



TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Misbehaving Dog Yearns To Be Pressed Against the Bosom
Once More: An Inspection Into the True Nature of the Relation-
ship Between Lisa Vanderpump and Brandi Glanville on *The Real
Housewives of Beverly Hills Season Five*

by 

Fucking Fake Men: Yaoi Visual Novels, “Invisible” Figures and
“Impossible” Practices
by rex @goldenglitz.itch.io

yaoi irl
by iplidl

The Secret History by Donna Tartt is a gay harem isekai
by shrimpchipsss

On *Torchwood* and the temptations of queer tragedy
by Julian shipyrd

the yaoi enjoyer to lesbian awakening pipeline
by meggie, bsky: pinkserendipity, tumblr: muckkles

math yaoi
by goose

Being Gay is Only Yaoi Sometimes: A polyamorous yaoi data anal-
ysis of The Raven Cycle (with yaoi graphs)
by zoe @miss_coverly

Pondering the ORV
by @soph_sol

crazy yaoi webnovel advice column
by simkjrs & zarinthel

The Misbehaving Dog Yearns To Be Pressed Against the Bosom Once More

An Inspection Into the True Nature
of the Relationship Between Lisa
Vanderpump and Brandi Glanville on
The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills
Season Five



A Necessary Disclaimer:

All claims made in this essay are fictitious and mostly in the interest of hypothetical lesbian relationships. This is all speculation made specifically using the narrative presented to me by the Bravo TV show Real Housewives of Beverly Hills up to the end of season 5, and none of these opinions are to be applied to the real human people Brandi Glanville and Lisa Vanderpump. All in good fun <3

“It seemed like almost- forgive the comparison- but it’s almost like you’re playing with your dog, and, all of a sudden, your dog bites you by mistake.”

-Andy Cohen, *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*,
Season 5 Episode 21, “Reunion Part 2”

Abstract-ish

In this essay I will give background to and describe the sexual

attraction, consummated or not, between “Housewives” Brandi Glanville and Lisa Vanderpump. Brandi is infatuated with Lisa as a Freudian replacement for an authoritative mother figure, and the two of them have a contentious dominant/submissive dynamic, even platonically, echoing that of a loving owner and her dog. However, once Lisa removes Brandi from that intimate space, Brandi views any critique as a parental punishment, eroticized by the inherent desire and sexual tension that colors their interactions. After repeated deprivations of attention, positive or negative, Brandi instead uses much younger male partners to channel youth from, climaxing when she sleeps with Andre, the close childhood friend of Lisa’s son Max, someone that knows of Vanderpump in a mostly maternal form, and vice versa. By adding herself into this dynamic, Brandi is able to co-opt this pseudo-incestuous relationship and use the boy to place herself in both positions, able to both sully the personal life of Lisa Vanderpump, and to use an avatar to imagine and indulge in her mommy-kink.

Background and Flavor

First, an introduction to our two characters as we meet them at the opening of the season. These two former friends occupy opposite spaces in the cast, and each show opposite extremes of this world of wealth porn and emotional voyeurism.

Brandi Glanville is the youngest cast member, tall, blonde, and looking like a Barbie right out of the box. Her personal life is a constant storm of drama, having been cheated on and left by an off-screen husband, with two phantom sons who cannot be shown on-screen due to an ongoing custody fight. In the void of showing her personal home



life, her TV persona takes center stage, which I can only describe as the most deliciously destructive wrecking ball to enter any social situation. Belligerently drunk and always horny for the MILF's around her, Brandi doesn't care how much the world is against her, she'll find the worst possible thing to say anyways, whether it's insulting the put-together Eileen Davidson by saying her home looks like "a serial killer's house, like the american psycho guy", loudly making fingering jokes in front of a special celebrity guest at her friends' dinner party, or crashing a gay "tops and bottoms" mixer to scream at host Kyle Richards about how she isn't supporting her alcoholic sister and that her own husband can't stand her. Brandi is openly bisexual, the only out queer woman at this point in the real housewives franchise. However, the only hook-ups we'll hear about from her are mostly "men" between the ages of 21 and 24 (we'll get into that.)



Now, let's pan away from Brandi's rental house to the palatial Villa Rosa, seated on top of a hill and opened up like a Malibu Barbie doll-house. Everything is covered in pink roses, there are at least eight dogs (mostly Pomeranians) and two "gay" swans frolicking in the bucolic fields. This is Lisa Vanderpump's house, who has a life and attitude that could only

be branded as "regal". Lisa really is the queen of the cast, secure in her job, her marriage, and her life. She gives us a perfectly manicured image that has only grown in power. Post-housewives, she now has two spin-off shows that she reigns over, and has a whole slew of restaurants and bars she and her husband Ken have developed and run. Also, she's British, so that's very fun. Her humor is dirty and biting, she always has a sly quip in the confessional. She adores dogs, the gays, and anything entertaining.

So, in the two seasons before this that they shared a cast, how did these two become such unlikely friends? Well, Brandi is completely in love with Lisa Vanderpump. And like I mentioned, Lisa loves dogs.

The Wagging Tail

Even early on in their friendship, Brandi is constantly comparing the role of Lisa in her life to that of a mother. She jokingly calls Lisa and Ken her “parents”, and while it could be just a dig at their haughty attitudes and age, there’s also an obvious line that can be drawn here.

To Brandi, Lisa is someone whose attention is something of a currency. She desperately seeks it out and is always gravitating towards it, and it reads as an impulse to make herself feel better through the approval of the mother. Within that is also the adoration of the mother in an oedipal sense, imagining someone who can both provide and satisfy you in ways that cannot be replaced.

An added element to this complex in sapphic situations is the ability to also see this provider of affection, this mommy you lust after, as a reflection of yourself, to allow jealousy and your interpretations of your own shortcomings to color your feelings. For Brandi, the intoxicating pull of Lisa Vanderpump is the idea of success. She is the star of every scene she is in, while Brandi is so often the obstacle.

However, Lisa is not a monolith of ideals. She is an icon, but only in the logic of the reality show she works on, which brings its own toxic tendencies. Lisa is a strategist who loves to casually play in the wounds of others, to pour salt in the form of gossip or rumors, to joke and throw around words or phrases that take a while to get traced back to her. When she is caught in a lie, she will barricade her stance and never let go of her pride, refusing to be accused of anything, even if it’s possible she is in the wrong. This stubborn-

ness will create problems, but she refuses to be anything less than unimpeachable.

Without getting into the specifics of the social drama, season 4 ends with Brandi daring to oppose Lisa. She even admits to mostly doing this so that she doesn't just come across as Lisa's lackey, an embarrassing position for any Housewife in the larger eco-system. Lisa's response is a full shutdown of their friendship and an ice-out, and she declares Brandi as dead to her. To her, this betrayal of her character has destroyed her trust. Even if it's an overreaction to run-of-the-mill drama dredged up for a TV show's finale, there is logic in the falling of Lisa's guillotine blade. Being friends with Brandi brings its own share of negative attention, and it's not worth it unless you can depend on her blindly following your lead.

Raising of the Hackles

Framing Brandi's adoration of Lisa and her lifestyle feels similar to that of a dog who connects with an owner, one who doles out authority and affection in equal measure. There is a logic to the relationship that allows Brandi to occupy Lisa's space in a way she never could as a lesbian lover. In the world of Housewives there is a strict limitation on the relationships developed, because the whole basis of the fiction is around the idea of a "social circle" and the types of intense relationships between women can have, but there is also a very conservative structure that the women must fit into, strictly abiding by a heterosexual universe and only playfully teasing towards their own sexual freedom and exploration. As Katheryn Bond Stockton argues in "The Queer Child" "The dog is someone who is not removed by generations from its mistress, who openly cries in pain and pleasure, and who past the censors can freely get into a woman's lap." (112) In this essay Stockton argues that the dog serves as a sexual vessel for the lesbian child, an empathic vessel that can receive affection and also act without heterosexual anxiety. Brandi wants to be able to express herself without worry of societal repercussions, but she is duly punished for this, many times trying to pull the other Housewives into extreme conversations or

situations that they are actively uncomfortable participating in.

However, Lisa's "persona" of one who is constantly giving a proper English behavior but never without a cheeky joke or dirty reference, gives a level of fabrication to her reality that seems to shelter Brandi. There is a hint of bestiality that Lisa loves to play with, calling her smallest and oldest dog "the sex monster", deciding her two swans are gay, and many times comparing her mostly mild husband to a saucy animal, grouping him with the rest of her menagerie. To Lisa, Brandi's position as another dog was an acceptable sexual category to her, as long as she stayed in control.

The Whining Growl

Season 5 opens with Brandi being almost universally hated and struggling for a foothold amongst the social circle of the women, while still dealing with the after-effects of her divorce and family issues. While Brandi is talking with a lawyer about fighting her ex-husband over child support, Lisa is shopping for a hot pink diamond that costs more than most houses. While Brandi is figuring out how to swear less so she can turn her podcast into a sustainable source of revenue, Lisa is opening up a new restaurant. Lisa is adored by the other women, while Brandi is derided. Amongst it all, Brandi is begging Lisa for forgiveness, which she withholds. When they are at the opening of Lisa's Villa Blanca, Brandi tries to joke around by ripping off a branch from one of the olive trees to offer it to Lisa. Lisa is not pleased, and half heartedly refuses it, grabbing it from Brandi and pretending to spank her with it, which Brandi quickly sticks her ass out to receive. There isn't anything really unique about this, I just think it's crazy.

"What would you like me to do, your highness? You want me to eat your pussy?"

-Brandi Glanville *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*,
Season 5 Episode 7, "Breaking Branches"

I could just continue reporting every insane yuri moment that hap-

pens between these two, but really, we should get to talking about the climax of this season: the Amsterdam trip. In every season of “Housewives” the women take a trip together, and it’s usually the perfect setting for issues to come to a head and to take us through an emotional circus of sightseeing and public blow-ups. Anyone who is even tangentially knowledgeable about this franchise knows about the legendary fight that happens on the first night of this trip. Interestingly, both Brandi and LVP are on the sidelines for the main conflict happening, so all that’s really important to know is that there has been a precedent set for everyone to act fully from their unfiltered impulses. In Amsterdam, the women are letting the id pilot their actions.

The Bite

Funnily enough, Lisa and Brandi are actually quite cordial for the beginning of this trip, and you can even see glimmers of their former friendship as they joke around while shopping together, making dirty jokes like nothing has changed. There’s a shift when they all go out one evening to smoke weed at an Amsterdam cafe and walk around downtown. Lisa ends up running into Andre, a friend of her son Max, a 23 year old guy who immediately hits it off with Brandi. This mostly happens off camera, but Brandi reportedly flirts with him to spite Lisa, and takes him back to her hotel room to sleep with him. This definitely perturbs Lisa, but we don’t hear much of her opinion until later.

Fast forward to the next night, when after a pretty exhausting and conflict-ridden dinner on a boat, we get a drunk Brandi joking around with Lisa as they start to file off. She finds excuses to touch her and pull her into her space, separating and barring her from the exit. Lisa is trying to keep things light and not escalate the situation, but those attempts are powerless against the stubbornness of Brandi’s aggression. Brandi starts commanding Lisa to kiss her, and Lisa refuses, and Brandi’s command changes from “Kiss me!” to “Slap me!” (One could draw the conclusion that, to Brandi, the two ignite the same feelings.)

Lisa continues to refuse, and Brandi, desperate for something, some material response from her, goes ahead and slaps Lisa Vanderpump. It's a shocking moment, and the warmth drains out of Lisa's face as soon as it happens. Brandi seems to know that she messed up, but is trying to coyly play it off, telling Lisa "Now you hit me."

Oh, Brandi. There's no coming back from this one honey.

In the fallout from this, along with just her general unpopularity amongst the women, it's concluded that Brandi should maybe not come to the last evening's dinner. And what does she do instead? Well, go on a date with her new boy-toy Andre! And have sex with him again, which she makes very clear to both us and the other women.

My theory behind Brandi's fixation on young men (she sleeps with others over the season, there's a whole minor storyline of her being a cougar), particularly Andre, is that it's a way to play out the mommy-fetish that she has, even if she has to inhabit the older role. In her mind, she is able to understand and live through the younger person, and maybe even use them as a mirror to view her own sexual obsession. She can be a part of this dynamic, and exploit it for her own purpose, all while also feeling power over men, both socially and financially, in a way her former relationships didn't allow her to have.

Andre's specific relationship with Vanderpump sharpens all of these desires to a point, letting her place herself in the center of an already existing relationship and defile it, to redefine Lisa's life without needing her permission. There's a pseudo-incestuous connection between the two of them, and Brandi pours salt into that. During the reunion, Brandi even accuses/jokes to Lisa that Lisa wants to sleep with Andre (to which everyone groans and shouts Brandi down) and she insists that there is sexual tension between Andre and Lisa, which I really think she believes, because to Brandi there is no other option. Lisa is upset that Brandi would do something she considers so inappropriate, but of course, to some-

one like Brandi, every boundary is something made to be crossed.

The Punished Dog

In my most yuri-brained fan-fiction imaginings, I think Brandi gained some perspective on her feelings for Lisa after her first time sleeping with Andre, and she flung herself against her all the more desperately in response to that, leading to the slap. This was Brandi trying to wring out any last bit of juice from Lisa, aiming for the love she so desperately wanted and burning up in the atmosphere of distance between the two of them.

