

WORLD OF

WRESTLING

By: Roland Barthes

SPECTACLE OF

TERRORISM

By: Richard Porton

CASE FOR THE

EMPIRE

By: Jonathan V. Last

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

ARTICLES

- Barthes, Roland** World of Wrestling
Top Five Richest Wrestlers In the World
- Porton, Richard** The Spectacle of Terrorism
- Last, Jonathan** Case for the Empire

01

11

18

28

WORLD OF

WRESTLING

By: Roland Barthes



INTRODUCTION:

[ed. Note: This is the initial essay in Barthes' *Mythologies*, originally published in 1957. The book is a series of small structural investigations of (mass) cultural phenomena; as Barthes explains in his preface to the 1970 French second edition, "This book has a double theoretical framework: on the one hand, an ideological critique bearing on the language of so-called mass-culture; on the other, a first attempt to analyze semiologically the mechanics of this language. I had just read Saussure and as a result acquired the conviction that by treating 'collective representations' as sign-systems, one might hope to go further than the pious show of unmasking them and account in detail for the mystification which transforms petit-bourgeois culture into a universal nature."

You might think about why the analysis of wrestling would lead off such a project. Also, keep in mind that professional wrestling (in Europe called 'amateur wrestling') in the 1950s had not reached the pinnacle of promotional and popular success that it has today (for one thing, TV was in its infancy); it was more of an 'outlaw' sport lacking the legitimization of gigantic revenues and spectatorships - not to mention wrestlers-turned-Governors. Does Barthes' semiology of wrestling apply to the current version of the sport/entertainment? By the way, cuts in the text are indicated in square brackets.]

“ “ The grandiloquent **truth** of gestures on life's great occasions.”
- Baudelaire

VIRTUE:

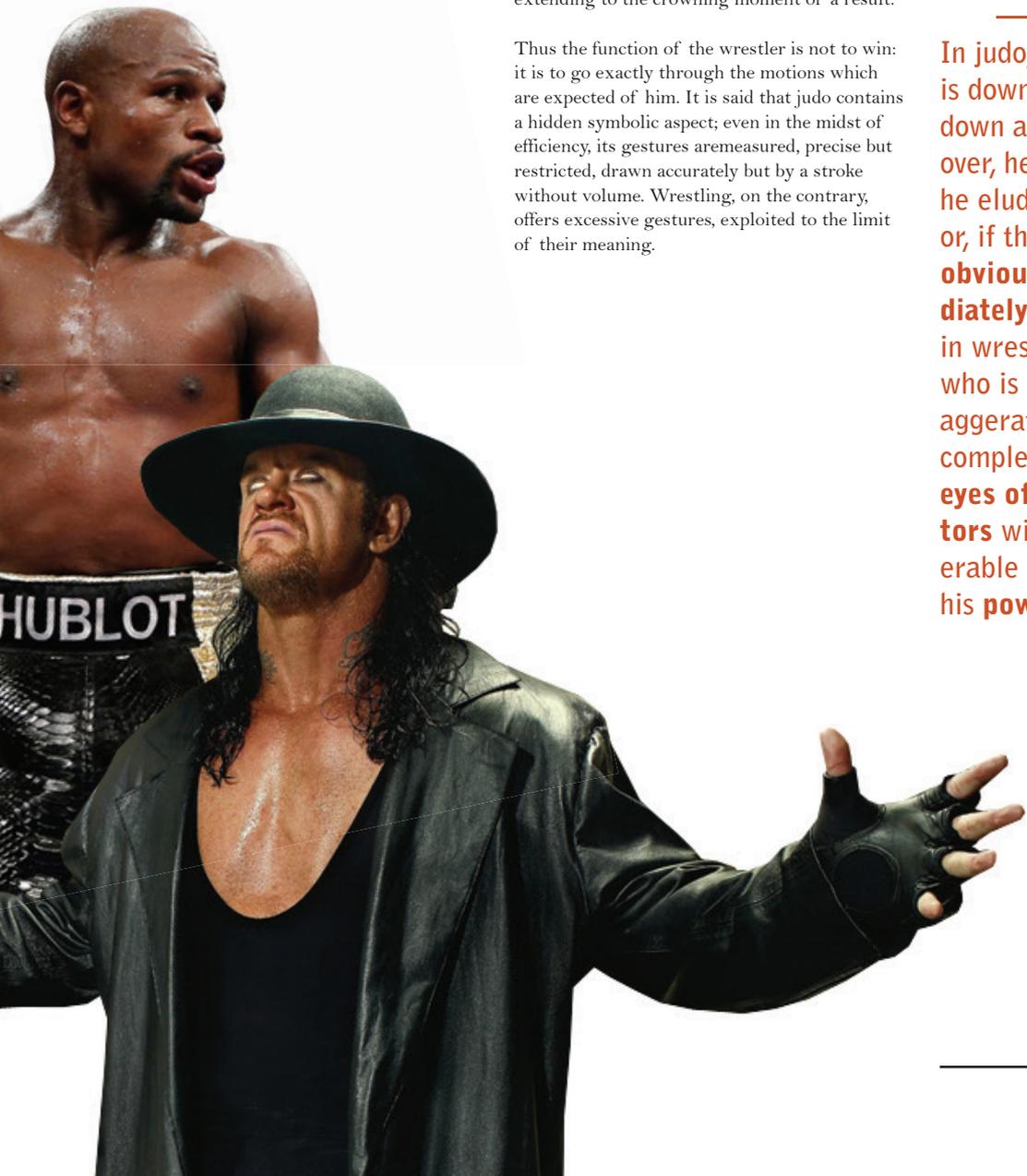
THE VIRTUE of all-in wrestling is that it is the spectacle of excess. Here we find a grandiloquence which must have been that of ancient theatres. And in fact wrestling is an open-air spectacle, for what makes the circus or the arena what they are is not the sky (a romantic value suited rather to fashionable occasions), it is the drenching and vertical quality of the flood of light. Even hidden in the most squalid Parisian halls, wrestling partakes of the nature of the great solar spectacles, Greek drama and bull-fights: in both, a light without shadow generates an emotion without reserve.

