

**The Internet *isn't* Forever: Early Internet Fan Archives, their Stewards, Lifespans, and the Political Nature of the Deaths of their Queer Communities**

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**ABSTRACT**

The concept of a “forever Internet” has been pervasive in the modern digital age, but the degradation of fan archives from the late 1990s and 2000s seems to tell a different story; as such, we find ourselves in the midst of a Digital Dark Age and we are losing independent digital fan archives quickly- what is happening and how can we save this digital cultural memory, particularly queer cultural memory? To lose these fan archives is to lose valuable insight into the lives and communities of the individuals who interacted in these spaces. By utilizing the lenses of play, theft, cultural memory and stewardship, we can begin to better understand the means and ways that these archives have fallen apart (or how they stick together in spite of overwhelming odds). Through the autoethnographic research of three emblematic fan archives in differing stages of life and security, this thesis attempts to shed light on a crucial issue in the modern age and provide a pathway for potential future means to get what we can out of the burning of our digital metaphorical Library of Alexandria.

**DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to queer fan archivists, fan communities and fanfic writers across the globe and Internet- especially to the various fan communities I've found myself a part of over my lifetime.

I want to also dedicate this thesis especially to my dad, who without whom I might never have become a fan boy.

Thank you for leading me to this point in my life. This one's for all y'all.

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: METHODS.....	29
CHAPTER 3: THE JEDI HURTAHOLICS ARCHIVE.....	43
CHAPTER 4: THEFORCE.NET AND JEDI COUNCIL FORUMS.....	62
CHAPTER 5: THE GOOD OMENS LIBRARY.....	77
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....	96
CHAPTER 7: FUTURE WORK.....	101
WORK CITED.....	103
APPENDICES	
APPENDIX A: Glossary.....	106
APPENDIX B: Screenshots.....	108
VITA.....	109

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Whether through serialized TV shows, 2000s public service announcements, in-school assemblies, terse discussions with parents, or even through just lingering on the Internet itself, nearly all of us have encountered Internet safety announcements/tips at some point in our lives. The most common, repeated, and cited quotation among these PSAs is the title of a 2010 *Criminal Minds* episode: “The Internet is forever” (CBS). For those of us in Gen Z, we grew up with posters like these on the walls of our computer labs and we heard it in cheaply produced public service videos in school assemblies that leaned on fear as a means to dissuade us from sharing personal information. Needless to say, it didn’t totally work; but, the phrase “The Internet is forever” has had staying power as a forgone conclusion in the minds of most folks. ‘Of course the Internet is forever, it has to be because I was told so by the people who helped bring it into existence!’ While most folks approach this statement with a level of personal fear (ie: a friend posts an unflattering photo tags you, a video of you saying something hurtful/ignorant or misinformed, a typo in a Tweet that gets screenshotted and passed around, etc.), researchers like myself are starting to become fearful about the Internet being “forever” for a different reason entirely- because we’re learning that it *isn’t*.

While every part of the origins<sup>1</sup> of our digital memory and digital history is at stake, one particularly important and particularly divisive topic to broach is that of fan works and fan archives. They are important cultural touchstones, and have been for as long as humans have been creating fan works<sup>2</sup>, but what’s odd is that it isn’t the large institutional archives that are doing the work of saving these digital fragments- it’s the fan communities themselves that are

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<sup>1</sup> These origins are often referred to as “Web 1.0”, a term that will be explored in the literature review, but can also be found in the glossary, Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> As long as there has been media, there have been humans who have been fans of it and making fan works of it.

often doing the leg work of securing, duplicating, and tending to their own small archives. In fact, I argue that any archivist worth their salt ought to take lessons from these “rogue archivists” as Abigail De Kosnik calls them, and their ability to organize, delegate, and most importantly protect these spaces from falling into the digital abyss. Rogue archivists are “nonprofessional archivists, usually media fans” who are committed to the “preservation of digital cultural memory” through the creation and maintenance of rogue archives, often full of fan transformative works which are then kept safe in these alternative communal archives (DeKosnik 12-18).

In light of this key definition that this thesis centers itself around, I would be remiss not to point to an organization that was built by fans, for fans, and built in order to save and secure fan works. It’s arguably the single greatest bastion of digital archiving in general but certainly the forefront of fan archiving, Archive of Our Own and its parent organization, the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW). Archive of Our Own, or AO3 as it is often shortened, which a product of fans, rogue archivists, and fan scholars (or ‘acafans’<sup>3</sup>) teaming up to try and save these fanfiction<sup>4</sup> stories from falling into disarray and disappearing. AO3 is a universal communal archive, which is defined by its goal of collecting as many fan works as possible into its safe haven and providing space for community to flourish (DeKosnik). This thesis begins with a discussion on the current happenings in fan archival practices so that the past can be better understood and the future can be better envisioned. AO3 is a crucial reparative archive, doing the difficult work of tracking down information that has otherwise been lost; but, AO3 isn’t the final answer for saving digital culture as a whole. We begin with the wins in fan archiving, the

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<sup>3</sup> as Henry Jenkins would call it in his ground-breaking book *Textual Poachers*

<sup>4</sup> often shortened to ‘fanfic’ or simply ‘fic’, see glossary, Appendix A

stewardship among rogue archivists, but it won't end like that unless we collectively make an effort to keep Web 1.0 from slipping into oblivion. AO3 exemplifies the understanding we must move forward with- that humans are the only ones that can reliably archive our own culture.

AO3's mission is two-fold. Firstly, it seeks to provide a "new, free, open-source software package to allow fans to host their own robust, full-featured archives... [supporting up to] hundreds of thousands of stories and [has] social networking features to enable fans to connect to one another..." (OTW 'FAQ'). Secondly, it uses its own software to host a "noncommercial [sic] and nonprofit central hosting place for fanfic and other transformative works" as well as provide a haven and resource for fan creators to get in touch with legal protection and advocacy (OTW, 'FAQ'). AO3 is and remains a steadfast and evergreen centralized location for fanfiction to live- and they truly live.

AO3 is unique in that it is not only a living universal and communal archive, as in it is constantly evolving and being uploaded to and backlogging other fan archives, therefore universal, but is also an open submission archive, therefore communal (De Kosnik). Like De Kosnik mentions in *Rogue Archives*, these archives are run by archivists who are donating their time, energy, and money in order to preserve their fan works and others. They aren't professionals per say, but they are building world-class archives; archives that can and often do relocate and move like water across the Internet if they become persecuted under manipulations of copyright law from large corporations and their entertainment lawyers running after them with cease and desist orders.

This practice of legal chasing, which necessitated fluid archiving in fanfiction, has fallen out of favor in the past decade- but during the 90s and 00s, it was a real threat to be perceived by

the copyright holders (authors, musicians, directors, and productions companies) for the transformative fan works fans were creating. This was particularly common in the United States during this time frame, and saw the destruction of countless small fan archives- including *The Jedi Hurlaholics Archive*, whose demise at the hands of the content's (*Star Wars*) parent company, LucasFilm, is one of the few well documented examples of such a phenomenon and will be discussed in more detail later. These phenomena were also seen in archives that held fanfiction associated with Anne Rice (specifically *Vampire Chronicles*, in the wake of *Interview with the Vampire* [1994]), *Star Trek*<sup>5</sup> and the Tolkein estate.

Of course, this has never stopped fans from writing fanfiction on these subjects- especially as, in most cases, fanfiction abides by 'Fair Use' conditions<sup>6</sup> of copyright and are perfectly legal to create. Being an organization by and for fans, the Organization for Transformative Works created Legal Advocacy, a branch of their organization whose mission focuses on "education, assistance, and advocacy" to protect fan work and provide legal representation for fans caught up in the United States justice system (OTW, 'Legal'). In tandem with OTW's Legal Advocacy project, the true jewel of OTW (outside of AO3) is their Open Doors project.

Open Doors is a nonprofit organization and project "dedicated to offering shelter to at-risk fannish content" that might otherwise be destroyed in the various ways that the Internet fails them or from the failures of the legal system to protect fans from getting slapped with unwarranted and frightening cease and desist letters. They seek to preserve fan culture and

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<sup>5</sup> See "The Premise" and fan vidding practices

<sup>6</sup> Fair Use describes the "legal doctrine that promotes freedom of expression by permitting the unlicensed use of copyright-protected works in certain circumstances." This includes parody, which fan works are most frequently protected under. See more about Fair Use [here](#).

fannish culture archival objects, such as zines, fanfiction, fanart, etc by “rescu[ing] fan archives” and placing them on Archive of Our Own (Open Doors). This project saves so much about fan culture, but its biggest reparative effort seeks to save and secure fan archives created by marginalized communities, and in particular the works and cultural memory of the queer community. This effort from OTW is key to the important work that must be done in order to secure the archives of Web 1.0 from falling into oblivion.

The stakes of this thesis naturally stretch outside fan spaces and are indicative of the decay that the Internet of the 90s and 00s is experiencing across the board. This might be hard to believe or difficult to swallow, and in fact the typical reaction to the basis of this thesis is normally incredulous denial and insistence that the Internet has to be made of stronger stuff, that I must be mistaken; but, the Library of Alexandria was supposedly quite secure as well and all it took was one nameless Roman centurion with a torch to destroy untold numbers of scrolls and books, incinerating irreplaceable human knowledge whose absence permanently stunted the intellectual progression of the entire human species. We have the chance to stop the digital fire here and organizations like OTW, and subsequently Archive of Our Own and Open Doors, are trying their best- but it’s hard to figure out what to do with this wall of flame coming towards us when we are only armed with a few buckets.

This thesis could not possibly provide an answer for how to save the whole Internet- there is simply not enough pages nor research time to answer a crisis question like that here- but instead this thesis seeks to explore three emblematic fan archives in various states of repair/disrepair and stages of life/death to serve as case studies for this condition of decay

spreading throughout the remnants of Web 1.0. The questions asked within this thesis, and deserve attention from scholars outside of this thesis as well, are as follows:

- How did we get to this point?
- How have fans been archiving their own works in independent archives?
- What is happening to archives as they age?
- How do the concepts of play, theft, cultural memory and stewardship interact with these three case study archives and how do they speak to the nuanced and complicated nature of these living fan archives?
- And, perhaps most importantly, what can be done to stop the disappearances/deaths of fan archives from coming about?

These questions are explored in the chapters as follows. The first chapter is a literature review that provides a lay of the academic landscape over the course of the existence/proliferation of fan studies as an academic discipline in the 1990s up until the present day. This also serves as a space to express the thoughts of the academics who are currently interfacing with subjects surrounding fans, digital archives, digital ephemera, and fan archives. The second chapter is a methods chapter that details the processes I underwent to piece through the archives utilized in the case studies and provides explanation for the basis of the autoethnographic approach to the thesis as a whole.

The first data chapter examines the remains of *The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive*, a deceased small fanfiction archive which was a *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* archive which served as a space for a small community to post/share slash<sup>7</sup> fanfics in relative quiet and privacy

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<sup>7</sup> Slash is a term for fanfiction pertaining to an explicitly queer pairing, oftentimes involving explicit descriptions of sex and sex acts- historically between two men. This is designated by fans with a backslash between names (ex: Qui-Gon/Obi-Wan, seen in *Jedi Hurtaholics*). Slash in the modern age is a term for all kinds of queer fan erotica,

in a nascent Internet. This archive met a violent end at the hands of an angry digital mob and LucasFilm itself and this chapter seeks to piece together what happened and how to prevent similar destruction from happening in the future. The second data chapter explores *TheForce.net* and its subsidiary *Jedi Council Forums*, an example of a very large and incredibly active multi-purpose single-fandom (*Star Wars*) fansite that has a large presence among *Star Wars* fans due to not only its breadth of information but its veteran status as a Web 1.0 site<sup>8</sup> that has adapted and survived to the present day. The third and final data chapter explores *The Good Omens Library*, an archive that moved around quite a bit on the Internet before finding a final home in Archive of Our Own and serves as an example of the kind of reparative work the Open Doors project can do as well as an example of the difference that a dedicated archival steward can make in the survival of a site's cultural objects. This is followed by a conclusion synthesizing the findings of the thesis.

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between two or more partners, but in the chronological scope of this thesis (read: Web 1.0) it is most often used to solely describe male/male (or, M/M) sex.

<sup>8</sup> Web 1.0 is a descriptor for the epochs of the Internet, defined by their user interfaces and purposes of the majority of users. *TFN* was created in 1996, making it the oldest surviving *Star Wars* fansite.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this literature review, I will define several key terms and concepts to contextualize a brief (and necessary) history of fan spaces and rogue/fan archives. This involves providing facts and history of a few key fan spaces, a general lay of the land, brief information about the evolution of the Internet, and how corporations interact with their fans. A variety of lenses and contexts are required to fully understand the landscape of media fandom/media play, which involves evaluating political, sociological, queer theoretical, scholarly, and community-focused lenses. By combining these approaches, we can better appreciate the nuanced digital ecosystem in which fan archives coexist- one long erroneously dismissed as trivial and unworth the time of serious scholarship.

It would be irresponsible to write this thesis without acknowledging some lasting social issues that exist in fan spaces, and have unfortunately existed for some time- especially because there is a direct correlation between the kinds of works that get removed from archives (or lead to the archives destruction or abandonment) and the people (read: marginalized folks) who created the works. In the 1990s and the 2000s, even through to today, the content purges that we see in fan spaces are almost always connected to sexually explicit queer works, largely referred to as slash (see also: slash fics, m/m, f/f, etc.). Slash is as old as fanfiction itself- think about the homoeroticism in Dante's *Inferno*, a work that itself acknowledges that it's fanfiction! We even hear of it in the Brönte sisters' escapades into what would later be dubbed fanfiction, as they wrote about the real life barons and their fictional adventures (Sawyer). For as long as fiction has existed, fan fiction has existed. And as long as fan fiction has existed, slash has existed.

The reasons for writing slash are highly individualized and encompass a number of rationales and identities of slash authors- but it's important to note that many slash writers identify as a part of the LGBTQIA+ community<sup>9</sup>. In the 80s and 90s, and well into the 00s as well, slash communities were a place of respite from persecution and discrimination among the devastating global epidemic of AIDS, which would leave millions dead worldwide before medical regimens that kept and HIV+ diagnosis from being an unavoidable death sentence<sup>10</sup>, but the damage of the stigmas produced in the 1980s and 90s largely remain and they impact the ways in which we understand our history. This social ostracization and subsequent isolation ripples through time in all facets of life and has consumed some parts of queer history into oblivion, altering the cultural memory present at the hands of bigots who allowed a genocide of queer individuals to occur. As such, queer folks have, like any other marginalized group, sought out the company and community of others (both those in the marginalized group and friends/allies) and after the advent and proliferation of the Internet and home computers, a marginalized group desperate for community after suffering great losses through the 90s had a place to meet each other across the globe- as well as a space to develop their own sense of self and articulate their own salient aspects of their identity.

The Internet allowed for high-octane individuality; all one needed to do was either grab a URL or jump on an AOL or Yahoo chat rooms and message boards. Robust conversations could occur across time-zones and hemispheres of Earth in real time. This led to the Internet being the

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<sup>9</sup> While many writers do identify within the LGBTQ+ community now, it is true that the majority of M/M slash writers at this time period of the Internet identified as straight women. See the introduction of Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* (and the book as a whole) for more.

<sup>10</sup> Many individuals across the globe are still unable to procure life saving and life sustaining medication to prevent and treat HIV and AIDS- often due to financial hardship and a lack of financial support for individuals seeking treatment (in tandem with pharmaceutical greed).

extension of the human consciousness<sup>11</sup>- once many folks had regular access to a computer (and particularly when it became home computers), our lives went digital and our lives sped up<sup>12</sup>. As more and more public green spaces to hang out went away, children, teens, and young adults found solace and belonging in ‘semi-private’ spaces on the Internet. I want to be clear in stating that I am fully aware of the damage the Internet has been party to regarding child pornography, child sexual abuse, and sexual grooming. Instant messaging and the illusion of total anonymity on the Internet, along with ‘disappearing message’ sites and apps (read: Omegle, being the worst offender, Kik and Snapchat) have caused immense violence<sup>13</sup>. Once the general public learned about fanfiction in the 80s/90s, and specifically slash fic and Real Person Fanfiction (RPF)<sup>14</sup>, a swift condemnation of these activities occurred much akin to the fear-mongering television PSAs about the ‘dangers’ of gay men in the 50s and 60s. There’s a good reason for this parallel- that’s exactly what was happening. This didn’t have anything to do with protecting actors and musicians, this had everything to do with creating cultural pushback on a subculture inhabited primarily by marginalized people, predominantly queer people and people of color, from all walks of life.

## Play

The impulse to play, and particularly imaginative play, is one that psychologists such as Jean Piaget defined as an important part of basic childhood development and necessary to

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<sup>11</sup> A developing area of Internet and media studies: see [Dunne-Howrie’s work](#) on Internet theatre and Covid-19, as well as [Firth’s work](#) on the Internet and cognition, for more.

<sup>12</sup> See conversations on fan and media time via *Rogue Archives* chapter 3 (DeKosnik).

<sup>13</sup> I would implore anyone who disagrees to take the time and fully explain what virtual child grooming is to any Gen Z individual and see what their response is- I’m inclined to believe that, tragically, far more folks would tell you that they have experienced it than those who would say that they haven’t.

<sup>14</sup> A form of fanfiction that is written about actual people as opposed to fictional characters. Often seen written about actors in visual media (ie: TV, film, web series, etc) and athletes. See more [here](#).

facilitate effective cognitive learning skills in young children (2). While this impulse for imaginative play changes as folks age, leaving experiences like playing pretend or having imaginary friends within childhood, the need for human connection through sharing an experience together never wanes and the capacity for creativity never fully leaves a person once they enter adolescence, emerging adulthood, adulthood, and so on.

The basis of any and all fan creations is the core concept of play. To engage meaningfully with a fictional world regularly is to engage in imaginative play, which, for teenagers and adults, may have tangible cognitive benefits. These imaginative and play-based fan creations can include fanfiction on non-canon pairings<sup>15</sup>, fanart of alternative universe (AU)<sup>16</sup> settings, cosplay<sup>17</sup> of characters in differing styles from the source material, etc etc. These products serve as tangible, and often readily accessible, examples of media play. Media play is defined as “a characteristic of contemporary media culture... in which individuals create meaning from activities that articulate a connection between their own creativity and mainstream media, all the while working within the boundaries of the media text.” (Booth 15). This kind of play is found throughout any fan archive because it is the genesis of all fan produced texts, of both the creation of passion projects like fan works and of the investment of dedicated consumers of said fan works.

The process of joining a fandom, or participating in any kind of experimenting/sampling of a fandom, is contingent on being able to engage both in media play and in what Paul Booth

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<sup>15</sup>A non-canon pairing is an imagining of a platonic, romantic, and/or (often) sexual relationship between characters that either have never met one another or hold disdain for one another. This means that the pairing has not occurred within the source text as of yet and/or will never occur. Often connected to concepts of fanon- a collection of fan held beliefs that act as a parallel set of information to the canon, or established facts of a given media.

<sup>16</sup> A popular fan production process, AUs are a genre of fanfiction where characters within a given media are placed in a different setting. Some popular examples include ‘Coffee Shop AU’ or ‘College AU’

<sup>17</sup> Costume play, often seen at fan conventions. Covered in detail in many works of fan scholarship- popularly in Camille Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women*.

calls “fan pastiche”- and with the digital landscape, it’s easier and more accessible than ever.

Fan pastiche, or how fans find joy in “color[ing] inside the lines” and take part in a “hedonistic pleasure” of play for the self and creation for an audience of the self, also reveals how this key aspect of fan culture is linked to performative behavior (Booth 4). This exchange of performance and play between fan writers and fan work consumers-as-collaborators within fan communities plays a crucial role in what creates “mutual fan understanding”- the building blocks for creating a fandom itself via the creation of a fanon (Booth 17).

Performance, as mentioned in the examples above of fanfiction and cosplay, is a key aspect to participation in a fandom. While this particular thesis won’t hit on cosplay as a central theme, Camille Bacon-Smith helps contextualize the meaningful affect of in-person physical fan conventions. The big shift regarding the proliferation of fandoms on the Internet is that now every day can be akin to a fan convention<sup>18</sup>, in that any fan at any time can interact with other fans about their fannish object of shared admiration.

The Internet’s history and ever changing landscape is codified into two distinct epochs, and a third that we stand on the precipice of. This is defined as Web 1.0, Web 2.0, and the yet-to-be Web 3.0<sup>19</sup>. This thesis concerns itself primarily with archives from Web 1.0, or the Read-Only web. This epoch extended from around 1995 to 2005 and was characterized by text-based interaction and the onset of blogging as a means of communicating. Web 1.0 primarily moved in one direction; for example, for fanfic sites in Web 1.0 an individual or group of individuals were in charge of a website and had to upload fics that were sent in via email.

