

Darth Strikes Back

THE SITH IS ABOUT TO HIT THE FAN AS THE HEROES OF *STAR WARS REBELS* GET ON VADER'S RADAR

WORDS JAMES JENNINGS

TAKING ON A REBEL fleet single-handedly, setting fire to a settlement of people and almost making teenage hero Ezra behead himself with his own lightsaber: just a selection of the villainous badassery unleashed by Darth Vader in the *Star Wars Rebels* S2 movie-length opener *The Siege Of Lothal*. And while Sith does indeed get real, series showrunner Dave Filoni says audiences should only expect to see the masked menace sporadically: "I'm very cautious because he's a character you don't want to overplay and make common. He's pivotal to *Star Wars*, so you want to make sure you don't put him in a light that would diminish him in any way. That's why we wanted him to come across as so powerful — not just physically, but in a strategic way that our heroes aren't used to dealing with. He doesn't even look at [Jedis] Kanan and Ezra as obstacles — just a nuisance."

As with the films, Vader was voiced by James Earl Jones, an experience that thrilled Filoni. "It's fantastic! It was very surreal," he beams. "He hadn't performed the voice of Darth Vader in

10 years, and he said 'David, you'll have to walk me through this, I haven't done this in a while', and it's like 'James, you're doing it right now!' [Laughs] You just don't want anyone else playing Darth Vader, right? We were fortunate that he was so generous with his time and he brought some real gravitas to the show."

Besides Vader, *The Siege Of Lothal* also features an appearance from Lando

Calrissian (Billy Dee Williams). "It's always a possibility — we just have to do it in a way that's organic to the story and for a good reason," says Filoni when quizzed if more familiar faces will pop up in the show. "So far we've done that. When we did the Lando Calrissian episode in S1 it seemed like a pretty simple episode, but then you see it has important implications when it comes to

Above: Vader shows Kanan who's boss.

Above right: Chopper, Ezra, Kanan, Hera, Zeb and Sabine are back to cause more trouble for the Empire.





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the S2 opener.” Also confirmed for S2 are *Clones Wars* fan favourites Ahsoka Tano (Anakin’s former padawan) and clone trooper Captain Rex. “We had to learn who Ezra, Kanan, Hera, Sabine and Zeb were in S1, and now that we’re past that we can start to have more connective tissue characters from both the original trilogy and *The Clone Wars*,” says Filoni. “It’s bridging together two eras — *The Clone Wars* and *A New Hope* — and you start to better understand the time gap and how people have aged.”

With a new, ever-expanding *Star Wars* universe developing, eager fans want to if *Rebels* feature Easter eggs that connect it to upcoming films *The Force Awakens* and *Rogue One*. “Yes, and I don’t know if I’ve ever given such a direct answer,” Filoni reveals. “Things that are happening in *Rebels* are things that have happened in the same universe as *Rogue One* and *The Force Awakens*. So what we do on the show has real repercussions for those, and vice versa. That’s why I’m constantly in touch and working with the Lucasfilm story team and why I’ve spoken to Rian [Johnson, Episode VIII director] and Gareth [Edwards, *Rogue One* director] and J.J.

[Abrams] about stuff and keep up to date on what they’re doing, because we all want to have this interconnected thing.”

Although he’s enjoying playing in the space that exists between *Episode III* and *IV*, Filoni says it comes with unique challenges. “We’re in between films, which is a tricky thing because you’re not trying to upset one thing or the other,” he says. “J.J. is on, I guess you could say, the fun end because he’s out there 30 years after everything, so he’s got a lot of room to expand into. There can be one or two lines from the prequels or *The Clone Wars* or the original trilogy that can sink an idea that we’re trying to do [on *Rebels*] because we have to be beholden to it for continuity. It just makes you be creative in figuring out ways to get around things. Obviously with *The Force Awakens* forging ahead you wanna give that as much room as possible to be creative — you don’t want to limit that with something we’re doing. But it’s hard to imagine that happening because it’s set so far after us, and that’s been beneficial.”

STAR WARS REBELS SEASON 2 PREMIERES ON DISNEY XD AT 8:30AM, SUNDAY OCTOBER 18.

Guardians Of The Galaxy

GROOT AND CO. GET ANIMATED

Was the animated series greenlit after GOTG was a hit? Marvel felt very confident about how unique the film was and its prospects, even though the audience had no idea who the characters were. About a year before the movie’s release I read the script and I was really into the characters — they were so funny. The songs were listed in the script, so I would play them as I was reading, and I just went crazy for it. So we began working on it a while ago.

The film’s humour gets raunchy at times — how does that adapt for an animated show?

The best humour in the movie I think is character driven, so we’ve been focussed on delivering that. How the characters get along, or mostly don’t get along. I think of the show as an action comedy. We’re targeting it toward kids, but we believe fans of all ages will like the show.

Are there any storylines and characters you can’t touch because of *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 2*?

No, because we were writing the scripts when they were still working on the first film. We incorporate a lot of characters from the movie, including some cameos — like Cosmo, who’s the Russian cosmonaut dog with telepathic and telekinetic powers. Nothing was off limits. We stay close to the film’s continuity, but aren’t exactly in the same continuity — we can tell our own stories.

Will there be any ‘70s music?

Yes! I was given a library of 800 songs from the ‘70s to pick from, which I whittled down. It’s the most fun I’ve ever had working on a series. JJ

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY WILL PREMIERE ON DISNEY XD SUNDAY NOVEMBER 9 AT 8AM.

