

Intro:

As much as I love Getter Robo, one thing it struggles a lot with is its female characters. Or, lack thereof.

Getter as a series has the potential to incorporate many female characters, the main robot consists of three pilots, one or simply all of them can be women, and these cases still happen but come with their issues.

Sho Tachibana is beloved by many but within her original manga debt she is written out of the story by getting with a unlikable racist, it's the very thing that saves her from dying like most of the cast yet is a very not satisfying to her character especially when her boyfriend is far from redemption. After that she is not used in the manga even though Arc anime did add her which was nice she- doesn't get much to do besides one conversation with Go, that I really have to wonder why she was here beyond fanservice. (And they ruined her hair)

Aside from that her other anime appearances have been very few, Shin vs Neo a lot of people are happy she was there at all and while she gets to do more she doesn't have much of a character or arc because of the short runtime of the series, and most people do not care for the Toei Go iteration of her or look fondly upon that iteration even if I want to give it more of a chance it is still a pretty basic super robot show- even if that's a lot of things.

In the manga spin offs and the single video game Getter got we have had full teams of women but of course both of these don't have finished or translation for us to really know what they are like and High is a bit fanservice heavy which collectively makes a few people groan, even if I'm sure it's otherwise fine.

We also have just a huge problem with the many supporting female characters, Ken really gave his two major protags wives only for them to have non existent chemistry and just be used for fridging purposes and you have the constant neglect Michiru gets despite feeling like she should be more important as one of Saotome's kids. Some people say New Getter was the best take of her and while I think they were doing something right there she unfortunately runs into the issue Arc anime Sho had: not getting much to really fucking do. Less bad to Sho's extent because she technically has more screen time, but I feel they could've done more with her character- also I may or may not have made an essay saying how a character from Kikaider is basically Michiru archetype actually done good but shhhh no spoilers.

But despite the many gripes with Getter female characters we could have for hours, there isn't to say there's never been a case where they pretty much got it right. A character I never see talked about enough despite fixing the very issues this series has with its women: Kei.

Or, specifically Armageddon Kei because oh boy the manga version fits right back into alllll the issues.

Why I like Kei (and consider her Getters best girl):

Before we get into the why on Kei being ignored because to some it's- obvious, I want to gush about why I think she is the closest thing we got to a solidly written female character for this franchise. I don't think this will change anyone's opinion on her, but I want to make my point clear why I think she's good before getting into the issues.

For starters, Kei really holds her own in a mostly male cast. She's feisty, will not be hesitant to defend herself and despite it seeming reckless she's actually super capable. She is shown to be skilled in firearms and knows how to even adapt to other weapons, honestly if someone taught this girl one fighting style she adapted too but more importantly she is capable of piloting the Getter. While one immediate issue is her actual screen time in the robot is very limited, all times she is seen piloting she is shown to just be a beast, she is skilled and adapts to it rather quickly.

That ties into another good thing about her character, her independence. While Kei is nice to most people she meets she makes it clear she wants to do things for herself. We are shown pretty immediately after her debut that she wants to go out to fight Invaders despite Benkei yelling at her for it and sticks to this goal by trying to steal a robot, of course the plan doesn't go exactly well but she still sticks to it. Kei is stubborn and doesn't give up even if she's actually reckless, and where her independence comes is in the form she tried to not heavily rely on men. She works with men, obviously, she has ones she cares about, but nowhere does it feel like Kei is ever a dismal even when she is put in immediate danger. All the times she is saved feels less like because she's a helpless woman and more because people around her care for her.

This is made better by the fact Kei has no romantic love interest- "but what about Go" THATS LITERALLY HER BROTHER. Ahem. Sorry. People can ship what they want but Kei canonically never gets with anyone, I'll leave it at that to not start the ship discourse.

I think what also helps all these factors be more developed is despite Kei being Getter 2 pilot she basically is the main character of Armageddon- (pans to Ryoma) okay she shares it with my favorite fuck head but ep 4 onwards is her story. Even if Armageddon's biggest issue is that it has a lot to fit into 13 eps so it's constantly jumping everywhere to conclude the story and a lot of things get cast aside, I think Kei still gets her moment every episode that doesn't feel like they forgot about her.

