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The Mileage of the Weary Father: Harrison Ford as Aging Screen Action Icon

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ABSTRACT

THE MILEAGE OF THE WEARY FATHER: HARRISON FORD AS AGING SCREEN ACTION ICON

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This thesis explores how fatherhood guides cinematic narratives of aging masculinity through a star study of the late-stage career of Harrison Ford. It bridges fundamental cultural studies of masculinity, such as those by Raewyn Connell and Michael Kimmel, with film studies to provide key insights into cultural narratives of maleness related to vulnerability, heroism, and most significantly, fatherhood. By focusing on Ford's late-career reprisal of his iconic characters, I explore how the development of his image provides a postmillennial recontextualization of twentieth century masculine iconography. This study covers three cinematic texts: *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008), *Star Wars Episode VII: The Force Awakens* (2015), and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017). The *Crystal Skull* chapter addresses how an aging Indiana Jones both succeeds and fails at adapting to the film's nostalgic 1950s American society, using masculinity studies from the 1950s, 1980s, and 2000s as context for Jones's transition into a father and seeming embrace of the nuclear family concept. The analysis of *Force Awakens* explores the failure of Ford's older Han Solo to embrace the nuclear family, through the corruption of his son to the Dark Side. Solo's sacrifice illustrates his acceptance of his failures as a father and aging man, examining a darker question of male legacy. Finally, the discussion of *Blade Runner* reconciles the former two films' ultimate failure to successfully adapt Ford's iconic characters into the father role by giving Rick Deckard a true chance at

redemption through his reunion with his long-lost daughter, essentially challenging the gender ideologies of the other two films, which focus on the theme of male heirs. In total, by providing an expanded gender context for Ford's recent films, my study examines how these productions address aging stardom through the theme of postmillennial fatherhood.

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THE MILEAGE OF THE WEARY FATHER: HARRISON FORD AS AGING
SCREEN ACTION ICON

BY

BAHNT FREIBERGER
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INTRODUCTION

Harrison Ford's persona, both on and off screen, is that of a man who does not mince words. In a 2017 interview for *GQ* by Chris Heath, he suggests his teenage son Malcolm would "kill [him]. Now. In my *sleep*" if he found out that Ford mentioned something about him in public. Ford consented to at least have the anecdote printed, "Just so he knows I'm thinking of him." In keeping with this straight-taking persona, Ford keeps the conversation simple as he shares his thoughts on his distinguished acting career, describing his talent as "storytelling" and liking to "hear a good story or a good joke." As of late, those good stories happen to involve the reprisals of some of Ford's most iconic roles, which correspond to the actor's increasing age. When questioned on the matter, all Ford can say is "You know, it's ... better than bowling" (Heath, *GQ*). Ford's distinctly American persona makes him one of the most durable actors to emerge from the 20th Century, with his star power never really diminishing since his emergence in the late 1970s. Having risen to fame as Han Solo in the original *Star Wars* trilogy (1977-1983) and the archeologist Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), Ford went on to show incredible range as an actor, starring in everything from tense dramas like *Witness* (1985) to comic romances such as *Sabrina* (1995) and more serious action roles such as *Air Force One* (1997). Known just as much for his avoidance of the press as he is for his iconic roles as Solo, Jones, or Officer Rick Deckard in *Blade Runner* (1982), Ford is both an enigmatic and fascinating actor whose roles have captured the imagination of entire generations. In the

hallowed halls of cinema, Ford's star was forged by characters who were cynical, tenacious, and above all vulnerable; as Indiana Jones once said, "It's not the years, honey, it's the mileage." This mantra could be easily applied to all of Ford's characters, if not Ford himself. At seventy-six years old, Ford shows no signs of slowing down, never letting his age affect his onscreen visibility or his abilities as an actor. This is seen most readily in his reprisals across the last decade of the three roles that made him famous (Jones, Solo, and Deckard), beginning in 2008 with *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* and following up with 2015's *Star Wars Episode VII: The Force Awakens* and 2017's *Blade Runner 2049*. While the novelty of seeing Ford return to his iconic roles is a primary driving force behind all three films, what is interesting about these narratives is how they reintroduce the once-independent characters as father figures, all while addressing each character's age.

The transitions of Jones, Solo, and Deckard into aging fathers encapsulates the image Ford has cultivated throughout his late career, one that takes into account the actor's transformation from the action roles of the '70s and '80s to the sensitive "New Man" figures of the '90s. By choosing to reprise these roles, Ford is recontextualizing his own image as an actor, a father, and a man, drawing on the masculine iconography that made him a star in the '80s and combining it with the increasing sensitivity he displayed in the '90s. In this past decade of the 21st Century, Ford's characters age in the same way he has, bridging disparate representations of onscreen white masculinity. In effect, Ford's developing image provides a postmillennial recontextualization of twentieth-century masculine iconography. Harrison Ford's return to the roles of Indiana Jones, Han Solo, and Rick Deckard will thus serve as a case study for how his

masculine persona is affected by the aging process, seen primarily through the lens of fatherhood.

The case study of Ford's late-stage career will guide this thesis in its exploration of aging white masculinities in cinema. Important masculinity studies by such scholars as Michael Kimmel, Raewyn Connell, Steve Cohan, Donna Peberdy, and Susan Jeffords will help contextualize the various cultural narratives surrounding masculinity. Themes of vulnerability, masculine heroism, and fatherhood will be primarily addressed, with particular emphasis on the role of the father in defining one's worth as a man. This thesis will therefore analyze the three aforementioned films to provide a thorough overview of Ford's later career reprisals of his most iconic roles. Five chapters will compose the study, with the first exploring Ford's Hollywood career from its beginnings to the present, and the second exploring the context of aging masculinity and star studies. Each of the last three chapters will focus on the cultural context and analysis of a specific film. The first of these chapters will address *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, complete with an analytical view of the film's 1950s setting and how it connects to the themes of the 1980s and 2000s. This chapter will address how Jones adapts to the 1950s through his embracing of the nuclear family. The following chapter will analyze *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, meditating on the failures of the nuclear family concept as seen through the falling out between Solo and his son, Kylo Ren. Such a meditation will illustrate Solo's ultimate acceptance of his inability to be a proper father, continuing the franchise tradition of exploring patriarchal legacy. The final chapter will provide a contextual analysis of film noir leading into a reading of *Blade Runner 2049*, wherein Deckard reconciles

Ford's previous two personae by receiving a second chance at fatherhood through a reunion with his daughter, contrasting against the father-son themes of the last two films.

Together, the three films act as an extended cinematic narrative charting Ford's discovery of being a father, his emasculation through failing as a father, and his re-masculinization through a second chance to be a father, allowing him to renew his identity as a modern man. This narrative is important for not only characterizing Ford as a man and an actor, but for its illustration of the process by which aging actors negotiate their worth to a rapidly changing industry. The theme of fatherhood is paramount to understanding the ways in which aging affects white masculine identity in America, which is embodied through Ford. His real-life prioritizing of family over career plays into this; not only does Ford project his identity as a father onscreen, but with his actual family. As Ford approaches eighty, with reportedly another Indiana Jones film looming, an analysis of the ways in which he reconciles his youthful personae with age is even more pressing, given the importance of the aging process to every Hollywood actor's gendered identity and overall star appeal.

CHAPTER 1

THE LIFE, CAREER, AND PERSONA OF HARRISON FORD

Born in 1942, Harrison Ford grew up in the Chicagoland area before attending Ripon College in Wisconsin, where he developed an interest in theater. Despite his growing interest in acting, Ford was not a good student and dropped out in 1964, just prior to graduation. That summer, Ford joined the Belfry Players theater company in Lake Geneva, WI, before moving to California in the fall with his fiancé Mary Marquardt, a fellow Ripon student (Jenkins 1-62). Early in his career, Ford took on several small movie roles, but eventually taught himself carpentry to support his wife and two young sons (97). Ford's friend, casting director/producer Fred Roos, believed in Ford's acting ability and encouraged him to try out for the part of Bob Falfa in George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973). Ford got the part, beginning a working relationship with Lucas and his mentor Francis Ford Coppola, who cast him for a small role in 1974's *The Conversation* (106, 111). When Lucas began casting for *Star Wars*, Roos asked Harrison to build a new doorway for the offices at American Zoetrope, Lucas and Coppola's co-run film company. It was Roos' way of getting Ford to audition for the part of Han Solo, described in Lucas's script as "a tough James Dean-style starpilot, a cowboy in a starship: simple, sentimental, and cocksure" (116). At the time, Lucas was getting frustrated with his inability to find the right actor for the part. After seeing Harrison continue building his doorway, Lucas eventually asked him to audition, and realized he had found his man (118-119). Given the

two already had a working relationship, Ford and Lucas understood each other. Lucas admired Ford's "sly intelligence," while Ford, knowing his director could take a joke, often railed against the dialogue, once saying "You can type this shit, George, but you sure can't say it" (119, 121). The success of *Star Wars* made Ford into an overnight celebrity, but all the while, his home life began to deteriorate. Ford separated from his first wife Mary, owing to the pressures of Hollywood and his increased traveling (141, 145). By the winter of 1978, Harrison had begun a relationship with scriptwriter Melissa Mathison (145).

Ford agonized over whether to reprise the role of Han Solo in 1980's *The Empire Strikes Back*, since he had not signed a multi-picture contract and was worried about being typecast, and despite the guaranteed success of the film (150). Ultimately, Ford returned to the role, while also trying for the part of Indiana Jones in Lucas and Spielberg's joint 1981 project *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Ford was not Lucas and Spielberg's first choice, which was Tom Selleck (159-160). When Selleck could not take the role, Ford stepped in, asking for Jones's dialogue to be changed so he would not "become some kind of Professor Solo!" (161). The dailies on *Raiders* caught the attention of director Ridley Scott, fresh off 1979's *Alien*, who was looking for a leading man for his next project, the Phillip K. Dick adaptation *Blade Runner*, released in 1982. Ford took the role after playing Jones, after which he prepared to work on the third (and at the time final) *Star Wars* film, 1983's *Return of the Jedi*. All the while, he attempted to find time to spend with his two young sons, Willard and Ben. At the time, Ford exclaimed, "I think — I like to think — I'm a fun dad." Despite this exclamation, Jenkins describes Ford's expression as hiding "an enduring sense of sadness and failure" (172). Following *Jedi*, Ford returned to the Indiana Jones franchise in 1984's *Temple of Doom*, wherein Jones temporarily became a father figure to young Short

Round. In real life, Ford would become a father again through Mathison, with a son Malcolm born in 1987 and his first daughter, Georgia, born in 1990 (223, 253).

Heading into the 1990s, Ford saw his film roles begin to shift away from more popular Blockbuster fare into more challenging and intellectual parts. By the time his daughter was born, Ford was working on *Regarding Henry* (1991), playing a work-obsessed lawyer who bonds with his family and comes to appreciate domestic life, all after receiving amnesia. As this shows, Ford was already shifting towards becoming a man more centered on his real-life family, and this is reflected in the roles he was taking on. Some of his film output from the 1980s reflected this as well, including Peter Weir's 1985 film *Witness*. Writing in *Acting for America: Movies of the 1980s*, Adam Knee proclaims that *Witness* “[showed Ford’s] ability to skillfully control, maneuver, and adjust himself to function well in a number of disparate contexts, and to reconcile being at once upholder of the system and renegade; to be man of violence and man of thought and emotion, object of female desire and possessor of fatherly (and husbandly) qualities” (168-69). Knee sees *Witness*, about police officer John Book going into witness protection in an Amish community, as indicative of Ford’s screen persona contrasting with the more rugged masculinity of cinematic action heroes seen in the Reagan era, such as Stallone and Schwarzenegger. Knee specifically states that Ford’s persona is defined by a “controlling and tempering [of] excessively macho traits,” both in the diegetic characters he plays and in the extradiegetic varying of his career through the roles he accepts, thereby differentiating him from other contemporary action heroes (160-61).

