

The legacy of the Jedi is failure. All of these things that they did, they brought about Darth Vader.

They couldn't recognize the Emperor when they were in the same room as him repeatedly.

They couldn't tell that the greatest Sith Lord in a generation worked in the office down the hall.

This is the Lawyers, Guns and Money podcast.

[MUSIC]

Hey, everybody. This is the second half of our conversation with Chris Kemp Shaw about his books,

The History and Politics of Star Wars, and The Rise and Fall of the Galactic Empire.

Thank you very much for listening.

So, this particular topic of conversation, I think, leads to the next question.

And one of the things you say that is surprising about the sequel trilogy, right?

And I think that people still kind of struggle to deal with it, right?

The Force Awakens is a profoundly depressing film, right?

It is a profoundly bleak and dark film.

And perhaps the one thing that makes sense in terms of continuity between Seven and Eight

is that that bleakness and darkness is then reflected in Luke Skywalker, right?

Whose life's work is fundamentally a failure.

But this goes to the second chapter that you have about the Republican democracy.

I mean, we have two stories in these nine movies about the collapse of democracy in the face of a fascist threat,

or in the face of an authoritarian threat.

And I'm not sure that there's any series which is like this, which is quite as bleak.

I mean, even something like Tolkien, which is fundamentally about losing this glorious past age,

is not as bleak as, oh my God, the Republic collapsed
and then it collapsed again.

- At some point Aragorn has a 100 or so years
of glorious rule and everybody's happy
at the end of the Lord of the Rings.

You do actually get like a happy ever after of sorts
in Tolkien and you don't, you so rarely get it in Star Wars.

And you know, part of that comes from the interesting aspect
of George Lucas' psyche that he keeps writing films
about the dangers of fascism and the importance
of fighting it and the importance of preserving it.
and then keep serving, particularly in the pre-cult trilogy,
a vision of democracy that is so cynical
about the republic doesn't work.

This is the thing that everybody's supposed to be preserving
and it appears to be garbage.

It's infected by bureaucrats and corruption
and all these things.

We don't get a heyday of republic.

Partly that's because it's at the end of the cycle.

But even right throughout the expanded universe novels,

Democracy doesn't work in Star Wars. It never does. It's always bloated and corrupt and

time-consuming and dysfunctional and it's only ever 15 seconds away from you know, the next fascist overlord or Sith Lord or

Scumbag who's gonna gonna pull it down and eventually, you know

The big three of Han, Luke and Leia are gonna have to jump up in the Millennium Falcon and fly off and save the day

Part of that again is a narrative thing, you know, no one wants to keep watching films or reading books about oh god

Democracy in the Republic is threatened

But don't worry we put together a steering committee and we've budgeted for the solution and it turns out that actually if we just shave

Point three off of the next fiscal cycle. This will all work out just fine

Because god that sounds dreadful and boring so that you know, you have to have that that tension but

It is profoundly depressing

no version of democracy in Star Wars ever works and

It's it's peculiar that that is constantly the case that the you know

The Rebel Alliance its real name in the Galactic Civil War in the original trilogy is the Alliance to restore the Republic and the Republic's garbage

then you get the

You know good news everybody we killed the Emperor and Darth Vader's dead as well and presumably the Empire's

dead end or and and and find and you get a period of the Republic and

It's dysfunctional. It doesn't work and then it gets utterly eradicated and collapsed and you did this this constant cycle

and if it was framed in a sense of

You know, it's it's a Republican democracy is vulnerable, but it's great

You this is this is you know, it's wonderful. This is also its greatest weakness

and that's why it's constantly worth fighting for.

Then that that narrative changes a little bit, but it isn't.

It's like this thing is dreadful and it doesn't work, but

apparently it's it's just slightly better

than being annihilated by a death star.

So jump in your X-Wing kids,

because we've got another one coming over the horizon.

And yeah, there's no

for a film series that has hope so intrinsically bound into its DNA, it is so bereft of hope

when it comes to the republican democracy that, yeah, it's just noticeable. I don't

even really have an explanation for it beyond the narrative purpose. But as you say, like

other places have worked around this, you know, Star Trek, you know, the more you find

out about the Federation, the shadier it looks at times, but there is a core element to it of,

yeah, actually this does make sense for Picard and his Merry Men, except for Worf who is not a Merry

Man, to travel around and do these things because it is worth it. It is better than what was

previously and I don't know if the Republic ever is better than what it's presented on

the screen which is pretty bad. I saw what you did there by the way.

But I mean this gets at this broader issue which is that cultural context. So Star Trek obviously

begins as a explicitly utopian science fiction saga that has you know some ways in which narrative

of requirements of, you know, traumatic television in the 1960s and late 1960s are going to complicate.

But this runs in many ways to the next generation. It's only really in the 1990s that you start to get this counter reading of the Federation prop up in Star Wars, particularly in Duke Space Nine, which had a very specific auteur who is pushing the bounds of the Star Trek Bible. And to some degree and then again in some of these like the Picard series where we've had kind of an attempt to

revert back to this more kind of negative betrayal of the Federation and conspiracies from within.