Quiet literally after Ryoma takes Shin Getter while Kei and Gai are sitting idly with Go they still want to do something and that is built up greatly in the following final two episodes with her learning to control Shin Dragon and getting to use that very thing in the final battle, they accounted well for the fact Go team would lose the very Getter in the show and that's really brilliant- even if Shin Liger is probably the lamest fucking Getter they could've gave her at the end but I disgress. Oh and I just love her giant final speech to Cohen and Stinger that really makes you realize the writers gave a fuck about her. Seriously, this could've been Ryoma but it's her moment and I love it. (Also how at the end her team gets off free but Ryoma doesn't but that just ties more to the old and new gen theme Armageddon kinda has)

Kei to me also strikes the overall balance between a girl who is feisty but also very sweet. Kei being a Getter pilot to some might feel weird cause- she's just kinda fucking normal but I don't think that's enough reason to put this in the next section cause to me it makes her stick out. She is a normal girl who while has a temper strongly represents hope for the future in the apocalypse. She does her best to stay upbeat and strong, defending what she believes in and trying to make other people happy, but that doesn't mean she isn't ever in a high state of other emotions.

The burden of being Saotome's kid, the man who destroyed the world takes a huge burden of her as the central mid-story twist, she recklessly goes in to kill him because she thinks she needs to fix his wrongs, she was gonna do it before this reveal anyways but now it feels like a necessity. Of course, that doesn't end up happening and while I do think that part is one of the things Armageddon should have addressed better, it's for the better that she didn't do it. Sometimes killing your parents isn't the answer even if they suck, most other narratives I support this but Saotome is a weird case where he didn't necessarily abuse Kei but rather neglected her because he was consumed by his own grief. Terrible parenting still, but I think next to the rivalry the show set up between Ryoma and Saotome it was ultimately the better choice he got the girl over her, and the justification being she is so worried for Go is a pretty decent one, it just be nice if we saw Kei actually acknowledge or process her fathers death more.

I also nearly forgot to mention episode 8 as it not only gives us fantastic world building the show otherwise lacks but shows us just how empathetic Kei is. How she easily connects to Leanne and uses her experience to realize her feelings on whether or not see Go as her brother, but also even if the people weren't going to be saved, everything about the last act of this episode where Kei is forced to kill humans for the first time, cannot bring herself and watches as Ryoma does it is absolutely heartbreaking. Especially the moment where she calls out to Ryoma only to not get an answer, it was a true moment of failure for Kei.

I'll also say while some people may not see Kei having a character arc with how Armageddon is the way it is, I still like how she still clearly changes through the story and by the end it is a found family message. To me, her arc is about not being defined by your heritage and those who you choose to make your family mean more than your blood. I think that's a really sweet message but this is one of those things where if you told me Kei did get development but it was just all over I wouldn't say your wrong this is just how I piece together and I'm not moving this to the critic section cause- I mean this can apply to a lot of fucking things in Armageddon. But she is overall the reason I can't call the show bad despite its many issues, she just always invests me whenever I revisit this canon.

Probably my actual biggest gripe with Kei's character is she should've had a few more interactions with other characters, the Saotome stuff like I said but her and Ryoma are shockingly similar and I feel it got overlooked yet if they got to interact more their chemistry could've been amazing, especially given "oh wait Kei kinda the reason he went to jail huh" and of course Hayato and her could've had more moments but don't feel like anything beyond

coworkers but her dynamics with Go, Gai, Benkei and some of the minor characters like Leanne still are very good.

There's also the issue of sexualization but being so honest this is probably the tamest in anime, especially for its time and compared to modern ones. Were the peeping scenes completely unnecessary? Yes, especially the first one with the rain water was more shoehorned in as the second time she kinda did have a reason to be naked, but like I said, not as bad as other shows given the fact it was twice is applauding in itself, especially since they never did jiggle physics shit. Also she's canonically 19 so she's not a minor yayyyy. (Insert confetti noise)

But all my praise aside, which I still think all my points hold true, we gotta address the elephant in the room.

Why others might not like/care for Kei:

Now this is going based on entirely assumptions, and while I would ask people individually I don't exactly know every single Getter fan and also, the answer is clear in some cases. I'll give one for the manga readers and one for someone who didn't read it first/maybe had Armageddon as their first exposure to Getter as a whole.

