

fanmade

magazine

Found Family

Issue #1

contributors

Ava Moreci

Ava Moreci is a Creative Writing MFA candidate teaching intro writing courses at Western Washington University.

Lucy Birch

MLitt, BA (Hons)

Lucy Birch's near decade of experience in UK archives led to her interest in researching female representation in archive materials.

CloudCorinne

Cloud is a Colombian artist and (fanfic) writer; their main interests revolve around Minecraft and the stories created using it.



fanmade team

editor

MAGDA P

assistant editor

VIOLETTAVONVIOLET

editorial

KAYSEN ASHDAM

LIZZIE C

JAE

beta readers

HUNTER

CASSANDRA

REIDINY BLACKSTONE

art

DNA

TAGZPITE

social

RIO LYNN

MY O VLKU

admin and research

AVA GALISON

Additional thanks to **Allaire** for her photography and **MY O VLKU** for help with page design.

**CHECK OUT OUR SAMPLE ISSUE
HERE IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY!**

FROM THE EDITOR...

After a string of pushed deadlines, all-nighters, and countless messages in the team server, we're finally here. Even if stressful at times, putting this issue together has been a joy, because we love fan culture and wanted to curate a first issue of FANMADE that reflected that love between the pages.

The theme – Found Family – was a no-brainer. No matter how much we bicker and argue and fight, Found Family remains the beating heart of fandom. It's what makes it worth coming back to, and why fandom discourse so often evokes such emotional responses. We're here because we care.

This issue wouldn't exist without the FANMADE team, naturally, so hats off to them for coming up with ideas, making amazing art, beta reading the articles, helping with page design, and much, much more.

Our beautiful cover was made by MY O VLKU, with original photography and a custom font. She doesn't do things halfway, that's for sure.

Most of the beautiful illustrations were made by DNA, Tagzpite, and our assistant editor Vio. Thank you for not asking too many questions and delivering immediately, even when faced with a “can you draw a baseball bat with nails in it by the end of the week please” or “hey can you draw a pregnant belly” at various hours of the night. I appreciate you guys very much.

In addition to the three brilliant outside contributors who have written for us this issue, we have articles put together by members of the FANMADE team – recipes by Kaysen, a guide and personal piece from Lizzie, a small fandom spotlight and deep dive by Hunter, and of course some deep dives by Vio.

Thank you to everyone who agreed to be interviewed for this issue, and to the amazing cosplay creators who agreed for their tutorials to be featured. All of your help and time is so appreciated.

The last person to thank is you, dear reader – thank you for opening this issue of FANMADE. I hope you love it as much as I do.

happy reading,
MAGDA

cont

the trope

38-42

found family

Wayback

80-87

stranger things

deep dive

60-63

mpreg

deep dive

112-115

fridging

deep dive

96-100

queerbaiting

deep dive

102-103

fanfic rules

events

the Scholar  ai and fanfic
106-111

the Scholar  tagging SYSTEMS
122-125

tag:realism  Writing '80S
88-93

tag:realism  Writing Siblings
50-51

tag:realism  Writing banter
52-53

Ratings – please read responsibly.

 General  Teen and Up  Mature  Explicit

Skill corner

16-21

■ hiStoRY of coSPlaY

Skill corner

22-25

■ baSiCS of coSPlaY

Skill corner

28-33

■ interVieW

coSPlaYeR Shinonna

poV:me

68-71

■ fanfic before fanfic

poV:me

72-73

■ fandom friends

poV:me

74-76

■ minecraft journey

SPotlight

54-57

■ creator SPotlight

0aSiSofataRaXY

SPotlight

64-65

■ Small fandom SPotlight





SPotlight

■ ShiP SPotlight

118-121

SPotlight

■ World cOSPlay Summit

34-35

SPotlight

■ found family author

47-48

inkPotSPrite

fan neWS

6-9

WebSite

10-11

food in fandom

12-15

tagging adVice

127-129

fan fun

36-37 49 58-59 66-67 78-79

94-95 101 104-105 116-117

the fanm

AO3 HITS 10 MILLION REGISTERED USERS

In 2008, AO3 was born, created in direct opposition to commercial fanwork-hosting websites, where fanworks were often deleted, targeted by copyright crackdowns, or restricted by unclear rules around intellectual property and fair use.

Now, almost 18 years later, it's home to over 17 million fanworks in over 75k fandoms, and has just hit the milestone of surpassing 10 million registered users.

To quote the celebration post in the AO3 news section:

” ...the active exchange of creations and ideas between fans remains a cornerstone of fan culture. [...] In today's world, where ideas are just one more commodity [...], it's more important than ever to appreciate and celebrate these aspects of fan spaces. ”

OVER IN FAN ACADEMIA...

If you're interested in fan academia, *Transformative Works and Cultures* (TWC) is a must-read. TWC is an international, peer-reviewed journal published by the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW). The last general issue, published in September 2025, took on topics such as gender in censored Chinese A/B/O fiction, the politics of RPF, and more.

TWC periodically publishes special issues centred around specific areas of fandom – the next one to watch out for is an issue focused on music fandom, scheduled for March 2027 (subject to change), and edited by Dr Lucy Bennett and Dr Jenessa Williams.

” This special issue grew out of our shared interests in how fans engage with music as an emotional, creative, and social practice. We're especially excited by how fandom intersects with identity, community, and technology, and how different modes of engagement shape fans' experiences.

We are also committed to highlighting underexplored perspectives; overall, the issue aims to capture the diversity, creativity and affective power of music fandom today, and we hope it sparks new conversations in fan studies and beyond. ”

aDe post

END OF YEAR STATS

The end of the year means one thing – statistics extravaganza.

Let's take a look at a few highlights.



A shout out to our friends at Booktower – the start of a new year means... Bookends!

” Booktower Bookends is your yearly wrap-up of everything you read, including fanfiction. It's a fun way for fanfic readers to see their total wordcount, top fandoms, and more! You even get a recommendation for what you should read next from your own TBR library. ”

If you're not already using Booktower to track both traditional books and fanfiction alike, now's a good time to sign up so you can receive your Bookends stats at the end of 2026.

Booktower is currently in Early Access, so you'll need to join the waitlist to receive an invite.

CLICK [HERE](#) TO JOIN

AO3 STATS

This year, the OTW shared AO3 traffic numbers, offering a snapshot of just how much – and how fast – fandom activity continues to grow.

- ♥ Average comments per month rose from a peak of 3.5 million in 2020 to over 5 million in 2025
- ♥ Weekly site traffic increased from 375 million visits in 2020 to 800 million in 2025

FOR A DEEPER
BREAKDOWN, VISIT THE
[AO3 NEWS SECTION](#)



DID YOU KNOW...

Tumblr turned 19 in February this year? It was first launched in 2007, and gained 75k users within two weeks.

AO3 Ship Stats: Year In Review JAN–DEC 2025 by centreoftheselights

Another popular dataset is the AO3 Ship Stats by centreoftheselights, an independent researcher who collects the data in their spare time. The project has no affiliation with AO3 or the OTW.

Published annually since 2013, the dataset measures the gain in total *public* fanworks over a given period – the most recent edition covering January to December 2025. It ranks the top 100 ships and includes additional information such as ship type (M/M, F/M, F/F, Other, Poly, or Gen), and the race of each character in the pairing.

As the author explains, the goal of the project is not just ranking:

“All of the information in the main post is intended to be factual and verifiable. However, the data is presented in order to highlight the lack of fanfiction focussed on women, F/F pairings, and People of Colour.

diScourSe

As with most things online, the ship stats have also sparked discussion around methodology. To address some of the most common questions, we reached out to centreoftheselights for comment.

READ ON THE NEXT PAGE



It’s important to note that the dataset measures works *gained*, not strictly new works. Does this skew results toward newer fandoms? Yes. The author is, however, transparent about that limitation.

Despite not being a perfect snapshot of fandom in a given year – does such a thing even exist? – the dataset offers a valuable glimpse into the pairings we’ve loved and written about a lot.

anDe post

Why do the stats only include publicly available works? Some argue this excludes a significant portion of fandom, as many AO3 works are locked to logged-in users.

» Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I'm very sensitive to ideas of privacy in fandom. In the old days, people privated their works because they didn't want people outside of fandom to know about them. AO3 won't show you how many private works exist in a tag unless you have an account, and I took the same attitude – I post my statistics publicly, so I don't include private works, because that might mean “outing” the existence of a fandom which would rather not have any public attention.

In more recent years, there's been a trend of people privating their works to avoid data scraping used to train AI models. This led to people wanting those private works to be included in the stats, but I feel like it would be very ethically dubious of me to decide on the whole site's behalf that *my* automated data-scraping is fine, actually. This does mean my data doesn't fully reflect what you'll see if you have an AO3 account, but it does share all the data I'm comfortable with publishing.

CHECK OUT THE FULL
STATS [HERE](#)

Why is growth calculated by comparing totals rather than counting new works only? Some argue this method can lead to discrepancies in larger or older fandoms, where works are more likely to be locked or deleted.

» There are always multiple ways of approaching any question in statistics. My stats take a holistic view of all different kinds of changes to AO3 – yes, a lot of new works get posted, but I also look at backdated works, older works having their tags updated, and works being removed from the site. All of those are a part of how different AO3 tags evolve with time.

“If I said “there were 2000 new works posted” but didn't mention that 1000 were also deleted in the same time frame, I imagine a lot of people would be confused about why the totals didn't add up! Unfortunately a small minority of people have decided that only new works should “count” in the statistics, and to them I say: if that's the data you care about, then my lists aren't the best fit for you – there are other people who post statistics about that more directly. I'd hope they can respect that, and not trash my work for the statistical equivalent of: *you should have written this fic about my OTP instead of yours!*

What's up on our Website?

In October last year, we launched the FANMADE website, and published some great content in the time it took us to get this first issue off the ground.

The website section I've been most excited to get started with is FANLAB, a space dedicated to celebrating standout fanworks and the creators behind them. Kicking it off felt like a big moment, so we wanted to start strong – and it doesn't get much bigger than this.

you took my heart (i was sleeping) by lameparties, also known as “the power outage fic”, absolutely dominated the Stranger Things fandom in December last year. With over two million hits, it is now the most viewed work in the fandom and the second most kudosed fic on all of AO3. Published in the middle of the hiatus between volumes of the final season, it arrived at the exact moment fans were desperate for Byler fanfic, quickly becoming unavoidable reading across the fandom, inspiring waves of fanart and discussion.

That said, FANLAB is not about numbers. While this fic represents fandom at its most visible and viral, a work does not need millions of readers to be worthy of attention. If a fanwork resonated with even one person, if it made someone feel seen, understood, or less alone, then it's already doing something remarkable – and is exactly the kind of work we want to talk about.

Beyond the statistics and the timing, the success of *you took my heart (i was sleeping)* ultimately comes down to lameparties, and their care for both Mike and Will not only as nuanced characters, but as reflections of real fears and hopes many people grapple with in their daily lives.

Some other content we've published:

A guide to the Percy Jackson universe by the amazing Kat Night

How Steve and Eddie became queer: a reader-response love story

A very cinematic Christmas dinner – movie-inspired recipes by Kaysen Ashdan

6 ways Supernatural shaped fan culture with input from Dr. Lynn Zubernis

Here is an excerpt from the interview with lameparties – head over to our website to read the full article.



I'd love to hear your thoughts on the final line of the fic: "He shares the shame. And in sharing, it turns into something entirely different."

lameparties



I really enjoy ambiguous endings, and I knew I didn't want them to have it all figured out at the end, because it's just not going to be that easy. But I wanted them to have something figured out.

I guess as a lesbian I always feel most myself around other queer people. Luckily, almost all of my friends are queer, and we share so much community: we listen to sapphic music, we read sapphic books, we go to drag shows, gay bars. When I'm with my parents or more conservative friends, it drains me sometimes and makes me feel a little alienated, like I don't relate to them – which is fine, I don't have to relate to everyone. But I need to relate to some people, and that's why community is so important. Community helps you feel more confident in your identity, and that's what "sharing the guilt" means for me in this case.

In the beginning, Will has no one to share it with, and neither does Mike. In this last chapter, they both express their frustration about being unable to talk to anyone about it, which is a common queer experience. But then they do it: they talk about it, they make up, they make out, they do the thing that's supposed to be wrong and create something beautiful together. And then it's like: if it's this good, and we're doing it together, it can't be that bad.

In a society where nothing makes you feel accepted as a queer person – which Hawkins in the 80s definitely is – this is big for them. Not just Mike reciprocating Will's feelings, but simply being queer, too, gives Will a person to relate to. I guess in the actual show we see that with Will and Robin, which is beautiful, and it shows that you don't even need to share it with someone romantically – you can share it with your friends as well.



@cosmicbyler @lameparties



in the fanmade kitchen



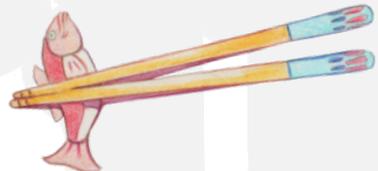
Before the main course – the rest of this issue – let’s start with a menu of recipes inspired by some iconic meals in film.

words by
KAYSEN ASHDAN

art by
DNA



design by
MY O VLKU



lembas bread

Lord of The Rings



Lembas bread originates from the Lord of The Rings and The Hobbit series. In the books, it was made by Yavanna from a special corn that grew in Ama. Orome gave it to the Elves for the Great Journey.

Lembas bread, or Elvish Waybread, was consumed on long journeys since it was filling and stayed fresh for months when wrapped in leaves. This recipe is a mix between shortbread cookies and sweet bread.

Hope you have your sword – you may need it for the journey ahead, as we try our hand at making this beloved bread.

- 2 ½ cup flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- ¼ tsp salt
- 8 tbsp cold butter (1 stick)
- ⅓ cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ⅔ cup heavy cream (more if necessary)
- ½ tsp vanilla



1. Preheat the oven to 200°C/425°F
2. Mix the flour, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl.
3. Add the butter and mix with a fork until the mixture resembles fine granules.
4. Add the brown sugar and cinnamon, mix them thoroughly into the mixture.
5. Add cream and vanilla, stir them in with a fork until a nice, thick dough forms.
6. Roll the dough out to about ¼ - ½ inch thickness.
7. Cut out 3 inch squares and transfer the dough to a cookie sheet.
8. Criss-cross (don't cut all the way through) cut each square from corner to corner with a knife to make the iconic triangle shape.
9. Bake for about 12 minutes or until it's set and lightly golden.

Princess and the Frog

beignets

We all wanted to try Tiana's "Man Catching" beignets, covered in syrup and powdered sugar, when we watched Princess and the Frog for the first time, right? Beignets have a rich history, originating in France and famously served in New Orleans. Beignets can be made with a deep fried choux pastry or a yeast dough. For this recipe, we'll be looking at the latter, a delicious yeast dough more common in New Orleans style beignets. Grab some coffee, whip out your tarot cards and see what friend you can pull from the other side with this tasty recipe.

Instructions

1. In a mixing bowl combine warm milk (not too hot or you'll kill the yeast), yeast, sugar, egg, butter, and vanilla.
2. Once combined, add flour and knead for about 15 min by hand until it forms a ball of dough smooth and soft. If using an electric mixer, mix on medium speed with a dough hook for about 10 minutes.
3. Place your dough in an oiled bowl and cover in cling wrap. Place bowl in a warm place and let it rest for 2 hours until the dough doubles in size. Tip: preheat the oven to 350°F for two minutes, then turn off and leave the door open for five minutes. Place the bowl inside to rest.
4. Once your dough has doubled, punch the air out and roll with a rolling pin. Cut the dough into squares.
5. Heat up some oil in a pot, and fry the dough for a couple of minutes on each side. Depending on how hot your oil is, you may need to flip from minute to minute. Oil should be between 300-350°F.
6. Fry until golden brown and crispy. Remove from the oil and place on a wire rack to cool.
7. Once your beignets have cooled, combine the maple syrup, powdered sugar, and milk to make a glaze and drizzle it over them.
8. Dust with powdered sugar.

1 ¼ cup warm milk

1 pk fast acting yeast approx. 7g

⅓ cup sugar

3 tbsp room temp butter

1 egg

1 tsp vanilla

3 ½ cup flour

Oil for frying



Maple Drizzle

2 tbsp pure maple syrup or honey

1 cup powdered sugar

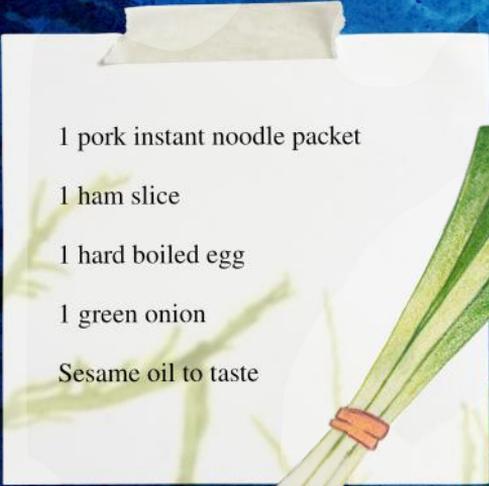
1-2 tbsp milk until desired consistency



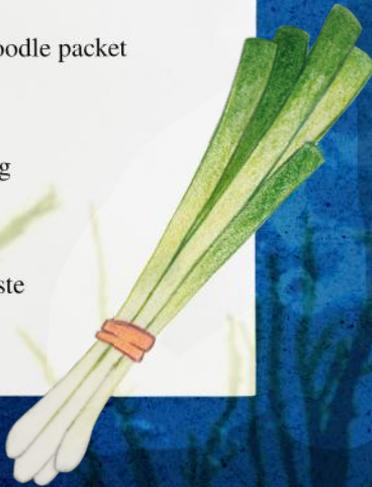
Ponyo

pork ramen

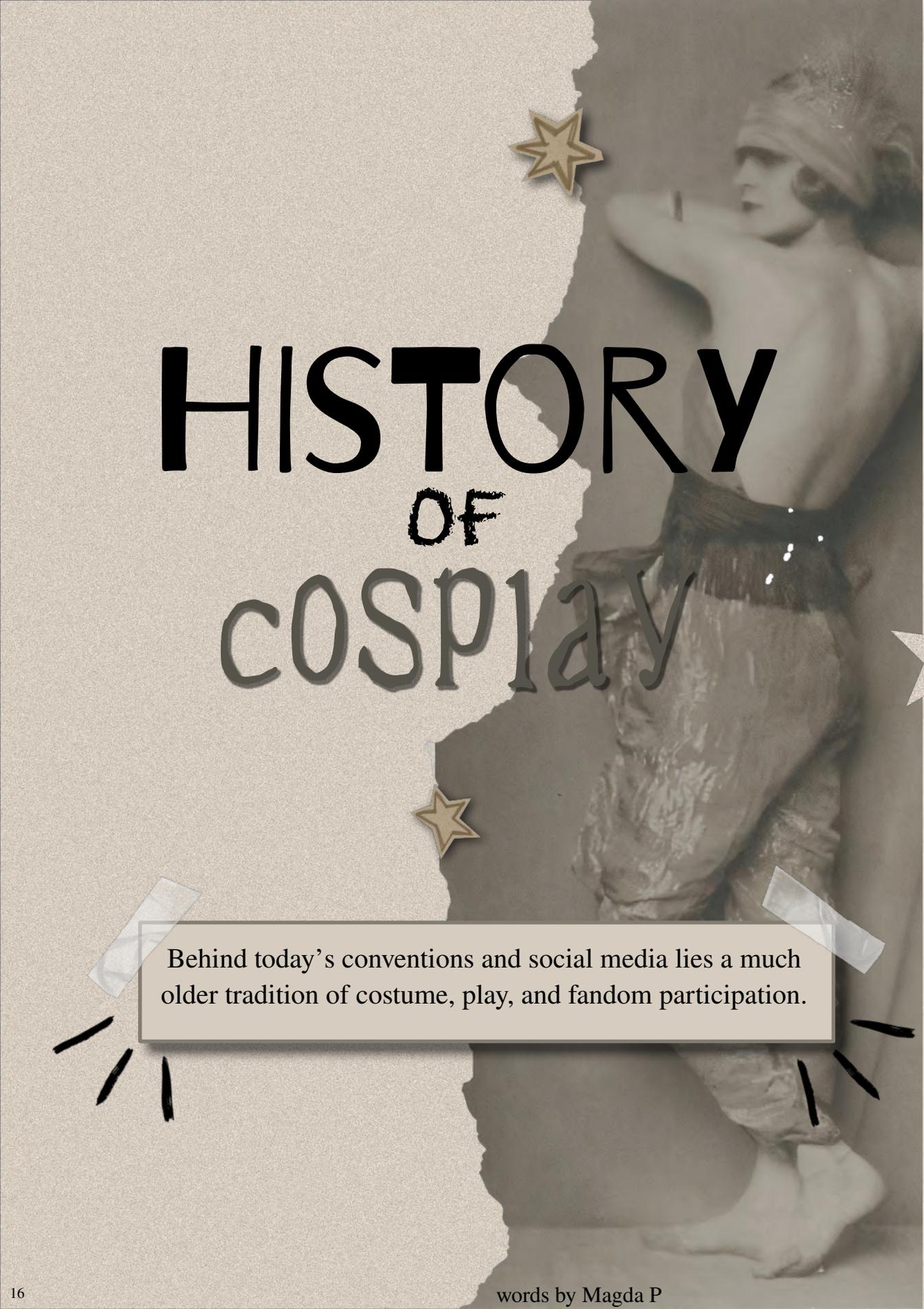
Studio Ghibli's food has been making mouths water since the 1980s. Don't you feel like you're starving every time Chihiro's parents eat that ghost food, or when you see the breakfast from Howl's Moving Castle? I don't want to step into anything too crazy, so let's try the simple instant ramen recipe from Ponyo.



1 pork instant noodle packet
1 ham slice
1 hard boiled egg
1 green onion
Sesame oil to taste



1. Put instant noodles into a bowl with seasoning and pour boiling water over until completely submerged. Leave for about three minutes covered.
2. Set the bowl aside while you prep your toppings.
3. Over the noodles, add the ham, half an egg and the green onions, then sprinkle sesame oil on top to add that shine and amazing flavor.
4. Now close your eyes and let the magic happen.



HISTORY OF COSPLAY

Behind today's conventions and social media lies a much older tradition of costume, play, and fandom participation.

While cosplay as we know it today is often framed as a modern phenomenon, humans have been dressing up for millennia. Long before pop culture characters, people used clothing, masks, and props to step into other roles.

Ancient rituals across cultures involved dressing as gods, spirits, animals, or ancestors. These were not “costumes” in the modern sense, but they served a similar purpose: transformation. Medieval festivals often included masquerades, pageants, and role-play, with participants embodying symbolic or mythological figures.

Even theatre played a role – ancient Greek actors wore masks to signify character and emotion. Shakespearean performers dressed as kings, fairies, and witches. While these practices were not cosplay, they shared with it the desire to become someone else, even briefly. That impulse is deeply human and as old as time – cosplay simply inherited it and made it distinctly fannish.

Cosplay, at its most basic, means “costume play”. It goes deeper than just wearing clothes, it’s about performance and participation. A costume can exist on its own, it can be worn for a party, a play, or Halloween. Cosplay, on the other hand, implies some level of embodiment.

That distinction is why debates about “cosplay vs. costume” come up so often in fandom spaces. A fully screen-accurate armour worn for a professional photoshoot and a handmade sword made out of cardboard can both be cosplay, at the same time. They’re not mutually exclusive. It’s about the intent – are you dressing up to represent, reinterpret, or play with a character from an existing source? Then you’re probably cosplaying, whether your outfit is handmade, thrifted, or commissioned.

“ it’s not just about wearing clothes, but about performance and participation.

ancient history – middle ages

Ritual dress, masks, role-play in religious ceremonies and festivals

ancient greece

Early modern theatre – theatrical costumes and masks to signal character and emotion

1930S-1940S US

1939 –
First World Science
Fiction Convention
(Worldcon), New York

1930S-1940S japan

1937-1940 –
Schoolgirl Fashion
Booklet by Junichi
Nakahara

post WWII japan

Shojo manga becomes dominant in girls' magazines

1940S-1950S

Costume contests become a regular feature at Worldcon

1960S-1970S

1967 – Kathy Sanders begins convention costuming, pioneer in choreography and dramatic movement in masquerade presentations

1980S

1981 – Peggy Kennedy introduces a skill-based division system for masquerades

1984 – Nobuyuki Takahashi coins the term “cosplay” after attending Worldcon in LA

1990S

Sailor Moon and other serialized mangas gain popularity
Cosplay and shojo manga influence each other



Cosplay has long been used as an umbrella term for costume-related fan practices, but as Victoria L. Godwin argues, “Costume fandom's underexamined histories and motivations illustrate how using cosplay as an umbrella term conceals and mischaracterizes rather than clarifies.” That is to say, before the word “cosplay” was coined in 1984 by Japanese journalist Nobuyuki Takahashi after he attended the World Science Fiction Convention in Los Angeles, costume fandom was already thriving. Takahashi was struck by the creativity and skill of costumed fans, and he coined this term to be easier to adopt into Japanese. Because of the term's origins, many believe cosplay as a practice comes from Japan, when in reality it's more complicated.

After Takahashi used the term in the magazine he was writing for, the idea took hold in Japan and was adapted to dressing up as anime characters, soon widely done at comic book and sci-fi events all over Japan. Then, in the 1990s, as anime, manga and related media started to get popular in America, cosplay was re-introduced there, but this time in the shape it took on in the East. To make it simpler – cosplay as we know

it today didn't originate in Japan or New York or anywhere else, but is rather a merging of fannish identities and creativity from all over.

