

Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet

New Essays

*Edited by Karen Hellekson
and Kristina Busse*



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A Brief History of Media Fandom

Francesca Coppa

Introduction

Not only has a comprehensive history of media fandom not been written, but there also have been very few histories of individual fandoms and the works of art they produced. Most academic studies take an ethnographic, not historical or literary, approach. But it's a different thing to write about fandom historically (which presupposes the relevance of specific fandom activities rather than seeing those activities as evidence in a case study that analyzes trends in communication or the rituals of a subculture) or from a literary perspective (which presupposes that the writing is actually worth reading, rather than evidence of a fan's behavior or ideology). Perhaps the only conventional published history is, fittingly, Joan Marie Verba's *Boldly Writing: A Trekker Fan and Zine History, 1967–1987* (1996), which chronicles the emergence of *Star Trek* fandom. Verba explains who the fan writers, zine editors, convention organizers, and various other historically important figures were. The reader learns the names of key movers and shakers like Devra Langsam, Sherna Comerford, and Paula Smith; she also describes the contents of *Star Trek* fanzines, year by year, describing significant stories as well as noting the emergence of writers and themes important to the fandom. But even as Verba embarks on this daunting task, she does so knowing that writing history isn't important to everyone, not even to fans themselves. As she poignantly notes in her preface:

The incident that motivated me to finally sit down and write this book was an exchange of letters in June 1990. An editor had stated in her publication that *Universal Translator* had been the first regular publication to list fanzine description. Checking my library, I found that *Scuttlebutt* had predated *Universal Translator*, so I wrote the editor, asking her to print a correction. She replied, "...when I asked friends who have been in fandom longer than I (actually they've been in fandom since fandom came into

being), the response was, “Who cares which was first?”
I care [viii].

Thus speaks a historian. This history, brief and incomplete as it is, is dedicated to her and follows her example. I briefly trace the emergence of U.S. media fandom (as something distinct from, but related to, science fiction, comics, anime/manga/yaoi, music, soap opera, and literary fandoms) and its development over the forty years of its existence, not year by year as Verba does, but half decade by half decade. The goal is to create a short, basic narrative of the development of specific media fandoms and the kind of art fans made in them. I am indebted to the work of the fans who came before me, and I hope that this essay is useful to those who will write the comprehensive histories we so badly need.

FIAWOL: Fandom Is a Way of Life

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *fandom* was applied to sports and theatre before being adopted by science fiction literature enthusiasts, who developed much of the fannish infrastructure, jargon, and language still in use today. Science fiction fandom is commonly said to have developed on the letters page of Hugo Gernsback’s magazine *Amazing Stories* (1926); as Arnie Katz notes in “The Philosophical Theory of Fanhistory,” “The large letter column, copied by most of *Amazing*’s competitors, gave readers plenty of space to talk to the editor, and ultimately, to each other” (<http://www.smithway.org/fstuff/theory/phil1.html>, accessed June 1, 2006). It was this interactive element that allowed for the development of modern fandom; by publishing fans’ addresses, *Amazing Stories* allowed science fiction fans to contact each other directly.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these fans began to organize and produce art; the first science fiction fanzine, *The Comet*, was published in 1930 (Stephen Perkins, “Science Fiction Fanzines,” <http://www.zinebook.com/resource/perkins/perkins2.html>, accessed June 1, 2006). According to Frederik Pohl (1974), “fans had begun to publish their own magazines to fill in the dry weeks between the times when the new issues of *Astounding*, *Amazing*, and *Wonder* came out” (23) because science fiction was published only irregularly in the depressed days of the 1930s; then, as now, fan

art compensated for deficiencies and gaps in the marketplace. Fanzines, Pohl explains, “contained comments on the stories in the professional magazines, or news of fan activities, or gossip or debate” (23) as well as amateur stories and art. Pohl derides this art as “pretty poor stuff” before admitting that C. M. Kornbluth, Donald Wollheim, Ray Bradbury, and a hundred others, himself included, “got their start that way.” APAs—or amateur press association zines—developed partly as a way to handle the sheer volume of correspondence this activity generated. In an APA, all correspondence would be sent to a central person, who would simply copy everything that was sent to him and send it out again. All of these zines, Stephen Perkins notes, take “advantage of the cheapest and most accessible technologies in any given period, i.e. mimeography, spirit duplicating (ditto) and xerography, as well as more traditional printing methods such as offset printing.”

Pohl claims that the trip he and seven other New York–area fans took to meet a similar group of fans in Philadelphia in 1936 was the first science fiction convention; conversely, a group of British fans (including Arthur C. Clarke) had a more carefully planned public event on January 3, 1937. The first World Science Fiction Convention was held over the July 4, 1939, weekend in New York City, and aside from a few breaks during the war, that convention—now called Worldcon—has been held annually ever since.

