



Hi my name is **Ebony Darkmess Dementia Raven Way** and I have long ebony black hair (that's how I got my name) with **purple streaks** and **red tips**

that reaches my mid-back and icy blue eyes like

**LIMPID TEARS**

and a lot of people tell me I look like **Amy Lee**

I'm not related to **Gerard Way** but I wish I was because he's a (AN: if u don't know who she is get da hell out of here!)

**MAJOR FUCKING HOT**

I'm a **vampire** but my teeth are straight and white. I have pale white skin.

I'm also a **witch** and I go to a magic school called

**Hogwarts** in England where I'm in the seventh year

I'm a **goth** and I wear mostly black. I love (I'm seventeen)

**GOTH Hot Topic** and I buy all my clothes from there.

I was walking outside Hogwarts. It was **NO SNOW** snowing and raining

so there was **NO SNOW** which I was very happy about. **A lot of**

**preps**

stared at me. I put up my **middle finger**

**MIDDLE FINGER** at them.

# All My Friends Are Losers

A Diary of Gen Z Cringe

**a/n:** *a/n* stands for Author's Note, a practice in fanfiction in which the author will insert their own commentary before, after, or even in the middle of a chapter.

The *inside covers* are the first and last updates to the fanfiction *My Immortal* by *xxbloodyrists666xx*, which is famous within internet fandom culture as a whole for being so artfully bad. At this point, it has transcended cringe.

# Forward



*a/n:* Me, age 11, in line at a Rick Riordan book signing at a local book store.

My relationship with the internet is synonymous with my relationship with fandom. I got my iPod Touch around the same time I became obsessed with the Percy Jackson books. My first social media was Tumblr, a fandom space, and my communities online have always centered around fandom. My internet life has been punctuated by my interests. Remove them, and you remove the context around my evolving relationship with the internet.

For years, I felt this overwhelming shame about the amount of brainspace these interests used. That time would have been better used for homework or being social. But I liked it. I liked using the internet to dive deep into the things that I loved. And I'm done being embarrassed about it. Maybe they weren't great, but they were mine.

The same reclamation that I am beginning to do with my old interests is happening all across my generation right now. The phrase "cringe culture is dead" echoes around social media.

*a/n:* **fandom** is a community of fans organized around one interest, almost always an intellectual property.

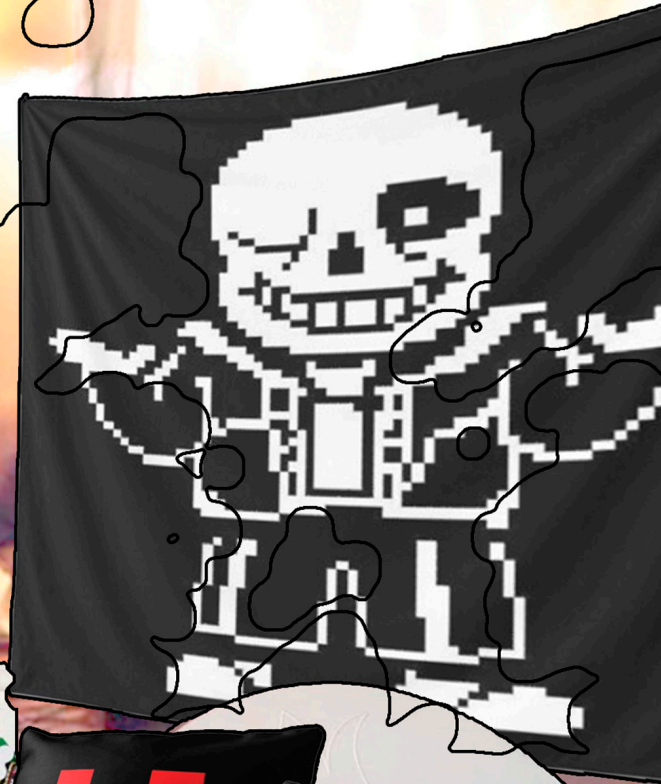
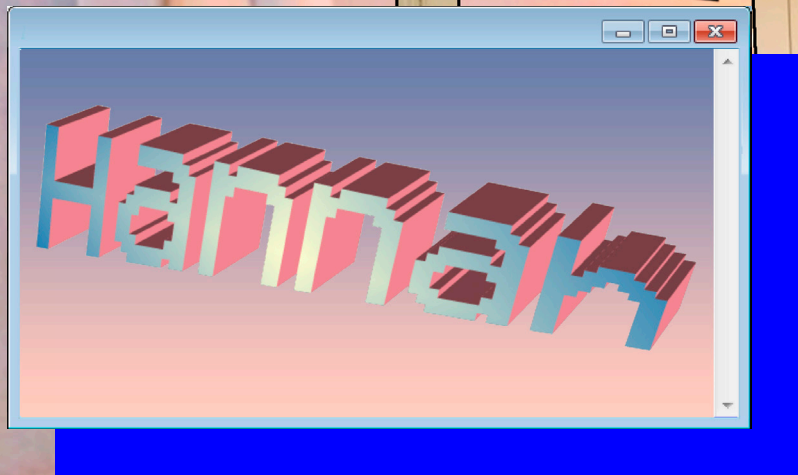
I don't think it's a coincidence it's happening now. As we sit in our childhood bedrooms during quarantine, we naturally think back to the versions of ourselves who inhabited these spaces.

Some of our rooms are adorned with visual reminders of interests and achievements. Many more are noticeably lacking any trace of the obsessions of years past.

Shame is tiring, isn't it? Isn't it more fun to love?

In this book, I talked to my friends about the things they loved growing up and how they carry the memories of those things with them to this day. The one unifying thing they all expressed was how these interests changed them for the better.

I imagined a childhood bedroom for each friend based on the topics and fandoms that they brought up in the interviews. As I've said, the spaces that we exist in shape who we are, both on and offline, so I have brought them together.



**Hannah:** My name is Hannah and I'll be talking about Undertale today.

**Kieran:** Do you want to give a quick breakdown of what Undertale is?

**Hannah:** Yeah, so it's an indie game. It came out in 2015, and it was made by Toby Fox. Not to talk about another fandom in the first five seconds, but he also worked with Andrew Hussie on [Homestuck](#). Yeah, but Toby Fox is a crazy talented musician and game maker. I think he made the music for Undertale and all the songs slap, but it's basically a game where you play as this character named Frisk and you fall into this underworld filled with monsters and you're just trying to find your way back home. It's the type of game where your actions very heavily impact the ending of the game. And you can have like a pacifist run, a genocide run, or something in between.

**Kieran:** How old were you when you were in this fandom?

**Hannah:** This was one of the first fandoms that I got into as it came out. I'm usually very late to things. I was 15 or 16 when it came out.

**Kieran:** Was that, like, the normal age of the fandom?

**a/n:** [Homestuck](#) is a popular webcomic whose publication spanned several years. It's one of the most influential pieces of internet fiction.

[Onceler](#) is a character from the animated movie *The Lorax*, and a very popular character among young teenage girls, who riffed on his character to create original versions of him.

[Transformative Works](#) is an umbrella term for pieces of media fans create that are inspired by a source material, including fanfiction and fan art.

**Hannah:** I think, because the characters are relatively difficult to cosplay, I didn't actually see a lot of faces in the fandom, so I don't really have a set age group. It just felt like anybody from 12 to, I don't know, probably like 25, 30, because the game itself was so good. You had full adults that were enjoying Undertale content, but then you also had kids that like video games. So I would say there was a wide range of people who were fans.

**Kieran:** Were there any specific sub-communities that you were in that had a more specific demographic?

**Hannah:** It's been a while. I don't think I was really in a specific demographic. Undertale had this very weird lifespan where it split into like 8 billion different things. It really got a [Onceler](#), um, lifespan where it kind of like, turned into 80 million things. And I left right before that. So I wasn't in any smaller group within the fandom, I was just enjoying regular content.

**Kieran:** So when you were in the fandom, it revolved around the original work instead of [transformative works](#).

**Hannah:** Yeah, definitely. I remember being very weirded out. I was like, "who the fuck is that?" And it was, like, "[Glitch Sans](#)." I'm like, "Who!? I don't know who that is."

**Kieran:** [Fresh Sans](#)

**Hannah:** Oh my God. But that whole thing was very confusing to me and I didn't know what was going on. I was kind of glad that I left.