So I think there's something, there's this question about whether some of what happens with Star Wars, why it's so depressing as it were, has to do with the time period in which the series gets really picked up.

Yes. Yeah, I think I think there is a cultural context, as you say, that's going on in the background that is driving this. And, you know, kind of broader questions about was X worth it? And that X could be, you know, the Cold War, the Second World War, the War on Terror, all of these things that provide question marks about, you know, was the thing that we thought to preserve worth preserving.

And, you know, that is an interesting historical question that comes up.

And I was talking to some people relatively recently, partly about Star Wars, but also about African American experience in the two world wars. That, you know, African American experience in the first world war is formative for those men, and then they go home and discover

that America is not interested in their formative experiences. And it's actually very, very keen

on them not talking about it. Which then changes the answer to the question, you know, was this worth it? And you get a similar kind of situation with the civil rights movement in the 1960s, after the Second World War. So you end up with quite interesting answers of, you know, was this worth it? Well, it kind of depends on who you ask. And that's an interesting book historical question for, you know, historians deal with this stuff all the time. But it's also a really interesting narrative seed for the types of storytelling that appear in the 1990s and in the early 2000s. And I, what matters is 10 years ago, when *The Force Awakens* is released, you know, that is it is it's an interaction of its time of, you know, were these things, these big moments worth it. And *Star Wars* is trying to grapple with those questions in a similar time period.

I mean, there's also the question about *Star Wars* and the fact that this is JJ Abrams in his whole modus operandi, whether it's in his *Star Trek* reboot or in *Star Wars* is to the same elements and turn them up to like 12 on the obvious meter, right?

So in a sense, you know, there's kind of way in which he's trying to create a film, which is perfectly going to satisfy everybody, right?

And so I think, you know, I think it's clear.

Yes. You spent a lot more time on *The Last Jedi* than you do on *The Force Awakens*, I think, for reasons which are that there's a lot more meat there to sink her teeth into.

But there is a way in which this goes off in this trajectory.

this trajectory. And this is why I wonder if some of the things we're talking about, and this might be again a little bit beyond your remit, but you know, clearly Disney has made a decision that nobody really wants to deal with the the sequel trilogy in terms of where they're going to set things. And it's all going to be in the era of nostalgia, which is the era of the

post, you know, the after immediately either during or after the events of the, a new hope through Return of the Jedi, or now they're playing around with going back to the High Republic era because there's always been a kind of fan interest in that. But I mean, in a sense, there are certain kinds of ways in which the historical context is intersecting with commercial decisions here that I think is pretty interesting. I want you to, because we're taking so much time, I want to make sure we move on to some other stuff. I think I cut you off, Rob, though, in asking that. So Rob, do you want to push things along?

Yeah, yeah. And I think that, so I actually think that the chapter five, which is about aliens and otherness, we kind of answered in part of the, in the empire one. So, and I would be almost

inclined to skip to the Jedi part, because I think there's some really interesting stuff, but I want to talk about warfare because you're a warfare guy. Yeah, you are a, so what, you know, there is this,

and of course, I don't realize any of this until much later when you re when you rewatch, right,

But, you know, the New Hope is very much sort of carrier battle, carrier battles against nuclear weapons, right?

And then once we leap into empire, suddenly it is trench warfare.

Yes, finally.

Like, how is it?

How do we get to trench warfare from carrier battles?

So, but and, you know, from reading the book, right, there's much more here.

So I think asking you, especially from your perspective, as a historian of warfare, talk to us a little bit about, like,

how warfare is being depicted across these series here.

So I there is loads as you say loads of really interesting stuff going on and you know again my

First World War historian with a hammer start seeing First World War

Aspects, but I think there is something very interesting

Going on which again is a reflection of cultural stuff about what types of warfare are noble and which types of warfare are not

I don't think it's a

coincidence that in

The impostor ranks back and in the last Jedi and in Revenge of the Sith the moments when

Combatants are about to fight and in fact in solo are about to fight a hopeless

Unworthy battle they start digging trenches. I think this is a first world war thing that is

Being picked up and redeployed because the audience will on some level

don't need to be a First World War historian to understand, to start

recognizing the visual signifiers of "this is a pointless bleak battle". You get

trenches, you get elements of mud and then people start getting shot and dying.

Whereas there is a wider aspect of the nobility of the fighter pilot. Now in

First World War terms that's kind of a mix of Biggles and the Red Baron.

Despite the fact that in First World War there is nothing noble going on

in those air battles, it is a horrible, bleak, depressing, god-awful experience for everybody involved.

And for, yeah, it's, but certainly at some time in Britain, you have the Battle of Britain,

which is, you know, the myth of the few, you know, the most noble of fighter pilots in

Britain's most desperate hour.