In addition to the structure of zines, APAs, and fan convention, science fiction fandom also invented a fannish jargon that is still in wide use today, often by people who have no idea of its age or lineage. Words and acronyms like *BNF* (Big Name Fan) (antedating 1950), *con* (antedating 1942), *egoboo* (antedating 1947), *fanboy* (antedating 1919), *filk* (antedating 1955), *gafiate* (get away from it all) (antedating 1959), and *mundane* (as a noun; antedating 1955) have their roots in science fiction fandom, but they migrated first into media fandom, then onto the Internet, where they’ve been comfortably integrated with online fannish argot like *beta reader*, *flame*, and *listmom*.

Late 1960s: The Emergence of Science Fiction Media Fandoms

There’s some debate as to what was actually the first media fandom, although there’s no debate that media fandom emerged from within science fiction fandom around 1966. Conventional wisdom has it that many science fiction fans

developed a particular enthusiasm for *Star Trek* (1966–1969), the groundbreaking science fiction series, which had been screened by Gene Roddenberry for fans at Worldcon in 1966. In particular, the show attracted the many female fans who, as Justine Larbalestier (2002, 23–27) has persuasively argued, have been present in science fiction fandom since the beginning but were underrepresented on the letter pages that were the public face of fandom. But as Cynthia Walker (2001) points out, many of the science fiction writers and fans who coalesced around *Star Trek* and turned it into a phenomenon had previously embraced another television series: *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (1964–1968). As Walker notes, “Whether it was the technology, the utopian politics, or something else again, *U.N.C.L.E.* attracted science and science fiction–minded audiences” (4). Walker points out a number of connections between *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and the science fiction fan community; not only did the show feature teleplays by known science fiction writers, but Harlan Ellison worked regularly on the series rewriting and polishing scripts, and Terry Carr hired a number of young science fiction novelists (such as Joan Hunter Holly, Robert “Buck” Coulson, and David McDaniel) to write a series of paperback tie-ins published by Ace. As Walker explains, “Ellison, Carr, and McDaniel were all originally SF fans who made the transition to pro writers, and all were well known in the SF community.... When Ellison, Carr, McDaniel and the others began to contribute to the shaping of *U.N.C.L.E.*, they brought these [science fiction] customs and practices with them” (4). Walker further cites Craig Henderson, editor and publisher of such fan newsletters as *File Forty* and *FYEO*, who asserts that “*U.N.C.L.E.* was very definitely the first television series to inspire a fandom-like reaction. *Star Trek* was the second, which is well worth remembering.” During the height of its popularity,

over half the television sets that were turned on Friday nights at 10 p.m. were tuned into *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* *TV Guide* dubbed it “the mystic cult of millions.” ... In a memo to programming vice president, Mort Werner, the NBC research department reported that viewers were watching *U.N.C.L.E.* “ ... not just because they dislike other programs that are on ... [but] because they are fans, fanatics.... They talk about the program with other fans and go beyond that: they proselytize, they want to convert non-viewers!” [Walker, “The Gun as Star and the ‘*U.N.C.L.E.* Special,’” <http://www.manfromuncle.org/gun.htm>, accessed June 1, 2006].

Unlike *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Star Trek* struggled for ratings the entire time

it was on the air, and perhaps this pushed its fans to become more vocal and participatory. Walker, however, persuasively argues that the key players in both fandoms were drawn from the same pool; Juanita Coulson, a contributor to the very first *Star Trek* zine, *Spockanalia* (1967), and the editor of the second *Star Trek* zine, *ST-Phile* (1968), was married to Buck Coulson, the coauthor of two Ace *U.N.C.L.E.* paperbacks. Media fandom, now a gigantic international phenomenon, clearly began its life in a very small pool.

Whether the first media fandom was *U.N.C.L.E.* or *Star Trek*, the women who built those fandoms tended to fit the profile of science fiction fans: they were better educated than most, heavy readers, and scientifically literate. Verba herself has a bachelor's degree in physics, went to graduate school for astronomy, and worked as a computer programmer; Jacqueline Lichtenberg (professional novelist and creator of the Kraith universe, which explored the Vulcan cultures of *Star Trek*) was a chemist before becoming a writer; Judy Segal has a master's degree in botany. Perhaps their involvement in science or in science fiction partly explains some women's great and instant affection for the character of Mr. Spock; certainly a female engineer, botanist, or computer programmer in the late 1960s knew what it was like to be treated as an alien with an inappropriate and disconcerting emotional range.

From the start, *Star Trek* fans produced not simply the critical discussion typical of science fiction fandom but creative responses to their favorite show. From the first, *Star Trek* zines included fan art—poems, songs, stories, drawings, teleplays. As Walker observes, Gene Roddenberry's strategy of turning a blind eye to fan art and fiction was probably responsible for the flowering of media fandom. Indeed, a creative *Trek* culture rapidly developed through the proliferation of fanzines like *Spockanalia*, *ST-Phile*, *T-Negative*, and *Warp Nine: A Star Trek Chronicle*. Bjo Trimble produced the *Star Trek Concordance of People, Places, Things* as a fan production in 1969; it was published professionally in 1976. In 1969, science fiction writer Ruth Berman wrote "For the Good of the Service," a story that Verba lauds as good enough to have been an episode; that same year, Lelamarie S. Kreidler wrote "Time Enough," "a story about a woman who wins and beds Spock" (1996, 3) which was the first of many future relationship stories. The various genres of *Star Trek* fan fiction were developing apace.

