

A People's History of the Imperium of Man

Warhammer 40,000 and Historiography in the Dark Millennium

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The Depth of Lore

- There are hundreds of novels, rule books, and magazine articles fleshing out the lore for 40k, across dozens of authors.
- More recently there have been official animations and an uptick in video games set in 40k.
- A deeply passionate fanbase of content creators who dedicate their entire media output to discussing lore.



The Great Man Approach:

“To be a man in such times is to be one amongst untold billions”

- Much 40k lore tends to be told from the perspectives of a handful of men, placing agency with them for the galaxy's events.
- “Average people” are referenced as an entity frequently, and there are stories from their point of view, but the broader history of the galaxy and lore rarely considers their agency.



The “Meta”

Making Cents of the Lore

- The first and foremost purpose of the lore for 40k is to sell plastic toy soldiers to be painted and played with in a game also sold by Games Workshop.
- The Rogal Dorn Battle Tank was primarily created so sell another tank for the Astra Militarum.
- Broadening the audience appeal of 40k is certainly a reason lore is added, or “retconned”.



Upsetting a Fandom

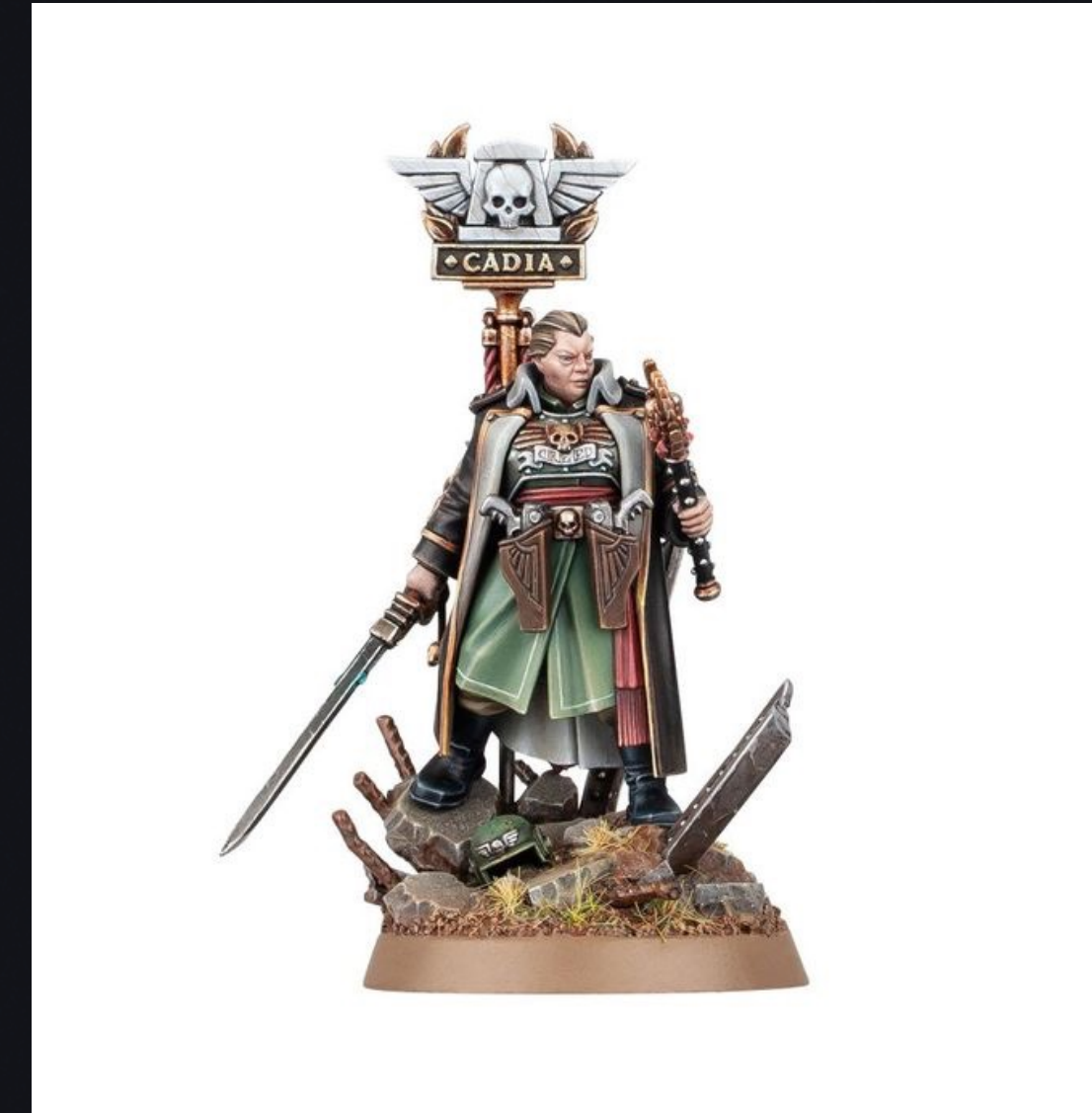
In the grim darkness of reddit, there is only war.