Brandi seems to reach some level of self awareness by the end of the season, as all of the women gather one last time in LA at a social event, Brandi is trying to stay detached. We're also given the background that her dad is going through some pretty intense health issues, and Brandi cannot let herself hear criticism. The moment Lisa approaches her to engage in a confrontation, she tearfully says "Lisa... I don't care about this conversation. I've apologized to you... I've told you I love you. My dad is dying, and you have not reached out." Lisa puts more emotional separations between them, trying to tell Brandi that the context of their relationship means that Lisa will not supersede these boundaries in light of tragedy, that for Lisa, to show emotional intimacy would be hypocritical, and that any closer bond between them has now been severed. Halfway through Lisa's calm explanations Brandi is sobbing and grabs her wrist, yelling "Hit me, hit me I don't care!" Lisa doesn't give her the reaction she wants, and Brandi moans "I can't, I can't pretend anymore Lisa, I love you, this is bullshit." then promptly runs away from her while literally gulping down wine.

The core to their tragedy is one of immovable stubbornness between two powerful personalities. Lisa never saw Brandi as more than a dog, and the second Brandi proved herself untrainable, Lisa could not entertain a relationship between them for a moment longer. Lisa has a life full of devoted adorers, whether it's other women in their friend group, a radius of gay men, or her beloved balding

pomeranian Giggy (Rest in Peace). To Brandi, Lisa is the climax of everything she could want, while to Lisa, Brandi is simply an aberration.

Fucking Fake Men: Yaoi Visual Novels, “Invisible” Figures and “Impossible” Practices

rex goldenglitz

(This was previously written for a colloquium during my Master's thesis in 2022, and has been subsequently edited for yaoi zine.)

In 1961, a 13 year old Lou Sullivan, the first gay trans man to be “allowed” to take hormones by the medical establishment, wrote in his diary: “Paul-Ringo-Paul-Ringo they keep bouncing around my head. They’re so perfect. Model yourself on them and you’ll have no worries ... I really don’t know what I’d have done without Paul, George, John, [and] Ringo. I’d probably be real queer.” One of his last quotes he gave to the (small, indie, queer) press as he died from AIDS complications in 1991 was that “he was proud to die as a gay man, even though authorities had said he couldn’t live as one.

Let’s go back to 2022. I am a 25 year old gay trans man, six months on hormones, trying desperately to get the yaoi game *DRAMAtical Murder* to run on my PS Vita. This task is both impossible (on a technical level) and invisible (on a cultural or level of practice). I connect these two events not only because we are both iconic gay transsexual men obsessed with boys, but because I think the appeal of both trans cultural historiography and games studies is that both are attempting to create a cohesive, linear, universal narrative of their object. In reality, these objects (such is almost always the case) are messy, complex, and interwoven with a rhizome of other practices and histories.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. It's 2022, and I'm trying to put *DRAMAtical Murder* on my hacked PS Vita.¹

My PS Vita was a PCH-1000 model — the “fat” PS Vita, the first-released model of the portable console. It has an OLED screen. Hacking my Vita allows me to have access to literally thousands of games, from the NES to the Vita's catalogue itself — but I *can't* put *DRAMAtical Murder* on my Hacked PS Vita.

Here were a few hypothetical options available to me:

1. I could download the already released *DRAMAtical Murder Re:Code* in Japanese and, given that I can't read Japanese, find a way to patch the contents in English.
2. I could use remote play, and stream the screen of my desktop PC to my Vita using a tool like Moonlight, but the PS Vita's wifi is poor. This also means I can only play at home, and not while out and about.
3. I suppose, technically, I could learn Japanese. But I want to play *DRAMAtical Murder* in English, or at the very least I want to play the game right now and not within the next half decade (giving myself generosity and grace with this timeline), which is probably how long it would take me to learn enough Japanese to play the game.

The first option I provided is impossible. The last two are not *good* playing experiences. The PS Vita is a portable console, and so I'd like to be able to play the game whenever, wherever I want. Remote-playing the game is out of the question — moreover, I would not be able to button-map the mouse and keyboard commands on my PS Vita while playing on my PC, which makes the effort of putting it on the Vita instead of playing it on something like my phone totally meaningless. Not only do I want to play the game on

1 I have since sold my Hacked PS Vita since the time of writing this. I sold it to a man on Facebook Marketplace who **ONLY** wanted to play the *Medieval* series. Upon resetting my PS Vita (obliterating all the JRPGs I downloaded and promptly forget to take note of before deleting the files) I did him the favour of setting the games up for him, and he was so so happy. I love selling shit on FB marketplace it literally never gets old

a portable console — I want to be able to press the buttons on said portable console.

In the case of something like a fan-translation: *DRAMAtical Murder Re:Code* has never had an English translation patch. Denpa Archive has a great guide to emulating the PS Vita version of the game on your PC, but it is of course limited to the original Japanese language. You cannot simply take the original fan translation of *DRAMAtical Murder*, or even the official 2021 translation, and apply it to the script of the PS Vita version, because large parts of the game have been rewritten in order to adhere to Sony's rating system. This was done because otherwise, the game would not be freely available to purchase at any "normal" brick-and-mortar games store.

So the game on the PS Vita, even if I *could* read Japanese, isn't really the same game as the one I want to play and already own on the PC. This also isn't to say that the game *cannot* be fan translated because it's on the PS Vita — Many, many already have, including games that have been translated *and* had patches to "uncensor" them. This isn't a question of the practice being technically impossible; it is instead a question of whether or not any of the fans in the community (the hacker community, the yaoi community, the patcher community) want to undertake the effort to understand how the game engine works well enough to patch a translation of *Re:Code*. There was a post on the *DRAMAtical Murder* subreddit² three days before the initial version of this draft asking if it was patched and translated. Denpa Archive's guide to emulating the game from a few months ago also contains people bemoaning the fact that there isn't a translation patch out anywhere.

2 This subreddit is now totally defunct and impossible to access due to it being an unmoderated subreddit and shut down by Reddit. An entire archive of posts and discussion about this game is now only legible through Google search result previews and ostensibly whatever got backed up on something like the waybackmachine. I don't have the time and this piece doesn't have the scope to do some real deep dives on this, but it needed to be mentioned.

Fan translations, despite my hopes, do not appear out of nowhere: they emerge from the needs and desires of a given fan community, and furthermore, as Consalvo points out, “reshape player expectations for what playing a game means and also who is supposed to control the flow of games” (43). BLVNs provide us with an interesting cross-section between the flow created by fan spaces and the flow created by what is available to an English-speaking audience. Some BLVNs are popular in these underground scenes but do not get localized. Drama CDs, which are often direct sequels to BLVNs, rarely, if ever, get official translations or distribution. Unless archived by fujoshis themselves, these items are often prohibitively expensive to obtain because of how fujoshi commodity values explode in the secondary market, and they rarely are given large print runs, either. Many of these items are highly litigated and stonewalled, including by the community themselves, in an effort to avoid getting into legal trouble by distributing these items. The practices of not only hacking, but the preservation of a kind of community, is foreclosed. Small discord servers of dedicated fujoshis who have painstakingly carved out illicit zones of interest and distribution exist, of course. Nevertheless, the flow of yaoi is dammed up, controlled, and difficult to access for a layperson.

On the flip side, the availability of a “legitimate” version of a game carries with it many assumptions: it assumes a given player base and their interest (as well as their disposable income), it assumes a given state’s opposition to “improper” games, and it carries with it as well the ideology of a given platform, regardless of whether or not this ideology is intended. For example, the Steam release of basically any Jast-translated yaoi game contains no sex scenes and requires a patch (which costs money) found on the Jast USA site to be applied to the steam release in order to restore the uncensored version of the game. This has not stopped steam from recommending every single hentai porn game in the world to me — which as far as I can tell includes full frontal nudity! — after looking at yaoi games. There’s a not insignificant number of English gay VNs that are uncensored on Steam, as well. So there is an ideology at work here: Steam is the largest platform for digital games. What porn it

allows and denies creates an ideology around what kinds of explicit content is socially acceptable.

And I *can* play these games portably now. Nearly three years of technological innovation since my original draft has provided me with the power to play yaoi wherever, whenever I want — to a certain extent. The Steam Deck had just come out when I wrote the initial draft of this piece. At the time, I disregarded it: it seemed too big, too clunky, and was impossible to buy due to stock issues. In 2024, the steam deck is my best friend. I played through the entirety of *Slow Damage* (the most recent Nitro+Chiral BLVN translated by Jast) on my Steam Deck, after a lot of hassle. So no, you can't play *DRAMAtical Murder* on your PS Vita, but you sure can play it on your Steam Deck. It has to be said that, due to a combination of the fact that the steam deck runs on linux and that seemingly all of the N+C BLVNs use an engine incompatible with Linux outside of translation layers and replacing a bunch of dll files (I'm pretty sure it's an issue with how the engine DMMD and the like render cutscenes and audio), playing these games themselves still requires more than a basic understanding of both programs like Lutris as well as understanding the command line. So again the interests of hacking and yaoi game playing overlap — for better or for worse.

I've written a guide on how to set up at least *Slow Damage* on your Steam Deck³ not only because I sincerely think playing a visual novel (including yaoi ones) is a better experience, but also because I think it is both my right and my need as a transfag fujoshi to be able to play these games portably on a political level. I also think the intersection between BLVN players and people who are Linux-literate (not that I can actually call myself literate in Linux) is marginal, and so lending my expertise is important to fostering a healthy, helpful, and happy fan space.

BLVNs are games designed to run on a PC, designed to be played multiple times, and are programmed with a set of endings prede-

3 You can find the guide here: tiny.cc/sldmsd

terminated according to the minimal impact your choices throughout the game make. But if I play it in my basement, it is also a game of looking over my shoulder during a sex scene to make sure no one is walking into the room. If I play it in public, fully uncensored on the bus and metro, I would have to account for nosy people looking over my shoulder, or children, or the (extremely loud) volume of Aoba's moans, even through my headphones. Speaking about the game, playing the game with another person — all of these modes of play generate wildly different affective experiences.

Affect generation is not simply a mediation between player and game, or even a question of space and place, but must necessarily include social conventions, culture, and the connections therein. Porn games like *DRAMAtical Murder* demonstrate this the most clearly — they are “body genres,” to borrow Linda Williams's term: “As a culture,” Williams writes, “we most often invoke the term [gross] to designate excesses we wish to exclude ... but not to say what form and structure and function operate within the representations deems excessive” (2). *DRAMAtical Murder* is a perfect object of excess: excessive to straight male audiences because it's gay, excessive to gay male audiences because it's written for and by women, excessive to “romance readers” because it contains graphic sexual assault and violence — it is messy, and it is weird, and for many people, these games are repugnant. Is this why the game is not allowed to be a game? Is this why no one talks about yaoi games — unless they're talking about straight cis women?

The fact that yaoi games are “gross” impacts not only the affects of the players within a space, not only the viewers, but the critical and academic reception of the game as well. It makes assumptions about *who* plays these games. In every essay I read, the only audiences an academic writer could conceive of as “enjoying” yaoi games fell into two categories: straight cis women and gay cis men. Female fans are an expected audience due to the existence of fujoshis as a recognizable cultural identity — and in the West, it is academically bolstered by writers like Jenkins's work on “slash” or “Boy's Love” communities being a supermajority of women. Cis

gay male fans are an expected audience because of the contents of the game: cis, ostensibly gay — despite Aoba’s protests against being classified so — men have sex in the game. These two options available to a scholar in this position is to plant a flag in the camp of “ethnographic community” or “textual representation.” I posit that neither of these are sufficient or adequate approaches to writing or studying yaoi.

These lenses are insufficient because the recorded experiences of players who don’t fall into either camp, by virtue of not being robustly studied at all, become “illegitimate.” Furthermore, for marginalized scholars invested in these spaces as objects of studies, it becomes difficult for them to make their own claims and experiences about these spaces sound and feel legitimate due to this lack of “peer” study.⁴ Articulating this assemblage to the academy relies on the scholar making an autoethnographic opening move — a further alienating and “un-academic” (although as of late much less maligned, thank you McKenzie Wark) practice that not only places the object of study under the microscope, but creates within the scholar themselves and object of study.

Moreover, games studies — and trans studies as well — is obsessed with a need to formulate a narrative, a cohesive beginning and end, when in reality many of these practices are being discovered and implemented concurrently by a variety of actors with many different goals and intentions. I want to resist the need to create a clear and simple narrative or set of correlations.

Under my methodology the question shifts from “are there trans men within this space?” A question that can only be answered “properly” through meticulous ethnography and archaeology, but

4 This isn’t all bad — I think what this necessarily does is force a scholar to be doing what all scholars should do: read and communicate with multiple disciplines, not just their own. My own frustration with both trans and games studies has led to my own growth as a scholar — but it is both tiring and should not be necessary for all scholars to do this every time they want to talk about how much transfags like them love it when anime boys fuck on their computer screens.

instead a localized one: “trans men are in this space. What are they *doing* here? Why are they here? Why are they invested in these spaces, these practices, and these technologies? What does the arrangement of affects surrounding the space, this object of interest, *do*? How do these statements, transversing communities, bodies, time itself, get preserved, and which statements are *allowed* to be preserved?”

