

FANDOM LORE

FINDING IDENTITY IN FICTION



BY VIVIANA BUSTAMANTE

The background features several thick, hand-drawn yellow brushstrokes of varying lengths and orientations, scattered across the light gray background. A white, torn-edge rectangular box is centered in the upper half of the page.

ATTENTION!

This zine is a smaller version of a website that includes what you're about to read, as well as video interviews and additional examples of the illustrator's work. To learn more about the project and these artists, go to www.fandomlore.org.



HELLO! I'M VIVIANA JOURNALIST

ABOUT ME :

Hello! I'm Viviana Bustamante, a recent graduate with a bachelor's degree from the University of California, Santa Barbara. I am also a copyeditor.

CONTACT :

<https://www.fandomlore.org/>



THE ORIGIN OF FANDOM LORE

Fandom Lore is a project that explores how fandoms based on Adult and Young adult fiction promote inclusion and diversity, giving marginalized groups a voice.

I interviewed seven illustrators and one author from various marginalized communities about their experiences with fan culture. The interviews discuss how fandom has influenced how readers perceive fiction. They examine how representation or lack of representation can affect a reader's individuality. They emphasize how fandoms foster community and belonging for those who feel isolated in a world dominated by what feels like a uniform culture. Ultimately, this project aims to promote a better understanding of our world's multiculturalism.

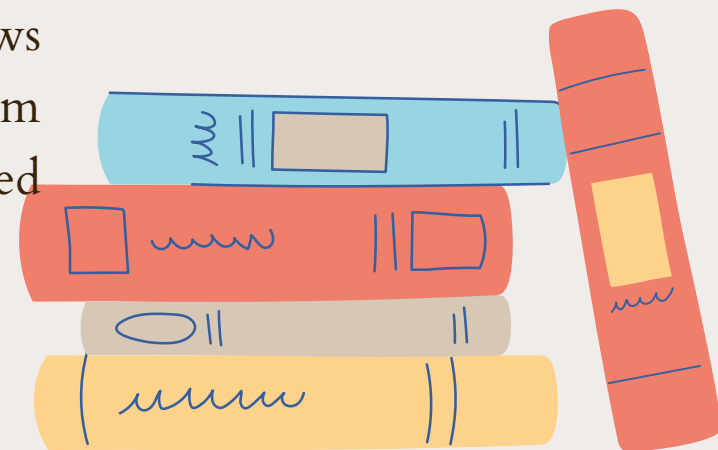
When readers cannot recognize themselves in the fiction they read, or when the images they encounter seem to misrepresent or exaggerate their culture, they can feel undervalued in society. The white, heterosexual-cis population has always found itself represented in literary works, whereas marginalized groups have had to carve their way into fictional worlds. Fandoms, or more specifically, the idea of a fanbase, has become the term used to describe communities built around a shared enjoyment of particular niches within pop culture.



They have become communities where fans can give a voice to the voiceless, to those whose perspectives are often ignored. Fandom provides a platform for them to be heard. Fan Culture has changed and challenged storytelling through social media platforms such as TikTok, Tumblr, and Instagram, opening doors to alternative perspectives that highlight marginalized communities. For Jade that means advocating for other South Asian and queer Muslim girls who continue to be misrepresented in the media.

For Bhavan that means using her illustrations to challenge the Indian beauty standards that surround skin-lightening cosmetics. For Karen, that means exposing the biases of her traditional Mexican culture. For TJ Klune, it has meant writing previously untold stories that feature a 40-year-old chubby queer man or queer teens with ADHD as the main characters. In the blink of an eye, fandom has turned pop culture into a conversation, offering an arena in which to highlight displeasure or appreciation for these fictional worlds. In these conversations, fans start talking about the representational gaps in media and come to a mutual understanding; in order to be represented, marginalized social groups and ethnic groups need to break the mold built by the dominant groups.


This multimedia project has been created by a UC Santa Barbara undergraduate student and is supported by the Raab Writing Fellows Program, which is funded by UCSB Trustee Diana Raab. The program offers mentoring and research opportunities in writing to selected undergraduates who want to develop their own artistic projects.



The Artistic Journey: Stories of Fandom Artists

Seven illustrators from marginalized groups were asked about their experiences with fan culture. The interviews look into how fandom has changed readers' perceptions of fiction.




