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Neta Yodovich

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#### AUTHOR

*Neta Yodovich is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Salford, currently studying the cultural and social value of video games. Her work has been published in journals such as Sociology, British Journal of Sociology, Games and Culture, and Feminist Media Studies. Her first book, Women Negotiating Feminism and Science Fiction Fandom: The Case of the 'Good' Fan, was published in 2022 by Palgrave Macmillan. Her research interests include pop culture, belonging, identity, and gender.*

ORCID: [0000-0002-3764-7284](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3764-7284)

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## Book Review

### **Greg Carter: I'd Just as Soon Kiss a Wookiee: Uncovering Racialized Desire in the Star Wars Galaxy**

**Austin: University of Texas Press 2025, 256 pp., ISBN 9781477331590, USD 34.95**

*Star Wars* is arguably one of the most extensively studied franchises in fan studies and the humanities more broadly. Thanks to its longevity, cultural impact, and expansion across multiple media, including films, television, novels, and comic books, scholars have long been drawn to analyzing its complexity and richness. Greg Carter's recent monograph, *I'd Just as Soon Kiss a Wookiee: Uncovering Racialized Desire in the Star Wars Galaxy*, offers a fresh and original perspective by exploring interracial intimacy (or lack thereof) across *Star Wars'* three cinematic trilogies. Although set in a galaxy far, far away, Carter demonstrates how each trilogy mirrors the social and cultural climate of the United States at the time of its release, particularly surrounding race and sexuality. While the book's primary focus is on *Star Wars*, Carter also draws on a wide range of science fiction and other pop culture texts, from rap and hip-hop music to Internet memes, enriching the discussion and situating the arguments within a broader cultural context.

The monograph is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 reviews depictions of interracial intimacy in twentieth-century science fiction, while Chapter 2 considers Darth Vader's racial coding, especially through Black audiences' oppositional readings. Chapter 3 turns to early African-American fans and the privileges of whiteness in fan culture. Chapter 4 interrogates sexuality in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). Chapter 5 connects the backlash against the prequel trilogy (1999-2005), particularly surrounding characters such as Jar Jar Binks, to racial anxieties of the time. Chapter 6 examines fan shipping practices, especially around Finn/Rey (Finnrey) and Rey/Kylo Ren (Reylo). Finally, Chapter 7 addresses how social media reignited debates about race, romance, and representation in relation to the sequel trilogy's conclusion in 2019. Carter engages not only with canonical theorists such as Stuart Hall and bell hooks, but also with emerging Black voices, including bloggers, journalists, and critics. In doing so, Carter challenges the dominance of white perspectives in fan studies while amplifying voices that are often overlooked.

Carter carefully explains the motivations and methodological choices taken in the book. The focus on interracial intimacy is persuasive. These relationships raise vital questions about kinship, belonging, and the social norms that govern intimacy. Who is seen as a viable partner and who is not? What kinds of relationships are supported and celebrated and what kinds are discouraged or excluded? Carter also justifies the book's US-centered scope by situating it within the country's particular history, from slavery and anti-miscegenation laws to the gradual acceptance of interracial relationships. The decision to focus on the *Star Wars* films, rather than the wider transmedia universe, is similarly well-reasoned, given their enduring prominence and reach. That said, the book's emphasis on Black-white relationships risks sidelining other racial dynamics, while the exclusive US focus overlooks the global audiences who also shape *Star Wars* as a franchise and as a community. While these issues may be beyond the intended scope of the book, acknowledging them more explicitly would have enriched its contribution and relevancy.

The greatest strength of *I'd Just as Soon Kiss a Wookiee* lies in its in-depth analysis. Carter attends to characters, storylines, and even single lines of dialogue (including the one that gives the book its title) with care and sophistication. The analysis opens up new and thought-provoking ways of understanding *Star Wars*. At times, however, certain arguments feel slightly stretched (for example, the claim that Luke initially rejects Darth Vader's revelation of paternity due to anxieties about racial mixing). Moreover, some relationships, such as that between Jyn Erso and Cassian Andor, receive little attention, although they could complicate or nuance Carter's arguments. Indeed, this relationship is featured in a stand-alone film and may therefore fall beyond the book's scope, but its absence is nonetheless worth addressing. Lastly, the book tends to reinforce a hierarchy of intimate relationships, with romantic and sexual attachments positioned as the dominant forms, without fully interrogating this social construct. Given the book's focus on desire and mixed-race individuals, it is understandable that sexual and romantic relationships receive significant attention. Nevertheless, this emphasis (and the prioritization of romantic and sexual bonds over friendships and other platonic intimacies) perhaps misses an opportunity to offer a more nuanced and thought-provoking exploration of intimacy in its many forms.

Overall, *I'd Just as Soon Kiss a Wookiee* offers a valuable and original contribution to *Star Wars* scholarship, fan studies, and cultural studies of race and intimacy. Its strengths lie in the fresh research focus, comprehensive and engaging analysis, and willingness to amplify underrepresented voices and readings. The book succeeds in deepening our understanding of how questions of race and desire reverberate across an iconic narrative and demonstrate how pop-cultural representations mirror and impact our social discourse.