Yet despite this difference, even in roles such as Solo and Jones, Knee stresses that Ford still embodied a nostalgic form of American masculinity, in line with the Reaganite ethos. The

Indiana Jones and *Star Wars* films, according to Knee, projected a spirit of “exploration, acquisition, and conquest ... aligned with Reagan-era conceptions of America as an ascendant economic power,” all despite the “tempered machismo” of Ford’s characters not properly aligning with other kinds of action heroes (161). Susan Jeffords elaborates on this specific breed of onscreen action hero, and its ties to the socio-political state of the 1980s embodied in Reagan. Jeffords explains that Reagan’s administration created a sense of foreign and domestic American policy that promoted a tougher breed of man. She states that the overtly muscular bodies of Stallone’s Rambo and Schwarzenegger’s Terminator in the Reagan years “offered the image of a ‘hard body’ to contrast directly to the ‘soft bodies’ of the Carter years” (Jeffords 13). Yet by the late 1980s and early 1990s, the hard body had undergone what Jeffords called a “reevaluation, [creating] a rearticulation of masculine strength and power through internal, personal, and family-oriented values,” specifically through the overlapping of “the hard body and the ‘sensitive family man’ ... dependent on the centrality of fatherhood” (13). For Jeffords, this rearticulation was timed with the transition of power from Reagan to Bush, with conservative anxieties played out on screen in narratives wherein the son must take on the burdens of the father and in turn protect him (67). With such anxieties over transitions of power and family values (specifically, fatherhood) playing out on both a political and cinematic level, Ford’s transition away from blockbusters like Jones and *Star Wars* mirrored both his own personal life changes and, more significantly, the gender ideologies of Reagan era America.

Following *Witness*, Ford truly began transitioning into more intellectual and dramatic fare in the late 1980s, transforming into a more overt onscreen father figure in his 1990s roles. Such late ‘80s roles included 1986’s *The Mosquito Coast*, with Ford playing a darker variation of the

family man who holds his family hostage in Central America, and 1988's *Frantic*, a suspense film where he plays a surgeon whose wife gets lost in Paris. Even a return to the Indiana Jones series in 1989's *The Last Crusade* came with a renewed focus on fatherhood, with the character reconciling with his father, played by Sean Connery. Ford bolstered his off-screen transformation into a committed family man with Mathison and his two new children through his onscreen roles as a "New Man" of the 1990s. This is seen in films such as 1990's *Presumed Innocent*, where Ford plays a prosecutor who drops a murder case to keep his family together, and *Regarding Henry*, whose amnesiac plot makes the film the most blatant attempt to domesticate the actor. Both Knee and Jeffords were careful to notice that the "New Man" of the 1990s could still be tough, but was now retroactively given "feelings ... [while] actually being self-destructive" (Jeffords 145). This was owing to men who focused too much on their careers at the expense of their families, becoming a cautionary tale for men going into the decade whose masculine identities were defined by fatherhood (144).

The link between violence and vulnerability in Ford's '90s career is noted by Virginia Luzon-Aguado, who states that this link is key to understanding Ford's Jack Ryan character in 1992's *Patriot Games* and 1994's *Clear and Present Danger*, where Ryan suffers due to "dramatic disruptions" in his family life (Luzon-Aguado 248). Vulnerability and violence being juxtaposed as a result of an inability to balance family life is also seen in 1997's *Air Force One*, where, playing the president, his character must save his family from terrorists hijacking the titular plane. As the decade continues, other films foreground Ford's onscreen midlife crisis at the expense of an ambivalence towards his cinematic families, as seen in films like 1997's *The Devil's Own* and 1999's *Random Hearts*, where the former sees Ford bond with a young man

outside his family and the latter has him discover his late wife was having an affair (249-250). The increased focus on fatherhood and family themes, coupled with character arcs revolving around midlife crises, thereby correspond with Ford's actual increasing age, coloring his roles going into the 21st century.

During the 2000s, Ford's mid-life crisis was fully seen off the screen as well as on it, not only in his choice of roles but in his 2004 divorce from Mathison, following their legal separation in 2001 (Mike Haederle, *People Magazine*). Luzon-Aguado explains that the 2000s found Ford facing "a more complex, self-conscious treatment of his heroic image and a closer focus on the unavoidable effects that aging has had on his persona" (250). After turning sixty in 2002, Ford embraced his newfound bachelorhood with "an infamous drunken spree in Mexico [and] and equally infamous earring," in addition to seeing younger women, culminating in a long-term relationship with actress Calista Flockhart (251). Ford met Flockhart during the 2002 Golden Globes, and after an eight-year relationship, married her in 2010 on the set of *Cowboys and Aliens*, making her his third and current wife (Haederle). Together they have an adopted son, Liam, the last of Ford's five children across his three marriages.

As an aging leading man, Ford spent much of the 2000s grappling with diminishing box-office returns and failed attempts to break out of his well-worn onscreen persona. With the exceptions of 2000's *What Lies Beneath*, which "exploited [his] largely unexplored dark side" by having him play a professor who kills a student he was having an affair with, and 2008's Indiana Jones reprisal in *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (both of which were sizable box office hits), Ford spent much of the decade in films that did not connect with audiences (Luzon-Aguado 251). These included 2002's *K-19: The Widowmaker*, 2003's *Hollywood Homicide*, and 2006's

Firewall, in which Ford's attempts to play a Russian officer, an aging cop, and a computer hacker, respectively, were negatively received (254-57). During this time, Ford's age became a new focus for audiences and critics, since he was now well beyond the leading roles of his youth. However, Philippa Gates notes that Ford's age only started concerning critics once his films became box office flops (284). This correlation between Ford's age and diminishing box office returns leads Luzon-Aguado to speculate on the present and future of Ford's career. According to Luzon-Aguado, Ford's failures in the 2000s may have forced him to take on more popular roles in the 2010s to renew his iconic persona, but with his advancing age, she suggests that he will eventually become more of a character actor than a leading man (262-263). This seems to be supported by some of Ford's roles in the early 2010s, including a string of five films in 2013 and 2014, consisting of supporting roles in *42*, *Paranoia*, *Ender's Game*, *Anchorman 2*, and *Expendables 3* (257). However, this statement was made prior to Ford's critical and commercial success for reprising Solo and Deckard, showing his continued commitment to acting in more noteworthy films even as he continues to age. Luzon-Aguado notes that Ford is committed to expressing himself through his characters, under the belief that audiences can discover who he is through the roles he plays (254). Given Ford's own attempts to connect his personas on and off-screen, his acting choices reflect his own development as a late 20th century and early 21st century white man.

CHAPTER 2

AGING MASCULINITIES, FATHERHOOD, AND MALE STARDOM

Sociological definitions of masculinity, especially white masculinity, are intertwined with notions of aging and fatherhood. Yet this is complicated by the fact that “masculinity,” as a concept, changes depending on the society and period of history. One constant, however, is the notion of hegemonic masculinity – or a masculine ideal that dominates other forms, such as white, heterosexual masculinity dominating homosexual or ethnic variations. As outlined by Raewyn Connell in *Masculinities*, hegemonic masculinity legitimizes patriarchal societies, elevating men while subordinating women (77). Societal and technological advancements in the 20th Century challenged the hegemonic masculinity, however, creating what Connell calls a “crisis tendency.” Such tendencies involve men becoming angry or confused regarding what is considered masculine, leading to their attempts to restore their threatened masculine ideal (84). These crisis tendencies can play out on micro and macro scales, affecting individual men as well as entire patriarchal societies.

Such tendencies are also impacted by aging, with age often affecting societal perceptions of masculinity and femininity. David Jackson explains that Western societies force ageist stereotypes onto older men, devaluing them as “official, old farts” who are “angry, messy or miserable” (8). Western media perpetuates these myths by equating old age with a loss of

humanity and vitality, transforming the aging process for men into a struggle to hold onto their sense of masculinity (8). Often, these ageist perceptions of older men create a dichotomy between the old and young, wherein aging men are discouraged from performing youthful activities and must reconcile, via atonement, mistakes from their younger days (9). This ageism affects men of all backgrounds, even those belonging to a perceived hegemonic masculine ideal. In such cases, these privileged white, wealthy, heterosexual men are, relative to their past hegemonic positioning, stigmatized due to their increasing age, marked by “bodily fragility and loss of sexual potency,” leading to a reduction in social power and status (10-11). In his book *Masculinities and Culture*, John Beynon emphasizes how manhood is affected by the aging process. “Masculinity is positioned in time in two senses: it changes *around* the individual man and *for him* as he ages” (17). Masculinity is therefore redefined and renegotiated as men age. These aging men undergo personal crisis tendencies, as they grapple with their manhood in a society that worships youth and stigmatizes aging.

Nowhere is this phenomenon more common than in the realm of media, especially Hollywood, where film stars of both genders must develop their unique on and off-screen personas as they age. Sally Chivers explains how early Hollywood’s use of young workers conditioned the industry into focusing on youthful narratives at the expense of older actors. While this obsession with youth remains, the continued presence of iconic actors from the Boomer generation, including Ford, is challenging these notions and changing the marketability of aging actors. This phenomenon is especially apparent with the start of the new millennium, where an increased awareness of the aging Boomer population led to social anxieties about getting old. These anxieties are reflected in several films featuring aging as a central theme,

which Chivers calls the “silvering screen” (xv-xvi). Elaborating on such films as *Wild Strawberries* (1957), *All About Eve* (1950), and *Cocoon* (1985), Chivers explains that “silvering screen” narratives de-emphasize middle age as an important stage of the life cycle, focusing instead on older people reminiscing about an unfulfilled life. These protagonists equate a loss of their youth with regrets and failures from their early days, longing to be young again so that they may take a different path in life (xvi-xvii). By foregrounding age through the visibility of their venerable protagonists, “silvering screen” films attempt to normalize the aging experience, thereby making their stars into palatable products and allowing audiences to see both the drawbacks and benefits of aging (7). Regarding aging male stars, Chivers states that such films exaggerate their masculinity to compensate for their fading manhood, thereby inflating the social anxieties about losing one’s masculinity with age. Part of this exaggerated masculinity involves grandiose romantic pairings, giving older men a sense of romantic entitlement even into their later years (99-100). Such cinematic exaggerations are tied into patriarchal systems, wherein older men maintain their authorial status while also rebelling against these very systems, thereby aging while keeping their masculinity (100). This concept allows “silvering screen” films to adopt a “Yes, we can” ethos, wherein aging males must assert their power to maintain their fading relevancy. In doing so, aging male characters in “silvering screen” narratives show off their fragile natures, since their compulsion to announce their prowess reveals how aging has diminished their masculine status (101).

