

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of
Millersville University of Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirement for the Degree of
Master of English

By
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May 2023

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dave, Ken, and Dan, who have shared and fostered my love for *Star Wars* from our school days. May we stay forever young in our joy of galaxies far, far away and pass on our joy to the next generations.

INTRODUCTION

When George Lucas sold his company, Lucasfilm Ltd., to the Walt Disney Corporation on October 30, 2012, (Krantz) it began a new era in storytelling for all of Lucas's prior properties including his largest: *Star Wars*. The purchase worth \$4.05 billion proved to be a financial bonanza for Disney as it took all of six years for the corporation to recoup its investment (Whitten). This new era included an immediate announcement of the development of a new trilogy of movies that would include the characters of Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, and Han Solo, who first appeared in the property's original trilogy of movies (1977 – 1983). The news of including these “legacy” characters sent shockwaves throughout a fandom that had up to then been living off of the nostalgia of the critically acclaimed Original Trilogy, the dwindling fruits of the less lauded yet popular Prequel Trilogy (1999 – 2005), two animated series (*Star Wars: Clone Wars*, 2003 – 2005; *Star Wars: The Clones Wars*, 2008 – 2021), a line of in-universe novels, video games, and toys. While fandom reacted to the news with elation and joy, what has transpired since that announcement has been a troubling behavior that has permeated throughout a small portion of the fandom that has had its voice amplified through content and discourse created through YouTube, Twitter, and podcasting. This behavior has at times been labeled as “toxic.” With the aid of the current social and political climate, it is a byproduct of over 40 years of a kind “cold war” between fandom and creators for ownership of the story. Furthermore, post-modern casting decisions by an ambiguous and inconsistent creator have angered a subsection of the fan base. The usage of marginalized peoples in traditionally white male archetypes upended the saga's traditional characterization choices with more inclusive casting choices relegating straight, white males to being part of the collective rather than leading the collective.

Fan theorizing of *Star Wars* has always been energetic and passionate. Young fans spent years using action figures and playsets to create their own head canon during and beyond the first trilogy of films *A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi*. In the 1990s with the movies moving further into the past, fans took to a litany of novels to satiate their theories. These books continued the stories of the characters of the Original Trilogy and added new characters to the saga. Yet, it was not until the advent of social media that an intense and often abusive form of gatekeeping has taken hold of the small, but vocal subsection of fandom. While unfulfilled fan theories born from trailers for new content and serialization of the stories can explain a level of disappointment among fans, it cannot explain abusive behaviors. Bryan Young, author and host of the long-running podcast *Full of Sith*, argues one of the reasons for the behavior is an intellectually dishonest discourse:

I think theorizing helps, to be honest. I owned a comic book [bookstore] and the theorizing we did as issues came out month to month helped sell comics but also invest in story. But back then, we weren't tied to an outcome. Right? Like, the worst that would happen is we'd go, 'Man, we didn't see that coming.' Now, there's an expectation that 'my theory is the only logical conclusion and if it isn't that, then there is something wrong.' And I think that's what creates this combative tone, and I think *Red Letter Media* and other click bait, disingenuous critics are to blame for that attitude.

The question then begs to be answered, if one of the main culprits for this abusive behavior is intellectual dishonesty, where does this dishonesty come from? This behavior from fandom while troubling and divisive has its roots in uncertainty over ownership of the material from an

ambiguous inconsistent creator that is both “alive” and “dead” – to paraphrase Roland Barthes. Barthes identified the author as “a modern figure, a product of our society” and felt that in Western society, “the explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it.” (143) Barthes sought to rid the reader of this need to seek out the author’s explanation. The French theorist Michael Foucault expanded further that the reader must “locate the space left empty by the author’s disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings this disappearance uncovers.” (209) While 19th and early 20th century theorists may have been designating “author” in the literal sense, we can expand the definition to include creators of artistic content such as directors, screenwriters, playwrights, and producers, ideally any one with creative control over the process of making art. Once these “creators” are eliminated, only fandom is left to fill this void in ownership and often unwilling to cede it back. For *Star Wars* fandom and its creators, this conflict for ownership has intensified over the past 45 years due to the delayed release of new material.

SPECIAL EDITION ALTERATIONS AND FANDOM BETRAYAL

Upon Lucas completing the Original Trilogy run of *Star Wars* in 1983 with the release of *Return of the Jedi*, fans took full ownership over the property. From that moment until the early 1990s, the creator was symbolically “dead” and fans filled the void with their imaginations, fanfic, and fan-videos. Starting in 1991 with the release of the novel *Heir to the Empire* by Timothy Zahn, a host of books known as the Expanded Universe (EU) stayed the engagement of fans through the early and mid-1990s. The Zahn Trilogy as it became known reignited a dormant fan base. These books and those that followed, while being blessed by the Lucas himself, were not considered part of the official *Star Wars* canon; however, fans assuming any future *Star*

Wars films were never to come took this blessing as the creator's "last words." Because of Lucas' passive involvement, fans eagerly handed ownership of the story to the various authors of the EU. For several years, fans eagerly accepted the stories being told to them, but in a preview of trouble to come from gatekeeping fandom, the story choice to kill of the beloved character of Chewbacca was met with extreme anger. In 1999's *Vector Prime*, the first book of the *Star Wars: The New Jedi Order* series published by Del Rey, author R. A. Salvatore dropped a planet on Chewbacca. He went on to receive death threats from fans ("In Depth"). Additionally, fans felt ownership over the creative decisions of legacy characters only. For example, the death of Anakin Solo, a character created through EU storytelling and not the Lucas-led films, was met with acclaim and applause. Fans made their voices clear, ownership extended beyond the fans only so far as the fans agreed with creative decision-making.

In the late 1990s, Lucas announced a series of "special edition" re-releases of the Original Trilogy as a primer for an upcoming trilogy of films that would serve as prequels to the original three movies. In these revised editions, Lucas symbolically returned from death, but was not welcomed with open arms due to the changes he made to the installment, foreshadowing fandom's stubbornness at abdicating ownership. To many fans the most notorious of the changes was Han Solo firing his weapon *after* the bounty hunter Greedo in their short standoff at the Mos Eisley Cantina. This change spurred the rallying cry "Han shot first" from fans who felt Lucas had somehow completely misinterpreted his own creation (in the original cut, Solo shoots Greedo without the bounty hunter pulling his own trigger). Fans further ridiculed scene additions and changes such the inclusion of Jabba the Hutt in *A New Hope* and the replacement of the musical number "Lapti Nek" *Return of the Jedi* with the CGI-infused "Jedi Rocks." Fans who had claimed ownership of the original films felt betrayed by Lucas' changes. These changes

angered and enraged fans. They began to view Lucas less as a “once-reassuring father-figure” and “respect for his authorial status began to unravel” (Guynes 195). This viewpoint became one of the exigence’s for the 2010 film *The People vs. George Lucas* (“About”), which was a “long indictment of Lucas for the kinds of offenses against fandom” fans perceived in his post-Original Trilogy creative choices (Guynes 22). Yet, these fans declined to acknowledge or understand story reasons around these changes and instead felt that Lucas had diminished the story. Bryan Young voiced the ideal way fans should respond by “understanding that the rights owners and authors can do what they want to their creations. Instead of getting angry, they should try to understand why the creator would make the changes and readjust the context of their understanding from there.” This readjustment of context did not factor into the intense gatekeeping over the Special Edition versions of *Star Wars* (in fact the original edits are not available for commercial purchase) mainly due to fandom’s headstrong unwillingness to relinquish their ownership of the content. Fans celebrated the creator’s return but when it came to previously released content, they wished for the creator to be more like a symbolic figurehead instead of a decision maker. Yet, this negative reaction from some fans did not diminish the intense anticipation from the fandom for the Prequel Trilogy. Famously, fans bought tickets to see the films *Meet Joe Black* and *The Siege* simply for the purpose of watching the trailer for *The Phantom Menace* (Dzieza). However, although fandom yearned for new content, cracks were forming in the willingness of a subset of fans to hand back the ownership of the saga to a now fully “alive” creator.

THE PREQUEL TRILOGY AND FANDOM FRUSTRATIONS

Lucas returned the saga to the big screen in 1999 by premiering the first movie of the Prequel Trilogy: *The Phantom Menace*. While the opening night and weekend of the film broke records (Wolk), Lucas did not receive the acclaim from fans that he had perhaps expected. Lucas's opening scroll depicting galactic economic trade conflict was an enormously different and underwhelming choice for fans expecting action and adventure. Fans disliked the casting choice for young Anakin Skywalker (Jake Lloyd) but leveled their harshest criticism at the inclusion of the clumsy, buffoonish Jar Jar Binks (Ahmed Best). Fans hated the character so much that they harassed and bullied Best to the point that he considered suicide (Parker). This treatment online of an actor who portrayed a disliked character would foreshadow abusive behavior by fans against Sequel Trilogy actors of color almost 20 years later. Following the release of the second film in the prequel trilogy, *Attack of the Clones*, reviews made a note to mention how little Jar Jar Binks appeared in the film, as if it was a selling point of the film and that Lucas had listened and reacted to fan reaction. Regardless of whether or not Lucas purposely diminished the character's role in the plot, in the minds of fans, they were still in control even though the film received worse critical acclaim than its predecessor.

Although the consensus critical and fan reaction to the prequel trilogy was that the films underwhelmed, fans were left with a complete saga of six films once George Lucas proclaimed that *Revenge of the Sith* (2003) would be the final installment – in fact, John Williams, the esteemed composer of all of the *Star Wars* saga films, felt so emboldened that the saga had come to a final conclusion that he composed an extra-long farewell style end credits music track. The creator once again returned to the “grave” for five years.

He returned from the “dead” in 2008 but in a collaborative way in helping to develop a protégé in animator Dave Filoni and produce *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* animated movie and

subsequent series. This time the creator was not returning to alter existing material or begin a new trilogy of films, rather to fill in the gaps between existing films. Fans, while enjoying the series, felt that the addition of Filoni helped to fix many of the issues concerning character development in the Prequel Trilogy – especially that of Anakin Skywalker and his motivations for turning to the dark side. By Lucas including not only a professional, but one who was a fan himself, fans viewed this as further gaining ownership over the story. Most importantly, the fans did not view *The Clone Wars* as altering or engaging in the holy trinity of the Original Trilogy. The gatekeeping among fans at this time revolved around whether the Prequel Trilogy was as good as the Original Trilogy and whether George Lucas had too much autonomy as a creator.

This short time of relative calm ended when Lucas once again altered his original films for the 2011 Blu-Ray release of the entire saga. Fans were further enraged by adding an audible “Nooo” by Darth Vader in the climactic moments of *Return of the Jedi* and Hayden Christensen to the very final moments of the same film replacing the image of Sebastian Shaw, who had played Anakin Skywalker in the original and special edition releases (O’Carroll). The anger of fans towards the changes further exhibited a growing negative behavior amongst fans unable and unwilling to cede ownership of the original Star Wars property back to its creator. This anger limited itself to “fanon discontinuity” or “fan-canon discontinuity,” which is defined by TV

Tropes as:

The act of fans mentally writing out certain events in a show's continuity that don't sit well, be it a single episode, a season-spanning arc, an entire season, or even an entire *series*. If a plot or ending rubs one the wrong way severely enough, fandom can just decide that the offending events never happened. On the series level, events may fall under Discontinuity because the show is perceived to suck

at that point or decline too far in quality. Events also get "discontinued" for particularly screwing up the characters or setting, and a show that starts to suck will end up screwing things up eventually anyway.

Lesley Goodman in her essay "Disappointing Fans" further elaborated on this phenomenon as a "collective decision." For Star Wars fandom, the collective had spoken: "You can add to the Saga, but you cannot alter the Saga."