The difference between cosplay and costume fandom might seem trivial to some, but it's important to outline when talking about either. In fan studies, cosplay is widely described as a type of performance that uses a costume to explore or express a fan's own identity. But many modern-day cosplayers admit that identification isn't always what motivates them – sometimes it's how comfortable an outfit is or how easy the costume might be to make, the popularity of the character, and many other factors. But they can still wear it to a convention and pose for photos “in character”, or make a TikTok lip-syncing to the character's voice, fulfilling the reenactment and play components of cosplay.

The line is fuzzy, but one thing is certain – when discussing the history of cosplay, one cannot simply start in 1984 when the term was coined, skipping past the rich costume fandom history that started way before that.



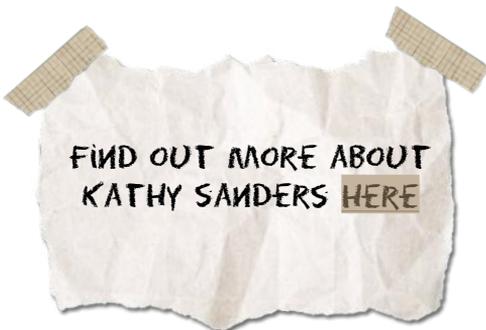
cosplay as we know it today is a merging of fannish identities and creativity from all over.

in the US

In 1939, at the first World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) in New York, Forrest J. Ackerman and Myrtle R. Douglas wore futuristic outfits inspired by pulp sci-fi imagery (more specifically the 1936 film *Things to Come*). They weren't portraying a single named character, but they were explicitly dressing as something from speculative fiction, in a fannish context. Ackerman and Douglas are both recognised as the Father and Mother of Convention Costuming, although Douglas' recognition came over 20 years after Ackerman's – despite the fact it was her who “envisioned, designed, and laboriously handmade” the costumes.

After 1939, costume contests became an annual tradition at Worldcon, drawing more fans each year.

Another important figure in the history of cosplay is Kathy Sanders, who began convention costuming in 1967. Incorporating her interest in Middle Eastern dance and culture, Kathy was “one of the early costumers to use choreography and dramatic movement in her presentations,” a staple of modern convention masquerades.



From the 1950s onwards, costume events were drawing large audiences and numbers of contestants, with some Worldcon masquerades running for hours, with over 100 costumes. To make competitions more organised, Peggy Kennedy wrote the first book on how to run a masquerade: *The Kennedy Compendium*. To make them fairer, she introduced a division system between entrants more and less experienced, first used in 1981.



in japan

In Japan, the early history of cosplay is closely interconnected with shōjo manga, a category of Japanese comics targeting an audience of girls and young women. Before World War II, pages of girls' magazines were mainly filled with “novels and lyrical pictures,” not manga. At the time, it was common for girls to make their own clothes, and those pages often served as inspiration. Junichi Nakahara is often cited as a great influence, particularly his “Schoolgirl Fashion Booklet” published from 1937

to 1940 in the magazine *Jogakusei no Tomo*. The aesthetics seen here in turn influenced shōjo manga artists that emerged post-war. The pages of girls' magazines became then heavily centred on those mangas, continuing their role as fashion leaders – which is why the practice (unique to shōjo manga) of drawing an entire figure separate from the story panels to show off the details of the outfit, emerged.

Once again, the effects here were symbiotic – shōjo manga and its full body illustrations laid the groundwork for cosplay, and cosplay in turn influenced the shōjo mangas of later decades, starting in the 1990s. It, in part, led to the creation of serialised media meant to appeal both to young female readers and “otaku” demographic alike (like *Sailor Moon*). As a result, fashion depicted in shōjo manga split into two genres: inspired accessible outfits worn in real life, and “symbolic fashion” that could be cosplayed.



FIND OUT MORE
ABOUT SHOJO
MANGA AND
FASHION HERE

cosplay today

Today, cosplay exists everywhere. Conventions, TikTok, Youtube, in living rooms at 2am while someone hot-glues EVA foam together and hopes for the best. It ranges from screen-accurate recreations to loose, emotional interpretations. Closet cosplay, genderbent cosplay, casual cosplay, original designs – you name it, it's all there to engage in.

Cosplay has always been about more than accuracy or performance. It's about the human desire to step outside ourselves, to try on identities, to tell stories with our bodies as well as our words. From ritual masks to pulp sci-fi jumpsuits, from shōjo fashion plates to TikTok transitions, the tools and platforms have changed, but the impulse has not.

Understanding the history of cosplay means recognising it as part of a much longer lineage of creative play and communal storytelling. It didn't appear overnight, and it doesn't belong to one country, one fandom, or one type of fan. Cosplay is, and always has been, a collaborative act – built from the simple question: *what if I could be them, just for a moment?*

COSPLAY

Skills WHERE TO START

Cosplay draws on many skills, and most people learn them slowly, experimenting rather than mastering, as and when they need them.

BASIC SEWING

Sewing is one of the most common cosplay skills, whether you're making a costume from scratch or altering existing clothes to match a character better. This can range from hemming trousers, taking in a jacket, or attaching patches, to constructing full garments. Hand sewing is often enough for small fixes, while a sewing machine can speed things up once you're more confident.



OneEmilys Cosplay

@oneemilys

LEARN FROM THE PRO

Check out Emily's cosplay sewing tutorial for beginners [here!](#)

EVA FOAM

EVA foam is a lightweight, flexible material widely used to make armour, props, and accessories. It can be cut, shaped with heat, glued together, and painted, making it ideal for items such as shoulder pieces, helmets, or weapon bases. EVA foam is popular with beginners because it's relatively inexpensive and doesn't require specialist tools to get started.



Lock Props

@LockProps

LEARN FROM THE PRO

Check out their video on tools needed for EVA foam crafts [here!](#)

PATTERNING



Patterning is the process of creating 2D templates (patterns) to serve as blueprints for building 3D costume pieces, like armour, props, or clothing. There are different ways to do it: draping (pinning fabric onto a mannequin and marking the shapes); tape and cling film (wrapping a body part or prop base in cling film and duct tape, drawing the design on the tape, and cutting it off to form a template); flat pattern drafting (using precise body measurements and geometric calculations to draw patterns from scratch), and more. Many cosplayers and companies offer ready-made patterns you can purchase, but there is also a ton of advice online on how to make them yourself.



Alice in Cosplayland

@AliceinCosplayland

Check out Alice's cosplay patterning tutorial [here](#)!



Winterstar

@winterstarcosplay

Check out Winterstar's cosplay patterning tutorial [here](#)!

LEARN FROM THE PROS

PROP PAINTING



Prop painting is what brings handmade pieces to life. This usually involves sealing a material first (especially foam), then using acrylics or spray paints to add colour, texture, and weathering. Techniques like dry brushing, washing, and layering help props look more realistic, worn, or screen-accurate, even if the base construction is simple.



Mercenaries of Mischief

@MercsOfMischief

Check out tutorials by Arkady Cosplays [here](#) and [here](#)!

LEARN FROM THE PRO

WIG STYLING



Many cosplay wigs come pre-styled, but small adjustments can make a big difference. Wig styling can include trimming, teasing, straightening, or curling with heat-safe tools, and using products like hairspray or gel to hold a shape. It's about turning a generic wig into something that transforms you into a specific character.



SHINOBI
COMPLEX

Shinobi Complex

@ShinobiComplex

LEARN FROM THE PRO

Check out a wig styling tutorial by Shinobi Complex [here!](#)

WIG HEADACHES and how to avoid them

-  invest in a wig grip headband, which will distribute the pressure of the wig and keep it from shifting
-  make sure your wig cap isn't too small
-  avoid too many bobby pins or pulling hair too tightly

MAKEUP



Cosplay makeup goes beyond everyday looks. It can involve contouring to mimic a character's features, changing eye shape, adding scars or fantasy elements, or using colour creatively. Makeup helps bridge the gap between costume and performance, especially for characters with distinctive or exaggerated designs.



AnyaPanda

@AnyaPanda

LEARN FROM THE PRO

Check out Anya's cosplay make up tutorial [here!](#)

TYPES OF COSPLAY

CLOSET COSPLAY

Involves creating costumes from what you have in your closet or can find at thrift stores; a great option for beginners with little skill or resources.

ARMOUR COSPLAY

Cosplay of characters donned in full armour, think Iron Man or Mandalorians in Star Wars; this is where EVA foam skills will come in handy.

GENDER-BENT COSPLAY

Cosplay where the character's traditional gender is swapped to match the cosplayer's.

GIJINKA (HUMANISATION)

A cosplay where a cosplayer creates a humanised cosplay design based on the design of a non-human character, for example, Pokémon characters.

MASHUP/HYBRID COSPLAY

Cosplay combining a character with a franchise or other character not otherwise associated with them, for example, Mandalorian Disney Princesses.

ORIGINAL CHARACTER/OC

Cosplayers who choose to create their own unique character set in an already established franchise, popular in, for example, Dungeons and Dragons, Elder Scrolls or World of Warcraft.



Jessica as a l a s t o r

from Hazbin Hotel



Next to Jessica is her mom Pam, cosplaying as Mimzy.



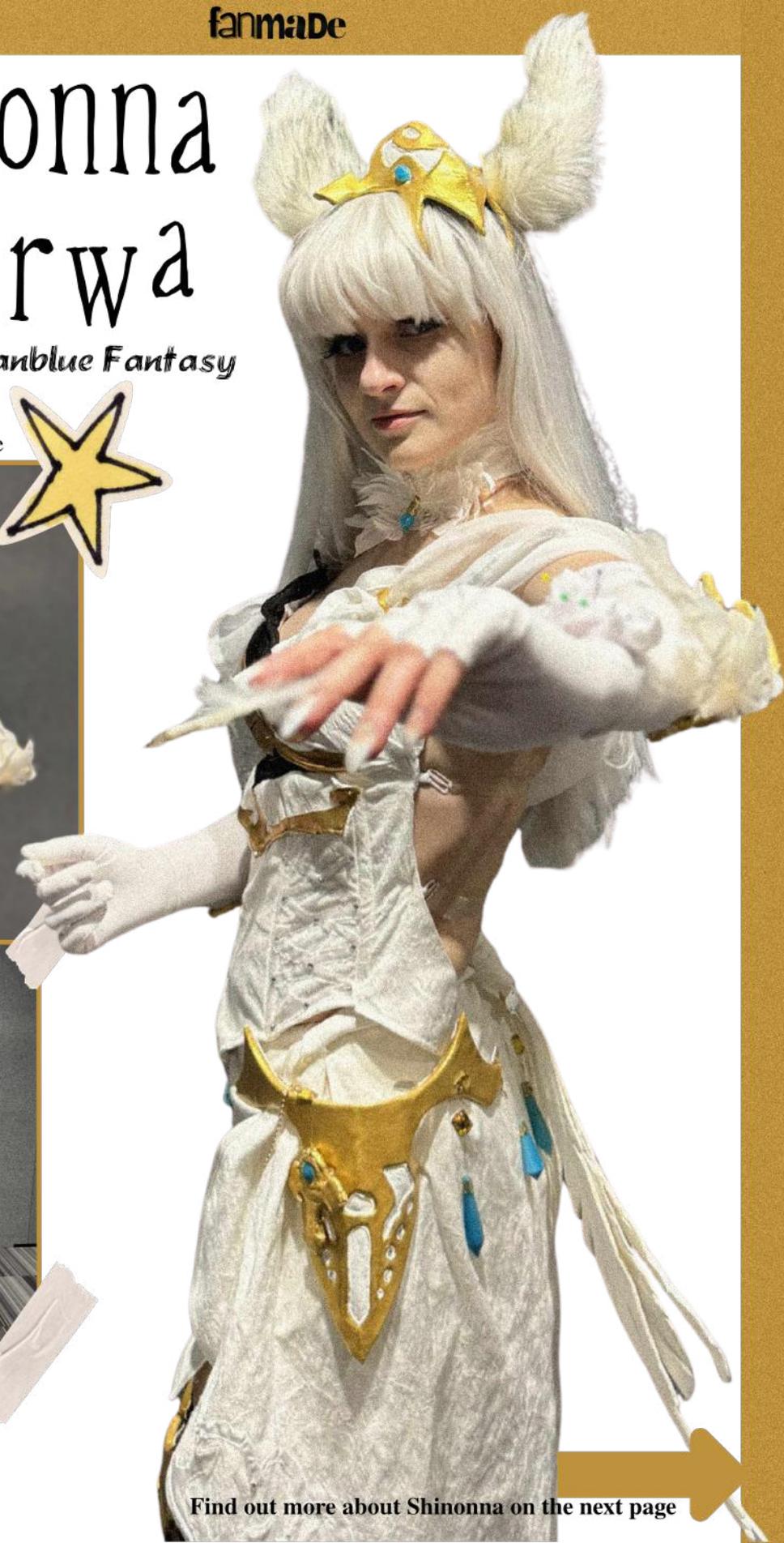

@sugarwhizz



Shinonna as Korwa

from Granblue Fantasy

photography by Allaire



@shinonna



@ShinonnaTok

Find out more about Shinonna on the next page



in conversation With...

Shinonna, a cosplayer from Bulgaria – we learn about her start in cosplay, hear her advice for beginners and get a look at one of her latest pieces, Alisa Bosconovich from Street Fighter x Tekken.



Shinonna cosplaying
Super Sailor Mars,
photographed by
SkullProduction92

entry point into
cosplay

Harry Potter dress up

first cosplay
Kagura from Gintama

We meet Shinonna at MCM London Comic Con, on the top floor, three minutes before an Introduction to EVA foam presentation. She is cosplaying Korwa from the Granblue Fantasy mobile game, and she looks so good we're a bit nervous to approach her. In just a couple hours time, she'll be walking the Main Stage in the Cosplay Masquerade.

Shinonna's first cosplay event felt a little bit like fate. A small shopping mall event she stumbled upon by accident marked the start of a long-lasting love for cosplay and conventions.

"I saw someone dressed as Mac Albarn from Soul Eater and I thought, where is this girl going, dressed like Mac Albarn? So, I followed her to the stage area, and that's how it started."

Nowadays, Shinonna goes to at least three conventions held in England a year, and five to six events in her home country – Bulgaria. She works as an SEO consultant at a tech company, but her free time is dedicated to cosplay. "I couldn't decide if I wanted to be creative or technical, so I work technical and I do creative stuff in my free time," she said.



as Kagura from Gintama, photographed by Paul Harris

in your opinion, what's the difference between a costume and a cosplay?

SHINONNA:

» I think cosplay itself is just you feeling a character. Liking that character and becoming it through whatever means you have. It doesn't matter how you become that character, but cosplay should have the play item as part of the action. If you're creating costumes, that's great, there's costume design, costuming, but without the play element, it's not cosplay.



When I go to smaller events, I organise a stream after, and I invite people who participated in the event. There was this young cosplayer once who was just debuting on stage, and her costume was purchased online, her wig commissioned. She was surprised I invited her; I said "It doesn't matter, you had fun, you were on stage, you impersonated the character, you were that character that day, and you enjoyed the show. That's all that matters."

are there characters or fandoms you gravitate towards when you choose the next piece to make?

SHINONNA:

» I usually choose characters I personally relate to in a way. Originally, I wouldn't say I felt that way, but nowadays the characters I choose are somehow connected to what I like in a person, and in myself. I mostly cosplay side characters – it's not intentional, it just happens. Do I like what they're doing, their approach to life? Do I feel like I can be that person? Do I want to be that person? It's fun to do side characters that not many people might recognise, because then I can explain who I am.

does how the character looks influence your decision in any way?



SHINONNA:

” I’m not scared of complex characters. I enjoy the part of cosplay where you learn new things and become a better craftswoman.

I like a challenge. Most of my cosplays are multilevel. For example, I made a wand for a Trelawney [from Harry Potter] cosplay. It’s made from clay, and it has real horse hair painted with iridescent paint, to resemble unicorn hair, inside. The runes are engraved by hand.

What small step would you recommend to someone just getting started in cosplay?

SHINONNA:

” I find that closet cosplay or wardrobe cosplay is a great first step, especially if you like characters that wear everyday clothes.

What kind of tools or materials would you recommend a beginner get?

SHINONNA:

” Get a second-hand sewing machine, it’s a better option than hand sewing, which is a lot of effort and you need a lot of skill and the right tools to pull it off. If you have a sewing machine with a straight and zigzag stitch, it’s so much easier.

Learning the basics of sewing with a machine will help you in the long run. I would advise a dedicated pair of scissors that’s always sharp, that you don’t use for anything but thread and fabrics. Chalk, to draw on stuff. You don’t need to learn patterning, you can just do the foil and tape method – foil yourself and tape yourself, get the measurement, transfer it to a piece of paper and you’re ready to cut your fabric.

I feel like people are not paying enough attention to safety – sanding requires a mask, glasses, and good ventilation. Same with paint, varnish, glue. I see a lot of tutorials that don’t mention safety, and it’s very important.

COSPLAYER CONVENTION EMERGENCY KIT



★ pocket-sized travel scissors

★ eyelash glue

★ needle

★ thread in colours of your costume

★ safety pins

★ bandaids

MAKE USE OF THE COSPLAY HOSPITAL AT BIGGER CONVENTIONS!





as Sybil Trelawney from Harry Potter, photographed by StudioGepard



as Effie Trinket from The Hunger Games, photographed by Adenry



as Soifon from Bleach, photographed by LTakanori



AS ALISA BOSKONOVICH FROM
STREET FIGHTER X TEKKEN.

photographed by AsenKPhotography



photographed by Skull Production

- ☆ combination of hand sewing and machine sewing
- ☆ accessories are removable, so the costume can go in the washing machine
- ☆ flowers and balls made by hand, burned so they don't fray
- ☆ wig was originally a long black wig, altered, with the help of a lot of hairspray and heat forming

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO MAKE?

This one took about three months before I decided to put all the black fabric on the organza and had to un-stitch everything, add the new fabric, and stitch it back together. That added about a month. But I usually have a maximum of two hours per two or three days a week to work on cosplay, which is why it takes longer. I also don't rush. I don't stress about events, I can go in an old cosplay, or in my own clothes. I can just have fun that way.





@furanocosplay

WORLD COSPLAY SUMMIT

Furano and Vinnie, the UK team at WCS 2025, cosplaying Iguin and Qifrey from Witch Hat Atelier.

photography courtesy of Furano Cosplay

Bringing together cosplayers from across the world, the World Cosplay Summit is as much about shared passion as it is about performance.

The World Cosplay Summit is an annual international cosplay event held in Japan, with the aim of promoting global interaction through Japanese pop culture. From a small cosplay exhibition held at Aichi Expo in 2005, it developed into an event bringing together cosplay teams from across the globe – in 2025, representatives from 41 countries took part in the competition.

To take a closer look at WCS, we chatted to Furano and Vinnie, last year's UK representatives. Cosplaying Iguin and Qifrey from Witch Hat Atelier, they didn't end up bringing home the trophy, but they did make lasting friendships, learn a great deal, and have a lot of fun along the way.

“Although the performance didn't go as planned, we're proud of everything else, from costume judging to the whole journey to get there,” said Furano.

He has been interested in costumes and cosplay for years – from dressing up as Zorro when he was a kid, to cosplaying Link from Legend of Zelda for a fancy dress party, cosplay has always been part of his life.

Vinnie, Furano's partner, was just an observer for a long time. Furano was keen to bring him into the fold, and what better way to do that than by competing at an international event? Iguin was Vinnie's first cosplay ever, meaning he had to learn everything from scratch. Furano felt the character was a great match for Vinnie, both because of his energy and because the character wears a mask, which he hoped would help with his shyness.

“I introduced the character to him as my offering to try and convince him into competing with me, and it worked,” Furano told us.

Despite his years of experience, Furano found the elements of women's fashion in Iguin and Quifrey's costumes the most challenging part of the build.

adVice for NeXt team



V: Trust your partner. If they don't think something will work, listen to them instead of brushing it off.

F: Enjoy it, it's definitely a once in a lifetime experience – winning isn't everything. The most important thing is that you enjoy every step on the way.

how to compete at WcS



Teams are selected through national qualifiers – you don't apply directly to the World Cosplay Summit.

LIST OF QUALIFIERS IN EACH COUNTRY [HERE](#)



In the UK, qualifiers take place at MCM Comic Con in London, usually in the fall, with judges looking at both costume craftsmanship and stage performance.



WCS takes place annually in Japan, usually in the summer. Dates and details for national qualifiers are announced by local organisers.

CROSSWORD TIME



					8							
1			7									
					3		7			6		
			9		8							
			5							10		
4								9				
					2							
								5		4		
		3	6									
							10					
					2							
F												Y
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10			



ACROSS

- 1 Just one more...
- 3 Opposite of lost.
- 4 TV shows sometimes q... us.
- 10 If a character is acting not like themselves, they are...

DOWN

- 2 If you like a fic, you might leave...
- 5 Dead ... do not eat.
- 6 This love isn't romantic.
- 7 AO3 is in ... (not alpha).
- 8 If AO3 is down, we go to...
- 9 No beta, we ... like

Word hunt

Find the **red** words hidden throughout the issue. They form a secret message ending with "lives on."



You can find answers to all fan/fun games on pages 132-133, but try not to look until you've completed them all so nothing is spoiled!

fanmade

! If you'd like to solve this crossword (and other fan/fun pages in this issue) physically, click [HERE](#) for a printer-friendly version.

FILL IN THE BLANK
fan edition

After coming up with these words, head over to page 95 to fill in the blanks.

- | | | |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 time of day/night | 5 verb | 10 piece of furniture |
| 2 name of TV show/
film/book series | 6 noun | 11 time of day/night |
| 3 name of character A
from nr 2 | 7 name of politician | 15 adjective |
| 4 name of character B
from nr 2 | 8 name of drink | 12 verb + ing |
| | 9 amount of time | 13 noun |
| | | 14 adjective + ly |
| | | 16 verb + ing |



words by Magda P

From sitcom lofts to superhero teams, fandoms have made an art out of turning strangers into something that feels like home.

When I think of found family, I see shoes messily scattered in a hallway. Sneakers, ballet flats, combat boots, an odd single heel. It doesn't matter what kind they are; what matters is that they all arrived in the same hallway, somehow, and decided to stay. Someone is laughing in the other room. Glasses clink. Your favourite food is on the stove. Everything is right in the world.



As fandoms, we're obsessed with these moments: the quiet in-betweens the canon rarely shows us. The character studies, the unlikely relationships, the chaotic pranks. The mundane wrapped around the drama. We're good at taking a group of characters and turning them into something more, weaving a web of tiny moments until a group of friends starts to feel like a family.

See the Marauders and their expanded friend group in fanon. Fans of Stranger Things adopting Eddie Munson as Dustin's dad #2 within hours. The Avengers practically raising teenage Peter Parker in every Tower-fic ever. Or Buck in 9-1-1 becoming like a second father to Christopher.

Found family stretches across genres and settings. Sometimes it's a pack, bound together by loyalty and shared violence. Sometimes it's a workplace that becomes a second home, or a club that offers belonging to those who didn't have it elsewhere. Sometimes it's survivors who outlast the end of the world together, a band that grew up under public scrutiny, soldiers

who trust each other with their lives, or a group of criminals who would never call themselves a family but treat each other like one anyway.

Fandom fills in emotional gaps because we want these characters to have someone who stays. What's shown in the source material is often just the hallway, with the shoes messily scattered, muffled laughing coming from the other room. As fandoms, we push the door open.

So what exactly do we mean **when** we talk about "found family," and why does fandom, in particular, cling to it so fiercely?

” as fandoms, We're obSESSed With the quiet in-betWeeNS.

defining found family

Found family, sometimes called Families of Choice, is a trope most often associated with ensembles. At its core, it's about two or more people choosing to treat each other as family. These bonds often form through forced proximity and shared experience – coworkers, roommates, classmates, bandmates – and are strengthened not by obligation, but by choice.

One of the best places to see found families evolve is in sitcoms. Think the Community study group, the Brooklyn Nine-Nine squad, or the New Girl loft residents. They're almost built for the trope: the comedy focus means the drama often takes second place to everyday shenanigans. Sitcoms rely on the “we're stuck together, so we might as well love each other” energy, the beating heart of the found family trope. This is perhaps why many found family fics resemble an episode of your favourite sitcom, with characters sitting around the table and bickering over the last slice of stale pizza or outlying the plan for the next mission (it just depends on the universe).

A03 STATS

There are almost 260k fics under the canonical tag Found Family.

The top fandoms are:

- 1** Batman
- 2** MCU/Avengers
- 3** My Hero Academia
- 4** DREAM SMP
- 5** Harry Potter
- 6** DCU
- 7** Star Wars

The most popular ratings under the tag are G (General Audiences) and T (Teen and Up Audiences).

There is a big overlap with tags: Hurt/comfort, Fluff, Angst, Team As Family, Emotional Hurt/comfort.

A03 STATS

The top A03 ships in the Found Family tag are:

- 1** Minor or Background Relationships
- 2** Wilbur Soot & Technoblade & TommyInnit & Phil Watson | Philza
- 3** Wilbur Soot & TommyInnit
- 4** No Romantic Relationship(s)
- 5** Dick Grayson & Jason Todd
- 6** Peter Parker & Tony Stark
- 7** Tim Drake & Jason Todd

the name debate

A popular sentiment in fandom communities is that found family should be forged, not just found; it should frame love and loyalty as a deliberate act rather than something we take for granted.