And in America, you have the aircraft carrier during the Second World War, you have the Pacific Theatre, you have the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, you have the Red Tails, the Tuskegee Army. There is something heroic about being a fighter pilot and George Lucas likes fighter pilots. He made the film Red Tails, he likes Fast Cars and he likes fighter planes. So that comes across in an aspect of it. But again you start picking up elements of this in the extra texts. The Rogue Squadron novels present a vision of fighter pilots which is kind of top gun in space to an extent. There's testosterone, machismo men doing Tom Cruise things in X-Wings and in TIE Fighters, but at the same time they're also doing Sink the Bismarck, which is, you know, a classic Second World War film, you kind of, you're mixing your historical metaphors going on here, which is interesting.

But the thing that I came back to a lot of in, when thinking about the warfare in Star Wars, firstly is that the psychological aspect of it doesn't really exist, certainly not the films and very rarely in the in the expanded universe books up until you get elements of it in the Rose Gordon books but not until kind of the more recent Disney stuff with Alexander Freed's Alphabet Squadron which is all about the psychological trauma of war is that that aspect isn't present so you know the nobility of the cause is the justification for fighting it and that's why the rebels win their cause is nobler than that of the Galactic Empire but there also isn't a lot of Star Wars in Star Wars at times. We kind of tend to overplay the existence of space battles in Star Wars when there really aren't that many of them. Certainly not on the screen. You get the Battle of Yavin and the Battle of Endor and that's Shiloh in the Expanded Universe. Okay,

they're quite big parts of it, but the Battle of Yavin is not a big part, time-wise of A New Hope.

it's the last 15 or so minutes of the film. The Battle of Endor lasts for longer but it's

kind of placed in a different way in Return of the Jedi. A bit of a space battle in the

Phantom Menace but it's not that important. It's Anakin Skywalker as a child flying around and he

blows up a spaceship and the opening of Revenge of the Sith and that's your lot for

George Lucas's space battles in Star Wars. So it's interesting again to me how we conceive of the

importance of X-Wings and TIE Fighters when they're not really in the films that much.

And again so much of the concept of space battles and warfare, active warfare in Star Wars,

comes from the books and the computer games. It comes from the X-Wing and TIE Fighter computer

games, it comes from the strategy games, it comes from the Thrawn trilogy, you know, all of those

things. It's the meta texts that have filled in a lot of the blanks for Star Wars and told us

what the Galactic Civil War looks like, because we don't ever really get to see it on screen,

we get little snippets of it.

Uh, Dan, do you have a follow up?

Oh no, I just said I'm really interested in that. It had not occurred to me the degree to which

which these set piece space battles, which I assume initially has to do primarily with

budgeting, but also the fact that these things get boring after a while.

How many time flights can you see in a 20 minute period?

That had occurred to me just how de-emphasized that is, but yet how much it is part of the

representational understanding of what makes Star Wars, Star

Wars, or these iconic, iconic spaceships, basically. But what I guess the only kind of side question I have is I have this big memory of reading something where Lucas talks about how he was looking for Knights on horseback. And that fighter pilots are kind of the modern version of Knights on horseback.

And that was what he was doing in Star Wars. I don't know.

Yeah, it's entirely possible and particularly again if we go back ironically to the First World War there's the whole kind of the chivalry the Knights of the Sky thing which is entirely how First World

War fighter pilots are termed in the culture at the time and then afterwards I've lost count of

how many computer games there are called chivalrous Knights of the Sky or some version of those words

you know, in increasingly nonsensical order that are about First World War flights and simulator games. It's all couched in the chivalry, the knight in shining armor on his horse, and he's the one wearing white armor and the bad guys, the one wearing black armor, and that's how you know who

the good guys and the bad guys are. But despite that, there is something intrinsically Arthurian about getting in a fighter plane and going off and fighting. There's a code amongst warriors.

you shoot at the plane, you don't shoot at the pilots, and you hope that the guy bails out and

you probably won't machine gun him on the way down to the ground in his parachute, except for the

fact that you absolutely will do. And that's how you win air battles in the first world. But it's

the pop culture moment obscuring the historical reality.

I want to make sure that we get on to the question of representation of

sex, race, gender aliens in Star Wars, because it's also important part of your book.

But I also want to flag and maybe we can edit what I'm about to say in a second. But I do want to ask you questions about Star Wars as database rather than narrative. I don't know if this is a distinction you've run across. I kind of put the idea of this idea. I can't remember exactly but this who the authors are who the theorists are but you know sort of the the postmodern condition is moving away from narrative and towards database is the mode of interaction with fiction right and the mega text the mega franchises are particularly central to that kind of idea right that you're reading you know i think um somebody wants to you know it's like reading the lore text right in in various video games right the way in which this has become Star Wars, but also the way in which the problems of canon have had various times structured or not

structured the Star Wars history, the Star Wars politics that we're talking about. But maybe before, but I'd like to get to that, but I really do want to talk a little bit because you,

one of the places where I think you get, you know, you try to a little bit defend

the franchise in a way that I don't think you are consciously defending it elsewhere has to do with

the ways and the accusations about racialized tropes. So Jar Jar Binks, the accents of the trade federation honchos, the hook nose money lender, elephant trunk money lender.

