



GAY CATS? YES WAY!

YAOI

MAY



CLOUD'S TIPS
FOR SELF-
ACTUALIZATION

GENDER
UNLOCKED



PUPPIES AND TENDERS
AND BEARS OH MY!

COMICS!



What changed
YOUR life?
Learn more inside

THE NEW VANGUARD

THE SECRETS
OF
GIRL
YAOI EXPLAINED



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WE ASKED 28 BRAVE
CONTRIBUTORS.....

WHAT

WAS THE

YAOI

THAT CHANGED
YOUR LIFE?

THESE ARE THEIR STORIES:

Arthurian Yaoi by Julian shipyrds

Summer Camp Yaoi by Elliott queerapika

Final Fantasy VII by Sully glowtoads

FAKE, Ranma 1/2 by Acernor

Utena and Other Thoughts by Juniper H chemiosmotic

Mermaid Melody Pichi Pichi Pitch! by Pearl

Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicles, YGO GX, ORV by Zarinthel

Gintama by Kile

Naruto by insy

Kingdom Hearts by Dee “Exed” wichables

Warrior Cats by Cody, Cyan’s boyfriend

Fullmetal Alchemist by Anonymous

Various series by Romane izanyas

Ace Attorney by Parker spidercycle

YGO, Kagepro, and Blood Blockade Battlefront by Hyde

Hetalia by Xtine

The World Ends With You by Daffy damientiamat

Ai Ore! by tshirt

Magnet by táo

BBC Sherlock by Ki

Ice Age by Crossy

Hannibal by Wawa

The Sisters Brothers by Cyan

The Magicians by Him Tortons

Scum Villain's Self-Saving System by tshirt

Immortal Days by voski wayshuh

Yugioh Retrospective by CEL

Yaoi Analysis by iplidl

Concluding Yaoi Comics by The front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire
and iplidl

Is This Love? by simk

A Note from the Editor

Additional art provided by Cyan and tshirt. Thank you so much Cyan!



So when asked for yaoi that changed my life I don't think anyone was expecting me to write about Lancelot and King Arthur. Unfortunately I am going to, and not even Marion Zimmer Bradley's magic threesome version. When I was 11 I read *The Once and Future King*, which is T. H. White's retelling of the King Arthur mythos. It was one of the first books I cried at. I was sitting and sniffing in my mom's office while she graded papers and she looked over like "oh my god are they dying," and it turned out I had just read one of several scenes where Arthur in his old age stares out the window and thinks about the arc of history and the irreparable wreck of his life.

In the spirit of being both once and future, and also in the true spirit of yaoi, White's prose is alternately mythic and anachronistic. Sometimes this happens in a fun way, sometimes this happens in a way that makes you go ah yes this was written by an English man in the 1950s. Guinevere is described as a film star at one point. There are Saxons, and there are also cannons. White references the IRA when going off about Mordred. (I warned you about the Englishness.)

In the book (which as you may remember or not based on your memory for Arthurian legend, is a tragedy) Lancelot is not particularly handsome, nor particularly secure in himself. He's kind of a flop. His saving grace is twofold: he is obsessed with being the best of the best of Arthur's knights, and Arthur loves him to disaster. Arthur loves him so much that when with his own eyes he sees Lancelot slaughter 22 men, including Gawain's unarmed nephews, whom Lancelot knighted, Arthur's reaction is not betrayal but disbelief. Arthur loves Lancelot more than he loves himself, almost more than he loves his kingdom.

"Yes, but it is different. I love Arthur and I can't stand it when I see him looking at me, and know that he knows. You see, Arthur loves us."

“But, Lance, if you love him so much, what is the good of running away with his wife?”

Obviously, we have to discuss Guinevere here. Poor Gwen. I am dreading her inevitable girlbossification by the Madeline Millers of the world, but thankfully we have not gotten there yet. Women in *The Once and Future King* are not entirely plot points but neither are they entirely characters. Yaoi! In *The Once and Future King*, she does love Arthur, and he loves her; unfortunately, it's the bitch ages, and she also loves Lancelot, and rather than have happy threesomes for the rest of their lives they are beholden to things like chivalry and the strictures of the Catholic church. Lancelot slaughters 22 men while Arthur cheers him on from a tower window in part because Arthur, in a fit of duty, has sentenced Guinevere to be burned alive because she and Lancelot got caught in flagrante delicto. It is pretty clear to me that Guinevere is 1/3 a woman these two men care about and 2/3 a way for them to proxy fuck each other.

There's lots more to unpack here (the book is 1000 pages and only the first 300 are *The Sword and the Stone* animal antics, after which the book takes a Turn.) But I just think it's important that only once Lancelot leaves to do Quests does Arthur's kingdom begin to fall apart. Lancelot is the greatest of his knights and Lancelot is also his undoing (yes, yes, I know Mordred is there being evil and sniveling but he takes Arthur apart by manipulating the situation with Lancelot.) Lancelot is the lynchpin holding the Round Table together. One man being another's best friend, liege lord, and undoing— well, that's yaoi to me!

I spent a lot of time turning Lancelot and King Arthur over in my head when I first read the book. A lot of it went over my head (I was 11 at the time, and deeply closeted, and also about to convert to Catholicism, so you have to cut me some slack.) But also it was the first book I'd read that was so carefully About Storytelling, and it left me with A) a deep and lasting love for tragedy and B) absolutely bonkers about knight/liege situations. Thanks, T. H. White!

JULIAN
shipyrds



There was this person at Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth (CTY), aka Smart Kids Camp—a place you had to take the SATs to get into—who wore skinny jeans before it was cool (this was like 2002) and a form-fitting v neck and said things like “I’m a straight girl in a boy’s body.” I was thirteen and would have happily switched bodies with this person, but at the time I just thought I had a crush. I didn’t have the language for anything else and I had hips that clearly weren’t going anywhere.

Another thing I didn’t have words for was the feeling, low in my belly and the bottom dropping out, when two boys kissed as a variety show gag to an audio backdrop of screaming teenage girls. Having never been kissed myself (outside of a kindergarten wedding—listen, I was very popular with the elementary school boys for some reason), I imagined what it would feel like.



I talked to the (other) girls about it later, giddy with the secret. “Why is seeing two boys together kind of...hot?”

And I wish I could tell you what these (other) Smart Kids said. I got back home and started daydreaming about having beach sex with kiefer sutherland (my first old man crush) and kind of forgot about it.

Until!

I was fifteen or so, back at CTY, borrowing my first manga from my friend Joy. I don’t remember what it was called, sadly. It centered on a number of murder mysteries in the art world and the boy genius who was tasked with solving them.

There was one particularly improbable scene that featured the protagonist interrogating an older man with long hair and, of course, at some point

they kissed.

My breath caught in my throat and I flipped the pages back, almost certain I'd misread something.

Nope. They were totally making out.

This time, I kept the secret. When Joy asked me what I thought of the manga, I was very normal and just said that it was good.

"How's this look for Naughty Catholic Schoolgirl Day," I asked, changing the subject to one of the decidedly unofficial camper-assigned dress up days, and turning so my skirt would flare.

"You just look Jewish," she said.

Um ok!

Anyway, I feel like when you're a teen, everything that happens to you kind of gets put into a blender and then saved for decades later because one day you'll be thirty four and drinking that proverbial smoothie and you'll realize three or four concurrent things about yourself, at least two of which will be wow I sure am a jewish transfag, and you'll never be able to separate those parts of you, never again.

Elliott
QUEERAPIKA

CLOUD STRIFE and the YAOI IDENTITY

what's gayer than absorbing the identity of another man? doing it twice. i'm talking about cloud strife from FFVII, a yaoi icon who has carried fujoshi gamers on his shoulders for nearly three decades. i owe everything to him, and i'm sure my highschool friends wish his pointy polygon form hadn't plagued my mind for all these years. sorry girls.

pretty much everything about cloud is yaoi, from his design to his character to his story. did you know the designers deliberately made him "less masculine" so that he could better rival sephiroth? direct quote. until this week, i didn't — he was meant to have smooth black hair, but was given his defining blond spikes instead. sephiroth, with his long hair and his long sword, exists in deliberate, calculated comparison. it's easy pickings for people looking for yaoi in a classic contrasting uke/seme dynamic.

but the previous design of smooth black hair and less ambiguous masculinity, now a contrast to cloud, still exists. it went to zack fair, who is notable as the first man that cloud absorbs. he's the origin of it all in the truest sense: let's begin with him.

ZACK FAIR

the most important thing about zack is that he's dead. it gets weird from here, because every time we see cloud, we see zack — in this sense, he is entirely defined by his connection to cloud, and by how cloud keeps makes space for him even when he really, really shouldn't.

see, cloud believes he *is* zack. this is psychological and somatic: for a long time, cloud thinks that he is a soldier working for the megacorporation that runs the planet. but he isn't. this identity actually belongs to zack fair, who truly was a soldier, and who died protecting cloud from that megacorporation.

zack died for cloud. cloud becomes zack. this confusion of identity is borne both as a trauma defence and a grief response: cloud believes he is zack so thoroughly that he forgets zack exists, thereby removing that hor-

rific memory from his mind while paradoxically ensuring that his friend is not lost forever. zack is safe within cloud. here he cannot be hurt.

and cloud's absorption of zack is total, taking on his mannerisms, his sword, even his skills and relationships. his style of fighting, his attitude to the world — everything. in doing so, zack fair lives on; it's not zack who died, not if he is standing right here in a different skin.

i struggle to think of something more yaoi than subsuming another man into your being, other than gay sex. nothing says that zack and cloud don't have gay sex, but it's unlikely, as cloud is catatonic for a long time — it's the reason why zack dies, protecting his vulnerable friend. the lack of physicality between zack and cloud works nicely though. there's a desperation around cloud's actions here, an unreasonable response to grief/loss/love that speaks of unfulfillment. zack and cloud's relationship is all about uncrossable distances, and reaching across anyway. there is little response between the two: they can never reply to each other, only assume permission and act in the way they think the other would want. the other's existence becomes cerebral, established in thought-space rather than physical-space. and the result is a loneliness so desperate it destroys. zack was as lonely as cloud; zack mythologised cloud too, dreaming of delivering him to safety so intensely that he gave his life to this fantasy.

cloud feels immense shame about his inability to save zack, and later on when he realises what he has done, shame about how he has treated zack's memory. but i think there's something here about cloud's respect and love for someone who took care of him. zack is physically and emotionally stronger, openly affectionate and protective. by taking zack on as a mantle, cloud stays safe. by becoming his own protector, cloud embodies zack more truly than zack himself could manage. he understands what it is that zack truly dreamed of, and gives him another chance to be a hero.

what i'm saying is: cloud did what zack wanted, though maybe in a more extreme form than he had imagined. i don't even need the authorial stamp of approval, but i have it anyway — in the movie sequel advent children, zack appears in ghost form to support a struggling cloud. and his

support is simply to ask cloud to repeat the final words that zack ever said to him, knowing that cloud will understand: “you’ll be my living legacy”.

these words are imprinted on cloud’s yaoi identity. zack totally meant it as a wish for cloud to survive, but i love the weight of burden here: it sounds like something an overbearing parent would say. cloud subconsciously shapes himself around it. and i can’t ignore how it calls to trauma theory of living legacies, too – though i’m sure square enix didn’t mean to express the theory so textually. here trauma is not solely marked by scars, but by the emotions and behaviours that a person experiences afterwards, which grow and take life of their own. it’s about carrying your trauma around with you, and having it change you physically — as janina fisher tells us, trauma manifests in a person’s life beyond the event as “fear, shame, anger ... startling, impulses to run or hide or fight, even against one’s own body”. zack had carried cloud’s body around with him, and the weight of it encouraged him onward to his death; cloud truly was his living legacy in that sense. but zack positions *himself* as cloud’s living legacy, which cloud’s body must carry not as a physical weight, but as emotion and behaviour that cloud cannot help but follow through. this kind of intense doubling and doubling-back is the kind of stuff that makes fujoshi crazy, by the way.

all of this is muted in cloud by the protective mantle of zack’s identity, which shields him even in the act of becoming his burden. and i think that’s the point. trauma theory is about understanding how to live on afterwards. zack and cloud do that for each other. fisher again: “every symptom is a badge of courage that tells part of the story of how that individual survived ... increases the hope that if they were ingenious enough to survive, there is hope for the future.” trauma as proof of survival; zack as proof of cloud’s survival, and in the same doubled way, cloud as proof that zack had once lived. and does he not still live? cloud is covered with living scars, emotions and impulses that indemnify his brain. is zack not the kindest of those scars? once again zack represents the future in his unreachable, unchangeable death — and how cloud has revived him again, but within himself. once again zack represents love.

this fucked me up for years. i have always loved stories where important

characters are already dead: it's a style of writing that really impresses me, and i enjoy what it does to the remaining characters who have to live with that hole, or in cloud's case, *in* that hole. the fact that cloud fills his hole with zack, and also himself, is so twisty and fun. forgetting and becoming a dead guy is fucked up – absorbing the man who died for you is fucked up. but i think zack would have been ok with it. and what's better than two guys aligning in their fucked up views?

this brings us to sephiroth.