As with any other trope, there is also discourse and debate about found family. The friction centres mostly around the term itself. *Found* makes it sound effortless, as though you simply stumbled into the right people. *Family* carries cultural baggage we struggle to shake – the instinct to assign roles, to ask who’s the parent, who’s the sibling, and so on. When taken too literally, this quickly spills into discourse, particularly around shipping.

The truth is, the found family trope has nothing to do with replicating a traditional family structure. It isn’t about replacing a family tree and shoehorning characters into boxes, but about finding a name for a bond that runs deeper than friendship or romance.

Found family as a term is way too ingrained in fandom culture to actually change it to something more accurate, and maybe we don’t need to, as long as we make sure not to take it too literally. Think of “Nakama,” a Japanese term often translated as comrade, buddy, or crewmate. In fandom spaces, it’s taken on a richer meaning – not quite friends, not quite family. **Fans** don’t even bother translating it anymore. It’s become shorthand for a chosen bond that defies labels. In many ways, that’s how we should treat “found family”: a fandom-born term with flexible meaning, not a literal family structure.

found family has nothing to do with replicating a family structure.



on family-coding

The thing is, people naturally fall into patterns, and it's not inherently a bad thing. Sometimes a duo just feels like father and son, or two characters feel like siblings. That's normal; we're raised in a world where family roles are everywhere. The problem only starts when one interpretation is treated as universal, when "this feels like family to me" becomes "this must be family to everyone." Instead of getting stuck in these assumptions, it's worth asking: why do I see them as family-coded? Why might someone else not see it that way?

Terms like family-coded or sibling-coded have popped up in recent years, echoing the long history of coding in media – queer-coding, race-coding, neurodivergence-coding. Coding is meant to signal something subtly, often because it couldn't be shown directly.

Family-coding works the same way, but it's based largely on vibes and personal experience. Characters might read as siblings to someone who grew up in a close-knit household, or characters who bicker a lot will read as siblings to someone who is used to bickering with their siblings. To someone whose family experience was distant or harmful, the same closeness might read differently – maybe romantic, maybe platonic, but not familial. This is of course not true in every case, but that's precisely the point.

When we say characters are "family-coded," we're often saying more about ourselves than the media. It becomes a problem when people say, "They're family-coded, so shipping them is wrong." That's not a universal truth, but a perspective.

Why found family?

Found family is the fantasy of being chosen not because you're perfect, not because you were born into the right circumstances, but because you showed up, and someone made room for your shoes in the hallway.

It's, in a way, the beating heart of fandom – a place where we collect characters, pair them together, break them apart, reimagine them, and heal them. **Found family is hope disguised as a trope. No wonder we keep coming back to it.**

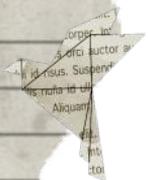
» When we say characters are "family-coded," we're often saying more about ourselves than the media.

WHAT DO YOU SEE

WHEN YOU
THINK

found
family ?

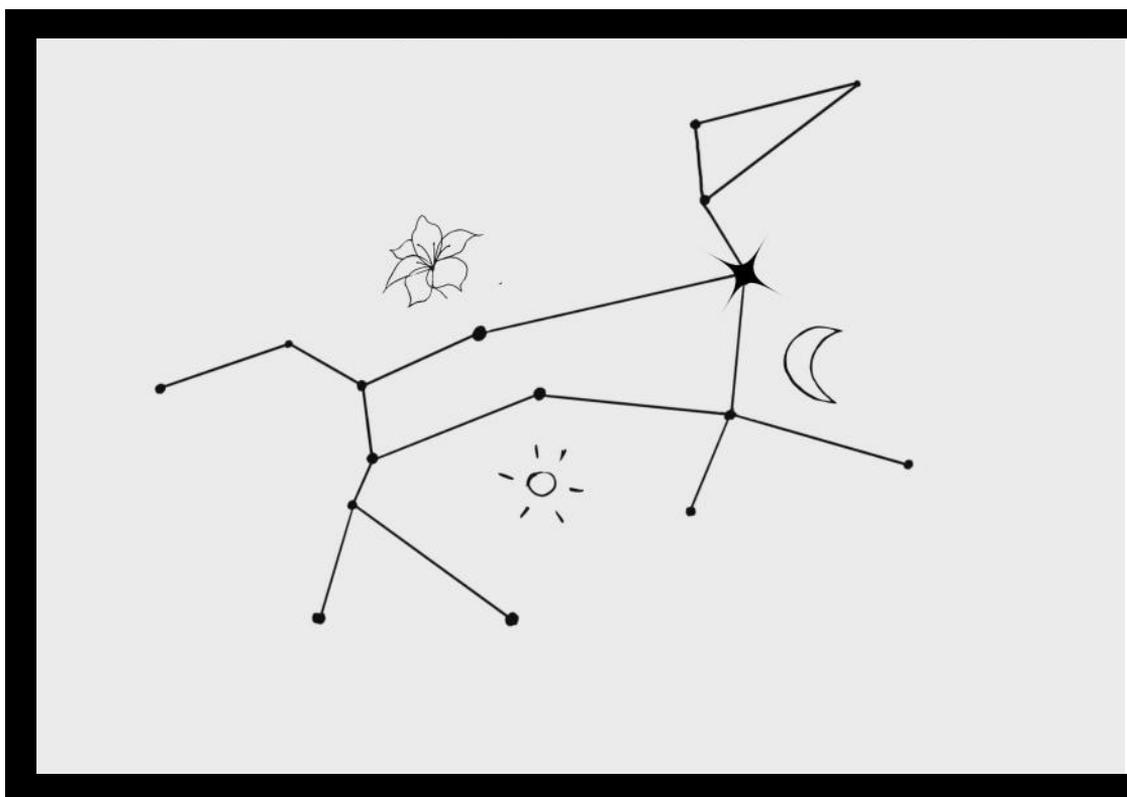
You've just read a lot of words, so now let's see
some visual representations of found family.



MISMATCHED, BUT JUST RIGHT

by Tagzpite





TOGETHER IN THE STARS

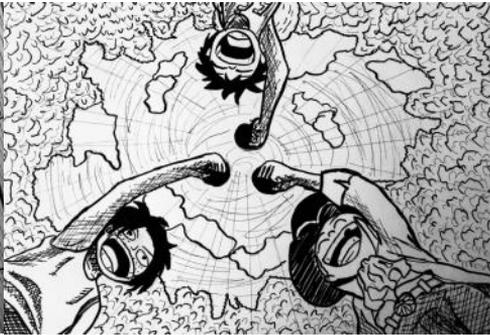
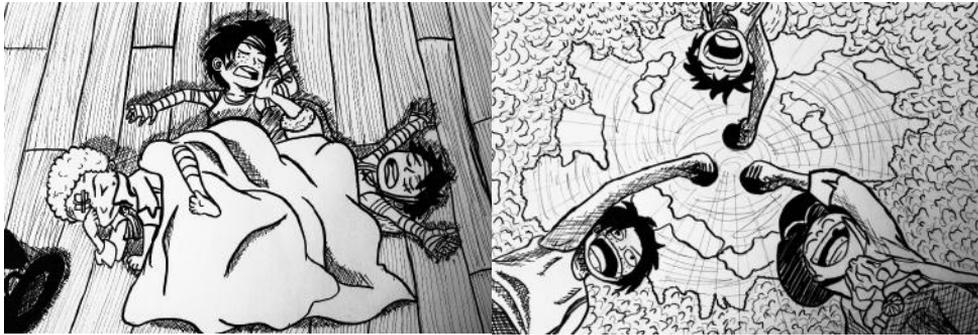
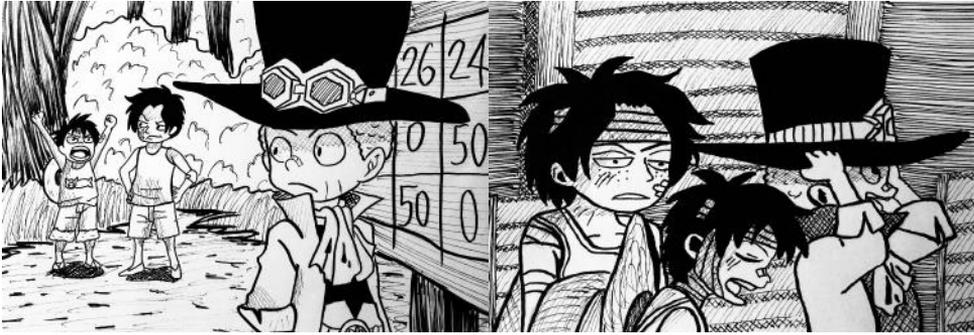
by Gabi P

The star, the moon, the sun, and the flower, together once again.

SWORN, NOT BORN

by Allaire

Three boys, one shared dream, and a promise. In a world that gave them loneliness, they chose to become each other's home.



in conversation With...

InkpotSprite, a fanfic author who knows their way around found family dynamics. They have been actively writing fanfiction since 2018 and have published a multitude of found family fics centering the Batfamily from DC Comics.

IS FOUND FAMILY YOUR FAVORITE TROPE?

»» Definitely! I feel like romantic relationships and blood relations are prioritised over friendship quite a lot in media and life; found family is kind of a middle finger to that mentality, it shows how important platonic bonds are, how blood isn't everything and neither is romance, that you can choose your people and build a home with them through the bonds you forge.

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES FOUND FAMILY SUCH A POPULAR TROPE?

»» There are people whose own family pushes them out when they don't fit into the box they were raised in anymore. Just seeing that you do have a choice on who you give your energy to, that people will care without any obligation to do so, and will love you completely for who you are – it's something a lot of people need.

WHAT DOES FOUND FAMILY MEAN TO YOU PERSONALLY?

»» In life, they're the people you chose and who chose you back, who don't need blood to want to be there for you; just you on your own merit is enough. In fiction it means something similar, but from a writing perspective you're setting up these characters from completely different walks of life and asking yourself not only how do they come together, but why do they stay together? Then, if you're like me, you end up writing 30k+ words trying to answer that question.

DO YOU THINK CRACK FIC WORKS WELL IN DC FANFIC?

»» Oh, definitely, DC's canon is crazier than any fics I could write and they treat it completely seriously too, which is a lot of fun to read. It's also reassuring, because no matter what I write, it will never be as insane as some comics written in the 70s.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE "EMOTIONAL CENTRE" OF THE FOUND FAMILY IN YOUR BATFAM FICS?

» My works *I'll Die When I'm Dead* and *If We're Good Will You Come Back?* are about exploring the ways these people have been broken and how they unintentionally use those jagged pieces to hurt those they love. It's showing that found family, like blood family, can provide love, but maybe not the kind of love you need, and it's okay to look elsewhere if working through it isn't an option. Then in other works, such as *how to feed your local demon* or *you can swear in my hoard*, the emotional centre is about people who are completely different from one another somehow fitting together, to build a home in one another that they never had elsewhere. In works like *Damain Drake* or *furballs*, it shows that blood isn't everything; you choose your family as you grow up and they choose you back.

What all of these have in common is that found family is about choice, choosing to love someone, to build a home with them, and how sometimes you have to leave others behind to move forward.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE SCENE WITH FOUND FAMILY VIBES YOU'VE WRITTEN?

» I like the scene in chapter six of *If We're Good Will You Come Back?* with Tim and Cassie because they've just had a major fight where issues they ignored came up, and they just talk it out, essentially saying: yes, I hurt you and I wish I hadn't, and I want to be better now. It's a really important scene to me because it shows the flaws found family can have, but also how they can be used for healing. I also like the scene in *I'll Die When I'm Dead* with Tim, Cass and Duke all bickering like siblings before they're even officially there. I was thinking of my own siblings when writing it.

ARE THERE ANY TIPS OR TRICKS ON WRITING FOUND FAMILIES YOU'D WANT TO SHARE WITH OTHER AUTHORS?

» My advice would be try to treat every character with nuance. In found family, it's not about heroes and villains; everyone is operating in a grey area and the real fun is in finding out why they're that way, what they're thinking, how it affects them and others for better or worse, and what happens after that. Not to say you can't have any antagonists; just always think about why they're the antagonist – how would you write them if they were the protagonist?

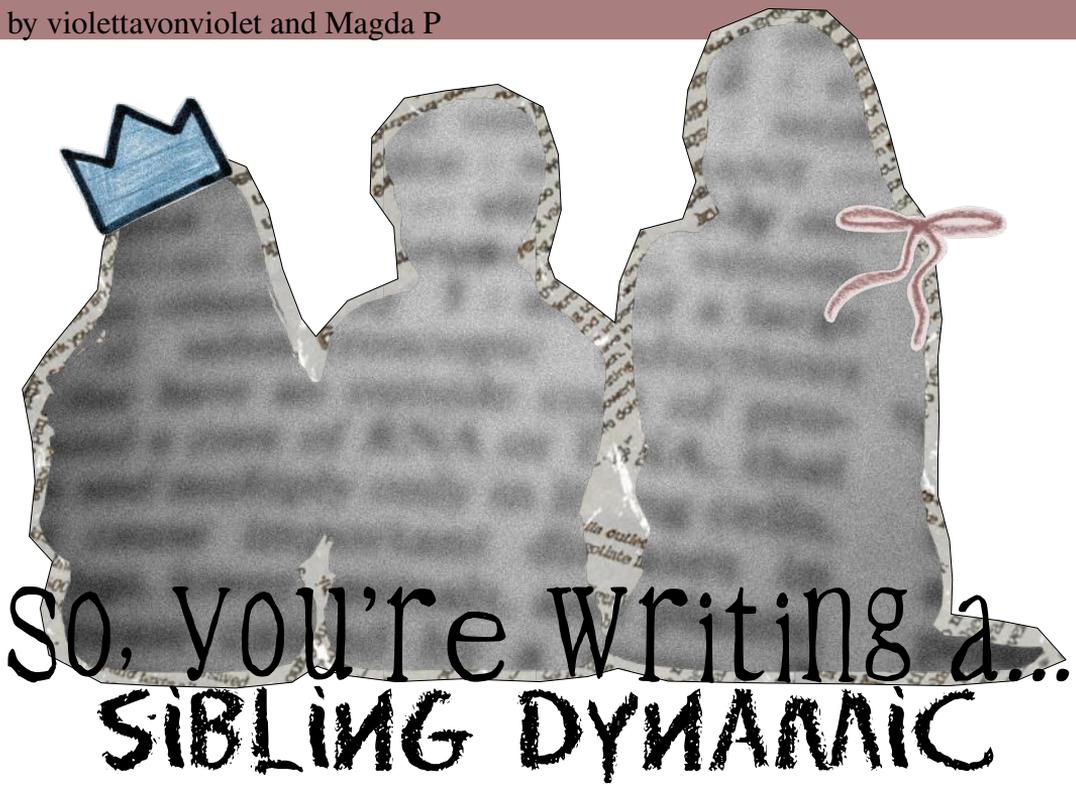
fanmade

gUESS thIS FOUND FAMILY

Below are descriptions of some iconic found families – based on them, try to guess the fandom! This list is a collaborative effort of the FANMADE team, so most of you are probably not in every single of these fandoms. So, make it a collaborative thing, share it with your fandom friends, and try to guess all ten. If you're impatient, you can find the answers on the last page of this issue.

SOMETIMES A FAMILY IS...

- 1 ...five guys: the prankster (likes carrots), the dad (is scared of spoons), the flirt (weird love for bandanas), the brooding one (pops out of nowhere), and the silly one (says the randomest shit). Oh, and also they're in a band together.
- 2 ...two emotionally unavailable brothers and their angel best friend who cannot listen to orders.
- 3 ...a bat, a butler, at least four brothers and a variable amount of other siblings.
- 4 ...a consulting detective, a doctor and a baby.
- 5 ...a deer, a dog, a wolf, a doe and a rat.
- 6 ...a tin can, a captain, a spy, another spy, a god, and a giant angry green guy.
- 7 ...a chainsmoking single father with a few years left to live + his two children who don't get human rights and can't shut up, ever.
- 8 ...a reanimated corpse father who is a certified ragebaiter and a guy who loves bland food + their son who was raised in a mass grave.
- 9 ...a 900 year old time traveling alien in a blue box and their companion.
- 10 ...a pig with a bell, a little shit and a crow father.



Your cheat sheet of some things to know before setting out to write sibling dynamics.

Where many writers get lost when writing sibling dynamics is starting from the word “siblings” instead of from who each character is – their personality traits, their dynamics with other people, their histories. Being siblings is just one part of each character’s tapestry. This is perhaps why sibling dynamics are so hard to write, and maybe even harder to give advice on.

Some variables are quite obvious when writing a sibling dynamic: how well do they know each other? Have they lived in the same house for an extended period of time? What’s their relationship with their parents? Was one considered a “favourite”? How large is the age gap? These are all important to consider, not just when it comes to fanfiction.

There are stereotypes we often fall back on when it comes to siblings:

- ♥ the responsible eldest daughter
- ♥ the over-protective older brother
- ♥ the attention-seeking, comic relief middle child
- ♥ the outgoing youngest
- ♥ the self-absorbed only child

And so on. They’re stereotypes for a reason – they ring true often enough that they feel natural on the page. Many of them also stem from actual research suggesting that birth order can influence how people act and view themselves. But, again, it’s important to consider your characters as individuals before shoehorning them into boxes.



♥ CANON V. FANON

Before setting out to **write** sibling characters in fanfiction, one important question to ask is: **am I working off canon, or am I adding to canon?** In other words, how close are the characters in the source material? How much of their sibling dynamic is actually shown, and how much of it is assumed? This is important if you want them to stay in character (if you don't, then power to you – ignore all of this and get to writing).

The biggest difference between building on a canonically close sibling bond and expanding on one that isn't as fully developed is **the** amount of world-building required. You'll need to come up with the things they bond over, the things that divide them, and the things they do to annoy each other. Ideally, these details should connect in some way to their canon relationship. That way, it won't feel like you're tacking information on, but rather deepening what's already there – arguably the fanfiction writer's biggest power.

♥ BLOOD VS HISTORY

An important question to ask is whether your characters are siblings by blood, and perhaps more importantly, whether they actually grew up together, with the same parents, in the same household. This shared upbringing is where most stereotypical sibling dynamics come from: the familiarity, the teasing and roughhousing, the constant bickering, and at the same time, the devotion and willingness to jump into fire for one another.

If your characters meet later in life, or are adopted siblings who didn't grow up together, they won't automatically act like "typical siblings." They might be more inclined to be open with each other about their feelings, less inclined to tease and bicker until they draw blood. The devotion can still be there, but the incessant need to hide that devotion underneath layers of "I don't care" might not.

♥ BE WEIRD WITH IT

Siblings are often strange around one another, doing things that might seem nonsensical to an outside observer. Inside jokes that make sense only to them are one example, but especially for siblings who grew up together, there are often strange, unspoken ways of passing the time. Throwing a paper ball back and forth for an hour, only to wordlessly decide the activity is over and retreat to opposite ends of the house. Making up games that don't really have rules, like "one of us says a word and the other starts running away." These moments of shared weirdness can do a lot of work in making a sibling dynamic feel real and lived in.

Signed,
TWO ELDEST DAUGHTERS ♥

SO, YOU'RE WRITING...

BANTER

How to write banter that stays true to the character, helps build relationships, and actually serves the story.

Writing banter feels like it should be easy. It's just characters talking, right? And yet, it often ends up being the trickiest of all.

Banter is both a great way to draw the reader in and – if overused, mistimed, or out of character – a great way to distract them from the plot a bit too much.

Banter is, in short, a playful exchange of teasing remarks. The keyword here is playful; even when it's biting or sarcastic, even if the characters are trying to hide that they care about each other (hello, enemies to lovers), banter implies a certain level of connection.

Think of it as characterisation, not decoration, always keeping your plot in mind. Although banter is known for quick and witty one-liners, not all of it needs to be funny. It's also important to remember that it's never one-sided. There's no need for one character to "win" the exchange, and if you try to do that, it might come across as bullying. Banter is a give and take.

(Sometimes it helps to take inspiration from real life – you interacting with your friends, or even overhearing strangers bickering in a cafe.)



When We Write fanfic, the filler moments are often the heart of the story.

IN THE CASE OF FANFIC

Online (and on library shelves), you'll find a lot of advice on how to write convincing and dynamic banter, often from professional writers. A lot of that advice is super useful and will apply to any type of writing, fanfiction included. But there are things that make **fanfiction** unique.

First, you have the source material to refer to – the average reader will already have expectations about how these specific characters would interact with each other. The nature of their relationship, their inside jokes, etc. Banter is perhaps the easiest way to make a character sound... out of character. A lot of readers will be turned off by that, but a lot of them will also embrace it with open arms (we say this in every single one of these guides, but do whatever you want, there are no rules here).

Second – as a writer, you've probably been told before that every scene needs to lead somewhere. You've been warned of "filler scenes" and told to avoid them. Well, this is fanfiction, so that rule, as many others, doesn't apply here. When we write fanfic (especially using tropes like, for example, found family), the filler moments are often the heart of the story. There's usually enough drama and action in canon, so we instead focus on what's missing, and banter is a big part of that. So if that's the kind of fic you're writing, don't be afraid to pack it with a lot of banter-y dialogue, and however many filler scenes your heart desires.

Third, despite it being easy to use banter in a way that makes the character feel OOC, banter can also be used to change dynamics established in the source material. Two people who hate each other in canon can become closer in your fic if you signal that change by some well-placed banter, like maybe a classic joke shared after a traumatic situation making one of them reluctantly smile.

CRACK FIC

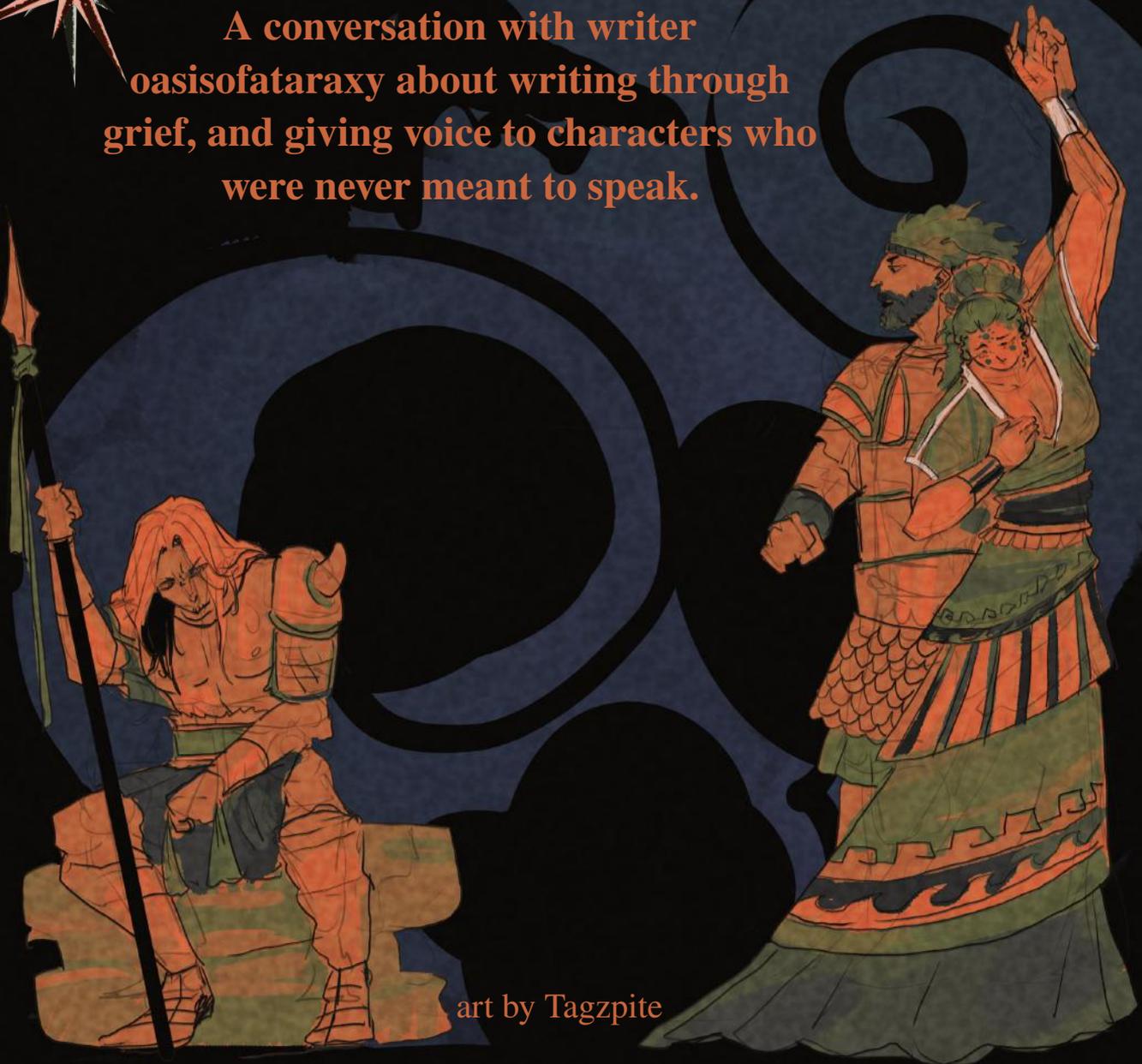
A great banter teacher is crack fic, where banter is often exaggerated to absurd levels. This is exactly why it's useful to learn what exactly makes it tick.