I am a user who “shouldn’t” be playing BLVNs, trying to play the game in ways which similarly “shouldn’t” be allowed. The trans scholar in me is tempted to say that the transmasculine body becomes— in the Deleuzian sense, the hacked device: I rewire my own body with the same ease — gatekeeping of meds excepted — as my own PS Vita. All it takes to make a Vita hacked is a USB connection and a program already compiled by skilled amateur experts. All it takes for me to physically hack my body is 0.25 mL of testosterone in linseed oil, which Lou Sullivan helped grant access to people like himself and myself decades ago. Hacking as a practice, then, becomes— transferrable, becomes methodology itself.

What relating hacking to transness does is make legible the kinds of practices, skills, and technologies which create myself and people like me. These objects orient not only themselves but how other people are read when put alongside them. If I were to accept that yaoi games should not be hacked, are not being played by trans men, or that these devices do not in themselves create a cultural practice and set of techniques which result in a kind of hobbyist-expert, I would be disregarding the ways in which assemblages themselves become cultural objects of study. By this same token, fujoshism as a social, sexual, gendered role cannot be separated from my own understanding of my gender and sexuality, despite being a transfag. Individual, singular, cohesive objects simply do not exist. By extension, singular histories, singular narratives of what can and should be a trans person, for example, are impossible — nor should they be.

Trans games studies is often overly concerned with representation,

with the in-game depictions of trans people. Trans cultural studies is concerned with tracing and origin and cohesive presentation of what makes one “trans.” When I opened with Lou Sullivan and called him the “first” trans gay man, I say this knowing it’s only true according to which kinds of gay trans men could be visible enough to be included and recorded within the history of gay trans men. I also know that my kinship and the line I draw between myself and Sullivan is artificially constructed by arranging our relation together on a chart. But the difference between calling Lou the first trans man and affectively orienting myself around him is that one forecloses a linearity of time whereas the latter statement generates an assemblage which culturally situates both myself and Lou — as trans men, as fans, as gay men, as men who love rotating men in their minds. The only reason I can relate to Sullivan is because he happened to write a diary throughout most of his life, which he meticulously preserved, which archives then also meticulously preserved. This is again, currently impossible for the trans masc yaoi reader. How many websites, links on Tumblr, on Reddit, are now dead and unrecoverable? How many files — translation files, cracks, raws, scripts, assets — are dead links on mega upload, or MediaFire? There is no archive (yet?) that contains the meticulous records of a gay trans guy’s life and his love for semes and ukes and yaoi paddles. I imagine this zine gets kinda close, though.

When Cass Adair writes, “Why can’t the erotic be a site of producing trans identity or practices? Why must we accommodate the asexual connotations of *transgender* when it replaces *transsexuality*” and posits that “a type of contagious gendering through which a crush on or a desire to fuck a trans person produces a recognition of the self in the other” (46) I can see the linkages of a practice — a sexual practice which seems out what is *desired* in as many multiple a meanings as possible — and an impulse to preserve a kind of sexuality. Adair locates this affect in pulpy t4t erotica, and in daddy-boy group sex. He jokingly writes, “it seems that all the trans guy scholars must be fucking one another and thus are simply too busy to write at all” (47). These practices aren’t universal, just like how a transfag reading yaoi isn’t universal, either. The assemblages

— these relations between objects and people and affects — that emerge, which both Adair and I are trying to articulate from parallel cultural spaces, is very real.

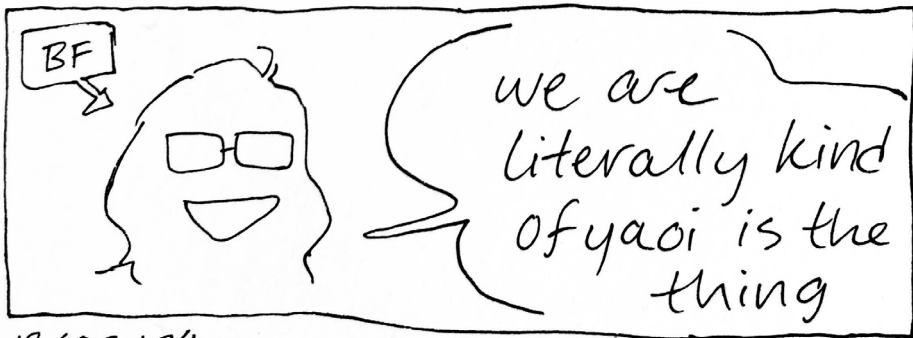
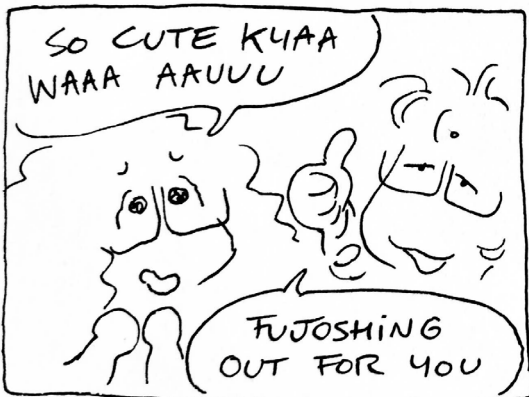
Maybe the solution I'm looking for is to have more transmasculine losers who don't have sex in the academy writing about wanting to have sex with virtual boys instead of real ones.

Works Cited

Adair, Cassius and Aren Aizura; "The Transgender Craze Seducing Our [Sons]"; or, All the Trans Guys Are Just Dating Each Other. *TSQ* 1 February 2022; 9 (1): 44–64. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-9475509>

Consalvo, Mia. *Atari to Zelda. Japan's Videogames in Global Contexts*. MIT Press, 2016.

GOT IN A RELATIONSHIP RECENTLY
to which various friends had to say:



The Secret History by Donna Tartt is a gay harem isekai

by shrimpchipsss

The Secret History, published 1992: the story that launched a thousand pale imitations.

Our protagonist and narrator, Richard Papen, retells his story of transferring from his dreary lower-middle class life in California to Hampden, a small, elite liberal arts college in Vermont, and joining its cultish Classics department composed of five other students individually chosen by the charming, enigmatic Professor Julian Morrow. Richard lies about his background and status as a scholarship student to fit in with his new peers whom he is obsessed with and gets pulled into covering up the eventual murder of their classmate and friend, Bunny.

Though it may not be obvious at first glance, this is a gay harem isekai story. To me. I think that specific genre schema is the reason people like the book so much, even though it was not written with that schema in mind, and I think this says something interesting about escapism, what it is that immerses readers into a story, and reader satisfaction.

I'll break down my initial classification into three parts:

GAY

First, let us take a look at Richard's relationships and sex life.

Richard "unreliable narrator" Papen tells us that he is straight, and indeed, he lets girls flirt with him at parties and even sleeps with a

few of them. He does this passively, enjoying the girls' attention or pity, or the picture the two of them create, but he's never specifically into any of the girls; they're just there.

On the gay sex side of things, friend and fellow Classics major Francis propositions Richard a few times, and begins kissing him one tense night. He kisses down Richard's throat and Richard even begins to reciprocate before they are interrupted by Charles. Richard later tells Francis that he is not attracted to him, but he also compares Francis' hand to a teenage girl's (33) and before they become classmates, inquires about him with such interest that male acquaintances find it suspicious (18).

Richard also has some really intense homosocial relationships with Henry, Bunny, Charles, and Julian, but I will speak more on that in the HAREM section of the essay.

But to go back to girls. In their *Sword Art Online* zine, tshirt describes the main character Kirito's attraction to the main love interest, Asuna, as being about her inhumanity and the way she is rendered in the digital, video game world, rather than her femininity (tshirt,13).

Richard describes Camilla, his main love interest, in a similar fashion, calling her beauty unsettling, almost medieval, evoking the Greek to the Gothic (24), the vulgar and the divine (97). It is like Camilla is so ethereal as not to be real. Just like Kirito, Richard's attraction to her is about her otherworldliness rather than her being a girl. I know this can be attributed to some kind of high-minded and artistic eroticism, and I know bisexuality exists, but I don't think that is what is happening here. Richard is trying to invent his own plausible deniability yaoi (simkjrs, 81) by loving Camilla, a "boy" who is a girl and is therefore permissible to pursue under the reign of compulsory heterosexuality.

Moreover, Richard loves describing Camilla in masculine terms; that she looks so much like her twin brother Charles (97), that she

looks like a little boy (452), her unconscious and slightly masculine grace of posture (438). He frequently describes Camilla's legs and feet, which of all body parts are quite genderless—"I found myself staring at her bare legs—tawny calves, slender ankles, lovely, dusty-soled boy-feet" (247)—and which he decides to masculinize any-ways.

I'm not saying that Richard "gay boy" Papen (shoutout Elliott Queerapika) is gay because he's into feet. I'm saying that Richard is gay because of the intensity of his homosocial relationships with other men, the homoeroticism between him and Francis, the only definite homosexual he knows, and because the One Girl™ he loves, he loves as an otherworldly BL uke.

As you can see, *The Secret History* is yaoi. There is also, of course, the forbidden student-teacher thing going on between Henry and Julian, but unfortunately, that is not the focus of this essay because RICHARD is at the center of things.

HAREM

The Secret History fulfills the harem fantasy via the homosocial relationships Richard has with his peers, putting him (and by extension, you, the reader) at the center of a male harem (with Camilla occupying the riveting space of a girl-who-is-a-BL-uke).

The Japanese harem genre which involves a main character and multiple love interests or partners originated in the 70s and was popularized by dating sims. The reader or player is meant to identify with the main character and expects to be put in all kinds of titillating situations with the harem characters.

Even though there is a de facto leader of the group in Henry, Richard is the lynchpin of the plot and a sort of neutral figure that different characters alternately feel like they can confide in, rely on, use, try to hook up with, kiss, or torment.

It's crucial to the plot of *The Secret History* and to the harem genre that Richard is liked by all of the main characters, and has distinct dynamics with each of them. Henry, the fellow night owl, visits him when it's late out; Francis makes Richard take him to the doctor and lavishes him, as he does the others, with gifts of clothing; Charles and Camilla treat him as though they've known him for much longer than they have; and Bunny brings Richard on his long, rambling hikes that no one else can keep up with.

The varied dynamics that Richard has with his friends are interesting because they fulfill the fantasy of experiencing every sort of relationship or romance possible, all at once. Unlike in another common story structure, the love triangle, harem members are not necessarily in conflict with each other as they become more intimate with the main character. Some harem stories involve jealousy and infighting, but in the end, they are still all fellow harem members, each with their own legitimate relationship with the main character.

Even though Richard isn't sleeping with his harem, the attention and regard of the other characters is heady and downright erotic. The first time Richard speaks to the coterie, he likens it to the characters in a favorite painting looking up out of the canvas and speaking to him (22). Their gazes are cool and heavy and even Julian's attention is all-consuming: "He listened, his eyes fixed on mine, apparently entranced by these fraudulent recollections. Never had my efforts met with such attentiveness, such keen solicitude" (28).

Furthermore, before Richard joins the Greek class, he describes brushing arms with Francis as he swept by in the hallway: "For a moment, as his arm touched mine, he was a creature of flesh and blood, but the next he was a hallucination again, a figment of the imagination" (22).

Isn't that thrilling! Richard's existence, and those of his harem, become meaningful and interesting under the weight of their

bonds. The Secret History is a harem story not of sexual gratification (though some of that does happen) but of aesthetic and social gratification. To put it more plainly, it fulfills the fantasy of being part of an exclusive, attractive group of and everyone liking you and thinking you are smart and interesting.

ISEKAI

In California, Richard lived a melancholy, drab, alienated life that he dragged himself through like a zombie, and upon moving—essentially transmigrating—to Hampden, he makes up a fictional, glittering, technicolor childhood and paints a picture of glamorous, rich parents to match the vision of aesthetic beauty and money the Classics students present to him.

This is reminiscent of the structure of an isekai story, in which the main character wakes up in a different world, either reincarnating with their memories from their first life intact, or taking over an existing character's body and assuming their role in the world.

When Bunny catches on to Richard's lies, he begins to torment Richard with specific questions that he can't answer without revealing that he has fabricated his whole background. This mirrors the way isekai protagonists are forced to adopt a persona and live a life that is not their own. Though Richard doesn't take over for an existing character, he makes up a rich socialite-sona for himself. In doing this, he fulfills the role of both the protagonist and the System, a computer interface-like character that often appears in isekai to enforce the plot and punish or reward the transmigrator for their compliance.

As mentioned in the HAREM section of this essay, the reader is meant to identify with the protagonist, and this is especially true of the isekai (and harem isekai) genre. As Sash points out in her Nu:-Carnival essay in Yaoi Zine 4, "the protagonist is rarely a blatant self-insert, but rather a proxy to be observed from a secure distance" (35). It is not that the protagonist does not have a personality or

flaws; that would be uncanny and unrealistic to readers. Rather, harem isekai stories and other power fantasy stories have main characters who are powerful or desirable for their flaws (tshirt, 15).

Richard is a mild, neutral kind of character who is somewhat detached and passive; once he has wormed his way into the Classics department at Hampden, it feels like things just happen to him. This makes it somewhat easy to put yourself in his shoes. The plot happens to Richard, and the story happens to you. And Richard's self-proclaimed fatal flaw is a common one: similar to the modern escapist reader, who enjoys stories for their ability to transport the reader to a different world, Richard has a "morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs" (7).

