

Interventions

Andor (Season 2), or the French Resistance in Space

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Introduction

In August 2025, *JWSFH* co-editor Meghan Roberts had the chance to speak with Terrence (Terry) Peterson, the author of *Revolutionary Warfare; How the Algerian War made Modern Counterinsurgency* (Cornell University Press, 2024) about *Andor*, the 2022-25 television series and prequel to the 2016 film, *Rogue One: A Star War Story*. Watching *Andor*'s second season, Meghan and Terry were both fascinated by the story that unfolds on the planet Ghorman—the France of the *Star Wars* universe. Ghorman is depicted as an elite planet, a center of fashion and luxury goods, where the people are generally prosperous, and sometimes regarded as snobs.¹ In the series, Ghorman ends up in the Empire's crosshairs because of the Kalkite at its core, an energy-rich mineral the Empire seeks to mine. Extracting the material will ultimately destroy the planet, however, and the Empire pursues a plot to discredit anything that comes out of Ghorman, painting the Ghor as a threat so others in the galaxy will be unmoved when the planet is stripped-mined into oblivion.² Luthen, a leader of the rebellion against the Empire, decides to encourage and support the Ghor's resistance. When Cassian Andor, (the series' main character and a key rebel operative), says the people of Ghorman are not ready to take on the Empire, that they can't handle it, Luthen responds that Ghorman “will burn very brightly” if/when it is destroyed. Things end badly for the Ghor, and for some of the imperial figures who conspire against them in the series. In the dialogue below, Meghan and Terry take up some of the big ideas, plot points, and characters in *Andor* (season 2), exploring the nature of resistance past and present, and what the show might illuminate for historians and students of France living in 2025.

Meghan: How did the obvious inspiration of France and the French Resistance during the Second World War in this season of the series land with you?

¹ See “Michael Wilkinson Talks Ghorman Fashion,” *Andor*, Season 2 (Disney Plus, 2025), YouTube video, 0:48, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJKjQDdhe9w>.

² See “Plotting Ghorman,” *Andor*, Season 2 (Disney Plus, 2025), YouTube video, 1:28, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdnRhPs2zLM>.

Terry: Tony Gilroy, the showrunner, has been pretty explicit that he is interested in French history, and especially the French Resistance, the clandestine resistance reference par excellence.³ I mean, he sort of hits the viewer over the head with it. He worked hard to create a dialect for Ghorman based on French phonetics, inventing a whole language, meant to sound like French. He hired all these French actors. And the model for the Ghor resistance is clearly the French Resistance, especially when it comes to communications. There's this wonderful use of radios throughout the whole series, and characters are constantly finding clandestine ways to communicate and cover things up. Radios send bursts that can't be decoded, and the characters memorize the codes beforehand. But one of the things I really liked about the series was how it shows resistance to be a coalition with diverse strategies for going about things. Ghorman very clearly resembles France during the Second World War, with civilians trying to organize an armed movement for the first time when they're completely occupied by (Imperial) military forces. And you've got these other characters, like Luthen, who reminds me of the French agents operating in Africa during the Cold War. There's a whole network of spies and assassins, but you've also got pirates, like Saw Gerrera, raiding and plundering, and fighting the Empire. The line between criminals and partisans and freedom fighters and bandits is fluid throughout, and I appreciated that about the show. I loved the way it explores the internal dynamics of repression as well, the interagency competition that you see within the Empire. And that interagency competition drives mass violence. Like, who's going to figure out how to crush this rebellion once and for all? There is so much great literature on how this works in genocide, and particularly during the Holocaust when rivalries within the Nazi government drove a radicalization of violence.⁴ I found that really fascinating in the series.

Meghan: I have to say, I found the plot of the series very pessimistic. I mean, there's genuinely nothing the people of Ghorman could have done to stop the complete destruction of their planet. In the end, their resistance plays into the Empire's hands, isolating the planet and then giving the Imperial forces the perfect pretense for a brutal crackdown on the population. I found that a tough story to sit with in 2025. What did you think about this idea that to resist is to play into the hands of your oppressor, and the absence of any alternative?