Crack fic often leans heavily on interruption and escalation, pushes character traits to extremes, and prioritises rhythm and timing over realism. These are tools you can borrow when writing any type of fic, as long as you remember to slightly tone them down for a subtler effect.

As homework, we suggest reading some of your favourite crack fics and paying attention to how the characters joke with each other. Do they interrupt one another to say something? What type of language does the author use to show their familiarity and relationships?

CREATOR SPOTLIGHT

A conversation with writer
oasisofataraxy about writing through
grief, and giving voice to characters who
were never meant to speak.



art by Tagzpite

DISCLAIMER

Samia's work often explores politics, grief, and gendered violence. This interview doesn't mention anything in graphic detail and is therefore rated T, but please read responsibly.

This issue marks our first ever creator spotlight, and narrowing it down to one artist was not easy. We ultimately chose Samia, better known as [oasisofataraxy](#), not only for her beautiful writing, but for the story behind her nomination. Samia was put forward by AchillesComeHome – their connection began through something as simple and powerful as commenting on each other's work. They first interacted at the beginning of 2024, but they both say it feels like they've known each other forever.

Samia was a fan of Kat's work before she ever wrote anything for the Percy Jackson fandom, and it was actually Kat's work that ultimately inspired her to start writing. Receiving a thoughtful comment from Kat was the start of their friendship. After connecting on Discord, Samia became Kat's beta reader, and the rest is history.

Is there a story behind your username?

I've always wanted my writing to be like a safe space, for people to feel calm, in one way or another, whenever they read something I wrote. That's where that came from.

fandoms:

- ✦ Percy Jackson
- ✦ The Song of Achilles
- ✦ Homer works
- ✦ Ancient Greek religion and lore
- ✦ Revenged Love

»

I've said it before and I'll say it again: the Ancient Greeks are calling her, and they want their talent back.

OASIS

a fertile or green area in an arid region (such as a desert)

ATARAXIA

a state of serene calmness, freedom from emotional disturbance, worry, and distress

What's your writing process like?

Every author probably relates to this, but I'm just... thinking all the time. If an idea stays with me for days, I open up a doc, write it down, and explore it in different directions. Most of the time, my ideas focus on the crux of the story, not the beginning. That's where I usually hit a slump, because I don't know how to introduce the world. So, I often start with the ending scene and work backwards.

Has beta reading changed your approach to writing in any way?

I think so. Kat's work, especially, I love the way she uses metaphors and emotion. I feel very inspired by her work, because I struggle with expressing emotions. I write around them a lot. Beta reading for Kat has made me realise I have so much potential to explore emotions and give characters dimension.

Is there a trope or theme you keep coming back to in your writing?

I have no idea if politics count as a trope, but I'd say that. I think art often stems from a place of some sort of grief, and sometimes you want to create something beautiful with that grief. My first work about politics was a piece about Danae [Greek mythology princess, mother of one of Zeus' children] and Roe v. Wade. That came from my exploration of being sexually assaulted when I was younger. I took that grief and explored it more with Danae as a vessel.

What are you working on right now?

One of my works in progress is about Briseis. Briseis is such an important character to me. In the Iliad, we don't see her point of view. We don't see any of the slave girls as characters; they exist only as vessels to help men. I do that a lot, I find the characters the male authors don't give attention to, and I make them grow from the environment around them.

Briseis is a Trojan princess the Greek army takes from Troy. She has no character autonomy; in this fanfic I'm working on, I want to give it to her.

What do you do if you hit writer's block?

My habit is to think or write about Patroclus/Achilles. Yes, my strategy to overcome not being able to write is sometimes... to just write. I love their dynamic, and I could explore it forever, so it usually helps. Or I'll find a random book and create a blackout poem from it.

Any advice for people hesitant to share their work?

Just go for it. Limiting yourself doesn't do you any favours. I understand if there's hesitation, but it's so important to be writing. This is a bit off topic, but I want to mention AI; it's always so disappointing. There are so many trials and errors it just doesn't go through. It doesn't explore emotion; it doesn't explain what it means to be human. Writing has been such an important thing for humans since the start of time. Ancient humans were doing it, and if they were doing it, you can too.





Ancient humans were writing – if they were doing it, you can too.

RECENT WORKS

TITLE: *i will save you from the flood and the fire (who are you?)*

FANDOM: Revenged Love

CHARACTERS: Chi Jiali & Chi Cheng

EXPLORES: sibling dynamics

FAVOURITE LINE: “Do you know what your first words were? It was my name.”

TITLE: *if love was contagious, i might be immune to it*

FANDOM: Revenged Love

CHARACTERS: Guo Chengyu/Jiang Xiaoshuai

EXPLORES: past sexual abuse and its effects

FAVOURITE SCENE:

“The two characters, Guo Chengyu and Jiang Xiaoshuai, are literally sleeping in one bed with a pillow barrier between them, and Chengyu throws a hand over that boundary. Xiaoshuai tells him to get his hand away even as he himself doesn't let go. It's a really sweet and almost mischievous scene after some hard/angsty talks and I think it encompasses their actual relationship really well.”

TITLE: *the snakes sting, how lucky it is that they don't strike the heart*

FANDOM: The Iliad, The Song of Achilles

CHARACTERS: Achilles/Patroclus

EXPLORES:

“This piece dwells on the decisions Achilles made in the past and whether he regretted them. In a way, it's very ironic, as we know that in Greek mythology the past can't be changed. But in this piece, Achilles is forced to think about the past, because Patroclus is the one asking, and he's made enough mistakes not listening to Patroclus to decline him... They make me so sick sometimes.”

t A03
@oasisofataraxy



Word SEARCH

The words can be found down, across, and diagonal, spelled both from left to right and backwards.

E	G	A	E	K	R	H	E	I	E	C	E	O	L
K	G	I	L	E	N	H	A	H	C	S	L	I	N
I	H	N	O	I	T	P	O	D	A	G	D	T	H
N	E	T	L	D	Y	O	R	L	P	N	E	B	E
S	A	I	I	I	C	R	O	B	R	I	S	I	I
H	A	G	L	H	S	P	O	T	O	L	T	Y	R
I	F	D	I	G	L	N	I	E	T	B	D	D	E
P	A	O	N	O	D	E	E	K	E	I	A	N	N
A	M	M	E	N	B	I	L	I	C	S	U	N	S
I	I	D	A	O	E	P	N	N	T	I	G	I	A
E	L	D	G	K	C	A	P	B	I	E	H	E	P
T	Y	N	E	R	F	M	N	S	O	E	T	E	O
Y	C	N	A	N	G	E	R	P	N	N	E	O	I
N	E	N	I	L	D	O	O	L	B	N	R	I	L

HEIR

PACK

KINSHIP

ELDEST DAUGHTER

PROTECTION

PREGNANCY

FAMILY

SIBLINGS

BOND

LINEAGE

BLOODLINE

knocked up

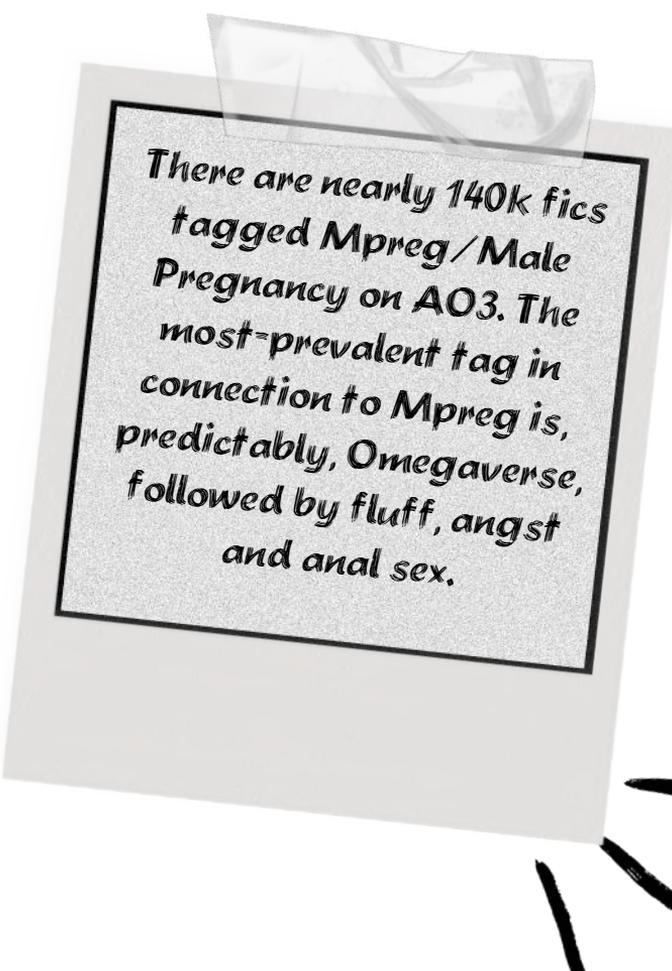
or: a brief history of Mpreg

Mpreg, after a closer look, is not a porn outlier, but a long-standing fandom practice that uses fantasy to explore family-making, gender, power and desire in ways mainstream media often doesn't allow.

Mpreg or Male Pregnancy – A common fandom trope in which a male experiences pregnancy and/or motherhood.

The first mentions of male pregnancy can be found in old myths surrounding the gods. Zeus giving birth to Athena and Dionysus, or Loki in Norse mythology. Technically speaking, stories like Frankenstein could count as a male birth. Modern adaptations in popular media include the body horror of pregnancy in the Alien franchise and the pure comedy of children's TV shows like *Fairly Oddparents* which include Cosmo, a male fairy in a heterosexual relationship, giving birth to their baby for a laugh.

But that isn't really what Mpreg is in fandom. In fanworks, the logistics and biology of the male pregnancy are often not explained. Sometimes they're left up to magic or medical experimentation, but the most common explanation is: this is an alternate universe where male pregnancy is a thing. Mpreg fanfiction often normalizes male pregnancy, with none of the body horror you might find in other media. It's the idea of a "perfect" ending for slash ships (although straight Mpreg also sometimes occurs), a gay couple with a white picket fence and 2.5 (biological) children.



There are nearly 140k fics tagged Mpreg/Male Pregnancy on AO3. The most-prevalent tag in connection to Mpreg is, predictably, Omegaverse, followed by fluff, angst and anal sex.

the birth of mpreg

Mpreg in fandom began with Star Trek, as many things did. A lot of fanfiction and fanart from the 60s and 70s depict Kirk or Spock pregnant. It helps that Star Trek has a lot of whacky episodes, so the idea of male pregnancy doesn't really come out of left field. In fact, in the later Star Trek: Enterprise, a canonical male pregnancy is depicted.

A zine found in a thrift store reveals art of a heavily pregnant Captain Kirk, which is possibly the first modern appearance of what we now think of as Mpreg. Though, given it was circulated as a physical zine in a time where homosexuality was not only frowned upon, but often outright illegal, there's no say as to when it really first appeared.

The earliest entry of a fanwork with the Mpreg trope on Fanlore comes from 1983, and the earliest work on AO3 with the tag is from 2001, followed by works from 2006 and 2008, which is when the tag started becoming more popular. There are also popular forums dedicated to Mpreg, like mpregcentral.net, with over 55k members.

“like many fan tropes, mpreg gained popularity through supernatural.”



enter the omegaverse

Mpreg is often combined with other tropes – fated mates, shifters or historical alternate universes, especially when the canon material doesn't lend itself to animalistic dynamics. In fandoms like Teen Wolf, where those dynamics already exist canonically, fewer AUs are needed.

But, like many fan tropes, Mpreg gained popularity through Supernatural, the birthplace of the Omegaverse.

The Omegaverse is an amalgamation of different animalistic tropes – humans in wolf-like dynamics, with dominant alphas, calm betas, and breedable omegas, no matter the gender. Characters in Omegaverse fanfiction experience mating heats, ruts, and are generally more controlled by their instincts and pheromones.

The popularity of the Omegaverse trope in the Supernatural fandom naturally evolved into imagining the omega, typically Dean Winchester, becoming pregnant during one of his heats.

The mechanics of Mpreg vary, from one-off magical events, to everyday Omegaverse where Mpreg is to be expected. The birthing process varies much the same – some choose a “simple” C-section, while others canonize a vagina for omegas. Sometimes the child is extracted from the stomach via magic.

Written by Women

It’s also worth mentioning the variations of societal norms in Mpreg fanfiction. Some, especially in fandoms like Supernatural, featuring more traditionally masculine men, highlight how being pregnant doesn’t change a character – how they’re still “manly” despite pregnancy. But there’s also the opposite, where the male characters face misogyny, and are often more or less forcibly feminised, often by cisgender female authors.

Fanfiction has historically been written and read mostly by women. This has been true since the early days of physical fanzines, and is still true today. This is not a shocking discovery – women are just more likely to read fiction, period. A 2025 You Gov survey on reading habits found that 63% of female readers consume mostly fiction, compared to 46% of male readers, echoing trends seen across multiple studies.

It’s safe to assume that a large portion of Mpreg fanworks are written by women. For some, Mpreg is a way to engage with pregnancy without the typical issues or everyday misogyny they face in the real world. Sometimes it’s a way to make male characters experience these same issues, which can be therapeutic. Mpreg inverts gender roles, creating a space where it’s easier to freely imagine how a character might react, unbound from both canon and social expectation. In fact, Mpreg can “queer” pregnancy and childbirth and normalise the idea of male pregnancy, including in trans-adjacent contexts.

At the same time, Mpreg often allows pregnancy to be idealised, to highlight the beautiful parts of it without real risks. Because male pregnancy is so overtly fictional, writers often feel less compelled to address real-life risks or implications. In short, in Mpreg fanfiction, pregnancy can be just as idealised as most smut.

The ratio of explicitly pornographic Mpreg stories and works focusing on romance, domesticity and family-making, is pretty equal. This split can be seen both on AO3, and in a poll conducted by mpregcentral in 2014, to this day a popular forum for those interested in Mpreg. This mix of domesticity-meets-erotica can resonate with readers across genders. For some queer men in particular, Mpreg can offer a way to imagine forms of intimacy, family and care that mirror experiences usually framed as exclusively heterosexual.

the diScourSe

Mpreg is a controversial trope, both within and beyond fandom spaces. Discussions around it most often centre on two issues: sexism and transgender representation – or the lack thereof.

Traditionally, Mpreg does not refer to trans male pregnancy. Some authors distinguish between the two using tags such as #tmpreg for trans male pregnancy and #cmpreg for cis male pregnancy. But what is mostly understood and depicted as Mpreg in fanfiction is an inversion: someone who cannot become pregnant in real life, becoming pregnant in fiction.

This doesn't mean Mpreg exists outside of conversations about transness. Opinions vary, and often sit in tension with one another. On one side, some fans argue that depicting cis men instead of trans men in Mpreg fic is fetishistic and sidelines trans male experiences. At the same time, they note that when trans men *are* included, it can still come across as fetishistic.

Conversely, some fans think making an Mpreg character trans would not meaningfully affect the narrative or the characterisation – yet, more often than not, authors still choose to depict cis men, perhaps because, even subconsciously, “man” is still too often equated with “penis.”

cloSIng note

Mpreg isn't trying to be realistic, representative, or instructive. It does what fandom has always done best – using fiction to imagine lives that feel inaccessible in the real world. This isn't true of *all* Mpreg fanfiction, of course, and it's not to say that none of it is problematic or perpetuates harmful stereotypes.

The beauty, and often the pitfall, of fanfiction is that it isn't regulated by strict rules or conventions. That's how we end up with a plethora of stories depicting the same trope, each written for different reasons, from different social positions, and often for different audiences.

Having said all that, we're not arguing that Mpreg is above critique. We are arguing that it's worth taking seriously. Even when it sounds silly or outlandish at first glance – as many things in fandom often do.

“mpreg isn't trying to be realistic, representative, or instructive.”

Small FANDOM Spotlight

words by Hunter

In our first small fandom spotlight, we're talking about
Grease: Rise of the Pink Ladies.



Grease: Rise of the Pink Ladies is a spin off TV show based on the movie musical Grease. The series takes place in 1954, six years before the events of Grease, and follows Jane, Nancy, Cynthia, and Olivia as they form the girl gang known as “the Pink Ladies.” It’s a return to the world of the classic ‘70s movie, but with a more progressive storyline and new characters.

Fans love it for the nostalgia, obviously, but it also shines on its own, with catchy original songs, a loveable and diverse cast, and a painfully accurate depiction of high school theater.

The show has 30 original songs written by Brandon Colbein, Brittany Campbell, and Justin Tranter, who also appeared in the

show. The most popular songs include “Crushing Me” from episode eight: “Or at the High School Dance...” with over six million streams on Spotify and “I Want More” from episode two: “Too Pure to be Pink” with over two million streams.

Unfortunately, the show was cancelled and taken off streaming less than a month after the last episode of season one aired. While some fans are still active on social media, hype for the show has died down considerably, as it is difficult to find. The series is available to rent or purchase on Prime Video and Apple TV, but the best place to start may be by streaming the music. You could also watch the original Grease musical to get into the spirit of the show (be warned that the musical was

written in the early '70s and does not always hold up well). You don't need to know the original musical to understand the show, it stands well on its own, but you may miss some easter eggs hidden throughout, like the significance of Gil Rizzo's little sister and the nickname she gives Jane's sister.

the fandom

There are currently **320 works** on AO3, with peak activity in 2023, when the show first premiered. Some of the most prominent ships are **Lydia/Cynthia, Jane/Olivia, Jane/Susan, Jane/Richie, and Nancy/Potato**.

Jane is the most commonly shipped character, which makes sense given she's the protagonist and part of a canon love triangle between Buddy, a goodie-two shoes "soc" who Jane breaks up with in the first episode, and Richie, a bad boy with a heart of gold, and the brother of Jane's fellow Pink Lady Olivia. The opposites attract energy that endears fans to the Jane/Richie ship also draws them to ship Jane and Olivia.

While Jane may be shipped with the most people, the most popular ship of the fandom by far is **Lydia/Cynthia, with 213 fics**, compared to the second most common ship (Jane/Olivia) having only 44. That's the power of canon lesbianism. That's right, *Grease: Rise of the Pink Ladies* showcases a **canon queer relationship** set in the 1950s. The sorely needed representation combined with the **rivals to lovers** trope makes Cynthia and Lydia a positively addictive ship for the show's overwhelmingly queer and female fanbase.

While Cynthia and Lydia may be the most popular ship of the fandom, the heart of the show is the **platonic love** shared among the Pink Ladies: Jane, Cynthia, Olivia, Nancy, and Hazel. As such, a very common storyline in fics involves Cynthia coming out to the girls, often with Nancy's help, as Cynthia comes out to Nancy in the show in a heartwarming scene that definitely didn't make the author of this article cry. Not one bit. The Pinks are always supportive of their friend and it usually ends in tooth-rotting fluff.

It is that **deep bond of sisterhood** between the Pinks both in canon and fics that draws fans to the show.

fun fact

Part of the way through filming, Jonathan Nieves (who played Richie) left the project, forcing the writers to hastily write him out. Unfortunately, they needed the character to be in one more short scene. Their solution was to photoshop Nieves's face onto a body double. The result was slightly disturbing and led to a lot of light-hearted teasing from fans.



Word

SEARCH

In honour of Femslash February, and to remind you to celebrate women loving women all year long.

If unfamiliar with any of these iconic F/F ships, click on it to find out more.

XENAGAB

CAITVI

BRITTANA

WENCLAIR

SWANQUEEN

CLEXA

ROMANCE

CATRADORA

SUPERCORP

POLYTRIX

The words can be found down and across, spelled from left to right and backwards.

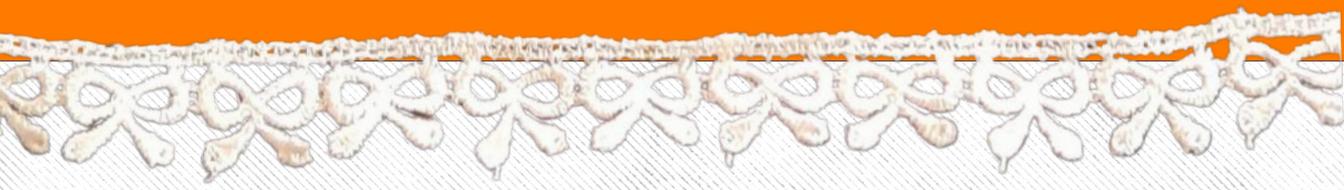
N	X	O	N	A	S	U	R	O	N	A	N	C	E
S	W	A	N	Q	U	E	E	N	D	A	L	N	R
R	E	O	E	E	A	I	E	I	V	T	I	A	C
T	H	Y	O	C	L	E	X	A	N	C	O	S	D
A	S	U	A	L	A	S	W	O	P	I	L	E	X
G	A	R	I	I	B	R	I	T	T	A	N	A	I
X	L	I	A	U	P	E	H	O	A	R	X	A	R
E	S	I	P	R	O	C	R	E	P	U	S	B	T
N	M	O	W	E	N	C	L	A	I	R	O	H	Y
A	E	S	C	X	O	E	C	F	U	E	I	B	L
G	F	A	L	O	S	A	P	P	H	I	C	E	O
A	A	C	A	T	R	A	D	O	R	A	T	A	P
B	H	I	L	V	T	Q	P	L	A	A	B	I	S
T	X	E	L	E	S	B	I	A	N	A	T	T	A

FEMSLASH

YURI

LESBIAN

SAPPHIC



my 
fanfiction
before 
fanfiction

or: the Polish Blogger scene

Before most of us knew the word “fanfiction,” we were already writing it together on Polish group blogs that turned daydreaming into multiplayer storytelling.

words by Magda P



Almost twelve years ago, on a random summer evening, I discovered the joy of group blogs.

Teenage me was obsessed with Harry Potter, celebrities, and writing – in any way, shape or form. I annoyed teachers with purple prose instead of essays and drifted through most lessons half-present, half somewhere else entirely.

Group blogs, as they existed on the Polish side of Blogger, felt like the inevitable collision of all those obsessions. You could find a blog set in just about any world imaginable, but some of the most popular ones lived at Hogwarts.

At their core, group blogs were a text-based role-playing game. You **created** a character – or sometimes adopted a canon one, like James Potter on a 1970s Hogwarts blog – and introduced them through a character card: appearance, personality, backstory, flaws (although in the early days, the card included only a photo and name, and the rest was made in the action).

You chose a face claim, often carefully reserved in advance so there weren't five Lily Collinses roaming **the** same corridors. Then the game began.

You'd wander through character cards like stalls at a market, looking for someone your character could love, hate, or ruin their life with. When you found a match, you'd approach the author, agree on the vibe, and start writing back and forth – sometimes for weeks or months.

For me, it was the perfect outlet. I spent countless evenings crafting elaborate storylines involving James Potter II (Harry

Potter's son) – who, in my head at the time, looked like Logan Lerman – discovering new sides of his personality depending on who he interacted with.

It scratched the writing itch, but it was also unpredictable. And, to be honest, I didn't even know what fanfiction was then. This was my fanfiction *before* fanfiction.

Imagine this – you've agreed with another author that your characters will have a rocky relationship, but will eventually fall in love. You write a reply where your character says something completely out of pocket, hit publish, and wait with bated breath. Then, on a random Tuesday morning, the notification arrives. You open it. Oh my god – they're kissing!

The number of times I stayed home "sick" from school just to reply to threads all day is, in hindsight, slightly embarrassing.

If you stayed on a group blog long enough, you could watch lore form in real time. Characters disappeared and returned, grew up, changed jobs, fell in love, got divorced. The world evolved collaboratively, shaped by dozens of writers making choices at once.

One of the most fun ways to see that lore emerge was through group threads, organised occasionally by the blog's admin team. These could take many forms, but were often centred on big events – a party, a (yule) ball, a prom. Any character could join any thread, and the interactions were usually chaotic, unexpected, and transformative in ways you simply could not achieve writing on your own.



new York city – the city that never sleeps (and never dies)

One of the blogs I frequented most was [New York City – the city that never sleeps](#). The premise was simple: modern day NYC, be anyone you want. It was the first group blog I joined not anchored to an existing fictional universe, which initially felt daunting.

Over time, though, NYC became the only group blog still standing. While many blogs faded as platforms changed and adult life took over, NYC adapted.

Platform changes also shaped the blog's history. When Onet, Poland's major web portal and home to many early Polish group blogs, discontinued blog support in 2012, years of posts and character work were at risk of disappearing. The NYC admin team took the time to manually transfer as many cards and threads as possible to a Blogspot-supported domain, relying on collective memory to label everything for easier browsing. The move to Blogspot became a defining moment, preserving not just content, but a living archive of collaborative storytelling. Perhaps this is the real reason NYC is still standing after a whopping eighteen years – the dedication of the team keeping it alive.

In a true “blast from the past” move, I spoke to the admin team to ground this article not only in my own experience, but in the voices of the people who shaped the environment I loved so much.

What drew you to group blogs and made you stay?

MAMA MUMINKA

» NYC was my first group blog, and I joke that it'll also be my last. I stayed for the interaction, both with characters and their authors. With characters, I loved the element of surprise. Back then there were no planning threads in advance; you just went with the flow. Interactions with authors mattered too; I'm a classic introvert and it's easier to express myself in writing than verbally. That's how I made many friendships that last to this day.

LISEK

» It all started with NYC. Before that, I wrote fanfics on private blogs. I remember that Onet had rankings of blogs and posts – that's how I found NYC. I had breaks, but I always came back.