There are people who think that wrestling is an ignoble sport. Wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle, and it is no more ignoble to attend a wrestled performance of *Suffering* than a performance of the sorrows of *Arnolphe* or *Andromaque* [Barthes here refers to characters in neo-classic French plays by Molière and Racine]. Of course, there exists a false wrestling, in which the participants unnecessarily go to great lengths to make a show of a fair fight; this is of no interest. True wrestling, wrong called amateur wrestling, is performed in second-rate halls, where the public spontaneously attunes itself to the spectacular nature of the contest, like the audience at a suburban cinema. Then these same people wax indignant because wrestling is a stage-managed sport (which ought, by the way, to mitigate its ignominy). The public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest is rigged or not, and rightly so; it abandons itself to the primary virtue of the spectacle, which is to abolish all motives and all consequences: what matters is not what it thinks but what it sees.

The Undertaker ●

<https://pngriver.com/download-under-taker-png-image-81024/>





● **Floyd Mayweather**

<http://www.pngmart.com/image/tag/floyd-mayweather>

This public knows very well the distinction between wrestling and boxing; it knows that boxing is a Jansenist sport, based on a demonstration of excellence. One can bet on the outcome of a boxing-match: with wrestling, it would make no sense. A boxing-match is a story which is constructed before the eyes of the spectator; in wrestling, on the contrary, it is each moment which is intelligible, not the passage of time. The spectator is not interested in the rise and fall of fortunes; he expects the transient image of certain passions. Wrestling therefore demands an immediate reading of the juxtaposed meanings, so that there is no need to connect them. The logical conclusion of the contest does not interest the wrestling-fan, while on the contrary a boxing-match always implies a science of the future. In other words, wrestling is a sum of spectacles, of which no single one is a function: each moment imposes the total knowledge of a passion which rises erect and alone, without ever extending to the crowning moment of a result.

Thus the function of the wrestler is not to win: it is to go exactly through the motions which are expected of him. It is said that judo contains a hidden symbolic aspect; even in the midst of efficiency, its gestures are measured, precise but restricted, drawn accurately but by a stroke without volume. Wrestling, on the contrary, offers excessive gestures, exploited to the limit of their meaning.

In judo, a man who is down is hardly down at all, he rolls over, he draws back, he eludes defeat, or, if the latter is obvious, he immediately disappears; in wrestling, a man who is down is exaggeratedly so, and completely fills the eyes of the spectators with the intolerable spectacle of his powerlessness.

CLARITY:

THIS FUNCTION of grandiloquence is indeed the same as that of the ancient theatre, whose principle, language and props (masks and buskins) concurred in the exaggeratedly visible explanation of a Necessity. The gesture of the vanquished wrestler signifying to the world a defeat which, far from disgusting, he emphasizes and holds like a pause in music, corresponds to the mask of antiquity meant to signify the tragic mode of the spectacle. In wrestling, as on the stage in antiquity, one is not ashamed of one's suffering, one knows how to cry, one has a liking for tears.

Each sign in wrestling is therefore endowed with an absolute **clarity**, since one must always understand everything on the spot. As soon as the adversaries are in the ring, the public is overwhelmed with the obviousness of the roles. As in the theatre, each physical type expresses to excess the part which has been assigned to the contestant. Thauvin, a fifty-year-old with an obese and sagging body, whose type of asexual hideousness always inspires feminine nicknames, displays in his flesh the characters of baseness, for his part is to represent what, in the classical concept of the *salaud*, the 'bastard' (the key-concept of any wrestling-match), appears as organically repugnant. The nausea voluntarily provoked by Thauvin shows therefore a very extended use of signs: not only is ugliness used here in order to signify baseness, but in addition ugliness is wholly gathered into a particularly repulsive quality of matter: the pallid collapse of dead flesh (the public calls Thauvin *la barbaque*, 'stinking meat'), so that the passionate condemnation of the crowd no longer stems from its judgment, but instead from the very depth of its humours. It will thereafter let itself be frenetically embroiled in an idea of Thauvin which will conform entirely with this physical origin: his actions will perfectly correspond to the essential viscosity of his personage.

It is therefore in the body of the wrestler that we find the first key to the contest. I know from the start that all of Thauvin's actions, his

treacheries, cruelties, and acts of cowardice, will not fail to measure up to the first image of ignobility he gave me; I can trust him to carry out intelligently and to the last detail all the gestures of a kind of amorphous baseness, and thus fill to the brim the image of the most repugnant bastard there is: the bastard-octopus. [Barthes goes on to describe other 'character roles' in wrestling, comparing them to stock characters in the Italian tradition of *Commedia dell'Arte*.] Wrestling is like a diacritic writing: above the fundamental meaning of his body, the wrestling arranges comments which are episodic but always opportune, and constantly help the reading of the fight by means of gestures, attitudes and mimicry which make the intention utterly obvious. Sometimes the wrestler triumphs with a repulsive sneer while kneeling on the good sportsman; sometimes he gives the crowd a conceited smile which forebodes an early revenge; sometimes, pinned to the ground, he hits the floor ostentatiously to make evident to all the intolerable nature of his situation. It is obvious that at such a pitch, it no longer matters whether the passion is genuine or not. What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself. There is no more a problem of truth in wrestling than in the theatre. In both, what is expected is the intelligible representation of moral situations which are usually private. [Barthes elaborates on this point, and again compares French wrestlers from the 1950s to characters in classical theater.]

What is thus displayed for the public is the great spectacle of Suffering, Defeat, and Justice. Wrestling presents man's suffering with all the amplification of tragic masks. The wrestler who suffers in a hold which is reputedly cruel (an arm-lock, a twisted leg) offers an excessive portrayal of Suffering; like a primitive *Pietà*, he exhibits for all to see his face, exaggeratedly contorted by an intolerable affliction. It is obvious, of course, that in wrestling reserve would be out of place, since it is opposed to the voluntary ostentation of the spectacle, to this Exhibition of Suffering which is the very aim



of the fight. This is why all the actions which produce suffering are particularly spectacular, like the gesture of a conjuror who holds out his cards clearly to the public. Suffering which appeared without intelligible cause would not be understood; a concealed action that was actually cruel would transgress the unwritten rules of wrestling [...]. What wrestlers call a hold, that is, any figure which allows one to immobilize the adversary indefinitely and to have him at one's mercy, has precisely the function of preparing in a conventional, therefore intelligible, fashion the spectacle of suffering, of methodically establishing the conditions of suffering. The inertia of

the vanquished allows the (temporary) victor to settle in his cruelty and to convey to the public this terrifying slowness of the torturer: [...] wrestling is the only sport which gives such an externalized image of torture. But here again, only the image is involved in the game, and the spectator does not wish for the actual suffering of the contestant; he only enjoys the perfection of an iconography. It is not true that wrestling is a sadistic spectacle: it is only an intelligible spectacle.

