

A Fanzine of Her Own: Women in Post-War Era Science Fiction Fandom

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Abstract

This thesis examines the active contribution of women science fiction fans who were referred to as 'femme fans' in the post-war era (1944- 1967). Femme fans experienced harassment and ridicule from male fans who believed women to be unintelligent and unable to contribute anything worthy to fan culture. Many male fans believed femme fans lacked an understanding of science and were therefore incapable of critiquing and writing science fiction. Male fan historians in the mid-twentieth century ignored the labour and contributions of femme fans in their historiographical work. This oversight of femme fans' participatory and enthusiastic practices leaves a gap in both fan and academic historiography. This thesis engages in reclaiming the history of these femme fans by documenting their engaged practices in fan cultures. By unearthing the narratives of femme fans, I underscore their engagement and knowledge of popular science in the post-war era. This thesis argues that femme fans in the post-war era shaped the genre of science fiction through their active engagement in fan cultures and knowledge of popular science.

Acknowledgements

I was a child of the nineties that grew up with a tenacious love of science fiction and fantasy. This love was instilled in me by my mother, who also loved these genres. Together we would watch the *Alien(s)* franchise movies until the ribbon in the VHS tape wore thin. I learned so much from watching and rewatching these films as a youth. I learned important lessons beyond how to detect a xenomorph bursting from your stomach. I learned the importance of strong women protagonists in unwelcoming genres. I learned the importance of believing in women. That girls can do bad ass things in space too.

I think back as to why my mother decided to show an 8-year-old me these films filled with gore and trauma. And in my adulthood, I recognize that there were some similarities between lady sci fi protagonists and my mother. My mother was high school educated, working-class, and a single parent who was a survivor of domestic abuse. She valiantly fought poverty, disability, trauma, and gender-based oppression all her short life. Maybe she didn't have a giant space bazooka to annihilate tentacled aliens. She didn't warn a crew of men about breaking quarantine on the ship. But she lived her life with a measured sense of grace and tenacity. And when she couldn't be the strong protagonist that I needed, we pushed the vhs tape into the tape player and cheered on Ripley. Because of her, I wrote this thesis.

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