Illustrator 

Karen De La Vega

A Mexican freelance illustrator who draws characters from Middle Grade and Young Adult literary fiction.

Fandoms: *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, *The Kane Chronicles*, *Disney*




Illustrator 

Jade Deo

A Caribbean-American illustrator on Instagram and Tumblr whose drawings are inspired by literary and cultural themes that center on the representation and inclusion of brown girls in fiction novels

Fandoms: *Shadow and Bones*, *House of Badawi*, *The Ivory Key*, *ect.*




Illustrator 

Bhavna Madan Mohan

A visual artist and illustrator from India who draws queer characters from fiction, including books for adults and young adults.

Fandoms: *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*, *Stranger Things*, *Naruto*, etc.




Illustrator 

Bowen McCurdy

A cartoonist living in New York City who has been professionally creating comics for four years.

Fandom: *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, Stephen King's *It*, etc.




Illustrator 

Brune Gonda

A Brazilian illustrator is known for drawing people into the fictitious world they want to escape into.

Fandom: *Harry Potter*, *Percy Jackson series*, *Heroes of Olympus series*, and *Magnus Chase trilogy*

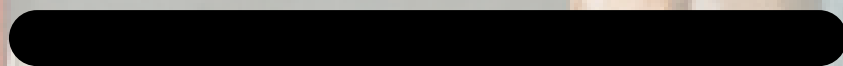



Illustrator 

Laura Sanchez

As a bisexual, Laura draws her favorite characters with who they can project their own gender and sexuality.

Fandom: *Naruto*, *The Raven Cycle*, etc.



Illustrator 

Soleil

An aro-ace illustrator who creates fan art on Instagram. They love to draw and read, especially drawing their favorite characters.

Fandom: *The Raven Cycle*, *Percy Jackson series*, *Six of Crows*, etc.





Bhavna Madan Mohan

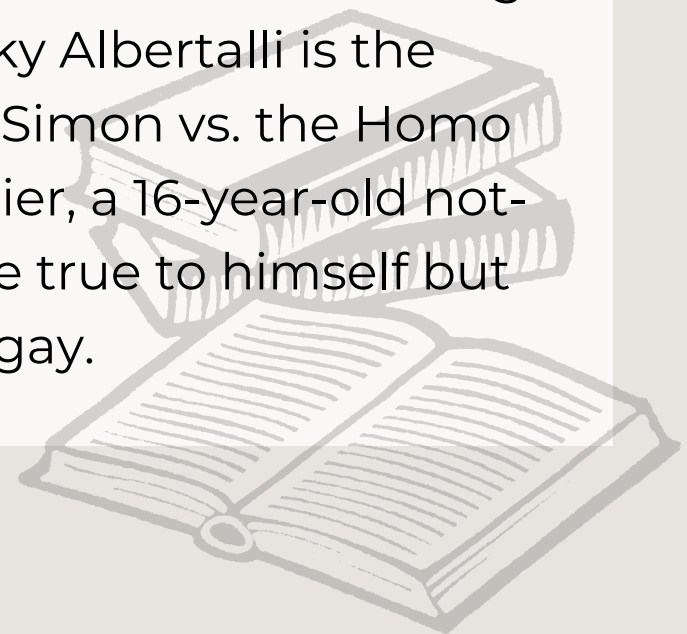
Indian Queer Illustrator

Bhavna Madan Mohan is a visual artist and illustrator from India who is currently based in Chennai on the Bay of Bengal coast. She studied Digital Media at the Srishti Institute of Art, Design, and Technology in Bangalore and interned as an illustrator/ designer at Notion Press in Chennai in 2019.

She has been a freelance illustrator for three years, with notable clients including Blossom Publishers and Young Adult author Becky Albertalli. Bhavna has engaged in fandom since early 2015 when Tumblr and Google Plus were popular social media sites for young teens. She strongly admires and enjoys the entertainers and artists she has come across in life. She was a big fan of the boyband One Direction and of Disney Animation— which is not to be confused with being in a fandom. Not every fanbase has a fandom, since a fandom is a group of fans who are much more involved in their favored subculture than others would be.