But *Star Trek* would soon become a divisive issue within science fiction fandom; many traditional fans, whose culture continued to be centered around

professional science fiction magazines, dismissed *Star Trek* as science fiction for nonreaders. This was an unfair slur against the (mainly) female fans who were helping to build *Star Trek* fandom and who were still active science fiction literature fans as well. The schism between science fiction and *Star Trek* fandom was exacerbated in 1974 when Jacqueline Lichtenberg and Laura Basta were nominated for the Hugo Award for best fan writer (the fan-awarded Hugo being the award given annually at Worldcon). As Verba (1996) notes,

Both Jacqueline and Laura were nominated for the “best fanzine writer” solely on the basis of their *Star Trek* fanzine stories, and this created quite a furor in science fiction fandom. Some science fiction fans were aghast at the idea of fans writing stories for what they thought of as a second-rate TV show. Some were afraid that *Star Trek* fans would distract the World Science Fiction convention from honoring those who wrote original science fiction novels. Other science fiction fans did not see what all the fuss was about. This began a debate about the relationship of *Star Trek* fans to the science fiction community which has continued, in some form or another, to this day [16].

Eventually *Star Trek* fans, feeling unwelcome at science fiction conventions, would start holding their own conventions. The first of these was held in New York in 1972, and this event really represented the beginning of the *Star Trek* fan phenomenon.

Early 1970s: Star Trek Lives!

Not only was a rift slowly developing between science fiction fans and *Star Trek* fans during the late 1960s and early 1970s, but there began to be a more nuanced rift within *Trek* fandom itself. The divide came, Verba (1996, 23) argues, between those fans who liked *Trek* primarily for the science fiction elements, and those who liked it for the characters, particularly the buddy dynamic between Kirk and Spock. Although I believe that this dichotomy is in many ways false (can *Star Trek* fans really have no interest in science fiction whatsoever?), the line she traces is one that arguably distinguishes media fandom from *Star Trek* fandom per se.

By 1975, *Star Trek* fandom was well established, as demonstrated by the publication of the seminal “*Star Trek*” *Lives!* (Lichtenberg et al., 1975) that same year. “*Star Trek*” *Lives!* is a fascinating history of the early years of *Trek* fandom, including the establishment of zine culture, the show’s famous letter-writing campaign, and the phenomenon of the *Star Trek* convention. Even in 1975, the fandom was growing exponentially: as the authors note in their introduction, the 1972 convention drew over 3,000 people; the 1973 convention drew 6,000; and in 1974, 15,000 people attended and 6,000 more were turned away at the door (5). And yet it was the book’s final chapter, “Do-It-Yourself *Star Trek*—The Fan Fiction,” that influenced not only the extant *Star Trek* fandom but also the developing media fandom, with its celebration of *Star Trek* fan fiction as a literature written mainly by women.

Unlike Verba (1996), who professed herself surprised at the growing dominance of female-written “relationship” stories within *Star Trek* fandom, the authors of “*Star Trek*” *Lives!* believe that it is intrinsic to the material: *Star Trek*, they raved, “did not keep its distance from emotion; did not deny close, warm human relationships even among males; did not call for a stiff upper lip; did not deny the existence and importance of sex; did not ban psychological action as a plot-moving force; did not deny the possibility of women who might be more than damsels.” They note that *Star Trek* was “startlingly sexy—sexy in theme, in attitude—not merely in gratuitous scenes of bodies,” and that this made it particularly attractive to women writers, who have developed “a whole new genre of fan fiction and perhaps of science fiction generally. And suddenly,” they add, not without a little bitterness, “the men have made themselves scarce” (225). Although there were and are many men in *Star Trek* fandom—making visual art, writing articles, organizing conventions—*Star Trek* stories are written almost entirely by women. In *The Best of TREK: From the Magazine for “Star Trek” Fans*, a compilation of articles from the magazine *TREK* published in 1978, men are responsible for at least half the entries, and yet fan historian Mary Ellen Curtin has calculated that 83 percent of *Star Trek* fan writers were women in 1970, and 90 percent in 1973. However else they were participating in the community, male *Star Trek* fans weren’t writing fan fiction.

The rest of the “Do-It-Yourself” chapter is a serious literary examination of a number of stories the authors have determined to be important; many of the stories have strong female leads (although the prevalence of strong, perfect women in *Star Trek* fan fiction would lead Paula Smith to coin the term *Mary Sue* to describe them in 1973 [Verba 1996, 15]) or deal with unexplored aspects