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<sup>18</sup> While in-person fan conventions continue to rise in popularity, the digital experience of fan communities online provides more space for comradery and, often safety, for fan producers and especially cosplay artists. Online cosplay is an important aspect of fan life online, but is not the subject of this thesis. See Bacon-Smith and Vardell, Wang, & Thomas for more.

<sup>19</sup> See here or Appendix B.0.1 for more information on the hallmarks of these epochs (Image Credit: here)

However, in Web 2.0 those individuals could, for example, simply post their fics on a social networking site of their choosing. Web 1.0's sole purpose was to "read and share information over web pages" (Nath et al. 1). This technological era provides the outline for the limitations and advantages of archiving fan work at that time, and also provides insight into just how necessary it was for rogue archivists to be on top of the technology of the times in order to maintain security, secrecy, and fluidity of movement in the face of potential corporate persecution.

Certainly in Web 1.0, the Internet was as much a sandbox as it was the Wild West, the nature of the communities that were made across the Internet in the 90s and early 00s reflect that. The 'sandbox', often an important and shared vocabulary word among many fan cultures as well as video game mechanics, describes an open world with narrative space to wander and some 'toys' (characters, tropes, narrative obstacles, a main plot with side plots, etc) but leaves a lot of room for fluid movement (Booth). This phenomena described in fan spaces aligns closely to Salen and Zimmerman's definition of play. This resonates within the largest, oldest, and longest lasting of modern fandoms and the contexts by which they persist. *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* are the preeminent examples of older and still viable modern fandoms- their massive narrative universes, span hundreds of galaxies in an ever expanding universe, and they have a few scattered world-building elements but otherwise, there's an emphasis on exploration- and in *Star Trek* it is the central storyline. This is one of the easiest fannish opportunities that a fan begin in; however, even outside of media suited to sandboxing, there is ample room for a fan to engage in

a variety of transformative works to build their own headcanons and fanon<sup>20</sup> around the source media.

Booth establishes that fandoms have two driving forces for play and creation that act in a mutually cyclical fashion- nostalgia and novelty. To engage in fan-related play, there must be a fan product created with a “sense of newness” that ties into some aspect of the original source text, tapping into the nostalgia fannish drive (Booth, 6). The goal, he says, is to hit the dual desired outcome of fan work: surprise and appeasement. As Suzanne Scott’s body of work shows, the “gift economy”<sup>21</sup> of fan works/fan labor within fan spaces is integral in considering the community culture in said spaces. When the practice of fandom-related play is elevated out of an individual practice (ie: a sole author writing their own fanfiction) and integrated into a community, this often results in the impulse to create together. Some common forms this manifests as are: beta-ing<sup>22</sup>, co-writing, providing feedback, and (as seen in the data chapters) creating works for another member of the community in a reciprocal and loose trading system.

Booth, among many other media scholars, recognizes fan production as a deeply affective process and also recognizes that for new media scholars within fan studies, the process of approaching fan culture from an academic lens is deeply affective (and potentially distorting) as well. As mentioned before, there is a prominent presence of queer fans and fans of color that act as creators in and stewards of fan archives- which adds to the affective sense of community in fan spaces among fans contributing to an archive simultaneously. Similarly, there is an affective

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<sup>20</sup> The common understanding of a canon text shared among a fandom, communicated often through fan spaces and/or social media. This is not limited to the original scope and/or tone of the canon text. Fandoms create fanon through collaboration and collective decision making and create a “meta-text” (Jenkins).

<sup>21</sup> Gift economy, or a description of the practice of trading skills among fans in fan spaces, is best explored by Suzanne Scott’s article “Repacking Fan Culture,” found [here](#).

<sup>22</sup> To beta is to act as an editor for a fanfiction, someone who serves as the first reader of drafts and then provides feedback to the fic author.

reaction that I have felt as a researcher in looking through archives from the late 90s and early 00s and being a queer transgender man in the 20s seeking remnants of queer communities finding solace in writing among the isolationary social practices during the AIDS epidemic. It's that bodily reaction to a deep set emotion, the "affective appreciation of the text" that entices people into fandom in the first place<sup>23</sup>, so it is only natural that it is the foundation for fan works as well (Booth 20).

### **Theft**

One of the most prevalent critiques of fanfiction and fan works in general is that it steals the intellectual property of a given popular author, director, musician, or athlete for its own gain. However, that the vast majority of fanfiction is produced either for the pleasure of the individual or to present to fandoms in small circles in small independent forums and archives.

These frequent external pressures to these fandom communities inevitably leads to intercommunal discussions on whether or not the creations they hold and protect constitute theft. Now, a political science student's thesis on this topic might go in-depth on copyright laws in various nations of the world, as there are countries where fanfiction is not within the letter of the law. But this isn't that thesis. While it's been proven many times in the United States that fanfiction, and all other transformative work, is fully within the bounds of the letter of copyright law- that isn't pertinent to the research being conducted herein (*Campbell v. Acuff-Rose Music*). What *is* important and pertinent to this research is perception of theft and ownership within fan communities.

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<sup>23</sup> Particularly present in the affect of archives on the viewer, see Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feeling* for more

Fan works are transformative works, meaning that they alter and remix a given base text and provide a means for it to grow beyond the author and beyond the base text itself. This is not an incredibly old idea, as Henry Jenkins came onto the scene in 1992 (along with Camille Bacon-Smith) and pushed back against Michel de Certeau's conception of 'poaching' in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), which postulated that a reader was a helpless entity meandering through a published work and poaching ideas from what they had read in order to incorporate it in other aspects of their life. He believed that a consumer could only truly consider a work, and if they were to create something from their experience of it- they were no better than an ivory poacher.

Though de Certeau could not anticipate exactly how his words would become incorporated into fan studies, and though he did not live long enough to see its response, his words would have a near irreparable effect on fan studies and fandom at large. In many ways, de Certeau vocalized how the general public saw fans; at best, they were painted as common thieves (often seen as incapable of creating their own creative works) and at worst, as vindictive poachers who intentionally harmed and distorted a given work into something perverted and broken away from the original contexts.

In many ways, we haven't entirely moved past that conception- in part because of Henry Jenkins's reworking and reframing of Michel de Certeau's conception of the fan as a thief. While Jenkins softened Certeau's language and gave fan creators a spotlight in his groundbreaking book from 1992- he kept the aggressive moniker of 'poacher' even in the title of the work itself: *Textual Poachers*. But Jenkins's work *did* initiate the important work of pushing back against the

then-dominant narrative that consumers of media were useless and helpless, at the whim of the creator only.

This ideology has created a complex among fans, especially as ethnographers and journalists have (whether intentionally or unintentionally) pathologized fan creators. While transformative works are legal in the United States, and in many other countries around the world, a pervasive narrative remains among the general public and fans alike that most fan fiction contains an element of criminality; there remains a suggestion, spoken aloud as well as implied socially, that there is something inherently shameful about fan creations because of their unique relationship to a source text. The adherence to, or conversely the removal of, this idea of theft in fan creations is one of the primary areas of fandom where conflicts and ‘fractures’ can occur (Reinhard). These “fandom fractures” according to Dr. Reinhard, are contentions so full of fan vitriol that they threaten the destabilizing of the fan collective.

This concept of ‘theft’ and ‘legality’ in fanfiction has always been a sore subject and a site of contention- a fracture. Many authors don’t help in mending this fracture either. At a first glance, it seems that fan works hinge on the Barthesian principle that the author is dead<sup>24</sup>- that the consumer’s individual perspective creates their interpretation of the work, and that this interpretation means more than any authorial/auteurist intention. This is not incorrect; for the fan creator, the author often becomes a collaborator or a compatriot in a shared universe, not a dictatorial leader that has the final say as judge, jury, and executioner of their authored works. But there are many instances where the fan creator sees the author as a road block at best, and an antagonist at worst. In this approach, which will be further explored in the subchapter “Cultural Memory and Stewardship,” the fan creator sees their works as a means to rectify, repair, or

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<sup>24</sup> See Barthes “The Death of the Author,” 1967.

amend portions of the text that they clash against and, most pertinently, create items through a hooksian oppositional gaze. This impulse to rectify falls especially within the concept of the oppositional gaze for fans of media that are resisting an unjust depiction of a marginalized group, that in the act of reimagining a work they state, as hooks did, that “not only will I stare, I want my look to change reality.” (116). And their gaze, made tangible through fan works, does<sup>25</sup>.

Neither fan creator is engaging in violating copyright law<sup>26</sup> but many authors, particularly in the late 90s and early 00s when fan works went digital, objected to the practice of fan works (and fan fiction in particular) as a violation of their intellectual property rights. Anne Rice is one of the most notorious authors who lashed out at fans who have created fan works, specifically fanfiction surrounding her novel series *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976-2018). On April 7th 2000, Rice made a statement on her website where she declared, “I do not allow fanfiction. The characters are copyrighted. It upsets me terribly to even think about fan fiction with my characters. I advise my readers to write your own original stories with your own characters. It is absolutely essential that you respect my wishes.” At that point, she let loose her lawyers onto the nascent Internet to destroy the spaces where *Vampire Chronicles* fan fiction was kept. These lawyers strong armed Fanfiction.net<sup>27</sup> into erasing all Anne Rice fanfiction by threatening legal action and financial punishments on the owners. On April 9th, two days after Rice’s open letter, the *Vampire Chronicles* fandom experienced the “Spec Writer Massacre” (aka “SpecWriter Massacre of 2000” and/or “Day of the Lawyers”), where Anne Rice’s lawyers sent massive

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<sup>25</sup> See fanon, especially in such instances where fanon overtakes canon (such as a non-canon pairing becoming so popular that it becomes a forgone conclusion that no longer requires nor requests canonizing)

<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that obeying the letter of the law is equivalent to obeying a code of ethics.

<sup>27</sup> Fanfiction.net, along with social media sites like Tumblr and Twitter, are not reliable archives as they have investments in capitalism and a drive to make money off of fans- which doesn’t mesh well with the work that fan archives do (ie: volunteer communal archival work). However, these sites are often seen as archival to young fans/newcomers to fan culture/production- making these ‘false archives’. See DeKosnik for more info.

threatening Cease and Desist letters to authors of *Vampire Chronicles* spec<sup>28</sup>, some of whom (like “The Brat Queen”<sup>29</sup>) were high profile and well-respected multifandom writers (Fanlore).

Those who were a part of *Vampire Chronicles* fan spaces went into hiding, forced to engage in that fluidity of movement that is a hallmark of rogue archivists, and hid their remaining fan works (De Kosnik 128-130). They made their forums private and locked away their real names for good, solely using pseudonyms in the desperate hopes towards anonymity. And those who experienced it passed on that information to fans more than a decade later, spreading warnings through social media sites like Tumblr about how Anne Rice’s behavior cost the collective fandom thousands of works that have not been, and likely will never be, recovered fully- as well as doxxing<sup>30</sup>, threatening, and driving away quality fan writers from the Internet, possibly forever (rsasai). However, we have seen a resurgence of fanfiction posted within the guarded confines of Archive of Our Own within the last few years and a massive resurgence (along with some backlogging) of fanfiction in the wake of Rice’s death in 2021. Efforts from elder *Vampire Chronicles* fan writers like ‘kyuuketsukirui’ on Archive of Our Own show that some backlogs of these previously hidden and/or missing fanfictions are resurfacing. kyuuketsukirui’s oldest *Vampire Chronicles* fanfiction that has been republished on AO3 dates back to March 2002. While these restorative actions on the part of fan authors are commendable

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<sup>28</sup>Short for “speculation”, a type of fanfiction that indulges specifically in ‘what if?’ scenarios. Was found most frequently in the Anne Rice/Vampire Chronicles fandom, but was then eradicated in the Spec Writer Massacre of 2000.

<sup>29</sup> The Brat Queen was a well known fan author who participated in several different fan spaces (unusual for this time period) and created such a name for herself that she had political sway in Internet fan spaces. Her website is [here](#) and has been dormant since 2006. The Brat Queen also released a prominent meta work on anti-slash movements, which can be found [here](#).

<sup>30</sup> Doxxing is the practice of maliciously seeking (and often abusing) private information about an otherwise anonymous/semi-anonymous individual on the Internet- in the modern day, it is usually posted on social media.

and should be encouraged, the number of retrieved works pales in comparison to what has been lost.

Unfortunately, Anne Rice is not the first nor the last author to retaliate against fan creators, and the destruction of one of the archives explored in this thesis is due to a cease and desist letter similar to those sent out in the doxxing process of the Spec Writer Massacre. It's important to fully understand the tactics here, because we currently stand at the precipice of corporations and media conglomerates now seeking to covertly enter fan spaces in order to engage in true theft from fanfiction using the excuse of fan service, while simultaneously providing a disservice to fans by infiltrating their community spaces, as detailed in chapter one of this thesis.

While the myth of the thief fan creator has been pervasive throughout (at least) the last half century, the reality of the thief corporation has existed just as long- but the Internet has, like most things in fan culture, allowed the average person to see behind the curtain so to speak and gain insight through the public nature of the Web 1.0 Internet. *Star Wars*, whose creator George Lucas<sup>31</sup> perpetrated similar online legal purges akin to Rice (of overwhelmingly queer fan work in particular) has also found himself, via his company LucasFilm, among the corporations who have been accused of picking up fan plots to fill in the gaps of their own content. *Star Wars Episode IX: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019) provides an example of a curious timeline of events wherein Disney is very interested in fan content and seemingly inserting it into their franchises

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<sup>31</sup> Lucas has not been as involved in the processes of LucasFilm after the company was acquired and absorbed by the Walt Disney Company on October 30th, 2012 for over four billion dollars, but Disney has certainly participated in this kind of behavior described here.

through their haphazard and slap-together approach to incorporating the “Reylo” ship<sup>32</sup> into the film.

Reylo is a “ship name” for Kylo Ren and Rey Skywalker, the popular yet controversial pairing among the fans of the sequel *Star Wars* trilogy which pairs together the primary protagonist, Rey, with the primary antagonist, Kylo; and at the time of writing, there are over 15,600 works in Archive of Our Own alone that are tagged “Kylo Ren/Rey.” A protagonist/antagonist ship is an incredibly common ship, as it replicates the primary conflict of fictional works in the form of romantic and/or sexual encounters and frustrations. Reylo however, has been controversial for a myriad of reasons, most of which involve fans objecting on the basis of morality; the ever-changing and vitriolic debate of morality among fan shipping is, regrettably, the subject of an entire other thesis<sup>33</sup>. The important piece to note for this thesis is its prominence and the similarly controversial move by *Episode VIII: The Last Jedi* (2017) director Rian Johnson to remove the possibility of romantic/sexual encounters between Rey and Kylo through frequent and intense torture scenes between them. After fans of *Star Wars* experienced a serious and potentially fandom threatening (read: finance threatening for Disney and LucasFilm) fracture between fans<sup>34</sup> on *The Last Jedi*, Disney needed something to repair the fracture quickly; fans saw Reylo as a last ditch effort by Disney to elevate *The Rise of Skywalker* in the eyes of

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<sup>32</sup> Ship is a diminutive of the word ‘relationship’. This term is often used to describe two or more individuals that a fan creator envisions as an ideal match. To describe something as a ‘ship’ usually implies that a fan creator(s) feel strongly enough about it to be insistent on its existence. This does not hinge on whether the canon text has ever placed the characters in a relationship, nor if the characters have interacted, nor even in the same original text.

<sup>33</sup> Research pertaining to fan conceptions of morality and moral policing is a fascinating, yet under-studied, section of fan studies. Current research on fan morality typically involves sports fans, instead of fictional media fans that this thesis concerns itself with. Examples of such are Brent Smith’s “Marginalized Morality” (found [here](#)) and Daniel A. Grano’s “Ritual Disorder and the Contractual Morality of Sports” (found [here](#)). In terms of the limited scholarship for fictional media fans, see Melissa Ames’s “Media Criticism and Morality Policing on Twitter: Fan Responses to ‘How to Get Away with Murder’,” which can be found [here](#).

<sup>34</sup> This fracture seems to have occurred both in regards to age of fans and subsequent exposure order (and acceptance) of canon. Ie: fans who saw the original trilogy in theaters and did not see the prequels (nor sequels) as canon vs. fans who saw the prequels and/or sequels for the first time in theaters.

fans, as the scenes were allegedly incorporated into the film later in the editing process via reshoots. The kiss scene garnered a somewhat tepid fan response. Disney may not have found the response that they were looking for, but fans saw the corporation on full display of its predacious corporate authorship.

This fan suspicion of corporate theft of fanon surrounding Reylo, combined with what the creator of *The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive* notes about watching LucasFilm IP addresses crawl through her archive before they issued a cease and desist order<sup>35</sup>, encapsulates the changing relations between fans and media corporations but also the hypocrisy of the vitriol towards rogue archives from said corporations. Corporations pretend that rogue archivists are thieves, when in reality rogue archivists are stewards of digital cultural memory and even stewards of a corporation's intellectual property in an age where said property may have a shorter lifespan than corporations might hope.

An interesting, controversial, and very modern example of such stewardship involves the *New York Times* Bestselling romance novel *The Love Hypothesis*, published in 2021, which began as the author's Reylo fanfic titled *Head Over Feet* posted online three years earlier (Hazelwood). Unlike predecessors of fanfic-turned-novels, Hazelwood did not shy away from the connection to her Reylo fanfiction, and has said in interviews<sup>36</sup> that her background in fanfiction is what gave her the confidence to pursue this novel. Even the cover of the book portrays main characters, Adam and Olive, who are styled very similarly to the appearance of actors Adam Driver and Daisy Ridley who played Kylo Ren and Rey, respectively. Despite the fact that there are many overlaps between *Star Wars* properties and *The Love Hypothesis*, neither

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<sup>35</sup> More information on this in Chapter 3: *JHA*

<sup>36</sup> An example of said interview can be found [here](#).

LucasFilm nor Disney have pursued legal action against Hazelwood, which one could postulate is due to the popularity of the novel and its potential to bring more positive press to Reylo as a concept. *The Love Hypothesis* has been optioned for a film adaptation, which could provide further insights into fanfic-turned-pro in the future as well as into the legal strategies of LucasFilm/Disney (and their contemporaries) in the future. This is an important inclusion into the matters of this thesis as it yet again signals an impending debate (and possible societal perspective change) in regards to fanfiction, questions of ownership, and where the blurry line is between fanfiction and fiction.

### **Cultural Memory and Stewardship**

While the utopic fan space that Jenkins theorized in *Textual Poachers* is a beautiful dream, it unfortunately does not encapsulate our contemporary reality nor the digital fan spaces of the 90s. But even with this utopic, and arguably naive, conception of fan spaces, Jenkins acknowledged the politics that fan spaces engendered. His later works (both written and TED talks) would explain how fan spaces become a breeding ground for, and communication hub of, world-changing philanthropic efforts; however, he did not emphasize the connection between the political and how fan spaces existed and why. Careful consideration of how marginalized fan creators utilize fan spaces as areas of cultural memory and justice begins with scholars like Kristina Busse and Abigail De Kosnik.

Busse's *Framing Fan Fiction* encapsulates twenty years of her work in fan spaces and takes care to consider a multitude of aspects about fan writers and how they create and share fan fiction, as well as the various socio-political and economic considerations involved. This

includes the affective and performative nature of fan work, similar to Booth, and discusses how these affective performances interplay with the creator's identity and identity construction, especially the creator's sexual desires in explicit and pornographic fan fiction (Busse, 78-98). The first section of *Framing Fan Fiction* works off of Busse's early contributions to fan studies, focusing on her conception of slash fan spaces as "queer female spaces." De Kosnik uses Busse's work on fan writing as queer in order to make the claim that all fan archives are women's community spaces as well as queer community spaces and discuss how politics interfaces with the archive and cultural memory.

De Kosnik's conception of rogue archives is pivotal to the ethos of this thesis, and this thesis hinges on De Kosnik's theory of the archive as counterinstitution and as queer and women's cultural memory storage. She argues that fan archives serve as "political potential" for folks marginalized by dominant oppressive groups to "build their own robust cultural memory sites" as a digital counternarrative "archontically rewrit[ing] the stories of dominant culture" within the same philosophical approach that postcolonial and feminist writers utilize (135). She adds that much of this "political potential" lies in the fact that, as marginalized people, their cultural stories and history are constantly snubbed by traditional memory institutions such as national archives or university libraries. By being curated and maintained by fan stewards, over two thirds of whom identify as women and/or queer people (according to Tumblr user lulu in an interview with DeKosnik<sup>37</sup>), rogue archivists are where the affect of archiving is allowed to blossom and thrive.

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<sup>37</sup> Interviews with fan archivists is a key aspect of DeKosnik's methodology in *Rogue Archives*, which represents a methodological approach that could be taken in future work with the information in this thesis.