And kind of the argument you make there ultimately, I think, is that these are cultural tropes.

sometimes they're disassociated from their, their, their, their

trophy in a way that sometimes can make them disassociated from

their actual, particularly racial or anti-Semitic origins. And

you also point out that there does seem to be a lack of

intent in a lot of these cases. I mean, if you read the stories about how, how they made some of these decisions, it's a little bit like what were you thinking, but it was also like, I can see how you, how you came to that. Maybe you could talk a little bit about that, in a little bit about how you kind of conceptualize those kinds of disputes more broadly about them?

Yeah, that's a that's a great question. And you know, I can't imagine a way particularly the way that he appears in Attack of the Clones, you could look at the character of Watto. Because not only is he the he's the he's the hook nosed moneylender with a stubbly chin and a floppy nose. And he's also wearing a hat that is pretty interestingly chosen and not draw a kind of conclusion to, you know, fairly well known antisemitic tropes. I just don't think it's possible to look at some of these these characters and not see it there. So I've always found it kind of a little peculiar when people say that they don't think it's set. It's like, but I've watched the film and I'm pretty sure it is. It's certainly in my reading of it. It's there. And you end up with a with an odd situation where it is exactly what you're describing in that the reproduction of existing stereotypes and tropes can happen without, I don't want to say without being aware of it, but without fully recognising that you're doing it. Because they become so ingrained in the culture that you can produce these kind of recognizable stereotypes without realizing that you're producing that stereotype when you think you're producing this stereotype. And I think that is charitably what's happening at times, particularly in the prequel trilogies.

It's possible that Woz thinking that Woz Jawszukis thinks he's drawing on X, in reality he's drawing

on Y and Y predates X by a variety of degrees. But at the same time you end up with, again as you say some of these conversations where you can go, "Okay, on that level I can almost understand why you've made those decisions." Because if this is your thought process it's not wildly unreasonable that this is where you've ended up in. But I wouldn't necessarily have ended up there if I was making a similar kind of series of decisions. I think I say in the book

that to kind of then kind of take, okay, you know, George Lucas has made these decisions and therefore

we can kind of impart these kind of judgments is too strong a word in part these kind of structures of decision making upon him is to overlook the complexity of George Lucas and therefore the complexity of any of the creative forces behind something like this because they are so multifaceted that you know George Lucas is the man who created Watto and he is the man who

did the accents of the Nymoidians and he is the man who created the kind of the the the persona

of Jar Jar Binks, but he's also the character, the man who created the persona of Jar Jar Binks, which is a hugely interesting character and Ahmed Best at no point believed himself to be portraying a racial stereotype in his performance of Jar Jar Binks. And George Lucas would then also go away and make Red Tails, which is entirely a film about kind of the marginalisation of African Americans during the Second World War. And those things don't exist in a vacuum. They exist within the sphere of George Lucas. So I think that kind of the almost the dissatisfaction, the dissatisfying vision of Star Wars that you end up with is

it is racially complicated and it's racially complicated in some very, very obvious ways that maybe should not have been included in some of the ways that they were.

But they're also racially complicated in some ways that require closer consideration.

And the judgments that people will take from those are the judgments people will take. And again,

you know, in the same way that who cares what the intent was, the reality is whatever the reader or

the viewer takes away from it. It's an entirely valid thing to look at that and go, I'm not sure.

or you know what, whatever.

But the fact that these tensions exist within Star Wars

and are then rippled out into the expanded universe

in the way that you get the portrayals of different species

and different races and different groups of people

speaks to the moment in which they're created.

And also to, again,

that kind of the database aspect of it,

you end up with silos rather than species.

This is what this species does.

You end up with monoculture rather than nuance.

And that's not great in itself,

but it's something that gets reproduced quite often

in science fiction as a whole.

Star Wars is not alone in this.

We spoke about Star Trek earlier on.

There's not a lot of nuance in the Klingon Empire

and less nuance in the Romulans.

And that's problematic in its own way. But it's something that science fiction as a genre does,

which is odd, but it's almost kind of like, at some time is the rules of the game. But that's

not a great answer either, to what I mean, I think it's maybe a better answer than you're willing to

give it credit for. And I would say that in two ways. One is that obviously there's a very long

tradition and science fiction of basically telling stories about human culture and politics

through cognitive estrangement. And that has almost always entailed projecting various

aspects of human society onto other making making this particular facet alien so that we can

read it or interpret it or engage with it in a certain way. Right. So it kind of there's a

kind of shorthand there in the politics and the political undercurrents of a lot of the way that

that people think about what science fiction does politically,

and I think a lot of the way it works politically.

There's also the fact that in these big mega franchises,

Star Wars, Star Trek, as you talk about,

these are budgeted limited series.

So there's a reason why Star Trek is foreheads of the week, right?

Because it's just too expensive to do anything else.

They're telling very stylized stories often in that idiom.

And I think that particularly a lot of

actually academics who are outside of media studies forget how dependent they are on visual

representation and visual storytelling, right? And something like Star Wars, you know, is trying to pack an enormous amount of information into two hours. And yeah, most of that has to be translated

visually, you have to get it when you see it, because you can't explain it, you just have to let it go.

on various tropes that you know will communicate certain kinds of ideas.