FANDOM PUSHBACK AND THE SEQUEL TRILOGY AND BEYOND

After the 2012 sale of Lucasfilm to Disney, plans were announced by the company to produce a new trilogy of movies that would serve as sequels to the original films and would include the main cast members of those films reprising their roles. Based on how fandom reacted to even the slightest bit of alteration to the Original Trilogy and those "legacy" characters, it should not have surprised any observer that the conflict between fandom and creator has reached beyond previously seen behaviors. Although the original creator is symbolically "dead" what has emerged in his place a new creator made up of a range of people including producers, story group members, screen writers, and directors. As Tara Lomax explains in her essay, "Thank the Maker," which appeared in *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling*, *Star Wars* once defined by a single author is now structured entity of authors, "...suggests an authorial structure that supersedes the singular author role" (Lomax qtd. in Guynes 46). However, for fans confusion still pervades because as she further clarifies, "However, a more practical critical account should recognize this new authorial structure still facilitates the authorial presence of a singular auteur brand" (Lomax qtd. in Guynes 46). She shows evidence of this with the hiring of Abrams as the director of *The Force Awakens* and the reliance of the new creative output on

filmmakers with independent filmmaking experience (46). We can take this “singular brand” one step further and claim these auteurs and artists, led by producer Kathleen Kennedy, are the new singular “creator” and this “creator” is once again both alive and dead due to the post-modern serialization techniques displayed by streaming services and filmmaking. This uncertainty creates a fan backlash over ownership of the story that is exhibited through gatekeeping that can be abusive and hyperbolic. This backlash can be witnessed through week-to-week serialization via streaming television and through more traditional sequel trilogy film releases. While political discourse and monetization of critical viewpoints are driving forces behind some of the gatekeeping seen in the fan community, the underlying uncertainty over ownership makes this gatekeeping possible by emboldening the very fans who benefit from the monetization and are gaslit by the political discourse. In short, the inability of gatekeeping fans to truly blame one person creates a deeper frustration than if they did.

Even Lucas as sole creator needs a bit of clarification. Over the course of the history of Star Wars, Lucas was credited by fans as the sole creator and storyteller of this property. Yet, he inevitably relied upon the creative decisions of others around him to make his vision a reality. Lawrence Kasdan lent his screenwriting and story elements to *The Empire Strikes Back* (Leigh Brackett also was credited although her script was almost completely dismissed) and *Return of the Jedi*; Lucas retained his status as the ultimate creator based upon the widely known aspect that Lucas had sole authority to strike or add elements. In addition to Kasdan, artists and actors themselves in the films added to the story with elements such as small story elements during the space battles and Harrison Ford ad-libbing the line “I know” to Carrie Fisher during the carbon freeze scene, which became one of the most famous and beloved moments in the saga. These aspects were not added by Lucas, yet because of his authority by the fans as the creator, his

creation receives credit. Additionally, Lucas did not direct *The Empire Strikes Back* (Irving Kirschner directed) and served as a Unit 2 director on *Return of the Jedi* (Richard Marquand directed). Therefore, story elements he inspired were brought to life through the direction of others. Yet, Lucas retained his authority and fans years later would note his vision as being more authoritative than the those who made the vision possible.

This past practice by fans to view authority as the true merits of creative ownership, is one reason for the extreme backlash against Kathleen Kennedy. As CEO of Lucasfilm, she would have sole authority to approve or deny any artistic choice. One would assume she has full leeway to make creative decisions before they become final, as evidenced by her decision in 2017 to relieve Phil Lord and Christopher Miller of their directorial duties on the film *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (Lang) and replaced them with veteran director – and friend of George Lucas – Ron Howard. She also fired Colin Trevorrow, who was slated to direct the final film of the Sequel Trilogy, in 2018. Reporter Chris Lee covered these years for Vulture.com.

Kennedy, who, five years into her Lucasfilm tenure, is showing less and less compunction about firing or replacing directors she feels are temperamentally or creatively unsuited to the job. ‘There’s one gatekeeper when it comes to Star Wars and it’s Kathleen Kennedy,’ says a veteran movie producer, who has worked with the studio chief. ‘If you rub Kathleen Kennedy the wrong way — in any way — you’re out. You’re done.’

For Lucas and after him, Kennedy, fans were always going to have conflicting opinions. However, in Kennedy’s case, she also is the symbolic head of a singular authorial structure, where the ownership claims are murky and lack transparency. Thus, for some gatekeepers, she is perceived as an illegitimate keeper of the *Star Wars* throne.

More often than in a book, film and streaming television present the authorial problem of ambiguity over authorship. Jason Mittell in his analysis of modern television, *Complex TV*, explains this challenge for fans, “Given the intensity of collaborative of the production process, such notions of authorship, even in its managerial conception, oversimplify the creative process and threaten to deny agency to the array of contributors who help make television” (95). This explanation can also be used for filmmaking, which in modern times often uses multiple writers and producers in conjunction with a director. The Prequel Trilogy made the question of authorship easy. Outside of some under-the-radar script interference by Tom Stoppard in *Revenge of the Sith* (Tom Stoppard), Lucas served as the sole visionary, screenwriter, and director. The Sequel Trilogy increased the ambiguity exponentially. The films featured JJ. Abrams (*The Force Awakens*, *The Rise of Skywalker*) and Rian Johnson (*The Last Jedi*) serving as directors, Lawrence Kasdan and Abrams, (*The Force Awakens*), Johnson (*The Last Jedi*), and Chris Terrio and Abrams (*The Rise of Skywalker*) credited as screenwriters. However, the original script for *The Force Awakens* was written by Michael Arndt (who received a credit) and the *The Rise of Skywalker*’s original director and screenwriter were Colin Trevorrow and Derek Connolly (both of whom received story credit). To further confuse fans, the property included Lucasfilm Story Group (a collection of minds who help writers and directors navigate the complex canon of *Star Wars*), Lucas who himself wrote story treatments for the sequel trilogy, and Kathleen Kennedy, the President of Lucasfilm. No longer did fans have one creator to look towards for ownership, instead, fans took one of three choices when assigning ownership: the director, Kennedy, or themselves. Unsurprisingly, fans with the most grievance towards the new creator refused to acknowledge this creator and thus began various activities to further solidify their ownership such as a crowdsourcing a film to replace *The Last Jedi*, petitions to

remake the sequel trilogy, and proudly amplify “The Fandom Menace,” an online collection of fans that refused to acknowledge any *Star Wars* that was created under Disney’s ownership of the property. The push back from fans regarding decisions in the Sequel Trilogy went beyond “fanon discontinuity” and into the most troublesome social discourse.

Soon after the initial teaser trailer over Thanksgiving weekend in 2014 for *The Force Awakens*, some fans began complaining of the decision to include a black man, woman, and Latino man as the three new heroes, while a white man was the antagonist. While it could be easy to simply call this behavior racist or sexist, there was another angle to this. Fans had already taken ownership of the lives of Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, and Han Solo, and had filled in the gaps within the Expanded Universe novels. Seeing those character’s stories deviate from the stories that fans had read and envisioned for years and sometimes decades, caused much of initial backlash and inability to accept this “new” *Star Wars*. In years past, fans who were minorities who felt unrepresented by casting choices of the original and prequel trilogy, wrote fan fiction that incorporated their wished representation; however, this new trilogy including representation of minorities and multiple women in strong protagonist roles, the role of fan-fic would naturally fall upon the fans who felt under-represented. This group did not stop at simply writing or dreaming of a *Star Wars* that included traditional tropes of white men as protagonists and women as love interests, rather they responded with petitions, horrific and abusive behavior on Twitter, and the emergence of “hate” content, where creators monetize a small portion of fandom’s hatred towards this new *Star Wars* through YouTube videos, tweets, and podcasts. This content becomes amplified by social media and outrage culture. These fans attempted and continue to attempt to reclaim ownership of the *Star Wars* property through a constant barrage of propaganda aimed at criticizing every aspect of “Disney *Star Wars*.”

In an incident well-known to *Star Wars*' online fandom and reported on by Adam B. Vary of *Variety*, the professional content creator known as "Star Wars Theory" recorded a live reaction to his viewing of the December 18, 2020, season finale episode of the second season of *The Mandalorian*. He, like others in fandom, had heard rumors of a major cameo appearance in the episode of a major character. Live reaction videos themselves are nothing new to *Star Wars* with YouTube littered with dozens of such content created by amateurs and professionals centered around movie trailers. "SW Theory," as he is known to his fans, broke down in tears watching the image of Luke Skywalker with a green lightsaber striking down droids and saving the day. What should have become a unifiable moment of joy and vulnerability took a disturbing turn soon after SW Theory's reaction was recorded by the YouTuber known as Sick Doctor and subsequently posted on Twitter by the user "fellowhomstdve" with the comment: "if you feel compelled to to have an emotional reaction to star wars [sic] by all means have one! I almost cried at Crait in the theater and I never cried at a movie in my life. [sic] but don't artificially recreate that shit for your millions of followers!"

Sick Doctor's video showing SW Theory's emotional reaction received 967,000 views in just six days and when the clip appeared on Twitter, it caught the eye of Lucasfilm Story Group member Pablo Hidalgo. Hidalgo responded to "fellowhomstdve" with the comment, "emotions are not for sharing." This comment, though intended to be a subtle jab at the poster, was ambiguous enough to trigger defenders and SW Theory himself. SW Theory took this response from Hidalgo as proof that the Lucasfilm Story Group was purposefully antagonistic against Star Wars fans who did not care for creative direction the saga had taken under Disney's control. For his part, Hidalgo deleted the tweet and clarified through an apology over tweets that his intention was to be sarcastic at what he thought was an insensitive comment from fellowhomstdve.

I wish to clarify that my post that “emotions are not to be shared” was sarcastic self-mockery and was certainly not intended to be hurtful to anyone and I’m deeply sorry that it was. As a lifelong fan, I appreciate fans expressing how they feel — it’s what being a fan is about! We can’t all be together in movie theaters or at conventions right now, so express yourself online! (In fact, those of us not prone to such displays will quietly live vicariously through your energy) (Vary)

The damage had been done, however, and SW Theory did not accept the apology and took Hidalgo’s reaction as a betrayal and posted a 5 minute and 54 second YouTube video to his millions of subscribers titled “Pablo Hidalgo Makes Fun of Me for Crying Luke Skywalker Reaction.” The video weaponized Hidalgo’s comment and further entrenched fandom into a kind of purity test with Lucas’ *Star Wars* on one side and Disney’s *Star Wars* on the other. It was not a secret based on his own videos that SW Theory had already been a vocal critic of *The Last Jedi* and its treatment of Luke’s character, and he used this incident to further delegitimize Disney’s *Star Wars* among his viewership and those who might have been on the fence. Fans who felt *Star Wars* under Disney’s control was illegitimate felt this incident provided proof that the current creator needed to be destroyed and that the fans themselves were needed to claim ownership of the property. Since this incident major YouTube creators such as Den of Geeks, Geeks + Gamers, Mike Zeroh, and RK Outpost have produced hundreds of videos condemning and criticizing Disney, Lucasfilm, Kathleen Kennedy, J.J. Abrams, Rian Johnson, Ewan McGregor, Vivien Lyra Blair, Moses Ingram, and others. Those accounts combine for hundreds of thousands of followers and produced videos all centered around delegitimizing the creators, fomenting anger from the most toxic subsections of fandom, and monetizing this anger.

The abusive gatekeeping has only increased since 2019 when *The Rise of Skywalker* became the final film to be released as of 2023. Serialization on the small screen replaced serialization on the big screen, but it has not minimized abusive behavior. The release of series such as *Kenobi*, *The Mandalorian*, *Andor*, and *The Book of Boba Fett* has seen varying degrees of gatekeeping, but most of it centered around Disney's treatment of protagonists and legacy characters. These abusive fans cheered Luke Skywalker's return, the Mandalorian (a male protagonist), and Bo Katan (a white female warrior), and the actions of Cara Dune (played by white actress Gina Carano) yet felt angered by the depiction of a child Princess Leia (dubbed annoying by fans), a black female inquisitor (played by Moses Ingram), and an Obi-Wan Kenobi suffering from PTSD, anxiety, and depression. These same fans who cheered Ewan MacGregor's turn as Kenobi in the prequel series turned on him when he released a video condemning the racist social media attacks on his fellow co-star Ingram (Hassan). Gatekeeping fans viewed the decisions they did not like as being brought about by an illegitimate creator, Kathleen Kennedy, but refused to acknowledge Kennedy in any decision that creators made that they viewed as positive. Alex Damon of the YouTube channel, *Star Wars Explained* posits that "Gatekeepers will treat the creator as alive if it helps their argument. But will quickly brush them off as "dead" if it doesn't. Or they'll attribute the creator with intentions that they never had. Like *Star Wars Legends* fans claiming that was 'Lucas's vision of Star Wars' when it never, ever was." While this may be a logical view that confirmation bias is the driving force behind a disregard for conflicting opinions with creative decisions, the negative, hyperbolic, and sometimes harassing opinions by fans cannot be explained simply through lens of confirmation bias. A move towards inclusive, post-modern storytelling in Star Wars is a factor behind much of this abuse.