And why wouldn't you? Want to be transported into an insular and self-contained little world 40 years ago, full of gossip and melodrama, where everyone is dressed just so and the main characters are an anachronism and a curiosity and mutually, homoerotically, obsessed with you. It feeds the modern ego perfectly, especially since people these days, more than ever, seem to care more about aesthetics than substance when it comes to subcultures and belonging.

When Richard discovers that his friends are covering up a murder, he immediately starts covering for them even though they haven't confided in him yet. When he and Henry can finally discuss it, Henry appeals to Richard's vanity, calling him clever for figuring things out, but later, Richard wonders if Henry planned his involvement all along: "Maybe he'd divined in me—correctly—this cowardice, this hideous pack instinct which would enable me to fall into step without question" (485).

Henry's status as a mastermind aside, Richard's desperate desire to belong and his obsession with the picturesque make him a perfect isekai protagonist because he's already internalized the need to be part of the story. Whether or not he was manipulated into it, he wanted to go along with the plot.

ON IMMERSION, ENGAGEMENT, AND PLEASURE

“The Pleasure Principle: Immersion, Engagement, Flow” describes the pleasures of immersion as stemming from being completely absorbed in a familiar narrative schema and the pleasures of engagement as coming from our ability to recognize schemas being deployed or subverted from a perspective outside of the text (Douglas and Hargadon, 154). *The Secret History* achieves reader satisfaction by both immersing and engaging the reader via the schema of being a yaoi harem isekai and because of its real world influences.

Though *The Secret History* popularized the sub-genre that later became known as dark academia, it fits neatly in two traditions: the American campus novel which by then morphed into the university bildungsroman and, coincidentally, that of a western boarding school (college edition) which is a popular setting for Japanese yaoi.

It is these schema along with the yaoi harem isekai framework I discussed in this essay which immerse the reader: Richard’s passiveness, the relatability of his desire to fit in and his idolization of beauty as virtuous and interesting, not to mention Donna Tartt’s incredible writing and her looming specter as the author.

The Secret History has a cult of anti-“death of the author” around Donna Tartt because of the way she infamously and controversially based some of her characters on people she went to college with. What’s this? Is *The Secret History* actually thinly-veiled RPF? Sounds like something that might have implications on the escapism of the story.

Tartt has said in interviews that she relates to all of the characters. Even though their aesthetics and personalities, and certain details of their lives are based on real people, the characters’ foibles and flaws are parts of her. This runs counter to the assumption that *The Secret History* was written so that Richard could be a self-in-

sert for Tarrt-the-writer. On the contrary, it is like Tarrt is wooing us via her composite parts in the harem, wearing the faces of her classmates and professor.

Interestingly, knowing that aspects of *The Secret History* were based on real people seems to add to the frenzy around the novel, much like people's fetishization of "snuff" films, or the way audiences perversely love to know about actors having suffered for a role (Williams, 190). Far from taking away from the romance and mystery of the story, it lends an air of realism and gravity and extends the fantasy from the fictional Hampden to the real Bennington College of 40 years ago. One must only read *The Secret Oral History of Bennington* to experience what I mean.

What I am describing is, of course, the pleasure of engagement, which also involves things like secondary criticisms of the text and our own meta knowledge (Douglas and Hargadon, 154). *The Secret History* fans get pleasure from knowing the real person lore around Bennington which only bolsters their understanding of their beloved characters. There is a real pleasure in getting to feel clever and interesting for understanding the influences the real world has on the themes and character dynamics you were already guzzling up so pleausurably.

And guzzle away people will. *The Secret History* takes the trappings of high culture and uses it for lowbrow wish fulfillment. This is a new vector of high-low books—the first being "high interest, low reading" books aimed at introducing more complex themes and concepts to readers with simpler vocabularies and syntax. In this case, rather than giving readers mature concepts in more easily digestible packaging, *The Secret History* uses a highbrow setting and writing style but prioritizes reader satisfaction the way pulpy lowbrow genres do.

Basically, mainstream publishing yearns to satisfy the id the way pulp fiction and trashy webnovels do. *The Secret History* makes great unintended use of the yaoi harem isekai schema, and even its

RPF elements can feel akin to reading the tabloids to a reader who is in-the-know. These elements appearing in a wholly unexpected place make them all the more effective for the way they engage and delight the reader in their discovery.

In conclusion, I think that the gay harem isekai schema, Bennington's lore, and the novel's highbrow form-lowbrow wish fulfillment nature will increase the yaoi aficionado's pleasure and enjoyment of *The Secret History*, which is why I wrote this essay. It's all for pleasure! And now... (ibuprofen meme) let's read *The Secret History* as a gay harem isekai together.

Works Cited

- Douglas, Yellowlees, and Andrew Hargadon. "The Pleasure Principle: Immersion, Engagement, Flow." *Proceedings of the Eleventh ACM on Hypertext and Hypermedia - HYPERTEXT '00*. May 30, 2000, pp. 153-160, <https://doi.org/10.1145/336296.336354>.
- Sash @ineedacatchyna1, "Nu:Carnival and Martha Nussbaum: Sexual Objectification in My Yaoi Eroge Gacha?!" *Yaoi Zine 4*, October 2024, pp. 30-37, <https://longposter.neocities.org/yaoizine4.pdf>.
- Simkjrs, "Plausible Deniability Yaoi: A Webnovel Listicle." *Yaoi Magazine, Volume 2*, August 2023, pp. 79-88, <https://longposter.neocities.org/yaoizine2.pdf>.
- Tartt, Donna. *The Secret History*. Knopf, 1992, New York.
- Tshirt, *Game of the Year: A Sword Art Online Zine*, November 6, 2022. <https://longposter.neocities.org/saozine.pdf>.
- Williams, Linda. "Power, Pleasure, and Perversion: Sadomasochistic Film Pornography." *Representations* 27. January 1, 1989, pp. 37-65, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928483>.

On Torchwood and the temptations of queer tragedy

by Julian shipyrds

If you were on Tumblr in 2009-2012, you are probably aware of Torchwood. A spin off of Russell T. Davies' 2005 reboot of Doctor Who, Torchwood stars immortal time traveler Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) as part of a cast of misfits assigned to investigate the assorted supernatural and alien debris that falls through a space-time rift running through the heart of Cardiff. Jack Harkness, in the tradition of swashbuckling space bisexuals, is great to watch, and his slow burn romance with buttoned-up researcher Ianto is the highlight of the series. Or at least it was to me, watching it as a deeply closeted teen in 2011.

Towards the end of the third series of Torchwood, Ianto is exposed to an alien virus and dies very fetchingly in Jack's arms. It's extremely Mimi from La Boheme (not, for once in an essay about queer people, Rent.) Ianto knows Jack is immortal and at no risk from the virus (Jack has already survived being blown up and sealed in concrete just in the previous three episodes); he knows that Jack will have to live the rest of his very, very, very long life watching people he loves die. He asks Jack not to forget him, and Jack promises that he won't. Ianto's last words are to deny that Jack is capable of remembering him a thousand years into the future; Jack kisses him, succumbs to the virus, and approximately four minutes of show time later, revives.

Reader, I watched this at approximately 1 AM on my beast of a high school laptop, huddled under the covers and trying not to wake my sister by sobbing too loud. I slammed the laptop shut to have a good cry. Then I opened up the laptop and watched the

scene again. It became sort of a talisman for me— any time I needed to cry and couldn't manage it, out would come my Megavideo rip of Torchwood-ChildrenOfEarth-xVideo-x64-S03E04-HD.mkv, scrolled to 53:14. Three minute death scene, me sobbing like a baby, reliable as clockwork.

I loved it for its utility; I needed those three minutes to unlock grief I couldn't access in other ways. I loved it despite there being two arguably sadder death scenes at the end of the second series (RIP Owen and Tosh, you deserved better.) And I loved it despite its being perhaps the most textbook example of bury your gays imaginable.

Like a lot of media analysis tools that gained widespread popularity in an era with TVTropes, “bury your gays” is a cudgel and not a scalpel. Of course no one wants to be straight people's tragedy porn. Of course it's grating to only ever see yourself onscreen as a cautionary tale. Of course the real life origins of the trope are rooted in homophobic moral panics and censorship. And of course many queer people are plenty tired of tragedy. We die more often than straight people, and sooner, for a variety of reasons; we live lives more affected by the mundane grinding sadnesses of poverty and illness and rejection. Is it then problematic to portray queer grief, real or fictional? What about homophobia? Is it actually inherently more revolutionary to write fantasy stories where everyone's chill with the gays, but somehow also they still have hereditary monarchies? I don't actually have the answers here, by the way. Like everyone's least favorite Republican uncle I'm just asking questions.

The real problem I have with “bury your gays” is that I love to bury my gays. I don't recommend “but I like it” as a lens of critical analysis, fan studies notwithstanding, but you show me a potential tragedy and I am pulling out the shovel. I love to watch Ianto choke to death in his lover's arms, and I love to listen to several hundred hours of podcast about gay divorce, and I cherish everything that Interview with the Vampire AMC has going on, and I read and

reread Nell driving her car into the tree, and I think stabbing is maybe the pinnacle of romance.

Why do I love a queer tragedy so? Why do I gravitate to fic that features death and despair and ideological divorce? Why, as a child, was I always putting my plastic animals through travails that wouldn't be out of place in a particularly melodramatic episode of Game of Thrones?

The easy answer would be that I was raised Catholic and haven't quite escaped the ideological shadow of the redemptive power of suffering, but I have too much experience with chronic pain to still think suffering is redemptive. The other obvious answer would be that I'm chasing catharsis in the classic Aristotelian sense of emotional release, but I don't think that's the entirety of it either. There is sometimes a sort of talismanic nature to watching, or reading about, or writing a gay tragedy, a warding off of potential harm. It does feel like a little ritual. Aristotle describes catharsis as a release of pity and fear: look at those poor bastards. And as a queer viewer, the scraped underbelly of that emotion, how easily that could be me. Thank god it isn't.

But neither pity nor fear nor their uneasy third, disgust, are really the emotions I feel when I press repeat on tragedy. To paraphrase Sontag, I "weep in part because [I] have seen it many times. [I] want to weep. Pathos, in the form of a narrative, does not wear out."¹ What I feel is grief, and also pleasure. Pleasure in ritual; pleasure in release; pleasure in a borrowed grief that is both real and unreal, because I can set it aside when the episode finally comes to its end; pleasure because after all, the painful and the erotic are never as far apart as we might pretend.

I watched Ianto's death scene again for this essay, half-expecting that it wouldn't really work the same. I tried rewatching Torchwood

1 *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 83. Despite the title and the way it's used in conversations about media (including by me, here) this is actually an essay on war photojournalism. Worth a read but not for the reasons you might think.

a few years ago and couldn't make it past a few episodes. I'm not 17 anymore, and everything from the special effects to the treatment of its female characters has aged not unlike milk. I've found new tragedies to visit and revisit. But I did cry, watching Jack try and fail to keep his lover by his side. And it felt good.

the yaoi enjoyer to lesbian awakening pipeline

a personal essay by meggie
bsky: pinkserendipity
tumblr: muckkles

i don't remember the first ever yaoi manga i read or first yaoi ship i ever had. i assume it was in late middle school, the same time period i got my own personal chromebook to keep in my bedroom rather than sharing the family desktop in the computer room. im sure it was nothing special, probably an extremely middle of the road scanslation featuring a stereotypical seme/uke pair and more than dubious consent, hosted on one of the myriad free manga sites that existed at the time, rest in peace, etc. So this isn't a story about That. this isn't a story about Any one ship in particular but rather what yaoi as a genre did for me from that point forward. it was critical to my young identity, my sexuality, and how i navigated my social world. yaoi was my best friend and my guide. yaoi was my shield and my sword. yaoi was the director of my most cringefail teenage moments. and at the end of it? yaoi told me i was a great honking dyke.

in 9th grade i met my yaoi dealer. we rode the same bus home from school. she was a senior and sat in the back. i cant remember how i ended up sitting next to her. maybe i saw some anime merch one day and knew we were kindred spirits. maybe i witnessed her cradling a manga in her lap, hunched over the well-worn pages, only the cover featuring two beautiful boys draped across each others laps visible from the outside. maybe it was just the last available seat one day. whatever the case, i began sitting next to her Every Day. and eventually she started lending me her yaoi manga. holding a physical copy of yaoi in my hand for the first time was an in-

credible feeling. to me, this was something that only existed in the online space. this was illicit, this was foreign, this was *yaoi* and it was in my very own grubby little fingers. you would think i would be discreet with such a prize. on the contrary; i was brazen with it. in fact i purposefully read my yaoi in public, in the classroom, for all to see. i did it to protect myself. and i did it as a fuck you.

you see by high school i had a complicated relationship with the concept of boys and dating and sex. which is to say it wasn't complicated at all and i simply recoiled from the very notion, you know, kind of like a young lesbian would. i disliked most male attention for, at the time, nebulous hand wavey reasons. I didnt know *why*, i just knew it felt bad. it didnt help matters that i was frequently on the receiving end of a shocking amount of sexual harassment. puberty was too generous to me and my top half developed quickly and amply. there are only so many times a 15 year old can be told to jump or get called "tig bitties" before she tries her damndest to become as unappealing as possible. one boy in particular enjoyed telling me to my face how frequently he fantasized about "titty fucking" me and it borderline frightened me given he was twice my size, although im sure i would have brushed off the notion should anyone have asked. it was 2009. 2010 maybe. the only thing worse than being harrassed was admitting it bothered you. as a girl it was much cooler to laugh along and play at being chill with sexual "humor" despite every internal inch of me flinching away.