Because the alternative is just endless exposition.

This is actually a pet peeve of mine in a lot of the social, the political science

I.R. work on pop culture and franchises that are television or video.

There's almost no attention to or hasn't been until recently.

There's been a turn towards this in the last 10 years, but there was not

traditionally it was all just text.

There is no treatment of the visual representational aspects of it as fundamental communication. It's the issue I get into when I, some of my students have never read comic books before, when they're reading something like Watchmen, having to learn an idiom where most of that information is not in the dialogue itself.

Right? Is something...

Yes, it's the confusion over the phrase visual storytelling. People take it to mean storytelling that's on the screen. When it's not, it's storytelling that you can see. They're not the same thing. It has to be something that you can see and understand that doesn't then get said out loud by someone.

And what's interesting to me, Ben, is the way in which you have the life cycle of these series, which you've talked about, is that you know, you introduce these, these kinds of representational

schemes for various reasons, some of which have to do with the political economy of production,

some of which have to do with narrative shorthand, and so on and so forth. And then eventually,

in these mega franchises, because they have so much product, you start turning towards auto critique,

right? You start turning towards people trying to play with those, which is I think why you wind up

with counter readings of the Federation or counter readings of the Empire or in, you

know, the most big example I love of this is the Star Trek cartoon lower decks where

the producers are very clear that they tried to scramble the species and the stereotypes

that represents the Bajoran as the Bajoran is a Klingon, you have the Orion pirate character

as a science officer, that kind of thing.

But I think that's a part of the kind of story that's that maybe people who aren't used to

to dealing with these, you know, meta-text, mega-franchises,

whatever you want to call them,

maybe don't necessarily appreciate as well.

- Yeah, I think that's a very, very good point.

- To go back a step,

but then also to push us forward to the next one, right?

You know, one of the fascinating things to me

about the depiction of aliens in the prequel trilogy

is that if you compare the prequel trilogy

to the original trilogy, and I'm thinking through like,

Okay, yeah, all these aliens in the prequel trilogy

seem to be representing some ethnic group, right?

We're reading some ethnic group onto them, right?

Try to do that with the original trilogy, right?

What is, I mean, the Ewoks, okay,

are stand-ins for the Yanomato

or some kind of indigenous people, right?

And perhaps that's why the Ewoks

are actually pretty unsatisfactory.

Who is everyone else, right?

I mean, Chewy, okay, you know, I can sort of see

he's kind of the black sidekick

that's really common in the '70s,

but he's more than that, right?

And Yoda, what the hell is Yoda?

What the hell is Jabba for that?

I mean, like what ethnic group do you look at Jabba

and say that, oh, he's a representative of this, right?

And that's, I think, why these representations

in the sequel trilogy, or not in the sequel

in the prequel trilogy, are actually quite jarring.

- Yes.

- No pun intended, right?

It's because they seem a step back
from what the originals achieved in terms of,
of, you know, sort of this depiction of aliens.

- Yes.

And with, you know, with the characters of Yoda and Jabba,
I mean, Yoda is a slight twist on the samurai master,
but the first thing he says is,
"Wars do not make one great."

So he's not that much of a twist
on the samurai master character.

Jabba's a really interesting one
because Jabba is the sua, the Orientalist,
Arabic crime lord, to the extent that I sometimes wonder,
you could put Jabber the Heart in an Indiana Jones film.

And it would actually kind of work
for some of those settings.

That's who Jabber is.

He's that guy who's there
kind of pulling all the strings in Cairo
or something like that.

But because you spend less time with aliens
in the original trilogy, again, it's budgetary reasons,

but it's very focused on Han, Luke and Leia

Darth Vader who, you know, man, robot, cyborg, who cares in that aspect, that it's only the storytelling, the world building happens in the prequel trilogy. And that's therefore when all of this stuff starts getting drawn in.

So now to push forward, because everything we've been talking about with respect to sort of the bleak view of the Republic and the Reconceptualization of the Jedi Empire, everything we've talked

about so far. It really comes to a head when we start thinking about the Jedi Order. One can watch the sequel trilogy, and one can come up with this at the end where you're asking the same question that Luke asks, "You want to restore the Jedi Order? Why?" What is the point of restoring the Jedi Order. And it's very interesting to me that in, whereas the High Republic novels and even the Acolyte, right, which happens around the same time as the High Republic novels, right, the High Republic novels really do try to reestablish the appeal of the Republic, right? I mean, that is clearly one of their intents, but not so much the Jedi Order, right? And in fact, you know, in the Acolyte in particular, I mean, the Jedi Order, it's not a leap.

And another one of these, the novelization of the fall of Count Dooku, right?

The representation of the Jedi Order is quite grim and negative in a lot of this in a way that sort of seems to parallel this decline of the Republic.

But then we, and that leads us, you know, and one of the next places that this franchise is going to go

is apparently Rey attempting
to reestablish the Jedi Order.

And you have to wonder, like, are we going to engage with the fact that we've been repeatedly asking this question, why should the Jedi Order be restored?