“ Even before the advent of Hollywood cinema, American filmmakers **exploited** the widespread fear of **political violence...**”

Naturally, it is the **pattern of Justice** which matters here, much more than its content: wrestling is above all a quantitative sequence of compensations (an **eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth**).

This explains why **sudden changes** of circumstances have in the eyes of wrestling **habitués** a sort of **moral beauty**; they enjoy them as they would enjoy an inspired episode in a novel...

[Barthes discusses the forearm smash as a gesture signifying tragic catastrophe, then moves to the next major spectacle of wrestling: Defeat.] Deprived of all resilience, the wrestler's flesh is no longer anything but an unspeakable heap out on the floor, where it solicits relentless reviling and jubilation. [. . .] At other times, there is another ancient posture which appears in the coupling of the wrestlers, that of the suppliant who, at the mercy of his opponent, on bended knees, his arms raised above his head, is slowly brought down by the vertical pressure of the victor. In wrestling, unlike judo, Defeat is not a conventional sign, abandoned as soon as it is understood; it is not an outcome, but quite the contrary, it is a duration, a display, it takes up the ancient myths of public Suffering and Humiliation: the cross and the pillory. It is as if the wrestler is crucified in broad daylight and in the sight of all. I have heard it said of a wrestler stretched on the ground: 'He is dead, little Jesus, there, on the cross,' and these ironic words revealed the hidden roots of a spectacle which enacts the exact gestures of the most ancient purifications. But what wrestling is above all meant to portray is a purely moral concept: that of justice. The idea of 'paying' is essential to wrestling, and the crowd's 'Give it to him' means above all else 'Make him pay.' This is therefore, needless to say, an immanent justice. The baser the action of the 'bastard,' the more delighted the public is by the blow which he justly receives in return. If the villain - who is of course a coward - takes refuge behind the ropes, claiming unfairly to have a right to do so by a brazen mimicry, he is inexorably pursued there and caught, and the crowd is jubilant at seeing the rules broken for the sake of a deserved punishment.

John Cena ●

<https://www.searchpng.com/2019/02/02/john-cena-transparent-png-free-download/>



● **Ronda Rousey**
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/473440979572354192/>

HUSTLE
LOYALTY
RESPECT

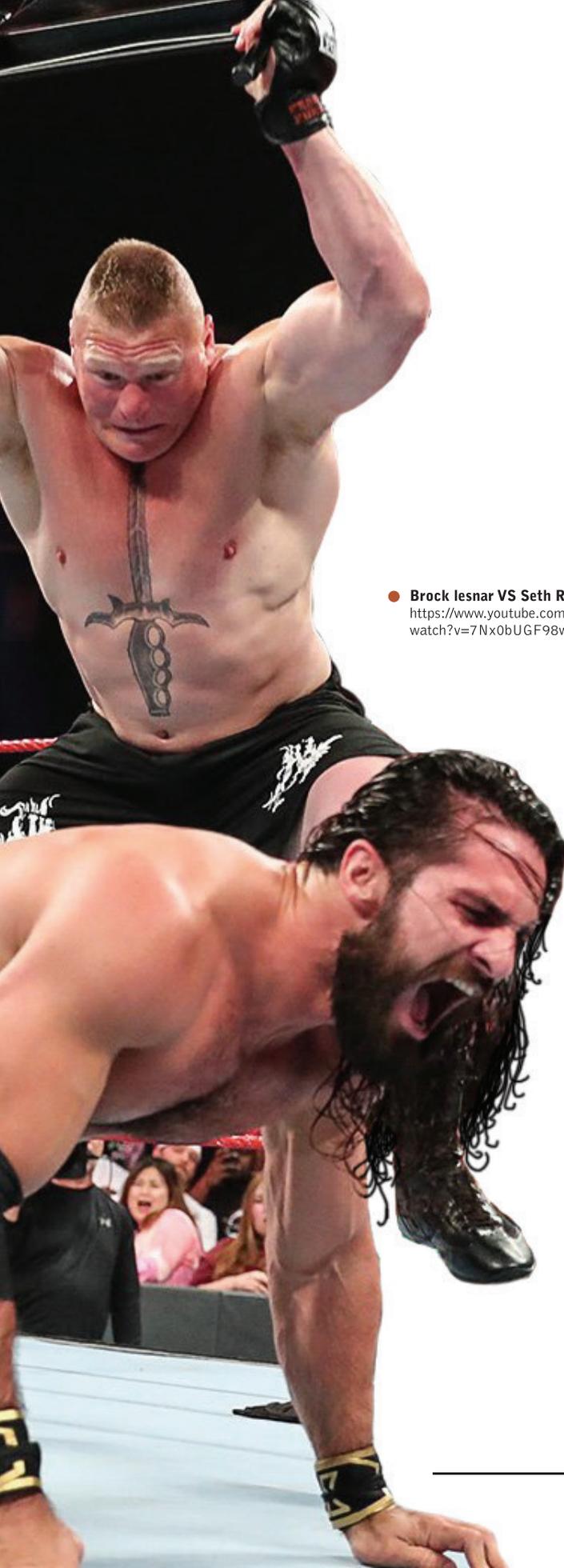
ROMA

HUSTLE
LOYALTY
RESPECT

HUSTLE
LOYALTY
RESPECT

REGRET NOTHING. FEARLESS.





● Brock Lesnar VS Seth Rollins
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NxBUGF98w>

CONCLUSION:

IT IS therefore easy to understand why out of five wrestling-matches, only about one is fair. One must realize, let it be repeated, that 'fairness' here is a role or a genre, as in the theatre: the rules do not at all constitute a real constraint; they are the conventional appearance of fairness. So that in actual fact a fair fight is nothing but an exaggeratedly polite one; the contestants confront each other with zeal, not rage [they don't keep pounding after the referee intervenes, etc.] One must of course understand here that all these polite actions are brought to the notice of the public by the most conventional gestures of fairness: shaking hands, raising the arms, ostensibly avoiding a fruitless hold which would detract from the perfection of the contest.