and so i initiated my campaign of male repulsion beginning with him. one day in class i took out one of my borrowed yaoi mangas and opened it in front of him to read. it didnt take long for him to ask what i was looking at and i was blunt with him, turning it over so he could see the very explicit page i was perusing. "its called yaoi. its a japanese comic about gay men having sex," i said. probably. you know, Something To That Effect. he was, justifiably and with great relief from me, weirded out by this, and his harassment grew more and more infrequent the more often he spotted me reading these comics. thus i wielded my borrowed yaoi as an amulet of protection. i didnt mind being thought of as a weirdo and a freak. so long

as i was no longer a target of sexual taunts from boys, i could put up with the rest.

for this minor escape i had my dealer to thank. she was a guardian angel for me in a way, and a siren in others. her very existence pulled me to the back of the bus like a magnet. our fingers brushed as she handed me the latest book from her collection, freshly freed from its shrinkwrap prison. i dont think it was normal for other girls to share porn with such frequency outside of fandom circles. it was different from reading drarry fanfic alone in the dark of my room, the author an unnamed phantom that could exist half-way around the world for all i knew, or from scouring scanslation sites for porn also uploaded by people who may as well have been anonymous to me given how i never paid a second thought to their usernames. these were personal recommendations. this relationship we had was Special and Different. i knew i was reading these sexual fantasies mere hours or even minutes after she had done so herself. it was thrilling. it was unforgettable. it was erotic.

and despite all of that, i dont remember her name. i dont know if i even ever knew her name. she drew me a piece of yaoi art, two boys staring into each others eyes, one stroking the jean-clad thigh of the other. then she graduated and i never saw her again. i kept that art for years, a memory of the older woman who supplied me with cartoon porn. its only now that i realize how formative this was for me, that i likely had a fledgling crush on her without being able to put a name to the feelings. i wonder if she remembers me, if i was the goober freshman she was simply indulging or if this time together was as important to her as it was to me. being several years older, its possible she remembers it even better than i do. i wonder if she still reads yaoi. i wonder if she's reading this zine at this moment. she would be the same age as my current girlfriend is now.

my yaoi days of yore were not solely about consumption. there was production too in the following years. lots of it. 14, 15, 16, 17, these are prime oc creating years. ultra prime fandom obsessive years. with no bills or work there was nothing left to do but draw hetalia

boys tonguing in the margins of my math homework. and often my friends and i drew together. one of my best friends and i developed some incredibly simple and incredibly stupid ocs to be the recurring stars of our collaborative yaoi comics. it was different from our scattered gaia online rp threads. we passed our comics back and forth in person like notes, one person drawing their character speaking or doing something and the next drawing their character reacting in turn. they were unintellectual and frequently sexual, with a smattering of era appropriate internet memes and fandom tropes. i dug these old comics out for this essay and they were so of the time and nostalgic, it cracked us up for a good half hour.

oh yeah, at 31 years old i am still close to most of my high school friend group. in fact, this friend in particular is my roommate and will likely read this, which is fine because she's married now and already knows what i am about to reveal: i had a massive crush on her in high school. it was my first crush on a girl that i managed to recognize for what it was. i recognized it, but i never acted on it. or i guess it's more accurate to say i *couldn't* act on it. even as i laid awake in her bed during sleepovers, my body aching to roll over and just kiss her, my mind rebelled against the very possibility. i think a lot of it was general teenage anxieties over romance, and physicality, and fears of rejection. but i think more specifically it was a denial of who i was. if i gave in to any of these feelings i would officially Not Be Straight and the thought terrified me into dumb inaction, to the point of even turning down her own advances toward me in our junior year. but i had an outlet for these feelings. *we* could not kiss, but our little guys hurriedly scribbled across cheap toothy sketchbook paper *absolutely could*.

i dont think it was an accident that she was the main person i took up this hobby with. looking back, ive always used yaoi shipping as a way to flirt. for me, a majority of the people that ive engaged in any kind of explicit fandom yaoi rp with have been people i was crushing on and more often than not who i ended up dating. almost all of my romantic relationships have begun as fandom friendships, including the one with my very first girlfriend when i was 18 going

on 19. i dont remember whether we met on tumblr or in person at a local convention first, but we clicked quickly. we cosplayed together and did fun and shippy photoshoots of our homestuck yaoi ships, flirting openly all the while. our first kiss happened in johndave cosplay when she set a camera on a timer, told me to close my eyes for a pose, and surprised me with soft lips and the scent of powder foundation. i started wearing more make up after that because the smell reminded me of her.

this first official relationship prompted me to come out to my parents. despite growing up in a tiny southern US town, neither of my parents were religious or socially conservative. my mom's best friend was a gay man who was like an uncle to me, and i had shared my fanart while relaying in detail what shipping was to her. despite knowing all of this logically, i was still terrified, to the point that i wrote my parents letters rather than have to tell them to their faces. when i finally came out my dad said he had 5 kids (at the time) so just logically, statistically, at least one of them was likely to not be straight. in other words, he had already considered the possibility and the only question for him was which one of us it was going to be (i think our numbers are 4 out of 6 and counting at the moment). my mom on the other hand said she had "kinda figured it out already" based on my hobbies and the things i most frequently talked about. so in the end even my very offline mother could tell over a decade ago that yaoi was a dyke hobby. duh, Of Course i was dating one of the girls i dressed up as boys with while holding hands and talking about gay sex. well actually uh yeah, uh. i see how she figured that out now.

so with that huge confession out of the way, i was free to introduce my gf to my parents so we could ride off into the proverbial sunset together. i had moved 5 hours away to go to college but that didn't stop us. we kept up on tumblr, and video called weekly. shipping took up 90% of our conversations. we went through the greatest white girl yaoi hits of 2012 together. im talking stony. im talking johnlock. to the point of me hand crafting a martin freeman 1 month anniversary card for her. And Im Talking Sterek. in fact it

was teen wolf that ultimately lead to our relationship's demise. the day after christmas, a little over 4 months into dating, my first gf messaged me on skype to let me know that it was over. the reason? well it was obvious wasn't it. i wasn't the problem at all, it's just that our relationship didn't feel as real, as intense, or have as much chemistry as scott and allison teen wolf.

thats right. thats how my very first girl on girl relationship ended. while yaoi brought us together, a het ship tore us apart. and fellas, does it get any more lesbian than that?



insomniac-arrest Follow

Oct 21



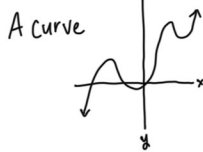
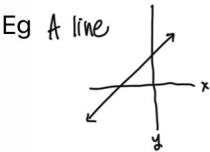
sage voice: is it not a little bit yuri to write yaoi in order to turn other women on?

Math yaoi

Case: dividing by zero (\Leftrightarrow why $0 \neq 1$)

Proposition 1.1:

Math likes things to be continuous
 \Leftrightarrow math likes things to fit into its self
 \Leftrightarrow its system \Leftrightarrow its structure
 (uniform, convergent, smooth, identical, ordered, etc)

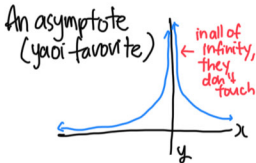
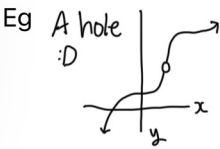


The integers (\mathbb{Z})
 $\{ \dots -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3, \dots \}$

Some nice shapes

Proposition 1.2:

discontinuity makes it hard to do math.
 (not uniform, not smooth, divergent, not identity...)
 Much of math is devoted to resolving discontinuity
 discontinuity disrupts (transgresses) math's ontology.



Fact 1.1: (about 1)

$$1 \in \mathbb{N} \subset \mathbb{Z} \subset \mathbb{Q} \subset \mathbb{R} \dots$$

1 is a natural number, an integer, a rational & a real number...

$\mathbb{N} :=$ the set of natural numbers
 $:= \{ 1, 2, 3, 4, \dots \}$ (in our notation)

called "natural" because they exist intuitively as quantity.

I have some positive, whole number of things, or I wouldn't "have" them
 We see 1 as "generating" (via +) \mathbb{N}

Fact 1.2: (about 0)

$$0 \in \mathbb{Z} \subset \mathbb{Q} \subset \mathbb{R} \dots$$

0 not in \mathbb{N} sometimes because absence of quantity not "naturally" a number.

Introduced in Indo-Arabic system as placeholder symbol for orders of magnitude (1, 10, 100, 1000...)

Becomes a "number" v'ia the introduction of negative numbers.

Given $\{ \dots -3, -2, -1, 1, 2, 3, \dots \}$, then $2-3 = -2$, which makes no sense.

So "nothing" has to become "Something", i.e. a number 0.

Theorem 1:

We can't divide by 0 because 0 has no multiplicative inverse

Corollary 1.1:

(\Leftrightarrow there exists no x such that $0x=1 \Leftrightarrow 0 \neq 1$ (abuse of notation))
 $\hookrightarrow 0 \cdot x = 0$

Theorem 2:

dividing by 0 is yaoi.

There's the obvious hole/pole (absence/presence) tension, & fractional division lends itself to a fair amount of sex jokes, but we follow a different line of thought. Namely, we look at identity.

dividing by zero is math's greatest taboo. its impossibility is equivalent to the well-known fact that $0 \neq 1$ (Corollary 1.1).

That some object x equals some object(s) y is called identity.

Fact 2.1:

If we try to divide by 0 \Leftrightarrow make $0=1$...

things diverge

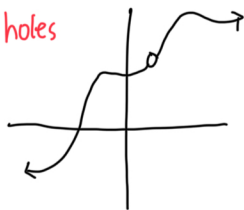


asymptotes



general disorder
(how large is $\frac{x}{0}$ compared to other objects?)

holes



indeterminate form
(i.e. no sensible solution)

$\frac{1}{0}, \frac{0}{0}, \frac{x}{0}$, etc...

$\Rightarrow \mathbb{Z}$ is not a group via multiplication $\ddot{\smile}$

In short, discontinuity!

So we could also call dividing by zero math's greatest transgression.

Statement 2.1: about algebra

Definition 2.1.1: a ring is a set of objects equipped with two binary operations (multiplication & addition) such that the set is a monoid via multiplication, a group via addition, & the distributive law holds.

a monoid: a set & a binary operation that is associative & contains the identity

a group: a monoid such that each element has its inverse

\mathbb{R} (the real numbers) is a ring via normal addition & multiplication

Fact 2.2: about identity

given some operation \cdot a set of objects A , and elements in the set $a \in A$, the identity is an element id in A so that

$$id \cdot a = a \cdot id = a$$

0 & 1 are the additive & multiplicative identity

0 & 1, as identity, are sort of universal in our concept of math. so even when we deal with rings whose objects aren't numbers, we still say their identities are 0 & 1. This is the dividing by zero that we look at

for \mathbb{R} & multiplication, id=1
take $x \in \mathbb{R}$. then $1x = x1 = x$
for \mathbb{R} & addition, id=0
 $x \in \mathbb{R}$. then $0+x = x+0 = x$

Fact 2.3: about inverses

yoai loves its "inverses" (foils, reflections)

algebraically they are a condition for groups & thereby rings, & most of what we think of when we think of "math".

given a set of objects Y with elements of form $y \in Y$ and some operation \cdot , y^{-1} is the inverse of y if & only if $y^{-1} \cdot y = y \cdot y^{-1} = id$

for $x \in \mathbb{R}$, $\frac{1}{x}$ is its multiplicative inverse and $-x$ is its additive inverse

Statement 2.2: about identity & inverses

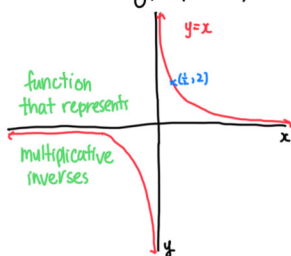
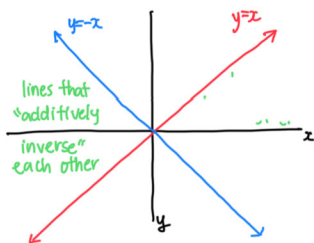
things are **inverses** if they become the **identity** when they're joined together.

So 2 & -2 are **additive inverses** because $2 - 2 = 0$, & 0 is the **identity**

And 3 & $\frac{1}{3}$ are **multiplicative inverses** because $3(\frac{1}{3}) = 1$, & 1 is the **identity**

Inverses are opposites that tend towards unity. Math wants them to be reconciled — things get strange if they aren't.

Inverses are reflections of each other ("diametrically opposed")



Inverses become identity; they tend towards "becoming" **one** through some algebraic process intrinsic to their existence. But they can only do this because they are opposed — **identity**, a synthesis of thesis & antithesis. Math runs on uniting opposites.

Naturally, mathematical inverses make versatile objects in yaoi studies.

Statement 2.3: about 0 & 1

0 & **1** are **identities**; they're not **inverses**.

Recall: we can't divide by 0 because $0x = 0 \neq 1 \Leftrightarrow 0$ has no **multiplicative inverse**

1 has -1 & **1** (itself) as its **additive** & **multiplicative inverses** ($1 - 1 = 0, 1 \cdot 1 = 1$)

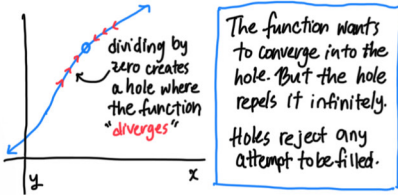
0 has **0** (itself) as its **additive inverse**, but it has no **multiplicative inverse**.