What's the point in restoring it?

And that has lots of metas.

So talk about that.

Yeah.

Again, it's another very good point that, you know, similar to when you look at the Republic, you look at the Jedi Order and go, you're the good guys, are you?

Because you don't seem great.

particularly during the prequel trilogy, you're progressively unconvinced as to the merits of being a part of the Jedi Order. Lucas spoke at various points in interviews with Paul Duncan, who did the archives books about the Star Wars original trilogy and the prequel trilogy, which are wildly expensive but brilliant about his conceived kind of conceptualizing as the as the of the Jedi is being basically like the Peace Corps in that they're not supposed to be going out and you know hitting people with lightsabers they're supposed to be kind of monks who occasionally go out and do stuff you know they're supposed to be a purity of purpose to them you see that in the way that Yoda talks about you know in the Empire Strikes Back in which he's trying to teach Luke, you know, be a piece that let the force flow through you. It's a very kind of Taoist vision of the force and the Jedi as a spiritual thing. It's not about being

able to do backflips and, you know, move your lightsaber real fast. That's not what makes a Jedi. But you see in the prequel trilogy, you know, the fall of the Jedi come as they get kind of caught up in the Clone Wars, but similar to the fall of the Republic. That's It's not that they've passed the point of no return.

It's all been happening in the lead up to the Phantom Menace.

It's already too late for the Jedi because they've become so indoctrinated and tied to their way of doing things.

They are blind to the evolution that is required of them.

They have sown the seeds of their own downfall to the point that you can have Luke in the last Jedi go.

The legacy of the Jedi is failure.

of these things that they did, they brought about Darth Vader. They couldn't recognize the Emperor when they were in the same room as him repeatedly. They couldn't tell that the greatest Sith Lord in a generation worked in the office down the hall. Is there anything in this massively supposedly powerful all-seeing Jedi that is actually functional by the time that they collapse because it doesn't appear to be so. Now in the expanded universe they kind of grappled with a lot of this stuff largely before in the Luke Skywalker creating his own Jedi order. Largely before George Lucas defined what the Jedi of the prequel era was, so that a lot of the expanded universe's authors are kind of fumbling in the dark.

But you end up, and it ties in again a bit, they kind of tie in a bit with the prequel

series, but in both the expanded universe and in the prequels, the Jedi end up being UN peacekeepers,

that they act at the whims of the state, you know, they don't go beyond their mandates, which means at various points in both George Lucas's vision and in that 1990s period, which I always find so fascinating, the Jedi just basically kind of stand there and watch as the in-universe version of the Rwandan genocide happens or the in-universe version of the Srebrenica massacre happens.

And they stand and watch because they haven't been told to do anything more than that. Their morality stops at the water's edge.

If the state hasn't given them permission to act, they will not act.

Which is, again, a deeply cynical view of what are supposed to be the purest people in the universe who act in service to the light side of the force.

they will always do what is right, they will always do what is necessary, unless the government hasn't filled in form 39B, which permits them to remove their lightsaber from their belt at four o'clock on a Tuesday to act against an unfolding genocide. Unless that form hasn't been logged, I guess we're just going to have to watch all of these people die. And you have quite gone Jyn's character arrive on Tatooine in the Phantom Menace. And yes, he He takes Anakin Skywalker away off of that planet because he's got such high midichlorian and he'll make a fine Jedi.

But he says to his mum, "I'm not here to free slaves, so I guess I'll leave then."

There's a difference between pulling down the entire infrastructure of slavery and the institution of slavery, but also just to saying to a slave, "Well, I wasn't granted permission to do anything about your personal circumstances, so I guess I'll be off then."

And that being fine, apparently, because, you know, the morality doesn't extend out here is a vision of the Jedi, which is problematic, I think, and intentionally problematic.

I mean, there's a dimension here which you don't talk about, right, which is locating,

locating the story within pop cultural theology and religious history.

And so, you know, one could of course tell a kind of Protestant story about this, right?

I mean, in this big, in this sort of, again, this pock historical way, which is that the

Jedi are a religious order, first and foremost, in a universe with metaphysical good and evil,

who misrecognize their obligations, who become decoupled from the true meaning of the force,

have to fall from it and be replaced by something else, right? In that some of the figures who

are valorized as being kind of getting it right, like despite what you just said, like

Keegong, are people who are somewhat dissident figures, right? Who do things wrong, who go again, who buck tradition. So I don't know.

Yes, no, I think you could have a really, because the spirituality of the Jedi and the

forces, you know, it's pure Buddhism, it's pure Taoism. I think you could have a very interesting

Lutheran vision of the Jedi in that somebody needs to be nailing some treaties to the doors

of the Jedi Temple to go, actually, we have wandered from the way. You know, there's a

Protestant reading of the Jedi that says that we have been caught up in idolatry and pottery.

And actually, we have lost touch with what it means.

This is also like, you know, like the whole argument that, you know,

they fundamentally misunderstand what the prophecy of bringing balance to the force actually means.

Right. But anyway, sorry.

Yes.