With onscreen males facing the socially-perceived “crisis” of growing old, one way to reconcile the aging process is to equate masculinity with fatherhood. Stella Bruzzi illustrates the historical perceptions of fatherhood in her book *Bringing Up Daddy*, focusing on how each

decade after World War II changed the standard for the ideal father. According to her, the 1950s espoused traditional values, which were broken down in the 1960s and 1970s, rebuilt in the 1980s, and then become more relaxed in the 1990s and 2000s. The 1950s glorified conservatism through film narratives about assertive fathers from bygone eras like the Old West, who ruled not just their family farms but the countryside at large (ix-x). Westerns of the '50s took on Oedipal tones, with sons looking to grow beyond the fathers they “wish both to reject and to emulate” (50). These Oedipal themes culminated in narratives about the dying father; Tennessee Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) is one such example, wherein a dying father must grapple with his son’s mistakes while pondering how his own father died happy for having his son beside him (62). The father-son narrative took precedence in films of the '50s; father-daughter pairings were common in the 1940s but faded out by the following decade to focus on more masculine themes (66). These themes were reflected again in the national discourse surrounding fatherhood in the 1980s, a rejection of the nurturing fathers who emerged amid the social movements of the '60s and '70s. Daniel Marcus expands on this in *Happy Days and Wonder Years*, exploring the cultural perception of the '50s amid the rapid societal changes of the preceding decades of the '60s, '70s, and '80s. Conservatives and liberals looked to the '50s and '60s, respectively, as high points for American culture, either for the 1950s’ economic prosperity or the 1960s’ social progression (9). Such perceptions affected the socio-political movements of the 1980s, with Reagan espousing a return to the more conservative ideals of the '50s as a rejection of the movements of the '60s. This rejection was based on a perceived weakness in post-1960s American culture, with “the dissolution of families, a descent into hedonism and irresponsibility, and a disordering of natural hierarchies and social roles” (Marcus 37). Part of recontextualizing

the nuclear family was emphasizing the role of suburbia, characterized by Nathan Holmes as “an expressionistic backdrop” (251). The suburbs, according to Holmes, project an air of nostalgia but also communicate their ultimate failure; today they “represent a mass-produced sameness, an utterly failed utopian project,” where people could “*play* at being a family” in an environment made for the nuclear family ideal (251-52).

When considering white masculinity in the late 20th and early 21st century, of course, other screen stars also prove noteworthy. For example, Clint Eastwood, as Dennis Bingham writes, embodies the fragility of gendered identities; like all men in Westerns, he must “repeatedly re-earn” his masculinity (117). Donna Peberdy’s *Masculinity in Film Performance* reaffirms Eastwood’s frailty by associating his aging with “weakness and vulnerability,” the result of a “*loss* of power, real or perceived” that comes with growing old, as seen in a film performance like *Gran Torino* (2008), where Eastwood’s Korean War veteran confronts such issues (151). By the time Eastwood was old enough to confront these anxieties in his own films, cinematic masculinity had shifted from the “hard bodied” action heroes of the 1980s into the more sensitive men of the 1990s, seen primarily through a new re-emphasis on fatherhood (Jeffords 166). With the public discourse increasingly shifting towards sensitivity in the 1990s and 2000s, the onscreen male heroes of prior decades began making their grand returns, now plagued by the anxieties of aging and fatherhood. These heroes found themselves in films that “explore the problems that arise when the will is strong but the flesh not so, when fathers have grown apart from their children, and when lone heroes can no longer fight evil on their own” (Gates 277). In such narratives, the actors find themselves more vulnerable than their characters were in the ‘80s, thereby matching contemporary definitions of masculine heroism even as they

are “undervalued because of their age” (Gates 278). Aside from Ford and Clint Eastwood, these heroes include Bruce Willis’s John McClane and Sylvester Stallone’s Rocky Balboa. Both are thrust into films that drag their aging characters from the 1980s into the modern day, where Balboa and McClane must contend with their grown-up children all while struggling with whether they can still be the men they were in their youth (Gates 281, 283). For example, 2007’s *Live Free or Die Hard* specifically argues that McClane’s role in the modern world is to mentor the new generation of heroes, thereby becoming a role model not just to younger audiences, but also to their middle-aged parents (Gates 283).

Hannah Hamad elaborates further on these aging comeback films in *Postfeminism and Paternity in Contemporary U.S. Film: Framing Fatherhood*. She explains that modern society diminishes star power based on aging, so adding fatherhood to an aging male star’s masculinity helps recontextualize their stardom and renew their marketability. This allows stars like Willis and Ford to keep up with younger, more emotionally sensitive actors such as Johnny Depp, Brad Pitt, and Leonardo DiCaprio (Hamad 70). Specifically, Hamad states that two benefits exist for aging stars renewing their personas through fatherhood: “First, it enables the staging of credible reentries into the star landscape, rendering them economically viable industry prospects. Second, postfeminist fatherhood as ideal masculinity enables the aging process to be efficaciously negotiated” (Hamad 71). Such benefits help restore the popularity of iconic actors to a youthful public that has seemingly moved beyond them, allowing these stars to gain new followings in a society that has radically shifted away from the hard-bodied masculinity of the 1980s. In place of Reaganist philosophies, the 21st century has embraced a new masculine ideal, where a man can reaffirm his masculinity through sensitive fatherhood (Hamad 75, 152).

Sociologist Michael Kimmel discusses the father's role in modern American society as key to understanding modern standards of white maleness, writing that "Contemporary American men do more housework and more child care than any generation of American men has ever done. They are the most involved fathers in history," as opposed to men of the 1950s, for whom "Kids were a headache, a responsibility, a drain — rarely a joy" (*Angry White Men* 139-140). When modern men get divorced, they still "feel a massive amount of love and devotion toward their children," although the presence of the father in his children's lives post-divorce will depend on his relationship with the ex-spouse, as "being an involved dad means being a good husband — even after the divorce" (142, 157). Ultimately, the modern test of masculinity for men in both marriage and divorce is to commit to their children, now that fatherhood is a primary standard for modern hegemonic masculinity. As Kimmel states, "American men have started to come home They gradually, and without fanfare or struggle, drifted into more egalitarian relationships because they love their wives, partners, and children" (*Manhood in America* 294).

While Kimmel focuses on the shift to fatherhood on a societal scale, his studies can be applied to Harrison Ford's career trajectory as well. As men began transitioning into this new form of masculinity beginning in the 1990s, continuing through the 2000s, and culminating in the 2010s, Harrison Ford's own on and off-screen transformation into a sensitive father figure reflects the shift in societal perceptions of the masculine ideal. Beginning with *Crystal Skull* in 2008, Ford began reprising his iconic roles, reviving his career by allowing him to reconcile his latter "family man" persona of the 1990s with the early roles of his youth. While this reconciliation began onscreen in 2008, it did not end there, as Ford's career revival has continued up through the 2010s, culminating with his reprisals of Solo and Deckard in *Force Awakens* and

Blade Runner 2049. While a gap of seven years exists between Ford's revival of Jones and Solo, the two films ultimately approach his characters in similar ways, as does *Blade Runner* with Deckard. The three films form a dialogue with each other, since through his resurrection of iconic roles, Ford has bridged his young and old personas to comment on the transformative power of fatherhood on his identity as an aging man. The remainder of this thesis will be devoted to showing the dialog between the three films, first by analyzing each respective franchise and character, and then by illustrating how Ford's older variation on the role engages the franchise narrative and the larger body of Ford's work. In doing so, this thesis will illuminate how Ford's characters reflect his own growth as an actor and an aging man, thanks to his embracing of fatherhood as a cornerstone of modern perceptions of masculine identity.

CHAPTER 3

“WHY DON’T YOU STICK AROUND, JUNIOR?”: INDIANA JONES AND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY IN *INDIANA JONES AND THE KINGDOM OF THE CRYSTAL SKULL* (2008)

Ford returned to his famous fedora on May 22, 2008, a full nineteen years since the last time he played the iconic archaeologist. While a box office hit, the film seemed to signal the last time Ford would step into the shoes of Dr. Henry Jones, Jr. And yet, with Disney’s acquisition of Lucasfilm in 2012, a new Indiana Jones film is on the horizon, currently dated for July 9, 2021. Ford and Spielberg will return, with a script currently being rewritten by Jon Kasdan, the son of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* screenwriter Lawrence Kasdan (D’Alessandro, *Deadline*). If the film holds to this date, it will have been a full thirteen years between adventures, almost as long of a gap as the one between *Last Crusade* and *Crystal Skull*. Much like his fourth outing, Ford’s fifth turn as Jones is facing a backlash to the idea of an elderly man playing a youthful adventurer. Two journalists writing for *The Guardian* have their own views on the controversy. Ben Child believes that the best way forward for the franchise is to introduce a younger actor in a series of flashbacks, while Ford handles a more modern storyline. This would provide a way for Ford to retire his version of the character, while another actor takes over (Child). Catherine Shoard takes a different stance, arguing that action set pieces are not the main draw of the franchise. Instead, the appeal is “Ford’s grizzled charisma ... [since]

all this can be done just as easily at 77 as 37. Just as academia is not a young person's game, neither is archaeology" (Shoard).

Both sides of the debate make valid points; Ford's persona makes the character endearing, but the fantasy of Indiana Jones runs far deeper than just one man's portrayal. Jones's iconography owes just as much to American cinematic mythology as it does to Ford. Delia Konzett states Indiana Jones is "a comic-book superhero with cinematic ingredients of the Western cowboy, the film-noir mobster, the epic adventurer and the patriotic combat soldier. This blend turns him into a truly invincible American action hero" (Maria Puente, *USA Today*). Jones's creator, George Lucas, describes him as "a classic movie archetype," who is endearing because actors like Clark Gable or Humphrey Bogart could have portrayed him just as well as Ford (Jim Windolf, *Vanity Fair*). Ultimately, Lucas cites Jones's vulnerability as the key to his character's success. It is this vulnerability that makes Jones an archetypal hero, but it also makes him a perfect fit for Ford's sensibilities. Regarding his goals for the character, Ford explains that he "[wanted] to allow the audience to see his fear, to have a chance to see him work his way through the problem, not to be one of those characters that you know is going to succeed" (Windolf).

Ford exudes this vulnerability across the entire *Indiana Jones* franchise, beginning with *Raiders*. Adam Knee's chapter on Ford in *Acting for America* analyzes Jones's relationships with Karen Allen's Marion Ravenwood in *Raiders* and Jonathan Ke Quan's Short Round in *Temple*. Knee finds that Jones's treatment of Ravenwood as not just a romantic partner but an equal is indicative of his vulnerable heroism, while with Short Round, Jones's vulnerability comes from his caring for the boy after developing a strong fatherly bond with him (164, 167). With *Last*

Crusade, Knee notes how Ford's maturing as an actor plays into his approach to Jones. Rather than have women go after him as in the first two films, Jones is now immediately attracted to his new female colleague, Dr. Elsa Schneider (Alison Doody), while also developing an Oedipal relationship with his father upon learning that he was involved with her. The new relationships play into the film's deeper exploration of Jones's motivations and feelings, highlighting both the character's and the actor's growing maturity (176-177). This vulnerability is also reflected in Jones's father, Henry, Sr., (Sean Connery) who is presented as a brilliant if distant archaeologist who has trouble connecting with his son. On a quest for the Holy Grail, Henry Jones Junior and Senior find that their actual goal is reconciliation, as Indiana quests for a true reunion with his aloof father (Bruzzi 136).

Such familial themes of reconciliation and father-son bonding are explored again in *Crystal Skull*, only now recontextualized through Indy's own adoption of the father role. Now, the film foregrounds Ford's aging in order to make it a key aspect of the story; despite Jones's archetypal nature, the filmmakers strongly felt that he could not be separated from Ford (Luzon-Aguado 258). This does not bother Ford, who according to Sally Chivers is "happy to 'look' old as long as he is seen to 'act' young... His insistence demonstrates that, to him, aging successfully means continuing to achieve physical feats not common even for the average younger person" (xi-xii). This statement corresponds with Chivers' assertion that onscreen aging masculinity exaggerates physical feats, to downplay the increasing vulnerability that comes with aging. *Crystal Skull* mixes the use of physicality and vulnerability in its portrayal of an aging Jones, making Ford's "'creakiness' as an action figure," reunion with a similarly aged Marion Ravenwood, and building of a family into key points that underscore the film's themes of aging

fatherhood (Gates 284, 285-286). The “underappreciated middle-aged [and] senior-citizen parent” is thus transformed into another form of heroic masculinity through the film’s narrative (Gates 288). Through the specific act of becoming a father, Jones’s aging is given a more positive context, signifying that onscreen aging is acceptable if fatherhood comes with it (Hamad 82). These themes are emphasized not just through Jones’s acceptance of fatherhood, but through the film’s 1957 setting, utilizing period views of masculinity and fatherhood to build Jones’s character.