It bears repeating that these archives do not solely serve as a repository of stagnant and finished fictional narratives. They are living and ever-changing spaces, ones that not only archive the winding journeys and changes to texts within the ‘walls’ of the archive, but also the responses and reactions to the texts themselves. The discussions in comment threads beneath fics, the email threads that blossomed from particular posts, the discourse and praise, the beta-ing and rewriting- these are all unique and powerful facets of community spaces. Cvetkovich states that a “useful archive” incites intense emotion in the viewer, and in DeKosnik’s ethnographic research she refers to as the “moment of discovery”- the sudden striking moment where the nascent fan realizes that they are not alone in their own feelings about the source text of a particular archive (DeKosnik, 135-139). Beyond an archive, even a community, the user finds themselves a part of a collective (DeKosnik, 139). Yes, fan archives serve as “evidence of just how much has been excluded [from official archives]” but they also serve as “collective memory of that group [that] is deserving of being sustained and passed on...” and (as Cvetkovich’s book title suggests) an archive of feelings- stewarded into the future by rogue archivists protecting their marginalized group’s narratives and identities from times gone by and the ephemeral present (Flinn and Stevens, 17; DeKosnik, 139 respectively).

This style of community archiving allows for more direct and intentional history-keeping among marginalized groups. Yet in fan studies, referring to fan archives as marginalized community spaces has not gone without criticism. Queer scholars, such as John Edward Campbell, have pushed back against such descriptions of fan spaces and fans themselves as “appropriative of queer frameworks” and accused fans of inappropriately making parallels between the struggle to survive and thrive as a queer individual to the struggles of being

perceived as an intense/dedicated fan (Jenkins and Tosenberger). In regards to affirmational fan spaces, Campbell is absolutely correct. Scholar Catherine Tosenberger defines affirmational fan spaces as spaces where fans appreciate a text for what it is or “otherwise investigate what the source text offers without seeking to alter or contradict it”- such as trivia nights or inquisitive discussion boards which weigh the general merits and minutiae of a given source text (Jenkins and Tosenberger). These spaces are dominated, in most instances, by straight cisgender white men. Therefore in these spaces, applying queer experience as analogous to the fan experience would be inappropriate which Campbell states in his own critique that “coming out” as a *Star Wars* fan and expressing a deep-set love for the franchise does not create the same social and political ramifications as coming out as queer. However, as Tosenberger and Jenkins both point out in their 2011 dialogue on fan cultures, this is not true for transformational fan spaces. Tosenberger’s definition of transformational fan spaces serves as a foil for the affirmational spaces; transformational spaces actively seek to “collectively rewrite and revise the source text” and are “more likely to be majority-female, and overtly queer or queer friendly” (Jenkins and Tosenberger). These spaces, often containing many overtly erotic writings and other taboo fantasies, are not only populated by queer individuals but also individuals who are (by virtue of writing transformative work) involved in a queer experience, thus disproving Campbell’s overly simplistic and broad-sweeping critique. While Campbell is correct that the base experience of ‘fan’ does not parallel to the experience of being queer, he does not consider the sheer volume of queer fans nor the queered space of transformational fan spaces, particularly in erotica fan production.

Jack Halberstam uses a postmodern lens to conceptualize queer time and space, wherein queer space is defined as “a place-making practice” by queer individuals in order to create a “counterpublic” in response to being ousted in the general public (6). These spaces are queered due not only to the queer individuals who build them, but also due to their “nonnormative logics and organization of community, sexual identity, embodiment and activity,” which construct them (Halberstam 6-7). By understanding these spaces as sites of “postmodern cultural production”, we can better understand why these spaces are not only inherently queer but also why they are persecuted by greed driven capitalist corporations.

Jenkins and Tosenberger point out that particularly young fan writers use transformational fan spaces to explore sexual interests and themes so intensely policed and censored in traditional public spaces. Fan spaces serve as safe havens for identity experimentation, discovery and expression, which demonstrates the dual nature of explicitly queer spaces as both “‘safe spaces’ and ‘spaces of targeting’” because they simultaneously allow personal and communal growth, but also create a space where “fans [become] perceptible to non-fans, and therefore renders fans susceptible to ridicule and condemnation” (DeKosnik, 147). One such archive explored within this thesis, *Jedi Hurtaholics Archive*, is brought to its untimely death for precisely that reason. *JHA*, again, is certainly not the only documented fan archive that has met this kind of death and serves as an example of the unknowable number of independent rogue fan archives that have met similar ends and faded from the Internet all together.

Much of the calls to action of this thesis are embedded in the same calls that Ann Cvetkovich makes in *An Archive of Feeling* and DeKosnik makes in *Rogue Archives*: that if we are to lose these archives, if they are allowed to slip out of existence and degrade to nothing, we

will lose key aspects of cultural memory and of evidence of affective interactions between queer- and women-affirming community spaces. It's more important now than ever, both globally and particularly within the United States, that these archives of feelings and cultural memories are maintained as sweeping anti-queer legislation goes into effect in several states at the time of writing in early 2023 (with more anti-queer legislation set to be debated and likely passed in US Southern states throughout the rest of this year). These archives are evidence that queer people were here and lived full lives with varied interests and rich digital communities sharing in collective storytelling. To allow these archives to slip away allows a quieter anti-queer violence to permeate history and continue to methodically erase queer identities, stories, and lives.

These are the stakes of this thesis and the conversation it enters; this is not simply an academic exercise in textual and autoethnographic research, this is where I take my stand as a queer person and fight back against the violence being thrust upon the subcultures I am a part of and the concepts I have become an expert in. The reflexive and autoethnographic approach in the next chapter is paramount in conceptualizing the fight yet to come to save as many remaining digital fan archives as possible. It makes no claims at being a perfect methodology, but rather claims to be an honest one and a personal and reflexive one. It is a methodology that respects the heart of why these archives are made: to encapsulate the feelings of marginalized folks in a queer setting. Just as those archives seek to hold and respect the feelings of individuals who contribute (and/or once contributed) to the collective knowledge and cultural memory of a small space on a bygone Internet, this thesis seeks to enshrine them in a format that I hope will last slightly longer among digital ephemera but also (and perhaps more crucially) archive my own feelings as a queer trans man along with them. It's not simply a practice of waxing poetic, it is a crucially vital

practice in the survival of honest queer narratives and expressions of affect that unfortunately seem to be ebbing from the Internet along with its current eradication from in-person public life, particularly in the Southern United States.

## **CHAPTER 2: METHODS**

This chapter explains and contextualizes the archival methods of research for this project with the current critical scholarly discussion occurring in fan studies spaces emphasizing how we “give up the game” and allow one another access to the innermost processes of autoethnographic research (Kirsch & Rohan 1). This synthesis of discussions on archival ethics in autoethnographic work through texts like *Beyond the Archive* and Melina Popova’s crucial “Follow the Trope” approaches to exploring fan archives coalesces in the research methods described herein. The three archives I examine in this thesis are in various stages of life, activity, and ownership. They are indicative of three separate fan cultures and two separate source texts, and as a result appear to have little to no overlap among their varied collections of creators and audience members. These archives do not encapsulate the entire fandoms of either of their source texts, nor are they meant to be representative of anything or anyone outside of their members, as this thesis is not meant to make broad sweeping claims on general fandom.

*The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive* [sic] was a “hurt/comfort” fanfiction archive which held dozens of works on *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* from 1999 to 2001. This archive, like many early Internet fan archives, was highly specific. Beyond just a single fandom or a single text, many early Internet fan archives pertained to a specific type of fan art. For *The Jedi Hurtaholics Archives* (henceforth referred to as *JHA*, as members often did themselves), they specialized in *Phantom Menace* slash fics solely focused on Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi as the primary ‘ship’. *JHA* was founded by a single curator, an individual under the username “KatieB” in 1999, and its first accessible story was posted two months after the premiere of *Episode I: The Phantom Menace* in theaters, the first *Star Wars* film released in the fledgling

Internet age. This marked the transition of a global well-established modern fandom from analog (mailing lists, printed fanzines, etc) to digital.

The most lively, vibrant, and independently well-preserved of these archives is *TheForce.net's Jedi Council Forums*, a carefully curated and maintained archive of *Star Wars* discussion boards from as early as 1998 to the current day; at the time of writing in December 2022, there are posts on a near daily basis on this site discussing the current state of the *Star Wars* franchises, which has undergone massive changes since those early posts in 1998, which at the time heralded a new trilogy, Episodes I-III<sup>38</sup>, became a contentious chapter of the franchise, fandom, and broader culture. The ability to move from each stage of the Internet is impressive due to the varying functions of Web 1.0, 2.0, and the impending 3.0, as detailed in the literature review. *TheForce.net*, like AO3, represents a key aspect of what makes digital fan archives special (and difficult to maintain under current archival understandings)- they are constantly in flux and adapting while simultaneously preserving the past. *TheForce.net* represents a possible “best case scenario” for fan archival processes, and perhaps gives us insight as to how to continue to preserve these archives, but it is an outlier- as many more archives (*Star Wars* archives in particular) fell to George Lucas and LucasFilm’s legal filing rampage in the 2000s that destroyed of innumerable archives of writing. *TFN* also brings up questions related to queer life and its erasure from *TFN* to keep the ire of LucasFilm away; it begs the question, if *TFN* might be considered a so-called best case scenario surrounding issues facing large fan archives- then who exactly is it a best case for?

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<sup>38</sup> It’s important to note that the chronology of the primary *Star Wars* narrative includes: the Original Trilogy, comprised of Episode IV (1978), V (1980), and VI (1983); the Prequel Trilogy, comprised of Episodes I (1999), II (2002), and III (2005); and the Sequel Trilogy, comprised of Episodes VII (2015), VIII (2017), and IX (2019).

*The Good Omens Library: A Nice and Accurate Stories Archive* centers fanwork of *Good Omens* by Neil Gaiman and the late Terry Pratchett, and exemplifies how Archive of Our Own is helping to mitigate the attrition of online fan archives across the Internet, and may provide an alternative to the difficult work of the individual rogue archivists like those within *TheForce.Net* (however, their choices arguably removed *TFN*'s standing as 'rogue' archive). *The Good Omens Library* is a unique case study because the fan culture surrounding it has significantly shifted, in both demographics and fan content production, in the wake of the television adaptation of the novel via Amazon Prime in 2019. This show was released after author Terry Pratchett passed away from complications due to Alzheimer's<sup>39</sup> and brings up questions of fidelity and authorial presence within fan works then compounded by Neil Gaiman's immense online presence. Like *TheForce.net*, *The Good Omens Library* is currently an active and living archive in its new home on Archive of Our Own. At the time of writing in February 2023, the newest fanfic posted on this archive was made less than a month ago on January 23rd, 2023. This archive could have faced a fate similar to the *JHA*, but through the Open Doors program via Archive of Our Own transferred hundreds of works that would otherwise have disappeared. The primary steward of *The Good Omens Library*, user Quantum\_Witch, is one of the sole reasons these works made it over to AO3 and serves as an excellent example of an "archive elf": a term from Francesca Coppa, founder of AO3, describing a person/team of people who worked silently in service of a Web 1.0 fan site in order to keep operations running smoothly (DeKosnik 126). This dutiful stewardship that many of these archivists feel as a responsibility to their subculture/community

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<sup>39</sup> Pratchett's death was a key turning point in the many fan spaces that his works had created, including the *DiscWorld* fandom alongside *Good Omens* as the two most heavily impacted. Both fan spaces reckoned with Pratchett's decision to destroy his partial works differently- but the intricacies of *DiscWorld*'s fan spaces and Pratchett's final wishes are best explored in a different thesis.

that leads them to invest so many hours into transferring works over. In the case of Quantum\_Witch, she transferred each story from *GOL* by hand. This selfless act to *The Good Omens Library* has ensured its survival, and serves as a prime example of fan stewardship and basis for further archival efforts.

### **Autoethnography**

*Star Wars* was a natural choice for this project, as *Star Wars* (rivaled only by *Star Trek*) is one of the oldest and largest modern fandoms to date. The franchise spans many mediums and decades, and many owners. It is here that I find my strongest autoethnographic connection to this thesis. I was raised by a *Star Wars* superfan, my father, and so many aspects of my life have involved the franchise. I was raised around folks within the fandom, as my father was very active on online forums, so when I got old enough to use the Internet I jumped on these forums as well. As I grew older, I became entrenched in many various fandoms and immersed myself in several fan cultures as well as multifandom sites (ex: early 2010s Tumblr), including *Good Omens*.

*Good Omens* provides a nuanced approach to fandom and fan works due to the complicated background the story underwent in a metatextual and textual lens. *Good Omens* exists in a series of dualities. It is a 1990 novel by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett and it is a 2019 Amazon Studios television series adapted by Gaiman and starring Michael Sheen and David Tennant. It is both a collaborative novel between two young writers and best friends at the beginnings of their respective careers and it is an (arguably incomplete) adaptation and memorial in the wake of Pratchett tragic death. In almost every sense, it is generically unconventional; it's a fiction book with two equal authors and an adaptation created without the input of one author,

an adaptation long awaited by a cult fandom that manifested nearly 30 years after the initial publication of the novel. Most importantly to this research, the fandom has two very distinct age groups and eras that have blended together in unique ways. *Good Omens* is the antithesis of the massive fandom(s) of *Star Wars* and provides vastly different authorial approaches fan works and their fans' sense of archival stewardship and the rhetoric surrounding both, which makes them ideal contrasting examples of theft, play, and the intersection of cultural memory and stewardship. The autoethnographic approach for this subject rests in my experience with the fandom through the lockdown phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. This global tragedy engendered a flood of fandom participation across most, if not all, fan spaces due to the influx of free time that digital living brought on, and was particularly visible in the television portion of the *Good Omens* fandom. While this thesis does not touch directly on works created in 2020, this academic impulse to look into a bifurcated fandom, one that is split both at the authorial level as well as the fandom level, is rooted in my experience during that year.

The concept of autoethnography in fan studies has been contentious since its inception. I have chosen this particular phrase for this thesis despite the term's loss of meaning in the modern digital age and the removal of physical environmental boundaries in auto/ethnographic work. My autoethnographic approach not only recognizes the personal investment that I have in this work through a Hillsian 'acafan' approach, which validates on the value of my knowledge of these communities that I carried before beginning this research and provides a base knowledge during archival research.

My autoethnographic approach sits somewhere between Anderson's conception of analytical autoethnography and Milena Popova's "Follow the Trope" approach to fan studies

autoethnographic methods, as I discuss below. My approach as a scholar informs my research basis through engaging in reflexive ethnographic archival work into subcultural spaces that I am a part of and centering my approach in a lens that feels authentically honest- my own. My focus on archival research, as well as the natural distance created temporally and physically in the ephemeral Internet, created a natural analytical distance between myself and the subjects of my research in order to uphold strict ethical archival practices.

By undergoing this process of metaphorically stumbling into archives and digging through what remains, by engaging with the spaces that I too roam, I am struck and guided by the stories and insights of the scholars who contributed to *Beyond the Archive*. I'm particularly struck by the last chapter of the book, where from the gate two scholars, Mastrangelo & L'Eplatteneir, admit that neither "[thought] they were going to be rhetoric and composition scholars, much less archival historians." (162). I walked into my Master's program in English in the literature track, I entered with a Bachelor's in Film and a need to stay in school to avoid the impending recession on the heels of Covid. I will walk out of this program with a degree in the RWL track and enter a PhD program for media studies where I will continue this work. Being at the right place at the right time is the key to beginning archival research, and the thing that folks don't tell you is that this kind of research is so fulfilling that it begs to be continued. Because truly, what more are we called to do as archival scholars than this- to tell the stories of people yet untold and unknown? What more can we do, as intellectuals, to uplift our common man or better yet our own people within our own communities? We are called to research, to write, and to teach. By exploring this methodology, I have not only grown in each of these facets as a man, a fan, and a scholar, but I have had the fortune to build the "joyful human connections [scholars

make] with their data, a phenomenon of research rarely articulated or made public.” (Kirsch & Rohan 7).

## **Methodology**

Methodology and fan studies has had a contentious relationship for decades now, mostly due to the alarming lack of open discussions on the ontological and epistemological aspects of fan studies methodology (Evans and Stasi 6). Much of this contention surrounds the complex relationship between the researcher holding identities as both fan and academic, which is common among interdisciplinary humanities fields like fan studies and provides an implied methodology that is only now being unfolded and openly discussed by scholars in recent years. This thesis does not seek to answer the long-standing queries among fan studies methodological practices, but rather utilizes my perspective as an academic, fan, and queer individual to reflexively and analytically process and understand these digital archives and appreciate their position in historiography. While the temporality of both the Internet and of queer life is often not congruent with the way time is experienced in more dominant in-person communities, the core constructions of these rogue archives and the language of fan spaces hasn't changed much since the inception of the archives that I explore in this project.

My research falls within an archival approach commonly found within digital spaces- the distinct art of educated and community-informed wandering. Milena Popova refers to this as “Follow the Trope” in her seminal paper regarding her methodology on the presence of consent portrayed in sexual encounters within fan fiction. While her approach is highly specific to her research, the ethos of her methodology is deeply valuable and has been integrated into my

research. Popova's description of field site construction through community inside knowledge illuminates how the archives were chosen for this project- my ability to root out data and metadata among these archives is rooted in my lifetime experience in digital spaces like these. I find that Popova and Anderson dovetail through this responsibility the autoethnographer holds to reflexivity in the research, that the researcher should invest in telling the stories of others as well as their own. By being a member of the communities about which they write, Anderson rightfully asserts that the autoethnographer is duty bound to use their increased knowledge to paint an accurate and holistic view of a given community, which I have attempted in this study (384).

Being a part of this community was, is, and always will be an asset to my methodology- here and in all future projects. To do this work in this field, in this way, is to "extract meaning from sources in locations most associated with isolation and loneliness - the archives" (Kirsch & Rohan 1). The strength of archival research comes, as the scholars in *Beyond the Archive* attest, through "serendipity, chance discoveries, and personal connections"; through our passions as scholars and archivists, the stories that need to be told get told (7). My identity and participation in these spaces strengthens my research, it does not cloud it. The work herein is evidence of an expanding understanding of the archive espoused by scholars like Kirsch, Rohan, and the contemporaries listed throughout *Beyond the Archive* extrapolate on. To rebuke the changing tide of archival research is to invalidate a passionate group of archivists, scholars, activists, and individuals who seek to ensure that the stories that are important to them get told. In light of this, I have chosen a methodological approach that affirms and uplifts these changing tides.

I leveraged my community understandings as an acafan to explore the best kept communal records on historic fan archives (including those that are deceased, decrepit, restored, and everything in-between): FanLore. FanLore is a wiki-style branch of the Organization for Transformational Work that stores information on the history of fan cultures and archives online, a forum for micro-community knowledge to find a home outside of the Internet ephemera- akin to a digital oral tradition. FanLore allows users to add information and pages to describe the fan archives they are or were once a part of. This community reliance on fellowship and stewardship is common in fan spaces and this camaraderie fosters a sense of trust and shared responsibility. The umbrella subculture of ‘fandom’ holds hundreds of sub subcultures and each understands their ephemerality on the Internet. This leads to a slow building of a knowledge base to be passed on to a new generation of fans, for both historic preservation and community safe-keeping in the present.

The average academic may look at FanLore as nothing more than a highly specific Wikipedia- lacking credibility and rigor for reliable research. However, to write off FanLore is to yet again cast aside fans and fan cultures as unworthy of academic pursuit based on its connection to popular culture or ‘low art’ status. Daily life can’t escape fandom anymore in a highly digital world, which this thesis will elaborate on further later, so to not invest in these fan communities would truly only do a disservice to not only them but to the academic community as well.

FanLore allowed me to access the organized thoughts from a variety of former members and stewards of many archives, and from this I selected *JHA*, *TheForce.net*, and *The Good Omens Library* for their diversity of composition, administration, stewardship, lifetime, and

terminations (or lack thereof). These three archives serve as ample case studies for the three typical lives of fan archives and forums born in the late 90s and early 00s: death by corporation and subsequent deterioration, life through ample funding and fan stewardship, and well-preserved archival echoes of a deceased site, respectively.

I documented these sites through taking screen captures of WayBack captures<sup>40</sup>, and if that sounds redundant it's because it is- but archives (and especially Internet archives) are in distinct need of redundancy now. I combed through every available link on the smaller archives, *Jedi Hurtaholics* and *Good Omens Archives*. On larger sites like *TheForce.net*, I sought out relevant threads within their *Jedi Council Network* archive that revealed the archival structure. There was more data for *TFN/JC*, but during the process of this research the site was updated and the archive was rearranged and updated in order to better protect its contents. While at any other juncture, I would have been thrilled to hear such news (and I still was excited to see money being put to good use in this archive), this timing was not good for the data collection process of this thesis as I lost many threads among the massive archive. This meant that I had to think on my feet in this living archive in a way nearly inverse to the ways and means in which I needed to think quickly in the dying/dead archive of *JHA*.