ElEna

» A classmate convinced me to create a brother for her character. Back then, you often didn't tell co-authors anything about yourself, not even your gender, so for a while people thought I was a guy, or even my own brother. Untangling that required a lot of apologies! But it was also a valuable lesson about building relationships online. Thanks to that, I formed friendships that have lasted longer than many offline ones.

“above all, New York city is a living relic - and may it remain so for as long as possible.

What is your favourite part of group blogs?

MAMA MUMINKA

” Definitely writing. Interaction would be second, community third. I’ve loved writing for as long as I can remember. I started – slightly embarrassingly – with Tokio Hotel fanfics. Later, I created a fantasy blog inspired by Eragon, and thanks to it I met the girls who introduced me to NYC.

LISEK

” I just laughed out loud because I also started with Tokio Hotel fanfics! Team Tom. Who knows, maybe Muminek and I met even earlier? But yes, writing is number one for me too. I treat it as a hobby, I like improving and seeing my progress.

ElEna

” I agree that writing is key, though you can’t remove the human element. If it were only about creating worlds, each of us would have several books published by now. Writing alone is one thing, but building a world with others brings a completely different excitement – checking messages impatiently to see if a reply appeared. The blog format gives more motivation and immediate feedback.

call to action

Even now, years later, I can trace so much of how I write and collaborate back to those spaces. I haven’t written on group blogs in a long time, and the main reason isn’t even adult life and lack of time, but the language. After years of living and studying in English, Polish no longer flows the way it used to. I could do it, but it would take the kind of brain power I now pour into building this magazine.

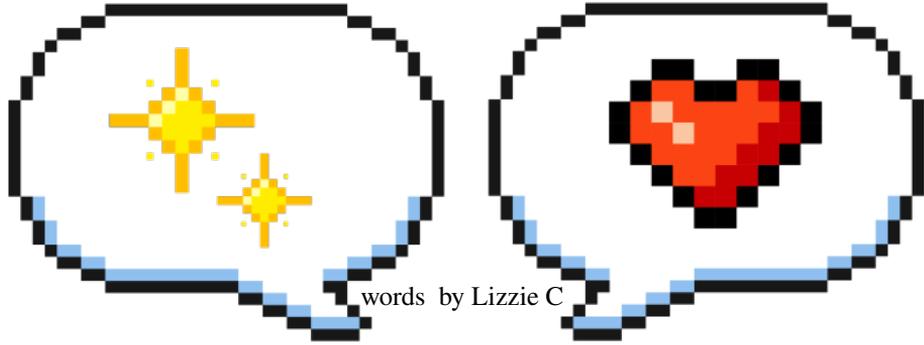
I’ve never found anything quite like Polish group blogs in English, though I’m sure similar spaces must exist somewhere. So here’s my call to action, dear reader – if you’d like to engage in what I’ve described above, but in English, hit me up. Let’s make it happen.



@shewolf

fanmade

does not encourage anyone under 18 to meet up with their online friends. Always be cautious and exercise internet safety!



Meeting your fandom friends

On why you should just make the plans to meet that one online friend you've been planning to meet for months.

One of the many saving graces of the internet is its ability to connect people, even when they're thousands of miles apart. Fandom is a special section of it, where like-minded people can bond over their shared interests and become genuine friends.

For many, the concept of meeting their online friends in person is a dream-like notion. Too many factors working against them – dropping anonymity, exchanging addresses, and actually making travel plans.

But for those who manage to pass those hurdles, it can be a really fun experience.

It can be quite intimidating to trust that the person you're attempting to meet is who they say they are. There needs to be absolute trust between the two parties, and some healthy caution is warranted, but it shouldn't hinder your excitement about meeting someone you've made a genuine connection with.

PLANNING ADVICE

- ◆ **Don't put all your faith in the transport system – always leave plenty of time for things to go wrong**
- ◆ **Travel insurance is highly encouraged**
- ◆ **Make sure your online friend is who they say they are – for example, arrange a video call before deciding to meet up in real life**

FROM EXPERIENCE

I asked my online friend Avramea01 – we’ll refer to her as Avra – about her own experience meeting online mutuals in real life. Avra met one of her online friends in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, travelling all the way to Spain for the meet-up. They were both fans of the same TV show.

“Organising it was a lot of stress on my part, since she lives in another country and I had to take the trip alone. It was during the COVID era too, so a lot of paperwork to deal with. We didn't really plan specific things to do, but we still found some ideas along the way,” Avra said.

Many online friendships never make it past tentative plans to meet in real life. Considering the additional stress of travel restrictions at the time, it’s all the more impressive that Avra and her friend managed to make it happen. I believe Avra’s story can act as inspiration for all those facing difficulties with meeting their *moots*.

One thing someone could be worried about when meeting their online friend might be a possible change in dynamics. For Avra, the time she spent with her friend actually made her understand her online behaviour better.

“We’re both workaholics and know that about each other. But I didn't really realise the amount of work done on her part until I met her. She had to do work late at night to compensate for the fact that she was hanging out with me.

“We communicated after the meeting about it. She learnt that I now felt bad to keep her away from the pile of work with the amount of conversations we had before, and now I understand better why there are some times when she can't answer for days.”

No one is exactly the same in person as they are online, usually because of the anonymity barrier, which allows us to perhaps act more like “ourselves” than we often would face-to-face. This might sound worrying to some, but as long as you remember not to force the conversation to work the same way offline as online, you’ll be just fine.

It might be a bit awkward at first. When chatting online, you can just send a gif to dispel any gaps in conversation. Face to face, you might need to work harder than that, but it’ll be worth it at the end of the day. Because now, you can drop the “online” and just call them your friend.



no one is exactly
the same in person
as they are online,
usually because of
the anonymity
barrier.



Minecraft: the language update

My journey through the MCYT fandom.

Minecraft. Even if you haven't played it yourself, you've probably heard of it. It's the best selling game with over 350 million copies sold (the only one to have crossed the 300 million mark!).

Even though it's an amazing game, there's no way it could have gained that kind of popularity relying solely on itself. There had to be more – an incentive for players to join, something to showcase the game to its fullest potential.

Dear reader, I welcome you to the wonderful world of Minecraft Youtubers (MCYT). They're exactly what it says on the tin – youtubers that post Minecraft content.

There are a lot of MCYT creators, but some of them achieved legend status. Aphmau with several incredibly popular role play series. CaptainSparklez with his song parodies, such as *Revenge* (the "Creeper? Aw man..." meme) or *Fallen Kingdom*. DanTDM, Yogscast, Ethoslab... These people have become celebrities in the Minecraft space.

Or so I'm told.



art by Tagzpite

my own legends

Most English-speaking Minecraft fans I've encountered have known about these people since their childhoods. I had been consuming Minecraft content since 2012 and not once had I heard of them.

I had my own legends.

"How so?" you might ask, or maybe not, but let's pretend you did.

See, back in 2012 my main language was Spanish, since I was born and raised in LATAM.

The two MCYT content creators I remember the best – as does most of the Spanish-speaking community – are Vegetta777 and Willyrex. These two were *the* Minecraft youtubers in 2013. They uploaded mainly modded Let's Play series. A lot of people credit these two with sparking the desire to play the game themselves. I know that's true for me and many of my friends.

ninos rata

This story is, however, not a straight line, dear reader. As time passed, Minecraft sank into obscurity. People that enjoyed the game, or had other nerdy interests, were labeled "weird" – or in Spanish, "niños rata" (rat kids).

As ashamed as I am to share this, I too jumped on the bandwagon and abandoned my love for the game, turning to the dark side.

Until the resurgence in 2019, when Pewdiepie, Philza and several other gamers jump-started Minecraft's popularity once again.

So, I came back. But I quickly realised the Spanish-speaking fandoms were going to take longer to rise to their former glory. And that posed a problem, because my English skills were mediocre at best. I could barely understand my beginner classes in school, so how was I supposed to understand these youtubers, speaking a mile a minute?

I almost gave up on it. Almost. My love for the game and those who played it kept me going. After a few months, I was practically fluent and could enjoy this new English-speaking world fully.



dream smp

The year is 2020, and a new SMP is rising to popularity at speeds never-before-seen. The Dream SMP. Safe to say I was intrigued – a role-play series that wasn't scripted? Sign me up!

Looking back, I have mixed feelings towards the fandom. While it was incredibly toxic and crazy at times, it still introduced me to friends I speak with to this day.

What I remember especially well is the technotwt (subtwt for fans of Technoblade) Squid Games. That's where I met ashnghosts, another competitor in the event. When I found out they were also from LATAM... to say I freaked out would be an understatement.

I hadn't realized it before, but I missed being able to speak with someone about my interests in Spanish. Someone with whom I could joke about our countries, who could understand the feeling of being in a foreign space.

But I still longed to see more.



smp

stands for Survival Multiplayer, a server where players collaborate, build and survive together in a shared world.

qsmp

And in 2023, that "more" came in the shape of a brand-new SMP, the QSMP, created by Quackity – Mexican content creator, formerly part of the DreamSMP. It was a way to connect content creators from different parts of the world and introduce groundbreaking tech, such as real-time in-game translating features.

It was a blast. I saw so many communities interacting with each other, sharing their inside jokes and learning about each other's cultures and languages. The QSMP even inspired people, including me, to begin learning new languages. All the while getting to watch my childhood heroes interacting with my current favorites.

It was a magical time that I wouldn't change for the world. The original QSMP server story arc concluded in May 2024, but the fandom is alive and well.



Fandom

DO YOU HAVE
A FANDOM
EXPERIENCE
YOU'D LIKE TO
WRITE ABOUT?
PITCH IT TO
US FOR OUR
NEXT ISSUE!

[click here](#)

ACROSS

- 2 When formatting this: Oh. Oh. – you'd put one of them in...
- 3 A fic in which you dive deep into a character's psyche is a character s...
- 4 M in MCD.
- 5 W in NSFW.
- 10 If there is a ..., AO3 will be seen.

DOWN

- 1 A form of hurt/comfort, but heavy on the hurt.
- 6 The ship between Jason Grace and a brick.
- 7 There was only one...
- 8 Oh no, I was to One Direction.
- 9 They sort tags on AO3. Tag...

? You can find clues for some of these [here](#) and [here](#)...



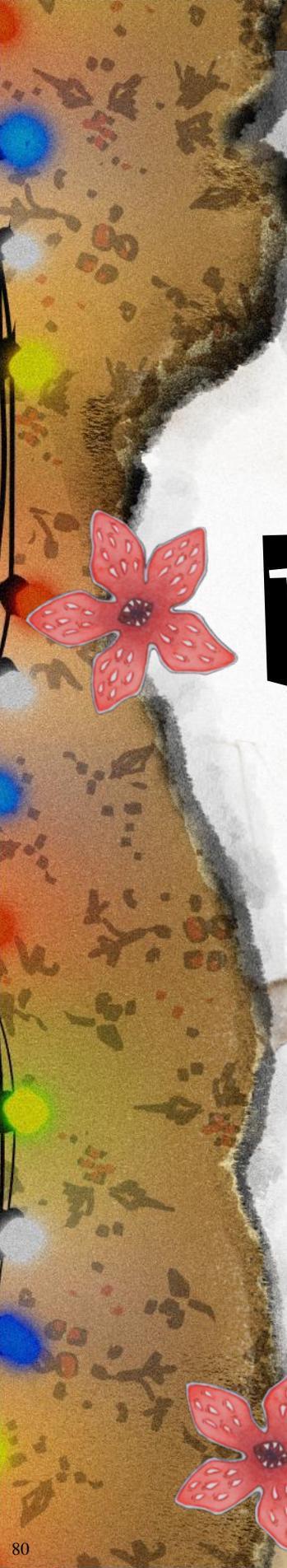
FILL IN THE BLANK #2
fan edition

After coming up with these words, head over to page 95 to fill in the blanks.

- | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 name of liquid | 6 household appliance | 11 character B |
| 2 number | 7 verb + ing | 12 name of TV show/film/book |
| 3 bigger number | 8 verb + ing | 13 character A from nr 12 |
| 4 celebratory word | 9 verb | 14 character B from nr 12 |
| 5 decade | 10 character A | 15 planet name |

words by Magda P

beyond
the



**UPSIDE
DOWN**

**Stranger Things has ended after almost 10 years.
To celebrate the end of an era, let's look back at
the fandom over the years – and glance ahead at
what might lie beyond the show itself.**

art by Tagzpite and DNA

Wayback

Stranger Things has grown from a sleeper hit into a fandom giant. Season one drew around 14 million viewers in its first month; season five volume one hit over 100 million views.

Fan activity exploded after season four. Nearly three quarters of all Stranger Things fics on AO3 were published after it aired, and Byler and Steddie took over timelines and Tumblr dashboards. The fandom lived loudly in the spaces between canon – fans latched onto small moments, spun alternative worlds, created memes, and developed elaborate theories.

All that to say, the Stranger Things fandom is hard to ignore. And now, it has reached the stage every fandom faces sooner or later: the end of an era.

STATS

- ~140,000 fics on **AO3**
- ~4,400 fics on **fanfiction.net**
- ~30,000 #strangerthings works on **Wattpad**
- Tumblr Fandometrics** most-reblogged show in 2022



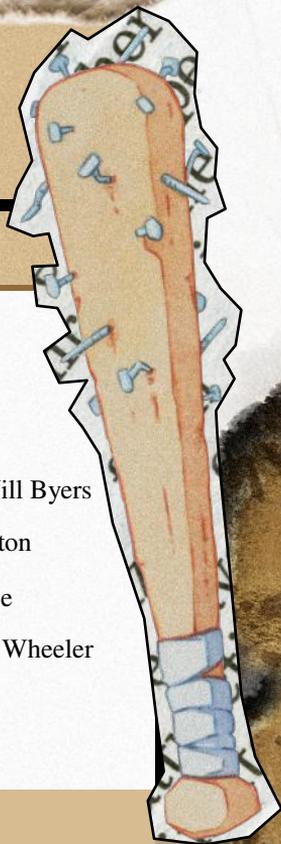
**A03
STATS**

SHIPS

TAGS

- 1 Steve/Eddie – Steddie
- 2 Will/Mike – Byler
- 3 Billie/Steve – Harringrove
- 4 Robin/Nancy – Ronance
- 5 Robin & Steve – Stobin
- 6 Max/Lucas – Lumax
- 7 Eleven/Mike – Mileven
- 8 Jonathan/Nancy – Jancy

- 1 Fluff
- 2 Angst
- 3 Hurt/comfort
- 4 Mike Wheeler Loves Will Byers
- 5 Bisexual Steve Harrington
- 6 AU – Canon Divergence
- 7 Will Byers Loves Mike Wheeler
- 8 Slow Burn



FORMATION

SEASON 1

FANFICTION

The participatory side of the fandom was still in its infancy, with only around 1,000 fics on AO3. Jonathan/Nancy (Jancy) and the poly Stoncy ship (Steve/Jonathan/Nancy) were the most popular. Nancy, Jonathan and Steve were often referred to as the "monster hunting trio," with many fans responding to the love triangle by shipping the three of them together.

TOP SHIP

MileVen

TOP FIC

Stoncy

MUSIC

Should i Stay or Should i go
by the cl@sh

NOTABLE MOMENTS

#justiceforbarb

Barb's death sparked the first major fan-driven campaign. Fans pushed for recognition online and in conventions, ensuring she wasn't just a plot device. This set a pattern in the fandom of refusing to let characters be simplified or forgotten.

SEASON 2

FANFICTION

The introduction of Billy Hargrove gave rise to Harringrove (Steve/Billie), the ship that would dominate the fandom until season four. The canon rivalry between the two carried an edge many fans read as homoerotic, and the enemies-to-lovers potential only added fuel to the fire. It was also what made it controversial – a lot of fans didn't like Steve shipped with a canonically abusive character.

Season two was also the beginning of Steve and Dustin's friendship, and when the now-iconic "Steve the Babysitter" trope was born.

TOP SHIP AND FIC

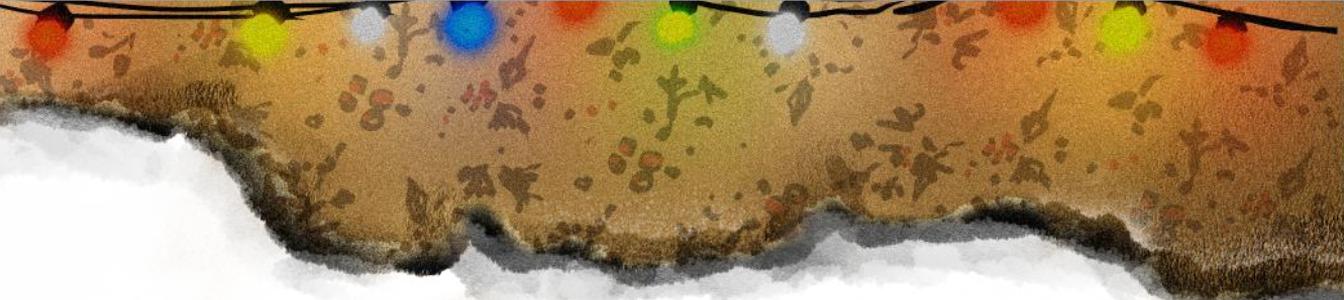
harringrove

MEMES

y-your mom
you are like papa!

MUSIC

eVery breath you
take by the Police



FANFICTION



SEASON 3

Season three cemented Steve Harrington as a fan-favourite, and Harringrove remained the dominant ship.

The introduction of Robin Buckley – and her coming out – marked the first explicitly queer main character in the show. The Steve Harrington & Robin Buckley friendship tag quickly gained popularity.

Where earlier Harringrove fics often had Steve navigating his queerness alone, Robin became a constant presence, holding his hand, calling him stupid, and teaching him the terminology. This dynamic later carried into Steddie (Steve/Eddie) fanfiction.



15/07/16

27/10/17

4/07/19

27/05/22



SEASON 1

SEASON 2

SEASON 3

TOP A03 TAGS EACH SEASON

- 1 Fluff
 - 2 Angst
 - 3 Friendship
 - 4 Hurt/comfort
 - 5 Romance
 - 6 Post Season 1
 - 7 Polyamory
- 

- 1 Fluff
 - 2 Angst
 - 3 Hurt/comfort
 - 4 Post Season 2
 - 5 Romance
 - 6 Implied/Referenced Child Abuse
 - 7 Smut
- 

- 1 Fluff
 - 2 Angst
 - 3 Hurt/comfort
 - 4 Post Season 3
 - 5 Implied/Referenced Child Abuse
 - 6 AU - Modern Setting
 - 7 Bisexual Steve Harrington
- 

EXPLOSION

SEASON 4

FANFICTION



Season four was when the fandom truly exploded. Eddie Munson's introduction drove the new ship, Steddie (Steve/Eddie), to massive popularity, right alongside Byler (Mike/Will) and Ronance (Robin/Nancy).

In countless fics, Steve and Eddie were dubbed Dustin's "dads." Popular fanfiction tropes included Eddie showing up at Family Video to "bother" Steve, them smoking weed together, or helping Mike and Will figure out their queerness. In nearly every fic, someone would make fun of Steve's "six little nuggets" speech.

The fandom largely chose to ignore Eddie's death, though new tropes emerged in response. One popular theory was "vampire Eddie," linked to D&D lore. Time loop fics were also common, often centring on Steve repeatedly trying to save Eddie from dying.

At the same time, Byler got more popular, fuelled by the confirmation of Will's queerness. The van scene, in which Will claims the painting he made for Mike was commissioned by Eleven, sparked what fans dubbed "paintingate." This moment inspired a wave of fics exploring how Mike might discover the truth.

Meanwhile, Steve, Eddie, Robin, and Nancy were affectionately nicknamed "the fruity four," with their time in the Upside Down jokingly framed as a pride parade or a double date.



NOTABLE MOMENTS

the eddie effect

In the summer of 2022, Eddie was everywhere – especially on TikTok. People were lip-syncing his lines, cosplaying him, writing songs inspired by him... The general public grew tired of seeing him everywhere rather quickly. Claims that "new fans are ruining Stranger Things" started to circulate, and age-old fandom practices were suddenly being judged. This was perhaps the most visible participatory fandom had been to a wider audience in a long time, and the reaction was not always a positive one.



AFTERMATH

FANFICTION

If season four belonged to Steddie, season five belonged to Byler. Canon or not, fanfiction writers had already made their decision.

Mike was widely headcannoned as gay, wrestling with internalised homophobia. Will canonically had feelings for Mike. Fans dissected subtext frame by frame, building elaborate cases for Mike’s queerness and imagining every possible version of a mutual confession.

After volume one, the fandom jumped onto a trope known as “mikewhatthefuckdidyoudogate” or “MWDFDYDG.” It goes like this: in season four, Will is sobbing about his feelings for Mike in the back of the van; in season five, after the 18-month time jump, he’s interrogating Robin about how to tell if someone wants to date you. Naturally, fans asked the obvious question: Mike, what the fuck did you do? The resulting fics offered every imaginable answer, with Mike often jokingly dubbed “Mike Queerler.”

Coming-out rewrites and post-finale fantasies followed: Will and Mike in college, reuniting at Lucas and Max’s wedding, finding each other in every universe available. Explorations of the group grieving El or subsequently fics imagining how she could’ve survived were also popular.



SEASON 5

NOTABLE MOMENTS

conformity gate

Conformity Gate is a fan theory about a secret final episode. The basic idea behind the theory is: the official finale is not the real ending, but an illusion created by Vecna.

Supporters believed that a hidden ninth episode would be released (commonly speculated on January 7, 2026), and this episode would reveal the “true” ending.

The theories and evidence were so elaborate even the most sceptical admitted there might be something to them. Of course, there wasn’t – but, as they say, maybe “conformity gate” was the friends we made along the way.



27/05/2022

26/11/2025

6/03/2026



~90,000 WORKS



~33,000 WORKS



SEASON 4

SEASON 5

TOP A03 TAGS EACH SEASON

- 1 Fluff
- 2 Angst
- 3 Bisexual Steve Harrington
- 4 Hurt/comfort
- 5 AU – Canon Divergence
- 6 Gay Eddie Munson
- 7 Eddie Munson Lives



- 1 Mike Wheeler Loves Will Byers
- 2 Will Byers Loves Mike Wheeler
- 3 Angst
- 4 Fluff
- 5 Mike Wheeler Is Bad At Feelings
- 6 Slow Burn
- 7 Hurt/comfort



THE RIGHTSIDE UP

Ultimately, the Stranger Things fandom comes down to one thing: a show about nerds and outcasts finding each other, choosing each other, and coming back again and again. They were not only fighting monsters or defying stereotypes, but building a family in the process. Whether the finale stuck the landing will always be up for debate, but what cannot be argued is that the show grew far beyond what it was ever meant to be.

Fans wrote and theorised, and somewhere along the way they turned the story into something else, something bigger and messier and more personal than the source material could contain. This is a testament to the power of fandom.

If we metaphorically think of a piece of media as a house, then most source material never goes past the corridor, often offering only a glimpse of what's inside. But fandoms open the door, sit down at the table with the characters they love, and explore them in ways the original creators never really intended. For many, the finale felt like a door slammed shut.

The gift of fandom is that we can open it again. We can sit back down at the table and keep going, for as long as we care to. The door is always open, at least three inches.

The floor is ours. Let's make it count.

WORD SEARCH

The words can be found down, across, and diagonal, spelled from left to right and backwards.

L	S	E	C	G	O	E	A	S	V	S	U	C	E
S	A	X	A	M	U	L	I	T	G	V	P	A	E
U	S	S	O	R	C	E	R	E	R	O	S	L	K
Z	N	C	S	O	G	G	E	D	N	A	I	I	E
I	R	O	N	A	N	C	E	D	R	N	D	F	B
E	E	Y	N	E	R	C	E	I	C	C	E	O	Y
E	K	T	P	N	O	E	E	E	D	E	D	R	L
I	A	L	J	A	N	C	Y	R	S	V	O	N	E
P	D	E	M	O	D	O	G	E	E	D	W	I	R
D	E	M	O	G	O	R	G	O	N	B	N	A	M
M	I	L	E	V	E	N	R	J	E	D	R	A	E
O	D	W	O	T	A	B	O	M	E	D	R	O	X
G	C	S	C	O	O	P	S	T	R	O	O	P	O
S	L	B	E	L	G	E	H	A	W	K	I	N	S

SCOOPS TROOP

SORCERER

SUZIE

VECNA

DEMOGORGON

LUMAX

CEREBRO

ROMANCE

JANCY

BYLER

CALIFORNIA

STEDDIE

UPSIDE DOWN

HAWKINS

DEMOBAT

EGGOS

DEMODOG

MILEVEN



words by Magda P

photography courtesy of DNA

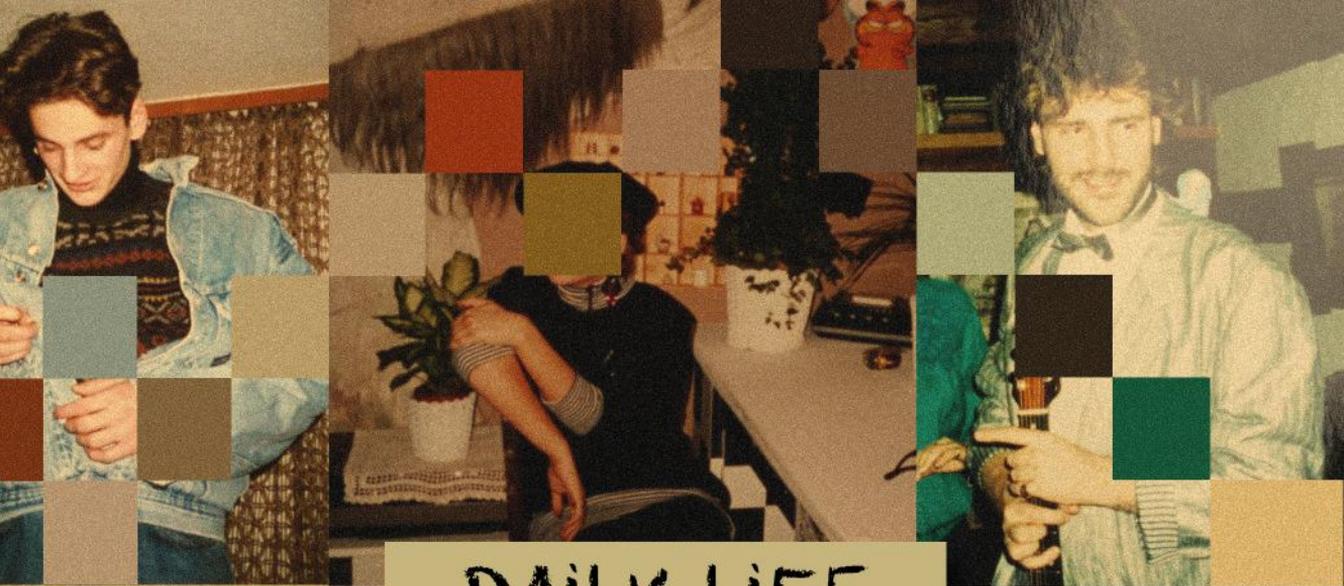
SO, YOU'RE WRITING... FIC SET IN THE 80S

Your cheat sheet of all the important things to know when writing a fic set in the 1980s.