It was in 2015 when Bhavna stepped into the fandom world after reading Rick Riordan's juvenile novel, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*. She saw fan art from Viktoria Ridzel, known simply as Viria within the Percy Jackson fandom, and fell in love with the concept of fan art. From her first introduction, Bhavna has jumped among different types of fandom universes. From literary fiction to the Japanese manga *Naruto* to the Netflix series *Stranger Things*, in each fandom, Bhavna has made a lot of friends who share her interest, establishing friendships that have transcended the fandoms they met through and evolved into long-term relationships. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, everything in her life came to a halt: her final year of college, her senior thesis, and her social life. She couldn't interact with people as much, but it was during that time that she started actively using her Instagram account. As Kidovna, she used to post fan art and interact with others who were also stuck in lockdown. These interactions were among the ways she was able to socialize at a time when socializing seemed impossible.

During the pandemic, Bhavna's art became so popular that author Becky Albertalli approached her and asked for her assistance in creating concept art for her new book *Love Creekwood*. Becky Albertalli is the author of the New York Times best-selling YA novel *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*. This YA novel centers on Simon Spier, a 16-year-old not-so-openly gay boy who struggles with wanting to be true to himself but fears what the world would do if they knew he was gay.



During the pandemic, Bhavna's art became so popular that author Becky Albertalli approached her and asked for her assistance in creating concept art for her new book *Love Creekwood*. Becky Albertalli is the author of the New York Times best-selling YA novel *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*. This YA novel centers on Simon Spier, a 16-year-old not-so-openly gay boy who struggles with wanting to be true to himself but fears what the world would do if they knew he was gay.

As a queer woman herself, Bhavan feels a deep connection to characters such as Simon and she uses her platform to give these queer couples room to love each other through her illustrations. In fact, she has two original characters with backstories uniquely their own that she has been developing for the past few years: Anjana and Kalpana not only represent Bhavan as a dark-skinned queer Indian woman herself but also challenge Indian beauty standards. Companies like Fair and Lovely, a skin-lightening cosmetic product, target Indians who feel inferior because of their dark skin color. Enraged by their marketing ads, Bhavan created Anjana and Kalpana to show her audience members they are beautiful despite what popular standards claim. Currently, she says she is obsessed with drawing Will Byers from the *Stranger Things* Netflix series. "He's queer. He's an artist. It makes sense," she said.





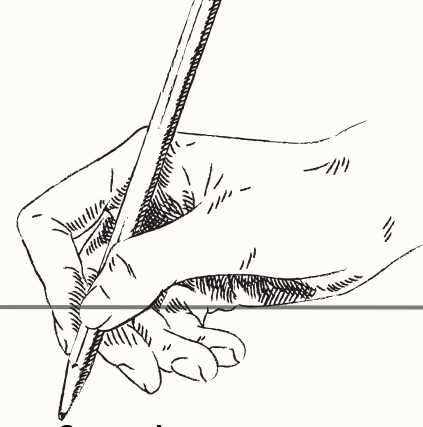
"It's always great to unwind sometimes and go into this other world. And these friends interact with me for the sole purpose of discussing these fictional worlds. I don't have to discuss my real-life issues. Only talk about the things that bring me joy and things I know will also bring them joy. Just people interacting about things they enjoy"

BHAVNA MADAN MOHAN



Karen De La Vega

Mexican Freelance Illustrator



Karen De La Vega is a Mexican freelance illustrator born and raised in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. After graduating as a children's educational psychologist in 2021, she became an illustrator and comic artist focusing on Middle Grade and Young Adult literary fiction. She had a childhood obsession with drawing the characters she read about. One of Karen's many muses as a 13-year-old was Rick Riordan's five-book series, Percy Jackson, and the Olympians.

The juvenile series takes Greek mythology into the 21st century, following 12-year-old Percy Jackson who discovers he's a descendant of a Greek god. The series follows Percy as he embarks on a quest to put an end to a gods' war that has been raging and to fulfill a prophecy that was made long before he was born.





Percy and his friends captured Karen's heart, but it was Rick Riordan's other juvenile series *The Kane Chronicles* to which she felt a closer connection. *The Kane Chronicles* is a three-book series that follows siblings Carter and Sadie Kane, two biracial children (Black and Caucasian), as they enter the world of the Egyptian gods. As the most powerful Egyptian magicians to be born in hundreds of years, the children must learn how to control their own abilities in order to survive the power of these awakening gods.