Only echoes remain of most sites from the 90s and 00s, echoes that the general public largely believes can be accessed through the WayBack Machine. The WayBack Machine is an invaluable tool for digital scholars, but it is not without its drawbacks. The WayBack Machine is a storage space that hosts a software from the organization Internet Archive whose goal is to “crawl and download all publicly viewable websites and take ‘snapshots’ of them, in order to

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<sup>40</sup> WayBack Machine captures are echoes of websites that no longer exist- these captures allow the user to peruse the site as if it were the date when the capture was taken. This does not guarantee that links or embedded images will be functional, but allows the user to see the site as it was on a given date in the past.

record the websites at different intervals over their lifespans” (DeKosnik 48). This very useful tool among scholars and inquiring Internet users is not, as some scholars have posited, the memex to save us all. The WayBack Machine has a fatal flaw, which led to the destruction and disappearance of deceased sites previously safe on WayBack- which is robots.txt, or robot text files (DeKosnik, 50). Robot text files are applied to domain names after they have been purchased by “a bulk reseller” of URLs, which occurs after a former user relinquishes a domain, often due to neglecting to upkeep the domain name (DeKosnik 50). This allows for the resellers to sell off sites to individuals looking to start a new website. When the WayBack Machine scans a domain and finds a robots.txt file, it retroactively removes all previous snapshots from the URL to prepare for a new site to inhabit that slot (DeKosnik 51).

This flaw is not currently repairable, and certainly cannot restore the countless snapshots of fan archives already lost to time. I use the WayBack Machine throughout this thesis, and pertinent snapshots appear as an appendix, but it is entirely possible that future readers who attempt to access some of these archives will not be able to find them due to robots.txt. These screenshots not only aid discussion of data in this work, but also provide an example of DeKosnik’s primary point in *Rogue Archives* (and the essence of what is argued in this thesis), that we cannot rely on digital means of preserving memory- any possible preservation of digital ephemera requires human intervention and stewardship.

In addition, this thesis will discuss missing portions of archives and can no longer be accessed or no longer have any remaining echo or trace in the WayBack Machine. This discussion finds parallel to traditional archives where even the most well-funded archives grapple with the fact that, due to colonialism, racism, classism, and homophobia, there exists

massive gaps in history from where artifacts were destroyed or scrubbed out of existence. This connects to an overarching metaphor of the archivist trying to prescribe meaning to a piece of papyrus that has endured the physical effects of aging. Just like that papyrus, archives from Web 1.0 are subject to the physical effects of aging- there are holes and damaged/illegible data and unavoidable deficits in information that we must attempt to fill in with outside information. Some of the research within this thesis hinges on that act of educated deductive reasoning in order to offer potential outcomes and most likely explanations for these gaps.

This research is strictly archival and involves no direct contact with archivists, conservation stewards, nor the authors of the pieces held in these archives, due to the ephemeral nature of the Internet and partly a personal choice. In terms of ephemera, many means to contact these individuals are either through in-site messaging that has long since stopped being supported or through email addresses that are no longer supported- making contact nearly impossible. Additionally, the unfortunate fact is that some of these archivists are deceased and/or no longer interact with the Internet (thereby making them digitally disconnected, and in some ways digitally deceased). In terms of personal choice, I wanted to limit the field site of this research to what I could find as well, as the fact that many of these fans were beaten back by inappropriate copyright strikes<sup>41</sup> against them and/or community fracturing and have since retreated into locked digital communities. In order to maintain their anonymity via their digital personas and out of respect for these fan and queer elders<sup>42</sup> who have endured before me, I made

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<sup>41</sup> This is a term for when a copyright holder issues an injunction on a user who they believe have violated copyright law in regards to their intellectual property.

<sup>42</sup> In this context, I am referring to older queer individuals who have influenced my life, directly or indirectly, in creating places and spaces where I could explore my identity and be surrounded in community by standing their ground and fighting for (and to protect) basic rights and to be heard. There is an innate feeling of deference shared among many queer individuals for our elders who have endured and survived. I owe these now-elders the respect they deserve in having distanced themselves from the Internet.

the choice to not reach out to individuals nor attempt to track them down through their digital footprints. With further funding and time, respectful contact and traditional ethnographic approaches could be considered, but were not possible within the confines of this project. I have also chosen to respect the anonymity of the users mentioned in this thesis to remain respectful of their privacy. Though there are instances within *JHA* specifically where the curator's name is visible, and though the pages that contain this legal name continue to exist on the Internet, I am taking the lead from the Organization for Transformative Works and FanLore and choosing to redact the curator's legal name from any and all examples brought into this thesis as a sign of respect to her work and to protect her from further and/or renewed legal troubles to her.

By implementing my dual reflexive and analytical autoethnographic lens, I explored the three archives as emblematic case studies of the life, death, and ephemera of Internet fan archives as seen in the snapshot of time of thesis research, from about January 2022 to April 2023. Naturally, this limits the potential for extrapolation as it focuses on only three archives among the thousands that still exist and the countless that have died. However, much of this thesis not only serves as an investigative study but also as a micro-archive of its own. In the perpetual uncertainty of the Internet, placing these pieces of fan archives in a thesis attempts to keep these writings from falling completely into oblivion.

In an effort to be transparent and upfront in my methodology and to limit confusion for any future research- this research has been completed over the course of a year, from early 2022 to early 2023. This disclosure is made as there are further upcoming projects from the source text franchises, *Star Wars* and *Good Omens*, that may change the way that the living archives

approach issues of theft, play, cultural memory and stewardship which are discussed at length at the end of this work.

### **CHAPTER 3: THE JEDI HURTAHOLICS ARCHIVE**

*The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive* is a now deceased fanfiction archive that evidence suggests existed from mid-1999, with its first accessible story being published July 14th, 1999, until its destruction on November 8th, 2001. This archive was created by user KatieB as a space for erotica surrounding the then-new first prequel of the *Star Wars* franchise: *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999). *JHA* appears to have been made as a reactionary fan project, as its first semi-retrievable story was published in July 1999 and *Phantom Menace* was released to theaters in late May 1999. This was (and still is) a common series of events in fan media creation, as a response to/reaction to fan consumption of the source text by the fan. This provides a good basis to examine the core themes of this thesis: play, theft, and cultural memory in stewardship. It seems this archive was intended to hold works for the then-announced two additional films in the trilogy, but *JHA* was destroyed before the release of *Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (2002). This destruction is crucial in understanding the effects of the concepts of theft and stewardship in fan archival studies.

*The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive*, as the name suggests, was an erotica-based slash fanfiction site focused on concepts we now refer to as ‘whump’ and/or ‘hurt/comfort.’<sup>43</sup> This archive centered their works around three pillars of fanfiction rooted in the primary protagonists of *Phantom Menace*. As listed on the site, this included: Qui-Gon centric works, Obi-Wan centric works, and Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan pairing works.

For the uninitiated, Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) and Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) are the primary protagonists in *Episode I: The Phantom Menace* and represent the Jedi Order with which the future central character, Anakin Skywalker, will interact as the plot

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<sup>43</sup> Interchangeable terms. See Appendix A: Glossary

continues. Qui-Gon is a Jedi Master, a seasoned veteran, expert, and teacher of novice Jedi. Obi-Wan is a Jedi Padawan, a young Force user entrusted to Qui-Gon as an apprentice. Qui-Gon is expected to train him up in the ways of the Jedi Code to eventually become a responsible Jedi Knight. Qui-Gon is depicted within the ‘speak softly and carry a big stick’ Jedi philosophy, a strong and silent type “maverick Jedi”<sup>44</sup> working in the best interest of the Force itself, and not the Jedi Order nor Council, and Obi-Wan as a young and restless Jedi trying to make a difference.

The Jedi (and furthermore, the organization- the Jedi Order) are often stylistically, and somewhat dogmatically, similar to the Catholic Church, as a highly regimented theocratic paramilitary ‘peace keeping’ force and overt religious influence over the Galactic Senate and Republic. The intense dogma is present in every aspect of the Jedi’s life, but the facet of the Jedi Code made most apparent throughout the entire franchise is that “Attachment is forbidden. Possession is forbidden...” yet “Compassion, which I [Anakin] would define as unconditional love, is central to the Jedi’s life” (*Episode II*). This becomes the central struggle for Anakin as the main character of the prequels, but before he can grow into a Padawan in *Episode II & III*, he appears as a young child in *Episode I*- therefore much of the film’s plot is entrusted and moved forward by Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan, and their Master-Padawan relationship.

This forbidden personal attachment to others creates a tantalizing opportunity for erotica fanfic writers, as it introduces an element of taboo and rule-breaking among devout Jedi- which also lends itself to adding to said taboo of the sexual power struggle between Padawan and

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<sup>44</sup> Description given in Qui-Gon’s entry in WookieePedia, a fan-run digital encyclopedia utilizing the software from Wikipedia in order to increase UI capabilities.

Master. The inherent implications of forbidden love amongst holy warriors lends itself to being utilized as a queer narrative in transformative works like fanfiction.

KatieB, the creator of *JHA*, was among the first individuals to receive an in-person mailed cease and desist order from a source text's production/parent country on the fledgling Internet (FanLore). This tragic historic event directly led to her decision to shut down *JHA*, as LucasFilm threatened KatieB with legal action against her if she did not take down the site quickly. The reasonings, timelines, and explanations of the destruction of *JHA* will be covered in more detail as the chapter progresses, but it's important to note the kind of fear that must have permeated KatieB's life in the final days of *JHA* and how this letter capped off a tirade of verbal abuse from anonymous bigots the site had been receiving for months before.

While we now know that KatieB did nothing legally wrong and, in fact, the *Acuff-Rose v. Campbell* case<sup>45</sup> (settled seven years before the closure of *JHA*) could have kept KatieB legally safe from being declared of wrongdoing and being forced to pay a large sum of money through the court system; still, the lack of awareness of these protections, the immense financial burden of undergoing a litigious fight, and the threats from the imposing, capitalistic, and predacious production company made it impossible for KatieB to do anything other than shut down the site. LucasFilm found where she lived in real life, something not easily understood/comprehended in daily life at the onset of the 2000s, and she was frightened as the sole creator and archivist for this communal space and alternative archive<sup>46</sup> (DeKosnik 75-76). This archive was incredibly small, less than 75 regular users, yet also was grounds for a tight-knit community.

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<sup>45</sup> This case was a crucial US court case that established the precedent that fans use to claim parody-based Fair Use under US copyright law.

<sup>46</sup> DeKosnik defines alternative archives as "propos[ing] new canons" which utilize "nonnormative criteria in assessing artistic value and historical importance." They "call for an acceptance of multiple canons" and seek to protect said canons when opposers come into conflict with them (75-76)

### *Exploring the Archive*

I found *JHA* through FanLore's cache of what is essentially a graveyard of Web 1.0 archives, and *JHA* was really the catalyst that sparked this entire thesis to begin with. This cache is the product of many individual fans and researchers uploading information that they have come across in their exploration of the fading Web 1.0 Internet. I was poking around the various webrings that are described in FanLore and found *JHA*'s connection to The Fan Fic Archive Webring. I investigated it, intrigued by the title, and found a simple page lacking in some information with a very detailed cease and desist description, alongside the C&D letter from LucasFilm. After reading this pointed and vile C&D letter, I knew that I needed to investigate the site further.

I utilized Popova's "Follow the Trope" method and organically explored the site by leveraging my own personal understanding of fansites through life experience in the *Star Wars* fandom. This allowed me to move through the archive and harvest data on fics, on KatieB's management style as the sole curator and moderator of *JHA*, and otherwise explore this small community through the echoes remaining of it on the WayBack Machine. This then led to my discovery that the fics on *JHA* were already mostly destroyed, which caused a great deal of personal (and unexpected) grief. At that point, I committed to this thesis topic and committed to figuring out what happened, and perhaps how we could stop Web 1.0 Internet websites from falling into oblivion.

### *Structure of the Archive*

*The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive* was sparsely structured as far as the average fansite goes, but it worked well enough for its users to traverse and for new users to potentially immerse themselves. Its home page<sup>47</sup> has only a few easily recognizable hyperlinks scattered about on the WayBack Machine capture<sup>48</sup>. This can be found, as many Internet users today know via our shared experiential schemas surrounding typical operating systems, through the slightly bolded and differently colored words on the page. In this first glance we can begin to see some of the complications in nuances and details lost by relying on a fully automated archiving tool like WayBack Machine, the most glaring of which here is the fact that all of the pictures and gifs once imbedded in the text are now gone and have been replaced by the generic symbols that indicate where they once resided. This provides a problem for the casual viewer of the archive, because the viewer already finds themselves lost and unsure of where the content of the archive lives. These shifting files, that appear almost like they are taking breath and exhaling in the center of the page, are in fact links to the heart of the archive itself.

This archive is unique in some ways among fanfiction repositories, mainly in that it allows for three main ways to access and sort through the writings housed in *JHA* on separate pages on the site: by subject (ie: which character(s) are depicted), by date uploaded, and by author. The unique aspect here is that this small archive was engaging in the precedents that made AO3 the highly organized archive that it is, and more importantly that this archive was built with this attention to detail by a single individual. Another important distinction that has fallen by the wayside in multi-fandom mega-archives like AO3, understandably and by virtue of

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<sup>47</sup> See Appendix B.1.1

<sup>48</sup> A WayBack Machine capture is an echo of a site that once existed- essentially a screenshot of the structure of a website at a given moment in time.

their size and more universal archival approach<sup>49</sup>, is the attention to detail in elevating the author and anticipating the demand for viewers of the archive to actively seek out particular fan authors (DeKosnik 75). This of course also bolsters the sense of community that is born of small single fandom archives like *JHA*.

By clicking on any of the links hidden underneath the absent pictures, the WayBack Machine takes the viewer to a different capture of the site, often disparate by months or even years, offering a view of a site in a state of temporal difference- the same site, and yet something simultaneously different due to disparate ages of captures. The WayBack capture dates can be found at the top of all screenshots of archives located in Appendix B.

The archive's home page lists a few other notable aspects that more typical in comparing it to other 90s and 00s rogue archives, which enabled *JHA* users to engage in media play easily and access repositories of erotic writing, places to read erotica, and an in-road to a larger *Phantom Menace* erotica community and the larger *Star Wars* slash community as a whole. These include a guestbook, a 'links' page, a question submission box, a disclaimer<sup>50</sup>, and banners<sup>51</sup> for webrings. In order to fully understand the importance of these portions of the website and how they make *JHA*'s impact and sense of place meaningful, we must explore how the concept of play interrelated to the archive's structure.

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<sup>49</sup> DeKosnik defines a universal archive as one that seeks "to collect as many cultural texts as possible, to make all the texts equally accessible to the public, and to present all the texts as equally valuable." (75)

<sup>50</sup> See Appendix B.1.2

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix B.1.1

## *Play*

A guestbook on early fan archive pages worked much of the same way that physical guestbooks work: it allowed for visitors to leave a note for the archivist(s) expressing a comment about their time spent perusing the site, often allowing a person to leave their name, location, and comment while stamping the entry with a date posted. The guestbook for *JHA* is, regrettably like many parts of the site, unreachable and uncaptured<sup>52</sup> by the WayBack Machine, rendering it fully destroyed. This means that it is now impossible to reach the community feedback to KatieB and obscures exactly how the page was received in a first-hand account, but there is a brief second-hand account of the culture of *JHA* towards the end of its lifetime on the Internet detailed towards the end of this chapter. Issues related to errors and failures in preservation attempts, such as the vanishing guestbook of *JHA*, permeate the research and data collection process for not only *JHA*, but the entirety of research related to fractured fan archives. Conclusions are drawn from what we have, but it is much like trying to figure out the words that happened in between tears of papyrus- sometimes an educated guess and a leap of faith is required. Neither the guestbook nor the submission link for the guestbook were captured before the site's demise.

The links page<sup>53</sup> was a space where KatieB, in a pattern that many creators of fansites followed, posted URL links to sites made by fellow fans and often involved trading links which contributed to the gift economy<sup>54</sup> model of fan spaces. This *JHA* page is sparse but straight to the point- it once listed the links of other fansites and provided instructions on what HTML to use in order to integrate a link for *JHA* into another site. Open access to tips and tricks of HTML such

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<sup>52</sup> See Appendix B.1.3 for WayBack error message

<sup>53</sup> See Appendix B.1.4

<sup>54</sup> Gift economy, or a description of the practice of trading skills among fans in fan spaces, is best explored by Suzanne Scott's body of work.

as this created linkchains and camaraderie of fansites and, in particular, the allyship among slash fansites. The links page of *JHA* has also been subject to the WayBack capture vanishing act pertaining to links connected to embedded images, leaving little information relating to the fansites that KatieB had become mutuals with<sup>55</sup>.

While we can't know who was once listed in the embedded image-based links from this partial capture from September 2000, we can begin to understand the larger *Star Wars* community and slash communities that *Jedi Hurlaholics* once rested through webring banners visible through WayBack captures. Webrings are “a collection of websites linked together in a circular structure” and are a major part of where we get the term ‘surfing the web’ from, as individual sites in a webring all shared a navigation bar/banner where users could flow from one site to another related site easily (FanLore “Webrings”). Webrings were in high usage during the 90s and 00s on Web 1.0, and there is evidence that exists that at least 268 fan webrings existed at some point on the Internet (FanLore “Category: Webrings”). *JHA* was a part of three such webrings, The Fanfic Archive Webring, The Episode One Erotica Webring, and the SW Slash Ring.

The first was an eclectic webring that came about sometime in 1999, which coincides with the creation date of *JHA*. Many webrings were linked together thematically or through specific fandoms or pairings, but Fanfic Archive is unique in beginning the work that AO3 took up later creating a place for varied fan interests to be kept safe and connected to one another. Additionally unique, as of 2019<sup>56</sup> The Fanfic Archive Webring still exists and accepts new

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<sup>55</sup> ‘Becoming mutuals’/‘mutuals’ is an Internet term describing two individuals/blogs/sites following one another and interacting with one another frequently- or in this instance, mutually promoting one another on their respective fansites.

<sup>56</sup> See Appendix B.1.7

fansites under the name “The Fanfiction Guild”. While the Fanfic Archive Webring does indicate early attempts to bring a more universal approach into previously strictly communal and alternative archiving practices, it did not quite have the capacity to maintain the information within the archive, and several of the websites associated with this webring no longer exist, like *Jedi Hurlaholics*.

*JHA*’s second webring was more classically approached, which was the Episode One Erotica Webring. The scope of this webring was much tighter than The Fanfic Archive Webring and only encompassed fansites that “had erotic fanfic or art focusing on The Phantom Menace”- which also included fansites that were focused on aspects of *Star Wars* outside of *Phantom Menace*, the only stipulation being that it had to pertain to erotica in some amount, large or small. This was run by the ringmistress<sup>57</sup> Eiluned, who functioned as a curator and gatekeeper of fansites that requested an Episode One Erotica banner. Eiluned, like KatieB’s links page, provided detailed information about how to integrate the banner into the HTML of a new recruit’s fansite; which DeKosnik points to as a key aspect of how fan interactions on the early Internet helped bolster confidence in marginalized fans’ ability to jump into coding and web design by building fansites and immersing themselves into the language of HTML.

The third such webring is one that embodies aspects of play as well as cultural memory stewardship, which is the Star Wars Slash Net Ring<sup>58</sup> (commonly referred to as the SW Slash Ring). This webring was created by an entity known as The ForceBoyz and its listed ringmistress was user prillalar. Unlike Eiluned from Episode One Erotica, prillalar was not as open with sharing HTML and placing the onus of webring integration on the individual applying for their

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<sup>57</sup> Ringmistress was the title given (regardless of gender) to the individual who operated and maintained a webring. Ringmistresses are excellent examples at early attempts towards stewardship for fan media archival practices.

<sup>58</sup> See Appendix B.1.1 for SW Slash Ring hub

own fansite. In fact, prillalar was very clear that an application process was necessary to become a part of the webring, only when the ringmistress had approved the application after a thorough investigation of the fansite. The reasoning for this extended approval process is not explicit in The ForceBoyz webring hub site, but given the context of existing on the Internet (and in real life) as a queer person in the 90s and 00s<sup>59</sup>, it seems clear that the processes required by ringmistress prillalar were a matter of safety and security. The application process speaks to the additional safety measures needed to protect queer spaces and queer individuals, and Ringmistress prillalar was ahead of their time. User prillalar was not only a ringmistress, but embodied what it means to be a steward of an archive and a community. The rigid structures the Ringmistress set up meant that I not only could not, but more importantly would not, pry into the semi-private and private community spaces created by the webring and who prillalar is/was. It is not crucial to know exactly the ins and outs of the identity and minutiae of the Ringmistress of SW Slash, it is far more crucial for due respect to be given to queer elders and their spaces (living or not) on the Internet.