- Some additions to the lore trigger discontent amongst the fanbase, particularly online.
- Perhaps no example of this response is better than the fandom's reception of female Custodies.
- Many prominent fans and lore "content creators" were upset that previous lore had been apparently disqualified.

All the Emperor's Women

The Herstory of the Astra Militarum

- Early works involving the Imperial Guard rarely mention female participants with characters such as commissars and Inquisitors stating women and co-ed regiments were uncommon.
- Later works portray women as common throughout the Guard, and holding senior ranks.
- The consistency of female service in the Imperial Guard is a very good example of how, in the setting of 40k, well informed sources should be given some skepticism.



Why the Backlash?

Are we still discussing toys?

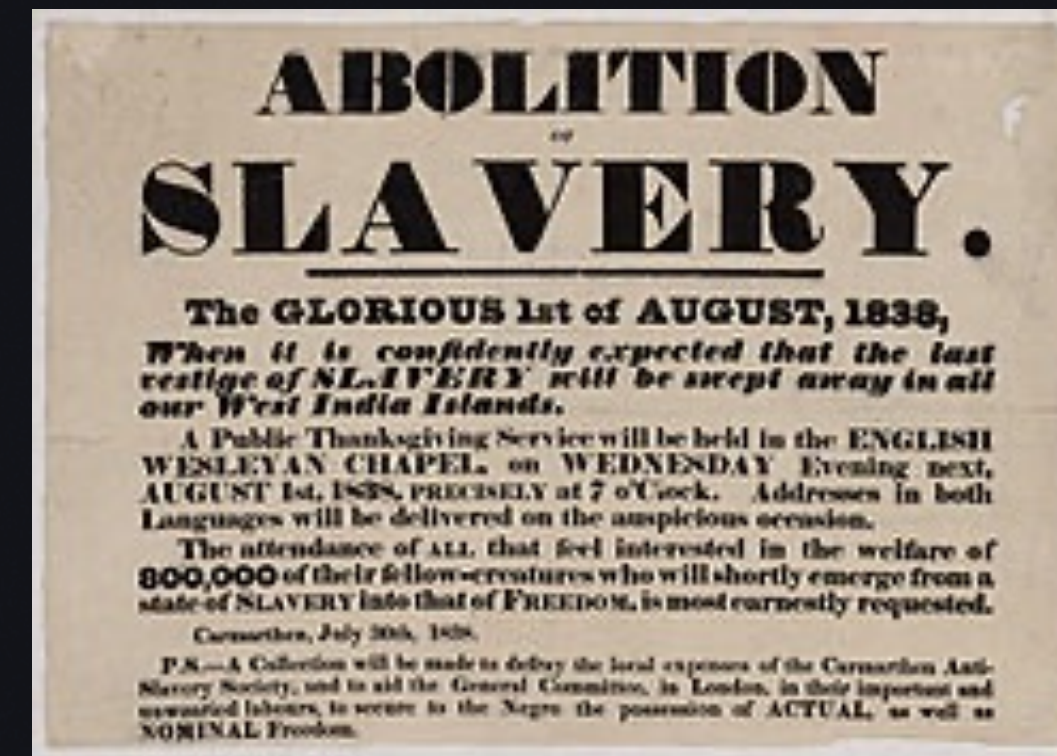
- As a historian it is easy to swallow the idea members of the Emperor's elite, secretive honor guard included women, given how inconsistent accounts of female participation in the Imperial Guard are.
- In actual history, it is common for women, and other social minorities, to be overlooked in historical narratives.
- The reason for the backlash over female Custodies is because their inclusion is a lot more threatening to real-life patriarchy than a tank.



Apart of a Broader “Debate”

No, we are not just discussing toys

- In our modern world, there is right-wing backlash to histories that highlight the struggles of the working class, women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community.
- Historical narratives that are critical of imperialism, slavery, and capitalism are portrayed by right wing pundits as attacks on patriotism and “rewriting history”.
- Sadly the U.S. federal government is actively aiding in erasing history and the people who’s lives made it.



Peer-Reviewed Warhammer?

Suffer not the pundit with publishing

- The backlash to 40k lore is apart of the same backlash to nuanced portrayals of history, and histories that highlight groups of people otherwise overlooked.
- 40k as a setting is uniquely positioned to be used as an example of why scrutiny of sources is important. The premise of an unreliable narrator is what makes this possible.



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