of alien (and particularly Vulcan) cultures. Specific stories discussed in the chapter include Laura Basta's novel *The Daneswoman*, about the first female starship commander; Judith Brownlee's stories about her original female Vulcan character, Captain T'Pelle; a trilogy of plays by Doris Beetem set on Vulcan in ancient times; Ruth Berman's story "It Seemed the Logical Thing," and Judith Brownlee's "Let Me Count the Ways," both about Sarak and Amanda's marriage; various stories of Spock's *pon farr*, mating, or marriage, including Catherine Blakey's "Encounter" and Diane Steiner's *Spock Enslaved*; "Mirror, Mirror" universe stories like Laura Basta's "Federation and Empire" and Juanita Coulson's "To Summon the Future"; and, almost as an afterthought, some Kirk-centric stories like "Joy in the Morning," by Claudine-Marie de Sisi and the *Alternate Universe #4* zine, in which "the heroism of Kirk is beginning to be better recognized." They also describe postscript or missing scene stories like Ruth Berman's "A Rose for Miranda" and a number of intense Kirk and Spock "bond" stories like Jennifer Guttridge's "Tower of Terror" and "The Winged Dreamers," Carolyn Meredith's "The Crossing Lords," and Clare Gabriel's "Ni Var." Last, they explain the genesis of Jacqueline Lichtenberg's own Kraith series.

I take the time to list these stories because the authors do; each story mentioned is discussed in detail, with excerpts and close readings, over the course of a couple of pages. The authors of "*Star Trek*" *Lives!* don't think these stories are important as examples of "fan communication" but for what they're saying in themselves, as stories in "a whole new genre of science fiction." This attention to detail and the tantalizing excerpts of individually named stories in particular fanzines was responsible for an explosive interest in fan fiction in the years after "*Star Trek*" *Lives!* was published. The book ended up publicizing the very phenomena it was celebrating. As Verba notes, "For thousands upon thousands of fans, this was when they became aware that such activity existed, and that they could join in" (1996, xviii).

The stories mentioned in "Do-It-Yourself" were only the tip of the iceberg; in addition to the "science fiction story" versus "relationship story" divide, there was also increasingly a divide in relationship stories between K&S (relationship) stories and K/S (homoerotic, otherwise known as *slash*) stories. The first of the latter is commonly thought to be Diane Marchant's "A Fragment Out of Time" (*Grup* #3, 1974) which depicted two nameless people (one male, one whose gender was not revealed) making love; Marchant acknowledged in the next issue of *Grup* that she intended these characters to be Kirk and Spock. Slash fiction

took the buddy story to another level, sparking a series of arguments within *Star Trek* fandom as to precisely how close Kirk and Spock were. But as Verba notes, “One might argue that the ‘relationship’ (K&S) and the homoerotic (K/S) stories were merely two aspects of the same theme. Neither was concerned about science fiction. Both concentrated on the interactions between Kirk and Spock” (1996, 23). If relationship stories were the public face of *Star Trek* fan fiction and slash stories were kept relatively underground, it was the shared focus on relationships that led some Trek fans to become more broadly defined media fans in the second half of the 1970s.

Late 1970s: Buddy Shows and Blockbuster Sci-Fi

The mid to late 1970s were characterized by two phenomena that turned some *Star Trek* fans into self-defined media fans. The first of these was the appearance of the buddy cop show *Starsky and Hutch* (1975–1979) and its British counterpart, *The Professionals* (1977–1983). Although these mainstream shows might seem a far cry from *Star Trek*, stories about the importance of friendship and partnership were now prevalent, and fannish practices for creating and distributing those stories were easily adaptable to shows like *Starsky and Hutch*. As Lichtenberg et al. (1975) note in “*Star Trek*” *Lives!*, women “tended to identify more with the male heroes of the genre—the adventurers and problem solvers” (224). As police detectives working the mean streets of “Bay City” (*Starsky and Hutch*) or agents in CI5, a government organization dedicated to fighting crime and terrorism (*The Professionals*), the protagonists of these shows were certainly adventurers and problem solvers; further, they were as isolated from mainstream society and dependent on each other as a result of their occupations as Kirk and Spock were—more so, in fact. The relative ease with which certain fans were able to apply their reading strategies and creative practices to these buddy shows gives additional credence to Cynthia Walker’s theory that *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, and not the more famous *Star Trek*, was the prototype media fandom; *U.N.C.L.E.*, too, is a buddy fandom, with characters who have dangerous, problem-solving, socially isolating jobs as globe-trotting international spies (making it a much different thing than the story of that isolated loner, James Bond).

The same aspects that made buddy shows attractive to relationship-oriented fans also made them attractive to slashers; the fact that these shows were set in an era

of tight jeans and unbuttoned shirts, and of the loosening of formerly strict standards of acceptable male behavior, only provided additional evidence for a homoerotic interpretation. As Camille Bacon-Smith notes in *Enterprising Women*, “When actors are shot in sufficient close up for the viewer to read facial expressions clearly, they cannot maneuver appropriate social distances and still look at each other while they are speaking ... so actors portraying friends consistently break into each other’s spheres of intimate space” (1992, 233). This leads to what one of Smith’s interviewees calls “Starsky and Hutch syndrome”: the idea that the leads appear unable to stay apart or keep their hands off each other. Such body language encouraged homoerotic readings by many mainstream viewers as well. Slash was slowly coming out of the closet; a new 1978 *Star Trek* zine called *Naked Times* announced on the editorial page of its first issue that “While *Naked Times* did not start out as primarily a K/S zine, that’s certainly the way this first issue has turned out, mainly due to the fact that that’s the majority of material I received.”