**Kieran:** Yeah. Was that more of a, "I just don't know what's going on and I have no interest in that" or was it like, "Oh, that's like so weird. I don't like that they're doing that?"

**Hannah:** It was a little bit of both. I couldn't really cringe at it too hard because I wasn't really a part of that section of the fandom, but I had made Undertale fanart before and I could see that this new side of the fandom was starting to become the face of it. When people would think of Undertale now, they would think of those kinds of fans. And I was like, "Oh God. People know that I like this game. I hope they know I'm not into this shit."

**Kieran:** I definitely feel like it's very common that fans of a certain thing don't want to be known as fans of that thing because they can't control how other people view that interest. When I was in middle school, I was mean to Justin Bieber fans. I did not care how normal they were about their interests. I just saw the stories

about the borderline unhealthy fans. Anyway, how long do you think you were into Undertale?

**Hannah:** Not very long actually, but I was really into it, so I ingested, like, a lot of content. To this day, Undertale is still in my top three video games, like, ever. It has, like, one of the best storylines I've ever seen. I really enjoy it. I could still watch a whole Undertale playthrough and be thoroughly entertained. That being said, I think I was deep in it for about a year.

**Kieran:** You said that you ingested a lot of content. What kind of content was that? Was that fan art? I know the fandom was really well-known for the fan animations. Was it fanfiction? What kind of content were you mainly ingesting?

**Hannah:** I never really ingested fanfiction. I barely know how to read, so I just don't read fan fiction. But I definitely looked at a lot of fanart, comics, and animations. The animations were really, really well done most of the time. The fan art was really well done too. The game is just a super emotional game. I watched a video about the downfall of Undertale a couple of days ago, and part of the reason why it had such a weird lifespan was that the game is supposed to trigger a lot of emotions for the viewers, but then it's so short it's like, where does all that emotional energy go when it

**a/n:** [Glitch Sans](#) and [Fresh Sans](#) are fan-made versions of the Undertale character Sans. Creating alternate versions of characters was very popular.

ends? And so a lot of people put that in their art and it's really beautiful. Mostly fan art, I would say.

**Kieran:** You were into Undertale for a year. Do you want to talk about why you left?

**Hannah:** I don't remember specifically leaving Undertale. It's pretty rare that I just leave a fandom. When I really like something, it's going to be on my mind for a long time, but the fan base was just starting to get very strange and I was feeling unwelcome. The main problem was that the main character is underage and people are very gross. Remember iFunny? That was where I got my content, which is cringe in its own right. More importantly, it was unfiltered. It wasn't monitored, so I could just be scrolling through Undertale content, and it would be like, "here's some really gross fanart." So that was one factor. Then when it started, like, splitting off into "Glitch Sans," "Underfell," all of the other universes, I was like, "I don't know what's going on." I feel like I missed a memo? I was like, "Maybe I'll just move on to something else. And if I ever want to come back to it, I'll just replay the game."

**Kieran:** Right. I feel like a lot of that might have happened because

Undertale is such a small game. I mean "Fellswap" and "Underfell" and all the different alternate universes. I feel like it all kind of comes out of the way it was a really small game with not a lot of content in and of itself. So I feel like that just could have been a danger of a fandom that big for an IP that small.

**Hannah:** Yeah I definitely also remember getting pretty frustrated because Frisk is nonbinary. And it was really cool that the main character of the whole game is nonbinary. I hadn't seen that before. But everyone in the fandom just, like, wanted them to be female and they would use she/her pronouns and draw them a certain way. And I was like, that's not correct.

**Kieran:** Yeah. How about after you left? Did you just not think about Undertale at all or were you forced to confront it sometimes?

**Hannah:** I didn't really think about it for a while, and then Deltarune, the sequel, came out our sophomore year of college and I was all over that. It felt like a fresh start. No Underfell. No Fresh Sans. It was back to the original content. I cringed most about my Undertale phase in high school. Just the face that it got, you know? But I don't really care now.

**a/n:** *iFunny* is an interest-based and image-based social media platform primarily used by young teens.

**(Alternate) Universes, AUs** for short, are fan-created universes for existing characters to exist in. Most commonly used in fanfiction. An example might be a Harry Potter Alternate Universe with no magic.

**Kieran:** Was there a turning point for you where you went from not being willing to talk about it to being very open about it?

**Hannah:** Yeah, I think it was probably when I came to MICA because there are so many people who are into video games and game design, and very niche things like smaller indie games. I went from a public school to somewhere with people who really understand that kind of content. Going from a place where nobody gave a shit about this game to people who actually care gave me a new appreciation for it because I knew that I could talk about it with someone and they would understand.

**Kieran:** At your public school, was there anyone else who was also super into Undertale?

**Hannah:** Hm. I feel like there had to have been. I was friends with a lot of Lose-uh, nerds. A lot of people an awful lot like me. I don't know if anybody was also into it. Maybe my friend Linda, but besides that, I don't think so.

**Kieran:** So not publicly.

**Hannah:** Right.

**Kieran:** Um, so you left, you cringed, you came back to it briefly, and now it's just, like, a piece of you. What did it bring to you as a person? How

did it change you, either for the better or for the worse?

**Hannah:** Hmm, that's a good question. I think it's hard to tell how something changed you. I definitely got a new appreciation for video game stories. I never really came to video games for stories before. Just for the visuals and the actual gameplay, but I got pretty frustrated playing Undertale, so I would just watch other people do it. I don't know. Yeah, that's my answer.

**Kieran:** Okay. I mean, yeah, that's absolutely a valid answer to that question. Is there anything else that you want to talk about in terms of this fandom or other fandoms?

**Hannah:** I feel like we've been talking about this concept of post-*cringe* for so long that I don't really feel cringe about most of the past fandoms I was in now. So I wonder if we could have had the same conversation when I was back in high school. Because now, I'm like, "Yeah, I can talk about it." But in high school, I think would've been like, "Oh god, I was into this game called Undertale. Cringe." Um, but there is still one fandom that just plagues me. It plagues me every day. When I was in middle school, I was really into *My Little Pony* and like, oh man, I just don't think you can get—you can't heal from that. Like, I can own everything else I

**a/n:** *My Little Pony* is a children's cartoon that aired from 2010-2019. It amassed a large adult male following early on, and has weird reputation as a result.

was into. I'm like, yeah, I was into Homestuck. I was into Undertale. Say what you want. I have a great personality. That's what I got from Undertale. I got a great personality. But you just can't escape My Little Pony. There's no coming back from that one, man. It was also short-lived. Only around a year when I was in eighth grade. I wish I was in sixth grade, so it was a little more normal, but whatever. My friend who got me into it was the only person I knew that was into it at our school. That was also one of the only fandoms that I straight up was like, "It's time to go now. It's time to find greener pastures." Um, it was, it was all fine and dandy. And then news broke—

**Kieran:** I've heard this story before.

**Hannah:** —of a Brony that tried to frick a horse. I was like, "Maybe I'm in the wrong place." So I saddled up and giddy'd on out of there. And I never looked back. Just kidding. Actually, I was just listening to *The Living Tombstone* the other day. I wanted to relive probably the best time of my life. Not necessarily because of that fandom. I was just in a really good headspace. It was when everything in my life was together. I was like, "Let's go back to that." And I was listening to old dubstep from like 2013 and stuff.

And I was like, "Oh, I gotta listen to *The Living Tombstone*!" That shit goes so hard.

**Kieran:** It is so amazing how universal *The Living Tombstone* is for people who are on the internet. Regardless of what fandom they were in, they have heard at least one *Living Tombstone* song.

**Hannah:** Yeah. *Discord* is definitely universal. That one's great. Um, I've been singing that song every year since eighth grade. It's always stuck in my head.

**Kieran:** Oh yeah.

**Hannah:** Such a good song.

**Kieran:** I just have one final question. You're talking about My Little Pony. I won't force you to get that into it, but you're talking about having to leave the fandom because of the fans. Comparing and contrasting that to your experience with Undertale, did you leave Undertale because of the fans themselves or the fanworks?

**Hannah:** Hmm, that's a good question. Um, I think I definitely left because of the fanworks. I didn't really care about what the people were like or anything. They weren't annoying. I know some fandoms, that could be very persistent and like, we need to get this ship, like the

**a/n:** *Brony* is the term used to refer to fans of *My Little Pony*, usually male and usually above the target demographic of the show.