POST-MODERNISM AND INCLUSIVE CASTING

Since the full cast of *The Force Awakens* was announced in 2014, gatekeeping fandom has viewed casting decisions involving characters cast by historically marginalized peoples or story decisions perceived as progressive as political “shots across the bow” by Disney, Lucasfilm, Kennedy, or the various content directors. However, post-modern storytelling encourages the “others” as protagonists. “The subject hero of the postmodern novel features otherness compared to the heroes of classical or modernist novels. His or her distinction is in the uncertainty, marginality, ethical pluralism, schizoid nature etc.” (Levchenko 104). The post-modern promotion of the “other,” while a welcome development for millions of fans, has been triggering for a vocal subset of fandom: white males. These fans view the replacement of traditional white male heroes with heroes who come from traditionally marginalized communities as “woke” and “proof” that these creators are intent on propagandizing left-wing, progressive, Marxist, policies. However, these same fans would be surprised to learn that the fans from marginalized communities enjoyed Star Wars in the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s, yet yearned for characters with whom they could connect culturally or socially.

Gatekeeping fans will point to Lando Calrissian, Padme Amidala, or even Princess Leia as proof that they are accepting of minority or female characters in prominent roles, however, they fail to acknowledge that by sheer numbers, the majority of major characters remained white and male. In fact no female or minority actor received top billing until Felicity Jones in *Rogue One* and since that time has remained only one of two women to receive top billing in a Star Wars property (Carrie Fisher received posthumous top billing in *The Rise of Skywalker*). Daisy Ridley who was the main protagonist of all three sequel trilogy films was billed behind Adam Driver, the male antagonist. The original trilogy included only four female characters with

spoken dialogue and two non-white men with spoken dialogue. The prequel trilogy included more non-white male side characters, but in terms of principal actors, only Samuel Jackson (Mace Windu) and Natalie Portman (Padme Amidala) represented the non-white male cast. Thus, for two generations, girls and children in marginalized communities used fanfic and the EU to find representation. While the ST and subsequent one-shot movies (*Solo*, *Rogue One*) and streaming shows have attempted to include more diverse casting representative of Star Wars fandom, the vast majority of abusive, sensationalized, or clickbait content creators are white and male. These creators claim that *Star Wars* has a political agenda and has gone “woke” for the purposes of showing diversity rather than telling strong stories and use the casting of John Boyega (Nigerian-American) as Finn and Kelly Marie Tran (Vietnamese-American) as Rose in the Sequel Trilogy. Recent research shows fans identifying with racist and sexist beliefs were “associated with lower liking of Finn, Rey, and Rose” (Reysen 3). These creators, whether or not they share these beliefs, further embolden this behavior by pushing the narrative that Disney Star Wars is “not” Star Wars and does not exist in the “real” *Star Wars* universe. In fact, looking at an array of titles on YouTube, these gatekeepers seem to be attempting to reclaim ownership of the story in a troubling way.

However, the past and current behavior of fans hints at a future where Star Wars under Disney ownership will eventually be legitimized, and fans will attempt to claim ownership over it in much of the same way they have done so with the previous two trilogies. Following the initial release of the prequel trilogy, fans gatekept on early *Star Wars* fan forums such as The Force.net and claimed that the Original Trilogy was the only legitimate *Star Wars* and the Prequel Trilogy was a mistake and should be erased and re-filmed. After the purchase of *Star Wars* by Disney, gatekeeping fans then accepted the first two trilogies as gospel, and claimed the

Sequel Trilogy was a mistake and should be erased and re-filmed. In fact, fans have petitioned for *The Last Jedi* to be rebooted and have attempted to crowdsource their own sequel trilogy. This repetitive behavior of refusing to give up ownership of the story when the creator “returns from the dead” or a “new” creator takes over only to eventually move the goalposts and claim ownership of the entire canon once the creator “dies” leads one to believe that should Disney announce a new trilogy of movies outside the oversight of Kathleen Kennedy with a new generation of fans in the Story Group, these gatekeeping fans will claim ownership over the ST and its subsequent content. However, it might not. The chief difference is the enticement of money from clicks encourages gatekeeping fans to present sensationalized and gaslighting opinions. These opinions get clicks, views, and publicity on social media. The content creators then monetize these opinions. The system incentivizes triggering fans as a way of increasing clicks, it also requires these content creators to continuously push narratives in an increasingly sensationalized way.

Click bait was always an issue, as some people would misrepresent what happened in a story to make it sound more dramatic than it was. But now the videos that perform best across the board on YouTube are all about real world drama. I should say manufactured drama. Because it's the same kind of thing, someone will take one thing someone said and twist it and blow it wildly out of proportion. I don't like it when it happens to fictional characters, but now it's happening to real people and it's only gotten worse. So no, I don't think YouTube promotes better fan discourse. It wants viewers engaged. Emotional content is what drives engagement. And anger is an easy emotion to pull out of a viewer. I think YouTube actively makes the discourse worse, and they know it (Damon).

A favorite way of pushing this narrative is through the usage of nouns such as “woke,” “agenda,” “failure,” and “hate” with adjectives such as “bad” and “massive.” At *RK Outpost*, a YouTube channel with over 201,000 subscribers and run by Ryan Kinel, the past 200 videos created about Star Wars have all been sensationalized negativity, giving the impression to fans that their beloved story is being destroyed. Kinel presents himself as an expert on Star Wars and then through his videos gives viewers the impression that he knows better than the professionals creating Star Wars content. The subtext is that Kinel and those that think link him are the true owners of the story and they have been exiled by an illegitimate creator. The YouTube channel for the website *Geeks + Gamers* (of which Kinel is a contributor) follows this same model. The channel boasts over 355,000 subscribers and monetized the Hidalgo tweet through five videos each approximately 9 minutes long with the following names: “Pablo Hidalgo Makes Fun Of Star Wars Theory For Luke Skywalker Reaction - Lucasfilm HATES Fans,” “Lucasfilm Employee Offers Pathetic ‘Apology’ To Star Wars Theory - Fans Aren't Buying This Nonsense,” “Lucasfilm's HATRED For Star Wars Fans Is Kathleen Kennedy's True Legacy,” “Wow! Another Lucasfilm Employee SLAMS Star Wars Fans - Kathleen Kennedy's Legacy,” and “More ATTACKS From Lucasfilm Employees - They HATE Star Wars Fans | So Much For That ‘Apology’.”

These videos, consistently hosted by Jeremy Griggs, present a consistent narrative to fans unwilling relinquish ownership of the story. Griggs wears a Star Wars ball cap in each video and sits in front of two massive video screens and white bookcases with video games lining them. He presents himself in this room as not only an exiled leader, but the white represents a “purity” and the ballcap represents his love for the property. The message is clear: “The current creator hates

you. The creator is destroying what you love. I love what you love. I am pure in my love for it. I am an expert.”

Thousands of fans live in a new hyper-reality, as defined by Jean Baudrillard, that is threatening their very identity (Baudrillard qtd. in Postmodernism). If as Baudrillard posits, reality is a copy of a copy because our cultural representations reference each other and past pieces, this would mean gatekeeping fans feel threatened by a cultural reference, copies, reboots, rehashes, allusions to previous works, that do not represent a reality that conflicts with their hyper-reality. For *Star Wars* fandom, this is especially prevalent, but what is lost is that *Star Wars* itself was a copy as it references the Samurai films of Akira Kurosawa, *Flash Gordon*, and the Western genre. *Star Wars* was always political with its allusions to the Vietnam War in the Original Trilogy and the war in Iraq with the Prequel Trilogy. *Star Wars* routinely referenced itself with the Prequel Trilogy being littered with callbacks, Easter eggs, and nods to its previous films.

SOLUTION AND CONCLUSION

The question then begs if there is a solution to the gatekeeping that permeates through this loud and deeply passionate subset fandom that at times voices its opinions with abusive behavior? Perhaps it goes back trust. Based on Baudrillard’s observations audiences are unable to decide on truth and will therefore assign any meaning they want. In post-modernism there is no one singular truth, rather it is a deep skepticism and at times an outright rejection of previous truths and narratives. Post-modernism thus naturally influences audiences to question what they are seeing and for *Star Wars* fandom, this heightened skepticism leads some fans to define anything they see as illegitimate and will rather clutch to one version of truth that fits their

hyper-reality. Simon Hunter of *The Media Insider* simplifies this claiming that because audiences cannot trust any of what they see, they become “disenfranchised with the truth” (Postmodernism). Thus, audiences invent their own truths and when the output does not equal this truth, it is viewed as illegitimate and heresy. Alex Damon voices this opinion:

I think Gatekeepers will treat the creator as alive if it helps their argument. But will quickly brush them off as "dead" if it doesn't. Or they'll attribute the creator with intentions that they never had. Like Star Wars Legends fans claiming that was "Lucas's vision of Star Wars" when it never, ever was. But when fans take ownership of the property, then yes. They feel empowered to say what a "true" fan looks like. Even if every fan has a different opinion.

Is it the job of the Lucasfilm Story Group, Kathleen Kennedy, and the host of directors and actors to earn the trust of this troubled section fandom? I believe not. While this subset of fandom is vocal and their public outcry can be filled with heinous rhetoric and abusive behavior, it still reflects a subset of fandom. The three serial Sequel Trilogy films each earned over \$1 billion at the box office as did the spinoff *Rogue One*. The Mandalorian and Kenobi each earned positive reviews overall from critics and were two of the most streamed series on Disney +, while *Andor* has earned Golden Globe nominations for its star Diego Luna. Rather than earning trust, the creators must trust that their story still resonates with millions of fans across the globe. Evidence suggests that the days of the creator seemingly making kneejerk creative choices such as adding a black character in the Original Trilogy and reducing the role of Jar Jar Binks in the Prequel Trilogy are gone.

And yet, while storytelling in this post-modern era suggests a recognition of inclusivity with character choices, creators still must look to tell the story they wish. With creators from a

wide range of cultural backgrounds and sexual identities, it is not a surprise that these creators would look to tell stories with characters cast with actors from marginalized communities. While writers and directors such as J.J. Abrams, Dave Filoni, Chris Terrio, Rian Johnson, Jon Favreau and Lawrence Kasdan, represent traditional white male storytellers in Star Wars, creators from marginalized communities have joined the ranks such as Deborah Chow (*The Mandalorian*, *The Book of Boba Fett*, *Obi-Wan Kenobi*), Robert Rodriguez (*The Mandalorian*, *The Book of Boba Fett*) Bryce Dallas Howard (*The Mandalorian*, *The Book of Boba Fett*), Taika Waititi (*The Mandalorian*), Rick Famuyiwa (*The Mandalorian*), and Leslye Headland (*The Acolyte*). These creators continue to push Star Wars further towards character choices that offer representation to all sections of fandom, and while gatekeeping fans with troubling behavior may be highly critical via their YouTube accounts or Twitter feeds, streaming numbers at Disney+ suggest these fans will continue to watch the content. Thus, regardless of the historical ambiguity of Star Wars ownership and the gatekeeping behavior of fans that at times can become abusive and hyperbolic, creators should feel secure in the knowledge that quality storytelling will always overcome gatekeepers because for gatekeepers to retain any sense of ownership, they must continue to digest new content. For *Star Wars*, the creators will undoubtedly anger a subsection of fans, but history suggests, those same fans will grow to seek ownership over the very content they purport to reject.