SEPHIROTH

if sephiroth had his way, cloud would also be his living legacy. he's the most famous villain in FFFVII, driven crazy by his mommy trauma and god complex, and cloud becomes his enemy because he keeps thwarting his plan to destroy the planet. he's also the other half of sefikura, one of the most enduring and epic ships in the yaoi world. cloud has earned his place as a yaoi icon, and sephiroth is on the podium with him.

during FFFVII, cloud pursues sephiroth. this is more than just plot — square enix built this dynamic into the game itself, and it was a resounding success within the industry and the genre. this pursuit mechanic involves looping back around the world map to find this villain in previously-explored locations: by updating the map with sephiroth's presence, we get to feel his omni-presence in cloud's mind. the pressure that sephiroth exerts upon cloud to think of him becomes more discernible, and more complex, in sephiroth's response to being hunted by the protagonist: which is to remove any thoughts that are *not* of him. he turns cloud into his puppet — he forces his way into cloud's mind on a psychic level, and imposes his own will onto him. chasing sephiroth makes cloud vulnerable; but he must keep chasing. he must knowingly open himself to sephiroth because that is his role in the game; and we as the gamer behind him are pushing him onwards, making him dance on those strings again and again so that we reach the ending. becoming implicit in the roles of martyr and murderer is a heady rush that speaks to the success of sefikura in FFFVII. *we* yaoify cloud. how fun is that?

here's a quote from cloud: "i wasn't pursuing sephiroth... i was being summoned by sephiroth". he's being literal here — sephiroth is deliberately drawing cloud to him. he wants cloud to follow and find him, because he wants to, um, 'form reunion' with him. this is also literal. sephiroth wants cloud to be with him, but more importantly, he wants cloud to *be* him — to obey his commands, to align with his views, to be in total sync with what sephiroth thinks and feels. this part of their relationship is all about sephiroth: narcissistic to the bone, sephiroth's obsession with cloud stems from that continual rejection, that pull away from his call.

cloud is meant to be sephiroth's vessel, by the way. not immediately obvious, especially with the care that the designers took to make their visual appearances contrast. but it's a really fun plot twist, and one that puts cloud's identity crises into sharp focus. sephiroth's identity has been forced onto cloud through medical trauma, with his dna inserted physically into cloud's body, turning his mental and verbal objections into something of a painful joke. he doesn't want to be sephiroth, because sephiroth sucks, and keeps killing his friends. but cloud's body betrays itself, betrays *him* and keeps him from feeling secure in his own identity. there's no part of him that he can cut out to get rid of sephiroth, and even after sephiroth is dead, cloud feels him. sephiroth is still in him. whose body is it, anyway?

i've made sefikura sound fucked up, and it is, kinda. but it's easy to understand the hold that it's had on fujoshi gamers. cloud doesn't go quietly — sephiroth's oppressive manipulation is what ignites cloud's will to fight back.

sephiroth's insistence that he is the original, and cloud a copy who must submit, is the kind of crazy that appeals to me more now that i've come to terms with my leo sun star sign. i suppose it's visually similar to how zack and cloud had existed, but in practice it is a more dynamic and charged relationship. like his mother before him, sephiroth is a virus: iterative, defined through the suppression of others and the subsequent displacement with himself. he exists only in this state of violence — made real through it — and he doesn't want to live in any other way. as derrida puts it, "as soon as there is the One, there is murder, wounding, trauma-

tism. L'Un se garde de l'autre. The One guards against/keeps some of the Other. It protects itself from the Other... The One makes itself violence."

sorry for putting french in front of you. this aptly describes and complicates sefikura, because actually, it's *cloud* finding himself in that abjection of sephiroth. who is he? not sephiroth's copy; not sephiroth. he is as much a One as he is an Other, and makes himself more of both as he rejects sephiroth. in that rejection he provokes sephiroth again, who must respond. it's an equal relationship only through its dynamism, in the constant flux and flow of violence that they put each other through. there's no real hope of reconciliation between them — they are on guard, conscious of the power they hold over each other. it's sustainable only if the two of them live forever, and cloud is the protagonist. eventually sephiroth loses.

sephiroth is measurably more yaoi than zack, by the way. zack has a girlfriend, for all that his character is defined by his homoerotic death scene. sephiroth has an obsession with cloud that follows him into the grave and beyond. in advent children, sephiroth somehow manifests into physical fragments in an attempt to resurrect himself — and when he does, he runs to fight cloud. cloud always ends his fights with sephiroth alone: their relationship is unique. and it's here that we get sephiroth's yaoi line: "i will never be a memory". once again, it's the final words that cloud hears before sephiroth dies (again, and hopefully more permanently this time).

i kinda like it more than "you'll be my living legacy". i think it's more comically connected to living trauma theory — yes, sephiroth is in his nightmares, but he does keep physically appearing to haunt him. it ties in well with sephiroth's narcissism, but also his place in the wider story as a lapsed war hero that cloud had, at one point, idolised. as a young boy cloud had looked up to sephiroth and tried to emulate him; cloud had joined the army to be like sephiroth. in a way, sephiroth is more of the origin to cloud's story than zack is. sephiroth's fall from grace is something a lot of sefikura fans tap into, recognising the toxicity of that connection. all yaoi should have a healthy dose of painful, hilarious irony.

i also like how in plain text it seems... relatively mundane? not normal,

and definitely terrifying to a man recovering from his protagonist status. but also a little bit like sephiroth is cloud's crazy ex who just can't accept the breakup. that does trump zack's parenting line for me.

anyway, with sephiroth in place, cloud moves from a fujoshi's delight to a fujoshi's icon. it's in sefkura that we see cloud at his most fierce and dynamic, which is hugely appealing. i think the stakes add rather than detract here, and the pain of finding yourself in/with a man who keeps killing your friends is very thrilling. as true rivals, sephiroth gets to transgress some of the barriers that kept zack from cloud through sheer force of villainy, and the intense doubling and mirroring between them is revitalising for cloud. sephiroth gives cloud purpose, defines him as an individual again — a One. that's yaoi.

CLOUD STRIFE AGAIN

the thing is, i'm not sure cloud wants to be a One. not in the sense that sephiroth means it, anyway. cloud's identity is a fractured thing, broken up by amnesia and survivor's guilt and the burden of being a protagonist, but it's deliberate. it's a defence mechanism, as fredric jameson puts it, against the eroding currents of life that cloud must continue to run against. and his healing is not to discard parts that do not resemble the cloud-before-the-game. there's a beautiful section of the game where he comes to terms with this, after he realises he isn't zack fair and that he is being controlled by sephiroth. it's cathartic to watch him try to find himself again, especially because he needs to accept the overlaps. cloud does not exist in the spaces between — his identity only builds upon the spaces.

in this way, i think *he* is yaoi. writing from the perspective of his ship halves makes him appear reflective rather than transformative, but in truth he absorbs. he is a space for other characters to go through (i am calling him a hole) and in doing so, those characters are different. it's in that type of connection that cloud finds his identity, and i find that really beautiful. deleuze and guattari talk about how a fragmented identity shows an unfettered desire that is rooted in the current of life, and who craves life more than someone who keeps being denied it? refusing to

cohere to a single, impenetrable ego is a choice, and it's one that shows a determination to experience the present whilst not letting go of the past. it's too hard to be accidental, and especially to do it twice. cloud's showing us something here.

he's my favourite kind of protagonist, in that sense. cloud resists the archetype of a lone(ly) soldier trudging on, because he keeps seeking out connection, be it for love or security or purpose. it is only in experiencing relationships that cloud can begin to make sense of his life. he can't exist on his own. he needs to know someone, and they need to know him.

and that, to me, is yaoi.

SULLY
glowtoads

shout out to ranma 1/2 for answering the burning pubescent questions in my heart such as “why do people start calling you a girl and treating you like shit once you grow tits, even when you’re not a girl?” didn’t know i was trans for another dozen years but thank u ranma

FAKE was the first manga with gay sex scenes that me and my friend group ever read; we passed the volumes around back and forth in hushed whispers and passed the tale of when a teacher picked up the final (explicit) volume to flip thru- luckily without spotting the page in question- with screaming laughter. this was the first time i remember reading the word “horny” and knew from context that it was naughty and must have a scintillating meaning. the dictionary just said that it meant you wanted sex, which was much less sordid and thrilling than i was imagining. likewise, i remember being confused at the glowing rod of light and somewhat disappointed when it was merely supposed to indicate a penis. just a penis? but everyone knows what that is, i thought this would be more secret and scandalous... (didn’t realize i was asexual for another six years)

you know when you read fantasy and the main character is using magic and the magic RUSHES thru their fingertips and pours tingling from their palms and they can feel the power at their disposal and they’re lit up and alive and it’s so visceral that you can imagine exactly what they’re feeling?? and you know when people kiss in fiction and their whole body heats up and the world slows down and their pulse is racing and there’s this deep, fervent longing to stay this close with the other person? well ONE of those is something that “everyone knows” isn’t real and is just a literary device, but it turns out that SOME people think that one of them is something that humans. actually feel irl. shout out to them i guess but i thought romantic attraction was a metaphor and am still kind of confused that it’s not to everyone. anyways, after two really great long term partners who were super kind and sweet and respectful and treated me really well and who i loved, fanfiction was still a more interesting way to experience romance. thank you fanfiction i love being aromantic and no longer feeling the need to RP romantic attraction with ppl who (it turns out) actually experience it. sorry to my beloved partners for assuming u were waxing poetic when you actually meant it

ACERNOR

As a fan of your scholarship, I simply had to contribute to this historic first instalment. However, I didn't feel myself to have anything deeply profound to say about yaoi on a personal rather than academic level. I read a bunch of LxLight (THIS ORDER IS NOT INTENDED TO BE A STATEMENT REFLECTING THE VIEWS OF THE AUTHOR OR PUBLISHER!) at the age of fourteen, but with an air of detachment. The only work that left a deep and profound impact on me, that I recently both returned to with more love AND found out is an influential and classic yaoi, is Revolutionary Girl Utena.

I know, obviously dykes will say this, but it IS genuinely that good and serves to sharpen one's toolbox OF literary analysis. And the bond between Utena and Anthy, as toxic and hurtful as it so often is, is one of the greatest examples of gay love piercing through the veil (or indeed, the coffin) and saving the day. The cookies and the tea are poisoned, but they will always drink them anyway, and will ultimately choose to be led by their fundamental compassion for the other and belief that she deserves a life without suffering. This is the transformative power of yaoi.

Changing one's life is not necessarily positive, of course; to me, the chilling spectre of fandom generic roving dudes has dogged my path lately. Or since I took my first stumbling steps across the desert of logging on. I have linked this concept previously to a certain flattening of the themes and seriousness of a piece. Particularly, I currently maintain that the widespread pairing of Commander Cody | CC- and Obi-Wan Kenobi is fundamentally at odds with their murderous final encounter in Revenge of the Sith, and by and large the spectre of tragedy, the silhouette of empire, that pointedly hangs over the entire Clone Wars show just as a Republic star-cruiser blots out the skies of Ryloth. (message char limit overflows here)

Ultimately, though, your deep dives and Insy and Xtine's irony poisoned forays into the yaoi mines are so formative and beautiful to me I cannot exalt anything other than them. Indeed, the greatest yaoi of all was the friends we made along the way.

(The audience choice award winning best yuri is obviously Bingqiu.)



JUNIPER H.
chemiosmotic



Pearl

I've always been fond of people with miserable endings. They tried their best, and it wasn't enough. They didn't try their best, and regretted it too late. They only realize the flaws in their plan when it's staring at them through a mirror, they die still hopelessly confused by what could possibly have gone wrong.

To me, this is 'romance'.

Romance being about commitment, and these people, above all else, have married themselves to a bad idea, have fallen in love with a concept above a person. Then, that concept eats them alive.

This is the plot of Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicles. It is also the plot of XXXholic, which while less yaoi centric to me also gave me an everlasting disorder. You win some and you lose some.

The main point of TRC is that many wishes cannot be fulfilled because if you pay the price to get them, then you'd become someone who didn't want them anymore. And then there are some wishes that can never be granted, no matter what. This is Hitsuzen.

T/N: 'Hitsuzen' means inevitable.

What TCR and XXXholic have in common is a perpetual loop of the Gift of the Magi-- people who sacrifice something for someone else, only for that person to sacrifice in turn, rendering both gifts pointless in giving, and only meaningful in what they had meant when they were sacrificed.

So you have to be thankful for what you've been given, or everyone will have paid their prices for nothing.

This is why Fai drinks Kurogane's blood. Even though it would be easier for him to die, he can't give up on his own fear: the blood is the proof that he still has more to lose. As long as he lives, people will make sacrifices to save him.

How scary is that?

It's like Kurogane said. He's a coward who can neither live nor let go. And now he is dead and still holding on.

An important tenet of the Grail Wars is that you can't win them, and any wish the Grail would grant is poisoned with blood and hatred. Nothing good can come. There is no 'greater good' to hope for.

Nevertheless, people cannot give up hope.

Gilgamesh proclaims immunity from the call of the Grail because he is the greatest of all heroes. There is nothing he does not already have. There is nothing he cannot grasp. He looks down on Artoria for having regrets.

Fate as a series is completely dependent on the regrets of its heroes. They can be forced to fight only rarely: mostly they must act as they will. They must long for the grail. They must desire to serve. They must be haunted by the mistakes that made them legends. They must die to the same flaws that followed them into the War.

Diarmuid is also immune to a desire for the Grail. What he wants cannot come from the chalice. What he wants is redemption, to serve a master and not be forced away by his inhuman charm that taints his own honor.

A simple wish, but it is beyond his grasp as surely as Enkidu's soul lies beyond Gilgamesh's sight. He can no more receive honor in a Grail war than a madened Lancelot can convey his sorrow to his only king. Each and every one of them can only be further tarnished.

Because Diarmuid's master's lover desires him, a command seal changes hands. A duel between warriors becomes a cold farce as Diarmuid is forced to turn his lance on himself. He curses the world as he dies. He curses Artoria. He curses her master. He curses his own master. He weeps tears of blood.

Have you no shame?

And Artoria only commits harder. You have to accept stains for the Grail. Otherwise, what will you have given up your principles for?

You will have cut your hair and sold it for a guitar pic for nothing.

In Yugioh GX, one of the protagonist's rival kills himself.

Zane Trusedale, e.g, Ryo Marufuji, goes through a lot of things that aren't very important. All you need to know is that he went from a gifted kid to someone who's notorious post graduation characteristic is that his heart has been weakened from the fact that he duels with shock collars in order to get a darker more 'real' edge to his duels, and he thinks being stuck in a life or death duel dimension isn't, on its own, hardcore enough.

Aware that he's pushing it, Zane challenges our main character to duel at possibly the lowest, more depressed point of his entire life. He wants to die in battle and he wants to communicate to Jaden that people can die in battle and have it not really be your fault-- that, to a certain extent, people make their own choices. That responsibility lands on them, and not all on our main character's shaking shoulders.

His little brother watches this duel, by the way. And Begs him not to do it. But Zane and Jaden understand each other, so they go for it. Jaden also wins against the boss of this season by committing to a mutual loss meaning death. He lives, of course, and so does Zane after the season ends. but he never really recovers from this. Zane is wheelchair bound. Jaden is possessed. And both of them are softer. Quiet. And tired.

The power of friendship wasn't enough. Jaden beat season three through the power of incredible violence.

Childhood innocence sacrificed to keep his friends alive. And now he is more distant from them, in an unbridgeable gap.

I think it's kind of gay to kill yourself. Or, in Han Suyong's case, I think it's kind of gay to write a story about a man who kills himself for the sake of another man who kills himself. You see?

I know I've literally written Kim Dokja and Yoo Jonghyuk having sex. But I think they're in an ace relationship, personally. Them and Han Suyeong. A throuple of indeterminate intimacy.

What's important is that Kim Dokja has theorized his way into creating a happy ending-- a utopia even greater than what Kiritsugu Emiya dared to dream of. He's even got the price worked out-- the only sacrifice required is himself. The world cannot exist if he is not outside of it.

The opposite crime of sacrifice is longing. Inability to accept an imperfect world.

Another way of looking at it is that Han Suyeong, despite her nature, is the type of person who would have walked away from Omelas. She wouldn't have accepted the pain of a single child as a necessary grease on the wheels of her ferrari.

Or she's the type of person who was willing to make everyone in the world suffer endless torments because it's the type of world that would save one person. Isn't she so kind?

Even though Yoo Jongyuk doesn't know it, he chose to do this. He wanted to meet someone he could only meet if he suffered and splintered and lost everything.