Conversely, foul play exists only in its excessive signs: administering a big kick to one's beaten opponent, [. . .] taking advantage of the end of the round to rush treacherously at the adversary from behind, fouling him while the referee is not looking (a move which obviously only has any value or function because in fact half the audience can see it and get indignant about it). Since Evil is the natural climate of wrestling, a fair fight has chiefly the value of being an exception. It surprises the aficionado, who greets it when he sees it as an anachronism and a rather sentimental throwback to the sporting tradition ('Aren't they playing fair, those two'); he feels suddenly moved at the sight of the general kindness of the world, but would probably die of boredom and indifference if wrestlers did not quickly return to the orgy of evil which alone makes good wrestling.

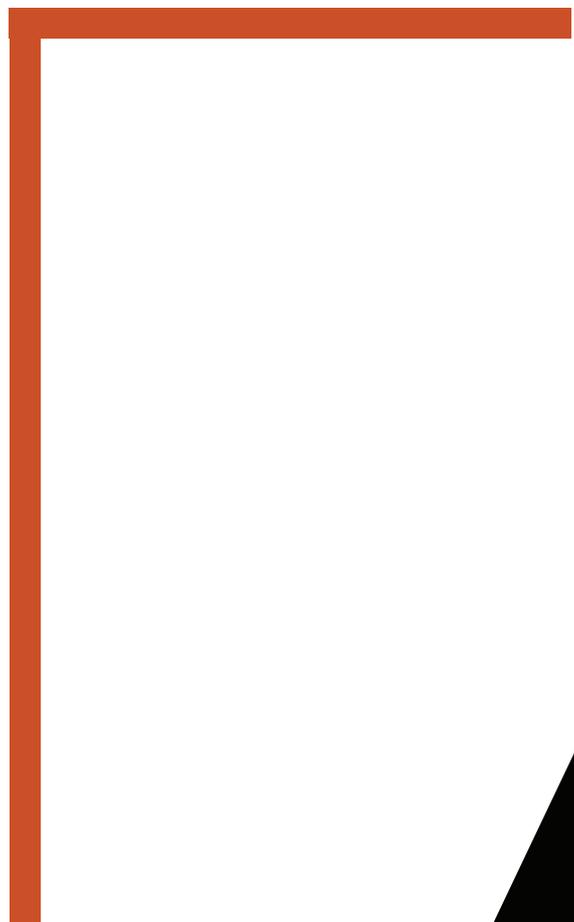
It has already been noted that in America wrestling represents a sort of mythological fight between Good and Evil (of a quasi-political nature, the 'bad' wrestler always being supposed to be a Red [Communist]). The process of creating heroes in French wrestling is very different, being based on ethics and not on politics. What the public is looking for here is the gradual construction of a highly moral image: that of the perfect 'bastard.' [Barthes goes into detail about the French 'model bastard.']

WRESTLERS, who are very experienced, know perfectly how to direct the spontaneous episodes of the fight so as to make them conform to the image which the public has of the great legendary themes of its mythology. A wrestler can irritate or disgust, he never disappoints, for he always accomplishes completely, by a progressive solidification of signs, what the public expects of him. In wrestling, nothing exists except in the absolute, there is no symbol, no allusion, everything is presented exhaustively. Leaving nothing in the shade, each action discards all parasitic meanings and ceremonially offers to the public a pure and full signification, rounded like Nature. This grandiloquence is nothing but the popular and age-old image of the perfect intelligibility of reality. What is portrayed by wrestling is therefore an ideal understanding of things; it is the euphoria of men raised for a while above the constitutive ambiguity of everyday situations and placed before the panoramic view of a universal Nature, in which signs at last correspond to causes, without obstacle, without evasion, without contradiction. When the hero or the villain of the drama, the man who was seen a few minutes earlier possessed by moral rage, magnified into a sort of metaphysical sign, leaves the wrestling hall, impassive, anonymous, carrying a small suitcase and arm-in-arm with his wife, no one can doubt that wrestling holds the power of transmutation which is common to the Spectacle and to Religious Worship.

“ **In the ring, and even in the depths of their voluntary ignominy, wrestlers remain gods because they are, for a few moments, the key which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil, and unveils the form of a Justice which is at last intelligible.**”

**TOP FIVE
RICHEST
WRESTLERS
IN THE**

WORLD



VINCE McMahon



Net Worth: \$2.2 Billion

Absolutely dominating the top spot is the CEO and majority shareholder of the WWE, Vince McMahon. Vince is a former professional wrestler that's used his wrestling status to move into several different industries. He is a commentator, promoter and film producer, with an estimated net worth of \$2.2 billion. Vince owns roughly 57% of WWE's Class A common stock, which tripled to \$90 per stock in October 2018. His Greenwich, Connecticut mansion is worth around \$40 million dollars, and when he's in Manhattan, he stays in his \$12 million dollar Penthouse. As if topping the richest wrestlers list wasn't enough recognition, he was also awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame!





Net Worth: \$280 Million

Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson is a former professional wrestler and American actor who has a net worth of \$280 million dollars. Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, Dwayne made his WWF debut in 1996 and made a name for himself in the sport until 2004. During his wrestling career, he was a nine-time world heavyweight champion, before deciding to switch his focus to acting. Since then, Dwayne has starred in films like *The Scorpion King*, *Gridiron Gang*, *Be Cool*, *The Game Plan*, *Tooth Fairy*, and *The Fast and The Furious Franchise*.

DWAYNE Johnson

JOHN Cena



Net Worth: \$55 Million

John Cena is an American professional wrestler who has a net worth of \$55 million. He began wrestling professionally in 2000 and has since enjoyed a highly successful career. He has won twelve World Titles, three US Championships and two World Tag Team Championships, to name just a few of his accomplishments. John is also passionate about acting and fitness. He has leading roles in films like *The Marine*, *Trainwreck* and *12 Rounds*.





Net Worth: \$50 Million

Steve Austin is a retired professional wrestler who has a net worth of \$50 million dollars. He is a six-time world champion and three-time Royal Rumble, winner. Steve joined the WWF in 1995, which is when his most famous persona was born – “Stone Cold Stunner” or “Stone Cold Steve Austin”. After he left the WWF, he got into television and film, cast in roles in *The Longest Yard* and *The Condemned*.

