

The Mandalorian (Season Two): Indulging nostalgia and setting up even bigger paydays

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Directed by Jon Favreau, Peyton Reed, Bryce Dallas Howard, Carl Weathers, Dave Filoni, Robert Rodriguez and Rick Famuyiwa

Over eight weeks at the end of 2020, Disney and Lucasfilm aired a new, second season of *The Mandalorian*, the first *Star Wars* live-action television series that christened their streaming service, Disney Plus, in 2019. As was the case with Season One, Lucasfilm and their creatives continue to parrot the action-adventure film genre with familiar cultural and film references, trying to capture audiences with nostalgia rather than meaningful drama.

The story picks up where the first season left off: Din Djarin, aka “The Mandalorian” (Pedro Pascal), is searching for Jedi so that he can return “The Child,” an infant of the same species as Yoda from the films, to its own kind. Din and The Child, whose name is revealed to be Grogu partway through the season, develop a sort of surrogate-parent-child relationship that is the main driver of the plot.

Meanwhile, Moff Gideon (Giancarlo Esposito), a leader of the remnant Imperial forces now in hiding, tries to capture Grogu so that he and his scientists can use its unique blood for scientific experiments of a sinister nature. The eight episodes in season two play out in a similar fashion to the eight episodes of season one: Din tries to keep Gideon from capturing Grogu with the help of a supporting cast that he blindly bumps into along the way. Espionage, space battles and hand-to-hand combat sequences abound.

Again, as noted, the writers and directors draw on familiar visuals and tropes from film and television history. The episode directed by Dave Filoni, who was the protégé of George Lucas prior to the Disney purchase of Lucasfilm, is set in the *Star Wars* equivalent of a medieval Japanese town ripped right of

Akira Kurosawa’s *Yojimbo* (1961). Toshiro Mifune’s shoes are filled by the character Ahsoka (Rosario Dawson) who walks and wields a saber in what is often beat for beat a duplicate of the source material (minus its social and artistic significance). There is even an elderly villager who peeks out from his shack in a way reminiscent of the Kurosawa film.

In this second season, the creatives have also started to introduce “legacy” characters from older *Star Wars* films and television: Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) and Boba Fett (Temuera Morrison) from the films and Ahsoka and Bo-Katan (Katee Sackhoff) from animated television. The writers here substitute familiarity for substance, seeking merely to fulfill the fans’ fantasies by showing their childhood heroes in a new light. The creatives openly liken the making of *The Mandalorian* to playing with action figures in the sandbox when they were kids.

The result is the same. The story is entirely predictable and has nothing to say. In the style of Quentin Tarantino, the creatives engage in revenge fantasy—setting up disgusting fascist-type figures to be mowed down by both the physical weapons and the cheap philosophizing of the protagonists. Jon Favreau even brought in Tarantino’s occasional associate, Robert Rodriguez (*Desperado*, *Machete*), to direct the series debut of Boba Fett with his signature over-the-top action sequences and brutal violence.

As season two was wrapping up, on December 15, 2020, Lucasfilm took part in the Disney “Investor Day” event to announce the various future film and television projects scheduled to appear over the next several years, many of which are spinoff series from *The Mandalorian*. The list of 10 new projects include a *Boba Fett* television series directed by Rodriguez and a new feature film written and directed by Patty Jenkins

(*Monster, Wonder Woman*) to be released in 2023.

The fact that Lucasfilm chose to unveil these projects at a Disney investor event shows what the *Star Wars* franchise is primarily being fostered to achieve: a maximization of profits. This has been the approach of Disney to the whole endeavor from the beginning—to create products that tug on nostalgia and adolescent dreams rather than presenting something artistically challenging. Of course, the *Star Wars* franchise has never been artistically challenging, but it did have a certain low-key charm at one point.

As we have noted numerous times in similar reviews, there is considerable talent and innovation involved in the making of works such as *The Mandalorian*, especially from a technical standpoint. Both seasons have made use of a new technology known as “the Volume”—a combination of physical set, 20-foot-high LED panels and digital elements appearing within the panels to be shot live along with the actors. Actors report that this technology better supports their performance, since they can more effectively immerse themselves within the setting, and the creatives can ensure that digital elements line up what they are filming on the spot rather than in post-production.

Another element to be enjoyed is the musical score, written and largely performed by Academy Award-winning and Grammy-winning composer Ludwig Göransson. The young music producer successfully combines elements of Swedish heavy metal and hip-hop beats with more traditional symphonic melodies to create something that is both groundbreaking and satisfying to hear.

From a financial standpoint, Disney’s move into the streaming world has been successful, especially in the course of 2020 when more people were forced to stay in their homes and turned to such services for entertainment and solace. By February of 2020, Disney Plus had signed up nearly 30 million customers, far more than the 20 million figure that analysts predicted would not be surpassed even by the end of 2020. By August, Disney Plus had more than 60 million paying customers, achieving its goal of signing up 60 million to 90 million subscribers by 2024 four years ahead of schedule.

Disney stock began the year at around \$140 per share and dropped—along with much of the film industry shares—in March to about \$85 per share at the

beginning of the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. By November it had recovered and returned to about \$150 per share and, following the Investor Day announcements in December, has since moved up to about \$170-\$180 per share.

The next major *Star Wars* project that has been announced is *The Book of Boba Fett*—the *Mandalorian* spinoff series created by Jon Favreau and Filoni and directed by Rodriguez. There is also now in production a *Rogue One* prequel spinoff series, *Andor*, written and directed by Tony Gilroy (*The Bourne Identity*, *Michael Clayton*). The former has been announced for December 2021, and the latter will likely be released sometime in early 2022.



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