Saga

A play by John Allen Biles

SETTING

Present Day

CHARACTERS

TREVOR KING - (40s) Male, A published author who has created the next pop culture story sensation, *Saga*.

MASON KLINGER - (20s) Male, YouTube content creator who owns and operators the channel “Klingerz Rulez,” which follows Pop Culture news, but recently became solely dedicated to covering *Saga*.

CLAIRE KING - (30s) Female, Trevor’s wife

SMITTY - (20s) Male, Mason’s producer

MALCOLM - (30s) Male, An associate producer of *Saga* and the official Netflix representative in Trevor’s entourage.

XAVIER - (50s) Male, Trevor’s agent

JESSIE “SAILOR MUTH” MUTH - (20s) Female, A rival content creator

DEREK “ASTROPUCK” PUCKERY - (20s) Black male, a rival content creator.

JASPER “DARTH J” JONES - (20s) Male, a rival content creator

FRED “FROTHY D” DRUNT - (20s) Male, a rival content creator

SYLVIE – (20s) Female, Malcolm’s Assistant

MONA – (7-8) Female, Trevor and Claire’s daughter

JOSHUA JACKSON – (30s) Male, reporter for *Lights, Comics, Action*

Prologue – On stage in Hall C during the San Diego Comic Con

Lights out. The collage website and newspapers headlines appear on large screen. The headlines say, “*Saga* is #1 in the country,” “Wednesday nights are for *Saga*!,” “is the next *Star Wars*,” “*Saga* brings in record viewership!” As the headlines appear, we hear an overlap of various voiceovers from interviews between unnamed interviewers and *Saga* creator and screenwriter, Trevor King. As lights come up and the screen retreats, the voiceovers fade away to reveal one interview still in progress. As the lights come up, Trevor King is seated on a stage with Joshua Jackson a reporter from the popular entertainment website, *Lights Comics Action*. Jackson is the moderator of the *Saga* panel. It is San Diego Comic Con and Trevor King is being interviewed about the newest hit series on Netflix, *Saga*. The interview seems to be coming to an end.

Joshua Jackson

I know you’ve told this story before, but perhaps share with the audience how *Saga* came to you?

King

I’m happy to tell this story as often as I can.

Audience cheers

Jackson

Apparently, your fans are, too.

More audience cheers

King

I was watching *Star Wars* for perhaps the millionth time in my life. *Empire*. Love it. I’d watch it every day if I could.

Jackson

Can’t go wrong.

King

No, you can’t.

Audience cheers

King (con't)

It was late and I had been indulging in my Blue.

Jackson

Always go Blue, never Black.

King

Never Black. Right. And I must have fallen asleep. It had been a long day. My daughter had youth soccer, and I had been spending most of my day in the sun. I had been up early anyway to try to get writing done. My son was just a few weeks old, and I enjoyed getting up early with him, but, I digress, I fell asleep. right at the start of the Bepin scenes. And I dreamed: *Saga*. Young girl. A floating city in the clouds. Escape from certain disaster. Live to fight another day. And in the center of it all was Japeth, who looked like how I envision my son looking when he grows up. Handsome. Humble. Quick-witted.

Jackson

Except your son won't grow up to have purple eyes and pink hair.

King

Right. Exactly. I hope not! That would be really weird. I'm sure the medical community would agree.

Jackson

Right! Talk more about your job as an author.

King

My job is to follow one rule: serve the story. Honestly. Serve. The. Story. Every plot twist must be in service of the story. Every character choice must be in service of the story. Dramatic irony is a great device, but only in service of the story, not as some bit of fan service, on a meta level. But, it must be about the story. I am storyteller. I'm not a businessman. I'm not great with managing my time. My wife might even say that at times I'm not the best husband or father. I am first and foremost a storyteller. I serve the story. And this is a story I believe in with all my heart.

Jackson

Right on. So...you call this show "Long Form Television." What do you mean by that?

King

It's not meant to be consumed in one or two episodes. It rewards viewers who stay with it. Fans shouldn't expect massive reveals every week. Character study episodes that

incrementally get us to a resolution only to have that resolution open up another metaphorical “can of worms.”

Jackson

So, fans who come into it halfway through...

King

Don't. You have to go back and watch from the beginning. It doesn't work otherwise. This story is too intricate and complex. It weaves and I'm the loom...

For example... (*cueing up the audience with a sly grin*)... You can't jump into a Season 2...

Audience explodes with cheers and applause

Jackson

Yeah, about that Season 2...

King

Well, I think that's my cue to leave

Jackson

You can't tell us anything about Season 2? The fans want to know!

King

(feigning ignorance) I have no idea what you are talking about.

Jackson

Tell us more! Tell us more! Tell us more!

Audience erupts with “Tell us more” chants as Jackson eggs them on.

King

Okay, okay, okay...

Audience applause and cheers

Here is what I can tell you. There will be a Season 2 and although I can't announce anything right now, I can announce something very soon and I think you will be very, very happy!

Jackson

Alright...alright...

King

I would but Netflix would find me in the dead of night and give me the old Buckner Blast!

Jackson

Best moment of Season 1! When Japeth blasts Buckner through the Mind Skull!

King

I loved writing that part

Jackson

Okay, thank you for your time today. Trevor King everyone!

Audience applause and cheers

King rises, waves to the crowd with flourish, and exits as the stage revolves.

Prologue ends

Scene 1 – Backstage of Hall C at San Diego Comic Con

A light shift and we are now backstage. King is speaking with his wife, Claire holding their two-year-old son Tristan, and his daughter Mona.

Claire

Trevor, Mona is tired, and Tristan is asleep, I think it is time we head back to the hotel.

Mona

I am not!

Claire

Will you be able to come back with us?

Mona

Did you not hear what I said?

King

I think Netflix has me doing another round of one-on-ones with some of major sites...

Mona

I'm not tired

Claire

Hush. You are tired.

King

I sure am (he yawns)

Mona

Well, I'm not (she yawns).

Claire

Uh huh, what did I tell you.

Mona

No fair! Yawns are contagious and he knows that!

King

All's fair and love and war with your mother, kid!

King's agent, Xavier, and the Netflix representative, Malcolm, enter.

Speaking of love and war...Xavier and Malcolm, my two favorite people to see at 3 pm on a Saturday.

Xavier

You are a terrible liar

Malcolm

I agree.

King

Is there any chance we can push these interviews back to later in the evening or maybe tomorrow morning? I'm exhausted and I'd like to have dinner with Claire and Mona.

Xavier looks at Malcolm who doesn't respond

Xavier

Malcolm, Trevor would really appreciate it.

Malcolm

We have this thing called a contract. You might have heard of it...

Xavier

Must you always be condescending?

Malcolm

You appreciate it. It shows that I care.

King

Fine. Fine. (Back to Claire) Sorry, dear.

Claire

Your other wife apparently is more important once again.

Malcolm

We treat him very well.

King

Yes, unlike Claire, your business doesn't look nearly as lovely when I wake in the morning.

Xavier

Trevor needs food at least, so push off these interviews for at least another hour.

King

I can manage.

Xavier

You look horrible.

King

I can manage. Let's just get this done.

Mason Klinger, a small-time YouTube content creator in his late 30s, enters. He is the host of a KlingerRulez, a television and movie review show that has been around for the past few years but is struggling to make a name for itself.

Mason

Excuse me, Mr. King

Xavier

(stepping in immediately) I'm sorry, Mr. King is not doing autographs at this convention.

Mason

I'm not here for an autograph. My name is Mason Klinger, and I'm the creator and host of KlingerRulez on YouTube.

Xavier

(overlapping the word "host")

I'm sorry, but not today, my friend. Now, you'll have to excuse us.

Mason

I'm just asking for a minute of your time, Mr. King.

Malcolm

Sir, you do not have a pass to be back here, you'll need to leave, or I will call security.

King

Calm down, Malcolm.

Mason

Please, just one minute.

Xavier

I'm sorry, but we not today...

King

It's okay, Xavier. What can I do for you, Mr...

Mason

Mason Klinger, creator and host of KlingerRulez on YouTube. I have 10,000 followers.

Malcolm stifles a laugh. Mason falters a moment. King glares at Malcolm.

King

And, what can I do for you Mr. Klinger?

Mason

I was hoping you would do me the honor of appearing on my channel

Xavier

Okay, thank you very much. Mr. King does not appear on channels that are not on our approved list.

Mason

It would mean the world to me, Mr. King. Please.

Malcolm

His channel is not on Netflix's approved list, Trevor.

Mason

He's right. My channel reach is not large.

Xavier

Get your audience numbers over 100,000 and we will talk.

Malcolm

No. He must be on Netflix's approved list, regardless of his numbers.

King

(trying to be polite)

Kid, I guess there are a lot of hoops you need to jump through before we can make this happen.

Mason

Fifteen minutes. That's all. A 15-minute interview.

King pauses clearly considering it.

Mason (con't)

Fifteen minutes. Audio only. Gives you plausible deniability if you don't like how the interview sounds.

Xavier

Why wouldn't he like how the interview sounds?

Malcolm

And it gives you instant followers.

Mason

Followers mean clout, which means respect.

Malcolm

Which means money.

King

That's quite cynical, Malcolm.

Mason

He's right. It is money. But, it's my job. It's my way of life. If I can do my job and get paid very well for it, is that such a problem? My job is to be a gateway for the fans. This

gives *Saga* a connection with more fans. It shows that *Saga* cares about even the smallest content creators. It's a win-win. *Saga* and Netflix look empathetic and like they care about their fans. I get more followers. You remember what happened with Lucasfilm when fans perceived that they were looking down on them.

Malcolm

Lucasfilm was not looking down and does not look down on the fans. I have friends who work there. That was a hit job by some content creators who completely misinterpreted and misrepresent Lucasfilm's fan interactions. These creators have agendas to get rich by peddling angry, juvenile content for clicks. Gaslighting fans is easy money. What is your agenda?

Mason

No agenda. I just want to make a honest living. I'm not interested in making headlines or starting wars. (*he speaks directly to King*) I love *Saga*. It is my life. Ever since my dad showed me Star Wars when I was five, I have waited for another story to speak to me like that did to him. *Saga* did that.

Xavier

Mr. King is quite hungry right now and is on his way to dinner. You'll have to make a request through my office.

King

I'll do it.

Xavier, Malcolm, and Mason

What?!

King

15 minutes. On camera...

Xavier

Trevor...

King

...but, nothing gets released until I, my agent, and Netflix have a chance to review the material.

Malcolm

He's not on Netflix's approved list.

King

He's right. *Saga* is the story that could grasp his generation in a keystone moment. Clearly it speaks to millions of fans, but what does it say about us if we reject opportunities to directly talk to them because they aren't on an approved list?

Xavier

You just talked to literally over 1,000 fans and it was streamed live!

King

But, not for free. And those fans in that convention hall paid hundreds of dollars to be there.

Xavier

That's the way it works, Trevor.

King

Saga should speak to everyone. We should make this attempt. It's fifteen minutes. What could go wrong? We get last say and it gets pulled if we do not like it. You and Malcolm write up a contract.

Malcolm

You can't expect...

King

I do expect. I make a lot of money for Netflix.

Malcolm

Fine. I'll alter the standard contract we use in these cases. I'll send it to Xavier's room for approval. But, this doesn't happen until this gets signed.

King

Sorry, kid, we can't do it tonight. Tomorrow night?

Mason

Yes. I already checked out of my hotel room, but I can probably get them to...

Malcolm

Want it officially known that Netflix will be very, very apprehensive to this.

King

Noted.

Xavier

Let's set this up at a conference room at his hotel, so that we don't make scene here. If the other outlets find out about this, they'll be livid.

King

(sitting)

Agreed.

Xavier

Are you okay?

King

Just a little dizzy.

Xavier

You need to eat.

King motions for Xavier in way that says, "Well, if you would wrap it up, we can go."