*The Living Tombstone* is a fandom musician who has created music based on several properties. *Discord* is a popular *My Little Pony* song by him.

top of the whatever. Or like whatever happened with *Supernatural*. Oh my God. When they had that weird reckoning day and they, like, put *Supernatural* gifs on everything.

**Kieran:** *The Mishapocalypse*.

**Hannah:** Oh my God. I was never into *Supernatural*, thank the Lord, but that would have been something that I would have left for the fans in particular. But for *My Little Pony*, it was definitely the fans. That was a very weird thing that guy did. I think he died. And then for *Undertale*, it was definitely the content.

**Kieran:** You've been in fandom for most of your internet life. How have those experiences helped form your identity, especially sexuality?

**Hannah:** When it comes to sexuality, I feel like fandom and overall internet culture was super helpful. I'm trying to remember if there was one fandom that introduced me to the LGBT community. But just speaking on internet culture in general, I didn't know the LGBT community was a thing until I was like 14. I didn't even know that you could be gay until I was in eighth grade. And even then it was like a negative thing. It was people being weirded out that this person in my class was bi. But, I dunno if it was because of the fandoms I was in or what, but I was introduced to that

community through LGBT accounts. So once I actually started reading about it from those accounts, I got a more positive view as opposed to what I got in eighth grade, which was bad. And yeah, it was nice to find that and be like, "Oh shit!" And I had this gradual progression where freshman year I was like, "I'm an ally." And then sophomore year, I was like, "Actually I think I like nonbinary people and men." And then junior year, I was like, "Oh no, I'm pan for sure. I like everybody." And then senior year, six months into this relationship with this guy, I was like, "Uh oh! I don't like men." And I think that if it weren't for internet culture, that would have taken me a really long time to figure out. It had definitely always been there because I dated like four dudes and ended like every relationship. I was like, "This can't be right. This can't be what this is like. This shit sucks." Um, so I think it would've taken me until, like, college to figure that out, if not for the help of these friends on the internet.

**Kieran:** Friends on the internet.

**Hannah:** Yeah. I think I've found a lot of friends through my fandoms. I felt most comfortable with people that were into the same things as I was, even if we weren't similar personality-wise. I also think it probably made me quieter because

**a/n:** *The Mishapocalypse* was an event organized on Tumblr for April Fools Day, 2013 in which many users switched their profile pictures to a picture of Misha Collins, an actor from popular TV show *Supernatural*.



I was around quieter people most of the time. Looking back at my cringey things and learning to stop cringing about them has also made me a better person. No matter what somebody is into fandom-wise, no matter really what they like, it's like, "Whatever, man, just enjoy yourself." And that takes the pressure off when you're in a fandom. It's like, "Maybe I'll cringe at this. Maybe I won't. What's important is that it makes me happy now. So I don't care."

**Kieran:** Any final thoughts?

**Hannah:** I've had a question that I've asked myself before, but I wasn't sure if it was relevant, but it is relevant. Obviously. It's your entire thesis. My question is, "Will we ever feel cringe as strongly as we do about the 2013 era ever again?" I feel like that was when we were really getting comfortable with this

internet culture thing. In the past, when you were really into something, it kind of just got lost to time. And all you had to remember it were the memories. And now everything that we made and talked about is exactly where we left it. Unless you'd explicitly deleted it, it's all there. And you can just go back and see it.



**Kieran:** I have a really interesting point to add to that. We're in a really special position because a lot of gen x and even millennial

social media is now lost to time. Places like Myspace, Gaia Online, and Geocities don't really exist in the same way anymore, and we might be turning the corner into being there as well. But as it is, I think we are the oldest generation where every ounce of our media is still somewhere to be found. So I do think we're in a really special position, having been on the internet from such a young age. We just saw this as a normal part of

**a/n:** *Gaia Online* is an anime-themed social media forum site. *Geocities* is a now-defunct website hosting platform popular in the 90s.

growing up. You know, announcing yourself to the online world. And we had no idea that how long that stuff was going to stay up.

**Hannah:** Definitely. And I think, generational, we're definitely moving towards a point where we won't really cringe about what's happening now like we did last time. At this point, we're aware of how things on the internet age, and it won't be a surprise when, at 25, we look back and our memes from 2020 are still accessible. It's like, "Well, no shit, where else were they going to go?" And I don't know, I'd like to think that we'll be able to look back and be like, "Oh, that was funny." And not like, "Oh my God, I can't believe I posted a Rage Comic."

**Kieran:** Yeah. I hope so because I don't want the cursed emojis to go the way of the Rage Comic. I like them too much.

**Hannah:** They're so funny.

**Kieran:** And I'm, I'm saying this because I know they're going to age really badly.

**Hannah:** Like can you imagine, in 2012, saying, "That Troll Face, man, I hope that doesn't age badly. That shit is so funny."

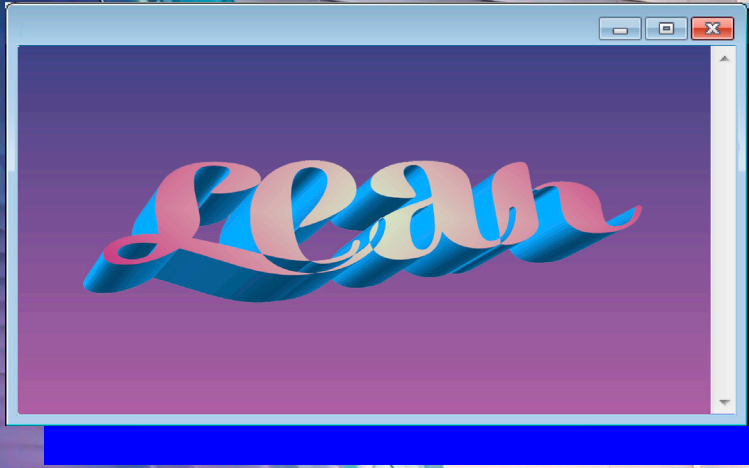
**a/n:** *Rage Comics* is a collection of reaction images of highly expressive faces drawn in microsoft paint.

*Cursed Emojis* are edits of existing emojis to make them more expressive.

*Troll Face* is the most well-known race comic.

**Kieran:** Oh, I actually do have one more question for you. For you personally, and also for our generation as a whole, and maybe even more broadly, for people as a whole, do you think COVID and being cooped up has allowed people to come to terms with, and start to reappraise their older interests and if so, why?

**Hannah:** I think so. I think a lot of people are in a pretty bad place right now. And I've heard a lot of people are going back, like I did the other day, by listening to music from like 2013. It's really amazing how music can immediately take you back, especially when you haven't heard it since like 2012 or whenever. I think that people are definitely getting a new appreciation for that time, and just being like, "You know what, I may have thought it was cringe, but..." about whatever they were into a couple of years after they got out of it. But it holds such a special place in your heart. I think a lot of the times that you can't not look back at it fondly.



**Leah:** My name is Leah, she/her pronouns, and I'll be talking about anime, specifically **Black Butler**. I won't try the "true fan pronunciation" this time. I'll also talk about Doctor Who and my phase in early middle school as a ~crazy~ cat lady.

**Kieran:** What were the demographics for these fandoms?

**Leah:** So **Black Butler** was, like, horny teenage girls age 14 to 16-ish, you know, and then Doctor Who has been around for over 57 years now, so the age range for that is like, literally anywhere from like my dad's age, like my dad's generation to my age to literal infants. So, and then the cat thing is like, I'm throwing it in as a technicality because the way I treated it was, like, totally like a fandom thing. Um, and that's also like, you know, going into like early 2000s internet culture of being obsessed with cats and like yeah, like **Keyboard Cat** and **Nyan Cat**, like that.

**Kieran:** Were there any subgroups within these fandoms that you were a part of?

**Leah:** Leading question, huh? I was a **Grell Girl**. Um, yeah, I was very much into **Grell Suttcliff** from the **Black Butler** anime.

**Kieran:** In terms of larger fanbases like Doctor Who's, were there any smaller sub-communities that you found yourself coming back to more than just like a general fandom atmosphere?

**Leah:** Yeah, I don't really think so because I didn't engage in the community. Um, I didn't really dive into any specific subset that much, except for, of course in the case of **Grell**. But even then I didn't really engage. I just sort of like read fanfiction and looked at fanart and embarrassingly would rant my friend's heads off about his character and his backstory and stuff and how cool he was. But like, like with Doctor Who, like, I wasn't in some like small Doctor Who fan community, I just sort of browsed **r/doctorwho**, and, like, looked at the crafts that people were making Doctor Who prom dresses and stuff.