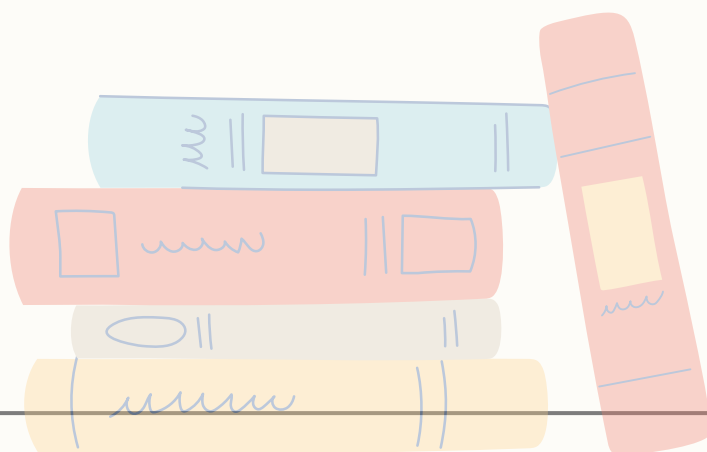
Family is very important to Karen, and she believes that books for middle-grade readers should address the ties that bind families together. *The Kane Chronicles* primarily center on Carter and Sadie, two siblings who were raised apart from one another after their mother passed away. Throughout the novel, Sadie and Carter form a strong bond, but they struggle to see each other as siblings after not only spending years apart but also because of the color of their skin. Whereas Carter takes after their father, dark-skinned with brown eyes, Sadie takes after their mother, light-skinned with blonde hair and blue eyes. Nothing can stop the siblings from defending one another as they learn more about their magical family history. Karen strongly identifies with Sadie and Carter as she, herself, has felt trapped between two cultures: the traditional Mexican culture she was raised in and the Western culture she was surrounded by.

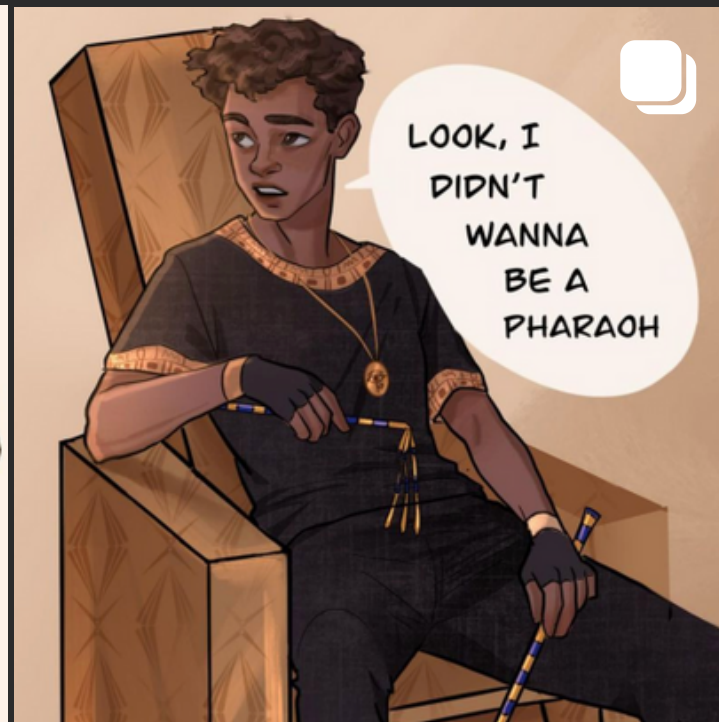
Karen's decision to post her fan art online was influenced by her involvement in Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson, and Kane Chronicles fandoms. Although she initially only posted her illustrations for herself, she soon realized the impact her work could have on minority representation thanks to the fans' response to her work. Karen continues to represent Mexican culture in her own original projects at the illustration agency Astound US.

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"Try not to talk in ignorance you should try to understand more this others' visions. Try to learn more about it and not just take the things personally and say what you think by why you learned and what the society and your family made you believe, like unlearning the things some people told you about how life should be. Question it. Question it all."