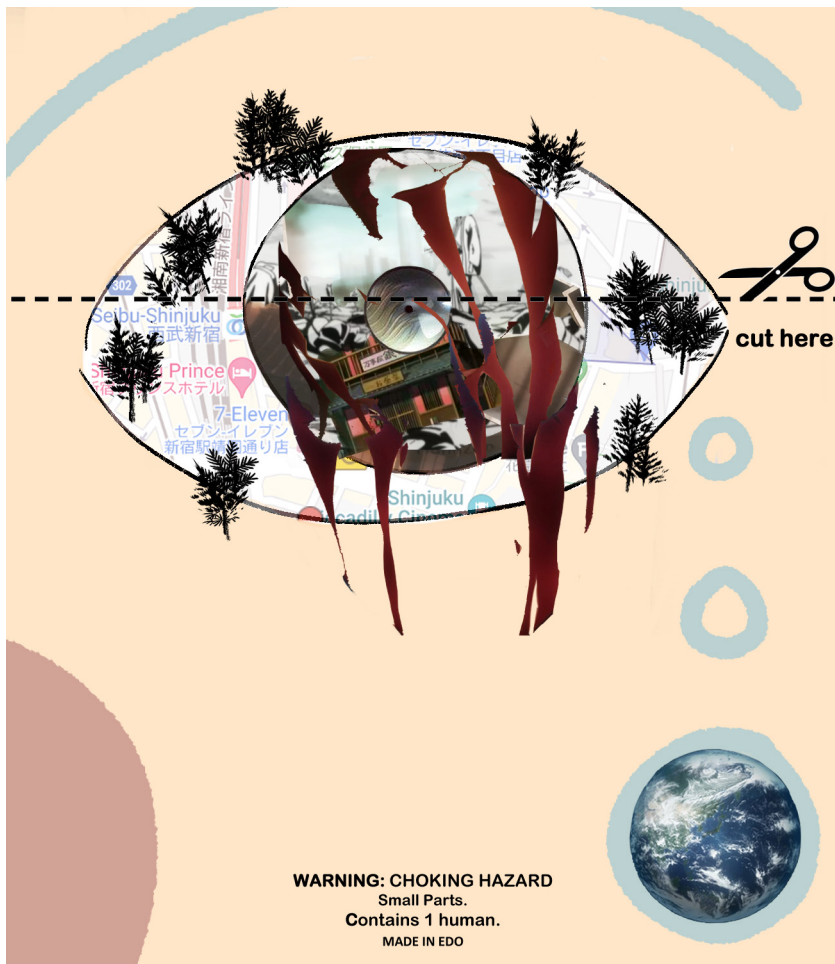
How brave of him.

He's standing over the corpses of every one else who cringed away from the price of their desires. Even if he loses everything, there's one person who will never look away from him, and one person who will always know him, her ink bleeding down his cheek.

That's 'romance'. To me.



ZARINTHEL



Kile

The Endemic Species of A(cat)suki Cats

when i was just a little thing freshly addicted to fanfiction in 2008-2012-ish, the number one thing i read was 1) self inserts and 2) naruto fanfiction. and within this niche on fanfiction dot net's Community tab was the perfect place to find those fics by the good effort of other like-minded readers who, among other things, collected the best of the best. (this was self-proclaimed). now i have nothing particular to say about the quality of these fics because i was in fact eating them up like candy and bouncing on the walls accordingly. and very literally.

the idea of redemption and savior through love for the most villainous characters has never been lost on any generation at any point in time. look at shen jiu. anyway, to do this, i present another short, numbered list

1) you must defang the beast. or give them new, less catastrophically deadly fangs. the akatsuki were particularly vulnerable to defanging by catboy-fication – or to the more realistically experienced pet owner's rational, kitten-fication – thus birthing the acatsuki.

a typical sequence of events would include morose teenagers, sad about their luck in life and love, finding solace in anime with their assortment of (presumably) real life best friends. smattered with inside jokes for their friends and with enough (A/N)s to provide context with the audience. and then BAM the doorbell rings. sad, wet kittens in a box with suspiciously specific “dyed” fur and aggro'd personalities that match the assigned best friends equally strong personalities. pause for cast to scream “KAWAII” in various manners of misspelling.

2) a house can be a home. this could also be tagged with #Stockholm Syndrome but i don't know how to spell that and i don't think the teenagers of the early aughts cared to figure it out either.

a flashbang or a bomb is suitable enough. the fics never finished half the time and there was no one to blame for the sudden acatsuki-fication of the cast, since the main purpose was to fall in love and drag the self

inserts into the world of naruto at the end to live life happily ever after. it's enough heavy handed mysterious back and forth transmigration that nothing needs to be explained by anything other than the will of "jash-in-sama" or madara/tobi (if it was published late enough ^__^).

this was all the backstory to say that it eerily reminded me of the fanfiction that we see on the archive nowadays, but perhaps without the zest of life that only cringy (good way), lackadaisical teenagers who roamed the halls in Gir hoodies from hot topic could perpetuate.

but actually it's mostly the back and forth transmigration, self-insert parabolas, and the System.

what with the heavy nostalgia for the forum-heavy days of the internet, jokes about millennial meme culture, and letting ourselves be cringe again, i'm always shocked by the lack of very specific endemic fiction on the archive. not to say i'm commanding anyone to write me acatsuki fanfiction in 2022-23 just BECAUSE. but because it's really, really funny to bait people. also, it's fun in normal ways.

the thing about nostalgia bait, for me specifically, is the endearment of a pre-written formula that the reader can expect to simply follow along with in addition to using the personality of the cast to move the plot along in new, fun ways. but i think that might be the explanation of what fanfiction IS in essence. and also, why disney won't stop rebooting their classics.

back in early 2021 i set out to write something of an SY/ALL reconstruction of the acatsuki cats, but it never panned out to be because i was taking it WAY too seriously and that wasn't very Paisley from Ohio-core of me. or very fun to read tbh.

and then later the rumor that FFNET was shutting down for reals this time (after literally over a decade of this rumor flashing in and out of existence) reminded me of all the unfortunate losses that we'll get from the small communities that won't ever be backed up. despite how fondly I feel about acatsuki fiction, it's not exactly everyone's pride and joy to

behold. also, a lot of those kids from ohio and sussex were really racist and i can't actually give merit to whether that deserves saving. ao3 will probably save them just to preserve racism perhaps to theoretically spite a single person of color who vaguely mentioned it on their locked twitter like a bloodhound sniffing out a person via a single hair.

cough anyway endemic species are those found in limited areas within specific habitat preferences and we as a community have the ability to spread the acatsuki like garden ornamentals and let them escape into the wilds of nature to become misplaced and unwelcome elsewhere. THAT is the power of friendship, dattebayo.



Insy

attack and dethrone god:

How ~~KINGDOM HEARTS~~ made me an atheist

i was 10 and had just finished playing goty ~~KINGDOM HEARTS 2~~ Sora/riku had my little heart in a death grip. I was so moved by the POWERFUL EMOTION of their reunion that for the first time in my life i was compelled to see what the interwebs were saying about how DEEP AND MOVING their relationship was.

The interwebs was saying this was YAOI.

I read my fill of lj manifestos about how ~~KINGDOM HEARTS~~ was neither light nor darkness but pure gay love over the weekend. And then went to be assaulted monday thru friday with the concept of a homophobic god at my private evangelical elementary school.

I was at a CROSSROADS. Was i going to go to hell for shipping yaoi???

I decided yes i was.

I came to this life changing conclusion in an ~~OLIVE GARDEN~~ where monumental decisions are made every day. I concluded that if god said yaoi was illegal then god could fuck all the way off.

I took it a step further even! He could fuck all the way off back to the primordial void as i had no further use for him if i he was saying love and happiness between yaoi and yuri couples was a sin. LOVE is LOVE! I see no difference!

Um. It took several years and many more personal revelations at other chain restaurants italian and otherwise for this to stick. BUT sora/riku

yaoi paved the way and really wasnt that the true meaning of ~~KINGDOM HEARTS~~ all along.

Dec
"EXED"
wichables

Growing up raised by Mormons I didn't read yaoi. I was a pure good hearted kid that certainly was NOT gay and NEVER watched or read porn. Instead I read good wholesome stuff. Like the Warrior Cats books by Erin Hunter.

My favorite character from those books was Ravenpaw. A soft hearted young cat unsuited to the Warrior lifestyle of the cat clans. Who finds himself on the run after learning his mentor committed a murder. He leaves his clan and is taken in on a farm by a gruff older cat with a checkered past named Barley.

Despite his sparse appearances Ravenpaw really resonated with me. Something about a soft kid, inherently incompatible with his incredibly strict and ritualistic people finding a home somewhere else with someone who accepts him. I loved reading fic about the unwritten adventures of the two. Their relationship was obviously romantic but not gay, because cats can't be gay.

I was convinced of this for years until I encountered a very erotic art piece of the two of them as humans. I realized then that I had been lying to myself. That I had loved the two characters because of their relationship. It was gay, romantic, erotic and everything I had convinced myself I wasn't above. I decided then to change and accept some facts. That cats can be gay, and so could I. I've enjoyed a lot of yaoi since then, all sorts of pairings with all sorts of dynamics but my mind occasionally goes back to Ravenpaw, where it all began.



CODY

WHEN I WAS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL MY PARENTS CAUGHT ME EMAILING WITH A FANFICTION.NET WRITER IN HER 30s ABOUT HER ROM x ED FMA YAOI PISS TIC AND THEY SENT ME TO THERAPY ABOUT (AND THE GIANT TANTRUM WHEN THEY TRIED TO ME ABOUT IT WAS SO HUMILIATING I PICKED

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CONCERN WAS RE: THE INAPPROPRIATE CONVERSATION BETWEEN ME AND AN ADULT STRANGER, BUT MY THERAPIST WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH UNDERSTANDING:



I discovered yaoi with Yu-Gi-Oh GX AMVs, which in retrospect is very funny because I have never watched it. I was 14 at the time, and back then a lot of people still had no internet access at home, myself included. My best friend did, however. There was a computer at her house (hidden all the way up the stairs in the one room under the roof, alongside her family's TV, in order to avoid the television tax which all TV owners in France are required to pay to finance public TV and radio channels). It was that time when kids would spend afternoons Looking At The Computer at the place of whoever had a computer. So we would watch AMVs of Naruto or magical girl anime we hadn't even seen, as well as MVs of artists and groups we liked (Fergie from the Black Eyed Peas was a big source of fascination to me, unsurprisingly). And in-between all that, we found yaoi.

It was pretty funny to us. She was the one who showed it to me one day. "Did you know people say Yu-Gi-Oh characters are gay?" I didn't. She showed me the good stuff—pretty innocent stuff, all the old school 2000s slightly-homophobic bad edits with people in the comments talking about ukeboys and using <_< emotes and making pedobear jokes. I didn't even understand most of it. I wasn't overly interested.

I already knew I liked women at that time and spoke about it rather freely. I had another best friend (a boy this time) who called himself bisexual because that was what emo kids did back in 2008. Calling themselves bisexual. I wasn't an emo kid but I thought it was pretty cool, so I called myself bisexual as well.

Yaoi slowly became less distant to me. My friend discovered that there was yaoi pornographic fanart everywhere on The Web and she showed it to me. It might seem gross to people, kids exchanging porn art, but honestly, it was just typical 14yo behavior. Kids discover porn and go "OMG, look at this" to other kids, and that's how they find out about the hidden exciting parts of having sex that sex ed or their parents don't talk about. So my friend and I collected hundreds of pieces of yaoi fanart, and at the time, it still was pretty innocuous to me. There was no notion of "shipping" characters—just finding art of Sasori fucking Deidara and debating whether it was hot or just kinda weird.

Shipping came with fanfiction, which I discovered on the French scanlation website where I read FMA releases. It was a pretty fun site, with translations of interviews, character profiles, fun facts, and one of the team members sometimes published self-insert fanfiction there. Then I found out about French fanfiction archives, and the more hidden depths of yaoi were revealed. That's when I started shipping M/M pairs on my own in the mangas I was reading. D.Gray-man was a big stepping stone for that: I entered a French micro-blogging community dedicated to the series and quickly made friends with some of the big names in there—one of whom is still one of my best friends today, another one of whom became my first girlfriend (she lived in my city!). By that time, I led a sort of “double-life”; I had already started writing fanfiction (pretty much the second I discovered it existed) and was gaining a bit of a following on FFnet. I had different “personas” for both sides of my internet life: a friendly and simpy one around the cool DGM fans, a cooler and more arrogant one over at FFnet because my fics were, in my humble opinion, of a far better quality than most of what French fandoms offered.

I followed the trends. I threw away ships I liked if my cool friends disliked them. I hated and made fun of female characters viciously, because that's what yaoi fans did. I enjoyed it, I won't lie. But I still felt a sort of distance between myself and my online friends, in that they would rage about yaoi and proudly call themselves perverts over it and even, at some point, ask the only one of us who understood Japanese to email a cute Japanese yaoi cosplayer and ask if they were a girl or a boy. It would've been so sexy if they were a boy, after all. I didn't enjoy that, I won't lie.

(That cosplayer actually replied and said that they preferred not to tell. I still wonder to this day if they were non-binary, and how they felt about a bunch of French girls emailing them to ask that.)

I didn't talk about yaoi IRL except with close friends in-the-know. I always felt some shame about liking it and would outright delete my yaoi fics if I became friends with a cool author who disliked M/M. I didn't like BL manga, unlike everyone else. I felt a little perverted over it all. My perception of it changed when I learned English... by spending a whole summer reading English DGM fics, because I'd exhausted all the French content. I would translate them word by word and everything. I'd focus

until I had migraines to read 10k words of any possible ship. When I came back to school months later, I could read and write English fluently. Exposure to anglophone fandoms, much wider and more diverse than francophone ones, made me feel a little less strained over liking yaoi.

Lots of things happened. I don't remember it all. But I think to this day that I never saw yaoi as "homosexual men" and never experienced the titillation that liking such a thing entailed for my teenage and young adult friends of the time. Or at least, never without a deep feeling of self-disgust. In fact, I loved to turn the "uke" into a girl and would devour any genderswap fic or art I could find. I wrote a worrying amount of genderswap fics which I never posted anywhere or let anyone read. Some of them are over 30k words long. I found it easier to get interested in male characters who actually got to have the story and relationships revolve around them, and I shipped my M/M pairings in such a way, without really thinking of them as being men or being homosexual. I disliked almost every single female character by default; and, on the other hand, became completely obsessed with the rare female characters I didn't hate. I could just turn my favorite boys into girls anyway! No need for a Sakura or a Chrome or a Lenalee, who were just boring bitches to make whore jokes about.

At the peak of repressing my own homosexuality, when I identified as a trans man, I tried my absolute hardest to use yaoi as proof that I was into men, actually, and found men attractive. I became the proto Women DNI guy. This period of my life is by far the darkest, and needless to say, I completely broke down when I gave up on being a guy and accepted that I was a very lesbianistic lesbian. And I think this is when I finally stopped feeling this weird guilt over liking yaoi and stopped hating other women for liking it as well. Yaoi was never "two homosexual men" for me. In my writing, they are queer, but not men. And I don't mean that in a "they're trans/nonbinary" way: they can be cisgender, but they're still not men. I don't write about men. I think this might be the case for a lot of women who create and enjoy yaoi, which is why the fetishist fujoshi argument is so stupid to me.

Yaoi has been a weird companion to me since I was a teenager, and it

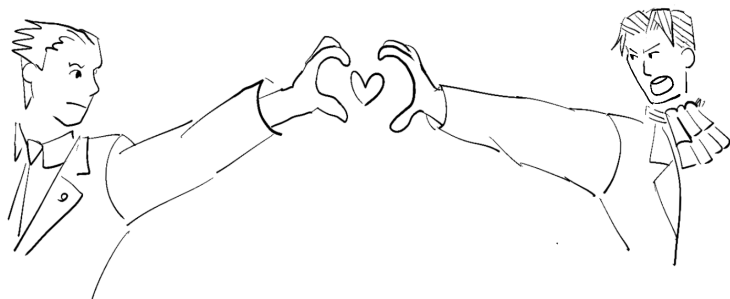
took me about 10 years to stop seeing it as a dirty little mutt following me in the streets and start seeing it as the haughty little cat living in my house that I can pet in peace one day and get scratched by the next. I still rarely feel interested in canon gay male content, especially BL manga or dramas. I love a lot of non-canon M/M ships, but never because of them being “two homosexual men”. It’s the same love and interest I give to M/F ships, and it sometimes ends up with me turning them into M/F ships. F/F ships are the only ones to be completely different to me—and the ones it took me the longest to open my heart to and enjoy.