Terry: I liked this, in part because I think it really captures the complicated moral calculations of any kind of liberation struggle. Luthen's comment about Ghorman

³ Romain Brethes and Tony Gilroy, "'Andor' est un hommage à la Résistance française," *Le Point Pop*, 21 April 2025, https://www.lepoint.fr/pop-culture/andor-est-un-hommage-a-la-resistance-francaise-21-04-2025-2587844_2920.php.

⁴ See, for example, Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

“burning brightly” was for me like the “FLN moment.” In Algeria in 1954, the Front de libération national (FLN) made this calculation that civilians were going to be killed in the fight against French colonialism. They understood that. The French government brutally repressed protests in Sétif and Guelma in 1945 and killed 17,000 to 45,000 Algerians. The FLN anticipates this and deliberately provokes the reaction of the state. But in some ways, provoking that violence makes the repression that people usually sublimates under propaganda immediate and visible. Luthen makes that same calculus, that people will die and suffer, but it's going to attract the kind of attention that will mobilize those who might otherwise not pay attention. It's super grim, but also, authoritarian states don't need a pretext to repress people. We see that in the series in the way the Empire helps to manufacture the protest. They enable the Ghorman resistance movement by allowing them to capture arms, they open up a plaza in the middle of the city where people have been massacred previously, they know that armed folks and protesters are going to come out en masse, and then—and I loved the writing here...someone's been reading history books—who do they put on the front lines, knowing it's going to provoke an incident? Really green soldiers who nervously fire on the crowds. Then, an assassin planted on a rooftop, a sniper, shoots and kills one of the soldiers. That kind of thing has kicked off revolutionary violence so many times in the past. During the French Revolution, the revolutions of 1830 and 1848.

Meghan: In the summer of 2025, the Society for French Historical Studies, the Western Society for French History, and the Society for the Study of French History came together as the Global Consortium of French Historical Studies at a meeting in Paris with the theme of “Resistance.” The conference took up resistance in a very expansive sense. For me, *Andor* shows that resistance is hard in every possible way. You watch so many characters just... lose. They lose things and people that they care about so much, and they lose themselves when they are forced to do terrible things they don't want to do. But they have no choice. What do you think about the way the show defines resistance?

Terry: I mean, I am sort of cynical, so I appreciated that it made resistance seem hard. And not just for the main characters who are part of the armed insurgency, but for random people, too. But, at the same time, I appreciated that there's no one model of resistance in the show. Resistance is actually a lot of things. One of my favorite characters from the last couple of episodes is the bellhop at the hotel on Ghorman. Andor arrives disguised as this fashion designer before meeting up with a nascent resistance group to assess whether they're ready to be given weapons, etc. He comes back later to assassinate Dedra Meero, an Imperial leader who's arrived on Ghorman. And the bellhop is not engaged politically at all, but he recognizes Andor as a rebel and leaves him off the register of hotel guests the staff turn over to the authorities every night. That's it. It's such a subtle act of resistance, but it's so vital and moves the plot forward. I think it shows that small forms of solidarity can be both incredibly dangerous and incredibly helpful. You don't just need a militant

insurgency in a heroic sense; you also need people watching out for each other, little acts of compassion. And I think that is absolutely something that we can learn from today.

Meghan: What about propaganda?

Terry: One thing I loved was how overconfident the Empire's propaganda officers were. In the beginning of the season, they're using these metrics. I mean, it reminds me of one of the subjects of my own book: the Psychological Warfare Bureau of the French Army. They strive to fine-tune the message, but everyone sort of sees through it. I appreciated how the show makes those guys into buffoons.