**Kieran:** Yeah. I definitely feel like that community is very creative.

**Leah:** Yeah, totally. I learned how to knit because I wanted to make the Fourth Doctor's scarf.

**Kieran:** You mentioned **r/doctorwho**, so, um, for your other fandoms, and also for Doctor Who, did you use any other platforms?

**a/n:** **Black Butler** is an anime about a Victorian boy and his demon butler. "True Fan Pronunciation" is a term for the Japanese name of an anime. Putting ~tildes~ around a word or phrase is a way to denote irony or snark. **Keyboard Cat** and **Nyan Cat** were two popular internet videos in the early 2010s, and very representative of the internet's interest in cats at the time. **Grell Girl** refers to fans of **Grell Suttcliff**, a character from **Black Butler**.

**Leah:** The platforms that I would engage in fandom on were **Reddit** and **DeviantArt**. And then there were quiz websites, like, um, I can't for the life of me remember this one quiz—it was like quiz and fanfiction website. It was actually really good. I really loved it. Can't remember the name of it at all.

**Kieran:** Was it just specifically for **Black Butler**?

**Leah:** No, it was for fandom in general. Um, like, one of my friends apparently wrote a very popular **Klance** fanfiction on that website.

**Kieran:** Do you want to talk about your time within your fandoms?

**Leah:** Yeah, so my time was like, let's say as a **Grell Girl**, um, that was really mostly like, you know, reading fanfictions and looking at fan art and naming website account usernames and stuff after **Grell**. Or like putting tiny little pictures of **Grell** on the bottom of all of my English assignments one year as a ninth-grader and writing poetry for that class, too, about **Grell**.

**Kieran:** So you have traces of this stuff until today.

**Leah:** Yes. So like, I fairly recently rediscovered all my **Grell Girl** stuff. Some of it will haunt me until the

end of my days. Um, and then also, like I said, I learned how to knit because of Doctor Who. My favorite sweatshirt. I own one sweatshirt and it's my **Tardis** sweatshirt. Like my piggy bank at home where I keep like little bits of cash is also a handmade popsicle stick **Tardis**.

**Kieran:** Oh my God.

**Leah:** Yeah. Doctor Who fueled a lot of my crafting, uh, at the time, like, I didn't really draw fanart and I don't so much still, but, like, boy do I fan-craft.

**Kieran:** And I feel like that is a reflection of the fandom as a whole. Cause I, I see a lot of Doctor Who-themed crafts on the internet.

**Leah:** Yeah. Yeah. You see fan art of like **David Tennant**, cause like he's **David Tennant**, but like it's mostly like the **Tardis** is like the thing.

**Kieran:** And it is a character in and of itself.

**Leah:** It literally is in some episodes. Um, and then with the cat thing, like that was all like, you know, regularly wearing like cat-ear headbands as just like part of my outfit.

**Kieran:** Which is such a look.

**Leah:** It was such a look, oh my God. I had several and I'd match

**a/n:** **Deviantart** is a art-based social media I think of as most influential for fandom between 2008 and 2014. Especially popular among anime fans, but there were strong communities for every popular fandom at the time.

**Klance** was a popular relationship from the animated series **Voltron**. It's well known for its passionate fanbase.

them to my outfit. Um, it was kind of a fit. Um, other kids at school would be like, “Oh, there goes Leah with her cat ears!” One time, my science teacher saw me walking down the hall and was like, “Where are the cat ears!?” And I also once during camp in the summer as a kid, we had, I went to an arts and crafts camp. And there was this one session where like, they’d have a pile of thrifted clothes. And like, you’d just like take those clothes and cut them up and like make stuff out of it. And so like, some kids would make like pillows or some kids would make stuffed animals and I made this hideous vest. It was awful, but I wore it throughout all of middle school constantly. Yeah. It was such a ubiquitous “Leah” thing along with the cat ears that, on my bat mitzvah, um, I have this frame of photos—like first of all, at my bat mitzvah, I gave out cat ear headbands. Um, and so that also helped fuel my collection of different cat headbands. And there was this framed photo that like people could sign and be like, Oh, happy, bat mitzvah like mazel tov. Um, and one of those pictures is me in that vest, like posing like, “Ooh, yeah!” And I had the cat ears on and I had these birthday cake glasses on. It was a whole look.

**Kieran:** Oh yeah. It sounds like it.

**Leah:** And so the vest had patches from other shirts that were like “Crazy cat lady!” And, like, pictures of cats on it. Um, and like leopard print strips all over it.

**Kieran:** That sounds like something that’d be incredibly popular and hip nowadays.

**Leah:** Oh my God. I don’t know what happened to it. It might’ve been thrown away because I wore like every day for like six years.

**Kieran:** So you enjoyed your, your time in these fandoms.

**Leah:** Um, I—see the thing with anime is like, there was, there was a lot of shame for me around anime. Um, and that’s like part of the reason why I stopped watching. Um, of course, you know, any outsider looking at me at the time would think “This girl has no shame.” Um, so I just kinda like picked and chose, like, random little things to be really embarrassed about. Um, but like, yeah, like for the most part I had a good time. Um, I’d get really, really, really hyper-focused on, like, specific animes to the point where I noticed this cycle where, like, I’d start watching an anime and get really, really obsessed with a character to the point where I’d be, like, in tears that they don’t exist in real life and I’d finish the anime and be really depressed and start a new one and the cycle would continue.

**Kieran:** Oh my God. So, on one hand, you did enjoy it. On the other hand, it was somewhat unhealthy.

**Leah:** Yeah.

**Kieran:** What were other contributing factors to you leaving the anime fandom?

**Leah:** The reason why I kinda stopped watching anime and like, you know, stopped with Black Butler and all that is just like, I don’t like the way that women are portrayed for the most part, like all that fanservice shit. Um, I don’t like the tropey characters of like the guy that doesn’t respect boundaries or consent and like, “Oh, that’s just silly and funny.” Um, yeah, I just didn’t particularly like that, so I just stopped watching it slowly.

**Kieran:** That makes sense. You said that you never really left the Doctor Who fandom.

**Leah:** Oh, totally not. It comes and goes in waves, like my level of like obsession with it. And my peak was definitely like late middle school, early high school. Um, but I’m still a total fan and every time a new season comes out, I can’t shut up about it and about the lore. Um, and then I’ll just like, you know, chill out for a bit, but yeah.

**Kieran:** Um, so I think this mostly applies to your anime phase. After you left. Um, did you have like sort

of a visceral reaction to seeing or hearing about those things that you used to be really interested in?

**Leah:** Yeah. When I found my old Grell Sutcliff poetry, I actually gasped. Um, yeah. Quite a feeling. Um, and the time that I went back to and tried to find old fanfictions that I was really into, um, that also had me in tears. Like I was in both laughter and also just, I dunno. It was just like an overwhelming sense of emotions, like, rereading those things. It was like I was in it all over again, but like, you know, I don’t know.

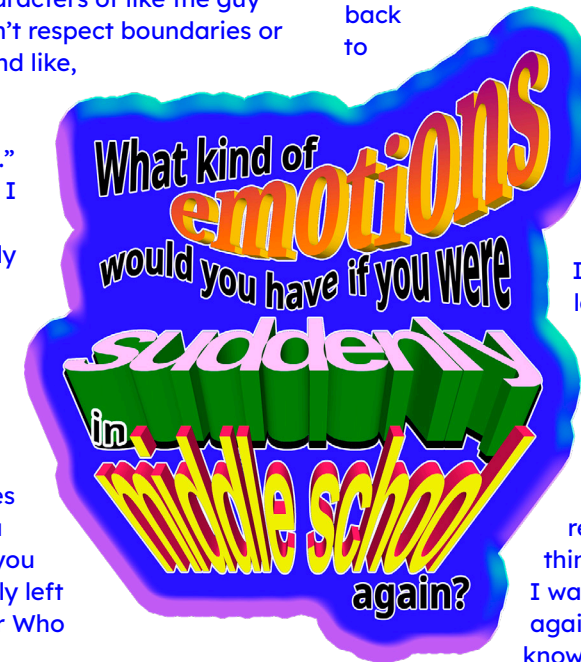
I wasn’t at all. It was just, it was really weird.