These webrings are an example of how media play provides tangible benefits to the fans who participate in the digital sphere, in addition to the community building inherent in not only these fansites themselves but in the webrings they connect with. Fansites perpetuated the idea of “surfing” the web, allowing a group of people to catch a proverbial wave and play at any hour of the day.

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<sup>59</sup> Queer individuals in the 90s and 00s would be subjected to the AIDS crisis (and the social isolation in the aftermath of the epidemic, as well as the sheer death toll- especially potentially preventable deaths), Don't Ask Don't Tell, the Defense of Marriage Act, Prop 8, and many other global and federal persecutions. Online spaces were often the only places that queer individuals could safely interface. See Halberstam for more on queer spaces.

## *Theft*

Due to *Jedi Hurtaholics* small size and regrettably short lifespan, intercommunity accusations of theft do not appear to be present within its archive. Within their own community, it seems writers and readers agreed with one another in terms of their use of remix and reappropriation of portions of the original text; however, accusations of misappropriation and theft were maligned against *JHA* and its writers in a major way. Again, it's important to note that much of the archive is not accessible nor exists anymore however this is extrapolated from what remains accessible.

In terms of the institutional safeguarding that KatieB completed in order to comply with her rogue archivist contemporaries, there's only evidence of one tactic that KatieB employed: a copyright disclaimer at the bottom of the homepage of *Jedi Hurtaholics*<sup>60</sup>. The disclaimer does what many fansites and fan producers do in order to have a semblance of legal protection, adding a clause that assures that the creator(s) know that their stories are utilizing characters that they do not own and give full credit for setting/characters/plotlines/etc to the respective authors/creators of the original media text. This kind of disclaimer has existed for many among fan spaces, including analog fan publications in the 60s and 70s, but exploded in usage after the Spec Writer Massacre in the *Vampire Chronicles* fan spaces in April of 2000 (as referenced in the literature review), just before the halfway point in the lifetime of this archive. Unfortunately, this disclaimer does not always protect the fan space and fan archivist fully, as was the case for *JHA*.

This disclaimer places copyright onto the website itself and puts it in the hands of KatieB, which is not entirely commonplace among fansites. I believe that this was done as an unusual expression of a selfless act on behalf of the fanfic writers who had entrusted her with their work.

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<sup>60</sup> See bottom of Appendix B.1.2

I point to the last portion of her disclaimer as evidence of this, which happens to be one of my favorite aspects of *JHA* because I think it speaks so directly to the experience of being queer and being responsible for holding and protecting queer space.

The last few lines of her disclaimer, equally odd to include in a typical fansite, read “**I also do not own any of the stories on this site; they are the property of their authors.** Do not attempt to steal them and pass them off as your own. **The Internet is not that big - I will find you,** and by the time I am done with you, well, you’ll think Darth Vader was a saint compared to me.” [emphasis my own] (KatieB). In the first half of the disclaimer,<sup>61</sup> though flippant, KatieB hits the usual disclaimer points- disavowing personal ownership, citing original creator’s ownership, etc.- but in the second half of the disclaimer, KatieB is aggressively protecting the writers and fanfics housed within her site. KatieB clearly states that she does not house any of her own works on *JHA*, she is solely acting as an archivist and a steward of these slash fanfics because she understands that they would not be accepted due to the queer content of the erotica and the queer community writing it.

### *The Untimely Demise of The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive*

On November 8th, 2001, sole archivist and creator KatieB uploaded a letter<sup>62</sup> to *The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive* that she begins by saying “You know, when I got up this morning, I knew it was going to be a bad day... this site has been closed down until further notice.” She then briefly details the story of *JHA*’s demise, publishes the LucasFilm cease and desist letter in full, and a

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<sup>61</sup> As seen in Appendix B.1.2

<sup>62</sup> See Appendix B.1.5

short open ended sign off that suggested that there may be a return after weathering the storm which, of course, never came.

The beginning of the end for *JHA* was when the website was chosen to be the ‘Awful Link of the Day’ at the forum website “Something Awful” in October 2001; *JHA* was chosen as ‘Awful Link of the Day’ for “homosexual content”<sup>63</sup> in relation to *Star Wars* (KatieB). The then-popular forum funneled hundreds of users that conducted what I describe as “Web 1.0 vandalism”<sup>64</sup> to *JHA*. KatieB describes just a few examples of said vandalism, including but not limited to: hateful “vulgar and homophobic” messages scrawled all over the site’s guestbook, utilizing KatieB’s email address in spamming and spam registering to pornographic blogs, and sending KatieB’s bandwidth “through the roof” with a severe uptick in website traffic. This vandalism is not an uncommon occurrence at this point in the Internet’s history and this unfortunate tradition of hateful spamming has continued into the current era as well<sup>65</sup>.

While KatieB handled said digital vandalism, this untoward attention eventually led to LucasFilm’s investigation of *JHA* and subsequent cease and desist order. This brought anxiety to KatieB as she waited between first noticing an IP address visiting the site from [lucasfilms.com](http://lucasfilms.com) and then receiving a cease and desist letter to her home address via priority mail (KatieB). While much of the letter is a fairly standard cease and desist notice, one part pertains directly to the kind of homophobia within the company’s interactions with fanfic in the late 90s and 00s. The portion reads:

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<sup>63</sup> Read: slash

<sup>64</sup> This kind of vandalism is exactly the kind of thing that Ringmistress prillalar from The Force Boyz was attempting to block.

<sup>65</sup> View raids on Twitch for similarities in modern day.

“It has come to our attention that you are using one or more of STAR WARS Copyrights and Trademarks on your website, [www.ktnb.net](http://www.ktnb.net). Specifically, we refer to the various stories derived from the STAR WARS Films that you have posted on the "Jedi Hurtaholics Archive" page. Your unauthorized use of STAR WARS Copyrights and Trademarks **dilutes the distinctive quality of those marks, tarnishes the reputation of Lucasfilm and misappropriates our valuable assets.**” [emphasis my own]

The rhetoric utilized here in the adjectives that LucasFilm chooses to include in this cease and desist letter is paramount; a rhetoric where they have explicitly acknowledged at this point that they have surveyed the *JHA* site. In the emphasized portions above, it is clear that not only is LucasFilm accusing KatieB of theft, but they are accusing her of having taken away something from their intellectual property; claiming that she has irreparably damaged their characters and their franchise by deigning to imagine a Galaxy Far Far Away that has queer individuals that live full lives, including sex lives.

As KatieB shows as she goes on to elaborate on the next steps after laying out LucasFilm’s terms, it is impacting her in an emotional and affective way- and understandably so! Even if it wasn’t something that had stakes as high as visibility and community for queer folks in an unwelcome world and an unwelcome Internet, it was still KatieB’s hard work being scrubbed away and the stories of dozens of writers purged from the Internet. In order to maintain the safety and security of the various webring that *JHA* was a part of, KatieB ended her sign-off of the Internet by asking her archival colleagues, contemporaries, and (most importantly) her friends and found family to remove *JHA* links from their fansites.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> See Appendix B.1.5

KatieB's last message to the Internet ends in a way befitting of an archivist of a fansite about to collapse; she drops a link to her email address and asks for anyone with comments and/or advice to reach out to her. Even at the very end of the line, KatieB reached out to her community for support. We cannot know for certain if anyone ever did reach out, but given the community at *JHA* and its interconnectedness with other *Star Wars*, erotica, and/or slash fansites, it would be irresponsible to not at least suggest that KatieB received support from the individuals that she spent so long supporting herself.

### ***Cultural Memory and Stewardship***

KatieB was a fiercely protective and involved archivist and steward of *The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive*. This was a passion project of hers, one that she invested a lot of time, energy, and money in; all in the hopes of providing a space for fanfic writers who loved *Episode I: The Phantom Menace* a space to explore queer relationships through writing, reading, and trading slash fics. She created a space that she herself did not even use to store her own fics, a space that she maintained in a seemingly solely altruistic fashion. So how did a site like *JHA* that was kept so meticulously and fiercely, by a rogue archivist who kept such a close eye on the archive, end up mostly lost to the sands of time? And what happened to KatieB?

As touched on in the literature review, KatieB had not actually broken any US copyright law in the act of archiving fanworks/fanfics relating to *Star Wars*, and specifically *The Phantom Menace*, and that theoretically she could have had a legal basis<sup>67</sup> to fight back against LucasFilm in order to maintain the existence of *JHA*. But to make this claim is to approach KatieB's difficult decision to remove the archive from the Internet in a contextual vacuum and to remove

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<sup>67</sup> See *Campbell v. Acuff-Rose* for more information

the implications of real life and the intimidation of a corporation looming over the average individual. How could an individual, especially one potentially going toe-to-toe with a mega corporation in an American court system, possibly afford to enter the ring and begin to fight towards what is objectively a just outcome? Who could go toe-to-toe with LucasFilm's corporate lawyers? And this is before LucasFilm would merge with Disney, making it even more impossible to push back without immense monetary resources. Because of the predatory nature of corporations towards fanworks and the fansites that hold said works, it quickly becomes difficult for the average rogue archivist to stay afloat in the face of such pressures.

Typically, the average rogue archivist must capitulate to the cease and desist letter to avoid losing their life savings to hefty copyright infringement fines<sup>68</sup>. This appears to be the route that KatieB chose to take here, one of resignation and sadness with seemingly little recourse. DeKosnik points out that the Internet allows for some slipperiness for rogue archives, where they can become private and resurface elsewhere on the ever-expansive Internet with a slightly different name but with the same content, and even seems to be suggested by KatieB in the final transmission from *JHA* as the hopeful message to her mutuals says to remove links until further notice and not indefinitely.

There are no further posts, messages, or transmissions that I could find connected to KatieB after the November 8th, 2001 announcement. As stated in the methods section, I made no attempt to find the individual behind the username KatieB and her name, which appears on the cease and desist letter as well as once on the home page, has been redacted and removed in order to preserve her anonymity and respect her privacy. Additionally, no attempt has been made to pry

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<sup>68</sup> The finer points of copyright litigation can best be explored in political science theses and/or law briefings and are not the focus of this thesis.

into the back doors of webrings to access any private or semi-private space. If the best outcome occurred and the small community of writers, fans, and friends were able to remain on a site of some kind, then this is a group of individuals who have surely gone through enough in the past two decades online and some rest is well deserved on their part- no need for a junior scholar to bust into their proverbial house after undergoing the stress being digitally hunted by LucasFilm. For these reasons, no attempt at contact was made, nor will it be made by this researcher. And, if the worst outcome happened and this community scattered to the winds after the death of *JHA*, then it's best not to chase digital ghosts and let dead things lie.

### *Present Day for JHA*

*The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive* can now only be accessed through captures on the WayBack Machine as its old URL has a new owner concerned with casino management based on the images and text that could be translated into English at the time of writing<sup>69</sup>. The stories once stored on *JHA* are now only accessible in fragments; usually only the first page of the fic is viewable as the WayBack Machine does not follow link chains down to their ends so any attempt to move to page two of a fic is met with an error message. For example, for the fic titled "The Best Medicine," the only thing that can be generated through WayBack captures is a disclaimer that was attached to the first page of the fic. Because WayBack is not very good at capturing the entirety of link chains<sup>70</sup>, the actual text of the work has been eroded to nothing.

As discussed in the literature review section, if this URL were sold by the current owners and a robots.txt file were to be placed on it, then the entire collection of captures would be wiped

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<sup>69</sup> See Appendix B.1.6

<sup>70</sup> This means that the fic was not accessible on a single page of the website. In order to move through the various chapters of the fic, one had to click links at the bottom of the page in order to move on. Because these links and their respective URL no longer exist in the present Internet, and because WayBack did not capture the page when it did exist, it is lost.

and the *JHA* would fade completely from the Internet. Hopefully this thesis extends its memory and makes it a little harder for the evidence of the archive's existence to be completely erased from the Internet. It's important that *JHA*'s legacy lives on as long as it can, especially because of its transparent end via KatieB's public letter at the archive's end. The archive's meaning as a queer-centric story space that has mostly vanished (and its implications of cultural memory lost), as well as its testament to its space as an area for queer play. Yes, its accusations of theft by LucasFilm did end up defining the death of *JHA*; but what gave *JHA* life was its investment in queer narratives and commitment to providing the space for queer individuals to engage in media play.

### *Autoethnography*

It was the most difficult to write and research about *The Jedi Hurlaholics Archive*. It is the chapter I invested the most time into, the most emotion into, and felt the most intense grief over. Part of this is because of how raw and real KatieB's closing letter was, how poignant her grief felt, even several years after the letter had been posted. But I believe most of my pain was felt in going through and really having to face the music in terms of facing the fact that *JHA* was just one of several sites that proved the basis of this thesis: that the Internet is, definitively, not forever.

By combing through the tatters of what was left of *JHA*, I realized in real time that *JHA* was tragically somehow considered one of the lucky slash archives insofar as still having an echo of existence left on the Internet (unlike other now-unknown sites, who have long since disappeared off the event horizon of the Internet and the extent of the WayBack Machine). That

this metaphorical papyrus, riddled with holes and gaps, is one of the better remaining digital cultural artifacts of queer life and queer play in the early Internet. That was and is still one of the most difficult parts of this thesis.

And yet, in this pain, I was also able to better appreciate the methodological approach I had taken and felt more secure than ever in my scholarly roots in autoethnography. How else would someone have even found *JHA*'s pieces, if not someone with a background very similar to my own? And how could I ever (and more importantly, why would I ever) desire to divorce my lived experience and remove my own perspective as a queer individual who engages in media play (and specifically *Star Wars* media play)? But the thing that tugged on my heartstrings the most is that in KatieB's final post before going dark, even among her well-deserved and understandable rage, there lay a glimmer of hope. She faced this overwhelming sense of dread and looked back into it with the confidence that somewhere, somehow, her constructed community site would persevere. She asked for her friends and colleagues to simply wait and lay low- surely they would be able to emerge eventually. And while there is no evidence I have found that they ever did fully emerge, it's safe to say that these users (at least some of them) left and transiently floated on to another area to read and write fanfiction- which of course, is the beauty of fluidity in rogue archives, that while they may change shape and form, their members have the potential to persevere elsewhere on the vast Internet.

## **CHAPTER 4: THEFORCE.NET AND JEDI COUNCIL FORUMS**

*TheForce.net* is a long-running fansite dedicated to *Star Wars* in all its many forms and adaptations and committed to creating a large forum for fans to find community among the immense breadth of options available to a given *Star Wars* fan. *TFN* (as it is often shortened in the community) began as a small investigative fansite shared between college roommates and founders Scott Chitwood and Darin Smith, originally called *Texas A&M University's Star Wars Page* in 1996. Demand was high enough for Chitwood and Smith's information and speculation to lead to upgrades, and by September 1997, *TheForce.net* had replaced the old Texas A&M site ("About Us"). During the prequel era, *TFN* served as a spoiler information<sup>71</sup> and speculation<sup>72</sup> fansite. As *TFN* grew, it made a tactical business decision (as they had been selling advertisements to fund their ever growing project and staff) to pivot away from speculation and instead approached new information about *Star Wars* in a journalistic fashion. This is still the primary function of *TFN*, as a front page newspaper of all things *Star Wars* at any given time; however, the site has expanded to become a multipronged and multipurpose site which includes fan forums and fanfiction archives. What began as a fansite and fan archive of speculation on *Star Wars* grew into an institution of its own and no longer abides by the standards of rogue archives- but among its many *Star Wars* fan related holdings, a rogue archive is tucked in among them. This archive expands on the concepts of the responsibility to cultural memory, and investigates the effects of paranoia that sweeping cease and desist orders from LucasFilm

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<sup>71</sup> *TFN* served as an early version akin to Reddit- a place where interested parties brought forth information they knew about real life happenings that might point to changes in production and produce hints as to what was happening in the narrative.

<sup>72</sup> Speculation, if you'll recall, is another older term for fanfiction (see: Spec, Spec Writer Massacre, etc)- while the 90s fanboys would have recoiled at the suggestion that they were writing fanfic (due to the misogynistic lens that fanfic is still viewed under), that is what they were doing. It was just like educated guessing fan fiction- even if you're guessing at something, you're still writing speculative fiction: ie- fanfiction

(among other media conglomerates) had on archives. As is elaborated on herein, the tensions between these two parties encited *TFN*'s scramble to become more "respectable" which led to disastrous consequences to their ability to hold a complete and truthful cultural memory within their site(s).

I could write this entire thesis solely on *TFN* and their immense and democratic empire (pun intended) consisting of a highly organized conglomeration of fan sites, fiction, and works, but unfortunately there is too much to cover on the subject of fan archiving and too little time to do so. Therefore, in an effort to constrain the scope of the discussion of this chapter, I will exclusively be looking at *TFN*'s platforming and absorbing of *Jedi Council Forums* in 2013- the full name of which is now *TheForce.Net Presents: Jedi Council Forums*. These forums have existed almost as long as *TFN*, having been established in 1998. They existed under IGN before being acquired by *TFN* in 2013 and they primarily serve as a place for community discussion, fanfiction, theorizing on the minutiae of canon works, and organizing lore among the incredibly vast and diverse mediums that *Star Wars* encompasses. We'll be focusing on the prong of *JC* (as it is often shortened to by its users) that comprises their fanfiction.

The *Jedi Council*'s fanfiction forums are managed by a group of mods<sup>73</sup> who hold the participants of the forum to a set of rules laid out in their forum FAQs<sup>74</sup> that route new users through their Welcome New Member linktree<sup>75</sup>. This gives an overview of exactly how

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<sup>73</sup> Mod, short for moderator, describes one or more individuals who are often in charge of monitoring forums/chats among members of a given site, in a manner much akin to managers at a store. They are connected to the creators and stewards of a given site and often communicate frequently with one another. They are also charged with enforcing rules and regulations of a site, often allowed to ban users and/or delete works at will.

<sup>74</sup> See Appendix B.3.4

<sup>75</sup> A linktree describes a page that is full of links to different sites related to the site that currently holds a linktree- think like a digital family tree of sorts. An alternative formatting option to a webring. Webrings have not seen a resurgence in modern day, but linktrees have. This is particularly true on sites like TikTok as a means to subvert negative algorithmic effects while still making money via affiliate links and such.

fanfiction posting works on *JC*, what users can expect to see on the site, and what actions and behaviors are prohibited in any fanfiction posted in the forums. These rules are applied evenly to all four fanfiction forums housed within the archive. The first of which is “Fan Fiction and Writing Resource” which is pretty much exactly what it says on the tin in that it’s not a place for narrative stories to be posted but is instead for seeking and giving advice. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, is “Before, Saga, and Beyond” which is where the bulk of fanfiction on *JC* resides as it comprises any and all *Star Wars* related fanfiction (and thus requires the most rules and regulations surrounding organizational tagging). Thirdly is NSWFF, or “Non Star Wars Fan Fiction”, which are fics that have nothing to do with the *Star Wars* franchise, but remains a fascinating addition to the site as it provides a place for community members to continue to be in community with their fellow *Star Wars* fans but also explore other fandoms, which is unique among single-fandom spaces like *JC* and *TFN*. The final board listed is “Classic JC Board (Reply-Only<sup>76</sup>)” which is a repository of all of the stories that existed on their previous host site—this again is unique in that these stories can still be interacted with. This is unusual among most independent fan archives as the process of moving sites is so difficult that it’s easy to have stories fall through the cracks, much less stay “alive”<sup>77</sup>.

### ***Exploring the Archive***

I knew of *TheForce.net* from my time on *Star Wars*-related subreddits and Tumblr blogs, and therefore walked into this archive with a relative understanding of the vast size and scope of

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<sup>76</sup> This indicates that a forum board is locked from accepting new submissions, but new users are allowed to leave comments on preexisting works. A hallmark of Web 1.0 sites.

<sup>77</sup> A fic being “alive” means that it can still be interacted with and changed in some way. While this example is not being totally alive, it also isn’t totally “dead”, since readers can still interact with it and conceivably the author could also add to the story through the comments.

*TFN*. I had not ever interacted with the *Jedi Council Forums*, which I found through poking around the vast site of *TFN*'s fan section. *JC* is well taken care of, so much so that it got an entire unexpected facelift in its organizational structure while I was pursuing my research, and provided a good foil for *JHA* in my mind.

While it was difficult to wrap my mind around redoing a portion of my research due to the technological changes that came with the site updating, it became clear that there was a silver lining- it forced me to return to basics and approach the archive from a new angle. By gaining a different perspective through this shift, I was able to better focus on maneuvering the site as if I were a new user (since the shifting of the site made it feel very novel), which allowed me to better understand the perspective of just how dissonant the community and its leaders were when it came to portraying queer life in all its many forms.