Buddy shows weren’t the only things broadening the scope of media fandom beyond *Star Trek*: the debut of *Star Wars* (1977) triggered a science fiction blockbuster explosion in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Suddenly fans who’d been suffering from a dearth of science fiction stories were drowning in them. After the huge success of *Star Wars*, producers were quick to try to capitalize on the sci-fi craze, producing shows like *Battlestar Galactica* (1978), *Blake’s 7* (1978–1981), and *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* (1979), as well as films like *The Black Hole* (1979), *Battle Beyond the Stars* (1980), and *Flash Gordon* (1980). Perhaps most importantly, the popularity of *Star Wars* finally made possible the return of the *Star Trek* franchise so desperately desired; *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* debuted in theatres in 1979.

This is not to say that *Star Trek* fans and *Star Wars* fans happily shared space in the emerging subculture of media fandom; as one science fiction fan glumly noted, “As far as I’m concerned, SW was the great splintering of *my* fandom (Trek) as people zipped off into that new media trend (still bear a grudge) and stopped doing stuff for my Trek ’zine and started writing *shudder* Luke Skywalker fic” (Ithiliana, personal communication). Still, fans of *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, buddy shows, and other kinds of mass media storytelling began to form their own distinct culture in the late 1970s. The first of the cons that would become MediaWest was held in 1978 and organized by Lori Chapek-Carleton and Gordon Carleton, founders of the T’Kuhlian Press, which put out such *Trek* zines as *Warped Space*. The con was called T’Con and held at the Lansing

Hilton Inn. The MediaWest Web site describes the con's philosophy and lineage:

When *Star Wars* began to generate a fandom of its own, some *Star Trek* fans felt threatened by this sudden upstart and began to treat *Star Wars* fans as badly as they had been treated. Others, however, thought there was room for a variety of interests, and Media Fandom was born....

Under the tutelage of KWest*Con veterans Paula Smith and Sharon Ferraro, a format was conceived: an SF/Media convention run by fans, for fans, with no paid guests. It had been observed that at conventions with little or no Media programming, fans would gather in the halls, or wherever they could, and have their own discussions, workshops, etc., but it was anyone's guess if there would be enough interest to support an entire convention without the drawing power of professional authors, actors, etc.

There was, and there is

[<http://members.aol.com/mdiawstCon/mwchist.htm>, accessed June 1, 2006].

Smith and Ferraro also edited a number of important zines, most importantly the ongoing *Trek* zine *Menagerie* (1973). They also created the FanQ awards to honor *Star Trek* fan writers and artists. These midwives to the birth of media fandom brought the organizational structure and habits of *Star Trek* fandom with them; the conventions they helped to organize were formally reestablished in 1981 as MediaWest, which has been held annually ever since. Other media and media-friendly cons followed, including Creation Con and DragonCon.

Early 1980s: Good Television and Better Blockbusters

In the early 1980s, it seemed like every new issue of *Starlog* announced the coming of a new and exciting science fiction or fantasy-themed film; some, like *Ice Pirates* (1984), were terrible, but most were of much higher quality than the films of the immediate post-*Star Wars* generation. Even the second *Star Trek* film was considered vastly superior to its 1979 predecessor, and within a few short years, films such as *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Poltergeist* (1982), *Blade Runner* (1982), *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982), *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1983), *Return of the Jedi*

(1983), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), and *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension* (1984) flew across the screens. It was at this time that media fandom really grew and spread, not only because there were so many films to choose from, but also because the obsessively researching nature of most media fans meant that it was a rare fan who didn't see even the nongenre films that Harrison Ford starred in (such as *Force 10 from Navarone* [1978], *Hanover Street* [1979], and the few seconds of his turn as a bellboy in *Dead Heat on a Merry Go Round* [1966]). Being an informed media fan could be a full-time job.

On the small screen, two different kinds of television were having an impact on media fans. The first of these was British media, imported and made available to American viewers through their broadcast on PBS. For instance, the BBC had tried to sell the long-running British science fiction series *Doctor Who* to American television in 1975, but it failed to catch on. It was only in 1978 that the Tom Baker seasons were sold to PBS, where they attained a growing and fervent cult status through the 1980s

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctor_Who_in_America, accessed June 1, 2006). Although *Monty Python's Flying Circus* had been broadcast on PBS since 1974, the early 1980s saw a rising interest in British media such as *Fawlty Towers* (1975), *Blackadder* (1983), and the various incarnations of Douglas Adams's comedy science fiction universe, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (radio series 1978, broadcast on NPR in March 1981; original trilogy of novels published in 1979, 1980, 1982; UK television series 1981, broadcast on PBS in 1982). Media fandom's affinity for the Doctor was only the most recent example of its growing BBC obsession; public television membership drives often featured scarf-wrapped media fen answering phones, and "British Media" became a catchall phrase indicating a love of a number of otherwise disparate British shows.