That is, there is no number which multiplied with **0** will become the **multiplicative identity**: **1**

Inverses resist each other, but we all know that absence suggests a presence. Conversely, there's no process by which **0** becomes **1**. Whatever happens here is stickier. **0** is the nothingness that can never suggest a something, & **1** is the something that can never be none. This ruins math.

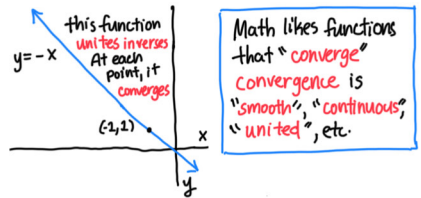
Theorem 3: $0 \neq 1$

Fact 3.1: divergence (0, holes)



0 is nothing, that is not the opposite (inverse) of some thing. It disappears into numbers with addition, & makes them into itself through multiplication. As identity, it is the foundation of math. But it cannot generate anything itself, and the holes it creates cannot be filled in.

Fact 3.1: convergence (1, lines)



1 is the perfect number. Through addition, it makes every number in \mathbb{Z} . And as multiplicative identity, it is in everything.

1 is a number that doesn't make anything into itself. It generates, unifies, conforms with, everything, in math.

Inverses can be identified to each other.

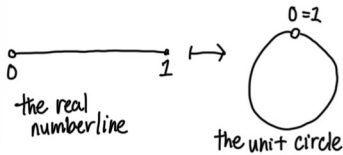
→ Any number, can be made into any other, except for 0.

→ So dividing by 0 disrupts (ruptures?) math; hence it is its greatest transgression.

0 cannot be united with 1!
But...

Theorem 4: we can't help but divide by 0.

Take $f: \mathbb{R} \rightarrow S^1$

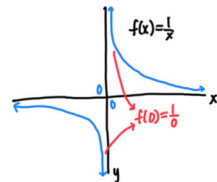


Take calculus:

$$\lim_{h \rightarrow 0} \frac{f(x+h) - f(x)}{h}$$

which births the concept of derivatives...

Take secondary school algebra:



If $0=1$, this is not a unity of inverses that become one in the identity; this is an identity of identities. That is, impossibly, 0 is 1.

Theorem 5: $0=1$

$\Leftrightarrow 0$ is 1 , 1 is 0 . Not that they unite into something, or anything at all, but that dividing by zero is that 0 is 1 , math's "greatest transgression".

The $=$ sign is *identity*. 0 & 1 are *identity* because they unite *inverses*, which is, in some way, the whole work of math: to make things continuous, uniform, & smooth (to make opposites whole \Leftrightarrow one).

So 0 & 1 are not a yaoi of inverses. They're more completely & irreconcilably opposed than inverses. We could go with "nothing" & "something" for absence/presence, but again, 1 is existence without 0 , 1 repels 0 , & 0 is existence without 1 . We can think 1 without 0 & vice versa.

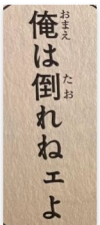
But we still have this identity, dividing by zero.

$0=1$ is an identity that can never be conceived of, represented, or reduced. It transgresses the uniform, binary, continuous system of math.

& yet it's still an identity - an identity that escapes definition and understanding.

0 & 1 aren't a unity, nor are they united, nor do they become one. Instead, they *are* each other, at the same moment they are not. Naturally, this is impossible.

It's whatever's happening here



← "I = you won't fall"

and that's pretty yaoi to me.

Thanks, kids for suggesting
yaoi

Being Gay is Only Yaoi Sometimes:

A polyamorous yaoi data analysis of
The Raven Cycle (with yaoi graphs)

by zoe @miss_coverly

ABSTRACT

In *The Raven Cycle* by Maggie Stiefvater, everyone is in love with each other, but that is only gay sometimes. To prove my hypothesis that *The Raven Cycle* is a polyamorous yaoi text, I conducted research on a sample of 69 scenes (yes) from the books and evaluated their yaoi severity and yaoi intentionality. After compiling this data into several yaoi graphs, I meditated on my findings and what they illustrate about queerness in *The Raven Cycle*.

INTRODUCTION

The Raven Cycle (TRC) by Maggie Stiefvater is a well-known queer American YA series, but it *isn't* well-known enough for being a polyamorous yaoi text. My recent reread of TRC gripped me with this realization, and I knew instantly that I needed to share this forbidden knowledge with the Yaoi Zine audience.

A brief introduction to TRC, for those who haven't read it: In their search for an ancient Welsh king, a group of friends discover a supernatural dream forest called Cabeswater in Henrietta, Virginia. Gansey is a rich boy who has died multiple times and has anxiety about it, Adam is poor and can do forest magic, Ronan can pull things out of his dreams and has a dead dad, Noah IS dead, and Blue is the Girl of the group who comes from a family of psychics. A lot of metaphorical dream magic and admittedly hard to

follow storylines ensue, but that's not ultimately why anyone gets obsessed with TRC. The *real* appeal is in the insane codependent relationships and the aforementioned gay stuff.

The polyamorous yaoi allegations are fairly textual. Blue outright says:

"Blue and her boys... were all in love with one another. She was no less obsessed with them than they were with her, or one another, analyzing every conversation and gesture, drawing out every joke into a longer and longer running gag, spending each moment either with one another or thinking about when next they would be with one another." (Blue Lily Lily Blue, pg. 103)

When I first read the series, going into it I knew there were gay characters, but I could not for the life of me pinpoint who would be The Yaoi Pairing. I've seen other fans echo this experience, and I think there's an obvious reason for it: they are literally all gay. Even in a book series with explicit queer rep and Canon Gay Relationships, there are always elements of implicit queerness that are never fully realized. With this essay, I wanted to explore the interplay that occurs when a text has both textual queerness and accidental queerness. Subsequently, the best way I knew how to do this was through very insane yaoi graphs. (Many thanks to my friend El who is an epidemiologist and made Figure 2 with their very professional Graph Making Software. Everything else I used free graph makers and prayed.)

RESEARCH METHODS

For this essay, I evaluated 69 scenes (it's what Ronan would've wanted) from TRC. I chose scenes to evaluate based off of vibes and what gay moments I remembered as plot relevant or particularly insane. For a comprehensive list of the 69 scenes with rankings and comments, you can view my yaoi spreadsheet at the following link: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1iwT3ko-Zup_ppksfGgnDuWkHXn-woPBT63wGQQLIJkYU/edit?us-

[p=sharing](#)

After compiling all my yaoi findings into the aforementioned spreadsheet, I evaluated each scene based on two criteria.

Firstly, I looked at **Yaoi severity**. This is looking at how egregious the level of yaoi is within a specific scene or aspect of the dynamic between two or more characters. While represented on a numerical scale from 0-5, these levels of yaoi have been titled and defined as explained below:

- **0 - Not Gay.** For whatever reason, this is not pinging my gaydar in the slightest. There is a heterosexual explanation for this.
- **1 - Homoerotic Neutral.** This is definitely gay—either in its existence OR one or both parties involved in the interaction are gay—however, this is not gay in a way that's based in platonic affection or romantic attraction. Homoeroticism that is not tethered to a fully realized gay Feeling.
- **2 - Homoerotic Platonic.** This is definitely gay and probably definitely attached to some homoerotic feelings, BUT in the interest of objectivity, I think this could just be a symptom of horniness and/or a codependent friend thing.
- **3 - Homoerotic Gay.** This is gay in a very romantic way. I cannot conceive of reading this as platonically. Absolute homo.
- **4 - Yaoi Gay.** With this level we have strayed into a level of gay that is distinct enough to make the reader feel as though they are reading a yaoi manga and not a YA series from 2014 about boys living in Virginia. This differs from Homoerotic Gay in that it is both More Severe and also more unhinged in its completely unintentional synergy with BL tropes.
- **5 - What the Fuck Yaoi.** Scenes with this classification were so gay that I audibly gasped, covered my mouth, or teared up over how intense the yaoi was.

Secondly, I looked at **Yaoi Intentionality**. This refers to *the level of gay severity I think the author intended with this scene*. Yaoi Severity and Yaoi Intentionality did not necessarily have to correlate. Intentionality is represented on a numerical scale from 0 (this is not

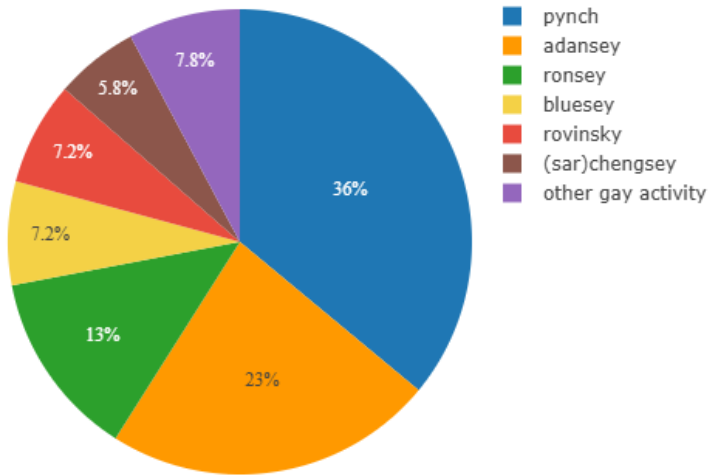
intentionally gay at all) to 10 (this scene threw the first brick at stonewall).

Limits of this study: I am incredibly biased and multiship like nobody's business. I encourage anyone who disagrees with my yaoi rankings or overall findings to make their own yaoi graphs. I mean this genuinely because I would love to read more yaoi graphs.

FINDINGS

Starting with the broadest overall data, let's look at Figure 1: Percentage of total TRC Yaoi scenes by ship.

Percentage of total TRC Yaoi scenes by ship

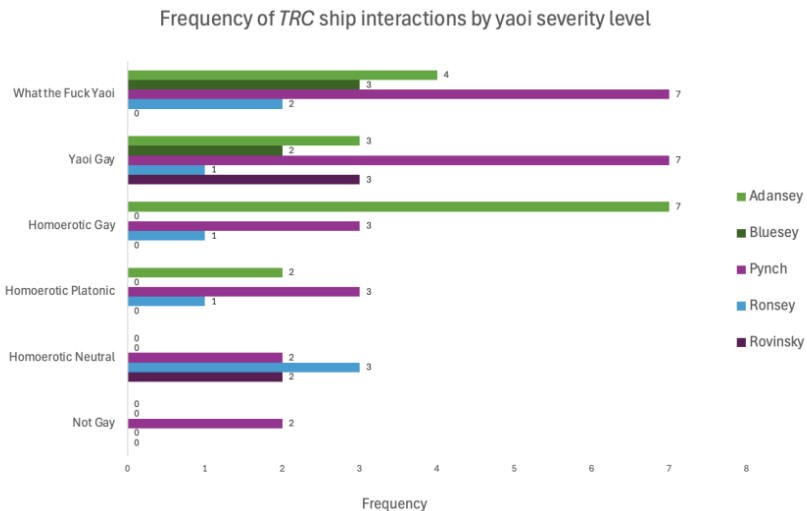


This pie chart breaks down the yaoi/yaoi-adjacent scenes I evaluated into specific ships, with Pynch (Adam/Ronan) definitely carrying at 36% of the yaoi content in TRC. It makes sense: Adam and Ronan are the only canon queer couple in TRC—explicitly romantic and reciprocated—and two of the three canonical queer characters in TRC (along with Kavinsky). Coming in next is Adansei (Adam/Gansei), whose homoerotic best friendship knows no bounds in its strange intensity, and then Ronsey (Ronan/Gansei),

platonic roommates who have an accidental master/dog dynamic.

On the lower end of the yaoi spectrum are Bluesey (Blue/Ganse), a canonical het ship that nevertheless feels Very Yaoi, Chengsey (Henry/Ganse), a noncanon yaoi ship introduced in the final book (which sometimes becomes a polycule with Blue, thus Sarchengsey), and Rovinsky (Ronan/Kavinsky), a yaoi ship that is canon on one side. Other Gay Activity refers to a) yaoi ships with only 1 appearance in this study or b) scenes that were tied to a singular character behaving gay rather than a specific ship.

This all feels very straightforward: of course the canon gay ship has the highest concentration of yaoi content, with the rest of the non-canon gay pairings trailing them by a wide margin. A further look at the Yaoi Data, though, suggests that the margin may not be as wide as it seems. Consider Figure 2: “Frequency of TRC ship interactions by yaoi severity level” and Figure 3: “Scenes ranked higher than homoerotic platonic vs amount of scenes evaluated for yaoi content.”



Again, Figure 2 shows Pynch pulling high yaoi scores across the board, specifically in the Yaoi Gay and What the Fuck Yaoi levels. BUT, when we look at scenes with high yaoi levels in particular, as opposed to the Total Yaoi Scenes shown in Figure 1, Adanse

is pulling comparable numbers—and is even pulling ahead of the pack with seven (7!) Homoerotic Gay scenes.