Xavier

Kid, where are you staying?

Mason

Um...I'm at the Econolodge

Xavier

I'm not doing this at a motel.

King

Malcolm, why don't we do it in your room first thing in the morning. 8 am.

Malcolm

Um...

Xavier

Malcolm?

Malcolm

That's...fine...

Xavier

Make sure your escort has left by then.

Trevor and Xavier laugh at this. Mason laughs in spite of himself.

Malcolm

Very funny. It was one time!

King

Get it set up. I'll be there in a moment.

Xavier

8 am, kid. Room 811. Don't be late. And do not. I repeat. Do not post anything on your channel that would give even the slightest hint that this is happening. In fact, you don't post anything on your channel, your social media accounts, you don't call your mom, you don't tell your dog. You don't even tell God.

Malcolm

You go to your room. You go to sleep.

King

These two can be a bit over-protective.

Mason

It's understandable

King seems to wobble and lose his balance.

Xavier

Trevor, that's it. We are leaving and getting you food.

Mason

Are you okay?

King

I'll be fine after a good meal, I gather. I expect some good questions. I won't answer anything about my personal life. I am happy to do this for you, but do not expect me to

just willingly give you any insider information. You want this to be your life? Your career? Show me what you have. Until tomorrow, Mr. Klinger.

End of scene 1.

Scene 2 – Malcolm’s Hotel Room, The next morning

The next morning in Malcolm’s room, Mason is setting up his camera. Malcolm is watching him intently. He keeps checking his phone intermittently.

Mason

You know, I thought the actual interview would be intimidating. I didn’t think I’d get the stare down while setting up.

Malcolm

What’s your angle?

Mason

My angle?

Malcolm

Clicks? Viewers? Is this just a money grab?

Mason

I don’t follow.

Malcolm

I checked out your channel last night. Your “show” is exclusively you spouting ideas about *Saga*, but prior to that, you talked incessantly about *Lost*, *Star Wars*, the *MCU*...but, now its *Saga*.

Mason

Yeah, so? I don’t see what you are getting at.

Malcolm

What made you stop talking about those other properties?

Mason

I didn't stop talking about them. I've moved on from them.

Malcolm

You've "moved on"?

Mason

Yes. It's what I said to Trevor last night. Saga struck me in a way that I imagine those other properties struck a younger generation. I wanted my own "Star Wars" and Saga gives it to me.

Malcolm

(looking at his phone)

"Iron Man: The movie I've been waiting for my entire life," "My life is complete now that The Force Awakens is here," "Why I can't stop watching Lost Season 6," "How will I live without Star Wars?"

Mason

What's your point?

Malcom

I think I made it.

Mason

Look, am I a bit exaggerated with my show titles? Yes. Everyone does it. It's a dog eat dog world out there and I'm trying to make a living. Those titles are honest even if they sound...

Malcolm

Like you need some therapy

Mason

I was going to say: hyperbolic

Malcolm

So, what are you going to call this interview? "Trevor King and Me: I have seen the face of God"

Mason

I'm very serious about what I do.

Malcom

I bet you are. Just, remember this. After this interview, you will not be able to go back to a time when you had few followers.

Mason

What do you mean?

Malcolm

I've gotten word, that Trevor wants to use your platform to make a special announcement about *Saga*. Do not fuck this up, kid.

Xavier and Trevor enter. Trevor is finishing an egg sandwich.

Xavier

I still do not think it's a good idea.

King

I disagree. You said it yourself that we need to be more creative with how we reach out to fans.

Xavier

Malcolm, tell him it's a bad idea.

Malcolm

It's a bad idea, but it's not the worst idea in the world.

King

See? Good morning, Mason.

Mason

Good morning.

King

Where shall I sit?

Mason

I'll have you sit here, if you don't mind. I brought these mugs for us, and perhaps we could put some of this coffee in them or water? You can take one with you, my treat.

Mason points out the mugs on the table that say, KlingerRulez on them. They are sort of hideous. He is absolutely proud of them. King seems genially amused at Mason's naivete. Malcolm and Xavier try not to laugh.

King

That would be fine. Coffee is lovely, although I prefer tea.

Mason

I'll remember that for next time.

King

(amused at Mason's moxie)

Indeed.

Xavier

You get five minutes, kid.

King

I gather, we should get started.

Xavier

Remember, you only get the video once this convention is over.

Mason

Right. Please have a seat.

Mason starts the camera recorder and confirms that it is accurately recording.

Mason (con't)

I think we are good to go. I do this little intro and then I'll splice in the opening montage and then we start the interview. So, this first part, is that little intro.

King

(adding sugar to his coffee as he rubs his temples)

Splendid.

Mason

Ready?

King

(finishes rubbing his temples)

I'm sorry. Yes. Early mornings are never my favorite.

Mason

(takes a deep breath)

Okay, here we go.

Mason immediately switches into his online persona, which is brash, loud, and fast.

Mason

What's up, Saga Fans! It's Mason Klinger and today, I am with the one, the only, the legend, the man, the O.G., the genius, THE creator of Saga, Trevor King!

Mason attempts to cue King, but King is not ready for it. Mason breaks character.

Mason (con't)

I'm sorry, that's when you should say, "hello, fans!" or "I'm happy to be here"

King

Oh, I see. I apologize. I didn't know I had lines in this play.

Xavier

This is eating into your time, kid.

King

It's fine, Xavier. That was my mistake.

Mason

Okay, here we go. Take 2. (in character) What's up, Saga Fans! It's Mason Klinger and today, I am with the one, the only, the legend, the man, the O.G., the genius, THE creator of Saga, Trevor King!

King

Hello.

There is an awkward pause as Mason clearly expects more.

King

(goofily pointing at Mason)

What he said!

Malcolm and Xavier look embarrassed.

Mason

THIS is KlingerRulez! (after a beat he breaks character) Okay, now we go into the interview.

Xavier

I'm going to say this one last time, Trevor. It's a bad idea.

Malcolm

It's not a good idea, but Netflix is fine with it.

King

(playfully, without any hint of malice as he rubs his temples)

Thank you, mommy and daddy. Mason, I have one word of advice for you. If you ever work with a production company, they will never let your forget that they think they get final say. But, as long as I am conscious, I make the final decisions. Mommy and daddy hate that. I still love them of course.

Xavier

(laughing)

Alright, wise guy. Tick, tick, tick.

King rubs his temples.

King

Ugh, this headache.

Xavier

That's karma.

King

Karma, thy name is Xavier.

Mason

But, which one is mommy, and which one is daddy?

Malcolm

(texting feverishly into his phone)

I'd think long and hard before you answer that question, Trevor.

King

I guess we will never know.

He turns to Mason and silently mouths the word "Mommy" and thumbs toward Malcolm.

Mason

Okay, I don't want your parents to get any more upset that this date is taking too long. I'll have him home before his curfew and promise no funny business.

King and Xavier laugh out loud. Malcolm even laughs at this. Mason has somehow charmed all three.

King

He learns quickly.

Mason

Okay here we go. (he flips into character) Hey, fans of Saga! It's incredible to be sitting next to this guy, Trevor King, the one and only. Thank you so much for joining me.

King

You are too kind. It is my pleasure to be here.

Mason

So, Saga completely changed my life in ways that even I am still learning. What inspired you to make it.

King

Well, I've mentioned in other interviews, that Star Wars was a deep inspiration for me. I would never consider myself a genius like George Lucas, but I felt a calling to create something out of that inspiration I am humbled by how fans have taken to Saga. I still cannot believe my luck.

Mason

Did you feel pressured when creating Saga knowing that you would receive comparisons to Star Wars?

King

(surprised by a question that was so strong)

I've never been asked that before. (he takes a moment to think) I do not think pressured was the right word. I knew that I needed to be careful with how I wrote the storyline so that it did not seem as if it was clone of Star Wars or even a homage. I wanted it to live in the same tonal world of adventure but keep many of the same overarching themes. I think I've succeeded, but the fans have been the ones to determine that. I can only hope that in the future, I will be able to continue to live up to their lofty expectations.

Mason

I think the fans will be overjoyed with whatever you create or them. Saga is a blank canvas. You could go in so many directions. It's exciting.

King

I like that metaphor. I do not have the entire story mapped out beyond this first season. I know where I think I want it to go, but that canvas is still very much blank. It feels to me somewhat similar as to the canvas Lucas had going from A New Hope into Empire. The sky was the limit.

Mason

If Season 2 gets the same adulation as The Empire Strikes Back, I think you will be just fine.

King

Do not forget, Empire was not well received upon its release. It's only been over the years that fans have come to view it as the best of the original trilogy and perhaps the best of the entire saga.

Mason

I know you cannot tell me much about Season 2, but is there anything that you can hint about it?

King

You mean more than I've already hinted?

Mason

I'll take that as a "no." I had to try.

King

Actually...I do. I made the executive decision to make a major announcement right here, right now on your show. While perhaps my agent thinks it's a bad idea and Netflix thinks its "a bad idea, but not the worst idea," I do want to give you and your viewers a hint.

Mason

Okay viewers! Get ready. Trevor King. The man! The genius! The O.G.! He is about to give you all a scoop of epic proportions. Full transparency, I'm just as in the dark as you! Get ready with your comments! Right after the show, I will be checking and responding to the comments section! Remember, I do my best to answer each question or respond to as many comments as I can!

King

Are you ready? I will only say this once and will take no follow up questions.

Mason

Please! What is this news!

King

I have finished scripting Season 2.

Mason

No way!

King

And...casting has begun.

Mason

Wow! That's quicker than any of us expected. The last reports were that the next season would be two years from now.

Xavier

Times up. We have to go, Trevor.

Mason

(breaking character) Wow. This is so cool! I'm so honored that you dropped that bit of information on my show. Okay, I need to record a simple goodbye. *(flips into character)* Well, Mr. King, this has been a dream come true. I have died and gone to heaven.

Mason steals a glance at Malcolm, who rolls his eyes.

King

You are welcome. And as a parting gift, I do have one other treat for you.

Xavier and Malcolm immediately freeze with concerned suspicion. They knew about the previous surprise announcement, but this “parting gift” is unexpected.

King (con’t)

In keeping with my inspirations: Japeth has a sister.

Mason loses his composure. Xavier and Malcolm stare at each horrified.

Mason

Holy shit! Ahhhhhhh! Holy shit! Holy shit! I knew it! I knew it! He’s not alone! He’s not gonna do this alone! I knew it! I knew it! Holy shit!

King

Thanks for having me, Mason.

Mason

Ahhhhh! Guys, what a bombshell! Holy shit! Holy shit! Holy shit!

The lights fade. End of Scene 2

Interlude 1

Voice over #1

“And in some shocking news, Trevor King the creator of the global sensation, Saga, has collapsed at the San Diego Comic Con. Representatives for Mr. King and Netflix said tonight that Mr. King’s prognosis is unknown, but a tweet from his brother asked for “thoughts and prayers.”

Voice Over #2

“Trevor King, creator of Saga, has been stabilized, but he has been put into a medically induced coma. Doctors have no further update.

Voice Over #3

“It is the third month of Trevor King’s medically induced coma. Doctors are unsure if he will come out of it. The family at this time has made no decisions. Representatives for Mr. King’s estate have asked that fans consider donating to the Society for Encephalitis Research rather than send cards, letters, or Saga action figures.

Scene 3 – Mason’s Studio, Three months after the interview

Mason sits scrolling his phone with a beer. There are a few empty bottles around him. His producer Smitty does the same, but with a few audible laughs and guffaws. They are doing research for their upcoming show.

Smitty

Fucking hack. Get this.

Mason

Hmm...?

Smitty

Mason...oh damn. Get this.

Mason

What?

Smitty

Rick from the Pod-Rick still thinks you’re full of shit.

Mason

He can think what he wants.

Smitty

Rick says the he has a contact at Netflix that denies there will be a season two until King recovers.

Mason

If

Smitty

And when he does recover, there is no guarantee King will even be able to finish his draft.

Mason

If

Smitty

Huh?

Mason

If. If he gets better.