The other significant development in television was American. "Quality" television series like *Hill Street Blues* (1981–1987) and *Cagney and Lacey* (1982–1988) introduced more complex narrative arcs and characterization issues, changing the ways fan fiction writers thought about television, and leading to what longtime fan Jessica Ross calls "a non-genre fandom explosion—everything became zineable" (personal communication, June 21, 2005). Ross drew on her zine collection to make the point: a typical multimedia zine of the period, *Warped Space 50*, put out by T'Khutian Press in 1983, features the following list of fandoms: *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Hill Street Blues*, *Remington*

Steele, *Knight Rider*, and a comic based on *The Fantastic Four* crossed with *Star Wars*. *Cagney and Lacey*, it is worth noting, was the first show to actually be brought back from cancellation by a *Star Trek*-style letter-writing campaign to the network, and not only was it one of the first shows where women got to be adventurers and problem solvers, but it was also the first lesbian slash fandom.

Late 1980s: Crossovers

Crossovers were nothing new in fandom: there had been *Star Trek/Man from U.N.C.L.E.* crossovers, for instance, as early as 1979. But even a cursory examination of a typical zine blurb shows the creative lengths to which fans went in pursuing multimedia crossovers in the late 1980s. Here's an example.

LIONS & TIGERS & ZINES, OH MY #1, Airwolf, Real Ghostbusters, MacGyver, Road Warrior, Buckaroo Banzai, SW, Land of Giants, Space Rangers, Equalizer, Kung Fu TLC, QL, Alf, B7, Are You Being Served/She Wolf of London, Fantasy Island, Moonlighting/Miami Vice, Miami Vice, 440p, \$10.00.

Moonlighting (1985–1989) and *Miami Vice* (1984–1989) are both detective shows, so one can see the potential for crossover between their worlds. But *Are You Being Served/She Wolf of London?* Presumably even werewolves have to shop. Here we see fandoms mixed together with gleeful abandon.

Although the list of active fandoms during this period would be long and would include such strange bedfellows as *Space: 1999* (1975–1977), *Simon and Simon* (1981–1988), *The Greatest American Hero* (1981–1983), *Remington Steele* (1982–1987), *Tales of the Gold Monkey* (1982–1983), and *Robin of Sherwood* (1984–1986), the three largest and most important fandoms to emerge in the late 1980s were *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994), *Beauty and the Beast* (1987–1990), and *Wiseguy* (1987–1990). Predictably enough, the relaunching of a televised *Star Trek* franchise attracted the attention of science fiction, *Star Trek*, and media fans alike. Henry Jenkins devotes a chapter of *Textual Poachers* (1992) to fannish engagements with the romantic *Beauty and the Beast*. *Wiseguy*, on the other hand, was an ongoing episodic drama about a federal agent undercover with the mob, but even the mainstream media noticed that the intense relationship between the agent and the mobster “verges on being

homoerotic” (O’Connor 1987).

This colorful explosion of zines might well, in hindsight, have signaled the beginning of the decline of that culture; in the late 1980s, fannish interactions began to move away from the medium of print zines and onto what would come to be called the Internet. Fans began to move their communications onto Usenet and bulletin boards; in many ways, the Internet was the ideal medium for fannish interaction because, as Henry Edward Hardy noted in his “History of the Net” (1993), “The written culture of the Net is much like an oral culture in the immediacy of communication” (http://www.eff.org/Net_culture/net.history.txt, accessed June 1, 2006). Fans already had those written-oral cultures in their letter zines, APAs, and fanzines. Fans of every ilk began to colonize Usenet, creating space for their interests. A glance at just some of the group titles shows the diversity of groups who began to use the net: fans met in such communities as rec.arts.sf.fandom, rec.arts.startrek.fandom, and alt.drwho.creative.

Early to Mid 1990s: Developing an Internet Infrastructure

Many, if not most, of the new fandoms that developed in the early 1990s developed their culture in both the traditional ways—zines, letters, conventions—but also in new, online ways. Both new and established fandoms established Usenet groups for fannish discussion and the distribution of fan fiction—alt.tv.x-files.creative or alt.sex.fetish.startrek. Fans created centralized online, fandom-specific archives for their fan fiction, but these early archives were labor-intensive; by the end of the decade, fans would write software that would automatically format and store fiction in searchable databases.

The *Forever Knight* (1992–1996) fandom can claim the first online mailing list, ForKNI-L, started on December 9, 1992, by Jean Prior; other fandoms got e-mail lists if they had a member with access to the technology. In the early to mid-1990s, running a mailing list was a relatively restricted thing; it required Majordomo or ListServ software and was generally run off a university server by someone who worked or studied there. Home computers were generally not online; commercial Internet providers were only beginning to be popular. Fans, as a group, were technologically ahead of the curve; many worked from VT 100 terminals at university computer labs or were early adopters of home computing equipment. But the fannish list administrators, moderators, archivists, and Web

hosts were drawn from the ranks of the most technologically savvy fans; if media fandom had expanded its traditional base in science fiction fandom, it still depended on a core group of highly educated, science-oriented women.