The manga reason is simply that she is a replacement of Sho, this is the entire reason despite her main character status and even her personality feels closer to a Getter 1 pilot, she's Getter 2. She is filling in someone's spot. Now, I wanna say also going off of how manga Kei is treated, I do like how an adaptation gave this character who wasn't really used well more spotlight, adaptations correcting some mistakes of the original is what I like to see, but I can't entirely call this a good case given it's at the expense of Sho, who like I said, is an otherwise strong character who was ruined for some towards the end of her run and was given barely any anime appearances. I don't think it's justifiable to hate Kei for taking Sho's spot as it ignores what her character does right, but I understand why someone would be disappointed and not really care about her.

Oh and Sho is actually in the background of Armageddon but has a implication she fucking dies and still got with Schwartz which I know they were trying to subtly nod to the manga but Jesus Christ this is just more salt in the wounds made worse by the fact again, Kei never got into a romantic relationship canonically so this could've been yet another time Sho and Schwartz didn't need to be together, cause she escapes this fate in SVN and Toei (from what I know on the last one). Of course I don't think Armageddon would suddenly be better if Sho was actually in the spot honestly for how Kei involvement works it would've been more confusing but in a perfect timeline maybe they both could've been important.

Though speaking of character replacement, that is also a similar reason for the non manga readers! The fact she replaces Ryoma temporarily as mc- for no good reason. Now I wanna actually say as the Ryoma guy while I was itching to see him come back I didn't actually mind his absence, partially because some of my favorite characters weirdly tend to have a trend of not being around a lot. (Something something you appreciate more when they're gone) and

even my first time I really liked Kei, but I'm not gonna pretend this isn't an issue, one that is a double edged sword if anything to both characters, cause the last point was really just bad for Sho.

Kei being introduced so suddenly in episode 4 when it's very clear Ryoma had been established as the main character and he's nowhere to be seen understandably makes some people feel like the show is forcing you to care about Kei. I personally don't feel this way as I think the stakes with her come off naturally but to someone it just be a million things shoved in their face as the twist with her being Saotome's kid happens again, super fast. It also feels annoying when Ryoma ultimately comes back so why should we care about her now? She still gets the spotlight but she's not the one we're focusing on. It's not necessarily her fault, but it's a reason some people just don't care about her.

On the Ryoma side of things he obviously gets undeveloped. I still like what they did with his character but he is nowhere near the insanely fleshed out level that New or Manga Ryoma is "but Megggg he was there most of the time in those" yeah- something Armageddon Ryoma could've had if this change wasn't made. Granted- with my opinions on his other works I feel like if Imagawa actually finished Armageddon and things were the same climate where it was so divisive I actually would feel inclined to be on the other side yet I can't deny Ryoma's character would objectively be more developed in that draft- unless he fucking planned to always do this I SEE YOUR CREDITS ON EPISODE 4 MOTHER FUCK-

But anyways I feel Armageddon Ryoma does what he needs to do and yet is still missing potential. He is still somehow who has struggled that he eventually overcomes, he always has AURA (god im cringing) but the way Imagawa portrayed him is unironically some of his strongest writing for a character and could've been if it continued in that direction. Still not super developed in these first couple of episodes but you can still read a couple of things from Ryoma. And Super Robot Wars when they try to use this Ryoma (at least to me) feels- off. Like I'm glad he gets to relax a bit to add to his character but it just feels- wrong? But also SRW Armageddon plots after fucking V have been barbones as shit AHM.

To add this is my only acknowledgment of anything regarding Armageddon over saturation cause I'm simply tired boss but I will say it does greatly disappoint me SRW plots really don't use Kei because it could actually fix the Armageddon SRW issue besides like- what Y did and just use fucking something else even if the Noir fucks crept into DLC but Kei potrayals from the little bits she has I do like. I also wish more merch of her fucking existed but I mean- I'm just use to liking characters with no merch at this point. Isn't that right Lyuze Casshern Sins (COUGHS BLOOD)

To also close something out there is- one thing I sorta neglect to mention in the praising Kei section. One thing that I don't think bothers most people but I will admit, doesn't ruin Kei for me yet ties to her third and probably biggest issue of her taking the spot of another character: The Genki twist. (Okay where the fuck do I begin)

To clarify I actually like this twist because it's batshit fucking insane yet somehow works. It's the reason why if you put Sho here you'd need to massively rework things, and it always gets me the implication Benkei literally renamed Genki to Kei by grabbing the end of his name like dude that's so fucking funny to me but also insane how that worked given these two never meet in the manga, it was just luck of similar sounding Japanese names.