Meghan: Something I really loved about *Andor* is that it shows the authoritarian Empire working in a very bureaucratic way. Unlike so many of the other *Star Wars* stories, neither the Emperor nor Darth Vader is even in this show, and I love that. You see the foot soldiers, and the strategies that they're trying to put in place. And you see people get eaten by the machine. There's no sense that, well, if you're just a good enough soldier of the Empire, if you are devoted enough, you'll be protected. The machine eats everyone. Dedra Meero is one of the characters I think is central to this idea. She was an orphan raised by the Empire and has been forged to be the perfect Imperial bureaucrat. She thinks of nothing other than doing the Empire's bidding. She is this incredible mastermind who knows how to manipulate the news, how to make events work for the Empire. But the show ends with her in prison. She is punished for her first failure and not given a chance at redemption. And then her superior, who sends her to prison, is dead by the end of the show. And his superior will be dead by the end of *Rogue One*, the film that continues the story told in *Andor*. Each of these people think that because they've become so powerful and are so embedded in this system and do everything that they are told to do without any questions or reservations, they'll be fine. And then they're not fine at all.

Terry: Dedra and Cyril are such interesting characters in that their motivations are complex, they're not these one-dimensional, evil people. Dedra's very cold, and so is Cyril. But they're not inherently sadistic people. Dedra gets more sadistic as the series goes on, but they're both doing what they are because they're interested in career advancement and doing a good job and finding their place. On the other side of things, the series made Luthen complicated as well. By the end, he is sort of a distasteful character who murders people unnecessarily and betrays people he's made promises to. He is so morally compromised, but would the rebellion exist without him?

Meghan: When it came to the Cyril plotline, I thought, okay, this I like. Everything seems like it's playing into the Empire's hands. They've manufactured this rebellion and created this situation where the plaza that's so central to city life in Ghorman's capital has been locked down. But then it is reopened, and so of course everyone rushes there, and the

Imperial troops surround it. It all seems exactly as Dedra has envisioned it, except for her boyfriend Cyril, the person closest to her, who she has put on this planet to do all this dirty work but who doesn't yet know what's really going on. He thinks he is just generally serving the Empire. He doesn't know about the strip mining and the plans to destroy the planet. And when he finds out, he has this intense moment of disillusionment, and he turns on her.⁵

Terry: It's the classic banality of evil. He's the "I'll do bad things if I can climb up" guy.

Meghan: I will say, I was very disappointed by how he died, because I wanted him to have more time to wrestle with that, and instead he just gets shot.

Terry: I was disappointed by the way that Cyril dies, too. That was a surprise to me, I didn't see that coming. The flip side of the banality of evil is that it's easy for folks to ignore violence and repression. But if they're confronted with the reality of it, it can also be just a completely devastating moment for their constructed reality.

Meghan: I think I wish that moment had been played out a little longer. I loved the recognition of historical contingency. You might have this perfect scheme. But you don't know how people are going to respond in the moment to things they weren't expecting, or that you didn't want them to know yet, if they figure something out early, or they see something that they weren't supposed to see and have a bad reaction to it. The brevity of Cyril's moral crisis stands in contrast to the Luthen and Kleya backstory. Luthen also had a crisis of conscience when he was a soldier and was supposed to kill Kleya and everyone on her planet. But he reached his limit—and that's when he found Kleya hiding. He devoted the rest of his life to figuring out what to do about that disconnect, eventually becoming committed to the Rebellion. I think the importance of historical contingency was explored beautifully in that plotline, and I just wanted something more to come of Cyril's turn.

Terry: It's like a post-Vichy moment. You have all these officials under German occupation in France during the Second World War who are happy to enforce Vichy's rules until the occupation crosses a moral line, and then they throw their lot in with the Free French, or with one of the other resistance groups. I think that's where the over-reliance on the French Resistance can break down. The Gaullist mythology of a nation of resisters obscures the fact that the moral moment isn't one moment, it's an evolving spectrum, and the choices that people make really depend on a complex moral calculus. It's easy in retrospect to

⁵ See "We're Going Home," *Andor*, Season 2 (*Disney Plus*, 2025), YouTube video, 1:02, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYjWLAsDgcQ&list=PL148kCvXk8pD01BG8veK2SGMIcoE-EbHmM&index=8>

think, oh, those guys should have supported the French Resistance, or, you know, the *Star Wars* rebels, or whatever, but in the moment, they don't know...it's 1942, the deportations haven't started, the *Service du travail obligatoire* is just ramping up in France. You're the guy who was mayor before. Why would you not continue to act according to what the established state, which is now the Vichy regime, says? I mean, there has to be a moral breaking point.

