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On Ethical Obsession and Anti-Corporate Fandom

In October 2023, a patron at a Disney Springs restaurant in Florida unfortunately passed away after suffering a severe allergic reaction. Her widower, Jefferey Piccolo, filed a wrongful death lawsuit; the restaurant assured the group their food was allergen free multiple times before the meal. Later, in May 2024, Disney filed a motion to order the circuit court have the lawsuit arbitrated rather than heard by a jury—a process much more cost-effective for the company—on the grounds that Piccolo waived his rights to a jury trial after signing up for a one-month Disney+ trial over three years prior (2024).

Disney has since backtracked on this decision and will allow Piccolo to have a trial, but Disney's corporate greed too often infringes on basic human decency. This story makes clear why I have mixed feelings about *Star Wars*. On one hand, it's not like I can control the media and art I'm interested in—I've loved *Star Wars* since my dad showed me *A New Hope* at four years old and it seems like I get more obsessed with each passing year. But on the other hand, such an unethical company doesn't deserve my loyalty, patronage, attention, or investment. So where does that leave me and so many others in the same predicament?

I try to practice what I call “ethical obsession,” where I reduce the amount of my own dollars going to Disney and maximize the happiness I get from *Star Wars*—a calculated praxis of anti-capitalist franchise enjoyment. Doing this can be harder than it seems, so I made a guide with my best tips and tricks to stay ethically obsessed with an unethical franchise you may love.¹

First and foremost, minimize the amount of your money given directly to Disney. When watching movies and shows, if you can buy DVDs or blu rays secondhand, that's always best. For the newer stuff—I'm not telling you to pirate the shows, but I'm certainly not *not* telling you that. Subscription services take a lot of money from you over the years, so please keep your money. As for merchandise, if you can buy secondhand or trade for it that's definitely recommended. I know there's pressure to buy new Black Series Hasbro figures, Lego sets,² and Loungefly backpacks as they come out, but I promise you don't need everything. It's good to save for a figure or Lego set you really want rather than paying exorbitant price tags for each and every one.

On this topic, tempering your excitement on moral grounds can help you show restraint when purchasing firsthand merchandise. Saying to yourself, “they want me to buy this,” can help

¹ Disclaimer: This is not about *Harry Potter*. Don't support *Harry Potter*.

² I am so guilty of this one, but remember it's about improvement, not perfection!

you stay frugal via political protest. As for merchandise, I find that fans create amazing works. Disney doesn't market certain parts *Star Wars* properties,³ so buying from small creators shows appreciation for those stories and characters without giving money to a corporation. Plus, small artists' pieces are often cheaper than official merch and fund much better causes than, for example, Israel's genocide.⁴ Additionally, if you want merch for a certain character or book, you should make it! Some of my favorite *Star Wars* fan creations are stickers I've made and drawings I've done—they don't have to be perfect or anything as long as they're yours. Fanfiction as well as material arts and crafts exercise your creative energy and contribute to your fandom constructively without giving money to unethical companies.

Books are a major part of the *Star Wars* ecosystem these days; it seems like there's a new book every month, and they can really add up if you buy them all. I definitely recommend getting a library card and requesting new books as they come out. You might not get them immediately, but I've had a lot of success with this technique.⁵ If you don't live near a library, you can probably find an online library with these books, though wait times may be longer. As for older books, I know secondhand bookstores like Half Price Books⁶ usually have a huge selection of *Star Wars* books, new and old. I found a super cool copy of the *Star Wars: Tales* omnibus at a Half Price Books, so you really never know what you'll find. If you're a comic book fan, secondhand bookstores usually have comic sections as well, though they can be small and out-of-date. If you want the new comics you can buy them from smaller comic stores, but I usually just pirate the series as they come out from myriad illicit sites.⁷

But if you're really itching to fully own a new book, you can allow yourself to get it. Ideally you should buy it new from a smaller bookstore, but depriving your happiness out of an admittedly small protest isn't always the best way to live. I really wanted a physical copy of *Reign of the Empire: The Mask of Fear* since Alexander Freed is among my favorite authors and I love the characters. I don't buy every single book, but I don't regret buying that one since I added cool marginalia. There's also a method to strip the DRM⁸ from library ebooks and keep them forever. That's what I do with pretty much all my *Star Wars* ebooks, so I get them from the library once and have them for eternity—it's nice to look back on a digital copy without spending money on a file.

³ Cough, cough, *The High Republic* or almost anything pre-2014.

⁴ Straight from the horse's mouth, see *The Walt Disney Company*, "The Walt Disney Company Donates To..."

⁵ Even if you don't read books, please get a library card. It's good for libraries, and maybe you can even start reading!

⁶ I've spent so much of my life inside Half Price Books browsing the sci-fi section. If you ever want to run into me, hang around Half Price Books and I'll probably be there.

⁷ But if you're a cop, then no I don't. I love buying all my comics straight from Marvel.

⁸ DRM stands for digital rights management, and it's the software used by libraries that make your books unavailable after a certain date and time.

I won't touch on larger purchases for experiences, such as a trip to Disneyland's *Galaxy's Edge* or *Star Wars* Celebration, since these larger purchases are a little more justifiable given their infrequency. For the bigger things, it's more about personal choice, and I don't want to dictate people's lives and say you shouldn't do these things since they can be really powerful experiences. Be cautious, however, of the exclusivity effect, where Disney has exclusive merch for sale only at certain events, making the purchasing decision much more rushed and less thought-out. It's necessary to go into these events level-headed and prepared to talk yourself out of buying merchandise just because it's exclusive. And if there's an exclusive item you really, really want, then get it! It's just important to know you'll be put into a manipulative situation by a money-driven company.