Such period views differ from the values later decades would ascribe to the 1950s. Daniel Marcus explains that 1950s’ culture was “appropriated” beginning in the 1970s, becoming “recirculated as a self-conscious dredging up of the past ... [to embody] a time of youth, innocence, and security” (9-10). This appropriation was a reaction to the political upheavals of the 1960s and the need for a more stable political climate in the 1970s, speaking to how one decade’s culture can be repurposed for the needs of another. The ‘50s continued to function as safe cultural nostalgia through the following decades, but with the ‘90s and 2000s came ‘50s-set media that made audiences “look not to the past, but at its representations,” such as the 1998 film *Pleasantville* (201). Such representations challenged the simplistic views of ‘50s nostalgia, contrasting with the actual views of that particular decade. These views are expressed in Michael Kimmel’s *Manhood in America*, which stresses the conformity of the historical 1950s along the lines of society, family, and gender. Kimmel states that men of the time were caught between the poles of bland overconformity and chaotic nonconformity. When faced with these two poles, men had to maintain their individuality, while also making sure not to abandon their jobs and families in the uniform environment of suburbia (170).

This led to the 1950s' idyllic myth of order and happiness hiding "an era of anxiety and fear.... a decade of containment," where men who failed as fathers, husbands, and breadwinners were branded as "homosexuals, juvenile delinquents, [and] communists" (170, 171). Delinquents were characterized as rebellious, nonconformist youths who wore black leather jackets and rode motorcycles, who represented "sexual and interpersonal power [and] control over [their] environment," thereby threatening the established order (175). Consequently, delinquents gave fathers an opportunity to prove their manhood by saving their sons from this rebellious nonconformity. Those men classified as communists were especially feared, as they were viewed as obedient, emasculated drones who could be brainwashed into doing another's bidding. While brainwashed, these communist men would lose their masculine sense of control, as seen in popular films of the time like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1954) and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), the latter of which has a man being controlled by a woman – a literal corrupting communist mother. (174-175). These Soviet (or metaphorical Soviet) threats to American masculinity were framed as a gendered battle between men and women, just as men from seemingly "every caste and color" were returning from war to begin families (Cohan 7, 34). Owing to the pressures of conformity pervading the 1950s, men of the era would "retreat to the home as frightened fathers preventing the next generation's adolescent rebellion," while indulging in "escapist fantasies of rugged individualism, luxurious sensuality, and outdoorsy adventure" (Kimmel 182). It is exactly this "escapist fantasy" that Jones finds himself still enacting when *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* opens. By continuing his adventurous exploits well past his youthful pre-World War II days, Jones sets himself up for a transformation into the archetypal father of the 1950s. Indiana's inherent sensitivity and vulnerability, however, also

make him an ideal father for the 2000s, marking Ford's off-screen transition into a more stable, reliable father himself. This use of the '50s cultural setting ultimately allows the film to appropriate period elements in the era of the new millennium, bringing forward certain aspects of the '50s as a means of highlighting Ford's revival of Jones as an ideal modern father.

As *Crystal Skull* opens, the film foregrounds Jones's (and therefore Ford's) age without ever actually showing him. Elvis music blares from a radio as teenagers challenge a military convoy to a race. For Spielberg, the message is clear: this is not the pulpy adventure serial world of the 1930s, but rather the rock and roll era of the 1950s. When Jones does appear as a Soviet captive, his hat is thrust into frame before the man himself, shown in silhouette as he puts the hat on. Spielberg's thematic imagery is prevalent here; even in old age, Indiana Jones casts a long shadow, as an icon of the real world 1980s and diegetic 1930s. He is more than a living legend, but nostalgia personified, a fixture of American popular culture. This is reinforced when the warehouse from *Raiders* reappears as Area 51, with the revelation that Jones was once called in to investigate the Roswell crash. By adding Jones into American UFO folklore, in the same way his past adventures continued the grand narratives of Judeo-Christian, Hindu, and Arthurian legends, *Crystal Skull* makes Jones himself into an American folk hero, a near-mythical figure in his own right. Such a transformation helps legitimize the new time period and the character's age; in allowing time to pass, it has only cemented Jones as a legendary figure. "This ain't gonna be easy," says Mac (Ray Winstone), Jones's companion. "Not as easy as it used to be," quips Jones, maintaining his heroic status while still exuding the vulnerability he is known for, now that age has become all too real for him. When he pulls out his whip to swing from two ceiling fixtures and misses his mark, Jones proclaims "Damn! I thought that was closer," illustrating he

still has the physicality of his youth even if age has somewhat tarnished his ability to pull off heroic stunts. Yet even with these setbacks, Jones's masculinity is never in doubt; his manhood is not only reaffirmed but contrasted against the femininity of Communist leader Irina Spalko (Cate Blanchett) and the subordinate masculinity of Mac, revealed to be a Communist agent. While the scene shows that Jones's age has not diminished his adventuring, this is undercut when he finds himself in a Boom Town, set up by the U.S. government to mimic a common suburb.

Thinking he's stumbled upon a real town, Jones scrambles around for help, lost in an environment more alien to him than the exotic locales he is so fond of navigating. Suburbia is its own adventure, but one for which Jones finds himself ill-prepared. When he realizes the town is an artificial construct, complete with plastic dummy families huddled around a television, Jones finds himself in his most life-threatening challenge to date; how could he possibly survive a nuclear blast? The answer lies in a lead-lined refrigerator, a ridiculous set-up that nonetheless propels him to safety miles away from the explosion. As a miraculously unharmed Jones emerges from the fridge, his iconic silhouette juxtaposed against a mushroom cloud, Spielberg presents an image that both encapsulates the movie's theme and foreshadows the solution to Jones's (and Ford's) new crisis. If Jones is now a legendary American folk hero, an embodiment of the serialized thrills of the 1930s, then he is completely out of his element in the atomic age, symbolized by his discomfort towards the exceedingly fake suburban trappings (including the idealized nuclear family). Jones's physical age may not hinder him, but his continued relevance or even existence in the atomic age is his latest struggle, just as Ford (an actor whose heyday was the late '70s to mid-'90s) is thrust into the CG-enhanced blockbuster era of the new millennium.

The lead-lined fridge acts as a symbol of domesticity that shields Jones (and Ford) from the complete annihilation of atomic (CGI) fire. If Jones is to survive in the nuclear age (and Ford in the modern age), then he must embrace the nuclear family that the fridge represents. Given his discomfort within the Boom Town and his continuing bachelorhood, Jones clearly is not ready to embrace that ideal yet, since he is still enacting an adventuring, escapist lifestyle. Indeed, his adventurous masculinity alienates his contemporaries. When the U.S. military picks him up, they suspect that he is a Communist agent. His former superior officer vouches for him, but the Federal agents who interrogate him are still suspicious. “Don’t wave your war record in our face, Dr. Jones, we all served,” one agent exclaims. “No kidding; whose side were you on?” responds Jones. Given his rebellion against the conforming nature of the new order, Jones’s prewar masculinity is seen as a threat to the establishment, so much so that his teaching career is all but destroyed by the subsequent blacklisting. Jones’s marveling at the mushroom cloud captures in one still image how out of place he is in the new world, a relic of a more adventurous time who is made a pariah for playing a young man’s game.

This ethos is reinforced when Jones talks with his colleague (Jim Broadbent), both men reminiscing about the past and commenting on the changing times. As Jones mourns his late father, Broadbent opines how “We seem to have reached the point where life stops giving us things and starts taking them away.” After reconciling with his father in the last film, Jones’s lament reveals how he is actively running away from his own age. As comical as the refrigerator scene appears, this latest over-the-top near-death experience has robbed Jones of his academic career. Whereas previous films’ death-defying stunts were merely clever set pieces, this one comes with actual consequences; Jones’s leave of absence from teaching cements his loss of

agency (and therefore, masculinity). He may have survived an atomic blast, but age, it seems, has finally caught up with him. Just as Jones prepares for a trip to Europe in the hopes of reviving his career, a juvenile delinquent in the image of Brando in *The Wild One* (1953) appears. Mutt Williams (Shia Labeouf) represents the rebellious masculinity that was so frightening to the conformist hegemony of the '50s. While Mutt is at odds with the wearier Jones, he also encapsulates another type of man that their society despises. Mutt and Jones proceed to race with Communists through Jones's campus. Adventure collides with academia here, as the restricting order of the time is disrupted by three subordinate masculinities: Jones's middle-aged bachelorhood, Mutt's youthful rebellion, and the Communists' anti-Americanism. After escaping the agents, Mutt remarks how Jones "isn't that bad in a fight for an old man. What are you, like eighty?" Since Mutt embodies youth, his metatextual remarks symbolize how out of place the aging Jones is in this new world. The next generation is amazed at the older man's resiliency in a fight, much like younger audiences realizing Harrison Ford can still be a convincing action hero in his old age.

Mutt himself is painted as a rebellious loner seeking a true father figure, mirroring Jones's own childhood. Like Henry Junior adopting his dog's name "Indiana" and modeling himself after a treasure hunter who gave him his fedora (as revealed in *Last Crusade*), young Mutt chose his own name (also modeled after a dog) and had no father to idolize. The closest thing to a father he has is Harold Oxley (John Hurt), another colleague of Jones who was obsessed with the titular crystal skull. When the pair find Oxley in Spalko's camp deep in the South American jungle, they learn that the skull's psychic power has brainwashed him, giving him great knowledge but leaving him unable to properly communicate. At the camp is also

Mutt's mother, Marion Ravenwood. Unlike previous films that introduced a new love interest for Jones in each installment, this film brings back a former flame to further incentivize Jones to settle down. The revelation that Mutt is really Indy and Marion's love child, Henry Jones III, is in no way shocking, although Jones pivots into his newfound father role rather abruptly. Upon learning of his paternity, the first thing he asks of Marion is "Why didn't you make him finish school??" Mutt is not exactly thrilled at this revelation either, and Marion, for her part, doesn't seem willing to give Jones a second chance after he walked out on their planned wedding.

Clearly Marion and Mutt cannot accept Jones as a proper husband and father, despite Jones being happy to see Marion and caring for Mutt's future. Jones even declares that Marion is the only woman he could see himself settling down with. When Marion asks if there were other women in his life after her, he responds with "they all had the same problem — they weren't you." Mutt's own disbelief shows that Jones is too rebellious for him to accept as a father. Yet during the subsequent action scenes, Mutt proves he is his father's son through fencing and vine swinging, channeling pulp hero theatrics. Jones, Mutt, and Marion each get moments to shine in these scenes, with Marion navigating the heroes through a series of waterfalls inside an amphibious vehicle. These scenes unite the heroes together as a nuclear family unit, making Jones see his own potential as a husband and father with partners who can truly keep up with him.

However, when faced with the task of returning the crystal skull to its Mayan resting place, Jones prefers to go alone, simply "because it [the skull] told me to." In an earlier scene, Spalko forces Jones to stare into the skull's eyes, while detailing her hopes to harness the psychic power of dozens of skulls to brainwash the United States. "We'll be everywhere at once, more powerful than a whisper, invading your dreams, thinking your thoughts for you while you sleep.