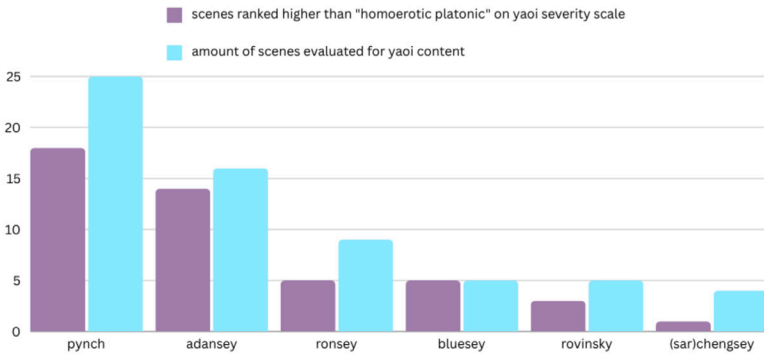


Figure 3 is even more interesting when we look at, among the yaoi scenes evaluated, how many of those scenes ranked as at least Homoerotic Gay, Yaoi Gay, or What the Fuck Yaoi. Here, we see that Adansej actually has a HIGHER rate of yaoi content that's surpassing homoerotic platonic. Pynch has more yaoi adjacent scenes that can be assessed, so while they are hitting the highest levels of yaoi, they ALSO have an overall bigger gap between the total number of yaoi scenes and how many of those are explicitly non-platonic.

A possible explanation for this effect is that, with Pynch being a canonical couple, their scenes have a higher tendency of straying into BL trope territory or clearly romantic scenarios. Adansej, in contrast, shines at the Homoerotic Gay level by displaying soooo much behavior that has no heterosexual explanation—but is less likely to hit those fully-fledged Yaoi levels.

Furthermore, part of this is also due to the slowburn nature of Pynch, where some of their earlier scenes can be read homoerotic platonically before they truly develop into yaoi scenes. Adansej, however? Since their relationship never turns into full on romance, there's a constant and unchanging homoeroticism with them.

Other observations I found fascinating include:

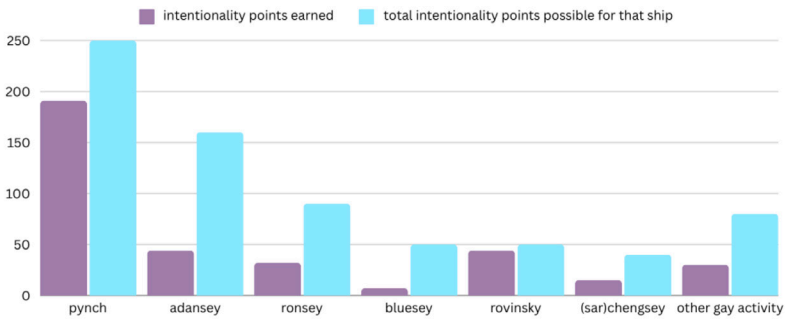
- Rovinsky peaks at the Yaoi Gay ranking, cementing their relationship as BL-adjacent and More than Homoerotic, just not at truly arresting What the Fuck levels. If their relationship was prominent for more than one book, I think they would have higher WTF levels, but as it is there isn't enough to get emotionally invested in compared to even the non-canon pairings like Adansey or Chengsey.
- Bluesey has a 100% "more than homoerotic platonic" ranking despite, as previously mentioned, being a canon het ship. This is because they're always doing some variation of lesbian yearning OR in a polycule relationship with Henry.
- Ronsey is all over the place, peaking at both Homoerotic Neutral and What the Fuck Yaoi—alluding to their relationship mostly being a vehicle to show Ronan's onesided (and not exactly romantic) queer attraction to Gansey.... notwithstanding some truly insane aspects of their friendship that make you wonder. Like the aforementioned master/dog dynamic. What is going on there.

Next, let's take a look at Figure 4: "Intentionality points earned vs. total intentionality points possible for that ship" and Figure 5: "Yaoi Intentionality in TRC by ship (total points out of 690)."

Our Yaoi intentionality data is perhaps more straightforward than our Yaoi severity data, though digging into provides some additional nuance. When it comes to Yaoi intentionality, there is an even wider berth between Pynch and all the other TRC ships because, in my heart of hearts, I don't think Steifvater meant for the friend group to feel as polyamorous as they come across.

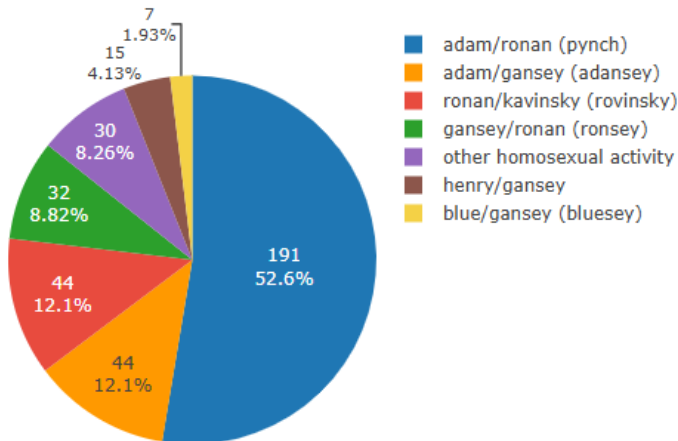
Figure 4 shows the comparison between the possible intentionality points a singular ship could earn with how many points they did earn (max number of points = amount of yaoi scenes evaluated x 10). Thus, the only ships with truly high levels of Intentionality are Pynch and Rovinsky. Being that those three are only explicitly

queer characters in the series, this makes sense. Figure 5 serves as an interesting counterpoint to these results, however.



For example, Adansej and Rovinsky are tied for 44 intentionality points each. Figure 4 contextualizes this by putting the data into a per-ship basis, but the raw number of intention points being equal is terribly interesting—especially when Adansej ranks as highly in Yaoi severity as it does.

yaoi intentionality in trc by ship (total points out of 690)



Another point of interest here is that, while Pynch has a higher number of raw Intentionality points—191 out of 250 possible, or 76%—Rovinsky actually has a higher percentage-based Intentionality score: 44 out of 50, or 88% Intentionality! This variation can be explained by the fact that Pynch is more of a slowburn romance that starts out as a friendship, so all of their scenes are not actually written for the purpose of Yaoi Romance; some are primarily intended to develop their friendship, which is a big theme in TRC regardless. On the other hand, Rovinsky is utilized almost solely to show that Ronan is gay. Their relationship is confined to a single book and has little underlying purpose aside from its connection to the theme of discovering sexuality, so by necessity it is always high in Yaoi intentionality.

Finally, I'd like to highlight the extremes that exist on the Yaoi Severity vs. Yaoi Intentionality scale in relation to specific TRC scenes.

Highest Intentionality, Highest Severity: These were across the board five different Pynch scenes, all tied with What the Fuck Yaoi (5) severity scores and 10 intentionality scores. These included multiple scenes where Ronan is monologuing about Adam's hands, "Ronan's second secret was Adam Parrish," and the scene where they finally get together and make out throughout the night + Adam touches Ronan's back tattoo. All scenes that were intentionally very heavy on the yaoi severity.

Lowest Intentionality, Highest Severity: By default, Bluesey is sweeping this category with multiple What the Fuck Yaoi rankings despite being a het couple. They possess zero yaoi intention with one of the juiciest, yaoi-adjacent stories of forbidden yearning and fate trying to kill them (literally).

When you take Bluesey out of the pool, Adansei is the front runner for this category with multiple 0-2 Intentionality scores. There are few things in TRC that are more yaoi than Gansey waxing poetic about Adam peeing in the woods. Yes, that is a real thing

that happens.

Highest Intentionality, Lowest Severity: “Ronan thinking the taste of gasoline is sexy” comes in with a Not Gay (0) severity ranking and a 10 Intentionality score—this is supposed to be really gay, but more so it just concerns me since ingesting too much gasoline would give you a tummy ache at the very least.

Surprisingly, or maybe not surprisingly, Pynch actually comes out on top in this category, too. Yes, they are the canon yaoi couple, HOWEVER, this allowed me to nitpick some of their scenes which I can tell are supposed to be more impactful as yaoi than they are. Specifically, “Ronan sleeping on the floor next to Adam’s bed in St. Agnes” got a 1 Severity score from me due to occurring OFF SCREEN. The intention is there, the implied yaoi is there, but it should be happening on the page!!! Not just in my imagination!!

Lowest Intentionality, Lowest Severity: This one is a three way tie between the following:

- Henry calling himself and Gansey blood brothers after having one of the most homoerotic relationships in the series. We got nerfed with this one.
- Ronan teaching Adam how to drive stick, which for the *canon yaoi couple of the series*, should be a LOT more homoerotic than it is. 0 points.
- Gansey’s sister asking if he’s sleeping with Ronan or Adam and Gansey responding, “Isn’t friendship worthy enough?” Oh, Gansey... you aren’t wrong but your closet is also glass.

CONCLUSION

So what does all of this mean? Well, it means that queerness in TRC is complicated. It means that, as Blue says herself, everyone in TRC is in love with each other—but that’s only gay sometimes.

While in many ways TRC is a solid example of queer representation in YA fiction, particularly for series that was published from 2012-2016, there is still a line between who is queer and who is Not. It's not as bad as, say, how some queer fiction regulates queerness to side/background storylines only—but TRC still adheres to the unspoken rule that not everyone can be gay... even if, as the yaoi graphs illustrate, everyone is clocking similar levels of yaoi tendencies.

This definitely comes from a pressure, even within gay narratives, to Not Make Everything Gay. Unfortunately, a lot of people still balk at how it's "unrealistic" for more than a few characters to be canonically queer, despite how often queer people band together and create overwhelming gay friend groups. Just because a character doesn't come out as queer doesn't erase it being... really heavily implied, though.

This becomes a double-edged sword in series with both canonical queerness and queer subtext. You could argue that, since TRC has canon queer characters, the characters who aren't confirmed queer are not queer by design. On the other hand, it's almost easier to read and argue implied queerness in a series where we've already accepted a baseline level of intentional queerness in the text.

TRC does spend some time contemplating the difference between friendship and romantic love, but only very generally. When Adam asks Gansey what makes loving someone different than being their friend, he's really only asking to gain clarity about his feelings for Ronan. Adam never directly confronts, or reaches a conclusion regarding, what makes his love for Ronan different from his homoerotic obsession with Gansey; Gansey never defines his feelings for Adam or Ronan or Henry as only platonic, but he also never considers that they could be romantic despite what the subtext suggests.

Overall, this overflowing cup of queerness makes TRC an interesting reading experience with both positives and negatives. You're

getting more textual queerness than you bargained for—but this *can* be a bummer if you find yourself more compelled by the Potential of queerness between two characters, rather than the queerness that actually comes to fruition. Yaoi that is so close, yet so far.

If you enjoy multishipping and/or polyamory, you will most likely be satisfied regardless. Which brings us back to my original hypothesis: is *The Raven Cycle* a polyamorous yaoi text? My yaoi graphs suggest that yes, it is.

While the canon yaoi ships lead the way, the non-canon ships still pull their weight at similar and even higher rates, particularly when you take into account the nuances of both Yaoi severity and Yaoi intentionality. These combined stats serve to illustrate a cast that is genuinely all in love with each other, either via confirmed canonical attraction, ambiguous homoerotic longing, or a secret third thing.

And in light of this, I say: perhaps being gay *isn't* only yaoi sometimes. Perhaps being gay is polyamorous yaoi all the time.

Pondering the ORV

by @soph_sol

I have been reading the ongoing webtoon adaptation of Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint (ORV) for nearly two and a half years now, and the webtoon isn't even halfway through the story yet. Given the pace at which new episodes of the webtoon are released, I think I'll be reading it for another five years.

I don't know how the story ends,¹ what conclusion the plot, character,



and relationship arcs are ultimately aiming for. Based on what little I've heard about it, I don't think that it's going to explicitly develop and portray an m/m relationship. The metadata on the webtoons site backs this up; ORV is categorised simply as "Action". But I fully believe that the author is intentionally making Kim Dokja/Yu Junghyeok as shippy as possible without ever actually going there. Because like. Wow.

But it's not just cheap jokes for queerbaiting purposes. The whole narrative of ORV is thematically invested in the connection between these two men. Reading Kim Dokja/Yu Junghyeok into the text enhances the story, rather than just being a fun ship idea to

1 * Usually I'm not spoiler-averse, but I'm doing ORV as a read-along book club with friends and it would change the dynamic if I were to look up the original webnovel to read ahead and end up knowing more than the others. It's fun to speculate together!

write fanfic about.

ORV is the story of Kim Dokja, a young man who's been obsessed with the extraordinarily long webnovel "Three Ways of Surviving the Apocalypse" (TWSA) for ten years, and especially obsessed with its protagonist, Yu Junghyeok. When the apocalypse as described in TWSA begins to happen, Kim Dokja uses his foreknowledge from the book to help him navigate the complex scenarios of the apocalypse.

Kim Dokja's relationship with the entire idea of stories could be the subject of several extensive essays, but suffice it to say that ORV is intensely interested in the power stories have over their readers, and also the power readers have over the stories they care about. This dynamic is fundamental to understanding Kim Dokja/Yu Junghyeok. Kim Dokja is certain that he fully understands Yu Junghyeok, having read an extremely long novel entirely about him. But he has trouble seeing how Yu Junghyeok actually changes over time due to the influence of Kim Dokja's actions. He doesn't let himself understand what he might mean to Yu Junghyeok.