Important fandoms that emerged during this period include *Quantum Leap* (1989–1993), *Highlander* (1992–1998), *The X-Files* (1993–2002), *Lois and Clark* (1993–1997), *Babylon 5* (1994–1998), *Due South* (1994–1998), *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001), *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1995–1999), and, of course, the nearly inevitable *Star Trek* franchises: *Deep Space Nine* (1993–1999) and *Voyager* (1995). In a way, the early 1990s can be regarded as a time of modernism for online fandom: a fandom was judged by the strength of its infrastructure; everyone knew you found *X-Files* fan fiction at the Gossamer archive, *Due South* fan fiction at Hexwood, *Star Trek* fan fiction at Trekiverse. A well-organized fandom might have two centralized mailing lists: one for distributing fiction, and one for hosting discussion, with fiction sometimes broken up into “gen” and “adult”; these lists had names like XFF, DSX, and ROG, which were a kind of code fans understood: *X-Files* fan fiction, *Due South* adult fiction (including slash), Really Old Guy (the 5,000-year-old Methos on *Highlander*). Eventually, as the Internet grew and the technology became more accessible, lists proliferated, with ever more specific mission statements; by the end of the decade, with the rise of OneList, eGroups, and Yahoo.com groups, anyone could create a splinter list or have her own fannish vanity list. From there, fandom arguably entered the postmodern era.

The movement of media fandom online, as well as an increasingly customizable fannish experience, moved slash fandom out into the mainstream. Whereas slash zines had often been sold at cons literally from a box under the table, the Internet allowed for slash-specific lists that fans who wanted to read homoerotic stories could join and that other fans could easily avoid. Similarly, slash-friendly discussion lists allowed these fans to consolidate and talk openly to each other; many began to articulate their reasons for slashing, reading strategies, and politics.

Late 1990s: When Fandoms Collide: Comics, Celebrities and Music, Anime

In the late 1990s, the mainstreaming of online technologies allowed ever more people to enter media fandom. Formerly, most fans had been mentored by older

fans or had attended a convention in order to meet others who shared their particular obsession. Now people could just google their favorite show, join the available lists, or start reading fiction—even erotic fiction—on a public online archive.

Several new and important media fandoms emerged during this time, notably *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), *The Sentinel* (1996–1999), *Stargate SG-1* (1997–present), and *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999). These fandoms all fit comfortably within the genres of shows typically attractive to media fans, but the late 1990s were distinguished by the crossover between traditional media fandoms and other kinds of fandoms, namely comics, celebrities, music, and anime. These intersections would quickly have a profound effect on traditional media fandom. None of these other fandoms was “new,” and each of them has its own history distinct from the one I’ve attempted to narrate here.

Comics fandom has existed since the very emergence of comics in the 1930s and can be seen as another kind of offshoot of science fiction fandom. As Gerard Jones explains in *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* (2004), Superman creator Jerry Siegal was involved in early science fiction fandom and may have created the first science fiction fanzine, *Cosmic Stories*, at age fourteen. It was a compilation of stories he had written and was advertised through a classified ad at the back of *Science Wonder Stories*. Jones locates comics fandom as having emerged from science fiction fandom and argues that “every subsequent geek culture—comics, computers, video games, collectible figurines—has either grown directly or taken much of its form” (37).

Celebrity fandom is arguably the very earliest form of fandom; as Henry Jenkins notes in *Textual Poachers* (1992), one of the earliest uses of the word *fan* was to describe theatre goers who admired the actors rather than the play (12). The Nifty Archive, which provided a home for a number of erotic stories, many of them homoerotic, many about celebrities, was established online in 1993; as fan historian Laura M. Hale notes, “Historically, this archive is not viewed as a home to true fan fiction but rather celebrity based erotica which was absent the fannish fan fiction context” (Hale 2005, 34). Although not part of fandom per se, the Nifty Archive did provide a center around which people interested in celebrity fan fiction could congregate. Similarly, Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs (1992) have described girls’ fannish engagement with musicians like Frank Sinatra, the Beatles, Michael Jackson, and David Bowie. In

the late 1970s, some media fans crossed over into music fandom, writing fan fiction about “Tris and Alex,” who were thinly disguised versions of Led Zeppelin musicians Jimmy Page and Robert Plant, although this remained a relatively isolated phenomenon. According to Hale, Duran Duran slash and het fic was circulating in fanzines in 1991, but fans “did not seem to come from the same community as ‘traditional fan fiction fans’ were coming from. They did not have the idea the material they were creating was taboo.... until they started interacting with media based fan” (34). Ironically, the fact that celebrity and music fandoms are so mainstream and have so many commercial venues, such as *People* magazine and VH1’s *Behind the Music*, meant that celebrity and music fandoms never had much of an organized subcultural presence. They were too close to mainstream culture, and although that mainstream culture has always looked askance at *Star Trek* fans or writers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fan fiction, devotion to a band or a singer, or a public crush on a celebrity has always been considered relatively acceptable. Music fans don’t generally need to attend conventions or to self-identify as “fannish” in order to explain their enthusiasm or defend their entertainment preferences.