No, and this is, but Count Dooku is that guy.

Yeah.

Right. I mean, he is sort of that guy, right? And there's so much of this literature, right?

And Yoda is a very complicated figure. But, you know, you read enough of this literature, it's like Yoda is just not very good at his job. I mean, fundamentally, right, as sort of being the Pope of the Jedi Order. Right. You know, and, you know, not just because he's Dooku's master, right? But Dooku is kind of the guy who's supposed to be showing up and nailing those theses to the door. And it just never happens, in part because of yes, yeah, yeah, there's a great,

There's a great line in one of the companion books where Dooku says that the problem with the Jedi is Yoda, that the Jedi can do nothing for the slaves of Tatooine, but they can do something for the slave masters as a critique of the Jedi order, which I think is great.

Okay, so we should probably turn to the book I haven't read, which is the big one that everybody's, even more people are reading. So Rob, do you want to take that away?

Yeah, yeah. So tell us about the rise and fall of the Galactic Empire. Everything you can in this 10 years. So this everything I can. So the second half of my Chris Kemple's origin story that I was

telling you earlier on is that when I was writing History and Politics, you know, the sequel trilogy was still coming out and they kept getting pushed back. If you remember back to the like the the release dates for the films kept getting pushed back, which was my excuse for not having finished the book. And then the pandemic came. And, you know, writing a book was not the most

important thing on my mind at the time, it was making sure that I could afford to eat as everything

shut down around me. And there was a brief period of time when there was lockdowns here in the UK,

and then the archives opened in August of 2020. And I jumped straight into the British Library

on like the second day that it opened, because I desperately needed some stuff in there for a book

art, this, the history and politics and some other stuff that I was writing. And when I left on that

day, I did, I tweeted out, um, I was in the British library today. It was super safe. Historians who are

looking to try and get in there. I felt fine in there because it was a scary time. You know,

we didn't have the vaccine or any of those things yet. And the British library saw that tweet and

they messaged me to say, can we put this in our newsletter? Cause we've just reopened. And I was

like, be my guest. And they didn't put it in the newsletter. They tweeted it out themselves saying,

Chris Kempser was here doing these things and he was looking at something about the British Army

and he was looking at history in Star Wars and an editor at DK Books saw that tweet and

passed it on to the colleague who emailed me to say would you like to help us write a book called

Battles That Change the Galaxy which is an in-universe military history book about Star Wars

and I was like yeah I would like to do that actually I would it turns out I would really

like to do that. So I did that and that came out 2021, I think, something like that. And hugely

enjoyed that. And while I was doing that, I also thought, is there, are you waiting for anything,

Chris, in your dream things that you'd really like to do? And I pitched them another book,

which is The Wise and Fool of the Galactic Empire, which is an in-universe historical examination by

by an in-universe historian of the Galactic Empire

from within Star Wars.

And that book came out,

everything takes with licensed property,

everything takes ages and then literally,

you have no time at all.

And that book came out in the UK on the 4th of July,

which I think is hilarious for a book

about collapsing empires as a date for it to come out.

And that's what it is.

It's written by the character of Beaumont Kin,

who appears in the sequel trilogy.

He's a character played by Dominic Moynihan

in "The Rise of Skywalker."

And his character is a historian.

He exists partly to kind of provide exposition.

And I wrote it as him.

And that's what the book is.

It's, you pick it up and it's,

the easiest way to say it, you know, we play it straight.

We treat it as if everybody who's reading this

is in the "Star Wars" galaxy.

And they've gone into space buns and noble,

and they've got off the shelf a book about the Galactic Empire,

and now they're going to read it.

And it was a ton of fun to write.

And it's probably the most important history book that I'll ever write, because it's the history book that will be read by the most people.

And I hugely enjoyed it.

And I think you don't need to be an academic historian or to have read a bunch of history books to get loads and that loads out of it.

But I think the more that you interact with those levels, more like dumb easter egg and jokes that you get about historiography and like kind of big biggers of writing grand span narrative history that you'll get some you'll get some extra stuff out of it for the for the listeners but that's what it is it's it's it's me writing as somebody else a big re-conceptualizing, re-examine, re-examination of what this organization that has dominated galactic history has actually worked on.

Do you have a specific set of theories you set out to work with?

Some interesting stuff comes out that Emperor Palpatine, for the author's point, if you went on understanding of the Empire really not that important. Yeah, you know fine he's a Sith Lord and he can shoot lightning from his hands and you know that'll probably ruin your day. He's not the guy who's gonna kick your door in at three o'clock in the morning, he's not the guy who's gonna stamp your passport, he's not the guy who's gonna throw you in prison for a thousand years, he's the guy at the top who most people don't really have that much of an

understanding about. The Empire is everything else and that's what Beaumont Kin, who's the author of this, wants people to understand that you have to disassociate the Emperor from the Empire, because the Empire is the stuff that is going to happen to you. And the stuff that does happen.

So is this a, are you positioning this as a revisionist history? Is that the idea? Yeah.