We will change you, Doctor Jones. We will turn you into us.” Jones and Spalko discuss the alien nature of the skulls, and their ability to grant “power over the mind of man.” By engineering a plot where Soviets make use of an alien weapon to brainwash the United States, Spielberg wraps all the anxieties of the 1950s into one compact threat. Jones will not take it seriously until he gazes into the skull itself. This seems to have no effect, until Jones feels compelled to return the skull to its original temple. He is guided not by his own agency, but by the skull’s, surrendering masculine control to a foreign power. Marion and Mutt will have none of it; they will stick with Jones to the end. While Jones may prefer to resolve the problem himself, it is only his potential family that convinces him not to face this challenge alone. In doing so, Mutt and Marion convince Jones that his old, rebellious masculinity, now exploited by an alien intelligence, must give way to the collective power of family to win the day.

The triumph of domesticity over the individual, first implied ironically through the fridge scene and now vocalized through Mutt and Marion, reaches its climax when the heroes and villains arrive in the lost city of Akator. Spalko places the skull upon the headless crystal skeleton of an alien, one of thirteen in a “hive mind” who possess a “collective consciousness.” This fascinates Spalko, who demands the creatures tell her “everything they know,” seeking the collective knowledge of the cosmos. When the aliens psychically pour their knowledge into her head, it overwhelms her to the point of disintegration, as her remains fly into the beings’ home dimension. The temple gives way to an interdimensional alien craft, the iconic flying saucer of UFO folklore that vanishes as Jones and his new family bear witness. Whereas Spalko desired to join the alien hive mind and give up her individuality, Jones desired to become part of a different collective: that of the nuclear family. His embracing of the family unit comes as Jones’s

silhouette is once again juxtaposed against an iconic image of the 1950s, this time the symbolic fear of UFOs replacing the literal fear of the atomic bomb. As Jones and Marion embrace, Mutt tries to leave. “Why don’t you stick around, Junior?” quips Jones, now mirroring his own father to show his adoption of the paternal role. He even lampshades this by saying “somewhere, your grandpa is laughing.” To reinforce the legitimacy of this newfound family unit, the film then cuts to Jones and Marion’s wedding. At this time, Jones has also been reinstated at the college and promoted to associate dean, an authoritative desk job that further cements him within the new social order. Mutt wears proper wedding attire, seemingly abandoning his delinquency now that he has a real father figure. To further mimic his father, Mutt then attempts to don the famous fedora before Jones successfully snatches it away. Spielberg’s symbolism roars back in this final moment; he subverts a passing of the torch by refusing to make Mutt the next Indiana. The hat is reserved for Ford alone; there can be no one else.

By refusing to make Mutt into Indy’s successor, Spielberg makes a powerful statement about his approach to Jones as a character, both within his film and in his relationship to Ford. In claiming sole ownership of the hat, Jones (and therefore Ford) is saying that he will never truly relinquish his adventurous ways (nor his acting career), even after taking on a nuclear family. For Jones, the family is a means of survival in this brave new world of psychic aliens and atomic marvels, so far from the supernatural knowledge he once traded in. That is not to say that Jones does not care for his new wife and son, merely that he will never truly become the ideal father of the 1950s. Spielberg acknowledges this not just through the final scene, but earlier in his gleeful destruction of the Boom Town, blowing up the carefully constructed suburban family upon which the U.S. government hinged American society. The appeal of Indiana Jones lays in his

rebellious spirit; he can never fully conform to the 1950s society, but realizes he needs to adapt and compromise in some way in order to survive in it. Becoming the patriarchal head of a nuclear family is the compromise. Not only does it afford Jones the chance to fit into the new order, but it also allows him to reconcile his age with his adventurous spirit. He marries a woman who is just as adventurous as him, while fathering a son who is becoming an adventurer in his own right. Understanding his place among a new family is pertinent for Jones as well as Ford, who in 2008 was already divorced from his second wife while in a new relationship with Calista Flockhart. Ford, like Jones, had to embrace the chance to be a husband and father again, not so much as the ideal '50s father but as the sensitive father of the 2000s. Doing this allowed Ford to begin resolving his own masculinity "crisis" brought on by the onset of age, a sagging acting career, and a second divorce. Following *Crystal Skull*, and after seven years and a third marriage, Ford found the avenue for translating his personal failures into cinematic ones, by dusting off another one of his iconic characters besides Jones. This time, however, it was the role that catapulted Ford to super stardom, the one he thought was put to bed a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...

CHAPTER 4

“HE WOULD HAVE DISSAPPOINTED YOU”: HAN SOLO AND THE DARK MALE LEGACY IN *STAR WARS EPISODE VII: THE FORCE AWAKENS* (2015)

When George Lucas sold Lucasfilm to Disney in the fall of 2012, a new trilogy of *Star Wars* films was greenlit, with the long-anticipated *Episode VII* set to hit theaters in 2015. This would be a belated sequel to 1983’s *Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*, after prequels dominated the franchise in the early 2000s. As a proper sequel, the question on everyone’s minds was whether Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, and Harrison Ford would reprise, respectively, Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, and Han Solo. While Hamill’s and Fisher’s returns seemed likely, Ford’s seemed less so. Ford was advocating for Solo’s death as early as *Return of the Jedi*, and, in contrast to his connection with the *Jones* series, largely disassociated himself with the franchise. That all changed with a call from Lucas, prior to the Disney sale, about a reprisal — one that would give the character a definitive ending, the kind he had wanted since 1983. As Ford recalls: “I think it was mentioned, even in the first call, that he [Solo] would not survive. That’s something I’d been arguing for some period of time, so I said okay. [It was not a necessity to get me involved.] But it was an interesting development of the character.” Elaborating further, Ford says he is “finished with *Star Wars* if *Star Wars* is finished with me. [I can’t imagine returning.] But it is science fiction. I’d rather not. You know, at this point I’d rather do something else” (Heath, *GQ*). The

character would return on film following his tragic death, although not with Ford in the role. 2018's *Solo: A Star Wars Story* found newcomer Alden Ehrenreich stepping into Ford's shoes, the result of being a spun-off prequel rather than some in-universe resurrection. *Solo* tracked the character's beginnings, but when it came to giving the galaxy's most infamous smuggler a definitive ending, death was the only way out.

For a character who began as the sidekick to Jedi Luke Skywalker, Han Solo became the lynchpin behind the franchise's next big revival. After 2005's *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* completed the origin story of Darth Vader, thereby looping the series back around to 1977's *Episode IV: A New Hope*, the saga seemed to have reached its end. But with the Disney sale, a new opportunity arose to tell a story about the legacy of Darth Vader and his children. *Episode VII*, eventually titled *The Force Awakens*, secured Fisher, Hamill, and Ford to play their old characters, but out of all of them, Ford's Solo was front and center in the marketing. Solo's iconic Millennium Falcon ship was the final image of the first teaser trailer, while the second preview used Ford himself, flanked by his loyal friend Chewbacca, as its own final image. While the prequel films' box office proved that Ford was not exactly needed to carry the franchise (unlike Indiana Jones), the new film's elevation of Solo to the forefront created an enormous amount of goodwill with fans. Despite Ford's positioning in the trailers and posters, however, the film wisely followed the franchise's history of "passing-the-torch" narratives, rather than making Solo the lead. The tease at the end of *Crystal Skull* becomes a reality in the *Star Wars* universe, albeit a violent one. For Solo would not peacefully hand his iconic blaster and ship over to his son Ben (Adam Driver). Instead, his son kills him, remaking himself as "Kylo Ren" in the image of his maternal grandfather Darth Vader, hoping to purge his connection to the Light Side of the

Force by committing patricide. Indiana Jones may have spent his revival film discovering his son and learning to be a father, but for Han Solo, his new narrative arc skips past the discovery, showing how a nuclear family unit breaks down. Jones ends his film by becoming a father, beginning a new life filled with promise. Solo, on the other hand, must confront his own failures as a father to Ben, feeling responsible for his turn to the Dark Side of the Force.

If Indiana Jones has the potential to succeed as a father, then why does this other iconic Ford character, who originated roughly during the same period of early blockbuster-era cinema, fail at it? Indiana ended his initial trilogy without a love interest, while the first *Star Wars* trilogy has Han romancing Princess Leia. Han's three-film arc from cynic to romantic should necessitate a turn to proper fatherhood. And yet as *The Force Awakens* opens, the Skywalker-Solo family is divided. History repeats itself, thanks to the sins of the father. Even more so than the latter *Indiana Jones* installments, *Star Wars* has always been about the core theme of fathers, sons, and the mending of broken families. As in our world, the *Star Wars* galaxy ties masculinity to fatherhood. But as the saga moves through multiple trilogies and time periods, representations of masculinity start shifting. Erin C. Callahan suggests that Han Solo, the Jedi, and the Sith represent three primary manners of hegemonic masculine archetypes in the original trilogy: the "space Western" cowboy and two variations of medieval Knighthood (86). Han "exemplifies the traditionally heteronormative masculine traits of physicality, aggression, power, and control, [modernizing] the cowboy masculinity with which audiences were familiar" (99). This cowboy coding is seen in both Han's costume, where he is "dressed in dark pants, boots, and a vest [with a] blaster holster [that] mirrors the cowboy's holster for his six-shooter," and his personality, where "his behavior also suggests that he has internalized the cowboy masculine identity...

signifying the idealized version of the pioneering and independent American spirit” (100). Han shows off this spirit during his introduction, with his selfish personality and indifference to killing bounty hunter Greedo. This shows Han’s “aggression and arrogance [as hallmarks of his] character, establishing him as the identifier of dominant patriarchal masculinity to audiences” (101). Throughout the original trilogy, Han’s familiar Western archetype is replaced by the new hegemonic masculinity of the Jedi Knights and Sith Lords. Jedi, as science fiction variations on knighthood, “use their powers to defend and protect, rather than to attack,” contrasting with the hyper-aggressive, hyper-masculine Sith Lords like Darth Vader, who “tend towards reactionary and heightened emotional responses such as anger, hate, [and] impetuosity,” all while “[seeking] power as a marker of success” (87, 88). This transition from Solo’s “space cowboy” to a new type of Force-rooted masculinity is why Luke Skywalker’s growth as a Jedi supersedes Solo’s own development throughout the original trilogy.

Han develops throughout the trilogy by first embodying the selfish-cowboy archetype and then protecting Luke in *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back* (101). Throughout the latter film and into *Return of the Jedi*, as Luke matures into Han’s equal, Solo’s growth is predominantly marked by his romantic pursuit of Princess Leia. He does this first through aggression, in keeping with his masculine cowboy persona. By trilogy’s end, Solo wins Leia’s affections by admitting his own vulnerability, thereby earning her love (102-3). For over thirty years, even with the added prequels, this was the conclusion for Han, Luke, and Leia. The latter two, revealed as siblings, embrace their heritage and power over the Force, while Han renegotiates his rugged cowboy masculinity with the new sensitive ideals of the Skywalker twins. But while this seems like a natural end for the heroes, the origins of the Sith and the

Empire revealed in the prequels belies a darker understanding of the *Star Wars* saga. Vader may have been redeemed in his final moments, but killing the Emperor does not erase decades of evil deeds under the Empire. Since the six-film saga up through 2015 dealt with the collapse of the Galactic Republic and the rise of the Empire and Rebellion, this new trilogy would have to address what war heroes do when the fighting stops. *Jedi* may have a happy ending, but now that the Saga continues, reality must set in.