**Kieran:** Good weird or bad weird?

**Leah:** A little bit of both.

**Kieran:** That makes sense. Your emotions were so high when you were in this fandom that it’s like muscle memory to react strongly.

**Leah:** Yeah. I mean, like how, how would, what kind of emotions would you have if you were suddenly in middle school again, right?



**Kieran:** Yeah. It really does bring you back. Um, do you think that your understanding of your time in these fandoms has shifted and evolved as you've gotten older?

**Leah:** Yeah, totally. I mean, because like these, these fandoms were so significant for a while. Um, like I have always kind of reflected on these things. Um, and so, you know, especially with anime for a while, I was like, after I stopped watching it, I was like extremely shameful of anime and like kind of hated it for a while. Um, but you know, now I kind of think back and I recognize the ways that these fandoms shaped, who I am in a way and like shaped my creativity. Like, you know, I can't ignore the years of artwork that I created as a result of these fandoms.

**Kieran:** Were those first few years of really visceral cringe societally imposed or self-imposed?

**Leah:** Mm that's a good question. It's a little bit of both, like, you know, like I said, at the time I like had really weird little things that I was like super ashamed of, especially with anime. I think that those were very self-imposed, but like, for the most part, like, you know, there's this thing where like, society hates anything that teenage girls love. So, you know, I went through that phase of being like, "Oh, I'm not like other girls." And so, like, I had to hate the things that I used to love because I was a teenage girl and things that teenage girls like are bad. Yeah.

**Kieran:** You've mentioned this a little bit, but what made you come back to these fandoms to reminisce, whether on purpose or on accident?

**Leah:** Um, I just think, since I'm so far past that time, it's just so much fun to relive it now, um, to like, re-experience it from a new perspective and to experience it again with other people and like finally share that side of myself. Um, yeah. I mean, it's just, like, it's really pretty embarrassing and it's cringe, but like, it's also really fun to, let's say, read that Grell Sutcliff fan fiction poem thing. It's really funny. It's, it's kinda decent actually. But also, I never left the Doctor Who fandom.

**Kieran:** So when, when you revisit it, it's because you want to watch Doctor Who again.

**Leah:** I mean, it's genuinely a great show. The thing about Doctor Who is, it's great and it's terrible and it's great because it's terrible. It's just one of those things.

**Kieran:** I feel like a lot of cringe is based on taking things way too seriously, so I definitely think that something that's as cheesy as Doctor Who would be a really great sort of lifelong interest and fandom. Do you think while you're looking back on them, you're looking back at yourself in those fandoms as like a different person, or do you find yourself really back in that place?

**Leah:** Um, I think depends like when I think back, I don't know, like when I'm just thinking in my mind, like, it almost seems like that was a different person. Um, unless I'm thinking about very, very specific memories. So like I know where I can really track the ways that it's affected me going forward. Um, I don't know, like, yeah, I guess, for the most part, it's almost like I was a different person.

**Kieran:** And do you think that helps you mitigate the cringe factor?

**Leah:** Oh, totally. Like let's say reading the poem to other people, like I can't, I can't think of that as reading my poem to others.

**Kieran:** It's just some girl on the internet. And honestly, isn't all high school poetry that you wrote in English class pretty cringey? In hindsight, what do you think you gained from these fandoms?

**Leah:** In terms of anime in general? Like a lot of my art was really inspired by it. Um, and you know, at the time I was, you know, a teenage girl and my high school days were not great. Um, and so I think that watching anime and writing stories that were kind of inspired by anime

really helped me release a lot of bad energy. And so I think partly that's why I would get so viscerally obsessed with it. Cause it was like a big escape. I'd go to completely different worlds and imagine myself there. And same with Doctor Who. I guess that's kind of why I like fantasy and sci-fi genres cause it's like, you know, I can actually be away from, in a completely different world from normal.

**Kieran:** You mentioned horny teenage girls before. Um, I think we don't really give enough credit to the fact that fandom is a really vital place for young people, especially young women to explore sexuality in a safe space.

**Leah:** Yeah, that's a really good point because that—I said I wasn't gonna talk about *Hetalia* but I'm going to talk about *Hetalia*. Um, so my involvement with the *Hetalia* fandom was entirely through horny fanfictions and, um, yeah, and reading fan fiction was a super important place for me to explore my sexuality. Cause it was a discovery point for my bisexuality. Um, so I remember like I was reading my usual, I won't say which character "*x Reader*" fanfiction-

*a/n:* *Hetalia* is a slice of life anime depicting the lives of personified versions of the countries involved in World War II.

*Slice of Life* is a genre of anime depicting the every day lives of normal people. Usually very episodic instead of having an overarching plot.

*x Reader* is a genre of fanfiction, often 2nd person perspective, that pairs the reader with a fictional character. Also referred to as Y/N fanfiction or Reader Insert fanfiction.

**Kieran:** Of course it's the "y/n" ones.

**Leah:** Yeah. I exclusively read those.

**Kieran:** Did you do the find and replace or did you just like do it in your head?

**Leah:** I did it in my head. It was really difficult. It was an exercise in concentration. Um, but, you know, I'd get equally obsessed with male characters as female characters and there was this one female character in Hetalia that I was really obsessed with. Um, and I found a fanfiction about her "x Female Reader" and I was like, "just as an experiment" and I was really into it. Um, and I was like, "Hmm, gonna put those feelings away for a bit." Yeah. Um, but it was totally like, you know, it got the ball rolling. Because I'd also, even as a little kid, I had anime crushes on girls or cartoon crushes on girls and it's like, the list just goes on. It's like, you know, *Shego* and like, uh, what's her name from *Avatar*? That goth girl with the—anteater goth girl. *June* or something. Yeah. She's hot. And then like, you know, it's a bunch of anime characters and it's like, Hmm, something's going on there? Um, so yeah. Um, can't remember what I started off talking about.

**a/n:** *Y/N* stands for "your name" and is used in Reader Insert fanfiction when a character might be saying the reader's name otherwise. Some sites will replace "y/n" with a reader's username on the site.

**Shego** is a villain character from cartoon *Kim Possible* who is often cited as a character who made people realize they were gay.

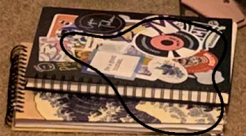
*Avatar the Last Airbender* is a Nickelodeon show about a young boy and his friends standing against a fascist emperor. **June** is a character on the show.

**Kieran:** I guess, uh, my final question to you is was fandom for you, in middle school, a net positive or net negative?

**Leah:** I think, uh, it was a positive. Looking back, I'm jealous of how carefree I was. You know, I wore that hideous vest. I wore those cat ears. I talked my friends' ears off about *Doctor Who* and *Grell Sutcliff* and like, I didn't think twice about it. Yeah, like sometimes I just wish that I could do that again. I try and sometimes I'm successful, but it takes like a lot of work for me to convince myself to, you know, just be a weirdo and just stand out and, you know, accept that some people are gonna be weirded out by me and just kind of do me anyway.



**a/n:** Leah, age 13, in her cat vest and ears.



**Amanda:** I'm Amanda, I'm 22, and the fandom I'm going to talk about is the Carmilla fandom.

**Kieran:** Oh my God. Yes.

**Amanda:** So—Oh God—So it started when I was in high school. 2014, I think? I don't know how I found it. I followed a bunch of different gay YouTubers and I guess one of them mentioned it? And so I found out about it and I was like, "Oh, this seems cool. It's LGBT-oriented." It had a bit of like fantasy in it. There was a vampire. I was like, "That seems like fun." Sophomore year of high school. That's, that's kind of how we reconnected, actually.

**Kieran:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I wish you could have seen my face when you said "The Carmilla Fandom."

**Amanda:** A little cringe.

**Kieran:** Yeah. 2014 to 2015-ish?

**Amanda:** And then there was a movie that came out.

**Kieran:** Did you ever watch it?

**Amanda:** I never watched the movie cause I had to pay for it and I wasn't at the age where I could pay for it.

**Kieran:** God. So what was the core of the fan base like?

**Amanda:** I would say gay teens, or people figuring out they were gay or

bi, or liked LGBT things. So many high schoolers. And I think mainly high school girls. I don't know exactly.