For the plot of Armageddon along with Kei relationships I'm fine with her being Genki, the only thing to super criticize about this is how it has unexplored potential of being trans coding in a character since yes she's still a cis woman in universe there is undoubtedly some gender fuckery going on here, but since it's the late 90s... it could've gone many ways and also we'd have endless discourse if they made it more explicit Kei a trans metaphor at most, but at the very least it doesn't entirely feel transphobic even if why Saotome raised her to be a boy is confusing, most people respect her name as Kei and that could be read pretty positively to say the least.

So yet once again the problem isn't Kei herself, it's for Genki end- cause is this even Genki at this fucking point? Not really! Like Genki was already mute which is something his cheerful ass is not but then you're gonna make him a girl when aging him up just so he can be a different character when everything about this adaptation is improving on this character anyways? Again, fine for Kei's side, but this is not a super deep reconciliation of Genki's character as the support child.

Even if one of my own mixed feelings on New Michiru is the fact she has a completely different personality than how she's usually portrayed in, at the very least the way she is portrayed in New feels like an actual response to the flaws of her original character archetype and makes her reasonably standout- but Genki I can't really say the same. I care about this version of Genki with the knowledge they grow up to become Kei, not really that it's Genki. Not to say no matter how you look at it from both angles what Kei goes through as a child isn't fucked up cause it absolutely was, it just not really beneficial to his character.

I think I only didn't count this as a reason people would not like Kei because I mean, nobody but me gives a fuck about Genki like I don't think a single person thinks he's their favorite character I'm gonna be honest but it still ties to the overall issue with Kei: she takes up other spots of different characters and people aren't gonna like that, people aren't gonna appreciate what her character does right cause they want those characters to get the spotlight but it feels like we're forced to care about her.

To be clear I don't think anyone hates Kei, maybe one rabid hater is out there that I don't know of but the general take away I get from this is "yeah, she just exists" which is sad given I genuinely think she is probably the best written girl this franchise has, actual women may not resonate with her for one reason or another. I'm a trans man after all I can't objectively call her a well written female character until more actual women come forward to say they do like her, and I wasn't trying to even if I do strongly feel she has the least amount of flaws of most women in Getter. Someone is still allowed to like New Michiru more, someone is still allowed to like manga

Sho more despite the issues they suffer, they have more reasons to easily click with people than Kei does, as sad as it is to say.

Outro:

I think I've been- a bit self conscious about how Getter portrays women or just a lot of the flaws of this series, even if everything we like has flaws. I genuinely have a lot of self doubt on my confidence in recognizing female characters because a lot of the ones I've enjoyed end up getting with a man, something people are really sick of and me pointing to Kei as the better example doesn't change my other taste or how she's from a series with similar and even worse issues in handling its female characters.

But I'm not gonna try to get too self deprecating in what is meant to be an interesting analysis on why I think a character works really well yet simultaneously why no one cares about them, even with this reality I still will always consider Kei to be my third favorite Getter character- okay she be second but I'm not immune to Hayato Jin disease -because she just resonates with me, she just makes Armageddon an enjoyable watch or discussion for me despite how people feel about it now.

One of my biggest nonsensical Getter dreams next to Michiru and Genki getting to properly be used is for another Getter media to use Kei cause while it doesn't effect how good she is in Armageddon as much as other issues, it is sad to know we just haven't seen her since in a new canon because of her last second addition to the manga and how she was just crammed into Armageddon. (Arc anime where was a cameo of her AT LEAST) I think if they were to use the more fleshed out version of her in Armageddon and put in her into something new I think more people would really grow to like her, maybe a Go anime adaptation despite the fact "yeah she's probably gonna die" will still play out they can at least make us care more about the death- but I also don't think we're ever getting the entire manga adapted so what do I know.

I really don't know what the future holds for Getter besides that live action movie which I hope is actually decent at best, I can keep to my silly little fanfics to resolve some of the flaws but it be nice if I got to see something like this officially as in the modern day I am more confident we could see female characters in Getter be improved upon. Until then, Kei is still my favorite Getter girl and I hope some appreciation about her can be spread a bit, despite everything she deserves it more.