Smitty

Right

Mason

This fucking sucks. The numbers are dropping.

Smitty

They are stagnant.

Mason

Dropping

Smitty

They've plateaued. Okay, they are dropping, but not a ton.

Mason

Rick's numbers continue to go up.

Smitty

Rick does more than talk about Saga. Maybe we should move our focus back to Marvel...

Mason

No.

Smitty

...until...

Mason

No.

Smitty

UNTIL King gets better.

Mason

If.

Smitty

If.

Mason

I'm not moving off of Saga. I made my name on Saga. KlingersRulez is on the map because of Saga.

Smitty

You got lucky, man. The scoop of the century. But, until King...IF King gets better, all you have is that interview.

Mason

I don't get why no one at Netflix will even chat with us. That dude Malcolm Morrissey seems like he has no idea who I am. And yet, he was there. He knows I'm legit. He knows that I'm not full of shit.

Smitty

Rhyme

Mason

Fuck you. I'm serious.

Smitty

I know. So...can we get recording? Jess needs me home before 11 tonight.

Mason

She hates me.

Smitty

That, she does.

Mason

Okay, how about this. How about we recap our theories about what kind of Japeth's sister will be and how she fits into the possible larger trajectory.

Smitty

We've done that.

Mason

Right, but what WE think she should be like. Like if we wrote Saga. What do we want her to be? What values? What stories? What abilities?

Smitty

What do we know? The script is done. Casting is “underway.” And the only actors that have been confirmed to have been at Netflix studios in the last three months were Nwake Ojuni and Marlee Starr. What if it’s one of those?

Mason

We’ve been over this.

Smitty

What if it is?

Mason

Japeth’s sister is not black.

Smitty

How do you know? All these properties are going in that direction.

Mason

What direction?

Smitty

You know? The “inclusive” route.

Mason

You mean “woke”.

Smitty

Fine, “woke”

Mason

It’s not either of them. It would make no story sense. Japeth’s a white dude and we met his parents. That would be truly “woke”. I have no problems with inclusivity and shit, but not when the story tells us the character should be white based on the parents. If Netflix does that then they’d be fucking over Saga. They’d be doing a disservice to everything King wanted.

Mason begins to consider those two sentences.

If Netflix does that then they'd be fucking over Saga. They'd be doing a disservice to everything King wanted. If Netflix does that then they'd be fucking over Saga. They'd be doing a disservice to everything King wanted.

Smitty

That's

Mason and Smitty

...the show...

Mason

Has anyone else been covering that angle?

Smitty

On it.

Mason

Could you imagine if this was true? If Netflix is casting that role without King being conscious? They'd be going over his head and making choices without him. It's creation. He gets to have a final say.

Smitty

I have found nothing in quick search.

Mason

That means that none of the big hitters have done it. This could put me back on the map.

Smitty

Nothing on the Pod-Rick, nothing on Nerds Unite, nothing on...wait...hmm...okay...well..

Mason

What did you find?

Smitty

Riker's Beard had a video out two days ago.

Mason

Riker's Beard? Those fuck faces?

Smitty

I know how you feel about them...

Mason

I refuse to credit anything they came up with...

Smitty

Well you're in luck. They are happy with the possibility that one of those actresses could be Japeth's sister. They have the idea that perhaps Japeth's family was a found family. They think he was adopted.

Mason.

That's not a new theory, but it makes no sense. Even if he was, its been well established that he is a member of the Moshi tribe and they are all white. So, even if he's adopted, he can't be black.

Smitty

So, let's go the opposite route.

Mason.

Let's slam them and at the same time push back on this insanity that Japeth's sister is black. No way would Netflix do that. And if they did...

Smitty

They'd be screwing over King's legacy and everything he wrote.

Mason

They'd be taking ownership of this story that is not theirs. They'd be instilling social justice into a story that doesn't need it.

Smitty

Riker's Beard is saying that Saga needs more SJW.

Mason

When I'm doing slamming them, they will wish I was on their team. That is the last thing Saga needs. The lack of any type of preaching to the choir is what makes people love Saga. It doesn't need to make grand gestures.

Smitty

They're loss is your gain. Their got pretty strong viewership with this video.

Mason

What do the comments say.

Smitty

Good call. Well...well...oh shit...dude...

Mason

What?

Smitty

You'll never believe this. There are a lot of viewers that are not happy with this take.

Mason

Well of course not. That's the way most fans should feel.

Smitty

What's the show outline?

Mason

Okay, we point out that the evidence leads us to believe that Netflix is casting Japeth's sister as a black woman. This would go against the story as written and thus against King's wishes. Riker's Beard is part of the problem. No one wants Saga to go "woke". The fans do not want that. King does not write "woke." He writes great stories for entertainment. Then back to how Rikers's Beard are idiots for bring this up and the evidence is in the comments section. The evidence for everything I'm saying is in the comments section. That's the episode.

Smitty

Let's get this on with.

End of Scene 3

Interlude #2

Montage of multiple videos on YouTube with the headlines: "Saga Casting Rumors – Why Netflix Going Woke?" "Netflix Going "Woke" – Saga In Danger Of Being Radicalized", "King Lies Unconscious While Netflix Rapes His Creation: Why Netflix HATES Saga Fans," "NYCC – KlingerRulez Gets Booted From Show – Netflix Out To Get Me"

Scene 4 – Backstage of New York City Comic Con

Malcolm Morrissey is back stage talking with his assistant. They are waiting for the panel on *Saga* to finish. Mason and Smitty burst in to confront them.

Mason

What the fuck, Malcolm?

Malcolm

You're not allowed back here.

Mason

I don't care. Why was I booted?

Malcolm

I don't know.

Mason

You do know.

Malcolm

You need to leave. Sylvie, go get security please.

Mason

No need Sylvie, I won't be staying long. I just want to know why you had me booted from this panel. I thought we had something.

Malcolm

First, I didn't have you booted, and second maybe you should have thought of your participation on this panel before you started spouting off nonsense on your YouTube page.

Mason

You know that everything on my channel is speculation. That's what my viewers want. They also want to know their property is not being fucked over by other people, while Trevor is out of action.

Malcolm

Look, you have no idea what you're talking about. I didn't get you booted. Your own words did.

Applause from off-stage.

And you need to leave...now. Sylvie, get security.

Mason

Not until you give me truth. Smitty, stop her.

Smitty

Don't.

Sylvie

You lay your hands on me nerd and I'll...

Malcolm

Don't do this Mason.

Xavier enters from just off-stage escorting Claire and Mona. Claire is holding Tristan.

Xavier

You did fantastically. They loved you. Trevor would be so proud.

Malcolm

It sounded great from back here.

Xavier

(sees Mason)

What the fuck is he doing here?

Malcolm

Language, Xavier.

Xavier

Shit, sorry. I mean, sorry Claire.

Claire

It's okay. *(to Mason)* She's heard worse, recently...online...

Mason

Hello Mrs. King. I'm Mason Klinger from

Claire

I know who you are.

Beat. Pause. No one knows what to say next.

Smitty

I'm Smithton Pace, his producer.

Beat. Pause. The awkwardness grows.

Everyone usually calls me Smitty. At least my friends do...

Claire

Mona go with Ms. Sylvie and get a hot dog or some popcorn.

Mona

I want extra butter on mine, Ms. Sylvie. Can I get my own this time?

Sylvie

Of course. I'll get you one for yourself and one for myself.

Malcolm

Smithton, why don't you give us all a few minutes. Sylvie, we will take care of this. It's okay.

Mason

Go, Smitty. I'll catch up with you.

Smitty starts to follow Sylvie and Mona out. Sylvie and Mona stop and look at him. He halts, looks around and walks towards a door that he thinks is an exit. He opens it and goes in. Sylvie and Mona leave.

Claire

What the fuck are you doing here?

Mason

I am here to talk to Malcolm. I was supposed to lead that panel. I want to know why I was booted, but Malcolm won't tell me.

Malcolm

I had nothing to do with that.

Smitty sheepishly opens the door, and everyone stares at him.

Smitty

That was a closet.

He exits.

Mason

I'm sorry for interrupting. How is Trevor?

Claire

He's the same. I asked that you be removed from the panel.

Xavier

Mason, you need to leave now. Claire does not need this right now.

Claire

I'm okay, Xavier. I actually enjoyed that. I thought I'd be scared to death, but I enjoyed it.

Xavier

Good. I knew you'd do great. There was nothing to it.

Claire

Oh, I was scared to death, of course, but it was like being on a roller coaster. (To Mason) I'm sorry this did not work out how you wanted, Mason. I also thank you for your appreciation of my husband's work and your enthusiasm for it. But, due to your videos, I and he will no longer have anything to do with you. They are vile, reprehensible, racist, and gross. They are everything that Saga detests.

Mason

They are only speculation. They are not fact.

Claire

You don't frame them as speculation and even if it is, I want this property and Trevor's name to have nothing to do with such speculation.

Mason

I'm not a racist. But the speculation is what my audience wants.

Claire

You know what they say about those who lie with dogs.

Mason

Do you know what that speculation has done for my viewership?

Claire

Perhaps you have the wrong viewers.

Xavier

That's enough, Mason. Claire will be leaving now.

Mason

Then tell me something that I can use? Tell me that Netflix isn't casting Japeth's sister as a black woman. Tell me I'm wrong.

Malcolm

You know we can't discuss anything about season 2. It's on hiatus anyway, until Trevor recovers.

Mason

If

Malcolm

Huh?

Mason

If he recovers. The longer he stays in that coma, the more speculation will come out. I'm not stopping the speculation, until you give me something to tell my viewers. They want to know. They are desperate for Saga information. And what do they get? Rehashed stories of Trevor from his wife. We've heard them before. She's been talking about them in interviews for the past four months. Saga will grow stale and if he does not recover? It dies.

Malcolm

It does not die. Trevor wrote season 2. Season 2 will be filmed.

Mason

But, when?

Malcolm

When he recovers.

Mason

If.

Malcolm

Fine. If. And if he does not, Claire gets to tell us when to start filming.

Mason

Claire?

Claire

It's in his will. I get to decide on all decisions involving Saga.

Xavier

That's enough information for you to take back to your "viewers".

Claire

If you truly care about Trevor, you will go back to your viewers and tell them that there is no Season 2 until his fate is resolved. But there will be a Season 2 and the decisions will be made by myself in his absence.

Mason

But, what about Japeth's sister? Are you really going against everything we've learned in the story and casting her as a black woman?

Claire

Malcolm?

Malcolm

If it were me, I'd tell him to fuck himself, but you like your husband don't like to listen to me.

Claire

I will not answer your question, but I will give you a scoop if you promise me that you'll stop these vile videos and go back to whatever you used to do.

Mason

I'll need a pivot.

Claire

Here's your pivot. Casting is completed for Season 2. There are many names that no one in the media knows about. But, the fans will be pleased at the trajectory of Season 2. It

will answer many questions and it will take the story to new heights. It's genius. My husband is a genius. And if he leaves us, know that I have every intention on ensuring the story HE wanted will be the one seen by audiences.

Mason

May I ask...

Claire

No. That's all you're getting. It should be enough for you to speculate and pivot.

Mason

Okay. I'll pivot. Trevor is a genius. He's inspired me so much. If it wasn't for Saga, I don't know what I'd do today. Saga means everything to me.

Malcolm

Will you please get the fuck out of here, now?

Mason

Thank you.

He leaves.

Claire

When he finds out Japeth's sister is black, he's going to try to burn it all down.

Malcolm

We know now who we are dealing with and when the time comes, we can control that narrative. You heard the fans out there. 95% of fans will be on our side. Besides, now that he knows its not Netflix but you who are continuing what Trevor wanted and wrote, he won't have a leg to stand on.

Claire

I hope so. Malcolm. I hope so.

End of Scene

Interlude #3

Montage of multiple videos on YouTube with the headlines: "All Hail St. Claire! Trevor's Wife Confirms Casting Done! "Fans Will Be Happy – Trevor Wins/Netflix Loses!", "QUEEN

SAVES KING – LONG LIVE SAGA!” OFFICIAL SEASON 2 CAST ANNOUNCEMENT
INCOMING!