While the thirty-year gap between *Jedi* and *Force* was not visualized, events in the latter film imply that Han and Leia's son grew up in the shadow of a family legacy marked by both light and darkness. Young Ben, named for Obi-Wan Kenobi, clearly grappled with having the infamous Darth Vader for a grandfather, Han Solo and Princess Leia for parents, and the now-mythical Luke Skywalker for an uncle. His *Indiana Jones* counterpart, Henry "Mutt" Jones III, was a juvenile delinquent for never having a proper father. Ben, by contrast, always had his father and, thus, a vast legacy to live up to. But as Ben inherited his grandfather's, mother's, and uncle's connection to the Force, it became clear that his father could not serve as an efficient role model for his emerging masculinity. Instead of "space cowboy" as an archetypal ideal, Ben had the Jedi-Sith dichotomy, two masculine ideals that superseded his father's. Ben is thus left with two alternate male role models — his Jedi uncle Luke, or his Sith grandfather Darth Vader, whose evil persona overshadows his noble past as Anakin Skywalker. The young Solo now finds himself in one of Gershon Reither's "filmmyths," wherein he sees his true father Han as "a symbolic dragon that he must overcome to win his independence," owing to Solo's inability to provide his child with "a meaningful rite of passage into adulthood" (3, 10, 20).

If we are to understand Young Ben as his own archetype of masculinity, it is best to consider the character within the postmillennial moment of the film's production. The son, here, mirrors the feelings of inadequacy apparent in many frustrated young males uncertain of their place in the privileged class of whiteness. Ben is like the young, disenfranchised male who, as Kimmel discussed in *Angry White Men*, "still feels entitled to power — as a white American man — by a combination of historical legacy, religious fiat, biological destiny, and moral legitimacy" (233). Ben's mirroring of modern white crisis tendencies continues the grand *Star Wars* tradition of each trilogy reflecting the socio-political trappings of their time, in keeping with the saga's mythical status within pop culture. For Ben, his "historical legacy" lies not with his father or uncle, but his grandfather, whose dark visage once gripped an entire galaxy in fear. Erik Erikson explains that "the overwhelming importance of the grandfather is often apparent... Their mastery persists in their grandsons as a stubborn, angry sense of superiority. Overtly inhibited, they yet can accept others only on terms of prearranged privilege" (314-5). Kimmel further elaborates on the history of patriarchal families, suggesting men "proved their masculinity... as family providers. And it was their fathers who lost it all, [squandering] their birthright. Instead of getting angry at their fathers, [they] claim the mantle of their grandfathers, [displacing] their rage outward" (246). While this implies that Ben never was interested in becoming like his father, the film hints that he at one point admired Han, until his growing Force powers made him see the emasculating effect of the Jedi and Sith on Solo's space-cowboy persona. Ben Solo, like other modern white men, "felt entitled to inherit [his] father's legacy. And when it became evident it was not going to happen, [he] became murderously angry — at a system that emasculated [his] father and threatens [his] manhood" (248). This manifests in Ben

Solo becoming the Dark Side warrior Kylo Ren, slaughtering an emerging order of Jedi and driving his uncle Luke into hiding. By doing so, Kylo becomes the *Star Wars* equivalent of a violent white male raging at society, “feeling aggrieved, wronged by the world, [driven by] a sense of entitlement, [that] making others hurt as you hurt is fully justified, [mobilizing] the self to retrieve and restore [a] sense of masculinity through any means possible, including violence” (75-6). So frustrated is Kylo by the perceived failings of his father and uncle, that he turns to a new father figure altogether, the mysterious Supreme Leader Snoke (Andy Serkis), who encourages his admiration of his grandfather to attain power. The irony here is that while Kylo struggles with various father figures, his power (and thus entitlement) comes from his mother Leia. A woman being the impetus behind Kylo’s otherwise male-centric legacy foreshadows the film’s eventual reveal of a new female protagonist, Rey (Daisy Ridley), whose awakening Force powers anger Kylo.

It is through this premise of the corrupted son that Ford reenters the *Star Wars* narrative, now dealing with the emasculating fallout of his son’s turn to evil. Kylo Ren is one of the first characters to appear when *The Force Awakens* begins. Interrogating and killing an old man in his search for a map fragment that might guide him to his uncle, Ren then shows off his Force powers by stopping a laser bolt in mid-air and probing the mind of pilot Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac) for information. Yet for all his power, Ren is still conflicted over the split nature of his familial legacy. When Snoke informs Ren of Han Solo’s newfound possession of the map fragment, Ren asserts that Solo “means nothing to me,” before privately communing with the fractured helmet of Darth Vader: “Forgive me, I feel it again, the pull to the Light. Show me again, grandfather, the power of the darkness, and I will finish what you started.” He thus

communes with the idol of Vader, all in hopes of renewing his Dark Side persona. Han Solo's finding of the map follows his and Chewbacca's reunion with the lost Millennium Falcon, stolen sometime after Ben's corruption. The Falcon is just as much a symbol of Solo's masculinity as the hat and whip are for Jones. Notably, while Jones begins his revival film with his iconic items, Solo does not, although he enters the film at the end of the first act by boarding his prized ship, beginning a process of re-masculinization. Orphaned scavenger Rey and former Stormtrooper Finn (John Boyega) flew the Falcon off the junk planet Jakku after finding the map inside the droid BB-8. Upon recognizing Solo, Rey is ecstatic, thinking of him as the famous smuggler while Finn knows him as a Rebellion general. These two young heroes have both heard of Han as a kind of mythical figure, just as worthy of admiration as Luke Skywalker. Like Jones, Solo has cast a long mythical shadow, which inspires rebellion in Ben and admiration in Rey and Finn. When Rey exclaims "You're Han Solo!" with delight, the man grunts, "I used to be." Having lost his son, wife, brother-in-law, and ship, Solo is cut off from every element that reinforced his masculinity, both the cowboy persona of his youth and the sensitive hero he became. Both personas are idolized by Rey and Finn, but as evidenced in the next scene, Solo's youthful cowboy masculinity is no longer in vogue.

As he states later in the film, Solo "went back to the only thing [he] was ever good at," smuggling, following Ben's fall. The sensitive masculine persona Solo adopted throughout the original trilogy seems to have failed him, as it could not prevent his son from embracing the darker half of his familial legacy. Solo's belief that smuggling is all he is good for reflects his own self-perception that he has failed as a father. But in returning to smuggling, Solo cannot easily step back into his early space cowboy days. When hauling monstrous creatures for rival

gangs, Solo finds himself trapped between the two parties, both demanding he repay his debts. Convinced he can “talk his way out of it,” Solo promises they will get their payments. The gangs do not buy it; “there’s no one left in the galaxy for you to swindle,” says one leader. While Jones, initially unburdened by a nuclear family, could easily continue his adventuring lifestyle, Solo finds reliving the past is not that easy. He has grown too much from his smuggling youth to ever fully encompass the cowboy persona again. This is seen later aboard the Falcon, when Han reminisces about Luke and his fledging Jedi order. “There used to be a time I didn’t believe in [the Force], used to think it was all a bunch of mumbo jumbo,” says Solo to Rey and Finn; “But it’s true. All of it. The Jedi. The Dark Side. They’re real.”

By embracing a more spiritual path post-*Return of the Jedi*, in contrast to his cynical attitude towards the Force in *A New Hope*, Solo shows that he can never fully return to his former cowboy persona. With Luke missing, Solo becomes the mentor figure to Rey and Finn, the equivalent of Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) and Ben Kenobi (Alec Guinness) from the prequel and original trilogies. While Solo advises Finn on his fleeing from the First Order, he takes a particular interest in Rey, who pilots and fixes the Falcon. In her, Solo sees a potential surrogate daughter, a chance to become a father again after failing with Ben. For Rey, who was abandoned by her parents, Solo is a chance to finally have a proper father figure, after spending most of her life surviving Jakku’s harsh environment. After Kylo Ren captures Rey, Solo reunites with Leia, although he worries that she wants nothing to do with him after Ben’s corruption. Unlike Jones, whose reunion with Marion was largely a happy one, Solo faces Leia with trepidation, feeling emasculated from his role as husband and father. Instead, she delights at seeing him again, while imploring him to bring their son back to the Light Side. “If Luke couldn’t reach him, how can I?”

asks Han, no longer possessing his trademark masculine confidence. “Luke is a Jedi. You’re his father,” intones Leia, still supporting him even after all their years apart. It is clear from their reunion that both Han and Leia still love each other, each feeling guilty for Ben’s fall and the collapse of their nuclear family. Now reunited, however, Leia’s faith in Han helps him recommit to fatherhood, restoring his sense of masculinity.

But while Han and Leia want their son back, Ben, ever the “angry young man,” has no intention of returning. Ren interrogates Rey over the map, revealing his face for the first time in the film. Unlike Vader, whose scarring necessitated the mask, Kylo wears his merely in emulation. He would rather hide his true face than project his connection to Solo. Probing Rey’s mind, Ren remarks how she sees Han as “the father [she] never had. He would have disappointed you.” Ren’s disregard for Solo shows his utter contempt for the nuclear family unit, since his father’s masculinity failed to give him purpose. Rey then questions Kylo’s commitment to the Dark Side after redirecting his mind probe, revealing his fear that “he’ll never be as strong as Darth Vader.” This shatters Ren’s belief in his mastery of the Force, now that an untrained scavenger girl can match him in power. His sense of entitlement to the Skywalker legacy makes Rey unworthy of the Force in his eyes, since she is seemingly unrelated to any Jedi or Sith bloodline. But with his conviction wavering, Ren realizes that he must now fully embrace one side of his family over the other. When Solo finally confronts his son over a large walkway, he pleads for Ben to come home with him. “Your son is dead. He was weak and foolish like his father, so I destroyed him,” says Kylo, emulating Vader’s own burial of his past. “No, leave here with me, come home. We miss you,” says Han, embracing his own sensitive masculinity once more. In this moment, Kylo breaks down. “I feel like I’m being torn apart. I want to be free of

this pain. Will you help me?” “Anything you need,” says Han, as father and son both grasp Kylo’s lightsaber, his own corrupted masculine symbol. By nearly surrendering his saber, Kylo debates submitting to his father, choosing Han’s evolved masculinity over the Dark Side’s. But even as the beam of light hovering over them goes out, Kylo chooses his fate, igniting his saber through Han’s chest. In his last living act, Solo caresses his son’s face, choosing to leave this world as a father before falling into the chasm below. By stepping out onto that platform, Solo hoped he could redeem his son. But since he could not, he at least takes solace in seeing his face and holding him again. Han Solo’s violent death is a reminder of his failures at creating a nuclear family unit, but even so, he died embracing his son once more, knowing he at least tried to be a good father.

The film reinforces this through Kylo’s own reaction to Solo’s death; he becomes unhinged during the subsequent fight with Rey and Finn, screaming “It’s just us now, Han Solo can’t save you,” as if trying to convince himself more than his opponents. Solo’s death did not give Kylo any sense of closure, enhancing his inner conflict rather than lessening it. Kylo’s subsequent lightsaber duel with Rey is one of the franchise’s most emotionally tense moments, as they fight over Anakin and Luke’s old saber. This signifies Rey’s inheritance of the Skywalker legacy, further angering Kylo, whose birthright should make it his. He feels Rey is undeserving of the saber, but she still overpowers him before escaping with Finn and Chewie in the Falcon, yet another part of Han’s legacy. Rey’s inheritance of the saber first and the Falcon second symbolizes her own worthiness to possess these items, as she contains the spirit of the Skywalker-Solo family, if not their blood.

