The Mandalorian shows why Star Wars should be smaller

Two months ago, just before *The Mandalorian* was about to premiere on Disney+, I made a joke to some friends: wouldn't it be funny if this show was better than *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*? I thought it was unlikely, but possible: ending a trilogy well is hard, and *The Mandalorian* didn't have nearly as many expectations riding on it. Eight weeks later and *The Rise of Skywalker* is out, a very profitable hot mess, and *The Mandalorian* concludes its first season with a finale that doesn't try for much, but also rocks. It is, surprisingly, the better Star War.

(Very mild spoilers to follow.)

Mando and The Child, out and about. What will they find next?
Most of the reasons why I like *The Mandalorian* boil down to restraint: It's full of things most Star Wars movies *don't* do. It doesn't have a Jedi, or anyone who's even *heard* of the Force. It's not about a Chosen One. It's not even particularly concerned with its place in any grand narrative — sure, the show makes it easy to figure out that it's set after *The Return of the Jedi* and there are a number of familiar *Star Wars* accoutrements. But its overall story? Very much doing its own thing.

Let's recap: The eponymous Mandalorian is a bounty hunter who takes a high-paying job for a former Imperial officer. That job turns out to be a child with special powers. He decides not to hand the child over to the definitely evil Imperial holdouts, and goes on the run. The stoic Mandalorian and the adorable baby have adventures, most of them aiming for you to say, "Hey, that's cool" about two or three times per episode.

I love how inconsequential *The Mandalorian* feels, especially since the *Star Wars* films have been about people doing Big Important Things involving the fate of the galaxy or whatever. It even ends with a reassertion of the status quo: Mando and The Child, out and about. What will they find next?

A big part of the *Star Wars* charm is the way that it feels like a world you can live in. And *The Mandalorian*? It shows people just trying to get by, out in the galactic equivalent of a small midwestern farm town. Sure, the Empire has fallen and the New Republic is starting to get its feet (only to fall again by the time *The Force Awakens* rolls around) but none of that matters. Out here, they're just trying to raise ugly lizards and gas up their spaceships so they can make it to the next job.

Now that I've seen it, this is the *Star Wars* I want more of. Smaller stories, about smaller people, being noble or selfish in ways that ripple through their own communities, not the whole damn galaxy. It's this implication at the heart of *The Last Jedi* that made that movie so compelling, and the diversions *The Clone Wars* made into the lives of Clone Troopers fascinating to watch. We come to *Star Wars* for the big and spectacular, but we stay because it always left room for the small and intimate.

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