Kim Dokja maintains a separation between himself and the story, an emotional distance he seems to need, even as he entwines himself ever further with the lives of characters he loves, and manipulates the plot in an effort to change the ending of TWSA. He cannot acknowledge to himself that being a part of Yu Junghyeok's life and story fundamentally changes his relationship with Yu Junghyeok. There's a wall there, for Kim Dokja. (A literal wall, actually, the Fourth Wall, one of his official skills within the apocalyptic scenarios!)

One of the ways that this emotional distance manifests in ORV is that Kim Dokja will do his best to ruthlessly manipulate anyone if he thinks it will provide the outcome he wants – and Yu Junghyeok is not exempt. To Kim Dokja, even though Yu Junghyeok is a fundamental part of his psyche, Yu Junghyeok is not legible as a real person. Yu Junghyeok is character, a tool. A pokemon Kim Dokja

has memorised all the stats for and will deploy as needed.

At the same time, Kim Dokja's efforts at distancing himself also mean he does not let himself be known by any of his travelling companions, Yu Junghyeok included. Kim Dokja is uninterested in showing his vulnerable, human side, and feels the need to maintain a particular persona no matter what. He doesn't let Yu Junghyeok in on his plans and machinations, leaving Yu Junghyeok to draw his own conclusions about what Kim Dokja is doing.

All of this might lead you to believe that there's no way Kim Dokja and Yu Junghyeok could grow close, given how Kim Dokja treats Yu Junghyeok and behaves around him.

But one of the contradictions of Kim Dokja is that although he is all of the things the above implies – self-important, arrogant, detached, calculating, petty, etc – he's also genuinely kind and caring, alarmingly self-sacrificing, and doing his best for the well-being of all of his companions and indeed of the whole world (universe? multiverse??).

And the two characters are constantly being linked together – narratively, using the artistic format of the webtoon to create visual juxtapositions, as well as through the active choices being made by both Kim Dokja and Yu Junghyeok. They have a special connection which neither of them have with anyone else.

Yu Junghyeok is a regressor, someone who is able to live his life many times over, attempting to make different choices each time to get things to go right. Because of the experiences he has throughout these many lives, he loses his ability to trust anyone or see them as equals. He becomes a burnt out, angry misanthrope who pushes other people away. But over time Kim Dokja convinces him to work together, and Yu Junghyeok learns to appreciate the power of teamwork – and openly acknowledges Kim Dokja multiple times as his companion, something extremely unusual for him. (He never becomes emotionally open!) Yu Junghyeok eventually comes to

genuinely believe that Kim Dokja is the only one who can actually reach the end of all scenarios and win, getting the good ending. Saving the world like that is something Yu Junghyeok has never been able to achieve in all his regressions but desperately longs for. Kim Dokja is special.

Meanwhile, to Kim Dokja, Yu Junghyeok is the protagonist of the novel that's been his lifeline for a decade. When he was a teen, he would tell himself he was Yu Junghyeok to get himself through rough times. TWSA and Yu Junghyeok are what he learned to believe in, when he couldn't rely on anything else in his life. The things Yu Junghyeok represents to Kim Dokja are huge and all-encompassing. ORV (so far at least?) honestly spends remarkably little time with Yu Junghyeok onscreen – but he's constantly in Kim Dokja's thoughts, present and relevant because Yu Junghyeok is the lens through which Kim Dokja sees everything.



Kim Dokja and Yu Junghyeok hardly ever have civil or friendly conversations with each other, over the course of the story so far. Even when they become frequent companions, working together and trusting each other (more or less), and even when Kim Dokja is dying in Yu Junghyeok's arms (he gets better!), interactions are almost always prickly. They're often infuriated by each other's choices, and are quick to believe the other is acting out of self-interest.

But that doesn't stop them from working together, helping each other, saving each other, being willing to die for each other. That doesn't stop them from finding ways to reach out to each other across planes of existence when there's no normal way to communicate.

The strength of Kim Dokja and Yu Junghyeok's bond is representative of the importance of the relationship between a reader and the stories they love, of why stories are so important and worth valuing in all our lives. Only because of his love for TWSA and Yu Junghyeok does Kim Dokja have the knowledge and perspective he needs to make his way through the scenarios and have the potential to save the world. Only because Kim Dokja believes in him does Yu Junghyeok have the strength of will to try to make this the life that really counts instead of giving up and trying again, over and over and over.

At one point in ORV, there's a prophecy hanging over Kim Dokja, that he will be killed by the one he loves most. When Kim Dokja's friends and companions ask him who the prophecy might be referring to, he genuinely does not know. The narrative makes jokes about who he might love most, then lets the prophecy hang in the background threateningly for a long time before it eventually comes to pass. When the time comes, Kim Dokja's conclusion is that the one he loves most is stories, is TWSA. He's killed by the narrative. But the person to enact the killing blow – it's Yu Junghyeok, because Kim Dokja asks him to. Kim Dokja loves stories; Kim Dokja loves Yu Junghyeok. Of course he does.



Stories sustain us, and stories only have life and meaning if they have readers. Kim Dokja/Yu Junghyeok is ORV. And me/books is yaoi.

Now we just have to wait five-ish years to find out whether anything that happens in the rest of ORV changes my opinion on any of this. Check back with yaoi zine in 2029!

crazy yaoi webnovel advice column

by simkjrs and zarinthe1

Dear Saint Valentione,

I am an influential and highly successful businessperson in charge of a large corporate conglomeration, but I have a severe neurosis that I have been unable to disclose to anyone: I have a phobia of Omegas. Recently, a business rival tried to set me up, and as a result of some questionably legal maneuvers, I had a one-night stand with an Omega who I believe I have marked but cannot clearly recall. Just thinking of the incident makes my skin crawl. Unfortunately, although I have thrown all of my considerable resources into finding the miscreant who dared to lay hands on me, I've found no traces of the culprit. Even my most capable assistant, who has resolved many intractable problems while at my side, has been unable to tease out any clues. Have you any advice on what to do?

Sincerely,
Bound But Angry

Dear Bound But Angry,

My condolences. It must have been so difficult for you to overcome your phobia of Omegas, even for one night. If just thinking about the incident makes your skin crawl, why not simply give up? During my second wedding to the same man, I sincerely thought about how much our five years of separation had hurt, and that made the moment of our reunion so much sweeter. However, you seem like absence has not made the heart grow fonder. You mentioned that your capable and hardworking assistant had been unable to find any clues? If someone as talented as that couldn't manage it, then I would take it as a sign to instead rejoice in the people that you already have. With such a talented staff, you have

no need for an Omega!

Sincerely,
Saint Valentione

Dear Val,

As a fellow hero, I am hopeful that you can shed some insight onto my rather unusual situation. You see, due to certain laws of the world in which I reside, I have been caught in a cycle of death and regression for dozens of rounds now. Although the situation is certainly wearing on my soul, what really troubles me is that there is a fellow I've met in every lifetime who I just can't seem to predict even with my lifetimes of experience, and moreover, he always seems to find a way to die for my sake in every round. I've tried keeping him close to protect him, and treating him harshly to push him away, and yet the ending always seems to be the same. How should I break free of this cycle within the cycle?

Sincerely,
Trapped and Troubled

Dear Trapped and Troubled,

The cyclical horror of life and death can really be a doozy! Meeting people only to lose them again is a terrible thing. But it seems your specific issue is to do with your inability to predict him-- that is to say, your inability to predict how and when he'll die. Otherwise, he seems unfortunately to be very predictable indeed. I'm afraid I'm more in tune with his situation than your own, so I will do my best through that lens. Trapped and Troubled, the root of the problem is that he is afraid; specifically he is afraid of a world where you don't exist.

This is a very difficult cycle to break, my friend.

In the end, the mistake is thinking it's about him to begin with: it's about you. You say you've kept him close. You say you've pushed him away.

If you don't mind my saying so, why not try... a little bit of flirting?

Sincerely,
Saint Valentione

Dear Valentione,

For years I've been working with a difficult and cantankerous boss, and I've only managed to keep my sanity by keeping strict boundaries between my personal and work life. He doesn't know a thing about me – not even my secondary gender – and I'd prefer to keep it that way. However, I accidentally slept with him while not in my right mind, and I found out after the fact that he hadn't been either because someone had roofied him.

Ever since that night, my boss has been on the warpath trying to find out who slept with him, and the better I am at my job – which is very – the less I want to lose it. Plus, just imagining trying to explain this to HR is a headache. I suppose the responsible thing to do would be to come clean, but it's not like he was the only one victimized here, right?

In this kind of situation, what should I do?

From,
Workplace Woes

Dear Workplace Woes,

What a difficult work environment! In some ways it reminds me of a horribly embarrassing incident that happened when I was attempting to flirt with my senior coworker. You see, shortly after our

first kiss he got possessed, and I didn't notice, so when I brought up the time of our second kiss to him much later, he was completely confused! He didn't remember it at all! Workplace Woes, I accidentally kissed a demon.

Funny how these things can happen.

If your boss is on the warpath, it might be good to wait for him to calm down before you break the news. But at the same time, you're not the one at fault, and the desire to keep your personal life private is a deeply understandable one. In the end, it comes down to what you value most. Do you value the trust your boss has in you to do your job, or the trust your boss has in you always being honest with him?

And if worst comes to worst, I have to say this journal really needs someone competent running it! And I promise-- I don't bite.

Sincerely,
Saint Valentione

Dear Saint V.,

I recently transmigrated into a book I read as a minor villain who gets killed off by the protagonist near the beginning of the story as just desserts for his evil deeds. Well, I somehow managed to avoid getting killed and cleaned up my image a bit in order to survive. The only thing is that the protagonist has been sticking really close to me for some reason and it's making me nervous, because even though I didn't do all of those evil things, the person whose body I've taken over definitely did. I can't even act too coldly to the protagonist out of fear that he'll suspect that the rumors surrounding this body's past may be true after all. How do I escape this uncomfortable and frankly terrifying position?

Sincerely,

Salted Fish Who Can't Lie Down

Dear Salted Fish Who Can't Lie Down,

You've found yourself in quite a conundrum! I'm relieved that you managed to survive such a harrowing experience. Changing your reputation can be a lifelong slog, so even a small success is truly a huge victory. Congratulations! Now, I can think of a lot of reasons for a 'protagonist' to be showing more than usual interest. Perhaps it is your very change of heart that has offered them hope for change in their own life-- but the way you describe it as an uncomfortable and terrifying experience makes that hopeful interpretation unlikely.

If you want to discourage someone's presence but are afraid of being rude, then there's a number of other options. Maybe you should act overly familiar and ask him to help you with many small, unimportant tasks. Monopolize his time whenever he's clearly attempting to speak with someone else. And remember: never apologize, and never retreat. It's on them to take a step back from whatever situation you've dragged them into.

All the Best,
Saint Valentione

Dear Saint Valentione,

My world has been ravaged by a zombie apocalypse, and I used to be on the side of humanity. However, I was betrayed by my teammates who wanted to gain political power in one of humanity's surviving bases, and as a result, I died and turned into a zombie. By the time my consciousness returned, I'd somehow become the zombie king.

I thought about wiping everyone out, but there was this guy I liked

who was working hard in one of the bases to research a cure for the zombie virus. He made me feel like humanity wasn't all trash, so it would be fine to abandon my zombie instincts and live with him as a human. The only thing is that it turns out he's the person who created the zombie virus.

I'm feeling torn on whether I want to kill him or not. What do you think?

Sincerely,
Hungry In Hiding

Dear Hungry In Hiding,

Killing the ones we love is often a difficult prospect. Sometimes it's necessary to save the world, but often there's another way forward! Surely there's a compromise between sparing him and killing him. You mentioned that you really loved 'playing house' with him. If he's amenable, why not attempt to recreate this experience on your own terms?

Since he's the person who created the zombie virus, he seems intelligent enough to acquiesce to your suggestions if he wants to, well, live. I personally feel like humanity is naturally worthy of being saved, and I hope that keeping him close will restore your faith in humanity.

Though, if he's the one who sparked the apocalypse.. That seems a little dangerous. In the end, you might really be humanity's savior by making sure he's kept away from other people-- not to mention other zombies. And take care of yourself, Hungry In Hiding!

Don't forget to always put your own safety first.

Sincerely,
Saint Valentione

WHAT IS YAOI? A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR, PART 3

okay here's the deal. this zine doesn't have a theme other than "things my friends wanted to submit to yaoi zine." but i think one kind of developed, by virtue of the psychic connection that exists between everyone who cherishes me. including between me and you, dear reader.

in this volume, "yaoi" became primarily reading things against the grain, particularly things that aren't meant for you. from reading the real housewives of beverly hills as d/s lesbians, putting BL visual novels on hacked devices, calling your irl gay relationship yaoi, reading beloved books in the vein of a trashy genre, and so on... yaoi is the irreverent spirit that animates these all. it's a perverse, winking way of seeing, indulging in bad rep and "bury your gays."

some yaoi is intentional, like meggie's lesbian flirting, and some yaoi isn't, like um. the field of math itself. and some of it defies easy categorization (whatever the hell those orv guys have going on) and while one of our contributors attempted to graph these subtleties out, it feels more like yaoi is the act of trying to make sense of it all.

this volume "yaoi"ed yaoi, as the advice column proudly shows, parodying a parodic art form. how many levels of yaoi can we get on? if the yaoi zine volume count is to be trusted, at least five. and hopefully many more.

xoxo, tshirt