When writing a fanfic set in any past decade, the acceptable level of accuracy is usually “just enough to go under the radar.” Anything above that is your own choice (looking at you, folks who look up specific brands of cookers), and anything below that will probably be jarring to readers looking for some semblance of realism. Some fic readers want the exact opposite – perhaps this is simply a case of knowing who you’re writing for, and which rules you can break.

(Spoiler alert – you can break all of the rules. There are no rules to fic writing.)

this guide is not meant to be exhaustive and focuses primarily on the realities of teenagers/young adults rather than older characters.



DAILY LIFE

Childhood in the '80s ran on trust and a shocking lack of supervision by today's standards. Parents often had only a vague idea of what their kids were doing. You left the house after breakfast, returned only when the streetlights flickered on, and no one tracked your location. Watches were optional, helmets almost unheard of, and walking home alone after school was the norm.

Playgrounds were borderline death traps – metal slides that burned in summer, climbing frames so tall you risked breaking your bones, and no soft rubber flooring to save you from bruises. If you wanted to see a friend, all you had to do was turn up at their house and hope **they** were home.

Even entertainment had strict borders – cartoons played in the morning, then television switched to adult programming for the rest of the day. Before VHS became common, films were either a trip to the cinema or a once-a-year Sunday movie on TV. And when MTV launched in 1981, music videos became cultural events in their own right.

Research meant libraries and heavy encyclopedias. Encyclopedia Britannica sets sat proudly on shelves, and school projects required actual trips outside.

Many children in the '70s and '80s were referred to as “**latchkey kids**” – children who came home from school to an empty house or were often left unsupervised, usually due to their parents being at work. According to a 2004 marketing study, Gen X is one of the “least-parented, least-nurtured generations in U.S. history.” This was also true outside the U.S., particularly in the UK and parts of Europe. Several factors played a role in this phenomenon: rising divorce rates, increased female participation in the workforce, and a scarcity of childcare options. Interestingly, the higher educated the parents, the more likely the children were to be latchkey kids.

So, is it realistic for your underage character to be running around unsupervised? Yes. Is it realistic for them to be doing so after dark? Not as much, unless their parents simply don't care.



DRINKING GAMES

Some well-known drinking games from the 80s include:

- ★ **QUARTERS**
- ★ **BEER PONG**
- ★ **SPIN THE BOTTLE**
- ★ **DRINKING WHENEVER A SPECIFIC WORD OR EVENT OCCURS IN A FILM**
- ★ **FLIP CUP**

SKIPPING SCHOOL

The situation differed from country to country and even from school to school, but skipping school was often easier than it is today. Without electronic attendance tracking systems, you could forge your parents' signature and intercept the report card in the post later on, and as long as you didn't do it too often, no one would notice.

HELLO, ANYONE HOME?

Homes in the 1980s were noisier and less private. With one landline phone, usually in the hallway or kitchen, every call was a performance for the whole family. This is a real goldmine for both miscommunication trope lovers and characters eavesdropping on each other.

And then there were letters. Writing letters wasn't just romantic, it was necessary and often the only way to communicate. Delivery times were much slower than they are today, especially for international post, which is worth keeping in mind when plotting timelines.

PHONES IN THE 1980S

- ★ **Landlines** were standard, often with one corded phone per household
- ★ **Cordless phones** arrived in the early 80s and were common by the late decade, but range was short and sound crackly
- ★ **Answering machines** ruled, with messages saved on cassette tapes you'd play back and erase
- ★ **Voicemail** wasn't common in homes
- ★ Mobile phones were rare, most teens relied on landlines and payphones



LANGUAGE

Some terms are so ingrained in everyday speech that we forget how recent their current usage is. A character in the '80s would not use the following terms in the way we do today:

★ GHOSTING

late 2000s-early 2010s

An '80s character wouldn't say they were "ghosted" – this term gained popularity alongside online dating and texting culture.

★ TRAUMATIC (EMOTIONALLY)

1990s in clinical context, mainstream use in 2010s

In the past, the term "trauma" meant physical injury or a medical condition, but today it's widely used to describe emotional distress, often in an informal way.

★ RED FLAG

late 2010s

Although the term "red flag" has long existed as a literal warning sign, its use as shorthand for problematic behaviour in relationships is very recent and shaped by social media and online dating.

★ TOXIC

late 2000s-2010s

"Toxic" would've been understood literally, not as a way to describe unhealthy or harmful behaviour. The phrase "toxic masculinity" was coined in the 1980s, but its use became more common in the 2010s.

★ TRIGGERED

as mainstream slang in mid-2010s

"Triggered" has its roots in psychology, especially in relation to PTSD, but entered everyday language much later. In the '80s, a character wouldn't casually describe an emotional reaction as being "triggered."

★ GASLIGHTING

2010s

The term "gaslighting" originates from the 1938 British play *Gas Light* by Patrick Hamilton, later adapted into a film in 1944, but it wasn't commonly used as a verb to describe emotional manipulation until the 2010s, when it spread online.

SLANG

'80s dialogue had its own flavour as well – used sparingly, instead of including the entire dictionary in a single paragraph, should do the trick. Think about how often we use modern slang words on a daily basis. They're not everywhere, just in the right places.

- ★ **AIRHEAD** not very smart
- ★ **BITCHIN'** really good
- ★ **LIKE, TOTALLY** enthusiastic agreement
- ★ **BUGGIN' OUT** acting crazy
- ★ **TRIPPIN'** overreacting
- ★ **DON'T HAVE A COW** calm down
- ★ **EAT MY SHORTS** rebellious insult
- ★ **FRESH/FUNKY FRESH** cool
- ★ **GAG ME WITH A SPOON** disgust
- ★ **GRODY** gross
- ★ **VEG OUT** relax, do nothing
- ★ **HOME SLICE** close friend
- ★ **HELLA** very
- ★ **KICK ROCKS** go away
- ★ **BOGUS** unfair or fake
- ★ **MAJOR DRAG** boring
- ★ **PSYCH!** just kidding
- ★ **RIGHT ON** approval
- ★ **SICK** excellent
- ★ **TAKE A CHILL PILL** relax
- ★ **COWABUNGA** excitement
- ★ **WHAT'S YOUR DAMAGE**
what's your problem
- ★ **WICKED** really good
- ★ **GNARLY** cool, awesome

SOCIAL NORMS

Politically, conservatism dominated much of the Western world throughout the 1980s. In the US, social programs lost funding as fears about crime and moral decline grew. Media coverage often fuelled panic, particularly around child abuse, which was treated as a national emergency.

The AIDS crisis shaped how people viewed the LGBTQ+ community, often based on cruel misinformation. Many people were genuinely afraid to touch their

gay friends or family members. Queer communities organised, protested and cared for one another, but mainstream understanding was far behind.

Conversations about mental health were only beginning to enter public awareness. Therapy was not as common, and language around emotional wellbeing was limited. Prozac wouldn't be introduced until 1988, and even then, medication and mental health care remained stigmatised.

IMPORTANT EVENTS

january 1981

Republican Ronald Reagan is sworn in as the 40th president of the US.

july 29th 1981

Royal Wedding – Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, marries Diana Spencer.

august 1st 1981

MTV debuts with the broadcast of “Video Killed the Radio Star” by the Buggles.

September 25th 1981

Sandra Day O’Connor becomes the first woman on the US Supreme Court

September 24th 1982

The CDC recognizes AIDS as a new disease.

july 13th 1985

The benefit concert Live Aid is held in London and Philadelphia, raising millions of dollars for famine relief in Ethiopia.

april 25th-26th 1986

Chernobyl disaster, worst nuclear reactor accident in history.

1989

Scientists begin work on the World Wide Web.

november 9th 1989

The Berlin Wall, a long-time symbol of the Cold War, falls.

THE TERM LGBT ITSELF
WASN'T USED UNTIL
AROUND 1988, WITH THE
Q BEING ADDED IN THE
1990S WHEN THE WORD
QUEER WAS RECLAIMED
FROM ITS EARLIER
DEROGATORY USE.

fan/fun

FILL IN
THE BLANK
fan edition

#1

Yesterday, I stayed up until 1 reading fanfiction. It was a 2 fanfic, with 3 and 4 in an alternate universe where they 5 6. They were, very randomly, friends with 7, and would drink 8 with them every 9. It was so good, I couldn't stop reading it. My roommate found me asleep on the 10 at 11, the fic still open on my phone.

The title of the fic was 12 *the* 13 14, *I love it*. I had some explaining to do to make sure my roommate didn't think I was crazy.

I'm going to make sure to leave the author a very 15 comment so they know I loved this fic as much as I love 16.

#2

As a fanfic writer, I look up crazy things on the internet sometimes. For example, the other day I asked my search engine, how much 1 can a human realistically consume? Turns out, it's 2 litres. Huh. So, I made my favourite character consume 3 litres of it. 4!

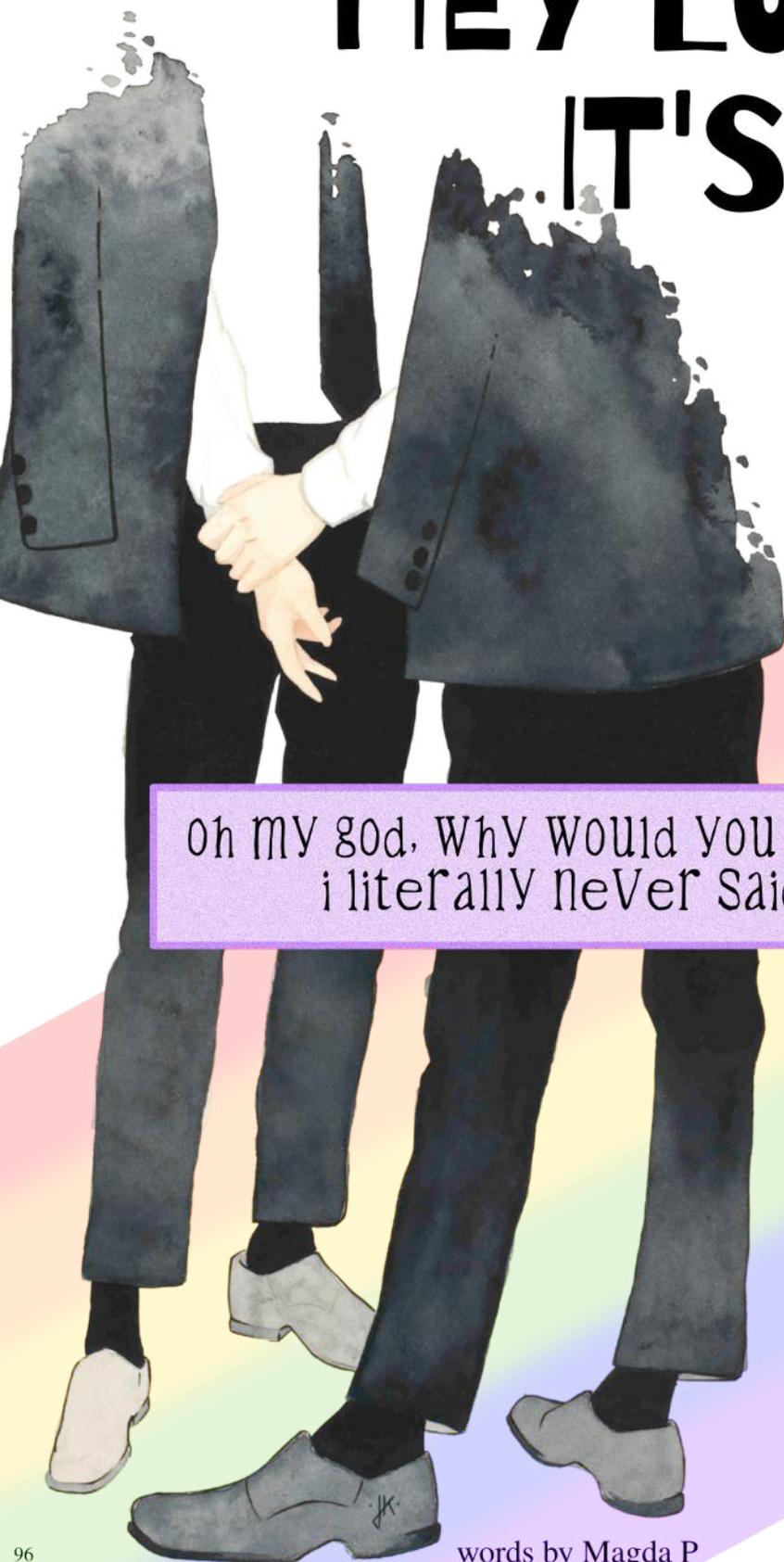
When I was writing a fic set in the 5, I had to figure out when the 6 was invented. Unfortunately, my characters couldn't use it, so they ended up 7 instead.

One evening, I was 8 in the library with my roommate and got an idea for a fic. Without thinking, I looked up *Can you die if you* 9 *too much?* right in front of them. They didn't know about my secret love for writing 10 going through unimaginable pain and then being saved and comforted by 11, so I had some explaining to do.

My roommate loved the idea and now we're writing a 12 fanfic together, where 13 and 14 are in love and live on 15. They're also making some **fanart** to go with it!

Mission success.

HEY LOOK, IT'S GAY!!



oh my god, Why would you think it's gay?
i literally never said that...



or: queerbaiting

Like many terms shaped by social media, “queerbaiting” has shifted, stretched, and blurred after being thrown around one too many times. These days, it can feel like every piece of media is accused of queerbaiting at some point in its lifespan. Underneath these accusations is usually fear: fear of being promised meaningful representation and then having it yanked away.

In the sample issue of FANMADE, we explored queer readings – how audiences find queerness in texts regardless of what the author meant. Many of you asked for what feels like the other side of that coin – a clearer look at queerbaiting.

In simple terms, queerbaiting is a term used to describe creative and marketing practices that hint at, but do not depict, same-sex romance or other LGBT representation. Simple enough, right? Well.

Thanks to the term’s overuse, people often shout “queerbait” when they’re actually responding to queer subtext, or a resonance shaped by their own social position. We’re not here to scold anyone for interpreting a story through their lived experience, but to untangle the term itself.

Let’s be clear from the start; queerbaiting is not about what fans see in a text, but rather about how creators and studios exploit those readings without

committing to representation. In fandom terms: Dean and Castiel from *Supernatural* having a relationship widely interpreted as homoerotic isn’t queerbaiting on its own. The network leaning into that reading, and never actually making it mean anything, is.

The academic world has been wrestling with queerbaiting for over a decade, and one thing stands out across the research: ambiguity. Queerbaiting itself operates on ambiguity, but it goes deeper than that. Not only is it difficult to define what queerbaiting is, it’s equally difficult to determine what *counts* as bait. What does a text have to do (or fail to do) for the accusation to stick? What most scholars do agree on is that the word almost always carries a negative charge.

That charge comes from history. The word “baiting” is not neutral. Historically, “queerbaiting” used to describe a very real tactic of entrapment. Queer people were literally baited, lured into compromising situations, blackmailed, arrested, or outed.

Modern media discourse obviously isn’t equating television producers with 19th-century blackmailers, but the word carries that weight. It describes a dynamic where queer audiences are tempted with something they want: recognition, community, representation, only to be punished or humiliated when they reach for it. Which is why people react so strongly.

“ queer audiences have
historically trained themselves to
recognise subtle signals.

queerbaiting VS queer reading



Queerbaiting is not the same as queer reading. If audiences treat texts as mirrors rather than windows, then not every homoerotic moment, emotionally intense friendship, or same-sex bond qualifies as bait.

Queer readings emerge from lived experience. Queer audiences have historically trained themselves to recognise subtle signals like glances, jokes, framing, or lingering shots, because explicit representation was denied to them.

The problem is that sometimes that skill can tip into confirmation bias. Once you **want something to be queer**, you're more likely to find evidence that it is. And none of that automatically equals queerbaiting.

For queerbaiting to exist, there needs to be a form of deliberate dangling – a recognition of a queer interpretation, followed by a choice to tease it for attention rather than develop it for the story's sake. It's exploiting audiences' dedication and free labour – the fanfiction, edits, discussions, and online engagement that quietly fuel a text's commercial success.

Who holds the mic



This is where the distinction between text and paratext becomes important. If queer subtext lives inside the story itself, queerbaiting usually lives everywhere around it.

Paratext includes interviews, promos, trailers, convention panels, gag reels, social media posts – all the material that frames how we're encouraged to read a story. And you might reasonably ask: didn't we establish that the author is dead? That meaning belongs to the audience, not the creator?

Paratext matters not because the author's meaning is absolute, but because of the creator's position in relation to the text. They hold the mic. They have the power to steer audiences toward certain interpretations even if they never intend to commit to them. No matter how strongly we argue for the legitimacy of fan readings, the author still looms over the text, holding both the pen and the microphone. That power means queerbaiting can occur even if we also agree that a single, "true" meaning of a story doesn't exist.

The author can hand the fan the mic for a moment, then take it back the second it stops being convenient.



follow the money

Isn't it always about the money?

Queer-coding predates queerbaiting by decades. It was everywhere at a time when overt queer representation was banned by production codes. If audiences know something can't be shown on screen, creators can't bait them with the possibility of it. That early queer-coding belonged to a completely different media landscape.

Today, explicit queer representation is possible, and sometimes even handled well. So the question becomes: if you can do it, why tease it and never follow through?

It's so simple it's actually laughable, as it usually is when money is involved. Canonising a queer couple often risks losing conservative viewers, but avoiding queer representation altogether risks losing queer audiences. The financially optimal choice is to commit to neither.

Straightness is usually exemplified for a surface-level audience, while queerness is left ambiguous for the portion of the audience used to looking for clues. Maybe it's there, maybe it isn't – keep watching to find out.

This model of appealing to everyone is a business strategy designed to optimise viewership, nothing more and nothing less sinister than that.



What counts as bait?

Queerbaiting very rarely hinges on a single scene or line – it usually accumulates through patterns, especially in paratext, which is why serial television lends itself so well to the phenomenon.

Promotional interviews where actors tease chemistry between two same-sex characters who will never get together. Trailers edited to foreground romantic tension the text itself doesn't acknowledge. “Wink wink” behind the scenes content paired with loudly insisting that the characters are straight. On the other side of the coin, executives shutting down questions about representation without actually answering them or being purposefully cryptic.

Scholars note that paratexts are messy and contradictory, produced by writers, actors, marketers, and publicists alike. This is where we run into the same problem as with trying to find a “true” meaning of a text produced by multiple authors. One might ask – how are the creators, or studios, supposed to control it all? Who is responsible?

Responsibility ultimately sits with those who control the resources and the messaging. Studios and executives may not be able to manage every paratextual signal, but they do set the tone for how potential queerness is discussed.

” this model of appealing to everyone is a business strategy designed to optimise viewership, nothing more and nothing less sinister than that.

Creators often claim they avoid fan discourse to protect the integrity of the story, dismissing it as “noise.” And sometimes that’s fair – not every demand deserves narrative control. But treating all audience response as interference conveniently ignores the fact that some of that discourse is pointing to patterns rather than plot wishes.

The challenge isn’t listening to everyone. It’s developing the literacy to distinguish between empty shouting and grounded critique. You might say that sounds like a lot of work. Well, as they say: with great power comes great responsibility.

the demand

The truth is, queer audiences are notoriously the ones participating in transformative fandom through fanfiction, fan edits, and more. We know free fan labour often drives media to more popularity than official marketing does. Open the comment section of a popular fan edit and you’ll see rows of comments declaring “I’m going to go watch [blank] now.”

When those audiences are consistently mobilised to generate hype, engagement and cultural relevance, it becomes disingenuous to dismiss their critiques as unserious, accidental, or “just wanting to see two boys kiss.”

At the end of the day, the demand isn’t for every subtextual clue audiences find in the source material to become “canon” or “a thing.” It’s for creators and studios to stop profiting from the suggestion of queerness while denying its presence the moment they are being held accountable. It’s for them to realise that if they want to benefit from the power of transformative fandom, they need to listen to fans too, and be clear about their intentions.

Queer audiences are often mocked with the statement that they need to develop “media literacy” if they think they’re seeing queerness where it doesn’t exist. I’d like to flip that on its head and suggest that maybe it’s the creators and studios that need to develop “media literacy.” We’ve seen enough instances of queerbaiting in modern media that avoiding these mistakes should be easy. And yet...

Well, maybe this is all just wishful thinking until the people with the mic start seeing the “mistakes” not as money makers, but as something worth fixing.

letter jumble

Can you guess the ship names of fictional couples often cited as examples of queerbaiting by rearranging the letters?

(We're not arguing whether these are or aren't queerbaiting – just stating that they are often considered so by fans.)

1 **QWANSEENU**

2 **SEOUCPRRP**

3 **CLKOHJNO**

4 **SILETED**

5 **UTMERRH**

6 **EKLNAC**

7 **LRYBE**

8 **KESTRE**



Answers on page 133.

words by Hunter

fanfic rules

OR A LACK THEREOF

Fanfiction can be classified as a genre in and of itself, but unlike other literary genres, it follows exactly zero rules and conventions.

While many published authors got their start in fanfiction (and many popular novels got their start *as* fanfiction), the practice of writing it is wildly different to that of writing an original work. Most of these differences come down to ones of restriction and boundaries. Specifically: fanfiction has none of either. Fanfiction is open in all ways, from the accessibility of who gets to write fic (anyone) to the line drawn between reader and writer. (Line? What line?)

Fanfiction operates under the assumption that its audience has base knowledge about the source material. A lot of narrative structure rules simply don't apply because the readers are already familiar with the characters or the setting. Tropes like PWP (porn with/without plot) and hurt/no comfort can forego character development and sometimes even plot (two things usually considered essential to storytelling). No exposition is needed to endear us to the people we are reading about – an average reader will have come across the fanfic because of their love and previous knowledge of the character.

In “What Is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things About It??” Bronwen Thomas describes fanfiction authors as transgressive, disdainful of convention, and simultaneously frustrated and fascinated by the source materials. This disdain for convention is woven into the very fabric of fanfiction as a medium. Novels and films are bound by these conventions, and so there are things they simply don't have the time or means to address. These holes pave the way for fanfiction. Thomas describes the drive to write fanfiction as coming from fans who “want ‘more of’ and ‘more from’ the fictional worlds they endlessly revisit.” A fan's admiration of the source text combined with a sense of dissatisfaction for the way it was handled under the bounds of a traditional narrative creates the need for fanfiction.

Fanfiction, at its most basic, is a written work created by a fan of a pre-existing text on which the work is based. Beyond that, however, fanfiction has no rules. In traditionally published writing, there are guidelines that more distinctly identify

mediums. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a novel is “an invented prose narrative that is usually long and complex and deals especially with human experience through a usually connected sequence of events.” It can’t be short, or it’s defined as a novella or a short story. Fanfiction, on the other hand, can be any length from ten to ten million words and its classification as fanfiction does not change. A novel must be prose, not poetry. Fanfiction is often prose, but it can also be poetry, and even spoken word, known as podfics – audible stories posted to fanfiction forums. Novels also usually include a “connected sequence of events.” Some fanfictions are made up of unrelated shorts, or “one-shots”, connected only by the fandom, and sometimes not even that. The fanfiction equivalent of a short story collection is still just called fanfiction. Overall, fanfiction has one rule for classification: it must be written by a fan of a pre-existing source text.

While fanfiction is written by admirers of a source material, it’s in no way bound by the laws of canon. Tags like OOC (out of character) and AU (alternate universe) indicate a disregard for canon sometimes even adopted by other fic readers and writers to make way for fanon, which “is used to refer to the process whereby over time certain plot or character elements become established within the fan community – even when those elements never appeared in the source text, or radically depart from it.”