Romane
IZANYAS

Tshirt here is my yaoi zine submission i hope you enjoy it.

“I used to be vaguely homophobic when I was in elementary school, you know, in the way Southern kids who have never really met a gay person before are, so I didn’t know anything about yaoi. Then my friends from Neopets dot com were like, ‘I ship L and Light from Death Note, look at this AMV!’ and I, as a child, was like ‘I don’t think that’s what the author intended. But I guess there’s nothing wrong with it. I just doubt that making these boys kiss was the authorial intent, so I’m not sure you should be breaking the rules like that.’

And then like a year later I got into Ace Attorney and looked at fanart on DeviantArt dot com and I was like ‘you know what, Phoenix and Edgeworth ARE in love. Boys CAN love each other. This IS the authorial intent.’ And then I started reading mid-2000s narumitsu longfic on <http://ff.net>. Thanks Ace Attorney yaoi for defeating homophobia”



PARKER

there is an unavoidable intimacy in possession. no matter the circumstances, no matter how the characters feel about one another on a personal level, there is an intimacy that simply cannot be denied.

no matter how hard you try to maintain a distance between you and the one you share a body with, there is an inevitable overlap, a bleedover of information, of self. who else could ever know you as well as the one who has cradled your soul, your mind, your heart, within their own vessel; who else could ever know you as well as the one who fit themselves within your body, within your heart, as if it were their home?

CASE ONE: TENDERSHIPING

in YGO, ryou and his spirit, the thief king, are not often shown together despite acting as narrative foils for yugi and his spirit atem. in fact ryou is scarcely shown at all: he fades into the background like a ghost more often than not and we are very rarely afforded a glimpse into his life outside of his introductory arc, at least in the manga.

we know he is socially isolated from both friends and family: he has himself and his dioramas and his ghost. so i think his possession would be a relief for him; instead of having no one, he always has someone, even if that someone is zorc-pilled, prone to violence, and repeatedly puts him in dangerous situations.

unlike yugi, ryou, is for the most part cut off from his spirit. they do not visit each other in their soul rooms; the thief king actively excludes ryou from his plans despite piloting his body to achieve his goals. and yet, towards the end, it is ryou who constructs a diorama at the thief king's behest as the battleground for his revenge plot against atem.

this must have required extensive communication, with the level of detail it had. i imagine ryou glad to grasp the opportunity to know the one who has haunted him all these years, both hurting and protecting him, especially knowing with confidence that yugi and his friends have defeated the king of thieves once before and that they could surely do so again.

after all, if he was bothered by the thief king's *anything*, he wouldn't have stolen the ring back from yugi after it was taken from him in the wake of battle city. the thief king is HIS shitty roommate from hell to evict if he so chooses!!

there is also, of course, the thief king: one who hurts more than he helps, one who cannot care for ryou the way he might have if it weren't for his zorcpilled grief and thousands of years of a festering grudge to fuel him.

he manages to care anyway; there was no reason for him to trap the soul of a teacher who had harassed ryou in a figurine, or to keep ryou alive during the battle city arc, either, when it risked his working relationship with malik.

it's hard not to care for the boy whose body you have lived in for years, no matter how zorcpilled you are; a boy who you have been alone together with for a long, long time; a boy who does not forgive you for the way you hurt him but keeps letting you in anyway.

we don't get to see any resolution between them, by the way. at the end of it all, when yugi is saying goodbye to the spirit of his puzzle and the millennium items are being taken away for good, there is nothing for ryou and the ghost who has been with him since childhood; the ghost who has been, for the most part, the only company he's kept for many years.

i like to think that at the end of it all, de-zorc'd, the thief king might have let ryou in the way ryou has always let *him* in. just once, just for a moment. an honest goodbye.

we don't know, though. i guess that's typical of ryou and his thief king. we never get to see them during such private, pivotal moments.

CASE TWO: HARUKA, KONOHA, AND THE SNAKE OF CLEARING EYES.

kokonose haruka has known he was going to die for at least six years by the time shintaro, the protagonist, meets him; by the time the story itself

begins in volume one, he is already two years gone.

kagero project, the series he's from, contains the daze: a world which 'devours' pairs of people close to death. to help them survive, its creator began to give some of these people parts of herself and her power, via her snakes. a caveat: the power given has to suit the human. can you guess what harukas most earnest wish might have been?

this is how konoha was born. konoha was not a person, not at first; he had been harukas oc for a video game he played with his classmate and friend, takane. he was harukas idealized self: not only healthy but inhumanly strong and capable of being of use to those he cared for.

konoha is who and what haruka was meant to be, yet haruka, who rejected this body, was stuck within the daze, in an endless white room and his hospital bed, only able to see the outside world in glimpses of konoha's eyes.

he resents konoha. konoha is living a life that was meant to be his—although that, too, is a life haruka was not meant to have. hes always been on borrowed time.

konoha, himself instead possessed by a fragment of the daze's creator's power in the absence of haruka, is barely aware of haruka beyond his understanding that he resembles someone his friends have lost.

the snake of clearing eyes is a parasitic entity constantly recreating a series of events that will lead to him being able to possess a physical vessel, however briefly, before one of the other protagonists—mary—forces time itself to loop back several years in a fit of grief over those she has lost. he's the one who actually created konoha, having secretly been the one to meet haruka instead of the daze's creator.

he finds konoha convenient and ultimately takes him over, having told haruka when he created the body, "i am very glad this was your wish for me [...] if you do not wish for anything, i cannot 'fulfill' anything."

it's only in the act of fulfilling the most ardent wishes of others that he is capable of action, and only then: only when he is doing what others beg of him. so he spends timeloop after timeloop brutally murdering a bunch of teenagers to get the perfect body for himself, even knowing mary will, in her grief, rewind time itself. and then he does it all again. so much work. years and years of effort expended over and over again in loop after loop—just for a taste. is it worth it?

we know after the series ends, haruka is alive. but it begs the question of how he lives. i like to think he took the snake of clearing eyes into his actual flesh and blood body to act as that substitute life. but why do i find that so compelling?

because he sees himself in the snake of clearing eyes.

kokonose haruka is a boy who has always known he was going to die no matter how desperately he wished otherwise. if he resents konoha for living, it stands to reason that he would empathize with the snake of clearing eyes, so desperate for a life of his own, even if the rest of those around them would not think the same. he can give the snake of clearing eyes a lifetime to live. his own lifetime, shared, and maybe that could be enough to satisfy him.

i think the snake of clearing eyes would hate him for this kindness. a shared lifetime that isnt on a timer that leads inevitably to repeating the same several years, again and again: a gift he does not deserve and did not ask for.

its a punishment as much as it is a gift, anyway, given that it isnt truly a life that is the snake of clearing eyes alone.

i think thats funny as hell.

CASE THREE: THE KING OF DESPAIR AND WILLIAM “BLACK” MACBETH.

kekkaï sensen takes place in the city of hellsalems lot (fka new york city) in a world after an apocalyptic event called “the collapse.” now let me

talk about william ‘black’ macbeth.

black spends his whole life repressing his immense power both because his twin sister mary ‘white’ macbeth was born without it and because hes afraid of it. during the collapse, his parents give up their lives to turn his sister into a piece of the barrier that keeps the effects of the collapse from spreading, and he embraces despair both literally and metaphorically.

the king of despair is...well, nobody really knows who or what he is, but where the thief kings motives were rooted in grief and vengeance and the snake of clearing eyes motives laid in a desire to live, the king of despair wants one thing: to die.

towards the end of episode 11, he monologues: “...how fragile a thing eternal life is, a fate of endless wandering; without death in mind one cannot be said to be truly alive. and so, forgotten by death, the despair that i am shall at least take my foolishness to bed with me.” he says this very dramatically on a live broadcast to the entirety of hellsalems lot by the way. right as he kickstarts the collapse 2: electric boogaloo!

it is uncertain who or what the king of despair is, but we know hes been ‘a silent observer’ since ‘rome’. prior to meeting black, he was a shapeless fracture of blue light, having presumably lost his physical body in one of his many previous suicide attempts. guy really just wants to die.

im especially fond of him because despite his behavior, he is actually the sort of guy who cares a whole lot about other people, specifically at the very least, black. during their fight in the season finale, another character says: “as long as you crave the light, you cannot kill him. It is precisely because you desire hope that you sought him out, is it not?” the him, of course, is black.

this enrages despair. despite that, despair does eventually admit—in a breathless, wavering voice—that actually, he had not taken blacks body by force. “you came to rescue him from me, but i didnt take him by force. he welcomed me.” top 10 most haunting lines in all of anime. to me. the tenderness in his expression, in his voice, the raw ache of it: and then, when

the protagonist leo arrives with white, the fear and hope.

black wants to live, despair wants to die, and even if despair didnt want to kill black alongside himself he was willing to do it. he doesnt, of course. its not the right choice. but despair wants to die and black wants to live, so until despair stops trying to kill them both, hes got to leave.

ive talked a whole lot about these ships now. whats their common denominator? I'd have to say the friction in each relationship. theres something so incredibly gripping to me about two (or, um, three if we count the haruka situation?) fundamentally different people (or entities) sharing a body.

the thief king and his millennia of grief and rage, worsened by zorcs proximity. ryou and his passive detachment from himself, his relief at knowing someone will always, always be with him: he is not as alone as he thought.

the snake of clearing eyes and who knows how many centuries or millennia spent desperate for a life of his own, grasping for it no matter what the cost, no matter how repetitive. haruka and a lifetime spent knowing he was living on borrowed time, that he would die young just like his mother—younger even than she had. konoha, caught between them, a vessel of both hope and rejection.

the king of despair and his yearning for death. for that final, eternal sleep. caring despite himself, hesitating in the face of the young man who had welcomed despair into himself. black and a lifetime of repressing himself and fearing everything, but mainly his own power—but not despair. not really.

so i want to ask everyone who read this a question.

do you think its gay to possess someone and be possessed in turn?

hyde

hi everyfujo.

my first yaoi was more an incidental yaoi, and absolutely not life changing. it was also cringe. i really liked len kagamine when i was 12! and the main ships for len (14 yr old) were with his sister or with kaito (26 yr old). the pickings were slim...

but this is a trend - i fixate specifically on one male character and seek out all content where he is involved. later on, when i am a fully realized lesbian, these characters would be called my wives. in the past, they were my boyfriends.

hetalia is the first media i sought out specifically for its active m/m scene.

i was just curious about it... i came to hetalia as kind of a yaoi tourist?!

but it quickly became #TooReal for me... and i boyfriended the southern half of italy. aka aph romano.

i spent a lot of time on the hetalia kink meme. i never put in any requests, but i read through all the romano related entries voraciously. i was like.. 13 or 14 at the time? and i was a dedicated reader of the meme throughout highschool, even through its transition to dreamwidth. i also pirated a ton of spamano doujins. i had them saved to an external hard drive that has been since forever lost. those spamano doujins are in heaven now.

i didn't have a specific romano ship i was a diehard fan for, although i DID read a lot of spamano of course. the first fanfic that ever moved me was a spamano written by someone with a piss kink LOL. but in general, i was a multishipper. as long as romano was there, anything went! i really was there entirely for him.

wow, i jsut went and checked my emails, and i was into hetalia from 2009 to 2012ish. THREE YEARS!

anyway i only recently realized i was autistic. like, 2018 or so. i was 23! and i do consider 2018 to be recent. i'd considered the possibility of Autistic!Xtine at least 3 times before, and i think part of the reason it took

me so long to come to terms with it is, well. one of the defining traits of autism is having a special interest, right? i think i was just too embarrassed to admit that yaoi (and m/m fic, and bl, and danmei, and etc) was my special interest.

i've distilled that interest down to just my general fascination with human relationships. of course i really like reading about romantic relationships--even before i discovered yaoi, i chose my next book to read based on how well i thought the romance plot would be--but i also like interesting friendships. in fic, some of my favorite stories are just conversations between characters who barely interact in the original. and in general, my attachment to a series depends on how much i like the cast and their relationships with each other. even if the plot is shoddy, if i like the characters, it's fine!

i think that yaoi is especially magnetic to me because... it's a no-strings-attached romance i can read. yaoi scholars far more qualified than i have spoken more eloquently on this point but--when both genders of the couple are the same, there's no gender-based power imbalance inherent to the dynamic (UNLESS ITS AN OMEGAVERSE).

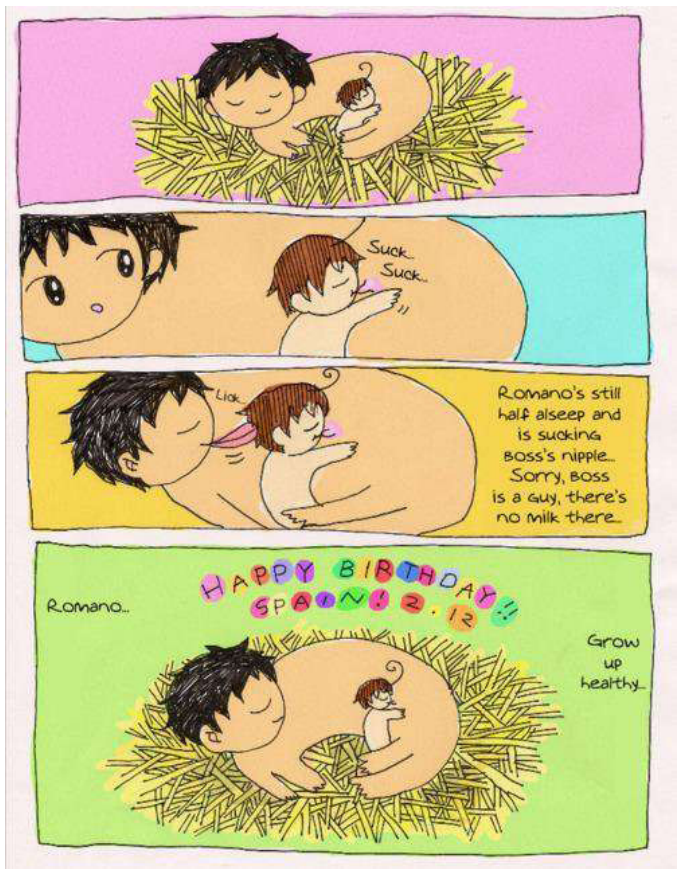
yuri, unfortunately, usually doesn't do it for me. i never related to femme4femme romance, definitely because i am not a femme4femme... yaoi really is the closest i have to masc4masc LOL. even when the men are feminine! i go for personality slightly more than looks, but if i had to put it on a scale, itd be 60 of one and 40 of the other...

so we all know i have a thing for male tsunderes. aph romano was the first in a dynasty of tsuntsun men... liu qingge and edmond (nu carnival) being the most recent installations into my collection.

i like characters who have a huge disconnect between what they are feeling and thinking vs. how they act... characters who find it hard to get along with other people because they can't read them... i like a good gap moe. when someone finally understands that person's true intentions/feelings, in a way, that does a lot more for me than a love confession itself (which can sometimes be one and the same).

basically, i've been sexualizing autism since even before i knew i was autistic and also fictional gay sex has been my special interest for a decade and a half. and it's all thanks to the southern half of italy.

thanks for coming to my ted talk everyfujo!