STEVE Austin

STEPHANIE McMahon



Net Worth: \$45 Million

In fifth place is a former professional wrestler and wrestling valet, Stephanie McMahon. She has a net worth of \$45 million dollars and owns somewhere in the region of 2.5% of the WWE. Much of her net worth can be attributed to her father, Vince McMahon, who is the founder, chairman and CEO of the WWE.



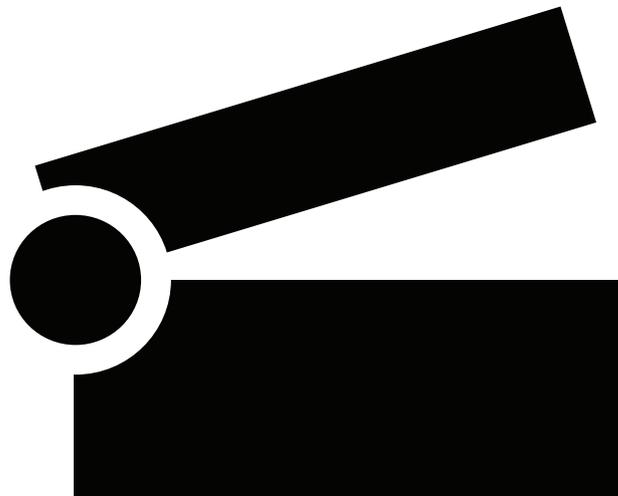
“Wake up
DETERMINED
Go to bed
SATISFIED”

— DWAYNE JOHNSON

SPECTACLE OF

TERRORISM

By: Richard Porton



TERRORISM IN CINEMA:

THE ONGOING cinematic obsession with terrorism reflects a number of deep-seated tensions within popular, as well as political, culture. Even before the advent of Hollywood cinema, American filmmakers exploited the widespread fear of political violence—often fueled by un-suppressed xenophobia—by making movies that castigate primarily foreign terrorists for sullyng the American way. Glancing at summaries in turn-of-the-20th-century trade papers such as *Moving Picture World* confirms the early cinema’s relish for depicting foreign anarchists—to cite one prominent target—as bomb-toting fanatics. One of the most famous extant films of that era, D.W. Griffith’s *The Voice of the Violin* (1909), exemplifies the unsavory mixture of political paranoia and cloying sentimentality that characterized much of pop culture’s response to resurgent radicalism. Released a year after what has been called “the anarchist scare of 1908,” the film explores the plight of Herr von Schmitt, a German émigré who teaches the violin for a living but misguidedly becomes a saboteur. When Von Schmitt realizes that he has been dispatched to bomb the family of a beautiful and wealthy young woman who previously spurned his advances, he magically regrets the errors of his way and rejects class resentment by saving the day with a typically Griffithian last-minute rescue.

REFORMED

For Griffith and his moralistic descendants, the terrorist is always nothing more than a demented individual who, with luck, can be properly reformed. Since it's now apparent that "terror" and "terrorism" are loaded terms indeed, the simplistic bromides of Victorian morality (which unfortunately persist in different forms in many contemporary Hollywood films) will not suffice. In assessing Matthew Carr's excellent *The Infernal Machine: A History of Terrorism* (2006), cultural critic Mike Davis concludes that "the satanic face of Terror" is "usually the State looking at itself in a mirror." Carr is particularly astute concerning the activities of pundits he terms "terrorologists," Cold War propagandists whose influence reached its zenith during the Reagan and Thatcher regimes. According to terrorologists, "political violence" was...

“**...a concept that referred to violence used against governments, rather than violence directed by them, unless it was to prove that enemies of the West were engaging in ‘state-sponsored terrorism.’**”



Ronald Reagan ●

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-09-05/ronald-reagan-the-diversity-president>



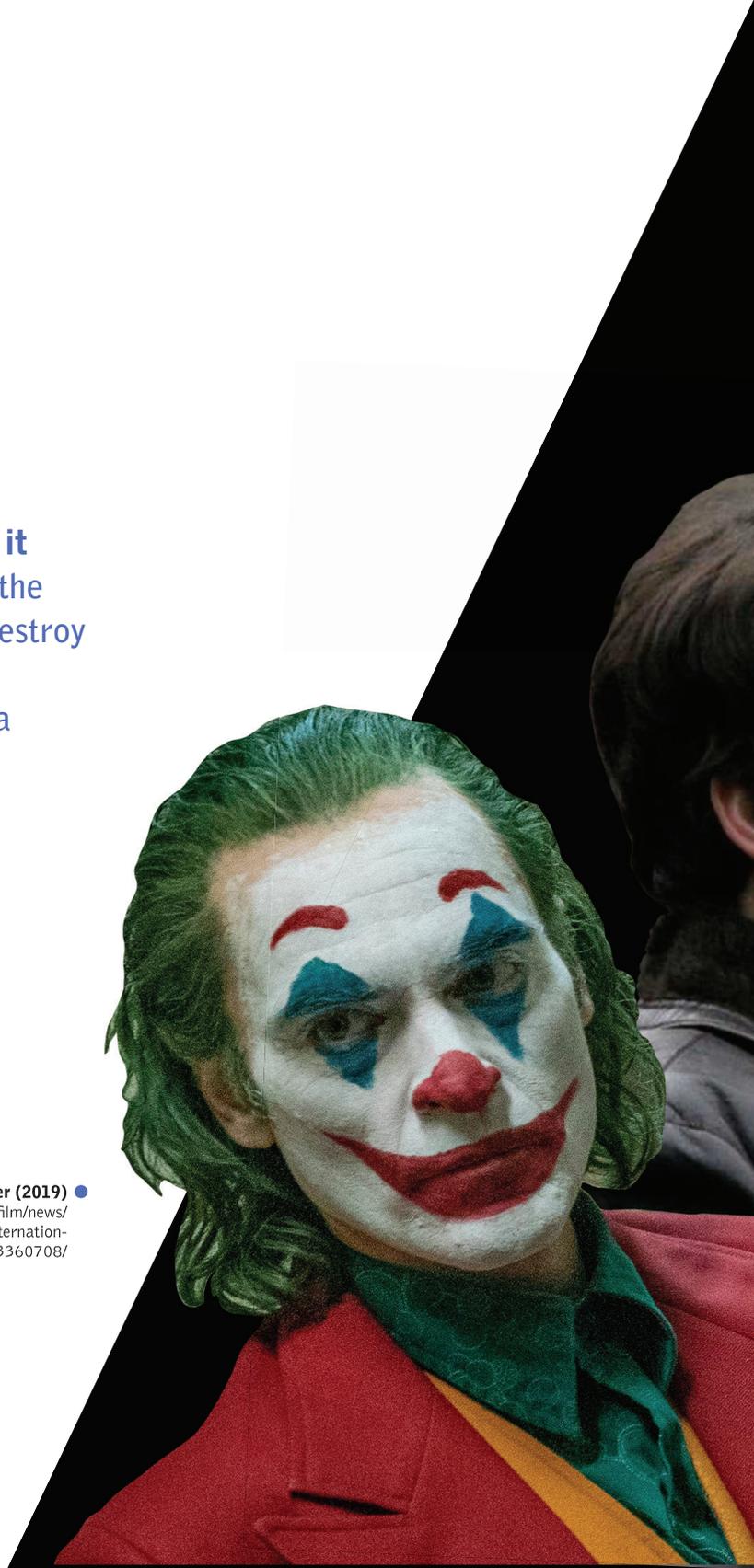
In the 1970s, a handful of filmmakers began to chronicle the intersection of freelance terrorism and the machinations of the State. Claude Chabrol's *Nada* (1974), based on Jean-Patrick Manchette's *Série Noire* novel, explored what Situationists such as Gianfranco Sanguinetti termed "the spectacle of terrorism." Citing examples like 1969's notorious Piazza Fontana bombing in Milan, which many dispassionate individuals now believe to be the work of Italian intelligence instead of the anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli, Sanguinetti charted the collusion of the government with right-wing provocateurs. (Pinelli supposedly "leapt" to his death during a routine police investigation; the incident inspired Dario Fo's play *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*.) *Nada* gives ample screen time to a cynical Spanish anarchist named Diaz (Fabio Testi), whose musings are uncannily reminiscent of aspects of the Situationist analysis:

