

Regarding adults who read prodigious amounts of sci-fi and fantasy...

What if this fellow sitting across from me on the 74 bus to Liberty Lake, after his day at the office, with his striped shirt and his khaki pants, and his hair that's just a *little* too long and just a *little* too greasy...he must be 28 or 30...or so...What if he got married to a woman who was wise, but young, and after the honeymoon they were packing a bunch of stuff to move into their new house that their parents had all chipped in to get them, and she saw him put his whole collection of *Star Wars* books into a box...

"Are you keeping those, honey?"

He looks askance at her, sensing the premature rejection coming, sensing that amused derision that had become a familiar melodious note since his Jr. High days. He searches for packing tape. "Yes. Why?"

She picks up Episode III, he watches her carefully out of the corner of his eye the way a mama cat watches you pick up her kittens. "Oh, I don't know... I mean, I know you used to be really into them..." He smiles because he still is really into them, and is about to say so... "...I just thought they'd have been something you've grown out of..."

"What? Grow out of *Star Wars*? What are you talking about?" He picks up Episode VI, recalling each character and dynamic moment. "I must've read this series nine times since 6th grade! Ha, no way, I've never been into anything more!"

She doesn't look at him, she looks at the book. "...Not even me?"

He looks up immediately, instantly and acutely aware that he'd gone and said something dumb, that somehow he'd wandered onto emotional turf, and now he has to consider carefully how he chooses his words, what he wants to say versus what comes out of his mouth... He puts the book back in the box. "Hon..." But he's never had to defend his love of *Star Wars* to a wife, to girlfriends, yes, to the expendable ones...but not the one who he wanted to stay. Did he really have to choose between his wife and his books? It would be an obvious choice, duh, pick the wife, she's real, she's not just a good story, she loves you back, she grows and changes, she disagrees with you sometimes—the books just sit there until you open them, and they always have the same things to say, he could nearly recite them by heart.

...But then again, over the course of his growing up, he'd come to understand different parts of the story in different ways, in spite of the words staying the same. He still learned from the characters' mistakes and victories. And he would never admit it (maybe he didn't even know it), but part of his love for his wife would not be possible if he hadn't read about love in this series. It would be tragic of him to let it go. It would be nearly a betrayal.

She turns to continue packing, but he says, "Listen," and he says, "I love you." She waits, and he looks down in the box and says, "These are my friends." She looks a little dubious. "Really"—he continues, saying the words as they come—"it's like these are the guys who have always been with me, we grew up together, I've done everything with these guys. They've seen me through some of the toughest parts of my life, I mean, my life hasn't been that tough, but sometimes it seemed like it, and they were always there. I've known them for most of my life.

"You're my wife now—I gotta tell you I love saying that, and I love feeling it—you have no idea what a novelty it is for a guy like me to have someone as cool and beautiful as you. Nothing could ever replace you in my life. Ever. Period." And he looks back in the box. "...But

would it be outrageous if I kept these guys around? And occasionally went out with them, like I would any of my buddies? They're good guys, you'd like them."

She comes close, puts her arms around his neck and kisses him on the cheek and then the lips. He senses he's said what he meant correctly. "Just promise me I don't have to dress up for any conventions," she says.

"Conventions, no. Bedroom, maybe..."

"Only if you dress up too."

"Deal."