XTINE

Okay so here's the 12 step guide to how toxic yaoi love between the world's most annoying teenagers can save the world:

1. Picture being an emo teenager with trust issues. You are irritatingly rude and aggressive to everyone you meet. This should be easy.

2. Picture being forced into a survival game that convinces you to overcome these trust issues. This should be hard.

3. Now picture another teenager. A second teenager. This teen is easily the most annoying teen you've ever met. He is arrogant and secretive and constantly lying through his teeth. He hits on you and then giggles like you're the joke. This should be easy.

4. This is the person you have to trust. He is your partner. Trust your partner. This, self evidently, should be hard.

5. This is the person who sacrifices himself to save your life. This part is also hard.

6. Vow to yourself to not let his sacrifice go to waste. This part is easy.

7. Win the survival game. This part is easy.



8. Discover who forced you into the survival game to begin with. This part is hard.

9. Trust the annoying teen, who is a god, who wants to destroy the world. Easy and hard are not the right words for how this part goes. You simply do, despite your better judgment, while crying.

10. Maybe you don't trust him, but you love him too much to kill him. Is there a difference?

11. Let your partner kill you.

12. Accidentally convince a god that the world is still worth keeping, because a person like you can learn to trust a person like him.

I am confident this is an experience any gay 14 year old can relate to.

Daffy
damientiamat

AT SOME POINT IN MY CHILDHOOD, I CAN'T REMEMBER WHEN, I READ THIS MANGA CALLED "AI ORE!" TEXTUALLY IT WAS ABOUT A GIRL WHO LOOKED MASC DATING A GUY WHO WAS MORE FEM. THEY WERE ALSO IN A GIRL BAND, THAT SAID, IF YOU READ IT, IT WAS THIS LIKE LESBIAN SEME DATING A GAY TWINK IN THE MOST BEAUTIFUL ACT OF MLM/WLW SOLIDARITY YET. WELL THAT'S THE PATRICK CALIFIA-EQUE READING. IT COULD ALSO BE ABOUT A CISLESBO & HER TRANSFEM GF.

Genre:

i'm pretty sure i had neither of those readings as a child. actually, i was just monomaniacally making my way through maybe-problematic manga on mangahere dot com in the definitely problematically named gender bender category. ai ore itself was incidental to what i actually wanted, which was to be something else. but that came a decade later. i really liked gender play, and i found a lot of it in shojo and i found a lot of it in ecchi. sorry. i didn't know yaoi existed as a kid; i'm not really sure how. i read black butler, sure, but to me it was just detective conan as styled by vivienne westwood (rest in peace).

YAOI GENETICS 101!! With MEEEE
AI MUCH 2 THINK ABOUT **ORE!**



* I don't own a tie. but my shirt is joyk.

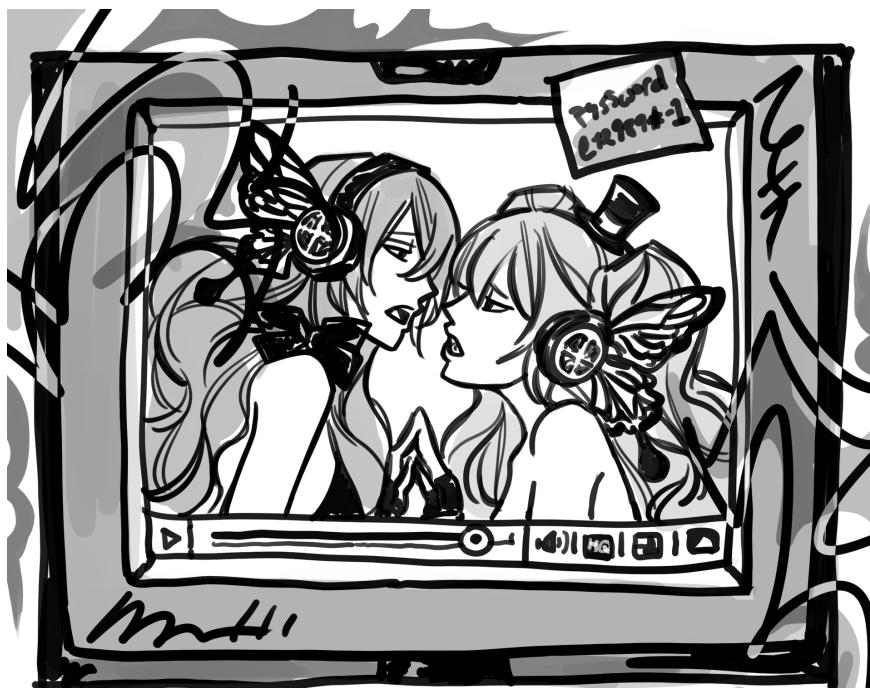
I'VE BEEN BOTH
 #VERS

Anyway:

it's just yaoi but with a het couple, but not in the normal way you'd expect. they're my parents.

SIDE NOTE: ai ore! is the SEQUEL to ai wo utau yori ore ni oborero, which is how the two get together. this is because of like. contractual reasons. it's the same story. but i didn't realize this as a child. i just thought it was (ao3 voice) established relationship, how refreshing, etc

JshuA



ok so when i was younger i never questioned my sexuality. i didnt know the words for straight gay or bi bc i was like fucking idk. 7. i just knew ever since i could conceptualize attraction that i liked boys and girls the same way i liked different kinds of candy. you want to put them in your mouth. i never thought it was abnormal either. i skipped that whole questioning and shame phase. yayyy woohoo good for me i guess.

but uh. the thing is. i didnt realize other gay people existed lmao. and i was fine with that ? like i literally didnt care in my mind i was the only person in existence who liked boys and girls. apparently i was the most special little guy ever bc i also thought the rest of the world, was girl+boy. i mean i knew enough to know that was the norm.

and for some reason i couldnt process it either when someone else finally explained it to me. what being "gay" was. like i literally just couldnt understand the concept applied to other human beings. maybe that was bc i didnt develop empathy yet and didnt think other people were real but whatever.

anyway, gay people weren't real to me and everytime i encountered the concept i just didnt bother and forgot about

it. until i was able to go on youtube and started to discover vocaloid. uh. magnet ft. luka & miku was probably the first song i ever listened to about gay love. the first thing i noticed about the video was wow that art is so pretty. i want to draw like that. the second thing was probably i have no idea what this song is about. so i read the translation and ...

it was the first time i had read about love that was described so passionately, and that had actually affected me. cause the thing is not only did other gay people not exist in my mind but the concept of love was virtually nonexistent as well.

attraction - and the act of sex, i understood. love? love was ... nothing positive really. love to me at that age was violence i could not understand. and like with most things i didn't understand i decided it just simply did not exist lmao.

i think the reason this song affected me so much is bc i also didn't realize sex was something you could actually want with another person instead of fearing it. the combination of 2 girls being attracted to each other, WANTING to touch each other intimately, while being in love, blew my mind right open. 3 things that i could previously not conceptualize, all of the sudden ... it felt like the world had expanded tenfold. 2 robot anime girls made me realize gay people exist and

helped me begin to conceptualize love and sex positively. it was just extremely compelling to me ... like holy shit other gay people exist ???? like for real ??? wait love is a thing too??? like actually ????? it was crazy to me. you can imagine my tiny brain being chemicalized beyond recognition.

im pretty sure this song is also what made me start searching "girls kissing" on youtube and tilting the monitor towards the wall too lmao.

thats why in my mind miku luka magnet is my first yaoi bc well its kinda embarrassing to admit vocaloid made me realize gay people and love exist lmao and WHAT is yaoi if not cringe and gay. and also gay sex. and anime.

also luka and miku cotton candy hair i want to put them in my mouth. i DID want to print out the art and eat it yea

táo

Basically, I knew something was wrong with me the first time I saw the pool scene in Sherlock – the one where there’s a bomb strapped to John’s body and Sherlock’s steely face turns into soft confusion for just a second. I can’t even tell you how much fanfiction I read widening that single-minute moment alone – stories that investigated the aftermath, stories that invented a gay stream of consciousness, stories which dipped between John and Sherlock’s perspectives. I know Johnlock is probably the most cringe yaoi awakening, but, being in seventh grade and having that be the first quasi-romantic affection I’d ever seen between two men – well, what can I say?

My fate was set.

Even now, it fills me with an almost childlike joy to remember. I recall reading somewhere that our favorite ships are one where we identify with one character, and the other character is our romantic interest. At the time I felt like I really identified with John. Sherlock was constantly saving him, a sweet, simple man, and I was, of course, in love with the classic, emotionally unavailable super intelligent guy – wasn’t I?

Honestly, I think when you’re trans, but haven’t yet realized, you can have a warped idea of both who you are and who you’re attracted to. I identified as – and I’m sorry – sapiosexual. Maybe even sapioromantic asexual. I thought I was a girl. I thought John was sort of like a girl, which was why he and Sherlock made me feel butterflies, or something. Some crazy logic like that. If I go back into that minefield I immediately find myself hurtling into jagged rock, lmao.

Now, as a more fully realized trans guy looking back on this, I can understand my love for the ship with a little more clarity. I actually find I don’t identify much with John, which was an identity I tied up with girlhood. I find myself relating to Sherlock’s faux sense-of-genius, embarrassing ego, and deep emotional instability. I find myself identifying with the desperately unsaid nature of his affection, the immaturity of it, and I understand my love for the masculinity, bravery, and maturity John represents. I feel like my first inexplicable love for this yaoi was a shattered-glass glimpse into my future: I love this, but I don’t yet know why. That meant I had

something to look forward to. Maybe i still do. ;)



Ki

Before I speak, I need to prime you with the knowledge that you understand me. Even if you think you don't, you actually do. So.

In seminal AO3 fandombait television program *Teen Wolf* (2011), the main point of fascination is Stiles Stilinski; a doe-eyed ADHD obsessive who chases his every thought with a frenetic intensity that often steals the scene he's in.

Stiles being a fascinating little creature means that people want to ship him. I'd say he has three main people to do that with, and the big ship on campus was none of them. It was practically mandatory to ship him with Derek, the dark, brooding werewolf anti-hero.

I don't think the suffocating pervasiveness of this ship is really that deep. Derek is a sexy paranormal tall dark and handsome boytoy. I've never seen the *Vampire Diaries* but I'm sure he wouldn't be out of place in the cast. And hey, everybody is already obsessed with Stiles. I don't think people actually care about the text of the show, just the pretty men they're fixated on. The shit they made in their heads is so obviously just a gay version of every romance ever at the time.

But there is a secret recipe at play. Because in 2011, alongside *Teen Wolf*, a film was released. It was called *Thor*. You know, from the MCU? In *Thor*, the titular character's treacherous baby brother (adopted) imprisons Thor on earth to steal his position. On Earth, Thor meets the love of his life, her father, and a zany bit character added for comedic relief.

Now I love Loki an abnormal amount for someone who cares as little about the MCU as I do. I love pathetic men and pathetic villains. As an avid fanfiction reader, I spent a lot of time trawling AO3 for Loki content, realizing they don't think he's pathetic, and clicking away. And over the years, I began seeing a weird pattern. Loki/Darcy. The comic relief girl. Her quirky antics were somehow enough to warrant a ship in a fandom that only blows up mandatory *Two White Guys* couples. And Loki is clearly NOT a brooding paranormal romance boy, but the ship had that Sterek stink on it anyway. A lot of it.

It seemed so mysterious, yet I remember, now, that Sterek wasn't just popular with paranormal romance swooners, but people who just like funny ships. A zany idiot tormenting that brooding villain. A genderless mass appeal. An Entrapta and Hordak. The raw impulse for Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint readers to pair Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyeok before they started developing any chemistry at all, simply by nature of the kinds of characters they are.

Okay. Listen man. I need to talk to you about Ice Age.

If you're unfamiliar, Ice Age is about a cynical mammoth named Manfred taking a great southern migration as a chance to be alone. When he rescues criminally annoying sloth Sid, he's forced to share his newfound alone time with him. He is not happy. Meanwhile, a pack of sabertooth tigers is on a vengeance quest against the humans who hunt them by eating their tribe leader's baby. One of them, Diego, accidentally lets the human mother jump off a waterfall to escape, delivering the baby downriver to Manny and Sid. Diego presents himself as a tracker who can hunt the humans down, and the three of them decide to travel together to bring the baby back to the humans, one way or another.

I will be clear; the homoeroticism exists, and it exists between Manny and Sid. The chemistry exists, and it exists between Manny and Diego. Manny is the heart of the film. And I don't care. Baby's First Yaoi, the thing that really boiled my brain, was Diego's extremely intimate threats to Sid's life and Sid baiting him like a barking dog. I'm sorry.

The film never really stops insisting that Sid is genuinely annoying — it starts with his entire family leaving him behind and ends with him being kind of a fuckup too — but he's key to the synergy regardless. There's no great moment that announces 'well maybe they weren't seeing Sid's true value!' because he doesn't have any. He's a lazy, annoying, unempathetic, impulsive, smug little womanizer. He never learns. The film proposes that well, he doesn't really have to— Manny is a deeply isolated person (mammoth?) who drives people away, and he needs someone who's annoying and can't understand boundaries to teach him to open up again. No matter how much he swats Sid back, Sid is confident in their friendship. Just

like how no matter how many times Sid's family abandoned him, he still went looking for them. They are lonely people, and Sid being an obnoxious little pissant forces them together.

On the other hand, I can't imagine a film with just Manny and Diego. They get along well and have a great rapport, with Diego's bad boy fun uncle attitude and Manny's asshole with a heart of gold routine. But the thing is that they are two dudes who mind their own business. They are only casually uniting, and Diego is only doing it so his pack of evil saber-tooths can eat the baby. The warmth of friendship doesn't exist, and it has to bleed from Sid terrorizing them. They need their idiot to unite against. And since they don't actually dislike Sid, it can only become camaraderie.

Diego is aware Manny is a smart guy and will take any threat extremely seriously, but he acts like himself from the beginning with Sid. After a while, it becomes clear Manny doesn't care if he threatens Sid — because Sid is annoying, and he himself has threatened Sid plenty of times — but he also doesn't intend to leave Sid alone where he can get hurt. Diego is 100% serious, but after a certain point he finds his own threats also becoming empty teasing. By the end of the movie, he's openly endeared and friendly. He gives death threats like he gives a noogie.

There is something so unreal, to be honest, about forcing a born killer to hold you in his teeth after he repeatedly threatened to kill you, and him holding you there against your will because he thinks it is so funny.

Diego's heel-face turn is obviously inspired by Manny, but over the course of the film, it's clear that he, too, was lonely, and he, too, benefits from an extremely annoying person filling his loner life. His pack is dog-eat-dog, ready to abandon him if he doesn't do his job, but Manny is willing to die for him, and — this is key to my childhood brain — Sid trusts him unconditionally despite doing nothing to earn it. Sid would follow Diego all year if he suddenly abandoned him for migration. He is just that kind of person.