Here was a site with a massive community associated with it, flush with cash from advertising revenue, and an incredibly active group of mods overseeing it- surely this would be perfect to juxtapose. What I did not anticipate was how far the foil between sites would go, specifically in regards to *TFN/JC*'s rules on depictions of queer sex (or rather, the lack thereof). I found this through my investigations of their rules as well as tracking who the primary moderators (or mods) were via the New User Guidelines. By ascertaining who these individuals were, I could begin to place them in the hierarchy of the site and better track down the minutiae of this space. This discovery added great complexity and depth to the information present and provided a really clear example of the nuances and decision-making processes of disparate fanfiction archives that originated in Web 1.0.

## *Play*

With a site that is this organized and easy to access/navigate, it's easy for a fan to find what they're looking for and for new fans to jump into the fray. The site, despite how large it is, still holds onto some old school traditions in fan forums and fan archives like having a "New Members" page where new fans can drop an introductory post and connect to seasoned and veteran members who can help guide them through the overwhelming size of the *JC* and *TFN* and plug them into the various sub communities within the massive umbrella of *Star Wars* fandom. By keeping these core tenants seen in earlier/smaller fansites, it keeps a sense of tight knit community in the face of overwhelming numbers.

However, unfortunately, this sense of community did not extend to all fans and all folks across *JC* and *TFN*. Unlike the other two archives detailed in this thesis, this archive capitulated under waves of threats from LucasFilm that caused archives like *Jedi Hurtaholics* to fold- the threats that if slash appeared on your site that you would get slapped with an injunction and cease and desist letter. By the time that LucasFilm got bold enough to begin strong-arming archives and fansites out of existence slowly but surely, archives like *JC* and *TFN* began to make revenue from their sites. As a result, these fansites chose advertisement deals instead of queer fans and slash.

Actions like this is where the rise of the dog whistle phrase of "family friendliness" in archives began to crop up- as seen among the rules<sup>78</sup> of fanfic posting on *JC/TFN*. The concept of "family friendliness" and the Internet have not historically gone together<sup>79</sup>- especially during the Wild West of the Internet during Web 1.0 where there were very few content limitations on

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<sup>78</sup> See Appendix B.3.5-10

<sup>79</sup> See "Rule 34", an Internet maxim that cropped out of a meme that essentially said that if it exists, there's pornography of it on the Internet.

anything. *TFN* and *JC* have a long list of content rules and censorship task forces among mods, and they make it clear that any user should review the rules before posting any fanfiction. Among these rules, *JC* makes it very clear<sup>80</sup> that sexual depictions of any kind are not allowed; in fact, it's their first rule listed in the post "What can I post in Story Threads?" (Briannakin).

However, sexual references to rape, incest, and prostitution are acceptable in fanfics on *Jedi Council Forums* so long as they don't become "explicit" (Briannakin). This feels counterintuitive to their aforementioned standard of "family friendliness", and certainly doesn't meet their PG-ish rating<sup>81</sup> they suggest to conceptualize the level of appropriateness for fic posts, especially since violence (and even some forms/descriptions of torture!<sup>82</sup>) is perfectly acceptable to post. The rules/regulations have a clause at the end labeled "Slash/ Same-sex relationships" which simply reads "LGBTQIA+ relationships are allowed for canon, EU<sup>83</sup>, Legends and OC<sup>84</sup> characters" (Briannakin). This is, of course, a misnomer (whether intentional or unintentional is unclear, and perhaps even unimportant) on the part of *JC*. Slash, while not a requirement but certainly as a tradition of the genre, nearly always involves some sexual content between members of the pairing in question. In creating this rule, *JC* sanitizes the presence of queerness and creates an environment in which queer sex is never alluded to in any way. In an archive that rests on the *Star Wars* universe, a Galaxy Far Far Away embroiled in war for centuries, it seems

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<sup>80</sup> Clarity provided by now-former manager/mod Briannakin, see Appendix B.3.5

<sup>81</sup> The irony of using MPAA standards as a means to conceptualize the kinds of content acceptable in *JC* should not be lost- especially since the MPAA's rating system was born of the Hays Code, a draconian set of censorship regulations slapped onto American film from 1934-1968 that irreparably affected the way Americans view popular visual media by its erasure of intimacy of any kind on the screen (among many other restrictions)

<sup>82</sup> See Appendix B.3.9 for torture, B.3.7 for rape.

<sup>83</sup> Extended Universes (EU) are a genre of fanfiction where the author fills in a gap in the given media's plot and/or timeline in order to pursue alternative outcomes and/or enact fan justice via engaging with oppositional gazing. EU can also stand for works that have been published that were once a part of the canon, or appeared to be a part of it, but are no longer (see Timothy Zahn novels and *Star Wars*)

<sup>84</sup> OC, or original character, describes a character that the author has put into the fanfic that is not affiliated with the fandom being written on and is instead an original and unique creation of the fan themselves.

fruitless and rather silly to think that there could be “family friendly” fiction written about it when the source material isn’t exactly “family friendly” to begin with! *Star Wars* is by virtue, violent and involves several instances of on-screen death in each and every *Star Wars* film<sup>85</sup> and in most of their TV shows<sup>86</sup>. So what “family friendly” values is *JC* trying to uphold in its fanfic repositories? Why would their audience need strictly “family friendly” fics? And why does it matter?

Clearly only certain kinds of play were permitted on *JC* and *TFN*. This included fics that engaged with the media in a way that fans, often older and more transformative-averse ones, imagined as being appropriate and/or admirable in the eyes of George Lucas and LucasFilm. Violence outside of the “honorable” violence at the hand of the Jedi would not be acceptable, but the kidnapping of children to become Jedi younglings was of course alright. Play that pushed the boundaries of the original work, that dared to “disrespect” the work, or even play that brought in new conceptions of the base text by incorporating aspects of other media was not allowed to be in the main channel of fanfiction repositories- if it would be permitted at all. By restricting the kinds of play allowed, and cutting out certain populations from engaging in play that feels authentic to them, *JC* and *TFN* eliminate their ability to portray an honest and inclusive account of fan activity and selectively chooses individuals to remove from the history of fan works for *Star Wars*.

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<sup>85</sup> These are not all cut-away instances of violence- in fact, in *Episode I- The Phantom Menace* (the film that will be investigated the most in this thesis given it’s release lining up with the advent of many *Star Wars* fansites) has a death caused by bisection through the stomach before said bisected humanoid is kicked into an endless pit. The audience can see the body falling apart as it spirals downward! See Darth Maul's final battle for more.

<sup>86</sup> Particularly so in *The Mandalorian*, a show that follows a devout and disciplined bounty hunter who shows little to no remorse in the murder of others for credits (money). See also *The Book of Boba Fett*, which has a more nuanced approach to depictions of violence, but violence nonetheless.

## *Theft*

*Jedi Council Forums* and *TheForce.net* both folded under the pressures and potential threat of legal action of LucasFilm intellectual property, which can be seen in their rejection of depictions of queer life and queer sex life in particular. This makes sense, as their first real tonal shift as a website was when they moved from being a speculative spoiler site for then-upcoming prequel films in the late 90s and early 00s to being a fan journalistic website that simply reported on the speculative happenings of *Star Wars*. But this archive deals with a problem unique only to massive platforms like this one- and that problem is plagiarism.

If plagiarism is frowned upon and punished in academia, then it is a true crime in fan spaces. Stealing another fan's work and claiming it to be your own is nearly unforgivable, and at *JC* it comes with a minimum three month ban<sup>87</sup> - a ban in which your socks<sup>88</sup> are also banned, which effectively puts the plagiarist into a viewer-only perspective for months as the fandom continues to tread forward. This intense reaction from fans reflects how fans have a more nuanced understanding of theft than the average person, and perhaps even the average academic (Jenkins, TED Talk). A deep understanding of what constitutes and delineates between remix, reappropriation, and theft is required to interact with fan spaces, much less to become a fanfic writer actively remixing said texts (DeKosnik 266). To remix media is to take pre existing pieces and shape them into something new and exciting while recognizing and intentionally flagging what the artist has done in mold the existing pieces<sup>89</sup> of another artist's work, which is a league

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<sup>87</sup> See Appendix B.3.11-12

<sup>88</sup> Sock is a now defunct phrase which came to popularity in late 90s/early 00s on online fan discussion boards/forums. This term, derived from the concept of a sock puppet, indicates a duplicate account for another user in order to act as a troll or talk with themselves in order to make it appear as though it were two separate people.

<sup>89</sup> This is not to devalue the process of remixing media and engaging in media play, but rather to assess the nature of fan works as a process of remix and rarely of complete original generative work.

of difference from the thief who takes pre existing works and claims complete control and sole ownership over said works that the artist did not in fact create (Booth; DeKosnik).

This urge to criminalize and punish remix as if it is theft is a misplaced threat against largely marginalized folks who create on the Internet via remix to play with media and to play with others, which creates a sense of belonging. While folks like George Lucas and Anne Rice, among other authors in the same school of philosophy as De Certeau, reject the very idea of the possibility of meaningful positive remix from fans- it's simply not the truth. Respectful (and one might even say reverent, since these works are coming from fans creating from a place that is not motivated by money or fame- just love) remix, and by extension fan works, is not only possible; it's the most frequent occurrence! True theft is deeply uncommon in fan spaces and is normally held at bay by the community (or subcommunities, in the case of large spaces like *JC/TFN*) and the accountability inherent within that community.

### ***Cultural Memory/Stewardship***

While the following two archives explored in this thesis have clear individuals who held the role of stewards who worked to protect the archives on their fansites, *TFN* operates differently due to its advertisement solicitation and institutionalization. When a fan archive pivots to focus on gathering revenue<sup>90</sup> instead of maintaining a focus on the archive itself then the ethos of fan rogue archivism starts to fall apart.

Scott Chitwood and Darin Smith, the original founders of *TFN*, created the site in order to “make a site HE [Chitwood] would be interested in visiting” and not necessarily for any

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<sup>90</sup> I understand that revenue via advertisement sales is not inherently bad, and can in fact lead to improvements in the ability for an archive to better store and secure information- however, in *TFN*'s case, that was not necessarily so.

reason beyond that- as so many fans do when creating a fansite. This approach to fansites and particularly fan archives taps into the passion of a fan and makes fan archives so successful in their goals of collecting and storing fan works. However, the moment that *TFN* began to pivot out of being a fansite rooted in speculative writings on upcoming films for *Star Wars* and move into fan journalism and collecting other fan projects to host on the site was no accident or coincidence. During this change in ontological approach by *TFN*, they were also undergoing a change in staffing, where Smith left the site entirely and Chitwood took a step back and ceded the day-to-day operations of the site to entrepreneur and fan collector Philip Wise. Wise owns Official Pix, which is a LucasFilm licensed picture service<sup>91</sup> that is usually employed at fan conventions, and Rebelcum.com which is a major hub for *Star Wars* fans to show off their collections as well as buy/trade/and sell amongst one another. Wise serves as a main partner of the site and Webmaster, where he has employed his understanding of site building and upkeep from his years of experience with Rebelcum.com; however, Wise entered this situation with the eyes and heart of an entrepreneur, as a fan of course, but primarily as an entrepreneur looking to make some cash.

Smith is not credited on the site at the time of writing, but Chitwood is listed as being “Frozen in Carbonite<sup>92</sup>,” along with several former partners, which *TFN* uses to indicate former members of their upper management levels and thank them for their years of service to the site. Chitwood’s withdrawal from managing *TFN*, while absolutely a well deserved break, led to the capitalistic bleed from Wise to permeate the site. However, this is not all bad, because it also led

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<sup>91</sup> It’s important to note that this is not a conflict of interest for Wise- his company Official Pix is owned by him- LucasFilm just happens to hire him with some frequency.

<sup>92</sup> Carbonite is a fantasy material in *Star Wars* that is used mainly by bounty hunters in order to transfer bounties across the Galaxy- it is sprayed onto an individual attached to a metal frame and encases them in material by flash freezing them.

to *TFN* to acquire *JC*, likely in order to increase traffic on the home site for *TFN*; in doing so, *TFN* saved an independent fan archive- but also stripped it of its rogue archivist status by becoming fully integrated into the business that *TFN* has become.

### TheForce.net and Jedi Council Forums in the Present Day

Both *TheForce.net* and *Jedi Council Forums* continue to operate at the time of writing and both are home to vibrant, overlapping, global, and involved digital communities. The sites are kept up to date and experience active participation frequently, *TFN* is updated about every hour and *JC* about every day. While *JC* remains a fan archive, kept up by a team of volunteer mods dedicated to creating and maintaining a community, it has ceased to be a rogue archive because it must now answer to *TFN* and obey its institutional rules.

*TFN* does not appear as though it will ever leave its complicated situation of capitalism intertwining into fan spaces, or at least certainly not any time soon. It then stands to reason that we can reasonably expect that *JC* will not be budging on their rules regarding queer erotica fanfiction, despite their exception-based rules on subjects like rape and incest. It's particularly damaging in the *Star Wars* fandom to bar stories that involve consensual queer relationships in their entirety, meaning not cutting to black as soon as two individuals enter each other's personal space before cutting to a train going through a tunnel<sup>93</sup>, precisely because of LucasFilm's aptitude for banning *Star Wars* related slash which creates a hole in the cultural memory of fans and obscures the true landscape of fanfiction in the 90s and 00s in this particular fan space.

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<sup>93</sup> A narrative gag used to subvert the Hays Code and indicate to the audience that characters had engaged in sexual relations.

This complicated situation with *TFN* and *JC* leads to a cacophony of emotion; yes, they are an independently owned and fan operated mega-fansite that has become a reputable fan news service and is going above and beyond to provide institutional support for *Star Wars* fan projects that align with *TFN*'s vision, but at what cost? When you try to play nice with a hostile production company by capitulating to their bigotry, can you ever accurately provide an archive of fan works? How do we reckon with these issues? The only way is by acknowledging the pain that *TFN* and *JC* has caused by staying silent amongst LucasFilm's tight grip on their fandoms, as well as acknowledge what could be better if *TFN*, and by extension *JC*, were to support queer slash writers in more than just lip service.

### ***Autoethnography***

*TheForce.net* was considered passé by the time that I entered the digital *Star Wars* fandom as a teenager, often seen as a relic of days gone by in a Web 1.0 landscape and viewed almost exclusively from a lens of nostalgia. When I was a young child in 2004-2008, however, I remember seeing this website and others like it on my home desktop computer as my father scrolled through *Star Wars* fan sites in his free time after work. My childhood home was (and still is) full of *Star Wars* memorabilia in varying states of upkeep from my father- from action figures long since unboxed for his eldest son when he was a young boy, to comics kept pristine in plastic sleeves, to unfinished Mandalorian Mercs and 501st Legion<sup>94</sup> submissions. Being raised by a *Star Wars* superfan like my father meant that *Star Wars* was, and is, a major part of my life and a keystone in the story of my childhood. I'm certainly not alone in that sentiment, the

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<sup>94</sup> The [Mandalorian Mercs](#) and the [501st Legion](#) are both cosplay guilds that specialize in costumes representing Mandalorian bounty hunters and Storm/Clonetroopers, respectively. They are considered elite cosplay guilds and hold fast to stringent rules and guidelines in order to gain membership. See more at the hyperlinked sites.

*Star Wars* franchise is one of the oldest and longest standing modern fan cultures of all time—rivaled only by *Star Trek* and Tolkein’s Middle Earth franchises (particularly *Lord of the Rings*). As mentioned in the previous autoethnographic subchapter in the first data chapter, LucasFilm’s endeavors in the 00s to remove queer slash related to *Star Wars* (particularly related to the prequels, as the series was released in that decade) from the Internet meant that as a queer individual, it could be difficult to feel a sense of belonging in *Star Wars* fan spaces when I entered on my own as a teenager. I had to explore my queer identity in a space completely separate from a space that was comfortable in a near familial way, just in an attempt to find representation somewhere, anywhere.

While *TheForce.net* wasn’t providing fuel for the homophobic individuals who bombarded *JHA* or helped LucasFilm slap them with a cease and desist letter asking for its destruction, they committed a more subtle (yet just as insidious) injustice against queer individuals seeking refuge in *Star Wars* spaces— a false sense of welcome and bare minimum rule-setting behavior with expectation of gratitude. *TheForce.net* (not unique in this unhelpful so-called “allyship”) created a series of rules<sup>95</sup> surrounding content restrictions in fanfic which dictated that while depictions of gay sex was grounds for immediate removal of a fanfic and descriptions of rape and incest were not; in these rules, *TFN* stated that “same-sex depictions”<sup>96</sup> between characters were absolutely permissible— but of course, showing any intimacy between them was not permitted. This kind of cherry picking in self-appointed neoliberal “allyship” only works to damage queer communities. As opposed to outright bigotry, now queer fic readers and writers must read between the lines to find that *TFN* is fine with queer individuals and queer

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<sup>95</sup> See Appendix B.3.7

<sup>96</sup> Take note of the rhetoric used here: not gay, not queer, not LGBT, but same-sex.

relationships, if no one has to bear witness to them. If they are silent. If they are so-called “well behaved” queers. This connects explicitly to the play and stewardship examined in fan archives, but it also is a theft of sorts; not an accusation of theft coming from a corporation to a fan, but instead a theft of memories of queer life from future generations.

While this series of rules makes my blood boil, it brings up a fascinating archival dilemma: what do you do as an archivist when you find yourself in a catch 22 like this? If you allow explicit *Star Wars* fan works on a site with this much prominence, then you almost certainly can expect the wrath of LucasFilm- but if you disallow it, you alienate fans using your platform to seek community with one another across the many dimensions of the Internet. I think that the answer to this is complicated, but at its core- what good is having all that funding and support as a massive fan archive if you aren't telling everyone's stories? The nature and beauty of the rogue archive is that it is subversive and works on an inescapable tension between the source text and the fan text- and that their purpose is to be a safe haven for work outside the established norms and save works that would otherwise be deceased.

The three key concepts in this thesis intermingle with this nuanced struggle that *TFN* and *JC* interact with and help provide insight on the struggle to achieve each of these concepts, which are necessary to have a truly successful and equitable archive, while also keeping the doors open. It can be easy for an academic to point at an archive that is engaging in questionable behavior like *TFN* and condemn it outright; but my hope is that, despite my genuine anger at the unforgivable actions against queer cultural histories of fan histories in this archive, there is also an understanding that there are difficult decisions to be made in the uncomfortable positions

rogue archivists exist in. *TFN* didn't end up making the right decision, and that doesn't negate the fact that they have done good work in maintaining the archive that they have.

## **CHAPTER 5: THE GOOD OMENS LIBRARY**

*The Good Omens Library: A Nice and Accurate Stories Archive* is a previously independent fan archive that has found second life and security through the OTW Open Doors program. *The Good Omens Library* (henceforth shortened to *GOL*) was created September 22nd, 2005 by founder HJ Bender and later run by, and transferred to Archive of our Own by, archivist/user Quantum\_Witch (FanLore). *GOL* was a passion project and labor of love, completed from scratch by HJ Bender, who bought a domain and built the site in 2005 in creative partnership with Quantum\_Witch, a friend and fellow fan creator, after they had built a friendship via LiveJournal, AIM, and other instant messaging forums. Bender's frequent diary-esque posting on LiveJournal as a young 22-year-old accountant provides much insight into his introduction to *Good Omens* and the fledgling pursuit of fandom after he began to post about *Good Omens* and saw the potential for slash art and writings. Through Bender and QW, we can see the trials and tribulations of beginning an archive as amateur archivists, a more transparent approach to the fierce connection between archive and community, and the more transient properties among fluid rogue archives. QW represents the most stalwart archival steward in this thesis, and as such is used as an exemplar as proof that the cultural memories housed within small archives can be transferred and protected by stewards who are able to take the time to invest the stories into places like AO3.

While *The Good Omens Library* was not exclusively established in order to house slash works, due to Bender's affiliations online as a slash artist and occasional writer as well as the circles that his friends and colleagues ran in, the slash category was by far the largest section of the fanfiction housed on the site, nearly twice as much as the next highest category at the time of

AO3 transfer in 2013 (FanLore). *Good Omens* as a media franchise has long been a safe haven of sorts for slash writers, artists, and queer folks in general. This likely has, in no small part, to do with the odd means by which the book was created and the functional duality of the franchise itself.

*Good Omens*, as described in the literature review, is a kind of cult franchise that has existed since the initial novel's publication in 1990 and risen to immense popularity in the 2020s through the adaptation of the novel into a television show. This unique way of approaching the writing process, of having two then-fledgling writers equally contribute to a novel that has two equally present main characters (both narratively piloted between Pratchett and Gaiman without favor for one or the other) creates a novel ripe for appropriation among queer individuals. This duality continues on into the various intricacies involving the creation of the *Good Omens* (2019) Amazon television series<sup>97</sup>, however the research displayed in this chapter predates this show by nearly 15 years, and as such the discussion is mostly focused on the fandom as it was before the TV show was in production and before the death of co-author Terry Pratchett, both of which changed the landscape of the fandom immensely and immeasurably.