“**The State hates terrorism, but prefers it to revolution. When each man realizes the desire to destroy the State, he tries to destroy all....Thus, the assassin becomes a type consumable by society....Terrorism is a trap for revolutionaries.**”

In a similar vein, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *The Third Generation* (1979) portrayed a group of hapless German terrorists who found themselves manipulated by wily government operatives. During a post-9/11 era when many of the clichés concerning dastardly Arab terrorists that flourished 20 years ago are being recycled, Olivier Assayas's three-part television drama *Carlos* revamps the image of the cinematic terrorist in a rigorous and innovative fashion.

Joker (2019) ●

<https://variety.com/2019/film/news/box-office-joker-dominates-international-1203360708/>





● **Carlos The Jackal**

<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/carlos-review/>

“ Is it **just me**, or is it getting **crazier out there?**”

— Arthur Fleck (Joker 2019)

(It premiered last May in Cannes, screens next week at the New York Film Festival, and opens theatrically in the U.S. next month.) While superficially a biopic devoted to the escapades of the most feared and notorious terrorist of the 1970s, Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, aka Carlos—labeled “the Jackal” by journalists, although imdb notes correctly that this nickname is not mentioned once in the film’s entire five-and-a-half-hour running time—Assayas’s epic thriller is a subtle piece of political analysis that shrewdly appropriates genre conventions. A director who both acknowledges Guy Debord as his primary intellectual influence and displays affection for quirky twists on Hollywood and Hong Kong cinema in films like *Boarding Gate* (2007), Assayas is aiming his critique at both the mass audience and the cognoscenti.

REVOLUTIONARY

ALTHOUGH Assayas clearly finds the oily Carlos (Edgar Ramírez) a repellent figure, the trilogy (made for television with the help of Canal Plus—a standard, feature-length version was recently released in French cinemas; IFC is releasing both versions in the U.S.) treats the Venezuelan-born playboy terrorist as the product of a late '60s-early '70s milieu indebted to the influence of the New Left and a romantic, thirdworldist ideology. The son of a wealthy Marxist, he, like many bohemian dilettantes, donned a beret and modeled his appearance and attitudes on Che Guevara. If Steven Soderbergh's *Che* (2008), compared by J. Hoberman to Rossellini's history films, resembles a sober treatise on guerrilla warfare,

“**Carlos often verges on black comedy—particularly since the protagonist proves to be more of an ineffectual bungler than the brilliant mastermind enshrined in journalistic folklore.”**

In an early scene, he responds to accusations that he's a bourgeois poseur by insisting on the label of “revolutionary internationalist.” But like so many of Carlos's assertions, this claim is little more than empty sloganeering. Despite priding himself on his service to the Palestinian cause, when Carlos is finally told by Wadie Haddad of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine that he no longer needs his services as a freelance mercenary, the smug revolutionary is dismissed as a “star.” Even though his given name was a nod to Lenin, Lenin himself would certainly have deemed him an “infantile leftist.” When he shoots himself out of a bind in Paris by killing several members of the DST (French internal security), he comes off more as an off-the-cuff version of Clyde Barrow than as a soured idealist.

Part of the ingenuity of Assayas's concept is his emphasis on Carlos's sexual charisma, a factor that is impossible to overlook when dealing with many self-styled urban guerrillas, whether Latin American bon viveurs (Assayas never lets us forget that Carlos was something of an epicurean with a taste for good food), the Baader-Meinhof gang, or the American-bred members of the Weather Underground. Ramírez's masterful performance helps immeasurably in conveying Carlos's skill with women, as well as his macho posturing. Whether preening naked in private or titillating his Latin American girlfriend by convincing her to suck on a grenade clip ("Weapons are an extension of my body," he boldly exclaims) as part of their foreplay, he is as much mack daddy as humble soldier of the revolution. His romance and eventual marriage to Magdalena Kopp, a member of Germany's notorious Revolutionary Cells (a group known for their hijacking of an Air France jet that ended with a raid on Entebbe), exemplifies his talent for combining romantic and political manipulation. Luring Kopp away from his colleague Johannes Weinrich, he grows tired of her after she bears him a child and becomes enamored with a younger, even more fetching woman. Women prove as disposable as revolutionary causes.