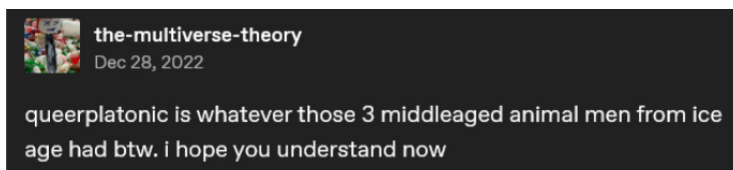
That's the secret recipe. What made Sterek mandatory even for people who have no interest in paranormal romance hunks. Why Darcy was

thrown at Loki. This underlying vein of True Yaoi, of a dynamic based less on actual relationship and more on the core of the kind of people they are, and the kind of synthesis that is possible between those two ingredients. The zany idiot and the villain have this chemical reaction you could see from space. TO ME!

You need a zany person to do a whole lot of impulsive shit, and you need that zany person to be stupid enough to not notice they're unwanted, or in danger, or that their dynamic is shifting, or the subtext of anyone's behaviour. You need the person tormented to be a genuine threat, and they need to not melt, but be worn down. The simple pleasures of having your day-to-day life filled with life and noise, your every interaction with the world commented on, to the point you allow yourself to be defanged.

Sid does this to Manny, sure but it didn't click even with the gay jokes because Manny is a kind, caring Dad Friend kind of guy who would fold for anyone. Diego is a fucking baby-eating tiger. But he trusts Manny, and Manny is endeared and receptive to Sid's constant noise because he is lonely, and because of that, Diego, who is also lonely, allows himself to be endeared too. He had Sid's throat in his mouth, and all he thought was that it was a funny thing to do.

My friend Hyde tagged me in this post:



Crossy



Entremet

The siren sounds
oscillate outside. Dinner is served,
yes, we can see that.
The table is set for three
but you and I stand, digesting silence
as the soup congeals.
I know you
would rather starve to death than endure
this humiliation of being
seen,
and then unwanted.
But there's a place for you here,
Come. I'm telling you
I won't leave you behind.
Let me lift this cup of me
to your trembling lips; let me
bridge
this heavy space between us.
The carpet crushes the sound of movement,
my footfalls muted on their way to you.
We are both wondering if
this is a hunt or if it's a courtship,
my hand over your hand
holding the gun.
Point it at me
if you need to.
I won't run, I know
you know, your mouth so dry;
all you have to do is ask.
But fine. Shatter all the china anyway –
you were never one for elegance.
Still, make sure you don't step on the shards
I say and you ignore. Of course.
They're almost at the door now;
listen to the frost crunch underfoot.

Won't you try the poached pear before
you leave?

Wawa

THE SISTERS
BROTHERS
IS A POORLY
MARKETED, POORLY
TITLED WESTERN
FILM DIR. BY
JACQUES
AUDIARD. IN 2018

THE PREMISE IS 2 BROTHERS
WHO ARE BOUNTY HUNTERS
ARE TRAVELLING ACROSS
OREGON + CALIFORNIA IN
1851 TO HUNT
DOWN + KILL -
I MEAN TORTURE
- I MEAN
KISS
TENDERLY
RIZ
AHMED.



CAN YOU
BELIEVE
JAKE
GYLLENHAAL
HAS PLAYED
TWO
GAY
COWBOYS?



THIS IS A REAL
SCENE OF THEM
HOLDING PROLONGUED
EYE CONTACT ACROSS
A WARM FIRE.

THIS MOVIE DEPICTS TOXIC
MASCULINITY IN VERY FORWARD
+ HUMANIZING TERMS. IT HAS STUCK
WITH ME FOR THE PAST FOUR YEARS
AS A SINGULAR THING. DO YOU EVER
MEET A VERY HANDSOME MAN, WHO
KNOWS YOU SEEK HIM HARM?
BUT WHO SHOWS YOU INHERENT
KINDNESS + OFFERS YOU LOVE + CARE? !?!

COULD YOU,
THROUGH THE
TENDER MALE
AFFECTION,
CHANGE + HEAL
YOUR LIFE LONG
WOUNDS? COULD
JAKE GYLLENHAAL
GIVE HIS ENTIRE
LIFE SAVINGS
TO A MAN
HE'D ONLY
KNOWN FOR A
COUPLE OF WEEKS??

RIZ AHMED COULD
DO THIS TO YOU TOO,
IF YOU VIEWED
The Sisters Brothers

[HSL] 2023
CLN

THE YAOI THAT BROKE MY BRAIN BY MAX, AGE 31.TXT

on april 17, 2019, yaoi broke my brain.

no, i did not have to go and look up that date. let me sing you the song of my people.

the magicians, a tv adaptation of a book series i've never read, started airing in 2015. i watched it with a friend over a feverish weekend in seattle in 2018, shortly after season 3 ended. watching the magicians is an insane experience that i still don't know how to describe. it has bonkers tone shifts the likes of which i've never encountered elsewhere. in season 1, scenes of people being tortured coincide with a visual gag where two books fuck like animals and our resident gay character says happily, "love wins." it will commit to any bit with its entire pussy out, and has never seen an uncomfortable implication it didn't want to dive into face-first. every season has a musical episode. it should, by all rights, be really bad. somehow, for not quite 4 seasons, it was good.

the yaoi origin story is in season 3 episode five when two of our heroes, quentin (the suicidally depressed bisexual autistic) and eliot (the suicidally depressed gay addict), get stuck in a pocket dimension. in order to find a key, go home, and advance their quest, they need to create a mosaic that depicts "the beauty of all life" using tiles in the sand. they spend fifty years there, trying over and over to rearrange the tiles to create the beauty of all life. their relationship turns from friendship to romance: they kiss, they fight like a married couple, they grow and sell peaches together. quentin marries a local village woman and has a kid, but we also see eliot raising the kid as if he were eliot's own. they're clearly husbands. when quentin's wife dies, eliot holds him. when eliot dies, finally, of old age, quentin mourns him, buries him... and finds a missing tile in the dirt. when he sets it in the middle of their mosaic, it unlocks the key. "the beauty of all life" was them spending their lives there together.

due to magical horseshit, quentin is able to send the key back in time to their buddy margo, who uses it to prevent them from entering the pocket dimension in the first place. the versions of them that lived there

stop existing... but at the end of the episode, the act of eating some fresh peaches triggers their memories of that world. their main-universe selves, miserable 20-somethings in magical grad school, abruptly remember the fifty years they spent together in another world:

ELIOT: I got... so old.

QUENTIN: You died.

ELIOT: I died. You had a wife. And we had a family.

QUENTIN: How... how do we remember that?

ELIOT: (laughing helplessly) I don't know.

this isn't picked up again for the rest of season 3, leaving both me and the entire fandom to become increasingly feral about queliot. they'd been *a* ship prior to that episode, mostly due to being the only two white guys in the main cast, but after that they were *the* ship as far as most of the fandom was concerned. season 3 ends with all of our guys having their memories erased, except for eliot... who is possessed by a monster obsessed with tracking quentin down.

then season 4 begins in early 2019. quentin visibly dissociates more and more due to the effort of appeasing the monster who lives in eliot's body, and who is obsessed with him in a very eliot kind of way. it's horrible and upsetting and delicious. in season 4 episode 5 we find out a crucial detail that was missed when queliot first remembered their lives in the pocket dimension.

in that episode, s04e05, we see eliot trapped in his own brain while the monster controls his body. he spelunks through his own worst memories looking for a way to communicate with his friends on the other side. eventually he lands on his memory of that fateful scene in s03e05, which we now learn cut away before this exchange:

QUENTIN: I know this sounds dumb, but... us. I mean, think about it. Like, we-- we work. We know it because we've lived it. Who gets that kind of proof of concept?

ELIOT: We were just injected with a half-century of emotion so I get that maybe you're not thinking clearly.

QUENTIN: No, I'm just saying, what if we... gave it a shot? (pause) I mean, would that be crazy? Why the fuck not?

ELIOT: I know you and you... aren't...

QUENTIN: What's that matter?

ELIOT: Don't be naive, it matters. Q, come on. I love you, but you have to know that that's not me and that's definitely not you, not when... not when we have a choice.

QUENTIN: Okay, I... Okay. Sorry.

WHAT??????

future eliot, the one who's stuck in his own brain, has been standing by, wincing, as he watches his past self accuse his husband of heterosexuality. here he jumps in to berate past eliot - "Yeah, it was a little crazy, but you knew. You knew this was a moment that truly mattered, and you just snuffed it out." - before kissing his memory of quentin, sayig something stupidly romantic, and barging through a door. he takes control over his body again just in time to stop real-world quentin - who has, after five episodes, finally let himself be convinced that the eliot he knew is dead - from killing him completely. and he accomplished this by referencing the moment when the taste of peaches reminded them of their lives together:

ELIOT, WHO HAS ESCAPED HIS MIND PALACE: Q! (laughing)

Q. It's me. It's Eliot.

QUENTIN: (rolling his eyes) Okay. No games, come on.

ELIOT: It's Eliot.

QUENTIN: No, bullshit, come on.

ELIOT: Fifty years. Who gets proof of concept like that?

QUENTIN: What?

ELIOT: (laughing tearfully) Peaches and plums, motherfucker. I'm alive in here.

quentin realizes eliot actually is alive in there, the monster takes back over eliot's body, and eliot returns to his mind palace to wait anxiously for rescue.

WHAT????????????????

so. obviously, i unhinged. at this point, this is some god-tier yaoi, and the magicians has a three season track record of drawing threads like these through the seasons and paying them off. quentin is now in a position of having to play nice with a monster who looks like his once and future husband, and the monster is getting... um, increasingly handsy. as the season progresses, more and more scenes occur where the monster not-quite-consciously mirrors queliot moments from the past, including one where he wraps his hands around quentin's throat in a fucked up echo of queliot's first kiss. quentin has to put up with it so that the monster won't kill them all while they try to find a way to save eliot. (i've never seen an actor more convincingly play "dissociated mess" than jason ralph as quentin in s4 of the magicians, ngl.)

basically, between the resonance of the pocket universe in eliot breaking through and the heavy queliot focus of the horror, everything is adding up to a future queliot endgame sitch. quentin will have to suffer, probably a lot, maybe even temporarily die (which happens a lot in the magicians) so that eliot can suffer equally, and then the show will pay it off. i was sure. we were all sure!

and um. at this point i should mention that one of the showrunners for the magicians was sera gamble? the woman who, as i would belatedly learn, countless supernatural fans would gladly fistfight on sight because of what she did to THEIR yaoi when she was THEIR showrunner?

yeah so the season 4 finale airs on april 17, 2019, and quentin dies. worse, he kills himself, after four seasons of serving as the show's avatar for why struggling against depression and staying alive is worth it. the other characters have a hilariously offensive send-off for him with a sing-along in front of a fire, while the ghost of quentin looks on and asks his undead former frenemy penny if his (quentin's) self-sacrifice counted as suicide. penny is like "lol idk probably" and quentin is like ok bye forever.

i watched this and thought, well that was badly written but i'm sure he'll be the big bad in the next season and that'll be juicy, and then after that it's queliot time. then i looked at my phone and found out that jason ralph, quentin's actor, had left the show forever. he was under a gag order

not to say anything about it until after the finale had aired, but he was gone; quentin was dead and his suicide actually was final.

WHAT.

everyone was vague about why jason was leaving, but it quickly became apparent that not even the other actors knew he would be leaving until the day the finale aired. they had actually filmed a scene, which never made it into the show, where we saw that quentin wasn't dead-dead and that he would be back. this is objectively wild, but even more wild was what light social media sleuthing turned up: hale appleman, the rl queer dude who played eliot (and who had frequently called jason ralph his work husband at conventions), tweeted something along the lines of "hmm. :/" a few hours before the finale aired and unfollowed jason ralph on all social media sites. (but kept following jason's wife, the much more famous actor rachel brosnahan, which is still so funny to me.) summer bishil, margo's actor and hale appleman's rl bff, unfollowed jason too, as did a few other cast members. arjun gupta, noted sweetheart who played penny, apologized to fans and said he didn't know it would happen like that. jason ralph didn't say a word publicly beyond the couple of interviews where he announced his departure, but did DM some particularly upset fans on twitter to offer condolences???

this, my friends, is where i went properly insane. in hindsight it was the combination of my own brain shit getting exacerbated at a really terrible time (i had just that very day started a leave of absence from work due to being too insane to function), the apparent mystery of what the fuck had gone on on set, and - of course - Yaoi, Interrupted. but at the time it just felt like a reasonable response to the Betrayal, which obviously was on a scale that had NEVER been seen before. justice for quentin coldwater! unbury your gays!

for like six months this was all i could think about. what the fuck happened? why did they set up my yaoi like that just to destroy it? how was it that a show that had been SO GOOD could then, in the space of one episode, become SO BAD? i tweeted self-righteously about how the magicians' writers had behaved immorally, citing stats about copycat suicides

and obscure dreamwidth essays on the writer's implied contract with the reader. i abandoned every single fic i'd started writing before then, but spent the next two months sitting in the local starbucks with my neighbourhood's most crochety old queens and furiously writing more fanfiction than i have ever published for any single other fandom. queliot did NOT belong to the showrunners, those of us left in the ao3 tag told each other. queliot belonged to us, and WE would do right by them.

i know cringe culture is dead, but reader: i cringe.

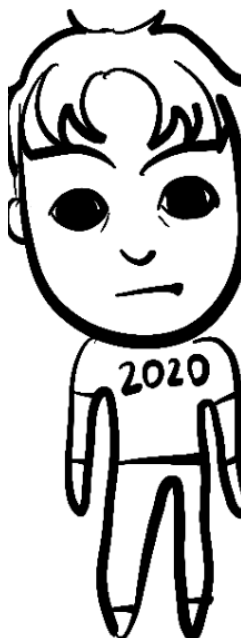
i didn't so much get over the magicians as burn out on being angry about it all day every day; clarity about how disproportionate some of my, and definitely some of other people's, reactions were didn't come until later. to this day, though, i get nervous about getting too invested in a currently-airing show, or putting too much faith into writers to know what they're doing. i still compare new things i watch to the magicians, sometimes unfavourably: when the magicians was good, it was fucking good! i haven't been able to bring myself to watch season 5 yet, but i still get emotional about all my little guys on rewatch. it's been almost four years and queliot is still the only yaoi that has successfully broken my entire brain. i have to give it that.

and if any supernatural fans are reading this: comrade, if you ever do see sera gamble in the street, call me. i'll join your fistfight.



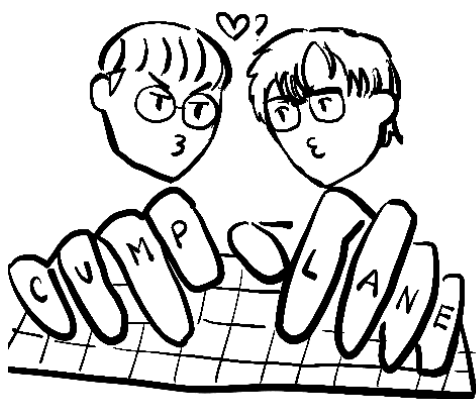
Him Tortons


in the year 2020 i was very sad. this should not surprise anyone. many people were very sad that year, and in fact continue to be sad through the present day. but i was very sad then and i decided to start writing fanfiction because i had some jokes in my head. the first one i wrote was for a ship that we now call cumplane, but at the time we called cucumberplane.



