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'Game of Thrones' or skin tones?

The dark-skinned savage is a longtime resident of pop culture.

My mother still winces when she talks about watching "Tarzan" films and TV as a child growing up in the '50s. Unlike the titular jungle-dweller who was wise and brave, the black "African" characters were cowardly, uncouth and quick to kowtow to any white man.

This week, I got a grasp on how she must have felt back then while watching this week's episode of "Game of Thrones."

As a sci-fi and fantasy genre fan, this new HBO show based on a popular book series initially appealed to me.

I easily stomach plotlines involving incest, attempted murder of a child and gory beheadings. But nothing prepared me for the appearance of a nomadic race called the Dothraki.

Unlike the other alabaster-colored, civilized characters on the show, every single one of them is a shade of brown.

Blacks, Latinos and actors of Indian descent make up the part of the cast that engages in fireside orgies, random disembowelments and feasts of raw meat. One could argue that, yes, nomadic people would bronze in the sun, but the Dothraki are well beyond bronze.

Others in the blogosphere noted the dichotomy, including a Slate writer who wrote "Is Game of Thrones Racist?" about "these barbarians of the most stereotypical, un-PC sort."

"Would it be better if the Dothraki had a specific antecedent in our world," Nina Shen Rastogi writes. "Or if they were portrayed by actors from a more uniform racial group, rather than by 'miscellaneous brown people?'"

My answer to the latter question is hell yes, because it would remove the stigma of random brown skinned people being equated with barbarians. It would be exponentially better still if the Dothraki were distinguishable by costumes rather than a skin color that resonates in reality.

Director James Cameron knew better. "Avatar" dodged a bullet with a similarly unsophisticated, but blue-colored, race of aliens called Na'vi.

"Thor" challenged racial lines by choosing Idris Elba, who is black, to portray a Norse god. Some fanboys and girls found the colorblind casting unbelievable. (Interestingly, those same clowns don't challenge the notion of a half-naked hero with a magical hammer.)

But I digress:

Sci-fi and fantasy stories are escapes from reality. One would think they also would provide asylum from long-stewing stereotypes, or at least present them in a novel way—like HBO's "True Blood" has by juxtaposing vampire hatred with homophobia.

The Dothraki issue likely boils down to a case of showrunners not thinking through the consequences of casting.

But not thinking is far from a valid excuse for "Games" at least four decades after my mom turned away from "Tarzan."

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