So what is the appeal of this narrative that enraptured folks on the nascent Internet to create two websites to house the fanworks of *Good Omens*, and 8 years later transfer the data to AO3? The folks at *GOL* prepared for such a question in a manifesto that was linked to the homepage of their first fansite, good-omens.com. The "Ship Manifesto" by user jennaria<sup>98</sup> served as a quick synopsis of the novel, introduction to the fan space in general, and most importantly

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<sup>97</sup> The second season of *Good Omens* will be released on July 28th, 2023, approximately 2 months after this thesis will be sent for final approval and storage in my university's library system. Its announcement video utilized Hillywood, a fan parody production company, to create a depiction of several key scenes from the first season. Neil Gaiman (playing a demon) was present in the video. View it [here](#).

<sup>98</sup> Link to WayBack capture [here](#). See Appendix B.2.1-8 for more.

an argument in support of the primary ship of the novel: Aziraphale/Crowley<sup>99</sup>, sometimes referred to as The Ineffable or The Ineffable Husbands<sup>100</sup> depending on the fan space and time period. This ship is comprised of the main characters of *Good Omens*: Aziraphale, the angel of God and East of Eden gatewarden and Crowley, fallen angel turned demon and the Serpent from Eden. Aziraphale and Crowley (then Crawly<sup>101</sup>) met upon the walls of Eden while watching Adam and Eve scamper away and they had a brief discussion and walked (well, Crowley sauntered<sup>102</sup>, as the fandom insists) their separate ways. After this and many subsequent encounters and trysts, these diametrically opposed foes decided to make an Arrangement.<sup>103</sup> This Arrangement was the basis of a friendship between Aziraphale and Crowley, an understanding born of distance from the home base that led to their mutual understanding that “they have more in common with their immediate opponents than their distant allies” (jennaria; Pratchett & Gaiman 19-23). They wouldn’t get in the way of the other working for Heaven or Hell respectively, and they wouldn’t do anything so extreme that it couldn’t be remedied (or made worse) by a human exercising their free will. Their long-term Agreement would last six thousand years leading up to the beginning of the novel’s central narrative- the birth and rise of the Antichrist and the subsequent efforts to stop him from bringing about Armageddon to prevent the demolishing of the Earth (and more specifically to this angel and demon- stop it from demolishing their life together). On its surface, this book is somewhat cut and dry- an angel and

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<sup>99</sup> The backslash listed here is indicative of the ‘slash’ pairing between these two main characters.

<sup>100</sup> The latter term is used most frequently among modern (read: TV) fans of *Good Omens*, however its use (like most fan terms) is not exclusively set in one era or another

<sup>101</sup> Crowley’s name change after experiencing life on Earth is frequently pointed to as a trans allegory by queer writers- particularly because Crowley has varying gender performance throughout the novel and it is noted that neither angel nor demon have biological sex and can change their appearance at will, making gender amorphous and ever shifting.

<sup>102</sup> A frequent descriptor for the slinky way that Crowley walks in the book- he is a serpent demon, after all. (Pratchett & Gaiman)

<sup>103</sup> Capital A as indicated by fans, also seen on Appendix B.2.4 and B.2.5 In the Ship Manifesto

a demon create a tentative alliance that still understands their mutual distrust and disdain for each other, right? *Wrong*.

The basis for this ship, and the reason that I believe it is so beloved among its fan base, is because the materials for a strong emotional (and potentially sexual<sup>104</sup>) relationship are already baked into the canon and requires little finessing with fanon to make a ship “float”<sup>105</sup>, so to speak. Aziraphale and Crowley have every reason to distrust for one another, they are on opposite sides of a holy war waged over the lifetime of the Earth’s existence, but in the loneliness of working on Earth they have found that it’s best to keep each other’s immortal company instead of that of mortals. They have six thousand years of chemistry together before the novel even begins and inevitably, as fans note, two individuals are bound to get lonely in that amount of time.

While *Good Omens* involves a large ensemble of characters in its complicated plot, the primary “lure” for the novel/franchise itself, as user jennaria puts it in the “Ship Manifesto”, is Aziraphale and Crowley’s equally complicated relationship and equally complicated selves. The appeal for the novel, the appeal of these characters, and what has enraptured their audience(s) for over 30 years is the fact that while they are angel and devil, they are not wholly good or wholly evil. As jennaria puts it, “Crowley is nice but not good, [and] Aziraphale is good but not always nice.” and the characters themselves say to one another at the advent of Armageddon that Aziraphale “always [knew], deep down inside, that there was a spark of goodness in [Crowley].” and that Crowley “[has] known, deep down, [Aziraphale was] just enough of a bastard to be

<sup>104</sup> Pratchett & Gaiman indicate in *Good Omens* (1990) that angels and demons are not sexual, “unless they really want to make an effort.” (See Ship Manifesto, chapter 2, Appendix B.2.4 and B.2.5) This has since led to the tag “making an effort” to be utilized on platforms such as AO3 in order to indicate to in-group fans that a fic will involve sexual themes, while also referencing the book.

<sup>105</sup> Puns are pervasive among fan spaces in general, but particularly so during Web 1.0 and 2.0- making a ship “float” indicates that a relationship could conceivably be understood and affirmed by the majority of the fanon.

worth liking.” (Pratchett & Gaiman 209-210) This complexity of their individual selves, and their relationship (and its lack of clarity between platonic and potentially romantic actions<sup>106</sup>), and their positionality in a large ensemble cast in *Good Omens* all contribute to making them desirable as objects of slash fanfic. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that fans like HJ Bender and Quantum\_Witch were drawn to the potential that rests with these characters, and in an early Internet setting were able to pull together their skills to create an archive that didn’t yet exist in a stable way, in order to provide a place of community for their friends and colleagues across the Internet, and particularly LiveJournal.

### ***Exploring the Archive***

*The Good Omens Library* was not originally intended to be a part of this thesis. I originally came upon the archive via its Open Doors homepage on Archive of Our Own while I was looking for *Good Omens* fanfiction on my own personal time. When I realized it was an Open Doors initiative, naturally I was curious and wanted to investigate more. It wasn’t until I ran into its FanLore page and read about the effort that *GOL*’s steward, Quantum\_Witch, had gone through that I realized that I needed to include this archive within this thesis.

*GOL* represents the potential to save fan works and showcases the immense work that archive elves go through in order to keep their sites afloat (DeKosnik). It’s clear from a user’s very first glance that *GOL* is a labor of love, just from the sheer volume of work that was moved around and the fact that it continues to receive submissions at the time of writing. I wanted to enshrine that labor of love from its contents alone, but then I found HJ Bender’s LiveJournal (which was connected to the WayBack Machine’s capture of the old *GOL* site). His LiveJournal

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<sup>106</sup> See Ship Manifesto, chapters 3 and 4, Appendix B.2.6 and B.2.7.

was linked on the original site as a means to not only keep up with what Bender was up to, but also to comment on his blog posts and get to know him more and/or inquire about *GOL*<sup>107</sup>.

This LiveJournal provided a means by which I could watch this archive come into being, expand, and change shape through the words of its co-creator. By being able to jump back and forth between the captures from the WayBack Machine and the dates of the LiveJournal posts, I was able to begin to better understand the timeline for *GOL* and it gave insight into the emotional and physical labor necessary to have run a site of this magnitude. Bender's LiveJournal was, by far, one of the most exciting discoveries that I made during the research process for this entire thesis. I spent around 12 hours crawling through Bender's LiveJournal, it was a fascinating look into the life of a queer individual seeking solace and community on the Internet. This helped to again humanize the research process and serve as a reminder of how important saving these archives is.

### ***Structure of the Archive***

As mentioned previously, HJ Bender detailed his process in creating *The Good Omens Library* via his LiveJournal blog in the months leading up to the site's publication in September 2005. Bender decided to buy his own domain and build the site from scratch, as a method of escapism in the wake of some intrapersonal strife after being rejected from UGA and having to continue to work as an accountant<sup>108</sup>, which he frequently and openly disdained, and forced interaction with his family- with whom he had a contentious relationship. Accessing HJ Bender's

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<sup>107</sup> See Appendix B.2.12 for example interaction with user lady\_of\_water on Bender's blog.

<sup>108</sup> See Appendix B.2.9

LiveJournal, I was able to gain insight to his thought process, struggles, successes, and interpersonal relations with co-creators, contributors/collaborators for, and members of *GOL*.

*GOL* was just one prong of the larger good-omens.com website that Bender built, and served as a repository and archive for fanfiction of *Good Omens*. Like the structure of *TheForce.net*, good-omens.com was a transportation hub for *Good Omens* fans surfing the nascent Internet. It was a first stop into a variety of LiveJournal blogs discussing aspects of the novel, fanworks of all kinds, and access to fellow fans/friends/family. This space encouraged and perpetuated fan labor in an exchange of skills. Founders HJ Bender and Quantum\_Witch did exactly the same thing when they combined Bender's technical know-how and penchant for fan art with QW's<sup>109</sup> connections to fanworks and fic authorial prowess. This led to projects like *The Good Omens Lexicon*, a digital dictionary based on the famous (and infamous) *Harry Potter Lexicon*<sup>110</sup>, and *Neutral Omens*, a text-based multi-fandom crossover<sup>111</sup> RPG<sup>112</sup>.

Community thrived on good-omens.com, and by virtue *GOL* did as well, from 2005 to 2012. In fact, the boom in users and content at the beginning of the site's existence in 2005 led *GOL* to reach the 100 fics archived mark in less than a month of its opening (Bender). They promoted several active LiveJournal blogs, including their most popular blogs "Lower Tadfield Air Base" and "St. James Park"<sup>113</sup>, which housed general community conversations and

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<sup>109</sup> QW used as shorthand for Quantum\_Witch's username

<sup>110</sup> A groundbreaking digital project to connect the various intricate (read: confusing) world-building elements of HP that was ultimately destroyed by JK Rowling's legal team.

<sup>111</sup> Crossover fan works involve a fan creator inserting a character and/or setting from another piece of media into a disparate media space in order to play with a variety of different favorite characters/settings. For example: a fic in which Anathema (Good Omens) has a lengthy conversation with Luna Lovegood (Harry Potter) in the greenhouse of Lower Tadfield (a setting in Good Omens) to discuss being a witch in the modern age (both Anathema and Luna are witches in their respective universes).

<sup>112</sup> Role playing game, a frequent fannish activity that combines the writing aspect of fic writing and the flare of drama in taking on a role of a given character. This RPG involved individuals playing *Good Omens* characters as well as characters in a handful of other unrelated media franchises, such as *Harry Potter*, and OCs (original characters).

<sup>113</sup> Named after key settings in *Good Omens*

promoted fan works respectively. Fostering community was important to Bender and QW who took time to invite affiliate linking, promote fellow fan projects, provide platforms for roleplaying, and provide many forums (LiveJournal and otherwise) to communicate with one another.

The site primarily housed four major fannish prongs: the *GO Forum*, *GO Gallery*, *GO Library* (or *GOL*), and *Infrablack*. The *Forum* was a standard fansite, it provided a small sampling of many important elements of fan work (fanfic, fanart, etc.) but mostly seems to have been a place to chat about *Good Omens*, life happenings, and updates on works-in-progress. The *Gallery*, a later addition to the site, served as a space to publish fan art of *Good Omens* and the *Library*. The *Infrablack* is a more mysterious aspect of the site due to its private/members-only nature, but appears to have been a Google Groups mailing list related to the site itself based on the brief description on the error page. *Infrablack* only ever had eight members, so it's unclear if this was just an unsuccessful initiative or if it was exclusively a mailing list for elite members and/or mods.

During the success of good-omens.com, something happened that prompted HJ Bender and Quantum\_Witch to abandon the website and move the *Good Omens Library* onto library.good-omens.net on November 12th, 2012. Unfortunately, despite the comparatively good fortune that this library has had with the WayBack Machine's numerous captures of the site(s), it is unclear what occurred to cause and/or prompt this sudden shift and fracturing of the site. *GOL* is the only one of the previous four major prongs from good-omens.com that made it to the .net URL. This limits the ability for direct community engagement with the fanfics, in comparison to the ample opportunities available on good-omens.com, but also provides more of a traditional

archival affect to the *Library* by removing some of the more socially focused tools on the site, like the connections to LiveJournal.<sup>114</sup> The most that can be presently discerned on what exactly happened is through Quantum\_Witch's moving announcement post where she says "The old dot-com is no more, may it rest in peace." This serves as the closing of the first chapter of *GOL*.

*GOL* existed independently on library.good-omens.net for about a year, when in 2013 Quantum\_Witch announced on the site that it would be moving once more to its (presumed) final home in Archive of Our Own through the Open Doors initiative. Open Doors gave QW the resources by which to pull the entirety of the archive onto AO3 in order to preserve the works in a more sustainable manner by utilizing the immense resources of AO3 as an archival nonprofit while also maintaining the history of the archive, as well as QW's position as steward and guardian of the *Library*. This means that, unlike *The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive*, *GOL* has a continued life on Archive of our Own and at the time of writing, *GOL* continues to have a robust and active community of writers contributing to *Good Omens* fanfiction on a regular basis- including some original writers from *GOL*'s first chapter of life, such as Quantum\_Witch and VulgarWeed. This allows for the archive to continue to serve as a place for community to thrive and for the complexities of this long standing media franchise to continue to be explored by fans through media play as the landscape of *Good Omens* as a franchise changes and shifts with age and adaptation.

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<sup>114</sup> I want to make it clear that this is not an action that necessitates a moral judgment- especially since those social aspects are incredibly difficult to code into a website and Bender and QW were working with no budget and both working full-time in very different jobs outside the fan space, as countless fans do.

## *Play*

Like Booth says, part of the fannish appeal of any media that has a lot of plot to cover and many characters to do it with<sup>115</sup> is that it creates the right conditions for sandbox play, which breeds ample space for fans to come in and begin to craft transformative works. *Good Omens*'s scope as a novel is massive, the book spans the entire existence of Earth (and a bit before it) and continues up to modern day- or at least modern day at the time of writing for Pratchett and Gaiman circa 1990. As mentioned previously, that's over six thousand years according to the narrator, God, in the novel- one of the largest sandboxes imaginable for fans. Aziraphale and Crowley's duality of personalities and complex approaches to life and morality means that you can tell almost any kind of story at almost any point in human history and find a way to shoehorn the Ineffable Husbands into the fray. This also means that Aziraphale and Crowley, because they are so well developed by Pratchett and Gaiman, exist without needing an explicit protagonist and antagonist because quite frankly, the angel and demon don't normally get involved with anything. In a world that is falling into holy war, slowly but surely, over the course of thousands of years- Aziraphale and Crowley craft their Agreement to live in a limbo where neither has to acknowledge the impending conflict (jennaria). In fact, they do everything possible to proactively thwart the rise of the Antichrist by nurturing the child away from his devilish nature- they just happen to be parenting the wrong child, due to a clerical error at the convent where the Antichrist was placed with the wrong family.

This sandbox, combined with Aziraphale and Crowley's clear fondness for one another tested in an epic struggle to keep the Earth alive, is perfect for slash-based fans like HJ Bender. Bender, in the posts prior to discovering *Good Omens*, was clear that his goal in fannish spaces

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<sup>115</sup> Read: an ensemble cast

was to indulge in slash<sup>116</sup>- mainly through slash fan art in the posts on his LiveJournal before encountering *Good Omens*. After being introduced to the novel by a friend in early 2005<sup>117</sup>, he then ends up engrossed in not only the novel but in the fandom as well. Bender was able to immerse himself into the *Good Omens* fan spaces on the young Internet because he was a part of several fandoms prior to *Good Omens*. This is common among fans, myself included, in that it becomes easier to jump into fan spaces and fan communities when you have already been a part of/are a part of several before- akin to learning languages or gaming lexicons. Once you understand how one language works or how a first person shooter game works, then it's easier when you are confronted with a completely new language or completely different FPS to adapt to the new situation.

Bender admits that he created *GOL*, among other sites and fan works, to stave off boredom while working an accounting job that he loathed<sup>118</sup>, using fan spaces and the production process of making fan works as a method of escapism from the routine of his daily life. Bender only touches on it once, in what I could find, but it is also very probable that Bender was utilizing the creative process of slash fan works to reckon with his own identity as a queer person. He mentions once on his LiveJournal that he was struggling to figure out whether he was gay or not after a conversation with a friend and fellow slash producer; a struggle that is understandable given the fact that Bender was writing from the conservative town and state of Athens, Georgia in 2005.

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<sup>116</sup> See Appendix B.2.10

<sup>117</sup> See Appendix B.2.11

<sup>118</sup> See Appendix B.2.9

Conceptions of time and space<sup>119</sup> when looking at the affinity that queer individuals had/have with *Good Omens* is crucial due to its uncommon dual origin, tight-knit fandom, and chronological understanding of its timeline of release. Beyond Aziraphale and Crowley's sexual ambiguity in their lives as divine beings, *Good Omens* was released in the midst of the AIDS crisis and representation (or even just the platform for imagined representation) at the time was absent in popular media. This isolationary social practice of cutting queer people off even further from general society in a discriminatory social quarantine necessitated digital spaces to make community among disparate queer individuals who had even fewer opportunities to safely meet in private, semi-private, and (especially) public spaces in the 90s and 00s. In a world that was so unbelievably hostile to queer individuals, they sought out places not only to be in community and converse with other queer folks but also to play with one another.

*GOL*'s first home, good-omens.com, had much more space for media play and meta commentary on said play for users- especially through the integration of the *Neutral Omens* RPG onto the site which provides a more direct understanding of play by coalescing transformative fan writings with the gaming structure of written roleplay, which also echos initial computer RPGs that functioned exclusively through written roleplay<sup>120</sup> in an unexpected parallel to the goals of *Neutral Omens*.

By breaking off from the main site, *GOL* lost the breadth of play options available to users but it gained depth and security of play. By owning the domain, Bender and QW ensured that the archive would be safe from deletion, unlike what some of their colleagues experienced on places like Fanfiction.net.<sup>121</sup> By splitting off from the main site, Bender better organized and

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<sup>119</sup> See Jack Halberstam's *In A Queer Time and Place* for more information

<sup>120</sup> See *The Fellowship of the Ring: A Software Adventure* for more

<sup>121</sup> See literature review for more information

sorted the archive and allowed for some metadata alongside the fic listing such as ratings<sup>122</sup> and content notices<sup>123</sup> (FanLore). The amount of fics exploded, particularly slash fics, getting up to a total of over 350 works by the time they transitioned from library.good-omens.net in 2013, becoming one of the largest archives of *Good Omens* fanfiction on the Internet.

Maintaining security through owning the domain and QW's modding, HJ Bender and Quantum\_Witch fostered and protected a community of folks creating queer fan works in the early 00s on the Internet- which as we saw with *Jedi Hurtaholics* was no small task.

### ***Theft***

Of the three archives researched and discussed in this thesis, *The Good Omens Library* has the least issues, and frankly the least to say, surrounding theft in an intercommunity sense. There was no evidence of the members of *GOL*, nor its parent sites, ever discussing accusations of theft among themselves nor in relation to their works. Much of this, in this researcher's opinion, has to do with the ways in which the authors interacted with fan concerns about perceived theft at the outset of *Good Omens*'s fandom.

Neil Gaiman in particular, among the two co-authors of *Good Omens*, has said the most in regards to fan practices on his works in general.<sup>124</sup> Gaiman once tweeted a response to a *Sandman* fan who had been railing against fanfiction that said "I won the Hugo Award for a

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<sup>122</sup> Ratings for fics is much akin to the MPAA rating system for films in the United States- *GOL*'s was K (all audiences), T (teen), T+ (some hinted explicit themes, not sexual), M (mature, explicit themes and some sex), and X (explicit, this is slash porn writing- some with plot and some without)

<sup>123</sup> Fan spaces have been utilizing content warnings on the Internet without issue for an incredibly long time.

<sup>124</sup> Neil Gaiman has also said the most to and about fan spaces because he is what the modern digital fan would call "chronically online", which is to say that he spends a frankly unhealthy amount of time on social media (particularly and famously on Tumblr and Twitter)- and as such, frequently answers random fan questions. See also his use of fan parody and Hillywood in the promotion for season two of *Good Omens*.

piece of Sherlock Holmes/H.P. Lovecraft fanfiction, so I'm in favour."<sup>125</sup> This broad acceptance of fan works, and even excitement about them on the occasion, from the creators of *Good Omens* led to a more relaxed environment for fans and because many of the folks who were enraptured in *Good Omens* tended to spurn more “mainstream” fandoms like *Star Wars*, it's entirely possible that they remained somewhat insulated from the litany of cease and desist letters that began to fly from creators like George Lucas and Anne Rice. By removing this sword of Damocles from the equation, *Good Omens* fans flourished more than their counterparts in spaces like *Jedi Hurlaholics* that were watching their communities being squashed under the heel of cease and desist letters. While the attitude of the authors of *Good Omens* certainly had an impact on the quality and quantity of fan works created on the franchise, the biggest impact for the members of *GOL*'s ability to make community, get beta readers, post fics, and gain feedback on said fics was in the hands of the creators and stewards of *The Good Omens Library*.