Being really into *Star Wars* also involves engaging with that franchise as a fan. For me and many people, this looks like consuming *Star Wars* content on various social medias, joining online conversations, and maybe going to in-person meet-ups or clubs. One key aspect of being an ethical fan is framing your fandom as a relationship with authors, creators, and artists rather than with a company. I didn't like *Andor* so much because Disney did a good job, but because Tony Gilroy's vision, Diego Luna's vision, the set designers, costume designers, directors, writers, and every artist involved spoke to me. People create art, so centering the actual artists making it best celebrates these stories. This is especially important for stories including marginalized or typically excluded people, orientations, or themes. *Doctor Aphra* (2020) isn't good queer representation because Disney is such a supportive company, but because Alyssa Wong is a talented writer with a unique perspective.⁹

This comes into play a lot during fan discussions on social media sites. I'm gonna use the app formerly known as Twitter for this section since it's the one I'm most used to, but this applies to others as well. There can be a tendency to treat *Star Wars* social media accounts as fellow fans, but I advise against this. The *Star Wars* social media account admin dubbed "Swagmin" isn't anyone's friend—it's an account run by a corporation because they thought it would be economically advisable.¹⁰ Your interactions with them are profitable. Further, Disney selects Twitter accounts to receive packages for shows because they have palatable and clean opinions. Posting these boxes or packages is free promotion for Disney, which is a huge misstep. Nothing is free when dealing with a company like Disney, so reduce how much you give them materially and from promotion. It can be nice to get stuff mailed to you, and I'm not telling anyone they have to refuse free gifts from their favorite franchises. Just be careful with how much free marketing you're giving these companies and celebrate the artists behind stories, not the business people behind the company.

⁹ And on this, Disney only publishes queer stories to continue to make money from those communities. It isn't some benevolent act, it's calculated support to increase profits.

¹⁰ I'm not sure this is a big phenomenon anymore, but it was at the time I started writing the essay. For that matter, just know that no corporation is your friend, even if they act friendly.

Now that we've covered what it means to ethically celebrate Star Wars we like, it's time to cover how to critically examine those stories and critique what we don't like. I want to provide an example here from Ellie, one host of the show *Daughters of Ferrix*. She's a super cool person with a really awesome show that's a big inspiration for the writing I do, so you should check them out. In the episode "Andor Is Letting Me Down," she discusses *Andor* season two's second arc, highlighting the circumstances surrounding Cinta Kaz's death. As a quick refresher, she dies after a blaster accidentally fires during a heist on Ghorman (2025). Ellie emphasizes how the show killing Cinta in the same episode after reintroducing her plays into the "bury your gays" pop culture trope, a writing trend which sees gay characters as more expendable than straight ones.¹¹ She also notes how Cinta and her actress face an intersectional marginalization—Cinta is a gay woman played by Varada Sethu, a woman of color. The context around Cinta's death—especially how she dies just minutes after kissing her partner for the first time in years—further this homophobic trope and fridges a queer woman of color to further her white partner's development.

Ellie has a great quote during her segment talking about Cinta's death. She says, "*Andor* is a good show, and it deserves to be better," and this mindset helps greatly when critiquing media we generally enjoy. Taking good care to recognize the presence of harmful tropes—especially when they have real world consequences—helps foster a more welcoming and safe fandom environment. Further, we must hold creators accountable when their works play into said tropes, as well as advocating for better representation in writer's rooms so voices of all kinds have an active say in the art getting created.

Even if we don't like the media we're critiquing, it's still important to be constructive. Now, I know from personal experience this can be difficult,¹² but falling into a trap of purely blind or vitriolic hate doesn't help anyone. On one hand, if there's just something I really don't like for storytelling purposes—for two examples, the young adult book *Force Collector* or *The Clone Wars* (2008)—I just won't talk about it. I mean, I didn't have any moral or ethical problems with the content, it just didn't interest me. It doesn't improve my or anyone else's life to hate on it, so I won't talk about it. On the other hand, if there's a story I don't like for ethical or moral reasons—let's say, *Republic Commando: Hard Contact* by Karen Traviss or *Splinter of the Mind's Eye* by Alan Dean Foster—I'm going to talk about it and raise awareness that the books play into hateful stereotypes, as well as hold the authors responsible. Constructive criticism and hate are distinct, and it's important not to confuse the two; real people are behind every art piece.

And that's where I want to leave us: celebrate artists, critique their art, and uplift fellow fans. I hope you learned something, but also know these aren't hard-and-fast rules. I'm going to end up breaking the dogma I've laid out at some point, just as I'm sure many other people will. If

¹¹ See TV Tropes, "Bury Your Gays."

¹² I know this because of how many times I've complained about *Ahsoka* (2023)...

you lived your life never giving money to or supporting any unethical company, you would probably just deprive yourself of joy needlessly.¹³ I make an effort to always reduce human suffering, but too often I forget I'm human as well. In such a hostile world, I would go insane without the things that bring me joy, like collecting Bossk merchandise or putting together Lego models of my favorite spaceships. Keep in mind that corporations are unethical, but meet yourself where you're at and have grace with those living in this unethical world.

¹³ See *The Good Place*, "Chapter 35: Don't Let The Good Life Pass You By" for a beautiful reckoning with this unfortunate reality (and while you're at it, watch the whole series).

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