With Han's death now mirroring the deaths of past films' mentors like Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan, and Yoda, Solo takes on a new role within the *Star Wars* tapestry. For Rey, he is an ideal to live up to, while for Kylo, he is someone to run from, setting up the sequel trilogy's central conflict of new generations clashing with the past. Ford's Solo casts a long shadow going into the film, but in death his shadow is even longer, almost all-encompassing. "You have too much of your father's heart in you," laments Snoke to Kylo in 2017's *Episode VIII: The Last Jedi*, reinforced in the final frame as he cradles a phantom image of his father's dice, still defined by his past no matter how far he runs from it. While the sequels so far have dealt with themes of legacy, embodied further in *Episode VIII*'s treatment of Luke, *The Force Awakens* made Han's death a driving force for the new heroes, signifying how important Ford's character is to the franchise. Despite Solo's cowboy masculinity giving way to the hegemonic Jedi and Sith variations, he still maintains a lasting influence on the series. Of all the iconic *Star Wars* characters, Han Solo is the first to receive his own spinoff film, even though its origin story necessitated new blood in the role. Alden Ehrenreich performed admirably as a young Han, but the film still lives in Ford's shadow, just as Kylo Ren cannot escape it in the new trilogy. The in-universe reverence afforded Han is a testament to Ford's vulnerability in the role, especially since his swan song hinged so heavily on the notion of masculine failure.

By fracturing the Skywalker-Solo nuclear family and emasculating Han, the filmmakers found a natural continuation of the *Star Wars* saga. Han's failures with Leia and Ben readily mirror Ford's own failures with two families, a form of cinematic catharsis for a man still rebuilding himself as an actor and father. By emasculating, re-masculating, and then killing Han Solo, Ford finally had closure for the role that launched his career, a role which still dogged him

years after he thought himself done with *Star Wars*. This closure came by passing the torch to Rey, whom Han embraces as a metaphorical daughter in place of his lost son. The idea that Rey is the true legacy figure instead of Ben sets up an important change within the *Star Wars* saga, as the franchise's generational shift also creates a shift in gender. A new gender focus rewrites the male-centric narrative of the original and prequel trilogies, with the father-son dynamic still important but no longer the thematic heart of the series. By removing male legacy as the key to Ford's cinematic revivals, *The Force Awakens* foreshadows Ford's next character return in *Blade Runner's* Rick Deckard, revealing a generational shift that reflects a larger cultural moment of gender resettlement.

CHAPTER 5

“ALL THE BEST MEMORIES ARE HERS”: RICK DECKARD AND THE JOYS OF FATHERHOOD IN *BLADE RUNNER 2049* (2017)

Compared to Indiana Jones and Han Solo, Officer Rick Deckard, a “blade runner” in the dystopian cyber punk Los Angeles of a then-future 2019, does not seem nearly as iconic. Ridley Scott’s titular science-fiction noir film, based on the Phillip K. Dick novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, was critically maligned upon initial release. But over the years, thanks in part to several director’s cuts, it blossomed into a cult favorite, one whose themes and visual aesthetics became enormously influential on the genre. Harrison Ford was once again part of that influence, thanks to his Bogart-like approach to Deckard, a cop who hunts down cloned superhuman “Replicants” who exist as slave labor for space colonies. An emotionless killer for most of the film, Deckard slowly becomes more human by the story’s end, after falling in love with Replicant Rachael (Sean Young) and empathizing with his final target, the Promethean figure Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer). Deckard’s growing humanity takes on an extra dimension in the alternate cuts, where Ridley Scott proposed he could be a Replicant himself through memory implants. This debate varies depending on which cut is viewed and how one approaches the central themes. Does Deckard’s increased empathy make him an artificial humanoid learning to become human, or a naturally born man who remembers what it means to be human? For thirty-five years the debate raged among sci-fi fans, until the fall of 2017, when *Blade Runner 2049*

took the story once more into the future, recontextualizing another one of Ford's iconic roles through the lens of aging fatherhood. While certainly playing with some of the creator-creation themes inherent in *Frankenstein*-derived sci-fi, which have their own parental overtones, the original *Blade Runner* did not seem overly concerned with the generational father-son themes so ingrained in the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* series.

With Ford reprising Deckard, perhaps his third-most-popular character after Jones and Solo, another opportunity arose for cinematic catharsis for Ford's aging masculinity. "I saw no downsides at all," says Ford of the reprisal. "The intellectual puzzle of it all. And I got paid. Always happy to be paid" (Heath, *GQ*). Ford recalls his initial attraction to the role in the 1982 original was "Deckard's desperation ... the dramatic circumstances he found himself in ... the notion of the impossible romance between [him and] Rachael" (Sammon, 523). That romance involved asking "how *could* they relate? [How do] you look for an emotional connection, [when] you realize there really isn't one? You manufacture the emotion, out of your own needs. He [Deckard] is damaged goods, you know? Deckard doesn't think himself suitable for this kind of emotional relationship, not with a real human being" (526). Coming off *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* at the time, Ford also remembers wanting to do "the anti-*Star Wars*" by "showing utility in a variety of different genres. Nobody wants to be typecast. Why would I only want to be Hopalong Cassidy, for instance, when I can be 16 different people?" (523). This mindset would serve him well once he moved beyond his blockbuster roles, but as *Blade Runner* turned from flop to cult favorite, Ford's character was re-evaluated after Scott's director's cuts implied he was a Replicant. Regarding this debate, Ford believes "the ambiguity is endlessly productive. I have no argument with ambiguity. It's the *finality* that I have an argument with" (539-40).

Despite the film's continued debates and its troublesome production, Ford thinks the original film is "a remarkable, worthy motion picture, made under very difficult circumstances. To the extent that I am able, I am proud of it" (543). If Ford could make his peace with the original *Blade Runner*, and then reprised Jones and Solo, it is no wonder that, with the right script (and the right paycheck) he could step back once more into Deckard's shoes.

When *Blade Runner* was first released, critics did not know what to make of it, especially since they were used to Ford's blockbuster personas. Says Tom Shone: "[*Blade Runner*] suffered from a distinct case of keeping up with the Joneses, and left many audience members puzzling over Ford's inability to properly abseil from the side of one building to the next, instead slamming unceremoniously into the side of it. What, did he forget his whip? ... It was the eighties' first real case of blockbuster burnout" (120-1). Luzon-Aguado elaborates that "[Deckard added] complexity and [introduced] dark undertones that mirrored the contemporary crisis of masculinity, [which was] not well received by mass audiences," even though Ford "wanted Deckard to be a human and humane character with whom audiences could establish an emotional connection in the midst of bleakness and despair, thereby retaining traces of his earlier, more likeable characters and reinforcing the more popular side of his public persona" (248). Knee agrees with this analysis, writing that the film "expanded Ford's repertoire and refined (and made less juvenile) his star image," while providing another vulnerable action hero in Ford's filmography (164). This vulnerability comes with a "noir referentiality" that "belies the emotions that hinder [Deckard's] work and that he increasingly feels for the Replicants," including Rachael, with whom his romance once more reveals an "emotionally and physically vulnerable" persona contrasting the hyper-masculine, hard-bodied Reaganite hero (164-6). By

emphasizing Deckard's vulnerability, director Ridley Scott compared him to "Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe, a man who follows a hunch to the end. He's in trouble because he's begun to identify with his quarry, the Replicants. [Harrison] possesses some of the laconic dourness of Bogey, but he's more ambivalent, more human. He's almost an antihero" (Sammon 98). By comparing the character to Humphrey Bogart, Scott recognizes that Deckard is both of a piece with other Ford personas like Solo and Jones while also simultaneously distinct from them. He is an archetypal part of cinematic mythology, an ode to film noir in the same way that Jones was to the pulp adventure serial and Solo to the Western. But the film noir detective is a very different beast from those other personas, and while Ford plays all three roles with his trademark vulnerability, the switch in genre necessitated a switch in persona, a harbinger for the more serious roles Ford would tackle in the '90s.

If Deckard is essentially a film noir detective from the future, one comparable to Bogart, then he must possess certain character traits. As John Beynon suggests, the Bogartian private eye, in such iconic films as *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *The Big Sleep* (1946), must be "brave, incorruptible, [overcoming] a series of tests and [fighting] greed, evil and self-interest," while "[regarding] a woman's sexual appeal as a threat to [his] integrity, [making his onscreen] masculinity far less sure of itself" (66). Steven Cohan elaborates on this archetype, suggesting this is a "'man's man' persona" which involves homosociality, or "power over women as well as other men, [along] with desire for other men as well as women ... [taking] the form of one man's domination over another, emphasizing independence, competition, and aggressiveness as the hallmark features of virility" (84). With Ford then channeling Bogart for his Deckard persona, the world he finds himself in must similarly match a film noir aesthetic, regardless of its

cyberpunk future setting. It is no surprise then that both *Blade Runner* films are set in Los Angeles, which bears a strong connection to film noir. As a genre, film noir involves “renegotiations of masculinity,” and with the City of Angels “in a state of perpetual flux and crisis,” it is the perfect setting for detective stories where masculinity is constantly challenged (Baker 111). Film noir scholar Frank Krutnik’s book *In a Lonely Street* details how such a detective, or “hard-boiled private-eye,” must “prove himself by his ability to withstand any challenges to his integrity- and to his very status as the active hero (i.e. to his masculine professionalism, or his professionalized masculinity),” thereby representing “an ‘Americanization’ and masculinization of the classical detective, [who moves through] a world of violence and lawlessness, lacking any intrinsically effective machinery of civilized order, and dominated by assertive masculine figures of self-appointed authority” (92-3). In keeping with this focus on masculine dominance, hard-boiled detective films feature “a heterosexual love-story, a factor which in many cases shifted the emphasis from the story of a crime or investigation to a story of erotic obsession” (97).

All of these film noir tropes coalesce in the original *Blade Runner*, from Deckard’s attempts to renegotiate his masculinity among the Replicants to his “erotic obsession” with Rachael. This obsession becomes problematic when Deckard instructs Rachael to have sex with him, intending to provoke an emotional response as a test of her humanity. The scene is violent and forceful, displaying Deckard’s own obsessive desire for Rachael and his darker anti-hero status. This anti-heroic nature of Deckard’s puts him among other noir heroes, who also reinforce their own masculinity in the presence of wily “femme fatales.” By dominating Rachel, Deckard characterizes himself as a detective in keeping with the noir hero tradition. Such a

characterization contrasts Deckard with Solo and Jones, who are, at worst, roguish seducers. Yet by the film's end, Deckard and Rachael both embrace their innate humanity (whether Deckard is a Replicant or not) and run off together. It does not matter whether their union is one of two Replicants or a Replicant and a human; what matters is their choice to see the humanity in themselves, after Deckard witnesses Roy Batty do the same in his dying speech following their duel in the rain. In his iconic speech, Batty laments "I've seen things you people would never dream. Moments [that] will be lost like tears in rain. Time to die."

The underlying question of "what makes us human?" lies at the heart of both *Blade Runner* and *2049*, but while Deckard wrestles with this question, he does not enter the sequel until its last hour. Despite his absence, he is still key to the narrative; not only was Ford prominently used in the film's marketing, but his plot function is as a living MacGuffin, similar to *The Force Awakens'* use of Luke Skywalker. Deckard's importance lies in being the father of the very first naturally born Replicant child, thus reinforcing the "aging fatherhood" theme of *Force Awakens* and *Crystal Skull*. Like those films, Ford shares screen time with a younger actor around whom the narrative now revolves, in this case Officer K (Ryan Gosling), distinguished from Deckard by being identified upfront as a Replicant. In keeping with film noir sensibilities, *2049* posits a central mystery. After K discovers Rachael's body, he is ordered to find the identity and whereabouts of her and Deckard's child. While Deckard is established as the father early on, K does not look for him until believing that he himself could be the missing child, spurred on by his own desire to become human.