Scene 5

Mason and Smitty sit in a hotel room during the Chicago Comic-Book Convention. With them are other YouTube personalities who cover movies and “geek culture”: Derek “AstroPuck, Jasper “Darth J” Jones, Fred “Frothy D” Drunt, and Jessie “Sailor Muth” Muth. They are sitting around their tablets and phones waiting for the casting news for Saga, which they believe will be announced that afternoon.

Derek

You sure your dude at Netflix won’t give you the casting early?

Jessie

Are you kidding?

Smitty

Derek, they hate him.

Derek

That’s because you guys wouldn’t lay off that “Netflix is woke” shit.

Mason

It’s true though. Their president came out and said their intention was to produce more content for “historically marginalized audiences.”

Derek

Hello? “Historically marginalized audience” member sitting right here. You have no idea how much I would loved to have Superman once be Black. Or Batman? A black Batman would be the shit, man.

Fred

Samuel L. Jackson as Batman?

Derek

(in his best Samuel L. Jackson impersonation)

I’m Batman, motherfucker. Get this motherfucking Penguin off my motherfucking Batwing!

Mason

That means they don't care about the story. They only care about being politically correct.

Jessie

As another member of the "historically marginalized audience..."

Mason

Here we go.

Jessie

...I'm very happy to see more stories about women...

Derek

...or black folks...

Jessie

starring women...

Derek

...or my black brothers and sisters...

Jessie

...and directed by women...

Derek

Wakanda, motherfucker

Jessie

...but, what do I know?

Mason

I'm not saying they shouldn't have those stories. I'm saying if it's your studio's priority, you aren't caring at all about the actual story.

Fred

A lot of studios hate me, but I still get the info. You just don't know how to keep it professional.

Jessie

There is one part of that sentence that is correct.

Fred

What?

Jasper

She's not wrong.

Fred

I get my info.

Jasper

You get lucky.

Derek

Fucking the assistant to Bob Iger's assistant doesn't mean you have any special ability to get access to insider info. You get lucky.

Jasper and Smitty start laughing.

Jessie

Am I missing something?

Derek

He used to fuck her, but, then she dumped him after she found why he was dating her.

Jessie

Are you serious?

Fred

To be fair...

Jessie

You're disgusting.

Fred

To be fair...

Jasper

Why did *you* ever date him in the first place?

Jessie

He used to be cute, but that was 10 years ago.

Fred

To. Be. Fair. I did grow to really like her.

Jessie

What a saint.

Fred

And you dated me because I have large cock.

Jessie

Gross.

Smitty

Mason, do you really think Netflix is going to announce today.

Mason

It makes complete sense. You have a thirsty fanbase and you've got a massive Saga presence here. Trevor is from Chicago and the Chicago Comic-Con is not known for being one of the top-tier cons.

Smitty's phone rings.

Smitty

(as he exits)

I've got to take this outside. Hey! I didn't think I'd hear from you today.

Jasper

I will agree that the presence is huge. It could just be because it's Trevor's hometown.

Mason

Could be, but I doubt it.

Derek

So, you really started to like her?

Fred

Dude, Maggie was the bomb. She had the sweetest smile and the cutest little laugh. When she laughed it sound like this. *(He mimics the laugh)* She may have dumped me, but you will not hear me say one bad word about her.

Derek

She was cute. I'll give you that. Guys like us don't normally get girls like her. I haven't dated a girl in two years. Jasper is divorced. I don't think I've ever seen girl come within the same zip code as Smitty.

Fred

She was the one, man.

Jasper

Isn't that what you said when Jessie dumped your ass?

Jessie

Seriously?

Fred

I said she wasn't the one.

Jasper

That's not what I remember.

Jessie

I was the one before the one who was the one?

Fred

I said "wasn't".

Jasper

Derek back me up on this.

Derek

It does sound like him.

Fred

I said "wasn't"! She "wasn't" the one!

Jessie

Hello? "She" is sitting right here!

Fred

You know what I...

Smitty

He's awake!

Derek

What? Who?

Smitty

Mason! Trevor is awake!

Mason

No way.

Smitty

He's awake!

Mason

Who was that on the phone?

Smitty

That was my contact. He's awake. They are going to announce it live tonight.

Mason

Who is your contact?

Fred

Are they going to announce the casting?

Smitty

I asked. My contact doesn't know.

Mason

Who is your contact?

Smitty

Sylvie.

Mason

What?

Jessie

So, he's just up and woke up?

Smitty

Yeah, it literally just happened.

Mason

How is Sylvie your contact? Are you fucking her?

Smitty

Not everyone is asshole, Mason.

Mason gives him a look that says, "come clean, Smitty."

Smitty (con't)

We've been seeing each other online a few times. She's nice.

Mason

You! You, gorgeous, gorgeous geek. You incredible nerd. You beautiful Goonie.

Mason kisses Smitty on the lips and hugs him. The others all laugh and hug each other.

Mason

I love you.

Smitty

I know.

Mason

This is amazing. We have the scoop. We have to drop this now.

Jasper

Whoa whoa whoa. We all get to do this. We are all here man. We all heard the news.

Mason

Smitty is my producer, and we are posting it first. You guys can post it a half hour after we do, and you have to give us credit. We will in turn give you guys a shout out in our announcement that you were all there when the shit came down.

Jessie

That's fair.

Jasper

Fine. Let's go Derek. Let's get our video recorded.

Derek and Jasper leave.

Jessie

Smitty, great job. When you're done with this scruffy-looking nerf-herder, I'm always looking for a producer.

She kisses him on the cheek and leaves.

Fred

So, no casting news tonight?

Smitty

Slyvie didn't know.

Fred

Fuck. Fine.

He leaves.

Mason

We've got a ton of information. You're fucking incredible.

Smitty

I know who was cast as Japeth's sister.

Mason

What?

Smitty

Uh huh.

Mason

No. Fucking. Way.

Smitty

I didn't want the others to know, man. I know I didn't tell you about Sylvie. I'm sorry. She told me to keep our talking secret and I like her man. I really like her.

Mason

Who the fuck cares about not telling me? Who is it?

Smitty

Monique Seals

Mason

(after a pause)

What the fuck? Monique Seals? She's black.

Smitty

So?

Mason

She's black.

Smitty

She's an Academy Award-winner

Mason

She's black.

Smitty

Dude, Saga just got its first Academy Award-winning actor. Marvel has them. Star Wars has them. Saga has one now.

Mason

Fuck that. Dude, Japeth's sister cannot be black.

Smitty

Why?

Mason

Because...

Smitty

He's white?

Mason

No, I'm not a fucking racist man. It's because his parents are white. His people are all white. It doesn't make any story sense for his sister to be black. This screams of Netflix catering to the liberal mob.

Smitty

So? Maybe there are more people to meet? Maybe his dad had an affair with chick from some other planet full of black people? Dude, why does it matter?

Mason

Because it's obviously token casting. He got criticized for not having black characters, so Netflix forces him to write one in.

Smitty

How do you know it was Netflix?

Mason

Because he wouldn't do that. He's about the story, not some kind of "woke" storytelling just to make some fans happy. Those are the fans who are racist. They can't stand anything that doesn't have some minority character who is super powerful. Why can't a story simply be a story. Why does race have to factor into it?

Smitty

Mason, you are the one complaining about race. No one else has mentioned race. I didn't mention race.

Mason

But, it will be mentioned and Netflix will get a pat on the back.

Smitty

Mason, Trevor claimed he'd written season 2...

Mason

Which means Netflix fucked his story over. And fucking, Claire... Claire signed off on it. I fucking defended her. I defended that bitch, and she has the audacity to tell me to fuck off? I defended her when everyone else claimed that Netflix would go woke. I said, "No. Claire said that his story is being honored the way he wanted it told."

Smitty

You have to let this go man. I made a promise to Sylvie that we wouldn't say a word about this.

Mason

How am I supposed to let this go, man? Seriously? You know how this business works? I need clicks. Clicks make me money. They make you money. They make us a lot of money. And the only way to get clicks is by putting out information and getting fans to see exactly what is going on and get them just as angry as we are.

Smitty

I'm not angry

Mason

You will be. You'll be angry after it comes out that while Trevor was in a coma, Netflix went woke for ratings and his wife sold him out.

Smitty

“Woke for ratings”? Are you listening to yourself?

Mason

It makes complete sense.

Smitty

You've got to be sure about this, man. You are going down a very dangerous path, dude. I'm not sure I can follow you on this one. I followed you when you came out against making Kenobi more about Reva than Kenobi. I followed you when you led the fight against Wonder Woman 1984. I followed you when you led the fight against the feminization of Thor. But, man, this?

Mason

There is a train leaving the station, man. You either get on now, or you can take Jessie's offer. Netflix went woke and is destroying everything I love. They've injected race and politics into this and his wife, who called us out and called us hacks, signed off on this. She lied to our face man. She lied directly to us. We have to produce this content now. We will have so many fans on our side.

Smitty

I can't man.

Mason

It's because of Sylvie. You like her don't you? You're dropping us and this for her?

Smitty

I like her, man. Guys like us...like me... don't find great girls like her often.

Mason

Fuck you.

Smitty

Don't do this, man. You'll ruin this for me. You'll ruin your reputation. Everything we've built...you built...it will be gone.

Mason

Fuck you. Go work for Jessie.

Mason begins to pack a small bag to leave for the convention center.

Smitty

Mason...where are you going.

Mason

I'm going to the man himself.

Smitty

Dude, he just woke up. No way will anyone let you near him – as if they'd let you near him to begin with.

Mason

I'm going to the hall. I'm going to find Sylvie and Malcolm and Xavier and fucking Claire...and I'm going to tell them what I know and what I'm going to do, and they'll have to let me see him. I'm going to find out and show you and everyone else that my show...the thing I love the most in the world...the thing that changed my life...is being destroyed.

End of Act 1

Act 2

Scene 1

Summary: The scene picks up almost immediately following the events at the end of Act 1. Mason forces his way into the backstage area of the convention hall and interrupts the interview with Claire taking place on stage. He claims that she has connived to bring her liberal agenda to

Saga behind Trevor's wishes. He accuses Netflix of being part of the "coup" and announces in front of everyone that he knows about Monique Seals and dares her to announce the casting at that moment. The audience does not know whether to cheer or not, so when Claire confirms that his information is true, there is an awkward mix of applause and murmurs. Mason claims that this proves he was right and that Trevor has been "stabbed in the back" by those who love him. He tries to start the chant "Save Saga" as he's dragged out by security. The audience does not chant with him.

Interlude #5

Summary: In this interlude, the audience sees various images of increasingly unhinged YouTube videos titles snippets the videos themselves from Mason's channel. The first is a video titled: "Netflix had me banned because I know the truth! Save Saga", which is a video that give his side of the events of the previous scene. The second is "Monique Seals is Netflix at its most 'woke'. Token casting is racist!" This last video is a recap of the news out of Chicago Comic-Con of the casting of Monique Seals and how Mason knows "the truth" about the casting. The second is the title, "The truth of Seals and Saga! King dethroned by Lady Macbeth!," which is an attack on Claire.

Scene 2

Summary: It is a few days after the convention. Smitty stops by to see Mason for the first time since that weekend. He hands in his resignation as he has decided to join Jessie. They both confront Mason over his behavior. Mason takes the resignation poorly and the confrontation even worse. He claims Smitty doesn't have his back because of Smitty's romantic relationship with Sylvie. Smitty claims that the news getting out strained his relationship with Sylvie and the two have been growing increasingly distant from each other, with Sylvie being transferred to a different department at Netflix after Mason confronted Netflix. Mason claims that he will somehow talk to Trevor and after he does, Trevor will fix everything.

Interlude #6

Summary: Mason's channel is suspended from YouTube after he appears with Tim Pool on Joe Rogan's podcast and urges his YouTube fanbase to boycott *Saga* and Netflix. He inadvertently doxes Trevor King. This leads to the King family and Netflix filing a cease-and-desist order from Mason. The audience sees various media and fan Twitter responses to the channel being dropped from YouTube.