Anime, manga, and yaoi have always had their fans in Japan; the problem for English-speaking fans has always been access, both to the materials themselves and to translations of them. Perhaps because of the access issue, anime fandoms were some of the earliest adopters of online communication. Hale (2005, 32) claims that anime fandom created their online fannish architecture as early as 1991, which was also the year of AnimeCon, one of the first conventions dedicated to anime and manga. The Internet has steadily increased the popularity of Japanese fan forms. Although western fans have always managed to find anime, manga, and yaoi, the rise of scanners, digital video, and file-sharing technology has made access infinitely easier.

When all of these fandoms—media, comics, celebrity, music, anime—moved onto the Internet, they gained a wider audience, and the most obvious audience for a “new” fandom was a person from what, for lack of a better word, we might call a neighboring fandom. So some media fans got interested in comics, some anime fans started writing about celebrities, and some celebrity fan writers began to model their work on that done in media fandom. This had several important repercussions, one of which was the rapid rise of the phenomenon known as *popslash* within media fandom. Fan fiction writer Helen, then a writer of *Sentinel* slash, currently a writer in the *Harry Potter* fandom, wrote the seminal popslash story “The Same Inside” (2001, <http://www.helenish.net/samep.shtml>,

accessed June 1, 2006), whose premise is explained by its famous and endlessly replicated opening line, “Somehow, in the night, Chris had turned into a girl.” Helen reimagined celebrity erotica through the conventions of speculative fiction, making boy band fiction explicitly about *gender* and about *genre*. Consequently, popslash grew popular among media fan writers, many of whom created similarly brilliant and science fiction–like premises to explore celebrity culture as a metaphor for gender identity and other performances of the self. Interestingly, however, the sudden surge in popslash connected media fans with entirely different groups of music fans who had never heard of *Star Trek* or MediaWest, and who may use fannish terms like *Mary Sue* or describe a story as being about Benji/Joel without having any connection between that joining slash and the slash that so famously joined K/S more than thirty years ago. If the expansion of the Internet allowed communication between fans in different worlds, the translation and adaptations of fannish terms, forms, and practices that has emerged from those communications is rapidly transforming the fannish landscape into something that older fans may barely recognize.

Early 2000s: The More Things Change, the More Things Are Totally Different

Media fandom may now be bigger, louder, less defined, and more exciting than it’s ever been. Arguably, this is fandom’s postmodern moment, when the rules are “there ain’t no rules” and traditions are made to be broken. FanFiction.net, the largest multifandom archive, was founded in 1998; today, it contains literally hundreds of thousands of stories, with more than 200,000 of them from *Harry Potter* alone.

The infrastructure of fandom has changed yet again. Mailing lists are rapidly dying, abandoned in favor of personalized blogging technology. If mailing lists customized fandom by allowing fans to select from among their fannish interests, blogs such as LiveJournal.com allow them to select particular fans from among many. LiveJournal debuted in 1999 but began to be widely adopted across fandom around 2003, where it caused a wide-scale reorganization of fandom infrastructure. Fan fiction is now posted to one’s individual LiveJournal, or to a LJ community devoted to a particular fandom, topic, or pairing. LJ comments are replacing letters of comment. People can move through fannish interests at an astonishing speed.

That being said, some things remain the same: major new fandoms include much in the way of tradition genre fare: *Smallville* (2001), *Harry Potter* (2001), *Lord of the Rings* (2001), *Stargate: Atlantis* (2004), the new incarnation of *Battlestar Galactica* (2004). And yet media fandom has also been visibly affected by the changes of the previous decade. For instance, there has recently been an explosion of fan fiction set in the DC universe of comics, films, and animated television, a trend that will no doubt be exacerbated by the release, as I write this, of *Batman Begins* (2005). Groups of female media fans now share space with groups of male comics fans, and they seem to be having productive exchanges, even if they do occasionally baffle each other. Similarly, the *Lord of the Rings* fandom has produced an offshoot fandom that, borrowing from the tradition of celebrity fandom, writes fan fiction not about the *Lord of the Rings* characters but about the actors who portray them in the Peter Jackson films. The practice of treating actors as characters was initially deemed more or less immoral by media fandom and was viciously debated during the emergence of popslash. Now the practice, although not universally accepted, is more or less condoned.

But media fans are making more kinds of art than ever before. Not only are they still writing fan fiction, but image manipulation software has also allowed for ever more sophisticated visual art. Digital editing software has taken the fannish art of creating music videos, or *vidding*—which began with slide shows over music in 1975, and was then developed into a high art by VCR vidders in the 1980s and 1990s—to a whole other level: the Vividcon convention, dedicated entirely to the art of vidding, was founded in 2002. Soon, media fans might simply be able to make movies on their home computers, as fans in the neighboring fandom of machinima are already doing (see Jones, this volume). And fans are continuing to create a rich critical literature about themselves and their art. Fans have always done a wonderful job of explaining themselves to themselves, and a tradition of fannish metadiscourse continues to flourish online at such places as the Fanfic Symposium Web site, the Glass Onion mailing list, and on LJ communities dedicated to self-reflexive fannish analysis. Panels on analytical and theoretical subjects continue to be held at fannish conventions. And critical books like this one are now being written by us, by the fans—smart women who no longer feel quite so much like aliens.

Note

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