When the film begins, K telegraphs his desire for humanity through his imitation of a domestic lifestyle. He owns a holographic wife, Joi (Ana de Armas) who encourages his belief

that he is different from other Replicants. Joi names him “Joe” to humanize him. His original name, K, provides a literary tribute to Kafka’s protagonist from *The Trial*, who himself felt dehumanized in an overtly bureaucratic system (visualized in the film as the bleak dystopia of 2049 L.A. and its draconian police force). K’s superior (Robin Wright) dehumanizes him by claiming “you’re doing just fine without one. A soul.” Obsessed with maintaining the status quo, K’s superior wants Deckard and Rachael’s child killed before other Replicants learn of it. Tyrell successor Niander Wallace (Jared Leto), meanwhile, thinks the child can solve the Replicant infertility problem, thereby increasing slave labor and driving up space colonization. What sets Replicants apart is their implanted memories, designed to imitate humanity while still being separate from them. While K knows he is a Replicant, his real love for Joi (who herself shows signs of artificial sentience) shows he already has sincere human emotions. His implanted memories both make him human and constantly remind him of his Replicant status.

While Deckard’s identity was left ambiguous to emphasize his turn to humanity in the original film, K’s identity is left decidedly unambiguous to show that humanity is seemingly beyond his reach. He can only acquire an imitation of it, never feeling truly human. K starts to doubt this after visiting Dr. Ana Stelline (Carla Juri), who creates the Replicants’ memory implants. Stelline lives inside a sealed bubble, owing to her weak immune system. She only interacts with the outside world through holograms, as well as visits from outsiders. Ironically, the woman who helps Replicants feel more human has not received the full range of human experience. She informs K that one of his memory implants (of living in an orphanage) is in fact real, implying that K was naturally born and therefore the child of Rachael and Deckard. After visiting Stelline, K tracks down Deckard, who has lived in hiding for thirty years in the ruins of

Las Vegas. In their first meeting, Deckard asks K, “You mightn’t happen to have a piece of cheese about you now, boy?” K recognizes the quote as Ben Gunn’s from *Treasure Island*; not only is the isolated Deckard the “Ben Gunn” of the film, but K’s recognition is a sign that both men delight in reading old, nostalgic fiction.

Nostalgia and memory are defining characteristics of Deckard, just as in the first film. *Blade Runner* showed Deckard’s old apartment as being littered with photographs. The sequel escalates this by giving Deckard all of Vegas as a replacement, complete with holographic recordings of Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra. Given that Ford himself is a nostalgic, masculine icon of the ‘80s and ‘90s, his character’s hiding among two nostalgic male icons like Presley and Sinatra highlights how much of an icon Ford himself has become. Much like Jones and Solo, whose reintroductions involve reliving their heroic pasts, Deckard is reintroduced with a past obsession. But unlike Jones, who merely continued his adventurous ways, or Solo, who attempted to after failing his son, Deckard has no legitimate glorified past — only a simulacrum. Deckard owes his lack of a glorified past to his fleeing from his anti-heroic career as a Replicant hunter to be with Rachael. With her dead and their child gone, Deckard’s one chance at happiness — to be a husband and father — was taken from him. In place of reliving his past, Deckard wallows in nostalgia for American pop culture, made into a physical space through Vegas. With his fatherhood role denied him, Deckard has no way to renegotiate his aging masculinity, and therefore has no purpose but to live in the shadow of the past. This makes his meeting with K extremely tense, since K believes he is talking to his father. Deckard explains his hiding of the child as necessary for it to live. “Sometimes, to love someone, you gotta be a stranger,” laments Deckard. “Here’s to strangers,” K says, clearly hoping he is still the child.

This hope is shattered when Wallace's men arrive to take Deckard, leaving K in the hands of a Replicant uprising who assisted in the child's hiding. Their leader, Freysa (Hiam Abbass) reveals the child as a daughter, completely obliterating K's dreams of humanity. By setting up K as both a reflection and inversion of Deckard, the film plays off the expectations created by *Crystal Skull* and *Force Awakens* in expecting a male heir to Deckard's legacy.

In making Ford's third cinematic heir a daughter instead of a son, *Blade Runner 2049* challenges the patrilineal metanarrative of Ford's late career screen revivals, preserving the themes of aging fatherhood while eliminating the father-son focus. Changing these gender dynamics recalls the focus on Rey in *The Force Awakens*, as the spiritual heir to the Skywalker-Solo legacy instead of the biological heir, Kylo Ren. In *2049*, K is more of the spiritual heir, and the daughter, deduced as Ana Stelline, is the biological one. Given her inexperience with human interaction and creation of fake memories, Stelline's personality also mimics Deckard, legitimizing her as his daughter. This revelation also resolves the decades-long debate over Deckard's central humanity. Ultimately, it does not matter if Deckard is human or Replicant; his importance to the story is only as the father of the miracle child. The miracle itself came from the proven Replicant Rachael giving birth, while the child that Wallace is so desperate to acquire is female herself.

While K is the film's protagonist, his realization that he is not the heir to a new evolutionary step shifts the film's importance from the masculine to the feminine. Childbirth ends up being the miracle; motherhood is the key to creating a child who transcends the human-Replicant debate. By being the father, Deckard is merely one part of this process, so his status as human or Replicant is irrelevant. Deckard even acknowledges this on two separate occasions.

When K asks if Deckard's dog is real, Deckard responds, "I don't know, ask him." His message is simple — a being is as real as it wants to be, regardless of it being born naturally or artificially. Deckard has made peace with this, considering himself human. When taken to meet Wallace, the Replicant creator implies Deckard was made to mate with Rachael. "I know what's real," replies Deckard, reinforcing his own ethos about the nature of humanity. His worldview extends to Rachael as well; when Wallace brings out a clone of her to entice Deckard, he sadly explains "her eyes were green," rejecting the clone as not *his* Rachael. Just because she can be recreated does not make her the same person. K experiences this as well, following Joi's destruction. A giant advertisement in Joi's image appears before K, leading him to reject it since it was not *his* Joi. While Joi is not flesh and blood the way Rachael was, her love for K made her real to him. This inspires K to become human himself, regardless of his own origins. Instead of following Freysa's orders to kill Deckard so he would not reveal anything to Wallace, K saves him from being taken off-world for further torture. Faking Deckard's death, K takes him to Stelline for a grand reunion. "All the best memories are hers," K tells Deckard, acknowledging both his own Replicant status and how Stelline helped him feel human. In a mirror to Roy Batty, a Replicant who also chose to be human and died in the rain, K makes a choice independent of Wallace, the police, or Freysa while dying in the snow. He becomes human by giving an old man a second chance at being a father, by reuniting him with his daughter. The film's last shot is Deckard holding his hand out to Stelline, elated to see his child for the first time.

By dying so Deckard can live to see his daughter, K offers a sacrifice that fulfills the promise first teased in *The Force Awakens* of substituting a male heir for a female one, all while giving Ford's character a second chance at fatherhood, after living his life wallowing in nostalgia

and regretful for past mistakes. In this sense, Deckard's revival shares much in common with Solo's, in how both men deal with loss and regret over their inability to be a father. But while Solo at least had a chance at fatherhood, Deckard's was denied. Solo must confront his mistakes as a father and ultimately sacrifices himself, leaving his son to live alongside the young woman who briefly became his surrogate daughter. Now in *Blade Runner*, a surrogate son longing for a father in Ford's character gives his life, so that father and child can be together. K gives his life so that a daughter may know her own legacy, unlike Kylo Ren, who refuses to believe a woman with no heritage could wield his grandfather's lightsaber.

When put in dialogue with *Crystal Skull* and *Force Awakens*, *Blade Runner 2049* climaxes the onscreen catharsis of Ford's onscreen character revivals, utilizing Indiana Jones, Han Solo, and Rick Deckard in old age to comment on Ford's own aging masculinity, and its renegotiation through fatherhood. Jones found a family, Solo lost one, and Deckard regained one. The foundation, destruction, and reformation of the family unit links all three films, but whereas the *Indiana Jones* and *Star Wars* franchises focused on the nuclear family, *Blade Runner* was content with reuniting a father with his daughter in the wake of the mother's death. Deckard and Stelline can never be a traditional nuclear family unit, but they now have each other. For former Officer Rick Deckard, being a father lets him restore his masculinity, which in turn formally restores his humanity by giving him something to live for beyond just empty nostalgia. The past no longer entraps him, since he has a future through his daughter.

CONCLUSION

HARRISON FORD: AN ICON OF AGING

Harrison Ford made his career out of playing tough but vulnerable action heroes, exemplifying a more sensitive masculinity when “hard-bodied” heroes dominated the screen. This sensitivity allowed Ford to mature into more serious roles in the ‘90s, increasingly becoming an onscreen father. Amid two divorces and a series of box office flops in the early 2000s, Ford began returning to his youthful action roles, now made more vulnerable through the onset of age. After playing onscreen fathers for a decade, Ford re-interpreted Indiana Jones, Han Solo, and Rick Deckard as fathers, partially to revive his own acting career, and partially as a form of onscreen catharsis. What’s notable about *Crystal Skull*, *The Force Awakens*, and *Blade Runner 2049* is how all three films transform Ford during their third acts. Ford either is not present (as in *Star Wars*) or is more of a spectator (*Crystal Skull*, *Blade Runner*) in these films’ climaxes, since he is now either part of a larger family unit or has relinquished the action role to younger actors. Despite this apparent sidelining, Ford’s importance to each narrative is never in doubt. It is through Jones’s perspective, not Mutt’s, that we see a UFO rise from an ancient pyramid. It is Han Solo’s death which drives the emotional lightsaber duel in *Force Awakens*. And it is for Deckard that K kills Wallace’s Replicant servant Luv (Sylvia Hoeks) to prove his own humanity. All three films reflect in some way on Ford’s connection to his onscreen children, whether that be embracing fatherhood with Mutt, dying by Kylo’s hand, or reuniting with

Stelline, the daughter he never knew but always wanted. Ford's characters in all three films exist to provide a legacy for other characters, whether they look up to that legacy, carry it forward, or struggle to move past it. Jones, Solo, and Deckard cast a long shadow, which is ironic given how their arcs involve succeeding or failing to live up to their own masculine legacies.

While Ford helped start these franchises and looks to continue at least one, with Jones, their success is no longer intertwined. *Star Wars* will go on without Ford, and while Indiana Jones will always be his character, the day will come when Jones will become like his father, Sean Connery, and see other actors take up his iconography. *Blade Runner*, simply by focusing most of its runtime on K, has already proved Deckard is not necessary for more stories. Ford may have revived his career through these reprisals, but his iconography is now secure, after transforming into a sensitive but still-commanding father figure. Popular culture has already noticed and capitalized on this newest variation of his persona. 2019's *Super Bowl LIII* featured an Alexa commercial where Ford plays an aging, domesticated man, struggling with technology and a small dog. Seemingly, Ford has revived himself as a father too, given his continuing thoughts toward his children. When Chris Heath asked him if he cares how he'll be remembered, Ford replies, "No. No. By my kids, yeah. It's *unnecessary* [to be remembered for his acting.] You live and you die. The unnatural thing is that the film lives. But I don't care about that. I mean, it was good while it lasted. While I was alive. It was fine" (Heath). As in life, Ford's onscreen persona is now defined by fatherhood, but even so, he is still a man who does not mince his words. His persona will always be synonymous with action and adventure, but as he ages, Ford will now be known as the father of future adventure heroes, both masculine and feminine. No matter the gender or the age, Ford has given the actors and characters of the future an icon to

look up to, a venerable persona whose age has only made him more admirable. After all, it's not the years, but the mileage that counts.

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