What is thus
**displayed for the
public** is the great
**spectacle of
Suffering, Defeat,
and Justice.**

OLIVIER Assayas

Olivier Assayas ●

[https://www.gala.fr/stars_et_gotha/
olivier_assayas](https://www.gala.fr/stars_et_gotha/olivier_assayas)



Much of the second installment is devoted to one of Carlos's most intricate operations: his seizure of OPEC headquarters in Vienna, which resulted in a protracted siege after many of the ministers and their delegates were held as hostages. A bravura set piece, the OPEC imbroglio is a tragic farce that highlights how Carlos, supposedly a radical renegade, is actually fatally compromised by his status as an assassin-for-hire. Sponsored by Saddam Hussein, he impetuously brokers a deal to release the hostages to Algerian authorities. Disappointing both his backers and Wadie Haddad, his putative mentor, the assault on a bastion of establishment privilege is little more than a vacuous coup de théâtre.

By the end of the film, it's clear that Carlos has become a pawn of both Cold War tensions and a terrorist media spectacle that he helped to construct. A series of authoritarian countries—Syria, East Germany, Hungary, and Sudan—accept his services as a mercenary—but are forced to summarily expel him when he becomes a loose cannon and outlives his usefulness. Assayas avoids facile attempts to psychologize Carlos—his personal and moral failures are more the result of a flawed worldview than, say, a troubled childhood or overbearing parents. Nevertheless, there is something pathetic, although not poignant, about Carlos's plight in Sudan, his final, pre-arrest port of call. Seeking out liposuction as a cure for an expanding paunch, and excoriated by the Muslim government for his dalliances with women, the once cocky operative has become a bloated shadow of his former self. According to Matthew Carr, Carlos's

“**status as the iconic international terrorist of the media age owed as much to what was said and written about him as it did to his actual deeds.**”

Assayas's film is, appropriately enough, as much of a profile of an image as one of the man himself—a narcissistic cipher who owed his career to the society of the spectacle.

CASE FOR THE

EMPIRE

By: Jonathan V. Last



INTRODUCTION:

Star wars returns today with its fifth installment, Attack of the Clones. There will be talk of the Force and the Dark Side and the epic morality of George Lucas's series. But the truth is that from the beginning, Lucas confused the good guys with the bad. The deep lesson of Star Wars is that the Empire is good. It's a difficult leap to make--embracing Darth Vader and the Emperor over the plucky and attractive Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia--but a careful examination of the facts, sorted apart from Lucas's off-the-shelf moral cues, makes a quite convincing case. First, an aside: For the sake of this discussion, I've considered only the history gleaned from the actual Star Wars films, not the Expanded Universe. If you know what the Expanded Universe is and want to argue that no discussion of Star Wars can be complete without considering material outside the canon, that's fine. However, it's always been my view that the comic books and novels largely serve to clean up Lucas's narrative and philosophical messes. Therefore, discussions of intrinsic intent must necessarily revolve around the movies alone. You may disagree, but please don't e-mail me about it. If you don't know what the Expanded Universe is, well, uh, neither do I.

THE REPUBLIC

At the beginning of the Star Wars saga, the known universe is governed by the Galactic Republic. The Republic is controlled by a Senate, which is, in turn, run by an elected chancellor who's in charge of procedure, but has little real power. Scores of thousands of planets are represented in the Galactic Senate, and as we first encounter it, it is sclerotic and ineffectual. The Republic has grown over many millennia to the point where there are so many factions and disparate interests, that it is simply too big to be governable. Even the Republic's staunchest supporters recognize this failing: In *The Phantom Menace*, Queen Amidala admits,

“It is clear to me now that the Republic no longer functions.”

In *Attack of the Clones*, young Anakin Skywalker observes that it simply “doesn't work.”

The Senate moves so slowly that it is powerless to stop aggression between member states. In *The Phantom Menace* a supra-planetary alliance, the Trade Federation (think of it as OPEC to the Galactic Republic's United Nations), invades a planet and all the Senate can agree to do is call for an investigation.

Obi Wan ●

https://www.reddit.com/r/PrequelMemes/comments/8o2d1s/general_kenobi_is_a_bold_one/





● **Anakin Skywalker**
<https://battlefront-forums.ea.com/discussion/105488/anakin-skywalker>



● **Darth Maul**
[https://www.pngarts.com/explore/
tag/darth-maul](https://www.pngarts.com/explore/tag/darth-maul)

Like the United Nations, the Republic has no armed forces of its own, but instead relies on a group of warriors, the Jedi knights, to “keep the peace.” The Jedi, while autonomous, often work in tandem with the Senate, trying to smooth over quarrels and avoid conflicts. But the Jedi number only in the thousands—they cannot protect everyone. What’s more, it’s not clear that they should be “protecting” anyone. The Jedi are Lucas’s great heroes, full of Zen wisdom and righteous power. They encourage people to “use the Force”—the mystical energy which is the source of their power—but the truth, revealed in *The Phantom Menace*, is that the Force isn’t available to the rabble. The Force comes from midi-chlorians, tiny symbiotic organisms in people’s blood, like mitochondria. The Force, it turns out, is an inherited, genetic trait. If you don’t have the blood, you don’t get the Force. Which makes the Jedi not a democratic militia, but a royalist Swiss guard.

And an arrogant royalist Swiss guard, at that. With one or two notable exceptions, the Jedi we meet in *Star Wars* are full of themselves. They ignore the counsel of others (often with terrible consequences), and seem honestly to believe that they are at the center of the universe. When the chief Jedi record-keeper is asked in *Attack of the Clones* about a planet she has never heard of, she replies that if it’s not in the Jedi archives, it doesn’t exist. (The planet in question does exist, again, with terrible consequences.) In *Attack of the Clones*, a mysterious figure, Count Dooku, leads a separatist movement of planets that want to secede from the Republic. Dooku promises these confederates smaller government, unlimited free trade, and an “absolute commitment to capitalism.” Dooku’s motives are suspect—it’s not clear whether or not he believes in these causes. However, there’s no reason to doubt the motives of the other separatists—they seem genuinely to want to make a fresh start with a government that isn’t bloated and dysfunctional.

The Republic, of course, is eager to quash these separatists, but they never make a compelling case--or any case, for that matter--as to why, if they are such a freedom-loving regime, these planets should not be allowed to check out of the Republic and take control of their own destinies.