The Marauders fandom is a textbook example of fanfiction’s disregard of canon. The Marauders fandom is an offshoot of the Harry Potter fandom that focuses on characters the original books paid little to no attention to. One of, if not the biggest ship in the fandom, is between two male characters

(Remus Lupin and Sirius Black) despite the original author insisting on the characters being straight. Fanfiction does not even subscribe to the rules set out by the creator of the work to which they refer. It’s as transgressive as it’s reverent of the original work.

The transgressive nature of fanfiction comes from the ways in which it often deals with the “what-ifs” of writing. It expands on works deemed finished by the author, challenging finality and presenting storytelling as an ongoing and collaborative endeavor. A story, in fandom, is something to be worked towards, rather than something that can or should be “finished.” This perpetuity comes from the blurred lines between reader and writer. Both in the sense that readers of source text become writers of fanfiction, and that the lines of communication between fanfiction readers and writers are more open. Readers of fanfiction have a direct link to the authors of their favorite fics through comment sections. As a fic writer myself, I’ve taken inspiration from my comment section before. Someone’s suggestion turned into a new chapter I hadn’t planned on writing. Some fics derive from other fan works, like a lot of the Marauders fandom being built around characterisations from popular stories like All The Young Dudes more than Harry Potter itself.

Ultimately, fan culture is one based on openness, and fanfiction has no rules. Fic almost always comes from a place of dissatisfaction with a beloved source text – so **why would a fic author want to follow something as fickle as narrative conventions of traditional writing?**



QUIZ TIME

WHAT'S YOUR AO3 TAG?

1 Where is your favorite place to read fanfiction?

- A In bed
- B Next to a box of tissues
- C On the bus/train/somewhere public
- D On the toilet
- E Other

2 What is the biggest indicator that a fic is going to hit different?

- A The title is a song lyric
- B Ao3 curse hit the author hard
- C “___ fell first, ___ fell harder”
- D English isn't the author's first language
- E Other

3 How do you like your canon?

- A Followed as closely as possible (with some exceptions)
- B Tossed out. Who cares?
- C Gently used
- D Shot in the back of a cab Curtis Sliwa style
- E Other

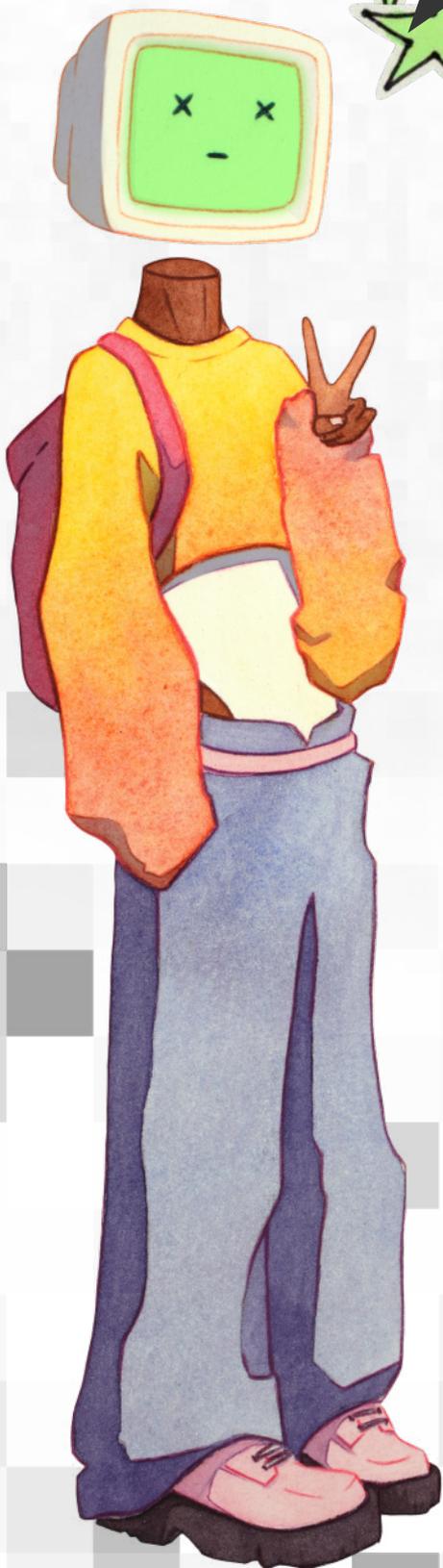


LAWS FOR LAWLESS WRITING

AI use is changing the landscape of fanfiction spaces, but should – and can – something be done in a space largely defined by no rules and guidelines?

words by Moreci

art by DNA



Archive of Our Own hosts over ten million registered users and seventeen million fan-written stories. A place for authors of all ages, interests, and skill levels to post work – engaging in writing under the safety net of informality and anonymity. As creative industries remain difficult to breach, spaces like this seem vital for practice and expression. This informality/anonymity may be key, however.

Fanwork is authored under far different conditions than other writing forms. Whether writing for school or for publication, many steps of revision and approval exist in the space between unofficial and official authorship. In fandom spaces, these steps are non-existent. Open AO3 and you will encounter this quickly. An author could post the absent scrawl of a grocery list and then upload a book-length narrative worthy of major publishing houses in the same breath. Yet, the absent scrawl might get equal engagement. Quality aside, these fandom spaces allow a reader to find, or a writer to publish, otherwise taboo, counter-culture, or niche content without censorship. An argument of these *specific* ethics is for another time... though the ethos that upholds this lack of censor is undoubtedly prevalent in the discussion of AI use.

We *know* AI is being used to write fanfiction, the question is: what should be done to combat non-human authorship? From form to content, the fanfiction environment is essentially, *nearly*, lawless. What does it mean, then, to want to implement new parameters for creative work?



GUIDELINES VARY

Whether you like Artificial Intelligence (culturally referred to as the company names of popular Language Learning Models such as ChatGPT) or not, “AI” has been integrated into our lives to a point that even those opposed to it cannot conduct simple Google searches without being fed an “AI Overview.” Arguably, complete avoidance is near impossible, yet spaces exist where its use is restricted. Professionally/academically, AI policy varies institution to institution. Publishing companies/journals and papers may allow AI use only with official disclosures, prohibit it entirely or allow all work – fully generated by a human or non-human alike without question.

Academically, it's more of the same. Many schools *allow* zero tolerance policies on a professor-by-professor basis but do not enforce rules school wide. **See** the prestigious Duke University's “Artificial Intelligence Policies: Guidelines and Considerations” as an example of this. We have not come to any universal agreement that use of AI – unlike say, plagiarism, is *bad* in writing settings.





IS IT FANWORK?

But this is about fanfiction, not academic or professional work. It's important to understand that we're talking about derivative works of copyrighted materials. Copyright law is complex, and varies country to country, but put simply: fanworks are protected under "fair use" laws, which requires them to remain non-commercial. It's therefore illegal to profit from fanfiction writing. Academically, we understand that the vast majority of these works are not part of one's schooling or in conversation with scholarship. So fanwork is recreation. Recreationally, no editor, publisher, or official policy is stopping individuals from, essentially, anything. What, then, is stopping the hobby-writer from utilizing generative software – in full or in part, to inform or produce work? Environmental concerns aside, fanfiction feels like a safe space for this tool to be used.

In 2023, The Organization for Transformative Works, the parent organisation of AO3, announced "there is nothing in our Terms of Service that prohibits fanworks that are fully or partly generated with AI tools from being posted [...] if they otherwise qualify as fanworks." This remains their stance. OTW policies aim to protect author work. This announcement, however, points to a protection of work that may be, in fact, non-human. Is the non-human capable of authorship? This is not something that, federally, The United States disagrees with. AI generated writing is not accepted or protected by US copyright.

Under the OTW statement, 860 comments sit debating the message. One user writes, "AI-generated works should not count as stories by fan-writers, which is what this site is for. Using AI does not make a person a writer, but a programmer. It's like commissioning a book and then taking credit for the writer's work. Except AI is not even a person."

The Fair Use logic also argues for the "transformative nature" of fanfiction, where these writings add "new expression and value to the existing work." This diction protects work that reshapes or adds to existing culture. Perhaps this user has identified an incoming legal conundrum: is non-human fanwork protected by these laws? *Legally*, should it be defined as fanfiction at all?

Few users agree with this stance of a zero AI policy. Many commenters argue that "Fanworks are fanworks, regardless of the technology used." Though, a majority take time to also suggest that while AI work should be allowed, it "should be tagged" as such. Nearly no comments proposing this tagging specify what level of AI use should warrant the tag.



**FROM FORM TO
CONTENT, THE
FANFICTION
ENVIRONMENT IS
ESSENTIALLY, NEARLY,
LAWLESS.**



On AO3, close to 3k works appear under the canonical (official) tag AI-Generated Text. Canonical tags include user-generated tags the tag wranglers decide are synonyms and should be included under the same umbrella. Here are examples of tags included under the AI-Generated Text umbrella:

- ★ AI ASSISTED FIC
- ★ AI BUFFER CHAPTERS
- ★ CREDIT TO CHATGPT
- ★ AI GENERATED CRAP
- ★ AI WROTE THIS AT 2AM
- ★ AI WAS USED FOR TRANSLATION
- ★ DON'T BLAME ME AI WROTE IT
- ★ ORIGINALLY CHARACTER AI ROLEPLAY
- ★ AI GENERATED AUTHOR EDITED
- ★ AI HELPS ME WRITE THIS

!!
 ...IS NON-HUMAN FANWORK
 PROTECTED BY THESE LAWS?
 LEGALLY, SHOULD IT BE DEFINED
 AS FANFICTION AT ALL?

Google Docs has integrated AI/LLM services into their platform to give writers generative assistance not unlike the services offered by OpenAI. Many may have already used these LLM suggestions without knowing. Popular programs like Grammarly have begun treating their software with the same tech. Should work aided by grammar or spell-checking tools be labeled as AI work? How about the use of LLMs to outline or brainstorm? One commenter expresses anxiety about labeling: If “AO3 is engaging in content moderation [...] How [will they] verify that a fic is actually machine generated? How will they stop witch hunts by people alleging machine generation without any evidence?”

Another user *admits* to using ChatGPT to help with their creative practice. “I think it's more of an ADHD coping mechanism combating the blank page problem. I struggle to get started on scene setting, often leaving a (describe xyz) note in my drafts until the last minute.” Should this user be forced to label their work as partially AI generated? As they claim later in their comment, “By having AI fill a page with garbage my brain kinda gets the memo. The AI descriptions are so boring and awful [that I’m] like, oh I can do better than that.” This touches on another common thread between users: they agree that AI is bad at writing. Many comments even view AI in fanfic as a non-issue: “it's so bad that no one will read that shit anyway.”



AVERAGING SLOP

In the same OTW policy statement, it was officially announced that “data from AO3 was being included in the Common Crawl dataset – which is used to train AI[...] We cannot go back in time to stop data collection[...] or remove AO3's content from existing datasets...” Not only do we know that AI is being used to write fanfiction, we know that fanfiction is being used to program AI.

AutogenAI teaches users about its LLM learning process: “This process involves inputting an enormous stream of words into the model. This stream can include everything contained in books, magazines, and newspapers, even entire websites, as well as student essays, emails [etc]. As the model analyzes this information, it begins to identify common patterns in how words and phrases are used.” LLMs generate language by finding averages in existing text. If an LLM like ChatGPT is averaging the fifteen million works on AO3 – not considering the data which shows user interaction (kudos, bookmarks, comments) this machine is understandably producing, as one user put it: slop.



WHERE DOES THIS
WORTH COME FROM,
AND CAN IT BE
MANUFACTURED?



If I am worried about AI replacing authors, then this should assuage me, but it doesn't. Instead, I worry that with every piece of AI averaged work uploaded, the outliers from this “slop” become more obscure. As a reader, I don't want to be desensitized to averaging. As a writer, I fear authors slowly mistaking this product of averaging for quality.



HARD WORK

Writing is hard work. It's hard work when it's a published paper, an essay, a scribble of word-vomit in a secret diary, a 300 word Buffy The Vampire Slayer one-shot typed in your notes app on a shaky school bus, or an ongoing gender bent rewrite of Superman crafted between shifts of a corporate nine to five. Perhaps this is hard work *worth* doing. I'll ask writers to think for themselves here. Where does this worth come from, and can it be manufactured? Until there is official policy in fan-spaces, the decision to use AI is up to the individual. Both reader and author must decide to engage or not.

I agree with the commenters stating that AI is not producing “good” writing. It's difficult then to imagine that a machine might ever succeed at this craft, or that a single sentence prompt could dare to truly imitate humanity's written word. But it is trying.



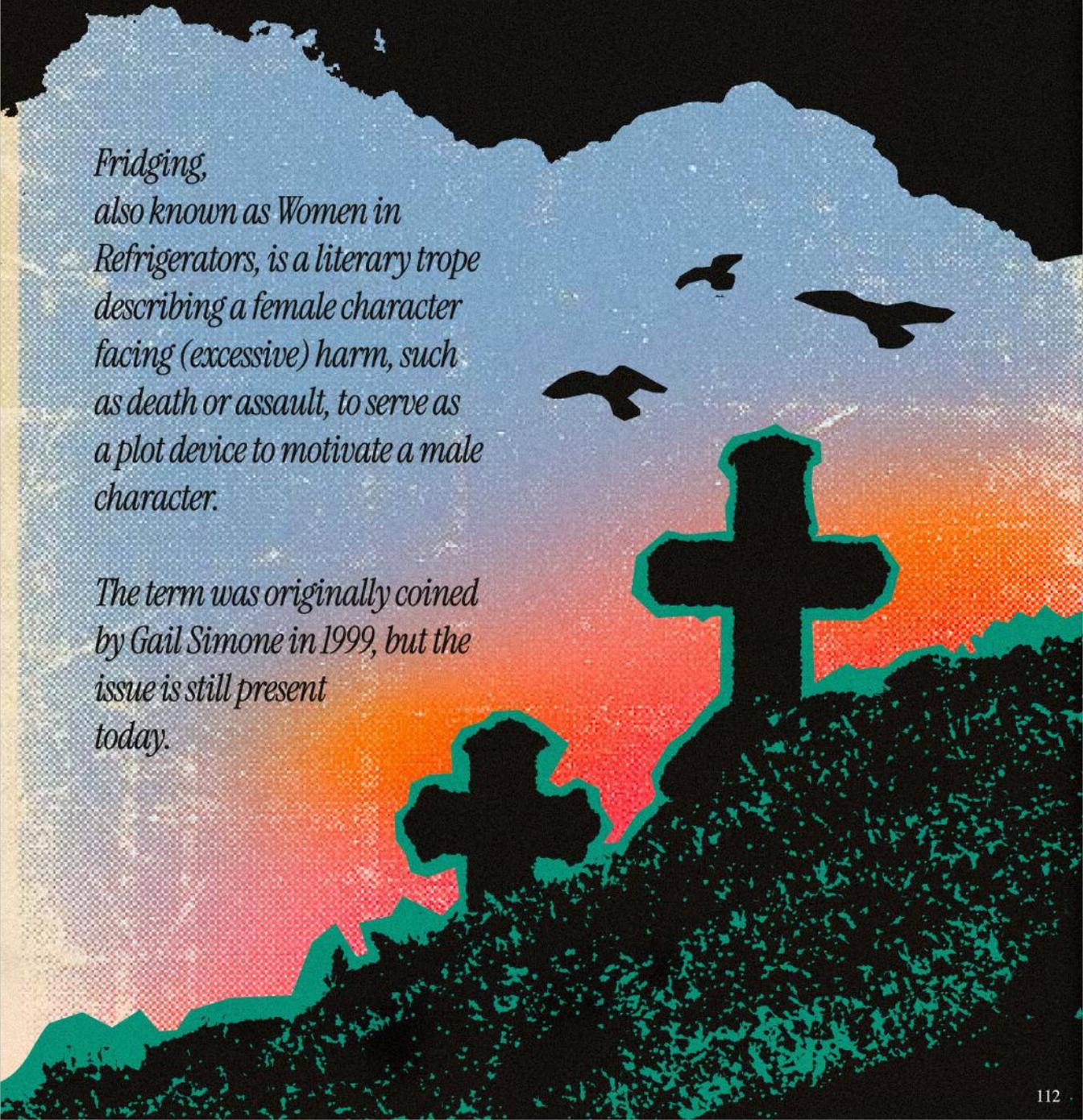
Warning: dead girl, do not eat

VIOLETTAVONVIOLET

words by

Fridging, also known as Women in Refrigerators, is a literary trope describing a female character facing (excessive) harm, such as death or assault, to serve as a plot device to motivate a male character.

The term was originally coined by Gail Simone in 1999, but the issue is still present today.



Fridging is the act of hurting women in fiction, not to examine how they react or grow from it, but to highlight the morality of the men around them. The most famous case of fridging in comics and comic book movies is Gwen Stacy, who dies because Spiderman can't save her. Her death has been written again and again, through a variety of comic runs, and even a couple of movies.

Have you ever come across a love interest's death so ridiculous you just had to stop and take a second? Maybe you've read Green Lantern vol. 3

#54 from 1994 – Kyle Rayner, the protagonist and a Green Lantern (basically a space cop who resides on Earth), comes home to find that a villain, Major Force, has killed his girlfriend, Alexandra DeWitt, and stuffed her in a fridge. Hilariously, Kyle then develops a phobia of kitchen appliances.

This is what prompted Gail Simone to come up with the term, first used in 1999 on her website titled Women in Refrigerators. It included a list of comic book women who were, more or less metaphorically, put in a refrigerator, and it counted at least 50 entries. The project has had a multitude

An excerpt from Simone's original list reads:

- *the paralyzation of Barbara Gordon, Batgirl*
- *Betty and Mrs. Brian Banner, both abused and/or killed*
- *Elektra, the real one, dead*
- *Karen Page, dead*
- *Wonder Woman, killed*
- *Zatanna, powers severely limited*

design by

MY O VLKU

of contributors, though Simone is widely credited with coming up with the term.

That was the first time Simone gained attention online. Nowadays, she's an independent comic book author, has worked with Warner Bros and had her own female-led comic book series with DC. (Birds of Prey, detailing the stories of a team of fe-

male heroes who toe the line of being anti-heroes, including Barbara Gordon and Dinah Lance, known as Black Canary).

Now, in comics, people die. It's part of the genre, and is to be expected. However, typically, they don't stay dead. Nobody stays dead except Bucky Barnes, Jason Todd and Uncle Ben.

Two out of three are currently alive, which only highlights the sentiment. Comic book heroes die and get revived in one way or another constantly. But women rarely receive the careful consideration male heroes do.

Where Jason Todd returns in multiple comic runs, dealing with his trauma and grappling with his shocking revival, women are typically quietly reconnected, and only when it is helpful for the plot. Other kinds of female trauma are forgotten in two issues and never make another appearance, as seen by the fact that Barbara Gordon is currently up and running, despite her paralyzation by the Joker.

Of course, there are also male fridging victims, like Loki in *Avengers: Endgame*, when he dies to motivate a now vengeful Thor. However, it's notable that the men who die, are more often than not, also in some way Other.

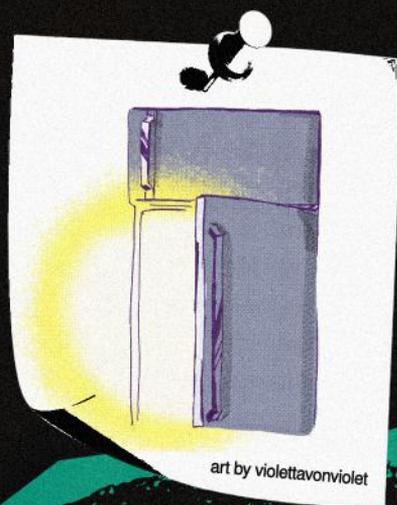
Loki is explicitly coded as a queer or is later shown

effeminate, as in his TV show. Which is another reason why male fridging doesn't spur the same kind of outrage — once again, they tend to return.

It's especially queer characters who bear the burden of fridging when female characters aren't available. In procedural shows, it's the trans sex-workers who end up dead much more frequently than the rich bankers.

so many fridges

Comics are not the first and will not be the last medium to kill off women for the character development of men. There's even an argument to be made that the traditional damsel in distress storyline in fairytales was a forerunner of current fridging. Her imprisonment or torture is a plot device used to motivate the knight in shining armor to go on an adventure to save her. In that sense, even the story of Mario and Peach could be considered a (mild) version of fridging.



Even more common is the trope of the dead mother who only ever appears in hazy, angelic flashbacks that offer her no character of her own, besides being a perfect and loving mother. And being dead. Fridging is very much present in the Bible, with Dinah in Genesis 34 or Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11:30–40. Before that, Greek mythology. In the story of Dionysus, Zeus is only motivated to actively care for his child once the mother is killed by a vengeful Hera and he has to carry his son in his thigh. Even tragic tales like Orpheus and Eurydice could be interpreted as early examples of fridging. In modern media, fridging is still rampant. Supernatural is a rather notorious case. Most women don't survive for more than a season, especially when they're a love interest. It's especially Sam's initial girlfriend, who burns on the ceiling in a symbolic repetition of the brutal death of their late mother, is a perfect example of fridging. She's not considered an actual character, but rather a kick-off for an entirely different story, and by the end of the series, she's barely a thought in Sam's mind. The Deadpool movies attempted to fridge Vanessa, Deadpool's fiancée in the second movie, though test audiences reacted so badly, her return was established in a post-credit scene.

More recent examples could include Eddie Diaz's wife Shannon in 9-1-1, who dies brutally, shortly after appearing back in Eddie's life.



fridging in fandom

We're not above those cheap methods and copouts in fandoms. How often are female love interests killed, or quietly disappear, in favour of male lovers? Take the Marauders fandom and Jegulus as an example. Jegulus is the slash ship between James Potter and Regulus Black, and features one big obstacle – Lily Evans/Potter, James's canonical wife. Now, in many fics, Lily is simply dead or not mentioned, in favor of the "much-superior" Regulus. Marvel fanfics are also rather notorious in the way they treat their female characters. In Stucky (Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes) fanfics, Peggy Carter is conveniently erased from the narrative or killed, to make the two soldiers star-crossed lovers through the ages. The most she's ever afforded is a foot-note on Steve's grief or a cover-relationship, because nobody could know Steve was queer. And they are no exception, but rather the rule. Fandoms love to kill off their women in service of male queer relationships.

do the work

Let's not forget that, at the end of the day, fridging is just lazy writing. It's an easy out that neglects the work necessary to come up with a better story. Women in refrigerators are often flat, idealised depictions of women with no agency, only there to serve a narrative purpose. Women are too often just an accessory in a man's story, and that has been a longstanding tradition in our society.

Fridging, as it's currently represented both in fandom and mainstream media, continually implies that the most impactful thing a female character can do in a story is die.

So, writers, next time you get the urge to stuff a woman in a refrigerator, ask yourself – wouldn't it be more interesting to put her on a rollercoaster and see what she does? Hell, you can even let the guy ride shotgun.

Gail Simone's website and list can still be found today:
<https://lby3.com/wir/r-gsimone.html>

fanmade

blackout

POETRY

Blackout poetry is a form of poetry where an artist takes an existing text and redacts (or "blacks out") most of the words. The remaining words form a new, original poem. Here at FANMADE, we're a bit obsessed with the concept – since fandom and fanfiction can be seen as their own form of blackout poetry, taking an existing text and painting over it, using some of the colours from the original, to create something new and exciting.

Below is an excerpt from one of the articles published on our website, discussing reading Steve and Eddie from Stranger Things through a queer lens. We invite you, dear reader, to create your own blackout poem by obscuring words of this excerpt, and sharing whatever you create on our socials – we can't wait to see what you come up with.



Queer readings work not because the text secretly wants them, but because interpretation is never neutral.

Before the Romantics, literature was seen as a mirror reflecting the world. Then came the poets who insisted writing was a lamp – the author's inner light shining outward. M.H. Abrams famously described this shift in *The Mirror and the Lamp*: the author becomes the centre of meaning, and the reader a passive observer.

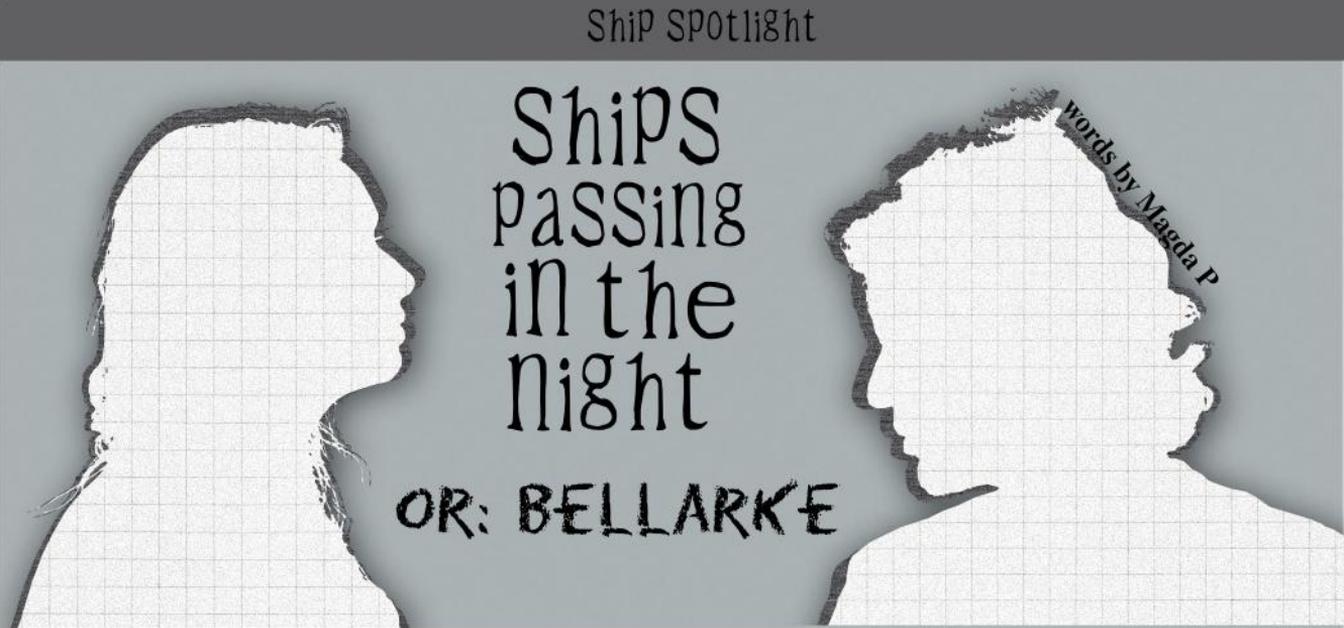
In the 1980s, Stanley Fish argued that no reading is ever unfiltered: we bring assumptions, strategies, and experiences to every text. Straight readings often pretend to be "just the facts", while queer readings get labelled speculative. But if you follow Fish's logic, queer readings aren't a stretch – they're just more honest about the lens being used.