KAREN LA VEGA





JADE DEO

CARIBBEAN-AMERICAN ILLUSTRATOR

A Caribbean-American illustrator on Instagram and Tumblr whose drawings are inspired by literary and cultural themes that center on the representation and inclusion of brown girls in fiction novels. Her first experience with fan culture came early in high school when she drew art for Rick Riordan's juvenile series Percy Jackson and the Olympians and Kera Cass's Young Adult series The Selection. She recently removed these old doodles from Tumblr merely because she was embarrassed by her old art style, and in 2020 created an Instagram account where she has continued to post fan art to this day. As [jaded.draws](https://www.instagram.com/jaded.draws) on Instagram, the artist visually depicts fictional brown female characters from YA fiction.





Jade identifies strongly with Zoya Nayalensky, a bi-racial character from Leigh Bardugo's New York Times bestselling series *Shadow and Bones*. In the shared fictional universe of the "Grisha-verse" fandom, which includes all of the characters in the lore of Bardugo's universe and their individual stories, Zoya became an icon for brown girls. She became an icon for Jade and all the brown girls who never got to be smart, powerful, and beautiful main characters. In so doing, she transformed the self-image of visibly South Asian women, transforming features that many had been taught to resent into those that made them feel empowered.

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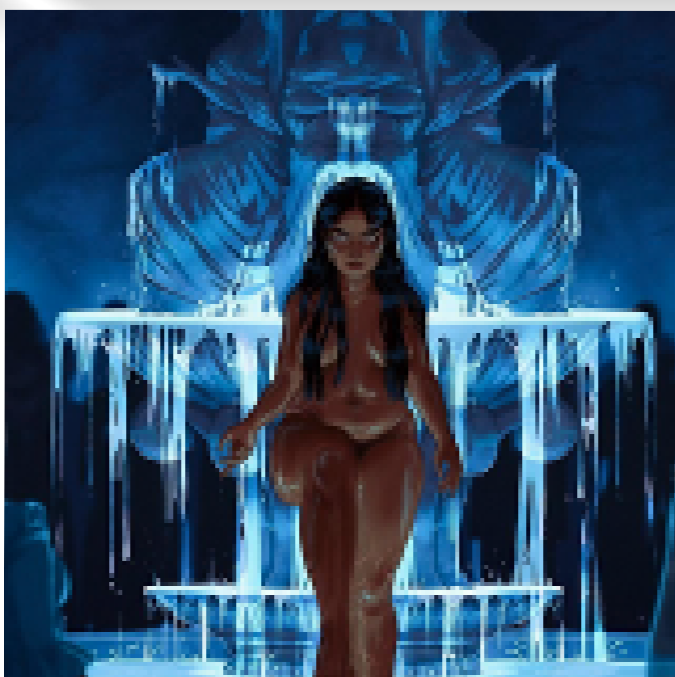
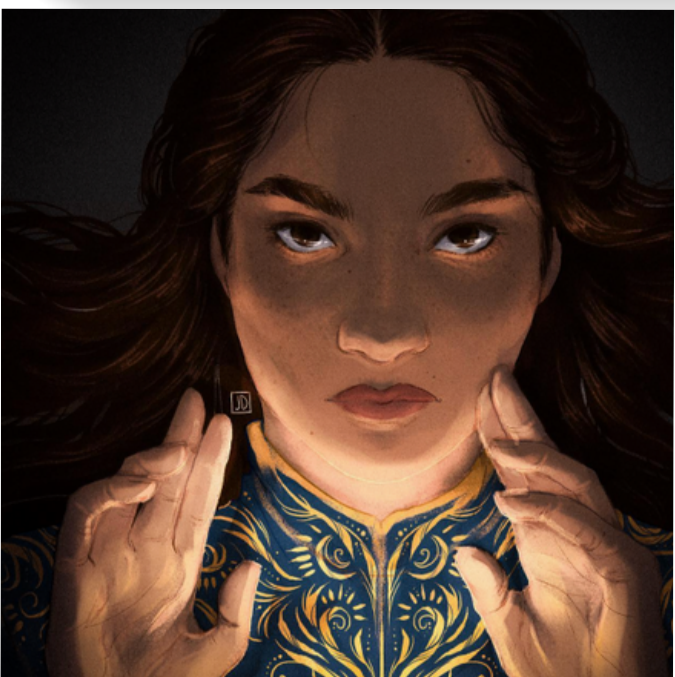
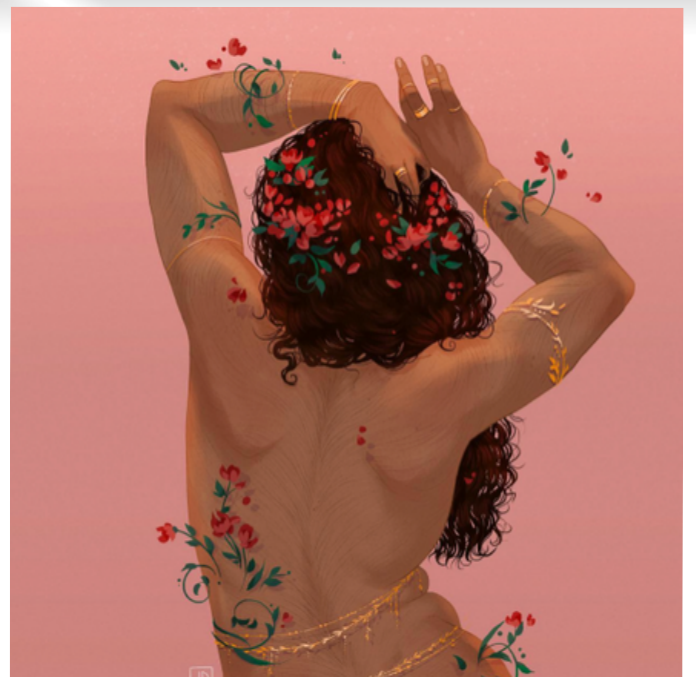
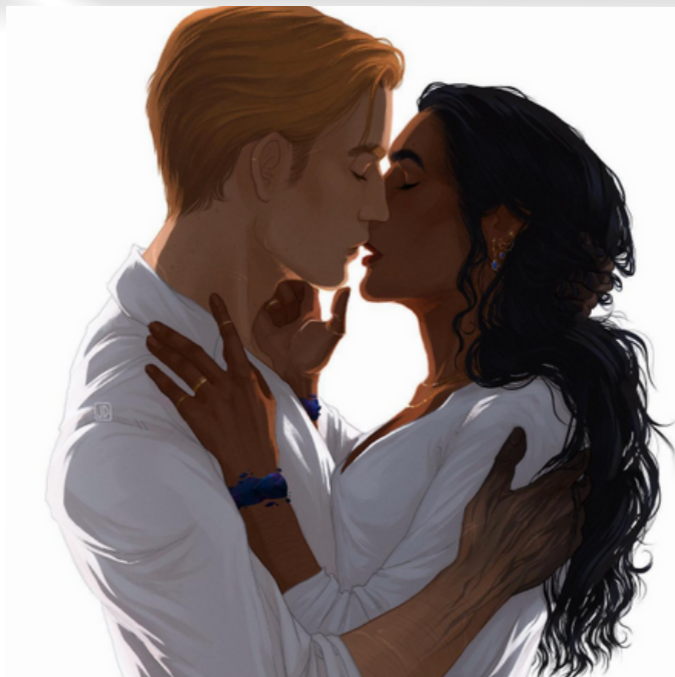
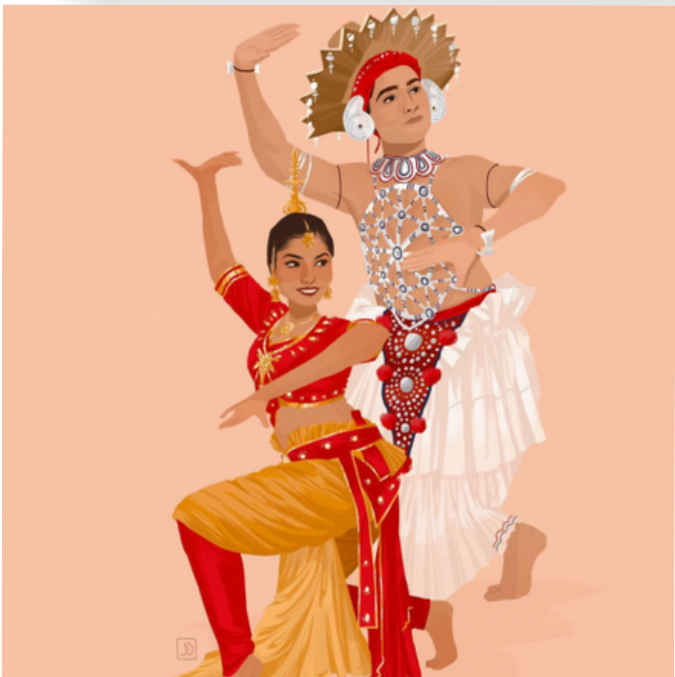
Jade believes that those with a media platform have a responsibility to give voice to minorities and to empower their presence in the world. She uses her sites to advocate for other brown girls and to provide a safe space for queer South Asian and queer Muslims. Jade has links in her Instagram to resources on real-world issues including Black Lives Matter resources as well as information on solidarity appeals for flood victims in Pakistan.