Meghan: When I teach the French Revolution, a common reaction my students have to pre-1789 France is: What's wrong with these people? Why aren't they doing something? And then, there's a golden moment where students think, okay, this is fine, 1789 is fine. And after that, they see revolutionaries as incompetent, and the violence as excessive. My students often seem to have in their minds a "correct" amount of violence. And I'd just like to know what it is. Because it seems like it's a moving target. In the end, what is the appropriate way to resist an authoritarian regime that has soldiers and weapons and has demonstrated time and time again a complete disregard for the lives of ordinary people?

Terry: My students often ask the same things about the Algerian War. Why didn't Algerians rise up before this? That question of why people do or don't act is one that comes up again and again, and it's often hard to get at the answers, because we don't always know. Just by the nature of the historical record. I think the show could be a great comparative tool because students have watched it, and they feel viscerally about it. And then you talk about the various Algerian nationalist movements that break with each other in the 1950s, the party splits. These sorts of fictional examples can be so helpful, especially when they're as well-written as *Andor*. You can point to dynamics and say, isn't this what's happening there? This takes its inspiration from real-life stuff, and that's the stuff we're talking about, right? I found myself thinking about that final scene where the massacre is occurring in Ghorman. The way the show sets things up there is a media information atmosphere that has so predisposed people to thinking that the people on Ghorman are responsible for any violence directed at them. And they're on the radio saying, "We're being murdered. This is a premeditated murder," and it's going out to the universe. And I could not help but think of Gaza.

Meghan: Okay, we have to talk about Mon Mothma's speech to the Senate following the massacre on Ghorman.⁶ As an American in 2025, I was so annoyed by that particular speech. I just felt like she spent so much time on propaganda, and a disregard for the truth, and I kept thinking, "You are going to get cut off the air before you get to the important part, which is that they killed all these people! Like, lead with that!"

⁶ See "Mon Mothma's Senate Speech," *Andor*, Season 2 (Disney Plus, 2025), YouTube video, 3:50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYnE2Mxayco>.

Terry: The Rebellion in *Star Wars* has always had this diplomatic component, which is interesting, because it comes out of the Cold War, and the United Nations, and the way that the Armée de libération nationale (ALN) or the Viet Minh engaged on the international scene. I just felt like that was the least nuanced of the plotlines. But they had a great opportunity to explore the way that people lie to put together a particular narrative, and everybody knows it's false. And even the liars don't necessarily believe their own lies. But if you say it enough, other people do. And they intimate that a little bit through Mon Mothma and just don't explore it as well as they might have. I mean, that would have been just such a chef's kiss.

Meghan: I wish could have actually seen more reactions to Mon Mothma's speech. It's almost like the series sort of assumed that, well, she said the truth on the Senate floor, so...whew! Now everybody knows what happened. And it's clear that Ghorman does mobilize. But I also thought, there probably plenty of people who are ready to dismiss her as a liar and just discredit her. At the end of the day, it is one senator...

Terry: Mon Mothma is like the Chuck Schumer of the *Star Wars* universe.

Meghan: You know, she kind of is! I'm going to point out that the things you are saying aren't technically true, and it's going to solve the whole problem. She's hung up on the lies, but isn't the problem that the point of the lies was to kill everybody?

Terry: It's as if Mon Mothma is the one good politician, and everybody else is bad, and they shore that up at the end, the singular hero taking the brave stance. And I'm so tired of moments like this and that heroic narrative, because it's not actually particularly effective. I mean, we've seen a lot of that in 2025 with legislators making rousing speeches, and it doesn't accomplish anything. And if you were really smart, as a rebellion, you'd sacrifice Mon Mothma after that speech. You'd make a political show out of the fact that she was being put on trial. That's the better strategic move if I'm an insurgent organization. But, you know, they've got to keep her alive, I guess, because she's in all the subsequent movies and everything. But if anyone who writes for the *Star Wars* franchise reads this, they should know that you could do a really great sequel plotline about how difficult it is to transition from an insurgent movement into a sitting government. There's so much history in the twentieth century to draw on.

Meghan: That's the film we need for our time.

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