**Kieran:** Um, what were the general vibes of this fandom?

**Amanda:** I got into the fandom, but I didn't really go in too far. Lots of Tumblr. But I'd say the fandom was pretty chill from what I knew. There wasn't much drama. There was a lot of fan fiction and fan art, like the normal fandom stuff. Like those, "These are what these people would say, but don't actually say."

**Kieran:** So it was a pretty creative fandom.

**Amanda:** Yeah. Very, very creative. Holy shit. And very diehard.

**Kieran:** Yeah. Things meant so much to them constantly. But otherwise, you don't really remember any drama?

**Amanda:** No, I don't.

**Kieran:** Honestly, I'm actually shocked there wasn't more drama in that fandom, given that the cast was really pretty involved with the fandom.

**Amanda:** I loved that. They still had some separation, but because I think it was such a small project. I don't think they thought it would blow up as much as it did. But it was

nice that the cast was able to talk with the fanbase. I will say, the cast was very good friends and actually got along.

**Kieran:** Yeah. I just always feel like a creator being too involved with the fandom of the project that they're working on is a recipe for disaster, but they showed you could do it and it might not be a mess. I appreciate that.

**Amanda:** I think one thing that helps with the creators getting involved with the fandom was that this was on YouTube and it wasn't a music industry thing or like an A-list movie or something huge. It was kind of like a YouTuber thing. You know, vlogging style. Which was cool.

**Kieran:** It also had to be at least partially because they're playing characters. It wasn't like the fandom was created around them. Like the actors as people themselves.

**Amanda:** God, I'm looking at the youtube page and I want to rewatch this.

**Kieran:** I have done two rewatching since I've been in college. It holds up. It really does.

**Amanda:** Now that I have the money to, I might buy the movie and watch it. I can stream it to you if you want to watch it.

**Kieran:** Oh yeah. Let's do that. So now that we're talking about rewatching, let's talk about leaving the fandom. Why'd you

leave? Did you just grow out of it? Was there something specific that tipped you over and made you say, "You know what? I've got to get out."

**Amanda:** I think for this fandom especially, nothing was a red flag. It was definitely more like, "I've watched this, and now it's time to go. Season two is done." Even though there's more to it than season two. And then they started working on a new project, which I didn't really care about.

**Kieran:** I have to ask. Were there any fandoms that you were in that you were like, "I gotta get outta here?"

**Amanda:** Oh, geez. Um, not really. I try not to go into fandoms too deeply. Yeah. I think that goes back to getting super into anime. I used to get super into it to the point where it's like—I probably have more than a hundred hard copy manga that I've bought. Like actual books. It's a little cringe.

**Kieran:** No, it's—I mean like, yes, but.

**Amanda:** I, yeah. Yes and no. Would I ever share the collection with people? Probably not. I will hide that away in a cave. But yeah. I think it has to do with just, um, getting way too into something that there's a burnout period. Like if you get into something kind of slowly and kind of casually, it's cool. But then, I know for me, I'll start getting super obsessed with it, and then I'll only focus on that for a while. This has

**a/n:** *Carmilla* refers to a webseries based on the pre-Dracula vampire novel of the same name. It was sponsored by Tampon brand U by Kotex, and aired weekly on Youtube for free.



translated over to video games for me. I'll get a game, I'll play the hell out of it, and then there's a period where I get bored of it and then I'll stop and not go back to it until, like, four years later. That also happened with Carmilla season zero. I don't know what that season was about.

**Kieran:** Cringe moment for me. I actually still have a yellow pillowcase from my Carmilla era.

**Amanda:** Dude. I found the sweatshirt with the Silas University logo on it. I have it, and I've been wearing it. It's so comfy. It's one of those hoodies that's obviously mass-produced, but it's really comfy.

**Kieran:** After you left the fandom, was the cringe you felt societally imposed, or was it something that you imposed on yourself?

**Amanda:** I think I've imposed it on myself, mostly. Like, when you're super into a fandom, there's that automatic cringe, but I think that everybody has a fandom they're into. Even if it's not, like, a show or YouTube, there's video games and anime. I also think people can be cringe about sports. Sports are just a fandom that's accepted.

**Kieran:** Fashion could also be a fandom. Like, if I look at someone's boots, I don't know who made them. But someone who's really into fashion can tell just from the cut of the boot or the shape of the heel. That's devotion. That's fandom.

**a/n:** *Silas University* is the fictional university in Carmilla.

**Amanda:** That is. I think it's just a more socially acceptable fandom. More normal. Well, nothing's normal.

**Kieran:** De-normalize "normal."

**Amanda:** Exactly. What is normal?

**Kieran:** Have you done any rewatches of Carmilla since that first time?

**Amanda:** Yes, I have. I remember doing rewatches pretty instantly after the first watch-through. Cause I was like, "Oh shit, I love this. Why? Because I was uncomfortable with being gay."

**Kieran:** How about after high school?

**Amanda:** I did after we talked about Carmilla this summer.

**Kieran:** How was it?

**Amanda:** I rewatched the first season. It was good. I enjoyed it quite a bit. I also didn't enjoy it because I had been obsessed with it, and it brought back that high school cringe. But I did like it. It's great. I'm going to keep watching it.

**Kieran:** Did you view it through a different lens?

**Amanda:** I think it was a more chill lens and one where I know what's going to happen. I had a few weird *deja vu* moments or flashbacks when watching it. Uh, I paid more attention to the camerawork and the sets where before, I was mainly

focused on characters' stories. The amount of work that was put into the backgrounds to make it look like a college dorm room was super cool.

**Kieran:** Yeah. I remember when I first started seeing like gift sets and posts about it on Tumblr, it was so realistically a college dorm room that I just assumed that they were real-life college roommates. I didn't know there were vampires involved.

**Amanda:** I think what was cool about Carmilla that I don't think anybody has pulled off since was that the vlogging didn't seem too forced. Like, the blogging style of the video worked. I have not seen a movie or TV show that works with the vlogging style and the one-angle camera placement as well as Carmilla did.

**Kieran:** It feels like a very unironic recreation of that style of media.

**Amanda:** Also, vlogging wasn't really as cringe back then.

**Kieran:** Um, so basically what you're

saying is that when you rewatched Carmilla, you were looking at it through a more technical lens.

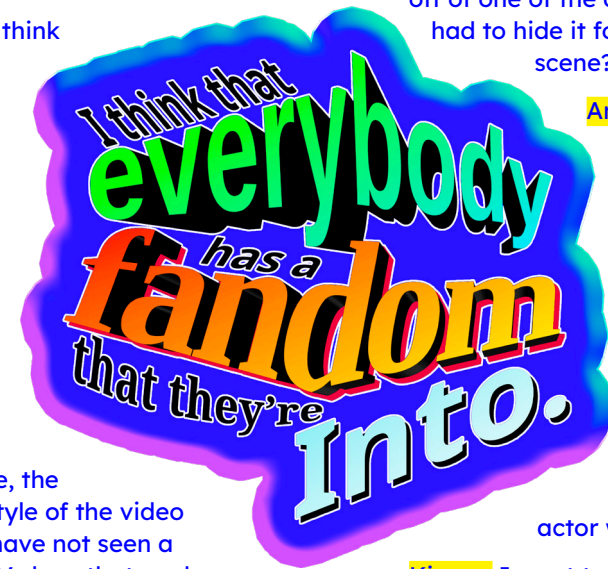
**Amanda:** Yeah. It was a more technical lens. I also wasn't as invested, which was nice. Kind of a nice step back.

**Kieran:** Do you remember that post that talked about how Kirsch's actor accidentally ripped the doorknob off of one of the doors and had to hide it for the entire scene?

**Amanda:** I do remember that. I also remember how they had to weirdly work with the camera angle because Danny's actor was too tall.

**Kieran:** I want to go back to something that you said before about being uncomfortable with being gay. Do you think that Carmilla helped you become more comfortable with your sexuality? Was it the show? Was it age?

**Amanda:** I think it's a bit of both. I think having content that kind of caters to me was very nice. There



**a/n:** *Vlogging* is a video genre in which creators film their everyday lives. It was especially popular on YouTube around the time that Carmilla was airing.

wasn't much gay content out there that wasn't super dramatic.

**Kieran:** Or like, not about being gay. For all of Carmilla's faults, it was not a gay story about being gay.

**Amanda:** I think age definitely helped too, but this show helped in the sense of, "Oh wow. They like each other." It was so natural and it didn't feel forced. It didn't feel like they had to be gay. It felt like, "Oh, they happen to be gay."