Scene 3

Summary: Mason convinces Jasper and Derek to let him post an apology on their website. The apology on face is heartfelt about the doxing, but he does not apologize for his behavior towards Claire, Netflix, or Monique Seals. Jasper and Derek confront him about failing to apologize for his behavior. The scene ends with the two of them pulling the apology from their website.

Interlude #7

Summary: Mason's account is reinstated and he reposts his apology, but with the addition of a message to Trevor King begging for one last interview so that Mason can finally clarify everything. He promises that if he's given this last opportunity to talk to King, he will never bother him again. He also promises that if King is not convinced at the information Mason has, Mason will permanently end his career as a YouTuber. In a second video, Mason claims that his request was formally rejected due to the cease-and-desist. In a third video, Mason claims that the King's representatives and Netflix ignore his calls and emails.

Scene 4

Summary: Derek and Jasper confront Mason as they claim their channel has had an uptick in criticism for allowing him on. They state that their viewership has gone down. Mason is empathetic, but claims that their Twitter accounts are being shadow banned and that Netflix has probably pushed YouTube to make it harder for viewers come across their videos. Mason tells them that his own channel is suffering and that he has defaulted on multiple loans. Derek and Jasper offer to buy his channel and help rehabilitate it if he promises to never post again. They tell him, that he would still be a minority owner and he would have a steady income without the work. Mason claims they only want his audience, but promises to think about it because he may have no choice. Smitty arrives as they are leaving. He tells Mason to simply get out of the business. Mason admits that he fears he is in too deep and that he can't simply change who he is. He states that even if part of him likes the casting of Seals, he simply cannot do an about face and remain respected by his viewers. He begs Smitty to have Sylvie use her contacts to get him in to San Diego Comic-Con, but Smitty says Sylvie would never do it and that if he is caught with Mason. Jessie offers to get him in on the condition that when it the convention is over, that Mason make a formal apology to Claire and Monique Seals because she claims that viewers in general hate corporate Netflix and those attacks are valid, but his attacks on women are over the line. Mason agrees.

Final Interlude

Summary: Various YouTube channels with titles that preview San Diego Comic-Con. Mason's channel appears last and it is simply milquetoast summary of what is happening at the convention.

Scene 5

It is the stage entrance to Hall C at San Diego Comic Con. Smitty is waiting for Sylvie, who will be with Trevor King and his entourage. Jessie escorts Mason into the scene. He tries to keep a low profile, but Smitty sees him immediately.

Smitty

Pull your jacket further up. That's not inconspicuous at all.

Mason

Look, I'm just nervous. I have to see Trevor before he goes on stage.

Smitty

He'll be here any minute and when he turns that corner, I cannot be seen with you. You got it? As far as Sylvie and Netflix are concerned, I have completely disowned you.

Jessie

Same, Mason. I'm not sticking around here. You do what I told you. You apologize for everything. Fuck Netflix. You don't have to apologize for their corporate bullshit, but you have to apologize for this culture crusade you went on.

Mason

If I can just get him to understand. I'm not racist or sexist. I'm not trying to present myself as symbol of Tim Pool or Matt Walsh or fucking milquetoast Ben Shapiro.

Smitty

Dude...we've been over this.

Jessie

Mason...

Mason

I can't let them think I'm like that. Because I'm not. You guys know I'm not. I have female friends in this business that I respect and admire. I have black friends like Derek, who is awesome at his job and deserves everything.

Jessie

Do you hear yourself right now?

Mason

Tell me I'm wrong.

Jessie and Smitty

You're wrong.

Mason

Why can't you understand? I want a great story. That's what I want! I want the story to be great and the story to come first. If the story has a black man, a white woman, a Native American non-binary human, an Asian transgender human...I don't care. I want the story to come first. Oh shit...

Mason makes a poor attempt to hide behind Jessie and Smitty as Malcolm, Xavier, Trevor, and Sylvie enter in mid-conversation. He pulls up his hoodie.

Xavier

You go on in five minutes. That audience is so ready for you.

Trevor

I'm ready for them.

Malcolm

Trevor, here are your tickets for tonight's screening.

Trevor

I'm only going to need one, Claire refuses to...Mason...

Mason steps out from behind Jessie and Smitty. For a beat no one moves or knows what to do. Xavier breaks the silence.

Xavier

What the living fuck are you doing here? *(to Sylvie)* Get security!

Sylvie

Fuck! Smitty? I told you...fuck!

Smitty

Sylvie, this was not my idea...MASON!!

Mason

Hey, Malcolm. Xavier. Hello Trevor.

Xavier

It's *Mister King*.

Trevor

I do not think we have anything to talk about.

Malcolm

You two are fucked for bringing him here. Sylvie...go get fucking security! Don't make me tell you again.

Mason

No, it wasn't them. I snuck in. Sylvie, it wasn't Smitty's idea. He had nothing to do with this. Neither did Jessie. They were just trying to get me to leave.

Malcolm

You should listen to them and leave right now.

Mason

Trevor, I need to explain...

Malcolm (overlapping)

Get the fuck out of here.

Trevor (overlapping)

I have nothing to say to you.

Xavier (overlapping)

You don't need to talk to him.

Mason (overlapping)

You have to let me explain!

Malcolm (overlapping)

Trevor, let's go wait outside.

Jessie (overlapping)

Mason, you should go.

Trevor (overlapping)

What you said about my wife is unforgivable.

Mason (overlapping)

You broke your rule.

Smitty (overlapping)

You don't need to do this.

Xavier (overlapping)

Get out of here!

Mason

You broke your rule!!

Trevor

What did you say?

Malcolm

That's it. It's time to go.

Malcolm grabs Mason from behind.

Mason

No! You broke your rule, Trevor. You broke your one rule.

(beat)

Trevor motions for Malcolm to let Mason go.

You stopped telling the story, Trevor. You stopped. You didn't serve the story. It became more important to include a black woman than it was to tell the story. That's shit, Trevor, and you know it. That's not being an author. That doesn't serve the story. It was your rule man. Last year, on that stage, you told the entire world that your one rule was to serve the story. But, you catered to the social justice warriors at the sacrifice of the story. You stopped serving the story. You broke your rule. Call me a racist, a sexist, a homophobe...I don't give a shit. I know I'm not those things. I know who I am. But, I can unequivocally tell you, that you are a dishonest storyteller and for that, I had to call you out. I had to challenge you. I thought it was Claire, Trevor. I thought she was corrupting your story without you there. I thought she was doing it a disservice and it angered me, and I had to call it out, Trevor. I'm sorry and I know the things I said were harsh and unfair, but how was I to know? You kept this all hidden, man. You and your Netflix stooges. You could have told us last year. You could have told me. In that room, in the hotel. You could have told me. Then, at least I would have known it was you and not her. I would have known that it was you, failing us. Failing me. And now, what do I have? I have nothing and I don't care. I'm about to be thrown out of a convention. My channel is gone. I have no audience. I have nothing. My career is over, but I don't care man. I fought to expose the truth, man. I fought to save this story. I fought to save you from this.

(beat)

Trevor

Malcolm, Xavier, give us a moment.

Malcolm & Xavier

What?

Trevor

I need a moment with Mason.

Malcolm

You don't have to talk to him.

Trevor

Yes. Yes, I do.

Xavier

Trevor...okay. Five minutes

Smitty

Don't fuck this up, man.

Malcolm, Xavier, Smitty, Jessie, and the guards exit, leaving Trevor and Mason alone. They don't speak for a few seconds, but it feels like an eternity.

Trevor

She knew you'd be here and find some way to talk to me.

Mason

Who? Claire?

Trevor

Yes. You have single-handedly soured her on these conventions.

Mason

I'm sorry.

Trevor

I'm not the one you must apologize to.

Mason

I would. If I could get five minutes of her time, I could.

Trevor

No. That won't be happening. Ever. You'll never speak to her again. And after this conversation, you'll never speak to me again, either.

Mason

I understand.

Trevor

No, I don't think you do. You are right, Mason. I'll give you that. I did not cast Japeth's sister as a black woman to serve the story. I cast her because its 2023, Mason, and in 2023, if I can make a story choice to be more inclusive, I'm going to do it. I broke my rule, per se. But, this is what you do not understand. Had I told this story in the 1970s. I would not have cast a black woman. I would not have cast a white woman, either. Japeth would not have had a sister. He'd have had a brother. If I had told this story in the 1980s or the 1990s or even 15 years ago, I would have cast a white woman. But, not today, Mason. Not today. Today, I cast a black woman. Not because of some virtue-signaling or to appease the social justice warriors but because I CAN. In the 1970s, I would have wanted to create a sister for Japeth, but the powers that be would never have signed off on that. Fifteen years ago, I would have wanted to create a black sister for Japeth, but no studio would have agreed with that decision. I would have been forced to make a different choice. But in 2023, Mason, in 2023, I could make this choice. I could make a story choice that is selfish, to me, because I want more audience members to see themselves represented in the story because the story means so much to other fans, Mason, not just you. You do not get to have a story that only caters to you and your version of what it should be. No one does. I have the power to make that decision, and I want people who do not look like me to see themselves as heroes. *Saga* is not just a story about faraway lands. The themes in the story translate to the lives of those who watch it. Found family, love, grief, redemption, they are all broad themes that touch the lives of every person on this globe who has watched the series. The series speaks to them individually, just like it did to you. That is the biggest thing you and others like you do not understand. It speaks to you individually, but you do not own in it beyond what you have in your head or beyond any fan fiction you may write or develop. No fan does. The moment its viewed it becomes the ownership of everyone, not the individual. I may not have served the story, Mason, but I served my audience to the best of my ability. If the story and the themes speak to you, but you cannot get on board because of the color of the skin of a character or the sexuality or gender of a character then that's not the fault of the story. It simply means the story is not meant for you.

Mason takes a moment to think. When he finally responds, he speaks with pain as if he's divorcing himself from

Mason

I cannot agree with that. I do not know where you lost your way, Trevor. I do not know where our stories lost their way, but when you make a decision based on making an audience member happy, you do not serve the story.

Trevor

I must wonder if you'd be saying the same thing if you were black.

Mason

Maybe not. Maybe I would. You aren't black, so you wouldn't know either.

Trevor

Fair enough.

Mason

You lost one fan, Trevor. I won't be watching anymore. I'll never forgive you or *Saga* for it.

Trevor

I'm sorry, Mason. Believe me when I tell you, that I honestly and genuinely am sorry.

Xavier, Malcolm, Sylvie, and Smitty re-enter.

Xavier

Trevor, it's time to go in.

Trevor

You may not agree, Mason. But you will still watch it because somewhere deep down, the story speaks not because of the color of the skin or the gender of the character but because you also believe in love, found family, grief, and most importantly...

Trevor reaches into his pocket and pulls out a ticket and hands it to Mason.

...redemption. Best of luck to you.

Trevor, Xavier, Sylvie, and Malcom exit to the stage of Hall C. Mason stares at the ticket. Jessie enters.

Smitty

Mason...

Jessie

Mason...what is it.

Mason

It's a ticket to tonight's invited screening of the first two episodes of Season 2.

Smitty

He gave that to you?

Mason

Yeah.

Mason goes to tear it up but stops. He is in an angry daze. He tries again but cannot bring himself to tear it up.

Jessie

Smitty...

Smitty

What?

Jessie mimes that Mason can't possibly wear the clothes he has on for the VIP screening.

Smitty

Oh! Mason, why don't we make a quick trip to Target.

Jessie

Smitty!?

Smitty

What?

Jessie

Mason, we don't have a ton of time and you need something to wear. Come on.

Mason looks at Jessie and Smitty. His anger fades and he cracks the smallest of smiles. There is the sound of audience cheering. He looks back towards Hall C and then back to the ticket. Mason smiles and nods his head and embraces Smitty.

Smitty

Come on, man. Let's get ready for Season 2.

Another huge cheer of the audience as we hear from off stage the chanting of "*Season 2! Season 2! Season 2! Season 2!*"

End

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