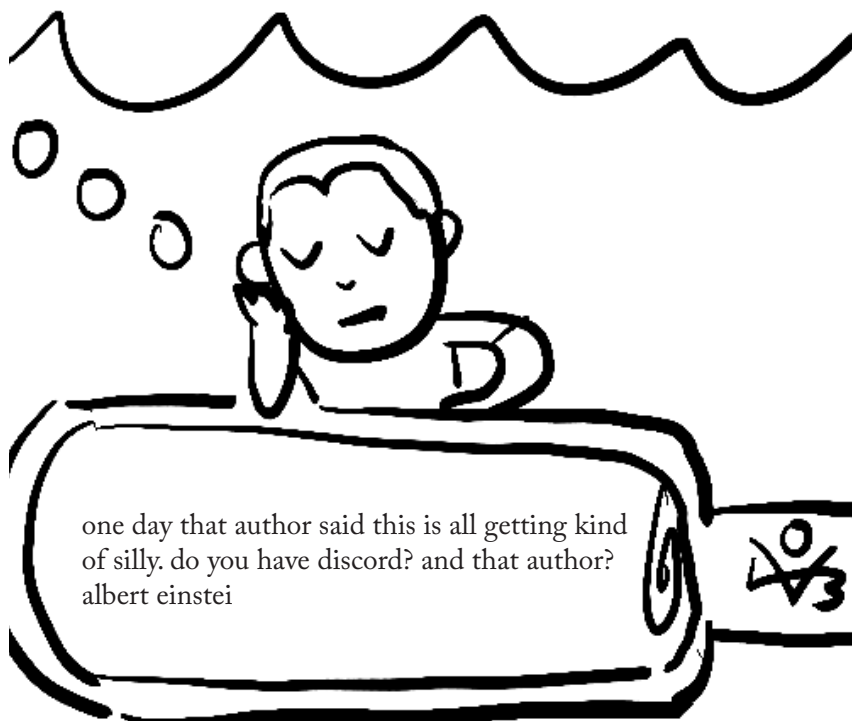
it went okay. some people were very nice to me, including someone named jim, whom i later became friends with. that's getting ahead of myself though. i wrote another one that was rarepair f/f that no one really read, and then i wrote another one that was a ghost story bingqiu that a lot of people read, including, much later, someone named kitschlet, whom i later became friends with. then i wrote some weird lesbian porn that somehow even less people read than even the first f/f. i wrote even more. i did an exchange, which was run by someone named verity, whom i later became friends with.

you may be getting the idea. i didn't talk to any of these people though, at the time. the idea of the reader was very abstract to me.





it keeps on going like this for a while, until later in the summer when i was feeling the worst i had ever felt. i read a lot of fanfiction to deal with it. some of it was long and boring, like the naruto rewrites my friend leon linked me. and some of it was cucumberplane (it was still called that then). and some of that cucumberplane was very funny. i think i was lonely too, so i was commenting on it. i told the author my favorite jokes. i offered speculation and meta. i even drew a little ms paint drawing. i wrote each comment like a little fic unto itself, very carefully designed to please someone else.



no, it was insy. we talked a lot at first. we messaged each other all day. i sat in my zoom classes with the window minimized and totally ignored and i talked to a stranger for hours and hours on end. my roommate was out of town for a month, so for a while my world shrunk down to me, my apartment, occasional visits from friends, and insy in my phone, insy in my computer.



don't worry, i eventually paid attention in class again, and saw more people irl and became a little less sad. but insy introduced me to more people, like allula, whom

i became friends with. i created a twitter, which is where i met a lot of you in this zine (some of you i met the normal way and others i met through friends). and now insy and i have spent weeks irl together. anyway, my point is that even when i didn't realize it, i was never really alone. i was surrounded by people whom i just hadn't become friends with yet, and i was always (knowingly or not) reaching out towards them.

AND
THAT'S
YAOI,
BABY!

Jshua

My Two Cents on Phill and Myeol

Work by voski (@wayshuh/mercurut)

to my fellow yaoiheads, i would like to preface this short essay by stating my credibility... my yaoi credentials if you will. close friends know that i'm unfortunately quite well-versed in the accursed realm of yaoi. since 2020, i have been regularly reading pages upon pages of the raunchiest, most fujoshi brand works. counting from july 2022, i have read over 407 comics, which is a rate of 67 comics per month. SO. as a self-proclaimed expert, i should know what constitutes the best yaoi. and yet of all the yaoi in the yaoi world, the one i consider life-changing is barely sexual, barely romantic, and not at all japanese. Dearest yaoiheads, i lift the curtains to Phill and Myeolmang, the main characters of Immortal Days.

immortal days is an ongoing korean webcomic by author and artist Heo Gin Gae in which the entire world has become immortal through cutting-edge technology and (un)natural selection (aka anyone who's mortal died out). all you need to know is that, because myeolmang and phill are basically the ONLY mortals (emphasis on only), they find solace in each other. The problem is theyre COMPLETELY incompatible in every sense of the word. And so in their begrudging codependence is where i find my solace.

the typical and also lazy analyst in the immortal days fandom will call upon the "two sides of the same coin" description to discuss narrative foils. I, however, am not a lazy analyst. im gonna keep it #complex. Instead, phill and myeolmang (myeol) to ME are the same coin but two different currencies. Two coins of equal societal value (like a dime vs a 10 cent euro) are not truly equivalent; a 10 cent euro cannot be used in america, and a dime cannot be used in the EU. In the same way, myeol and phill were handed down the exact same fate: both are mortal. but in all other manners of life, the two could not be more different.

when phill and myeol question each other's morals, its evident that their views exist on two opposite ends of a spectrum. phill is a risk-taker. he lives off the high of dying, while myeol does everything in his power to avoid it. its a surprise to see that myeol hasn't outwardly expressed his

bitterness for phill's actions in response to his privilege. what i mean is, phill is a rich white academically gifted dude. he can afford to sit in his office and do fuck all. but myeol? He survives. He claws his way through life, and only puts himself in dangerous situations because that's all he can afford to do. myeol regularly mentions in text that his job (which is basically an illegal PI assistant) is one he accepted out of necessity. much more importantly, he was coerced into taking on this position by phill. so, basically, myeol's 10 cents for life is "because i fear death, i fear the world, and i survive," while phill's is "because i fear death, i hate the world, and i take it out on the ppl around me."

phill's attitude isn't subtext by the way. from the beginning, the audience is made aware of just how shitty a person phill is. In chapter 8, when phill knocks out a pair of guards by piercing their brains, myeol expresses his discomfort because of their highly improbable but potential mortality. phill, however, pushes back and confronts myeol with "don't talk like you're some kinda textbook on morality. Makes me sick." Throughout the webcomic, phill consistently maintains his position that he and myeol are two lone humans in a monster-ridden world. They're two survivors stuck in a zombie apocalypse. And yet myeol, despite being entirely afraid of the world around him, still firmly disagrees and is sympathetic to his fellow humans. the person who arguably faces more threats due to his race and economic status still shows more grace towards the world than the guy who has it all but one thing.

SO. to regurgitate my point. the coin analogy is meant to outline how Phill and Myeol have the same foundation— due to their genetics, both are mortal. But all of their outward traits, what truly makes them their individual selves vary so greatly that they can't be considered to exist within the same realm. they're narrative foils, but they're also so much more than that because their respective actions don't rigidly correspond to their values. despite everything, phill isn't wholly bad and myeol isn't wholly good. Myeol is just as capable of doing fucked up shit (like maiming a guy) if it aligns with his goals. phill, while not motivated by extrinsic values, fights for the ultimate good (taking down terrorists and the like).

as an aside, I also want to mention another aspect of the coin analogy which is the concept of currency exchange. in currency exchange, a euro and a dime have the same value, but due to conversion rates, their holistic value depletes. and so, just like in currency exchange, if the two were to try to bridge their differences, it would result in an absolute merciless nuking of an important part of themselves. this is more hypothetical and observational of the fandom rather than the work itself bc like. if Heo Hin Gae had been inconsistent in their characterization in any way i would not be writing this essay. lol. SO! In the #fandom, ppl LOOOVE to woobie phill and make him out to be a better guy than he is. it's unfortunately pretty common for ppl to imagine that Phill is actually controlled by his deepest darkest desires as if they're intrusive thoughts or smthing but . No he's actually a shitty person, those are his actual thoughts, and he manipulates, gaslights, and does just a lot of ridiculously bad shit just because doing anything otherwise would greatly inconvenience him. removing this aspect of his character not only does a disservice to heo gin gae as an author, but to literally every character that has ever expressed their anger at phill. and so, i sincerely believe that "normal-pilling" phill removes his value as a character just as the value of a money is depleted in a currency exchange. Also, this kind of brutal mis-characterization does happen with myeol, but it's much more occasional and on a smaller scale. it's also more related to the fact that he's a brown asian 🙄🙄🙄🙄.

OKAY. Back to my main point. Phill and myeol as a pair are so crazy to me bc like. bc of their differences, the two can't possibly be put in the same coin pouch. and yet, just bc of the one trait that they do have in common, they still feel obligation towards each other bc "birds of a feather stick together." everything abt them screams "we would never have met if our circumstances were different." WHICH THEY ADMIT TO THEMSELVES!!! theyre so deeply incompatible in a way that a romantic relationship, in canon or fanon, just would not make any sense. but the tension (sexual, romantic, WHATEVER) is PALPABLE. it is THERE. Heo gin gae managed to create a story that has a serious discussion about morality and balanced it out with the occasional yaoibait/implications of situationship on the DL. both the story and the author work together to create a push-and-pull for the audience while also signaling "its never

gonna happen.” so i guess, the reason why phill and myeol are my ideal yaoi is because theyre not.



VOSKI
WAYSHUH

PUPPYSHIPPINGOLOGY 2002 TO NOW: A RETROSPECTIVE

puppyshipping (seto kaiba x joey wheeler, or katsuya jounouchi in the original japanese version; yugioh) is one of those kaleidoscopes where you never really know what you're looking at, only that you can't put it down because it's doing severe cocomelon shit to your brain right now.

like, puppyshipping isn't anything groundbreaking. it's the main character's rival x the main character's best friend. yeah, they bicker with each other over attacking/defending the main character's honor, but, like, duh. of course they do. and in a franchise filled with guys possessing each other via magical objects, sharing mindscapes, breaking space and time and destiny to be with each other (or beat the shit out of each other. you know how love/hate is), a relationship built on their tangential connection to a middleman is just not good enough. puppyshipping is literally just two guys, no magic connections between them.

and yet. and yet!!! **seto kaiba x joey wheeler is the second most popular ship in all of yu-gi-oh.** (puzzleshipping is first. naturally.)

the truth is that puppyshipping doesn't need all the magic shit because the appeal is that it's lying to you. kaiba and joey piss each other off because, for yugi, that's the role they're set up to play. seto kaiba is the angsty hater who picks fights with yugi, and joey wheeler is the comic relief best friend who cheers yugi on and disses yugi's opponents. they know this.

so whenever their bickering gets weirdly personal and for a split second, we get a glimpse of a dynamic between them that has nothing to do with yugi, they get to fall back on the excuse that it's really not that deep. it's a song and dance, a hard reset every single time: they're just two guys committed to their predetermined roles.

the yaoi potential is obvious: you can fill those spaces of ambiguity with whatever the fuck you want!!! ergo, puppyshippingology is the art of digging into what the hell it is, a quest to quantify what goes unsaid.

this essay is not me defining what puppyshipping actually is (because i've already done that. twice: puppyshipping defense essay (2016) and Here's How Puppyshipping Can Still Win: The Sequel: 2 PUPPY 2 SHIPPING (2022)) but a personal recollection of what growing up with puppyshipping was like and how its evolved. because what happened to fans with puppyshipping is the same thing that happens when you give anybody 20 years to analyze a single text: they get really, really complicated with it.

1. PUPPYSHIPPING (2002-2011):

if there's anything puppyshipping fics written in 2004 will never let you forget, it's that jounouchi's dad is a shithead. he's a deadbeat alcoholic with a violent streak and a gambling addiction who pushes all his debts onto jounouchi when they already live in poverty, their financial situation so abysmal that jounouchi has been doing manual labor to pay the rent and groceries since junior high. plus, jounouchi's parents divorced when he was ten and his mother took jounouchi's younger sister with her, so it really is just him and his old man.

all this information is canon btw, with the key distinction that yugioh doesn't like dwelling on this for very long (obviously! it's sad!). jounouchi's father is only in one panel of the manga and we don't even see anything except his boots, and physical abuse is only implied once. jounouchi's financial problems are only mentioned in offhand lines and the few story arcs where he's trying to win money or some nice treat for himself. still, joey wheeler fans noticed this and went guys! we need to save him!!!

cut to seto kaiba. kaiba killed his own stepfather before the story even began—correction, kaiba owned him so hard (hostile company takeover) that he drove his stepfather to suicide. the patron saint of father haters everywhere.

puppyshipping fans looked at him and collectively nodded to ourselves. this is the man who will rescue joey wheeler.

you don't even need to ask. yes, there are fics of seto kaiba killing joey

wheeler's dad and kaiba dragging joey back to his mansion so he doesn't have to live in poverty anymore. i've read at least thirty. it's a staple of the genre.

of course, this means retroactively justifying why kaiba and joey fight with each other so much in canon. the term "puppy" in puppyshipping comes from the constant dog-related insults kaiba hurls at joey. kaiba calls him a mutt, a deadbeat, a loser dog (負け犬, makeinu) who has no right to even stand. it's legitimately uncomfortable. there's no room for interpretation here, seto kaiba digs into jounouchi's self-worth issues with intent to harm (this is the main reason why puppyshipping draws so much criticism btw, more on this later).

but we still need to repackaging this as a ship that's like, fun. so to explain why kaiba treats joey so cruelly? it's because kaiba has a crush on him. it's how a boy picks on the girl he likes to get her attention: kaiba has been secretly attracted to joey this whole time, and he shows it through insults because joey is cute when he's upset. "puppyshipping" takes on a double meaning: it's kaiba's dog insults, blooming into a puppy love (coughs blood).

we mined the shit out of this too. genre staple #2: fics where joey decides he's going to kill himself because his life is a fucking nightmare. his dad is an asshole, he's working four jobs, he's getting his ass beat by street gangs whenever he goes outside, and his crush thinks he's ugly. it's up to seto kaiba to go "no! i don't think you're ugly! i have a crush on you please don't kill yourself ☹️". sometimes fics will even combine this with the trope of kaiba killing joey's dad. we're robust like that.

despite how corny and out of touch early puppyshipping fanwork was, i have a hard time turning a critical eye towards it. they're cute. they're what they had to be. being 13 is difficult enough, getting the characterization of some yugioh shithead should be the least of your concerns. it's not a crime to imagine a world where joey is a little bit (okay, a lot) more desolate and helpless and kaiba is a little bit kinder and romantic. sometimes a story where your yaoi prince charming shows up to your house and kills your dad is what you need to hear.

