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# ARROW'S BLACK CANARY MADE ME A BETTER FAN

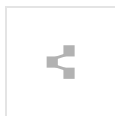
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Arrow

Caity Lotz

Arrowverse

Fandom can be great. It can bring people together, teach you a new skill, or allow you to grow your confidence by participating in a community of likeminded individuals. Online fandom can offer all of this and more as it allows people who might not otherwise have a community to find one in various places on the internet. Twitter, Tumblr, Archive of Our Own, and yes, even Reddit, give fans with no one else to talk to a safe place to explore a newfound passion and share it with others who won't judge them for that very same devotion. It can even, these days, offer fans direct access to some of their favorite creators, writers, artists, and actors with only a few strokes of the keyboard.

At least, that's the utopic version of fandom we believe we live in. In actuality, while much of what I just laid out is, in fact, true, there is another side to online fandom that if left unchecked can become toxic. While the internet, especially in places like Twitter and Instagram, allows us an unprecedented level of access to our favorite fandom personalities, it also breeds a kind of anonymity that can lead to abuse of those very same people. What's worse is that none of us is entirely immune. It's a lesson I had to



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learn myself and one which was taught to me by a surprising instructor.

Back in the fall of 2013, I was not the best comic book fan. Don't get me wrong, I was deep in my relatively new obsession with the medium — I had been introduced to them by a friend in college only about a year earlier and was in the midst of my "buy everything with a character you think you might sort of like" phase of collecting — but I was, let's say "strict" when it came to adaptations. I was happy to complain at length on social media and to anyone who would listen (and many who wouldn't) whenever I felt a version of a character I had come to love was too different, had been changed too much. If we're being completely fair, I suppose it's probably far more accurate to say I was kind of an asshole. Then came a second season for The CW's *Arrow*, and a completely new perspective for me.

Credit: The CW

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Like a lot of comic book fans in the age of social media, if a creative team was planning to bring one of my favorite characters to life

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you could guarantee I had thoughts. Really, they were more like rules, and if the creators weren't going to adhere to these rules then their version of the character was not only bad, it was *wrong*. For this reason, when *Arrow* announced its second season would introduce the Black Canary as played by the newly-cast Caity Lotz, I was pissed. After all, *Arrow* already had a would-be Black Canary in Katie Cassidy's (Dinah) Laurel Lance, who they had been setting up slowly over the first season to eventually join the vigilante team later on. How could they completely flip the script on fans, fans like me, who were waiting for this hero to take the stage? I vented my outrage on social media, mostly in Facebook posts that were, thankfully, not public but which do rear their heads in the site's memories every fall. It never morphed into outright abuse, but it certainly could have.

This type of outrage is far from rare, perhaps especially among comic book fans. We don't tend to like it when you change our favorite character or story to fit a new take. These days, the most rigid and outright abusive versions of these fans tend to show up in the cases of films like *Wonder Woman* or *Black Panther* or *Captain Marvel*, cases where

women or people of color take center stage. The complaints may range from changes to the costume to the actor not being attractive enough or countless other perceived slights. Often, these general critiques are lobbed into the open on social media to be liked and retweeted into feeds throughout the site. Other times, the "outrage" becomes targeted campaigns intended to tank a film ahead of its release. Such was the case with *Captain Marvel*, in which a contingent of angry comic fans flooded the film's Rotten Tomatoes page with negative reviews ahead of its release in an attempt to lower its audience score as much as possible. These negative reviews were left by people who hadn't yet seen the film and led to Rotten Tomatoes completely **changing the way the audience score works.**

In other, much more personal cases, fans target creators and actors directly, spewing hate into the comments of their Instagram posts or their Twitter mentions. When DC Universe released the first trailer for *Titans*, the flagship series of the new streaming service, fans, upset at what they perceived the show had "done" to Starfire, unleashed a wave of vitriol onto actress Anna Diop so severe that the actress **disabled comments on her Instagram** (she has since turned them

back on). What had she done, exactly? Many so-called fans complained about her appearance and while yes, Starfire's wig in the first season of the show is Not Great, that's also not her fault. Then again, it's safe to say that Diop's greatest perceived "crime" was that she's Black.