Yes, it's written in the immediate aftermath of the sequel trilogy. So in a weird sense, become the furthest forward into the Star Wars timeline that we have ever gotten in the new canon, which was not something I really considered that much when I was writing it. But I knew that this was the time period that it would have to be set in. So yeah, Beaumont Kin, having come

through a more recent war, is now looking back and going, I think we need to reevaluate everything,

because clearly we didn't do a great job of it last time.

I mean, what I have finished the book and one of the most one of the parts that appears to me is the academic is, oh, here's a footnote. Let me chase that down. Right. I need to see about some other interpretations of this particular event that's happening here. There's also,

I mean, and Dan will remember that his colleague at Dr. Minerva, Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, had a

long series of discussions about what is Star Wars about? Is it about the Jedi Sith? There is about something more. Right. And I think that what you will, what this book here indicates, It's both. There are both the stories going on at the same time. It is the Jedi Sith story alongside this story of sort of a broader political and social universe that is functioning along identifiable and intelligible minds.

Yes, 100%. There are layers to it. And the layer that you intersect with depends very much on who you are in the galaxy. Jedi and Sith, if you're a Jedi, is super important. Jedi and Sith, if you're a moisture farmer who has to pay his tax bill, probably not as pressing as your lived reality. Yeah, there's a, I'm thinking about that great moment in the, I think it's Knights of the Old Republic one or two, where the one of the character, one of the NPCs, or, you know, he's not playable or whatever, not part of the party is just sort of like, yeah, you're Jedi Civil War, you had this obtruse argument, we don't really understand what it was about, you're all the same to us. Yeah, all I knew was that it appeared to be very funny. Yeah, because Patrick's position, which I've echoed in the Battle of Hoth debate at Wired, is that, you know, essentially, there's a, if you understand the causal dynamics as primarily being about the sort of secular conflict that that this is kind of just as far as Palpatine and the jet air concern. This is just a kind of sideshow that it's primarily the art, it's primarily a Sith, a Sith, a Sith Jedi battle about, you know, the metaphysical future of the universe. And that a lot of what they're doing that seems irrational makes much more sense when you understand that those are the stakes, right? Why it's so important to get Luke is even if it means doing stuff that's tactically kind of dumb from a military standpoint, or why, as you would put it later on, the Empire is just, what is it extractive for? Like, what is doing all this stuff for? What's the point? Right. Yeah. And that aspect definitely comes

up in the book. And you have Beaumont Newhall looking at kind of the reactions of ordinary imperial officers to what appears to be the most stupid decisions imaginable going on around them and what that and how difficult it makes it for them to wage a war, because they don't really know what's going on.

So on that point, and I hate to close these things on my observation, but I've been wanting to make this for quite some time.

And I think your book really brought this out for me, right?

In terms of the way that writers of fiction build worlds, there is something that is so incoherent and haphazard about the way that Star Wars has been built.

But what I would say about that is that over time that has resulted, that that incoherence has resulted in a world that sort of has more of an intrinsic sense to it than sort of the world of Westeros or other things where people set forth to sit down and write out this fictional world and write out this fictional history.

If you were to look at 20th century global history that happened in the real world, none of it makes any sense.

like there's the Germans, okay, they're the bad guy, and then the Russians are the good guy, and then when the Germans are back again for some reason, and then the Russians are here for, and none of it makes sense.

And that sort of appealing incoherence, where there are so many different authors who have their hands in the creation of the Star Wars history, actually, in the end, it makes a ton of sense, and it has a certain sort of deep appeal to it because of that.

Yes, and all you can do is look at the sources, whether it's the novel, the novelists and

their novels or the universe sources and extrapolate a conclusion.

And it's fine to do it that way.

In fact, it's the only way that really makes sense.

I'm looking forward to your book on historiography and Star Wars and what Star Wars tells us about the craft of history.

I don't know because it is like, I mean, isn't like the first page on Wikipedia about how like this is all, you know, there is no like coherent canon.

the whole point that these are different kind of stories and perspectives and they're not going to add up to anything which is very actually out of step with the way I think a lot of fandom thinks about these things.

Yeah, I've always liked the way that Games Workshop approach things with Warhammer in the basically the line they use is everything is canon, not everything is true. And that's not the worst way of framing this stuff that you know, everything is canon, but it doesn't mean it happened.

>> Awesome.

>> Well, Chris, I want to thank you so much.

I want to thank you so much for joining us for these two podcasts.

Dan, I want to thank you as well.

The listeners, we heartily recommend that you go out and buy these two books.

If you're more on the academic side or just really the fan side, I think that the history and politics of strollers is fantastic.

I personally found The Rise and Fall of the Galactic Empire just an amazing read.

I could barely put it down.

My daughter is reading it now.

And so I cannot recommend it enough.

And thank you so much for joining us today.

Thank you both very much for having me.

It's been a real treat.

Thanks for being so generous with your time.

That was a lot of fun.

Thank you again for listening to the Lawyers, Guns and Money podcast.

We would like to thank Elizabeth Nelson of the Paranoid Style for supplying as our intro and outro music, I'd Bet My Lands and Titles, a track on the album for executive meeting.

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