2. VIOLETSIPPING (2011-2018): A QUEST FOR WORLD'S FIRST ETHICAL YAOI

the name “violetshipping” comes from a combination of joey and kaiba’s ace monsters, red-eyes black dragon and blue-eyes white dragon. red and blue make violet, therefore violetshipping.

in 2016, there was a push to change puppyshipping to violetshipping because a ship name rooted in the dog insults kaiba taunts joey with is disrespectful. to, um, joey. and it’s really important that we treat joey with dignity right now because this is the phase where puppysh—violetshipping fans are facing the abuse apologist allegations.

is there a word for yaoi feminism. like. oh my god. politically correct yaoi? where both men respect each other and it’s so normal and awesome. we empower ukes now, they may be gay but they’re still men!!! and masculine!!! and semes are more emotional now, no longer impenetrable sex machines who thoughtlessly dominate. yaoi men are people too. we may be in the business of yaoi but we don’t do it like those fetishizing fujoshi...we’re doing it correctly.

doing yaoi “correctly” was a common attitude if you were in any tumblr-adjacent fandom having an SJW moment around 2015 (“reminder that if you like k/l/l/i/n/g/s/t/a/l/k/i/n/g every single character from steven universe hates you”), but it hit puppyshipping especially hard. it’s one thing to get backlash from yaoi haters accusing you of putting yaoi everywhere (that’s what the “don’t like don’t read” warnings at the door are for), but when your own ship peers don’t want to hang out with you anymore and think you’re weird now, well. that’s kind of depressing.

“violetshipping” is puppyshipping in the advent of essays like The problem with Puppyshipping (2013) and yugioh fans on tumblr confession blogs regularly asking “wait a minute, why do people ship kaiba and joey? they don’t even like each other”. an era where it’s like, cool to make fun of puppyshipping now because puppyshippers are fujoshi romanticizing kaiba’s abusive behavior. violetshipping was an attempt to broadcast to the larger yugioh fandom that yes, we see all the criticism! we agree with

you!!! romanticizing abuse is bad!!!

and it makes me a bit sad because nobody in this situation came to it with ill intent. there weren't any proshippers trying to "co-opt" joey x kaiba, and the people who hated puppyshipping genuinely were just trying to curate a space away from people who enjoyed pedophilia incest and abuse. it's the most frustrating trope in the book. miscommunication. puppyshipping was never about some kind of toxic hatesex between kaiba and joey—I told you earlier: puppyshipping started because people wanted better for joey, poor execution notwithstanding.

i deliberately try not to quote posts from this time because i'm sure people want distance from stuff they said 10 years ago, but. to demonstrate what it was like back then. here's MY essay. from age 13. the context: i'm accused of hating joey because i pair him with a character who is actively hostile to him when i could just ship joey x yugi (wishshipping) instead.

“since [joey and kaiba] Are foils, they can learn and grow together!!!! i want seto to come to respect joey and them to find comfort in each other!!!! i want them to bond over the triumphs and perils of being the eldest sibling and protector and i want them to grieve over how they were robbed of proper childhoods i want kaiba to learn that its okay to lose and i want joey to learn that it's not his responsibility to run headfirst into solving every little thing that goes wrong”

— puppyshipping defense essay (2016)

note this fixation on the idea that since jounouchi and kaiba have so much in common, they can make each other better. that jounouchi and kaiba together isn't inherently toxic, there's capacity for good between them too. an insistence that joey x kaiba can be “ethical”, that fans want what's best for them. it's for their growth! joey and kaiba can fix each other!

i find the sentiment of fixing each other really cute. because, like, we already wrote that. was kaiba killing jounouchi's father and rescuing him from poverty and jounouchi teaching kaiba how to love and be loved

in turn, not them fixing each other? this era was less about facilitating scenarios where joey and kaiba would fix each other, but fixing puppyshipping itself.

violetshipping was the era where kaiba x joey fans made fun of themselves the most. we mocked how trope-y the fanwork made a decade prior was, made satirical art and posts about how dumb those fic authors were. our older puppyshipping fics made us look bad so we did anything to create distance from it. honestly? it was unfair. people who hated puppyshipping were never going to see our snappy zingers. we were just assholes for no reason.

what gets me the most is that fics written in the early puppyshipping era weren't even that egregious! you can go back to the original ff.net puppyshipping communities and see for yourself, the average puppyshipping fic is adorably mundane. joey and kaiba work together on a school project, joey and kaiba have detention together, kaiba turns into a cat and joey takes care of him, joey catches a cold and kaiba takes care of him, ad infinitum. i crunched the numbers. "joey is gonna kill himself if kaiba doesn't kill his dad"-type fics occur at a rate of 7% (n = 2,300).

but people remember those fics the most because they're so distinguishably puppyshipping. as consequence, even a rate of 7% is too much. so. as contrast to puppyshipping and all its baggage, violetshipping is just like any other ship. it's normal. and don't get me wrong, i love being normal! say it with me people: being normal is awesome. there genuinely was so much cute joey x kaiba stuff made at this time. but this softening of joey x kaiba into something more conventional has the downside of doing away with everything that made them distinct. we basically swapped one generic yaoi trope for another.

i look back on violetshipping the same way i wistfully look back at my own puberty (mostly because i was going through puberty at this time lol). this recoil at what you did as a child, an eagerness to throw yourself under the bus to show that you're not stupid anymore, and yet wanting the same exact things your younger self did and making it more complicated because you weren't doing it "correct enough" the first time, whatever.

er that means.

3. KAIJOU ANARCHY (2018-NOW): WHO GIVES A FUCK ANYMORE

well. turns out when you make puppyshipping look like every other bitch, eventually you get bored. and tired. everyone who liked kaijou for the cookie cutter yaoi they invented for themselves moved on to the next rivals to lovers ship that hit the exact same beats, so anybody who still ships puppyshipping now likes it for what it actually is. isn't that scary.

no longer needing to conform to a standard, kaiba x joey fans finally had the opportunity to stop worrying about outside perception and go back to the text, to let kaiba and joey breathe in their most basic form. and through revisiting canon, we were met with the best possible scenario: that this entire time, kaiba and joey were more interesting and complex than we even expected them to be.

to recount the puppyshipping facts, 1: jounouchi and kaiba have a lot in common. their childhoods were ass and now they have psychological problems. 2: they're constant assholes to each other. the game is easy. if you can extrapolate deeper meaning between these two facts, you win.

“what they do to survive [their childhoods] determines the outlooks they carry for the rest of their lives: jounouchi learns that losing is inescapable and the best you can do is learn how to cope with it, whereas kaiba learns that losing is something you must protect yourself from because there's only so much you can afford to lose...one would argue that they have the perspective the other lacks—they argue that they have the perspective the other lacks. but in my opinion? it doesn't actually matter. what interests me is how they treat each other as a result.

...jounouchi and kaiba see their counterpart less as an individual person but more a representation of who they could have become if they had, in their eyes, never learned the lessons they needed to...so they can't leave each other alone because they can't stop seeing their failures reflected back at them. the other is a defective version of themselves

that they need to correct because they can't stand constantly acknowledging who they used to be, so they try to bend the other to be more like their own image—an 'i can fix him (by dragging him down to my level)'."


— Here's How Puppyshipping Can Still Win: The Sequel: 2 PUPPY 2 SHIPPING (2022)

the main idea i'm trying to hit is that, from the very beginning, kaiba and jounouchi have always been trying to fix each other. that's why their dynamic is so wrought in the first place!!! i think there's something beautiful about that. the one thing puppyshipping fans wanted this entire time, spent years and years trying to argue for the possibility of, was in the text all along. kaiba's way of "rescuing" joey from his father is all those pointed insults about joey being weak, the underlying message that joey become like kaiba and kill his own dad himself.

i hope you understand that this is fantastic for me. dysfunctionality is awesome. obviously, killing your own dad because seto kaiba tells you to is bad! but thank god puppyshipping isn't just seto kaiba by himself. for starters, joey doesn't resent his dad in the slightest so patricide is never going to happen anyway.

this is a mutual tug of war. joey thinks kaiba is full of shit and that kaiba would be better off if he lived more like joey and adopted his self-righteously masochistic and reckless to near-suicidal tendencies. they're both wrong!!! they're hypocrites and they're stupid!!! it's great when both parties are wrong because there's so many different and engaging ways to be wrong. there's no pretenses to uphold anymore, no need to "make puppyshipping look good" here. writing joey and kaiba as passionate people, passionately messy and flawed people, is writing them correctly. these traits don't make them inherently less compatible or less romantic—inversely, they open up more opportunities for joey and kaiba to ignite, these traits put them closer to the truth. as the saying goes, puppyshipping is the most fun when you ship them the same way you leave a fork in the microwave.

i'd love to say this is when we entered the golden age of puppyshipping, but honestly, i think every age is the golden age of puppyshipping as long as it exists. regardless, in the pantheon of yugioh fanfiction, puppyshipping fics hold a tangible je ne sais quoi. i've read my share of wishshipping and rivalshipping and whatever-shipping fics, but puppyshipping is the one i always come home to because no other yugioh pairing was so rigorously put through the wringer the way she was. this is a ship with a lifespan so eventful it had a legitimate inflection point, a ship pushed to justify its own existence and came out all the better for it. haters said we couldn't do it, but we have been holding a monopoly on the most developed joey and kaiba characterizations for years now!!! we just keep fucking winning!!!

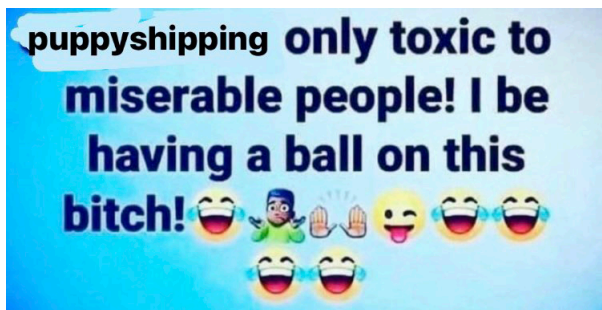
joukai fanwork is a lot more experimental now, but it's also a lot more relaxed. rather, it's only that the atmosphere has become so relaxed that people are comfortable enough to start pulling whatever bullshit they want. like, you've probably already noticed by how flippantly i alternate between them, every name for puppyshipping is used interchangeably now, and you can predict how a kaijou fan portrays the ship depending on what they default to. kaijou/海城/  is primarily used by artists, especially in east asia. joukai is used by ao3 authors, setojou/SJ/SxJ is used by ff.net authors. puppyshipping is used by people who are either 30+ or think it's funny, and violetshipping is used by people who got invested in jouey x kaiba during that era or just think it looks prettier.

it's so cute. this ship has lived such a rich life that there's just as much to the ship's history as there is its two characters, and that it took multiple generations of people who so ardently loved joey and kaiba to get to where we are now.

this essay is a retrospective. it's a victory lap. it's a love letter to my 13 year old self. i understand that my relationship with this yugioh ship is. unconventional. i watched puppyshipping grow up. i grew up with it, i know her. puppyshipping will always be whatever you want it to be by how you interpret it, and that's how it lives and breathes as something more than what it is. we give ourselves into puppyshipping and puppyshipping moves in turn. she's like a brother to me. me and puppyshipping are so

fucking parasocial.

so, um. in conclusion, maybe the real yaoi was me x puppyshipping all along. the end.



CEL

TSHIRT AND I HAVE BEEN TALKING A LOT ABOUT YAOI THEORY. THEY PROPOSED THE FOLLOWING:

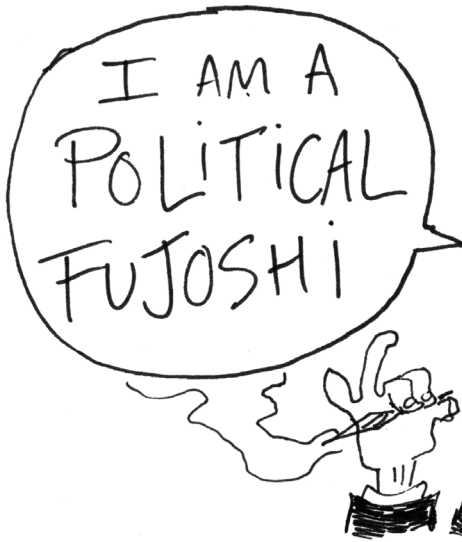
ABSTRACTIONIST	YAOI	IDEALIST	YAOI
YAOI	THE ABSTRACTIONIST IS COMMITTED TO YAOI AS A THING UNTO ITSELF. ITS APPEAL IS AS AN ARTFORM THAT ABSTRACTS GENDER & SEX AND IS INHERENTLY QUEER OUTSIDE OF ITS LITERAL CONTENT. (EX: YAOI IS QUEER BECAUSE IT ALLOWS WOMEN TO ENGAGE IN SEXUAL TITILLATION & EXPLORATION OF GENDER TOGETHER.)	THE IDEALIST'S PRIORITY IS THE SIMULATION AND/OR REORDERING OF HETEROSEXUAL GENDER ROLES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF QUEERNESS. EX: CERTAIN TRAITS "MAKE" A SOME OR UKE, AND THOSE ROLES ARE STATIC OR REFLECT THE HIERARCHY OF POWER BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS.	REALIST
YAOI	YAOI	PRAGMATIST	YAOI
		THE PRAGMATIST PRIORITIZES THE LIQUIDITY OF GENDER & SEX ROLES.	
			THE REALIST'S INTEREST IN YAOI IS AS A LITERAL ART FORM ABOUT MEN TOGETHER. REALITIES ABOUT SEX AND GENDER ARE PART OF THE APPEAL.

- IMO, THE IDEALIST IS FUNDAMENTALLY AN
- ★ IDEALIST/ABSTRACTIONIST: ABSTRACTIONIST BC THE CHARACTERS, TO THE IDEALIST, SHOULD ACT OUT A THEORETICAL PLAY OF SEX & GENDER AS REAL AS UNICORNS - NO RELATION TO MEN AS THEY EXIST
 - ★★ REALIST/PRAGMATIST: WHERE I FALL. WHILE I RESPECT YAOI AS MANY THINGS, ON AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL MY INTEREST IS IN LITERAL STORIES ABOUT MEN TOGETHER - BECAUSE I AM A MAN WHO IS ATTRACTED TO MEN.
 - ★★★ ABSTRACTIONIST/PRAGMATIST: ~~THE PEOPLE TO WHOM YAOI IS MOST FLUID~~
 - ★★★★ IDEALIST/REALIST: HONESTLY NOT TOO SURE THIS EXISTS. MAYBE IN S&M AND SOME APPROACHES TO OMEGAVERSE. TO ME SEEMS MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE.

iplidl



The cartoon "la Puissance ou la Jouissance" (by Copi)



I'M NOT A FUDANSHI
I'M A MALE FUJOSHI
AND YAOI ALLOWS ME TO
EMBODY THE DIVINE
FEMININE

iplid1



Simk

WHAT IS YAOI? A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

as a yaoi zine, our definition of yaoi follows our definition of zine: maximally inclusive, diy, and weird. i was less interested in the modern multimillion dollar industry than the random shit that set us all down our respective freak paths.

i was inspired by a 2000 interview between kunihiko ikuhara and mari kotani on the history and context surrounding the sexuality that informed revolutionary girl utena. over its course, ikuhara and kotani become preoccupied with what the translator calls deviance, or escape from the system. kotani argues that in many girls' stories, the system is often represented by bdsm and school settings, and many of these stories reverse the dominance relations we see in our everyday lives. and ikuhara later describes the relationship between women in his work as "yaoi," because their relationships are so sexual and vivid. he ultimately concludes that the essence of yaoi, to him, is that reversal kotani describes earlier. he believes it generates the eroticism and underpins the genre.

so that's the theoretical justification for my working definition of yaoi. but practically speaking, i wanted to celebrate offbeat eroticism, childhood escapes, and most of all, our ordinary reversals of our worlds. i wanted yaoi to become a way of saying "queer," for people for whom saying queer became gay. what is yaoi, then? it's transgression, it's perversion, and most of all, it's the friends we made along the way.