**Kieran:** In hindsight, what do you think you gained from this particular fandom experience?

**Amanda:** I would say one, we reconnected, which was super cool. And that was kind of a huge part of this. Two, it was fun to see content like this out there. There really wasn't any, unless it just focused on being gay, but even then it felt not genuine.

**Kieran:** So like gay content for straight people.

**Amanda:** Exactly. And during that time, in 2014, gay marriage wasn't even legalized then. So this felt like a huge thing. And thankfully like the next year in 2015 gay marriage was legalized, which is actually weird to think about. I remember when I found out. It didn't really hit because I was young. It was like, "Oh cool. It's legalized." And you

don't understand really the struggles of what people went through, but after getting older, it's like, "Oh, there was a time where if I was like my age now and went back to that time, I would have been worried about being in a relationship."

**Kieran:** It's so weird to think about how quickly media's understanding of and representation of queer people has evolved. I remember when Korrasami happened. Oh yeah. That was 2014. I sat in my room and I cried for four hours straight because I couldn't believe that there was someone like me on TV.

**Amanda:** And then the next year Carmilla happened

**Kieran:** Yeah. In hindsight was being in fandom a net positive or negative experience? And do you have anything to say to your past self who is either in your pre-criinge phase or your cringe phase?

**Amanda:** It was definitely a net positive. If I could say something to my past self, it would be, "Just don't care as much." Like it's okay to care, but don't care as much as you think you need to. Nobody really cares. That sounds bad. This is a bad message. This is not worded well.

**Kieran:** In conclusion, don't care.

**Amanda:** "Nobody cares about you and don't care about anyone." No,

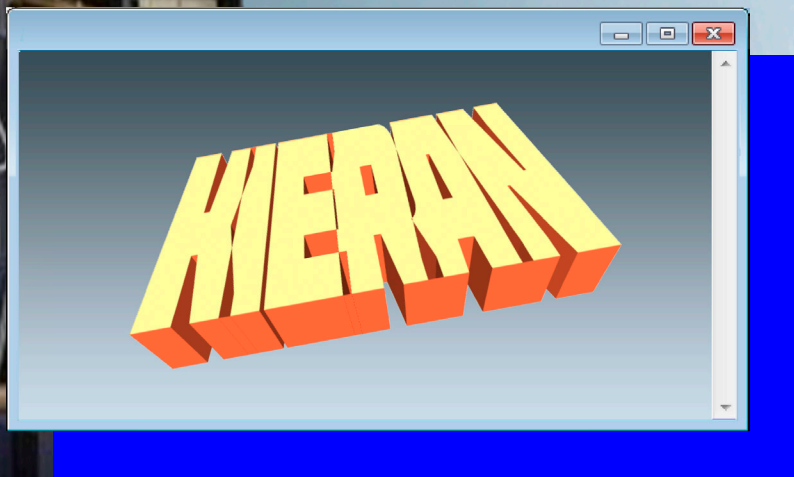
**a/n:** *Korrasami* is the name of the relationship between Korra and Asami from the Nickelodeon show *The Legend of Korra*. They were one of the first visibly gay couples on children's television.

it's more of a—In conclusion. Um, like what you, like, don't be scared of judgment. And if people do judge you, so what? You like what you like

and it makes you happy. Do what makes you happy as long as it's not hurting others, right?



**a/n:** Amanda's Silas University Hoodie, excavated from the closet.



**Necktie:** Please introduce yourself.

**Kieran:** I don't have any plausible deniability. My name is Kieran Henstenburg, this is my thesis project, and I was too into the TV show *Glee*.

**Necktie:** Can you introduce *Glee* or any other fandoms that you were in, such as the media it was based around, its most active years, years you were involved in it, and perhaps what age that was for you?

**Kieran:** Yeah. Um, so I've been online in a fandom capacity since maybe fifth or sixth grade. I got online for the Percy Jackson fandom and specifically one fan artist named Burdge Bug who did *Percabeth* fan art. And I started a Tumblr because that's where she posted. At that point, I was lurking on Tumblr specifically for her and Viria and Minuiko, who were also fanartists. I was also on Deviantart and I followed them and then a couple of other fan artists for Percy Jackson and Harry Potter. Um, but at that point, I was really only consuming famous fan artists' content and not really creating anything of my own or even

reblogging or interacting with their stuff. I was just lurking.

Then my next fandom was probably *Legend of Korra* and I was much more outwardly super into that. I would draw fanart, but I would never post it, so none of my fanart from that era survived. I want to say it was *Glee* after that because *Legend of Korra* was seventh grade and then *Glee* was eighth grade. *Glee* is when I got back on Tumblr and really started interacting with fandom. That was eighth grade to late sophomore year of high school. So, three years. I wouldn't really create content for anything. Like, I think I like created one gif once and it was, like, so bad and it got like 12 notes on Tumblr, but I would interact with these posts through the tags that I would add on Tumblr. I still have some of these posts, but a couple of years ago I went back and really cleaned out my blog and lost a lot of those posts as a result. But I would have full conversations and rants in the tags of those posts when I reblogged them.

And then I had a *Glee* Twitter as well. I did make one friend. Her name was Elke. She was a couple of years

**a/n:** *Glee* was a teen drama television show following a group of high school students in a show choir.

*Percabeth* is the name for the relationship between Percy Jackson and Annabeth Chase in the Percy Jackson book series.

*Reblogging* is the method for sharing other people's posts on your Tumblr.

*Legend of Korra* was the sequel show to *Avatar: The Last Airbender*.

Notes are the likes/reblogs on a Tumblr post. You can tag posts with tags to organize or comment on posts.

older than me, and she was Dutch. I became her friend through, what's it called? QuizUp. Yeah. It was this fandom trivia app. Not to flex or anything, but I was ranked number one in my region, the East Coast, for *Glee* trivia for weeks because I was so good, and I was on the leaderboard for the national *Glee* trivia leaderboard pretty regularly. But Elke was also really good and I kept getting matched up with her for head-to-head trivia, so I finally DMed her and was like, "Do you have any social media that I can follow you on?"

When I fell out of *Glee*, we kinda lost touch, but then she got really into *The 100* TV show, so I checked it out. I think *Glee* was my first foray into transformative works as a culture and not just as an element of fandom. I read a lot of *Glee* fanfiction and then I read a lot of *The 100* fanfiction. I did post my opinions on episodes of *The 100* on my Tumblr, but after season two ended, I lost interest. I was really only interested in *The 100* for one season. And then I got into K-pop and haven't recovered since. Yeah. That's just a brief history of the fandoms that I've been in and my interactions with them. I didn't actually start to interact with people in fandom until late high school. I was just lurking or posting to my

Tumblr blog that had, like, maybe ten followers, none of whom I knew.

**Necktie:** I see. Side question, you mentioned Tumblr a lot in the history of you being in fandoms. Was Tumblr more of an avenue for you to reach further into fandom, or was it the social media platform that you used because of fans?

**Kieran:** Back in those days, Tumblr was a fandom space. I mean, other people used it. There were hipster blogs, and like, I'm sure there were other users, but it was a social media platform that was centered on fan communities. And it knew that. I was on Tumblr because I was into fandoms, and I was into fandoms because I was on Tumblr. I think they definitely fed into each other. Also, in my brief history, I did miss Carmilla. I was into Carmilla, the web series, for several years after *Glee*, concurrent with other fandoms. I got into it specifically because I saw gifsets of it on Tumblr. Basically, I would follow the people on my Dashboard around to different fandoms as they migrated from one fandom to another.

**Necktie:** I see. And you mentioned that the first media you kind of interacted with was fanart. Did you know that fanart existed or were you just looking for content that had to do with your first interests?

**a/n:** DM is short for Direct Message. It's both a noun and a verb. *The 100* was a teen drama television show about inhabiting earth after hundreds of years.

**Kieran:** I didn't know that fanart existed. I mean, I wasn't really on the internet until I made a Tumblr. Like, I definitely knew about the internet, but I was so uninterested in it. I was like, "I like books." I used to read so much. I could go through 10 books in a month. I was a really, really dedicated reader, and I really loved Percy Jackson. So when I finished the last book—this was before the Heroes of Olympus series—I was starved for more content. So I went looking for more, and the first place I went was Google image search. That's how I found out that fanart exists.

