

The rise of Black Geekdom in South Africa

Black geeks who are shattering stereotypes and making their mark in a variety of professions have become increasingly prevalent in South Africa in recent years. These people have strong interests in science, technology, fantasy, and other fields that are frequently connected to geek culture.



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The term "geek" often refers to someone who is highly knowledgeable and passionate about a particular subject or field. In the past, this term was primarily associated with White individuals who were interested in science fiction, comic books, and video games. However, in South Africa, the rise of Black Geekdom is challenging this stereotype and creating a new narrative.

One of the reasons for the rise of Black Geekdom in South Africa is the increasing accessibility of technology. As more South Africans gain access to the internet and digital devices, they are able to explore different areas of interest and connect with like-minded individuals. This has led to the emergence of online communities focused on geek culture, which has given Black geeks a platform to express themselves and share their ideas.

Promoting diversity and inclusion

This rise is a positive development that is challenging stereotypes and promoting diversity and inclusion. It is also inspiring a new generation of young Black geeks who are eager to pursue their passions and make their mark in the world. As more people become aware of the contributions that Black geeks are making in various fields, it is likely that the trend will continue to grow and evolve in the years to come.

The rise is also being driven by the efforts of individuals and organizations that are working to promote diversity and inclusion in the tech and geek communities. One example is the annual rAge expo, which is one of the largest gaming and geek culture events in South Africa. The expo features a range of activities and events, including talks by prominent Black geeks, cosplay competitions, and gaming tournaments.



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In addition to events like rAge, there are also a growing number of organisations that are dedicated to promoting Black Geekdom and supporting Black geeks. One such organisation is Afro Geek, a newly launched initiative created to celebrate artworks, comic books, cosplay and various other achievements by African creators. Afro Geek co-founder Neo Mothoagae says the organisation was established as a response to a glaring void in the local market.

“As a geek it’s been really great to see events like rAge and Comic Con keep growing in leaps and bounds. But we do find there to be disproportionate representation at events of this nature, and there are several socio-political reasons for that. So we started thinking about how cool it would be if there was a local event where afro geeks can congregate, and how we can effectively break down those barriers to entry.”

Afro Geek Fest

One of the ways that Afro Geek is looking to correct the lack of representation in major tentpole events is through the launch of the Afro Geek Fest, the organisation’s first ever geek culture convention that aims to put the works of Black talent at the forefront.

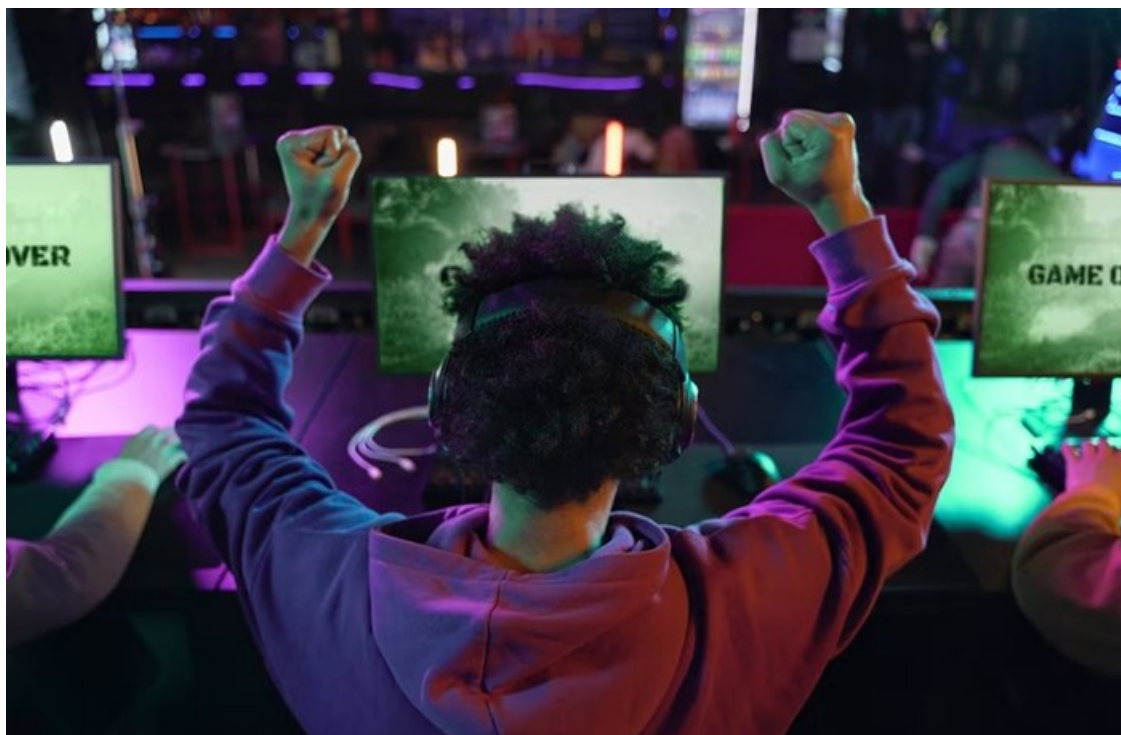


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“There has been such an abundance of amazing Black talent entering the scene in the past two years, whether it’s comic

books, or gaming or cosplay. The Afro Geek Fest seeks to provide a platform where these individuals can showcase their talents to people who look like them, and really the hope is that this can in turn inspire the next generation of afro geeks by showing what is possible and what they can achieve.”

One such afro geek is event host Gigi Bopela, a cosplayer, podcaster and entrepreneur.

Bopela feels that one of the factors inhibiting the growth of this community is older generations forcing young people down “safer” career paths, though this has become less prevalent as Gen X and millennials now account for the majority of the country’s parents.



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“When we were growing up, there was a perception that you could not live comfortably while pursuing self-employment or a career in the arts. Many of our parents would tell us to choose something stable, like law or teaching. I remember a time around the mid-2000’s when IT was a buzzword, and suddenly all of our parents were telling us to pursue careers in IT.”

But a lot has changed over the past decade, and an increasing number of young people in townships and inner city communities are not only venturing into developing their own comic books, video games and animation, but finding success in these ventures. Bopela also chose to wander off the beaten path, establishing a successful mining research and robotics company called Geekland Enterprises.

While this paradigm shift has been incredible to witness, Mothoagae feels a lot more still needs to be done to educate the youth on all the opportunities available to them. “Our unemployment rates are higher than ever and many young South Africans are still programmed to believe that tertiary and a 9 to 5 is their only viable option to earn a living. We have so many talented youngsters sitting at home not aware that they actually have the tools to lift themselves out of poverty. So our only hope as a country is to reframe the narrative, to show the youth that you can in fact earn a living by doing what you love” he concludes.

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