

TOXIC FANS DENIGRATE SCI-FI/FANTASY WORLD

Backward attitude goes against central theme of liberation in Star Trek, Star Wars, Battlestar Galactica and the Lord of the Rings

By Lyla Miklos

The Hamilton Spectator

Published online June 27, 2022

Published in print June 28, 2022

In early May I was a guest on Zena Hagerty's podcast My Heart Remembers discussing Toxic Fandom along with her show's editor Dakota Lanktree.

The TV series Star Trek: Strange New Worlds had just premiered. Fans on social media vehemently objected to the character of Admiral Robert April being portrayed by Black actor Adrian Holmes. Robert April was first introduced in the 1970's in Star Trek: The Animated Series. He was voiced by actor James Doohan and depicted as Caucasian.

Fans complained about how Star Trek had become too woke and wasn't adhering to established cannon with this casting choice. First, Star Trek has been woke since it first aired in 1966. The Star Trek franchise has been tackling timely social issues with its various racially and gender diverse casts travelling across the Universe since the very beginning. Second, in the spirit of Gene Roddenberry's positive vision of the future Star Trek needs to mature and evolve to ensure that humanity's trek to the stars embraces everyone on its journey.

A few weeks later the eagerly anticipated Obi-Wan Kenobi series starring Ewan McGregor premiered. One of the new characters on the show was an Inquisitor hunting down Jedi for the Empire named Reva played by Black actress Moses Ingram. Fans flooded her social media with racist hate messages, essentially for simply existing as a Black woman in their beloved sci-fi franchise. Ingram shared online how hurt she was by all the hate. McGregor then posted a video stating unequivocally that there is no place for racism in this world, that he stands with Ingram and that as the lead actor and executive producer of Obi-Wan Kenobi, if you are sending her bullying messages you are NO Star Wars fan in his mind.

Thank you Ewan! I wish J.J. Abrams, Disney Studios and the Star Wars franchise had this same reaction when Black actor John Boyega and Asian actress Kelly Marie Tran were facing racist vitriol from so called fans for their roles as Finn and Rose in the last Star Wars film trilogy.

Tran had to remove herself from social media entirely because of the constant barrage of hate mail she kept receiving. Years later, the studio publicly supported Boyega, in what could only be read as a cynical PR move, after he gave an emotional speech at a Black Lives Matter protest.

This nonsense of not allowing anyone but cisgender, white, able-bodied, heterosexual men into sci-fi fandom spaces is sadly nothing new. I remember when the critically acclaimed reboot of the television series Battlestar Galactica changed the gender of the character of Starbuck to female and actress Katee Sackoff was bombarded with hate mail before the show even premiered.

Over twenty years ago when casting for Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings films was announced fans of J.R.R. Tolkien's books took exception to out gay actor Ian McKellen taking on the role of Gandalf. They claimed that Tolkien never wrote Gandalf as gay so the part shouldn't be played by an openly gay actor. This inane stupidity inspired me to write a fan letter of support to McKellan. He actually took the time to cheekily write me back saying, "I have had 100's of supportive letters – mostly from young straight men!"

It is mind blowing to me that fans of these science fiction and fantasy franchises can accept space wizards, the force, antifascist rebel forces, Vulcan neck pinches, warp speed, evil rings that can control the world, alien species of every hue, cyborgs that destroy humanity, but can't accept women, BIPOC or LGBTQIA+ people in their spaces.

What a lack of imagination! But far more disillusioning is that these fans want a future that maintains the status quo by keeping the dominant class in place. This backward attitude goes against the central theme of liberation all of these popular works of fiction embody. The heroes of Star Trek, Star Wars, Battlestar Galactica and the Lord of the Rings are all freedom fighters against the forces of oppression.

Lyla Miklos (she/her) is a queer feminist labour activist, broadcast journalist, education worker, publicist, vocalist, UU & Trekkie.

<https://www.thespec.com/opinion/contributors/2022/06/27/toxic-fans-denigrate-sci-fifantasy-world.html>