**Necktie:** Okay. How would you describe the core of the fan bases you were involved in? As in age, gender, or general vibes?

**Kieran:** I think the Percy Jackson fandom skewed pretty young, but a lot of the creators were late high school and early college. I heard last month that Burdge is married and teaches art. I remember her going to art school while I was still following her, and I would have been

in middle school at that point. I have a better idea of the demographics for my later fandoms though. So I was in a very specific part of the Glee fandom. I was on Quinn Fabray fan Tumblr. Quinn Fabray is a very divisive character within the Glee fandom, so this was sort of a smaller subsection of the fandom and that was predominantly queer girls and women. They ranged from around

14 (my age at the time) to 20 years old. And then I

basically followed that demographic around from fandom to fandom until I left Tumblr. This group definitely moved like a pack.

**Necktie:** You describe your experiences in these fandoms with a ton of detail. Would you say that you enjoyed

your time in each one of them, or was there any point that you felt you had to leave?

**Kieran:** I do deeply treasure my time in all of these fandoms. I don't think I would be doing this project if I didn't, but there are definitely some times in fandoms when I wondered if it was worth it. I remember when Lexa was killed off in *The 100*, I was sad because the character had died,



but it didn't really affect me deeply in the way that it affected a lot of other people until I went online and I saw what other people were saying about it and how sad they were. I think seeing other people's reactions impacted me much more, and I grieved much harder for that character because of it. I also think that being in fandom exposed me to adult content at a pretty young age. I don't think I'll ever really know how that affected me, but I was definitely reading very adult content in fanfiction in middle school. In hindsight, I don't know how much of that stuff was depicting healthy relationships or healthy sex. I didn't have the same critical thinking skills I have now, where I can distinguish problematic behavior even if the author does not. I don't know if that content skewed young me's views of healthy relationships and sex. I was just so starved for content that represented me. I was coming to terms with being queer, and I didn't connect with the rep on TV.

**Necktie:** So were the elements of fandom you enjoyed the most connected to the representation that it provided you?

**Kieran:** Fandom was pretty key in helping me come to terms with my sexuality. I think Carmilla, the web series, was probably the single most important piece of media in my coming to terms with being queer. I think this is because the creators were telling the story that they wanted to see. Um, and I don't

think that I had seen a relationship between two women depicted by a queer creative team before that.

**Necktie:** On the other hand, you said that there were times you felt like it would be best to leave the fandom. Is there a pattern in your experiences that led to you saying you should leave?

**Kieran:** I never had a moment in any of these fandoms where I was like, "I have to get out." I would just lose interest and stop consuming that thing. Or I would get distracted by another piece of media. I was bad at having multiple interests at once, so if I got into something, I would be only into that thing. I had space in my brain for one interest at once, and that interest would balloon until it filled every part of my life that wasn't already taken up by schoolwork.

**Necktie:** When you look back on your experiences, did you cringe about being in those fandoms and if so, what do you think the source was? Was it coming from yourself or from society's view of that fandom?

**Kieran:** Because I didn't really create a lot of content—actually, I did try to write a Glee fanfiction once. I have not gone back to look for it because I know it's bad, but I'm sure I could still find it. It's on fanfiction.net. But other than that, I didn't really create anything for these fandoms, and I didn't really leave a lasting mark, so I don't cringe in that way.

I think the big thing that I did cringe about is when my parents would be like, “Oh, you like Glee.” In the years after I had left the fandom, and even when I was in it, the way they would mention me liking Glee made me feel like it was something I should be embarrassed about. Like, they thought it was funny or quirky that I was too into this thing and all of my emotions were wrapped up in it. I was so embarrassed when they would ask me about it, because I was like, “This is mine, this isn’t yours. And I know that my interest in this fandom is fundamentally different than how you think I am interested in it.” I think that disconnect was a really big part of what made me so embarrassed to reveal any of my interests to people. I was really afraid that they would turn it into something that it wasn’t. So I guess I would say the cringe was societally imposed. I didn’t want people to misunderstand me.

**Necktie:** So then what made you come back to Glee or any previous fandom, and have you come to appreciate them in a new way?

**Kieran:** I came back to Glee for a couple of reasons. I kept getting recommended this podcast on Spotify called Showmance, which is this podcast where two actors from Glee talk about their friendship and their experiences filming the show. At first, I was like, “I’m not going to listen to that. Too many weird associations.” And then I listened to the first episode because

quarantine got boring. They talked so fondly about their memories of being on the show that it was contagious. They were cringing at the embarrassing moments of the show, but then going, “But I had fun and this did mean so much to me.” I think hearing them articulate that was really meaningful to me. Another big element was meeting other people who used to be in the Glee fandom and had very similar opinions and experiences. And then finally, there is this other podcast that I have been listening to these past two semesters called “Recovering Gleek” where these two ex-Glee fans go back and rewatch every episode as adults. So I think the reason I’m looking back on this show fondly is because everyone else is doing it too. And because there is sort of this shared experience of reliving those years.

**Necktie:** So the validation from other fans that were deep in the fandom sort of balanced out the embarrassment you had about it from your parents.

**Kieran:** Yeah. My parents actually watched Glee with me, and I think that’s part of the reason I was so embarrassed that I was into it. Like, they watched it, but they weren’t obsessed with it. I was obsessed with it. So I was really embarrassed that I had this weakness where I could be so easily won over by a show they didn’t care about. It meant a lot to me to see these other people go, “You know, what? This

show meant too much to me as well.” It created this space where we could reminisce and have this agreement that this show might’ve meant too much to us, and that was okay.

I also think that we cannot discount the importance of quarantine and the extra time that we’ve all had to ponder our pasts. I think a lot of this collective revisiting of the past is like, “What else am I going to do over quarantine?”

**Necktie:** Looking back on all of these experiences, what do you think are the biggest things you’ve gained from being in fandoms?

**Kieran:** I think I gained pride in my own identity, even though I got it wrong for like eight years. I gained real pride and appreciation for having a queer identity. Growing up, I felt somewhat ashamed of it even though I was in a very open and accepting environment. Society as a whole at that point still didn’t like gay people very much, so I went and found a community that did. I also think being in fandom made me better at analyzing media. All I was doing in fandom was picking apart interactions between characters. Did I get the interactions wrong most of the time? Yeah. But the fact that I was trying made me better. And then finally, it was absolutely an escape for me. I was, um, I was pretty friendless in high school, and it wasn’t always like that. I actually lost all of my friends halfway through sophomore year, and that was pretty traumatic for me.

That’s when I really threw myself into fandom super deeply. I think that it provided me a space where other people existed because I was otherwise very socially isolated.

**Necktie:** Would you say overall that being in fandom was a positive or a negative experience for you?

**Kieran:** On the whole, it was absolutely a net positive. I think I’ve covered the ways that I relied on it earlier. That being said, there are definitely ways that it negatively impacted my life. I feel like, in high school, although it did provide an escape for me, it also prevented me from going out and trying to make new friends. I was like, “I don’t want new friends. Instead, I’m just going to sink myself into this because this can’t leave me. This can’t hurt me.”

**Necktie:** What do you have to say to people in the early stages of cringe?

**Kieran:** Keep liking what you like, because more than anything else, people dig confidence. If you lean into the interests that make you unique, people will pick up on it and you will get a group of like-minded people. I think it’s far more fun to be among people that you have things in common with than it is to just be among the cool kids.



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ABOUT

No longer using this account.

I've decided that it was time I leave Gaia. I've been on here since 2003, and I've fallen out of love with the site. I apologize for any inconvenience over artwork or requests. I've really enjoyed my time here, and with everyone. If you have any questions please contact me at the following:  
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please contact me via my email or deviantart with any concerns.



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Might disappear easily due to college. Sorry about that, will come back eventually.

grateful for the time we got to spend together. It was worth it.  
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All my wonderful art.  
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*In case you guys haven't noticed. I quit Gaia. To all my Guilds; If I didn't make someone else the captain PM me. I'll make whoever PMs me the captain. Moving on. I quitted for tons of reasons. A few of them was because of all the noobs asking for my stuff, the pervs whenever I'm in towns asking for cyber, and lastly...I need to get on with my life.*



Last Login: 12/14/2015 5:03 am  
Registered: 05/14/2004  
Gender: Female

For the final time, thank you guys so much for everything. This is your captain speaking, over and out. :)  
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