### ***Cultural Memory and Stewardship***

FanLore's description of *The Good Omens Library* lists HJ Bender as the founder of *GOL* and lists Quantum\_Witch as the archivist. Institutionally for FanLore, who created the page at the behest of Open Doors as they are both projects overseen by the Organization for Transformative Works, it makes sense that this delineation between the two co founders would come out of the transition process for *GOL*; QW as the archivist who got stories off of library.good-omens.net and Bender created the code and crafted the appearance of both good-omens.com and library.good-omens.net. However, this isn't the most accurate view of the

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<sup>125</sup> See his tweet [here](#).

roles that Bender and QW played in the lifespan of the archive and requires a more nuanced approach.

Bender and QW were co-creators of *GOL*, it was an idea that clearly came out of their discussions on LiveJournal<sup>126</sup> (much of which is presumably through private messaging, but their public posts and comments seem to suggest that the work they were completing collaboratively on the website as a whole in the months leading up to the 2005 release of good-omens.com). They discussed it with fondness and excitement on LiveJournal and noted that they were coming together to support one another and pick up the slack of the other as they were very different individuals with completely different skill sets. By collaborating, Bender and QW embody the essence of fan practice and particularly rogue archivists in fan spaces; the goal of these projects is to bring together passionate people with complementary skill sets in order to work together to protect, save, and steward important cultural works into the future.

While it is unclear when exactly HJ Bender ceased his involvement with *The Good Omens Library*, at some point between the establishment of library.good-omens.net and the years to come after the transition to Archive of our Own via Open Doors, Bender stopped engaging with the site/community. This is understandable, as the fans who create fansites (or fandomains, as Bender referred to the site<sup>127</sup>) are often held to an obscene expectation of perfection and unyielding attention to the site, ensuring that it works all the time (DeKosnik 126-130). This is, of course, an unreasonable expectation to hold these rogue archivists to because the vast majority of them hold full-time jobs that rest completely outside the realm of the archives they maintain—such as Bender being a young accountant attempting to get into college. On Bender’s current-day

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<sup>126</sup> See Appendix B.2.12 and B.2.13

<sup>127</sup> See home page of good-omens.com, Appendix B.2.14 and B.2.15

personal website, where the now 40-year-old works as a professional artist, he mentions his experience in website building and lists working on “a *Good Omens* fan website” and notes that he continued to do maintenance on it “after he had left the fandom” as well, indicating that at some point Bender split from the fan space in general. There’s no way to discern exactly what his motivations are for this, and much of these decisions (though not made lightly) are made within the privacy of a fan’s inner circle and their own home, and even a fan as notable for their fan labor as HJ Bender is in *Good Omens* spaces holds no responsibility to disclose the reasonings and motivations behind such a momentous decision to visible exit a community like that. While his exit is of interest to this thesis, the infringement of his privacy and the passing of any moral judgment for leaving the *GOL* project would be an immense error as a researcher.

### *GOL in the Present Day*

In the wake of Bender’s absence, Quantum\_Witch took up the reins and decided to pull the contents of the site onto Archive of Our Own. This is presumably due to the lack of technological know-how in terms of upkeeping another person’s homegrown website, especially given her previous postings<sup>128</sup> in regards to leaning on Bender’s website expertise. With the Open Doors non-profit organization’s approval and assistance, QW began the monumental task of responsibly and ethically manually transferring fanfiction to AO3 and into a protected collection to maintain *GOL*’s history and pride as an independent fan archive (FanLore). This process began in July of 2013 and was completed in November of 2013 (FanLore).

This undertaking was immense and without financial compensation, making Quantum\_Witch the epitome of what it means to be a fan archivist and steward in the

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<sup>128</sup> See Appendix B.2.16

current-day. This wasn't a handing over of *GOL* to OTW in an exchange of ownership; this was OTW breathing renewed life into the *Library* and giving the resources and security to the archive that took so much energy for Bender and QW to upkeep as individuals while allowing the ethos of any fan archive to survive. This ethos is the ability to change, morph, and evolve as time goes on. The traditional institutional and/or national archive is one that is often stagnant, it's the life support of knowledge. What makes these rogue archives unique is that they take in new and vibrant work and allow it to live out its full digital life, and then allow it to naturally die with a dignity knowing that it will not fade into the abyss of the Internet but will instead continue to be viewed and consumed by individuals for years to come in a safe and secure environment. We can look to archivists like Quantum\_Witch as exemplar rogue archivists who undergo an immense stress in order to save hundreds of stories, and in particular queer stories, from perishing and vanishing from memory forever by banding together with rogue archivists and fellow fans in order to do our part and save our own history and our own cultural history.

### ***Autoethnography***

My connection with *Good Omens* begins at the intersection of COVID-19 and one of the first interactions I ever had with one of my now-life partners when we met in 2020. I had blown through all of the shows I meant to watch in the midst of quarantine and they were living with a close friend of mine, we got to talking about various nerd related content and they introduced me to the show. After watching it, I was hooked and became invested in the canon and fanon, the spaces where Neil Gaiman resided on the Internet and where the *Good Omens* fans resided as well- possibly for the first time in my adult life I was able to pursue a fan space as fervently as I

did with fan spaces as an adolescent. This was key to keeping myself relatively grounded and sane during lockdown months, and of course, this fan space led me to begin dating the individual who introduced me to it in the first place. So it was an incredibly special and particularly challenging academic endeavor to write about this space that I am so invested in; however, I also knew that its unique construction as a bifurcated fandom (book and television series) with a long digital history meant that it was particularly suited for this thesis project, which made it a conceptual target in the beginning of my research process.

Where the researching and writing of the *JHA* chapter was haunting and crushing at times, the same could not be said of my experience with *GOL*. It was heartening to be able to flip through the LiveJournals of HJBender and Quantum\_Witch and watch their unique and queer friendship blossom into existence on the Internet. There's something so endearing about being able to see two individuals become friends, but there's also something intensely disturbing about being able to so transparently see this interaction take place. It, at times, feels voyeuristic- especially when taking into account the fact that Bender and QW did not always practice the safest Internet interactions, including divulging age, location, and job which could have led to revealing their real life identities; and truly could still be done, although as stated before- that is not the goal of this thesis and runs counter to my personal and professional ethics and therefore was not done. However, I did check among Quantum\_Witch's friends list on AO3 and found a user "hjbender" so naturally I clicked on the profile in order to check and make certain that it was indeed the same person and what I found was that the man who once built *GOL* from scratch was still engaging in fannish pursuits and indeed now makes his money as a for-hire fan artist on the Internet instead of trudging along as an accountant. HJ Bender has had such a history on the

Internet that now his fan works have amassed to such a quantity that he has created an archive to serve as a repository for solely his work<sup>129</sup>.

I chose to look into *GOL*, and chose to end the data portion of this thesis with it, for a simple reason: hope. *GOL* has, against all odds, managed to eke out a means of survival and was able to make it to a larger and more stable digital repository. AO3 is not the end all be all solution, there is no cure-all in archival work, but at this moment in time AO3 provides the best option for *GOL*'s continued existence. Hope is woven into the very fabric of *GOL*, it provides a map forward and an understanding that not all is lost from Web 1.0, it only needs strong stewards and strong community to make it to safety.

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<sup>129</sup> The Bent Archive can be found [here](#).

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

*The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive*, *TheForce.Net* and *Jedi Council Network*, and *The Good Omens Library* all exist(ed) on the Web 1.0 at some time, with the latter two remaining in existence today after being financially supported and able to transition from each evolution of the Internet to the next. *JHA* gave perspective on the effects of conflicting definitions and understandings of theft among fans v. producers, the importance of creating community play space for queer individuals seeking community with one another, and the aftermath left when a site of digital cultural memory is destroyed. *TFN* and *JC* represent a quandary in archival ethics and understandings in its catch-22 related to rules on queer works being a part of their archive in the wake of homophobia-driven archive destructions (like *JHA* experienced) and the choices made that eliminated the full picture of queer life and queer cultural memory from these archives. Finally, *GOL* served as an example for how queer cultural memory can survive as the stewards of these single-fandom slash archives turn to larger universal fan-created archives like *Archive of Our Own* as a means to maintain the stories they've been protecting and provide a newer and safer space for their members to continue to engage in media play.

Through these emblematic archives and the conceptual lenses of play, theft, cultural memory and stewardship, we are able to see that though the situation that lay before us in an evaporating Internet is dire- it is not impossible to save what remains of these fan archives and sites of cultural memory and queer history. But we will not find archival salvation through the machinations of machinery and AI (though they can often help aid our quest to do so), we will inevitably find it through the hard work of human beings- particularly when it comes to the cultural works and memories of marginalized folks when they are made digitally tangible.

Completing autoethnographic research has proven to be one of the single most difficult, most heartbreaking, most inspiring, most exhilarating, most exhausting, and most rewarding tasks I have ever taken part in. I understand that the function of the Master's thesis is to explore an area of academic interest through methodical research and to prove to a board of professorial mentors that a given MA student is able to walk the walk and talk the talk necessary to advance to the PhD level and demonstrate readiness to undertake comps and dissertation work in the future; however, I feel that beyond all of that, I gained something far more valuable through this process. I feel that I gained a better understanding about who I am as an academic, as a fan, as a son, as a partner, and as a trans man. I have gained a sense of clarity and of purpose in my work and in my life, and I look forward to the opportunity to continue this journey. I would be remiss not to acknowledge the limitations of my research, this snapshot of the Internet at this very specific moment in time; but even more so, I would be equally remiss not to take the time to point out the exciting work coming down the line that will impact this area of research and some areas of potential future work.

### Limitations

Like all media studies and fan studies works this paper will be outdated in some capacity before it is even defended, doubly so by the time it's uploaded in the University of Tennessee Library after a successful defense. I knew this entering this thesis, but despite the light speed pace that the Internet moves at, but I feel that this thesis intervenes in enough digital studies history and handles a gargantuan glaring issue in the present and so it will not become entirely

irrelevant<sup>130</sup> in the coming years. The ever shifting sands of the Internet was one of the anticipated limitations of this paper as well and actively impacted my ability to re-access posts on *TheForce.net* and *Jedi Council Forums* due to a site update and face lift that occurred sometime between completing my research around December 2022 and double checking those same sources in March 2023. At that time, I realized I had lost a handful of posts among a site with tens of thousands of posts. I had accidentally stumbled into a needle in a haystack situation, if the needles were embroidery needles and the haystacks were a barn filled to the brim with hay. However, this simply led to finding different areas of the *Jedi Council Forums* and, I believe, led to more interesting results and areas of discussion than I previously had.

It is also important to note that a limitation of my research was due to an ever shifting political landscape impacting my daily life, chiefly the continuation of the mounting genocide<sup>131</sup> of transgender individuals in the United States which has begun to be put into law in my home state of Tennessee (where the entirety of this research was conducted). This kind of pervasive and unending anxiety and primal fear undoubtedly negatively affected this thesis in some way. But, this kind of anxiety was also a primary driving force of my persistence in completing this thesis because I want there to be more than just artifacts of anguish and sorrow when queer individuals look back at this time in American history; I want future generations to know that I, and thousands of queer folks like myself, had digital communities to lean on and we shared fictional works about our favorite things and that, despite overwhelming odds and the many attempts to snuff it out, our trans and queer joy persisted. I won't allow the cultural memory of

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<sup>130</sup> Hopefully won't be irrelevant- again, the Internet moves so fast and so erratically that it can be hard to anticipate much of anything!

<sup>131</sup> See Gregory Stanton's Ten Stages of Genocide for more information

queer individuals be relegated only to queer filmic media (mostly created by white cisgender gay individuals), it must also include the kind of queer writings<sup>132</sup> that occur only in fan spaces.

### Anticipated Changes

While it is true that the Internet is incredibly difficult to predict, it is not completely impossible to do so! These fan spaces will continue to evolve and change, so here are some predictions (the good, the bad, and the ugly<sup>133</sup>) as to the futures of the three case study archives in this thesis. Firstly, *TheForce.net* and *Jedi Council Forums* show no signs of wear, tear, or decay and will likely continue to host hundreds of conversations a day and continue to be the one of the largest and oldest *Star Wars* fan spaces. I do not anticipate that they will change their rules regarding “family friendliness” on their fanfiction boards, nor do I anticipate that they will recognize the dog whistle nature of the term- at least not for a long while.

Secondly, unfortunately, I anticipate that in no more than a few years there will be a robots.txt file placed on the former URL for *The Jedi Hurtaholics Archive* which will trigger the deletion of the few remaining captures held on the WayBack Machine. This will mean that there will officially be no more tangible traces of *JHA* remaining on the Internet, outside of the few captures posted on its sparse FanLore page and, of course, the captures stored in this thesis’s Appendix B. This is an immense tragedy and loss, one of many sites akin to it that have vanished off of the Internet.

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<sup>132</sup> Especially slash writings- narratives about queer joy and queer love are incomplete if they do not include the more intimate aspects of our lives, including but not limited to sex.

<sup>133</sup> A surprising amount of slash in this film franchise’s fan space, if you can believe it. See Archive of Our Own for more.

Thirdly, I have full faith that *The Good Omens Library* will continue to survive and live on Archive of Our Own, where it is still monitored and modded by Quantum\_Witch. However, I believe that beyond simply living, I foresee a thriving future for *GOL* in the very near future. This is due almost entirely to the release of the anticipated second season of the *Good Omens* television series, which will (regrettably for this researcher) release July 28th 2023, mere months after this research has completed. There are many fascinating aspects of specifically the second season of *Good Omens*, which include but are in no way limited to: the entire series being canon divergent from the novel as the TV show has gone beyond its scope now, the authorship of *Good Omens* tipping to be a majority Neil Gaiman authorship due to the continued demand for the show even after Terry Pratchett's death and subsequent destruction of several in-progress books<sup>134</sup> (potentially including a sequel to *Good Omens*, although that is speculative), the use of Hillywood and fan parody to promote the release date<sup>135</sup>, the fear about a continued intertwining of a pro-fan work author with an anti-fan work production company, and (most importantly to fans) whether or not Aziraphale/Crowley will become a canon relationship as it has been rumored to become. There are so many moving parts in the release of this second season, and I anticipate a massive spike in fanfiction posting within *Good Omens* tags in AO3 akin to when the first season released as it brought a new generation of *Good Omens* fans into the fold. I anticipate that *GOL* will also have a spike in new members and new readers because I anticipate that the authors who are still attached to *GOL* will write new and robust fanfiction for it, as they did once before.

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<sup>134</sup> This was a stipulation in Pratchett's will and was complied with to the letter. This means that, per his instructions, his harddrives and all other digital storage implements were destroyed via steamroller. This was completed in 2017 during an opening of a museum exhibition titled "Terry Pratchett: HisWorld". Read more [here](#).

<sup>135</sup> The promo video was funded by Amazon, bringing into question the "true fannish nature" of Hillywood's actions for some individuals, so to speak.

## **CHAPTER 7: FUTURE WORK**

There is much work to be done in regards to the preservation and protection of fan archives, more than I could even begin to fully articulate here but, with the danger of sounding like every scholar on the planet in mind, I think the key thing is that this work needs more funding and more time to conduct more thorough research. I think that an ethnographic approach to this same subject of research could yield interesting results if you were able to collect interviews from individuals that were a part of the creation and/or stewardship process of a small independent fan archive that then either utilized the Open Doors project or, conversely, fell apart.

Outside of the academic sphere, there are some love letters that have been written or are being written about digital media fan archives. The most notable and tightly related to this thesis is the ongoing psychological horror ARG<sup>136</sup> *Welcome Home*<sup>137</sup>, which is structured like an incomplete Web 1.0-style digital fan archive of a fictional children's television series (modeled after *The Muppets* and other Jim Henson puppets) of the same title that ran from 1969 to the early 1970s before being mysteriously pulled from the air. Fans of the show have created this digital fan archive in an attempt to find physical artifacts of the show with which they can create speculative fiction through fanart and fanfiction- but upon further inspection of the site, the audience/user can tell that there's something wrong with the archive itself, there's something lurking in the code- players must tear apart the site to get to the bottom of what's going on, where the puppets went, and who the mysterious curator and benefactor, the Question-Answerer,

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<sup>136</sup> Alternate Reality Game- these games are designed to look like functional and real websites that casually reference their fictional aspects as if they were real. It's like consensual recreational gas lighting.

<sup>137</sup> *Welcome Home* is created by Clown, an artist and web designer who is building the narrative of the game in real time, slowly dropping clues to the plot over time. Check out the game [here](#).

is. Projects like *Welcome Home*, outside of a clear work of passion and a love letter to the fan archive, also serve as a means to open the conversation of disappearing fan archives to the public through fictional/narrative game form.

The future of Web 1.0 fan archives has not yet been written, and there's still time to intercede and do what we can to save as many of these digital cultural artifacts as possible. Our Library of Alexandria is only just beginning to catch fire; perhaps if we can be more aware of the nature of our Internet, we might be able to pull as many stories out as possible.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

- **Canon:** The base text that a fandom is based on. Created by an author/authors and usually published in an ‘official’ capacity (via a production company, publishing house, etc.).
  - **Canon Divergence:** A version of fan creations that intervene in a specific point in the canon text and then ‘diverge’ and move in a different direction than the author chose to go. See also: Fix-It Fics.
- **Headcanon:** Similar to fanon, but pertains to one or a few fan(s) beliefs surrounding aspects of the source text. These usually involve elements of the narrative, world, and/or characters that are not explicitly stated in canon, allowing space for fans to create their own interpretations.
- **Fandom:** A group of fans who form a collective identity surrounding a(n) ‘canon’ text(s) and interact with one another about said text(s). This identity is directly connected to the creation of ‘fanon’.
- **Fix-It Fics:** A genre of fanfiction that seeks to remedy what a certain fan/group of fans see as an egregious mistake on the part of the author. These intervene with the text and make changes to characterizations, dialogue, terminology, and/or narrative direction in order to bring these elements in line with the fan(s) perception of the canon.
- **OTP:** Acronym for “One True Pairing”- a quick declarative statement from a given fan on whom they believe are destined to be in a relationship (often romantic and/or sexual). This statement usually serves as a primary stance-taking tool among fan spaces, indicating the kind of content they may be into and what ‘side’ of the fandom they exist on (ie: a collection of preferences, pairings, and most often consumed types/genres of fan works).
- **Hurt/Comfort:** A popular genre of fanfiction which often involves two characters who undergo a tragedy/trauma together, endure through the hardship, and then provide comfort to one another in the aftermath (ranging from tame floral language ‘fluff’ to bodice-ripping explicit ‘smut’). Similar to ‘Whump’

- **Smut:** Sexually explicit written text, definition not limited to fan works. Smut is often chosen to describe straight/straight-presenting ‘ships’, but is not exclusively used as such. See ‘slash’ for more information.
- **Fluff:** Text that does not contain sexually explicit language. Oftentimes describes the PG aspects of a relationship (hand holding, first kisses, slow dancing, etc.)
- **Fanzine:** Short for ‘fan magazine’. Originally physically printed, now usually digital, these zines pertained to a specific fandom and included a variety of fan works including fan art and fanfiction. Originally circulated through mailing lists, now hosted on a variety of social media websites and archives.
- **Whump:** This is another term for Hurt/Comfort. See above.

**APPENDIX B- SCREENSHOTS**

Disclaimer: These screenshots are held on a physical format as well as this digital ephemera of a Google Drive folder. I recognize the inherent irony of keeping these in a file format that may one day elapse- but such is the reality of our impermanent Internet! This remains the most secure kind of storage for this thesis, given the affordances and limitations of this particular project.

Find the file folder [here](#).

**VITA**

Hailing from Appalachia, Grey Mangan grew up in the Tennessee Valley and can often be found with his nose in a book somewhere on the Tennessee River. Grey received his Bachelors of Arts in Cinema Studies at the University of Tennessee and was fortunate enough to also pursue a Masters of Arts in English with a concentration in Rhetoric, Writing and Linguistics at his alma mater. His varied research interests include online fan space and rhetorics, digital cultural memory, religion on the Internet, and queer fan studies. After graduation, Grey will begin his PhD program in the Film, Television, and Media Studies Department at the University of Michigan. He is immensely grateful for the unwavering support of his two fantastic life partners, loving family, and caring friends as he takes his next steps into academia. He looks forward to adding some blue and maize to his closet full of orange and white this fall.