Beyond posting her illustrations on Instagram, Jade collaborated with Bowen Street Press to create limited-edition prints for C.J. Khemi's debut novel *House of Badawi*, a Caribbean-inspired world filled with a strong, independent woman who wants to join the Keeper, an all-women legion with a duty to protect the House of Badawi's "spring of immortality." She also worked with Illumicrate, a monthly subscription box for book lovers, on its edition of Akshaya Roman's debut novel *The Ivory Key*, a Young Adult novel inspired by Indian culture and mythology, which features four estranged royal siblings working to bring peace to their kingdom.

Jade has illustrated many more book jackets for minority writers and says she will continue to support Own Voice authors—books written by underrepresented and marginalized writers—on her page. She believes it is crucial to uplift authors who empower marginalized groups, especially brown girls who continue to be misrepresented in the media. And she has witnessed how the inclusion of marginalized groups in fiction can have on a person's race, ethnicity, and other visible aspects of their identity. People interact and connect with others who, on a personal level, see these fictional worlds and characters in the same way. Her fandom experience is something she needs to tell in her own words.

"The power of art, even if it's just fan art, and it's not in a museum or anything—people still interact with it and they love the content that inspired it.





Brune Gonda

Non-Binary Illustrator



Brune Gonda, a Brazilian illustrator, is known for drawing people into the fictitious worlds they want to escape into. On their Instagram as *thecaprica*, Gonda illustrates patrons of their artwork into the worlds of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series, *Heroes of Olympus* series, and Rick Riordan's *Magnus Chase trilogy*. Fan art gives Gonda the chance to escape into these fictitious worlds where those who are considered different can find love and acceptance.

Gonda appreciates how fandom has created a community that fosters representation and identity for those who feel alone in the real world.

Representation in media was very important for Gonda growing up, but in their youth, there wasn't much representation for non-binary LGBT + people with ADHD, such as themselves. Gonda felt seen after reading Machenzi Lee's YA novel *Loki: Where Mischief Lies*. The YA novel centers on the non-binary Loki, the god of mischief, who is desperate to prove himself and accepts an assignment from his father to investigate rumors of Asgardian magic on Earth.





Gonda envisions a world in which non-binary identity is a commonplace concept, a place where people can accept their existence without making it a big deal. It's unfortunate when racist or homophobic people feel it's necessary to target those who are different from them, Gonda says. But while the artist can tolerate these people attacking themselves, they cannot tolerate it when these people attack their attack their followers. Lee's Loki was one of the first non-binary characters that made Gonda feel seen.

And they loved seeing more LGBT+ people feel represented in other series such as Rick Riordan's middle-grade series Percy Jackson and the Olympians, about a 12-year-old boy with ADHD and dyslexia struggling with school and to stay out of trouble. Unbeknownst to him, he is also the son of a Greek god and stuck in the middle of a civil war. Gonda also related to Rick Riordan's middle-grade trilogy Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard, with a pansexual protagonist, gender-fluid love-interest, and deaf and hard of hearing side-character.



“If you are just a lonely kid needing something, [Fandom] was a refuge. So, it is important for us to keep it good, To keep it safe, to keep it healthy, because those children will need it. And children need a safe place, on the internet, to have friends and to share that joy with them.”