Credit: DC Universe

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This story has played out countless times in recent years. Angry *Star Wars* fans, for example, have abused the minority actors in the films at length throughout the past four years and while John Boyega has stuck around on social media, other actors, like Kelly Marie Tran, have been **run off the platforms**.

And it's not just racists and misogynists who perpetuate this type of toxic fandom, even if it may seem like it much of the time. Shippers, fans heavily invested in various relationships on a series or in a film, have been known to attack writers and actors when their specific ship is not made canon. Just last year, *Batwoman* fans drove star Ruby Rose **off of social media** after her

casting was met with anger and hatred by a number of sides, from LGBTQ fans who thought she wasn't the **right kind of gay** to comic fans upset that she wasn't Jewish. And while the latter can be a legitimate concern for Jewish fans of the comics who want to see themselves represented on screen by an actor who shares their faith and heritage, none of this was her fault and none of it was going to be dealt with through abusive comments on social media.

So what does all this have to do with me, Caity Lotz, Black Canary, and Season 2 of *Arrow*? As I already said, my complaining on social media about the changes they had made to one of my favorite characters thankfully never made it to the abusive stage, but they were still, in some ways, unkind. More than that, though, they revealed a version of myself that was unwilling even to hear these creators out, to see the story they were creating and decide its quality on its own merits rather than as a comparison to a glorified version in my head. I decided, without evidence, that these writers and actors did not know or care about the material as I did. How could they? They had changed it so much.

But I was wrong.

If you know me, follow me on Twitter, have read my writing, or ever been within a five-mile radius of me, you probably know that these days Sara Lance is my favorite character across all Arrowverse shows. This was true even before she left *Arrow* to join the crew of the *Waverider* over on *Legends of Tomorrow*. It was true before she was killed and brought back to life on *Arrow*. It was true, possibly, even before the end of that second season. In creating Sara Lance the way they did — making her the Black Canary, creating her connections to those characters and that story — the writers, and Lotz, created a character I loved just as much as the Dinah Lance in the pages of my favorite comics and one who stayed true to the essence of that original character, her story, and her legacy while allowing that same creative team to expand the overall narrative of the show. Without something I had previously railed against in public, I would never have gotten something that I have even more publicly praised. In fact, the two are exactly the same thing seen through fresh eyes.



Credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

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All of this struck me recently as I scrolled through Twitter in the last few weeks. Warner Bros. is set to release their newest feature-length adaptation of DC Comics characters and this time they're going for the heart. When *Birds of Prey* swoops into theaters on February 7, the characters on the screen will not be the ones I came to love in a tiny apartment in Philadelphia nine years ago, nor will they be the version countless others have fallen in love with in the decades they've been appearing in comics. They will, instead, be new creations — a combination of those comic book heroes, the mind of their writer and director and a team of creative professionals, and the actresses who play them.

So many people who call themselves fans of the *Birds of Prey* comics have taken on the role I once played, shouting into the ether about how these changes — changes which they have not seen in context or had the opportunity to appreciate without pre-judgment — are ruining the characters they love. The racists and misogynists are back

too, upset that Black Canary is Black and that this film full of women centers female experience and sensibility. Some have claimed, without evidence, that the film will flop despite ticket sales outpacing both *Wonder Woman* and *Black Panther*. Others, even more bizarrely, claim none of the women in the film are attractive, which is both irrelevant and laughably false.

To the racists and misogynists, I have little to say, as we know they are unlikely to cease their onslaught no matter the argument. But to the fans, the real ones uneasy and quick to judge something different than what they know, I say this: creative ideas, and comic book characters, in particular, do not belong to any one person or to any one version. They are not set in stone. They change over time depending on the person or people to whom they have been entrusted. We may not like every adaptation of a character we have held dear, but if we limit our thinking to only those preconceived ideas of those characters locked away in our minds and our memories we may miss a wonderful story that otherwise could never have been told.

**MORE ARROW**

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I have not seen *Birds of Prey*. I cannot speak to its quality or accuracy in adapting any one version of these long-standing characters, though early reviews suggest it will be, at the very least, a good time. I can only speak to my own experience and in doing so hope that everyone gets the chance to see their own minds changed thanks to a new take on a favorite character. *Arrow* took its final bow on January 29 of this year and though we had our disagreements, I will always be grateful that it gave me mine.

