the production history of the series is well known and so often told that recounting it verges on unavoidable and inadvertent plagiarism. What is the point of engaging in such a dalliance? Why care about the August release of the third season of the STAR WARS: REBELS Disney cartoon?

If we were in any other socio-political landscape in American history, it would not be worth anyone's time. But, unless you've been living under a rock for the past 12 months, it is obvious that we are not living in the same world we were in November 2016. We're living in an America where a game show host is the imperial president, neo-Nazi stormtroopers are policing the streets, and, after a complete collapse of the old republic's governance, our new hopes can only be derived from the rebellion that resists these developments.

In any struggle, a subculture of mythologies is necessary to provide activist movement members with a framework narrative against which they can define their activity. These narratives provide a bedrock from which momentum builds. They give people a sense of meaning. They must be fictional, even if they are fictionalized retelling of history, because fiction is the breeding ground of activist idealism. Without fiction, the imagination is stifled and the proposition that another world is possible becomes much more difficult.



What has always made Star Wars different from other science

fiction/fantasy stories was the postmodernism. There was always a sense, particularly in the original 1977 picture, that you could expect to see Harrison Ford or Carrie Fisher knowingly wink into the camera at the audience, breaking the fourth wall as their contemporaries on "Saturday Night Live" would do every weekend on television. Whereas other sagas, such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, almost instantaneously began to take themselves far too seriously, there was always a playful, joking aspect to STAR WARS. This can be attributed to Harrison Ford's infamous jest to George Lucas while on set filming the first picture, "You can type this shit, but you can't say it." Ford and Alec Guinness (who rued the day he ever got involved with this whole business) both understood from the outset that the entire project was a bit of a farce and they should act accordingly on camera. And quite obviously Lucas never got that memo, and the prequel films, produced from 1999-2005, will go down in film history as great disappointments precisely because they presented themselves as anything but a postmodern joke.

And so today, living in a postmodern American political landscape that would make Andy Warhol blanch, what "Star Wars Rebels" has the capacity to do is offer myths with just the right dose of mirth.

Let's be clear on what the "Rebels" television series is. Whereas the original films were always about a special group of important figures from within the story universe (Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader was even known as the 'Chosen One'), this show is about ground-level working people who get caught up in affairs that go well outside the realm of ordinary. These everyday resisters, imbued with just enough lighthearted humor reminiscent of the aforementioned postmodern flair, do not wander into the cute cartoon realm of other Disney offerings or past Star Wars cartoons (back in the 1980s, Lucas created two cartoons, "Droids" and "Ewoks," which were embarrassments). Ezra Bridger, a young boy swept up in a conflict he barely understands, is a salt-of-the-earth type. Kanan and Hera, the romantic couple who lead the crew of a starship called the *Ghost*, function like suburban parents or middle class caretakers. Sabine, Zeb and Clone Trooper Capt. Rex, ostensibly all outcast aliens in this galaxy far, far away, are more reminiscent of two young adults and an ornery war veteran uncle. And Chopper, the cantankerous protocol droid modeled on R2-D2, is more like an extremely talented pet.

In other words, this is a story about a politicized family unit that struggles for social justice while also striving to overcome daily interpersonal challenges that any parent of an adolescent understands quite well. We are dealing with a group of activists who have constituted their membership cell into a family unit, something that is familiar to many activists. In fact, it defines the nature of activist ontology itself, the very essence of struggle and participation in it. The familiarity with activists turning their cell of activism into a family is caused by the necessary and requisite obligation of challenging any part of our ruling capitalist system, described by Marx and Engels as a force that "reduced the family relation to a mere money relation." Later, they write "[the worker's] relation to his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family relations." In other words, capitalism, as an anti-ecological, anti-human, anti-family and anti-feminist force that promotes racism, imperialism and all other chauvinisms, needs to be struggled against with an equal and opposite force that is ecological, humanist, pro-family and intersectionally feminist or else it cannot succeed. Activists must build little families out of their activist cells or their activism withers and dies.

And so "Rebels" as a television show, flaws and all (and there are some, I readily admit), is the inspirational mythology needed for the resistance to Trump and the larger mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism that were in place the day before the election and will be there after any president exits the Oval Office. The key moment for me that articulates this is when a recurring character from the films, a senator known for her progressive stances, comes out from behind the firewall of parliamentary protections and says, "No, we don't want to reform, we want a revolutionary change that will abolish

the entire system and build something new!”

This is the inspirational point that those who resist Trump must look to. It was precisely and exactly our political system and its bipartisan consensus over the past four decades that gestated and vomited Donald Trump into the Oval Office. The bitter truth pill in this entire debacle is not that things can be voted better, but that the belief that voting matters got us into this mess precisely because such an act legitimizes the system. These are the legends that our society needs to resist Trump.