THE EMPIRE

We do not yet know the exact how's and why's, but we do know this: At some point between the end of Episode II and the beginning of Episode IV, the Republic is replaced by an Empire. The first hint comes in Attack of the Clones, when the Senate's Chancellor Palpatine is granted emergency powers to deal with the separatists. It spoils very little to tell you that Palpatine eventually becomes the Emperor. For a time, he keeps the Senate in place, functioning as a rubber-stamp, much like the Roman imperial senate, but a few minutes into Episode IV, we are informed that he has dissolved the Senate, and that "the last remnants of the Old Republic have been swept away."

Emperor Palpatine ●

<https://www.sideshow.com/collectibles/star-wars-emperor-palpatine-hot-toys-903374>



Lucas wants the Empire to stand for evil, so he tells us that the Emperor and Darth Vader have gone over to the Dark Side and dresses them in black. But look closer. When Palpatine is still a senator, he says, “The Republic is not what it once was. The Senate is full of greedy, squabbling delegates. There is no interest in the common good.” At one point he laments that “the bureaucrats are in charge now.” Palpatine believes that the political order must be manipulated to produce peace and stability. When he mutters,

““There is **no civility**, there is **only politics**,” we see that at heart, he’s an esoteric **Straussian**. Make **no mistake**, as emperor, **Palpatine is a dictator--but a relatively benign one**, like Pinochet.”

It’s a dictatorship people can do business with. They collect taxes and patrol the skies. They try to stop organized crime (in the form of the smuggling rings run by the Hutts). The Empire has virtually no effect on the daily life of the average, law-abiding citizen.

Also, unlike the divine-right Jedi, the Empire is a meritocracy. The Empire runs academies throughout the galaxy (Han Solo begins his career at an Imperial academy), and those who show promise are promoted, often rapidly. In *The Empire Strikes Back* Captain Piett is quickly promoted to admiral when his predecessor falls down on the job. While it’s a small point, the Empire’s manners and decorum speak well of it. When Darth Vader is forced to employ bounty hunters to track down Han Solo, he refuses to address them by name. Even Boba Fett, the greatest of all trackers, is referred to icily as “bounty hunter.” And yet Fett understands the protocol. When he captures Solo, he calls him “Captain Solo.” (Whether this is in deference to Han’s former rank in the Imperial starfleet, or simply because Han owns and pilots his own ship, we don’t know. I suspect it’s the former.)



● **Darth Vader**
http://pngimg.com/imgs/fantasy/darth_vader/

But the most compelling evidence that the Empire isn't evil comes in *The Empire Strikes Back* when Darth Vader is battling Luke Skywalker. After an exhausting fight, Vader is poised to finish Luke off, but he stays his hand. He tries to convert Luke to the Dark Side with this simple plea:

““ **There is no escape. Don't make me destroy you. . . Join me, and I will complete your training. With our combined strength, we can end this destructive conflict and bring order to the galaxy.”**

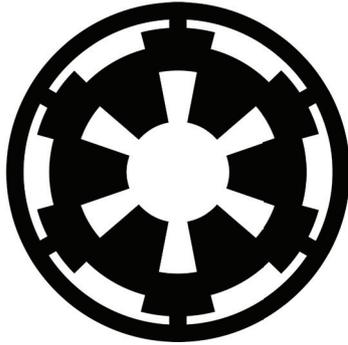
It is here we find the real controlling impulse for the Dark Side and the Empire. The Empire doesn't want slaves or destruction or “evil.” It wants order.

None of which is to say that the Empire isn't sometimes brutal. In Episode IV, Imperial storm-troopers kill Luke's aunt and uncle and Grand Moff Tarkin orders the destruction of an entire planet, Alderaan. But viewed in context, these acts are less brutal than they initially appear. Poor Aunt Beru and Uncle Owen reach a grisly end, but only after they aid the rebellion by hiding Luke and harboring two fugitive droids. They aren't given due process, but they are traitors. The destruction of Alderaan is often cited as ipso facto proof of the Empire's “evilness” because it seems like mass murder—planeticide, even. As Tarkin prepares to fire the Death Star, Princess Leia implores him to spare the planet, saying, “Alderaan is peaceful. We have no weap-

ons.” Her plea is important, if true. But the audience has no reason to believe that Leia is telling the truth. In Episode IV, every bit of information she gives the Empire is willfully untrue. In the opening, she tells Darth Vader that she is on a diplomatic mission of mercy, when in fact she is on a spy mission, trying to deliver schematics of the Death Star to the Rebel Alliance. When asked where the Alliance is headquartered, she lies again.

Leia's lies are perfectly defensible—she thinks she's serving the greater good—but they make her wholly unreliable on the question of whether or not Alderaan really is peaceful and defenseless. If anything, since Leia is a high-ranking member of the rebellion and the princess of Alderaan, it would be reasonable to suspect that Alderaan is a front for Rebel activity or at least home to many more spies and insurgents like Leia.

Whatever the case, the **important thing** to recognize is that the **Empire is not committing random acts of terror**. It is engaged in a **fight for the survival** of its regime **against a violent group of rebels** who are committed to its destruction.



■ AFTER THE REBELLION

As we all know from the final Star Wars installment, Return of the Jedi, the rebellion is eventually successful. The Emperor is assassinated, Darth Vader abdicates his post and dies, the central governing apparatus of the Empire is destroyed in a spectacular space battle, and the rebels rejoice with their small, annoying Ewok friends. But what happens next?

(There is a raft of literature on this point, but, as I said at the beginning, I'm going to ignore it because it doesn't speak to Lucas's original intent.)

In Episode IV, after Grand Moff Tarkin announces that the Imperial Senate has been abolished, he's asked how the Emperor can possibly hope to keep control of the galaxy. "The regional governors now have direct control over territories," he says.

“**Fear will keep the local systems in line.**”

So under Imperial rule, a large group of regional potentates, each with access to a sizable army and star destroyers, runs local affairs. These governors owe their fealty to the Emperor. And once the Emperor is dead, the galaxy will be plunged into chaos. In all of the time we spend observing the Rebel Alliance, we never hear of their governing strategy or their plans for a post-Imperial universe. All we see are plots and fighting. Their victory over the Empire doesn't liberate the galaxy—it turns the galaxy into Somalia writ large: dominated by local warlords who are answerable to no one. Which makes the rebels—Lucas's heroes—an unimpressive crew of anarchic royals who wreck the galaxy so that Princess Leia can have her tiara back.

“ I’ll take the
EMPIRE... ”

Galactic Empire Symbol ●
<https://www.pinterest.com/>