Meaning doesn't exist in a vacuum; it exists in shared context. And straightness is one of the contexts quietly assumed.

Then there's Roland Barthes, who officially killed the author. In *The Death of the Author*, he argued that once a text exists, the writer's intentions stop being the final word. Meaning is made in reading, not writing. The task isn't to stab the text looking for a hidden truth, but to move across it, exploring possibilities.

Fandom operates in this space – treating gaps as invitations rather than errors. So let's explore.





SHIPS PASSING IN THE NIGHT

OR: BELLARKE

words by Magda P

Spoilers for all seasons of *The 100*.

Bellamy Blake and Clarke Griffin have been many things: enemies, co-leaders, saviours of their people. According to the show, they were also *just* friends.

Ships passing in the night. *Fleeting encounters between people who meet briefly and connect deeply, before parting ways forever.*

Bellamy and Clarke begin as enemies, but ultimately become best friends, co-leaders, *the head and the heart*. And to many fans – *almost* lovers. Seven seasons of shared leadership, life-or-death decisions, and mutual devotion. And yet, they never get together, nor do they ever openly address what exists, or could exist, between them.

Bellamy and Clarke, in the grand scheme of things, do connect briefly, and deeply – and then part ways forever, in one of the most baffling and out-of-character arcs the show ever attempts. What happens to them in the final season is frustrating, mind-boggling, and, frankly, bad writing.

I understand the intended takeaway. Men and women can be friends. They can love each other deeply without romance. Even at the end of the world, relationships don't have to fit into a neat box. *Bellarke* could have been a beautiful platonic love story, if handled right.

The 100 is loosely based on a book series – very loosely. Beyond the premise and a handful of characters, the show quickly diverges and builds its own lore. One detail is important though: in the books, Bellamy and Clarke are explicitly romantic. They get together in the first book and are engaged by the end of the series. It's not surprising that audiences expected something similar from the show.

The general consensus among the fans is that something might have been planned for Bellamy and Clarke in the final season;

in the Show

the original plan was however scrapped and quickly replaced by whatever mess ended up happening, because Bob Morley requested time off and changes were made to accommodate that. In the first episode, Bellamy is taken, and the rest of the season largely revolves around the rest of the characters trying to find him. That's not really the main problem most fans have with Bellamy's absence in the final season. It's more the fact that this plot seems to have been used to justify killing him off, instead of justifying his absence. At the end of the day, Bellamy and Clarke's relationship could've had its closure even with the limited time the actor was available. That opportunity was, however, not taken. A tragedy of timing, if you will.

Showrunner Jason Rothenberg has long insisted that Bellarke was written as purely platonic. That memo apparently never reached Bob Morley and Eliza Taylor, who have both stated they were directed to play the relationship romantically. Morley has also said that even if the characters were never meant to become canonically romantic, they should've at least talked about it – an opinion shared by much of the [fandom](#).

Even if the intention was platonic, the execution missed that mark by approximately seven seasons.

” bellarke could have been a beautiful platonic love story, if handled right.

Read purely from within the text – treating Bellamy and Clarke as people rather than plot devices – their relationship is largely a tragedy of timing.

Since romantic feelings between the two are never openly addressed in the show, it's up for interpretation when such feelings could've been realised by either of them. The general consensus within the fandom is that there's something there early on, particularly from Bellamy's side. But Clarke is with Finn, who then dies. She is grieving, traumatised, the world is still ending. Bellamy does what Bellamy does best: he stays, he supports, and doesn't ask for something he knows she can't give.

Then Lexa enters the picture.

Lexa is inseparable from Finn's death, and by all logic, that should've made her an unlikely romantic option for Clarke. Instead, the opposite happens. The early seasons were particularly good at subverting expectations.

By season two, whatever Bellamy feels has deepened, but there's never space to name it. In season three, more of the same – and they end up on two opposite sides of a conflict. Still, they come together by the end of the season, once again united by the need to save their people.

By season four, it feels as though Bellamy has stopped entertaining the possibility of anything romantic between them. Ironically, this is when Clarke seems to begin considering it.

They never align. The head and the heart. Perfect co-leaders, but never on the same page.

Season five cements Clarke's feelings like a full stop at the end of a sentence. For six years, she calls Bellamy on a broken radio, not knowing whether he's alive and receiving her messages. When they reunite, they have different priorities. Bellamy is in a relationship with Echo and now sees the group he spent six years with in space (dubbed Spacekru by the fandom) as his family. Clarke's first and only priority is Madi, the girl she found and practically raised. It feels too late. Too complicated.

Their reunion makes it seem simple enough, but the moment they're back with the others, the fractures are clear as day. And yet...

In the final shot of season five, Bellamy and Clarke stand side by side, looking out at a new planet, perhaps their new home. After this episode, fans were left hopeful – a fresh start, an opportunity to mend what's broken. Right?

Season six flirts with their old dynamic and gives us some of the most iconic scenes between the two. But, knowing what comes next, those scenes leave a bitter aftertaste.

Even if Bellarke never became romantic, even if they never spoke the words out loud, even if they didn't feel that way about each other at all, the story could've ended with them as partners, equals, friends. A love that never found its moment but never disappeared. A true tragedy of timing, but a bond too strong to be broken by that tragedy. Instead, Clarke shoots Bellamy. He isn't even part of the final scene.

And no matter how the show tries to justify it, I don't believe Clarke Griffin would ever be happy in a version of eternity where Bellamy Blake is not there.

the fandom

When it comes to shipping, The 100 fandom is pretty evenly split between Bellarke and Clexa (Clarke/Lexa). With almost 40,000 works on AO3, 15,000 are Bellarke, and 14,000 Clexa. The most popular tag in the fandom is Alternate Universe – Modern Setting, with fans exploring Bellamy and Clarke's dynamic in more forgiving universes. Some of the most popular Bellarke fics take place at a college or university. Clarke is often portrayed as either an artist or medical student/medical professional, and Bellamy as working in a profession focused on protecting people – law enforcement, bodyguard, or firefighter.

The 100 fandom also loves to expand on the quite rich lore established in the show, building on the language, Trigedasleng, spoken by the Grounders, and making up new traditions or clans for the main characters to interact with.

popular tropes



BEST FRIEND'S BROTHER



SEASON FOUR FINALE RE-WRITES

Bellamy gets stuck on Earth with Clarke or Clarke makes it to space.



LANGUAGE BARRIER

Accidentally implying to the Grounders that they're in a romantic relationship



GROUNDER BELLAMY



ARRANGED MARRIAGE

If we're meant to believe Bellamy and Clarke's relationship was written as purely platonic, let's review the **evidence**. Spoiler alert: it's damning.

romantic trope count 1

Verdict **GUILTY**

S01E08

The classic **gun-training trope** – he adjusts her stance, gets flustered, pretends he didn't. This is what they teach in writing romantic tension classes.

romantic trope count 2

Verdict **GUILTY**

S02E05

Reunion run-and-jump hug, complete with Octavia's **raised-eyebrow commentary**. They knew what this looked like, and the fandom went crazy for that scene.

romantic trope count 3

Verdict **GUILTY**

S03E11

Clarke bandages Bellamy's hand with so much **lingering eye contact** they might need a chaperone.

romantic trope count 4

Verdict **GUILTY**

S03E13

Extended hug, eyes closed, dramatic exhale – who hugs their platonic friends like that? No, actually, raise your hand, I want to know.

romantic trope count 5

Verdict **GUILTY**

S05E01

Clarke calls Bellamy on a broken radio, not knowing whether the transmission is reaching him, for six years.

romantic trope count 6

Verdict **GUILTY**

S06E10

Bellamy performs CPR on Clarke while frantically crying “I can't lose her again.” If this was meant to be platonic, someone needed to pick up a book titled *How to Write a Friendship Without Accidentally Making Your Audience Think The Characters Are Madly in Love*, and read it five times over.

the best of both Worlds

AO3 tagging system



Traditional archives and AO3 share more DNA than might be expected. By examining their different approaches to tagging, this article argues that fandom has already built a best-of-both-worlds archival model.

words by Lucy Birch

What is an archive? A variety of images may come to mind – a small dusty room, filled with faded fileboxes and crumbling parchment, or perhaps a seemingly infinite warehouse, with glaring fluorescent lights and towering shelves stretching as far as the eye can see. What may not immediately come to mind is a website.

The International Council on Archives (ICA) defines an archive as “the documentary by-product of human activity retained for their long-term value.” Similarly, and more simply, The National Archive (TNA) – the centralised archive body of the United Kingdom – describes archives as “collections of information.” Worth noting is that, contrary to popular assumption, the inclusion of historic material is not required for a collection to be classed as an archive; a good proportion of modern archival work involves the organisation of corporate records.

While Archive of Our Own (AO3) does not collect paper or parchment, it is

unequivocally an archive, with many similarities to traditional repositories, and it meets perhaps the most fundamental requirements of an archive: it holds records, in an organised manner, and makes them publicly accessible.

differences

It should also be acknowledged that there are several areas of differences between the mainstream archive and AO3. Perhaps the most obvious is the fact that AO3 is an entirely digital archive; while there are many mainstream archives which incorporate digital material, few can be classed as “born-digital.”

AO3 does not follow the archival process cycle (also known as the records life cycle), the underlying structure of most traditional archival processes. In this cycle, a record is collected and added to the collection (formally termed as acquisition and accession), maintained in good condition, and periodically assessed for either retention or disposition. In

comparison, AO3 does not have an acquisition or accession process, instead allowing any member to add anything to the archive (provided it follows the terms of use), and does not systematically review or remove records.

Perhaps the largest, and most obvious difference, however, is AO3's effective and extensive use of a tagging system.

Most persons reading this article will presumably be familiar with tagging, as a predominant feature in both modern social media and AO3.

In AO3's own words, "a tag is a keyword or phrase that provides information about a work," which when searched provides "all works or bookmarks on the site that are using that specific tag." As technology and internet access have become prolific (and often necessary for participation in society) many traditional archives have experimented with the use of tagging systems in assisting searches, to varying degrees of success.

Archival tagging structures generally fall into one of two categories: user-created or archive-created. An archive-created tagging structure is managed solely by archival staff, who create each tag and choose which records should be associated with it. "Pre-digital" tagging systems, for example physical index cards, are one example of an archive-created tagging structure.

In comparison, a user-created system, while generally facilitated by the archive, allows its users to create tags and associate records without the input of archival professionals. This system is usually associated with more modern archives, particularly those of niche or counter-cultural collections – for example, the Punk Archives, which describes itself as a "community-driven catalog of punk culture and the sounds that influence it."

archive-created VS user-created

In 2024, I completed a survey of several mainstream English archives, of which a reasonable proportion had implemented some form of tagging system.

As an example of an archive-created system, one surveyed archive had implemented a digital tagging system during the lull of standard archival tasks caused by COVID-19 lockdowns. The tags were replicated entirely from the archive's previous paper index system. The lifting of the lockdowns left the system half-finished, as staff returned to their usual duties, and as many records were not yet digitised they could not be easily associated with a tag, leaving many tags empty and functionally useless. Workload constraints on the archival staff also prevent the tags from being properly managed, with many examples of misspellings, repetition, and otherwise superfluous tags.

” archival tagging structures generally fall into one of two categories: user-created or archive-created.

An example of a user-created tagging system is The National Archive (TNA), which currently claims to have over 50,000 tags associated with over 90,000 records. A purported benefit of this system is that it vastly minimises the workload requirements of archival staff, with TNA stating that while all new tags are checked for compliance with the code of conduct, the utility and usefulness of the tags is not checked. This has, however, led to an uneven implementation of the tagging system in terms of general usefulness. Many of the existing tags are overly specific, and appear to have been largely created by users for personal research projects, rather than to assist others in subject-specific searching. Further, being based on user-interest, the tags are not evenly distributed throughout the archive's collections. Jane Austen's will, for example, has only a single tag associated with it ('jane austen') and is the only record associated with this tag, despite her position as perhaps the foremost English author of the 19th century. Overall, while likely useful for personal research, TNA's implementation of a user-created tagging system is ineffective for general use.

While an archive-created system, therefore, theoretically allows for greater control of the tags and associated records, hopefully preventing duplicated or superfluous tags, this model requires an often impractical level of staff involvement. Similarly, user-created tagging systems, while initially appearing as a hands-off alternative for archival staff, have a propensity to generate overly-specific, and therefore widely useless, tags.

ao3 tag Wranglers

In comparison, AO3 utilises a symbiotic blend of user-created and archive-created tags, allowing site members to create a vast array of tags, but implementing a significant oversight to maintain consistency and coherency. A total number of existing tags has not been published, however with over 17 million works and 10 million registered users, it can be assumed to be a vast number.

This huge system of fandoms, fanfics, and tags is made possible by the tireless work of tag wranglers, a committee of over 400 volunteers who organise the millions of tags generated by AO3's users through a set of "wrangling guidelines." Despite their oversight, AO3's tagging system is a collaborative endeavour, with the ultimate goal of representing the varying experiences, opinions, and understandings of the users.

Perhaps the most immediately apparent result of the tireless work of tag wranglers is the stellar consolidation – and differentiation – of similar tags, allowing for far greater flexibility in search terms. This is facilitated by the allocation of individual tag wranglers to the fandoms they are most familiar with, allowing them to make decisions on when two tags should be set as synonymous; while it is obvious to most that "Pepper Potts/Tony Stark" and "Tony Stark/Pepper Potts" refer to the same relationship, it might not be immediately apparent to those outside of the Marvel fandom that "Pepperony" is also a synonymous term.

” a03 has an inspired tagging system made possible by the fervent support of the fan communities, the tireless work of volunteers, and the vast financial donations received each year.

Underlying the tag wranglers’ individual work is an efficient *wrangling interface*, which generally ensures that any created tag only requires sorting once. When a tag is used for the first time across the Archive, it appears in the interface for a wrangler associated with the fandom tagged in the work. The wrangler will then identify the meaning of the tag, and determine if any other synonymous tags already exist – if they do, the new tag will be associated with those existing.

With this system as effective as it is, why, then, do traditional archives not emulate it? Simply put, the main consideration is money. While AO3 is entirely funded by the financial support of the fan community (receiving over \$269,000 USD in their April 2025 donation drive, exceeding the \$75,000 goal), comparatively, mainstream archives are often critically underfunded and overworked.

Another difficulty of mainstream archives is the necessity of “backwards” tagging, adding tags to existing records in addition to the never-ending influx of new information into their collections. In comparison, AO3 has the benefit of tags being added to works as they are created and added to the archive, meaning that there is no backlog – if new tags are added to older works, it is generally done by their creator.

Undeniably, AO3 has an inspired tagging system, representing a balanced, symbiotic relationship between users and archive staff; a system made possible by the fervent support of the fan communities, the tireless work of volunteers, and the vast financial donations received each year – as such, it sadly cannot be expected to be emulated by traditional archives. Nonetheless, it should be positioned as an aspirational model for the modern archive; a “best-of-both-worlds” system, which respects both the individual user and the coherency of the archive.

TAGS HALL OF FAME

Please enjoy some of the tags we've encountered on our travels across the Archive over the years. The completely unhinged creativity of fanfic writers knows no bounds.

POV: you have dictator tendencies but you're like really horny

(Blank) you are like a kitten stuck in the rain to me but I can't bring you home

I made creative decisions based on how hot they sounded

No beta but we don't die trust me it's okay

Panem's first bisexual dictator! Now out

Your honour they won't stop slow burning

Improper use of a psychology degree

Lesbian-centric semi-nonsexual thropple

Dubious consent due to improper use of invisibility?

Family is mentioned so many times this may as well be a fast and furious movie

Improper use of improper use of

Does A have a choking kink? Find out next week since this week is his
sons funeral

You can take A off of bite mode by holding him like a cat

Improper use of the light. Sorry

This bed IS big enough for the both of us because I'm rich

POV: two hot guys saw you across the bar and they HATE your vibe

The homosexual tension of holding a baseball bat

Not dark academia not light academia but a secret third thing academia

tagging adVice

For the uninitiated.

When posting a work on AO3, you'll need to fill out some information about your work, both to make it searchable on the archive and easier to interact with for anyone that might want to read it.

mandatory

RATING

Not Rated you might not want to apply a rating to your work for a multitude of reasons, but remember that some readers might avoid not rated works in case they turn out to be out of their comfort zone. Not rated works will also get treated as explicit by the search engine.

General Audiences (G) content suitable for anyone.

Teen and Up Audiences (T) content might be inappropriate for audiences under 13.

Mature (M) content with adult themes, but not overly graphic.

Explicit (E) content with graphic adult themes (porn, graphic violence, etc.)

ARCHIVE WARNINGS

Archive warnings are there for you to warn your readers of topics/themes commonly considered heavy and/or triggering.

Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

This doesn't mean your work doesn't contain any content that would warrant a warning – it means you chose not to warn your readers, for any reason, like wanting to avoid spoilers, or simply not being sure yet what to warn about.

Graphic Depictions of Violence

What it says on the tin – as the archive itself says, it's up to you to decide where to draw the line.

Rape/Non-con

Use this warning if your work contains non-consensual sexual activity.

Major Character Death

Once again, it's up to you to decide who counts as a "major character." You might want to go off of the question of whether an average reader would be impacted by this character's death, or how much of an impact their death will have on other characters and the overall plot and themes.

Underage sex

Use this warning if your work contains descriptions of sexual activity involving characters under 18. AO3 specifies that this doesn't include dating activity such as kissing or vague references without actual depiction, but as always – use your own judgement.

No Archive Warnings Apply

Use this if none of the warnings apply to your content.

FANDOMS

Just list the fandom, or fandoms, your work belongs to.

UP TO YOU

CATEGORIES

F/F – Female/Female relationships

F/M – Female/Male relationships

Gen – General, so no romantic or sexual relationships, or if they appear, they're not the main focus of the work

M/M – Male/Male relationships

Multi – more than one kind of relationship, or a relationship with multiple partners

Other – other relationships (you can tag the exact type of relationship in additional tags)

RELATIONSHIPS

It's important to remember the **distinction between Character A & Character B and Character A/Character B**. The & implies a platonic relationship, whereas the / means a romantic and/or sexual relationship.

Make sure to tag the main relationship featured in your work. When it comes to tagging background/side relationships, it's up to you which ones to tag. You know your fandom best, so think about the users of the archive and whether the way you're tagging your work might hinder their search abilities. If your work only briefly mentions a pair of characters or features them sporadically, is tagging them necessary? Would it be better to mention them in additional tags instead?

CHARACTERS

The main characters in your work. It's up to you to decide how many to list.

ADDITIONAL TAGS

These are also called **freeform tags**, and this is where you can go crazy. Add anything not covered by the archive warnings that you'd like your readers to know before reading. As long as you make sure not to include fandom, relationship or character tags in this field (since you've already covered those), you can be as creative as you'd like. The tag wranglers encourage users to use any tags they see fit.

There are the **basic tags you might want to use to indicate tropes**, like Found Family, Hurt/comfort, First Kiss, There Was Only One Bed – the most popular ones will usually be **canonical tags**, meaning they'll appear in the drop-down menu when you start typing. Choosing one of those will automatically make your work searchable by that tag, so make use of them when possible.

You might also want to tag **character dynamics or traits**, like Character A loves Character B, Character B is a bitch, Character A needs a hug, etc. Some of them might be canonical tags, some might not.

If there's no canonical tag for what you want to convey, you can come up with your own. These types of tags are organised by tag wranglers – they look at each individual tag and see if they can link it to a canonical one with the same meaning to make searching easier.

ENJOYED fanmade?

If you enjoyed this issue of FANMADE, please take five minutes to fill out a survey to help us get a better idea of what topics you'd like us to cover in the future!



[CLICK HERE](#)

If you'd like to write for us, head over to our pitching form – as long as it has to do with fandom, we want to hear about it. If you're not sure where your idea fits or how to develop it into an article, don't worry, our team is here to help. The only qualifications you need are a) you're over 18 and b) you're obsessed with fan culture.



[CLICK HERE](#)

QUIZ RESULTS

mostly A

HURT/COMFORT

You like your favourite characters to be in pain, but it needs to lead to a buttload of comfort.

mostly B

HURT/NO COMFORT

You just want to see pain, pain, and then some more pain. Respect.

mostly C

A/B/O DYNAMICS

You like to read about your favourite characters going at it, but you also enjoy the backdrop of social commentary. Score.

mostly D

CRACK FIC

You just want to crack up at the impossible situations your blorbos get into. The more unrealistic, the better – you're just here for the laughs.

mostly E

AMBIGUOUS ENDING

Can you decide on *anything*, really? You love an ambiguous ending, but they also keep you up at night more often than not.

CROSSWORD 1 ANSWERS

ACROSS

1 chapter 3 found 4 queerbait 10 OOC

DOWN

2 kudos 5 dove 6 platonic 7 beta 8 tumblr 9 die

CROSSWORD 2 ANSWERS

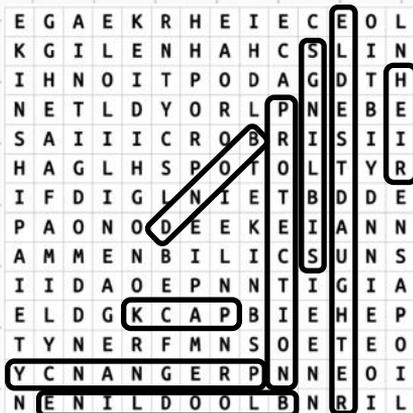
ACROSS

2 italics 3 study 4 major 5 work 10 screen

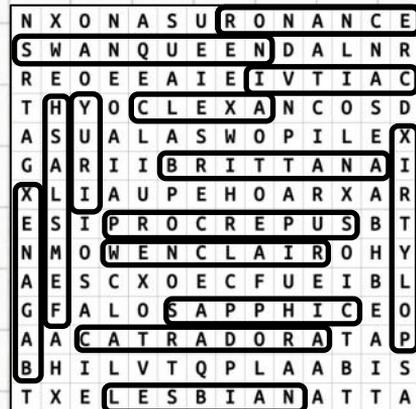
DOWN

1 whump 6 Brason 7 bed 8 sold 9 wranglers

WORD SEARCH 1



WORD SEARCH 2



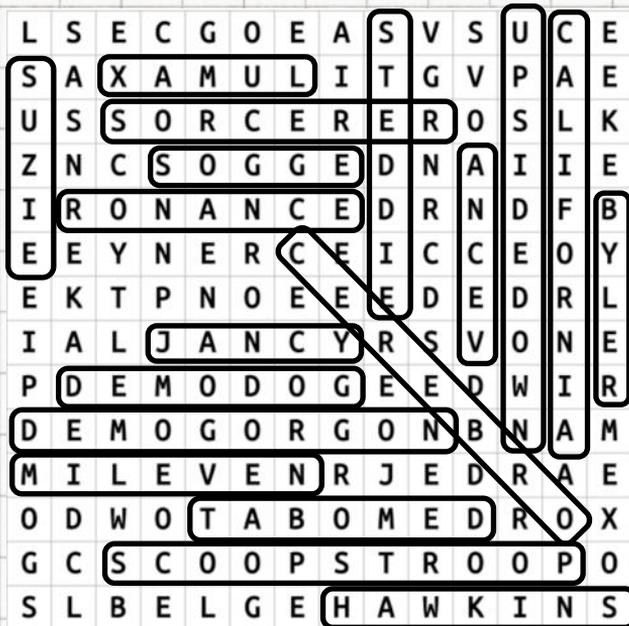
FOUND FAMILY GAME ANSWERS:

1 One Direction 2 Supernatural 3 Batfam 4 Sherlock 5 Marauders 6 Avengers
7 Chainsaw Man 8 Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation 9 Doctor Who 10 DSMP

QUEERBAITING LETTER JUMBLE

- 1 SWANQUEEN
- 2 SUPERCORP
- 3 JOHNLOCK
- 4 DESTIEL
- 5 MERTHUR
- 6 KLANCE
- 7 BYLER
- 8 STEREK

WORD SEARCH PAGE 87



SEE YA IN THE NEXT ISSUE!

Thank you
for reading

fanmade
magazine

Pitch to us