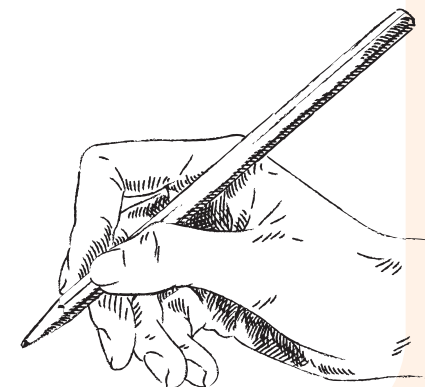


Bowen McCurdy

Bisexual Illustrator



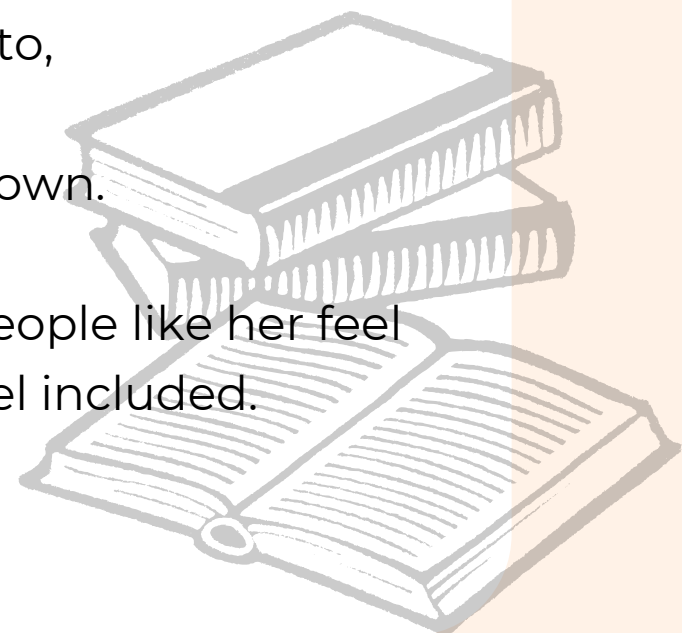
Bowen McCurdy is a 26-year-old cartoonist living in New York City who has been professionally creating comics for four years. Through fandom, she learned a lot about herself, her sexuality, about being non-binary, and a variety of other factors that shaped her identity. When she was 14 years old, her first step into fan culture came after watching Neon Genesis Evangelion, a Japanese animation series that explores the story of human-made machines, known as Evangelions, who battle beings known as Angels to decide the fate of humanity. She saw herself in the story and specifically connected with the protagonist Shinji Ikari— a bisexual man who was unlike any character she had seen at that age.



As she grew older, Bowen saw herself in Richie Tozier, the protagonist of Stephen King's horror novel *It*. Stephen King never explicitly stated that Richie was gay in the 'canon' — a term that refers to source material for a certain fictional universe — yet some fans suspected that he was gay or queer-coded, which is when characters are not explicitly stated to be queer, but there is enough implied meaning for an audience to interpret them as queer. Even when a character's sexuality isn't explicitly mentioned, readers often make them queer in head-canons to solidify their repressed identities. A head-canon is an interpretation of, or a belief about, the details of a fictional story that were not included in the source material but are details the fans believe. Bowen, like so many fans of Richie Tozier, felt they could relate to him on a personal level, despite his sexuality never being explicitly mentioned.

Through fandom, Bowen found acceptance of herself through these characters, and as a cartoonist, she wanted her comics to make her audience feel as represented and seen as she did in these fandoms. Her graphic novel, *Spector Inspector*, which she co-wrote with Kaitlyn Musto, intertwines queer romance and horror genres to create a story about teens trying to escape /a haunted town.

Bowen says she will continue to write stories to make people like her feel included, in ways that other fandoms have made her feel included.





Laura Sanchez

Illustrator



Fandom is a big part of 26-year-old Laura Sanchez's life, as they wouldn't have become a professional illustrator if it hadn't been for the support that came from the fandom community. As a bisexual, non-binary person, fandom has provided Laura with a safe space in which they can be themselves while projecting their own gender and sexuality onto their favorite characters.

Fan artists like Laura communicate how a fictional world personally impacts them by adapting these characters to their own styles and perspectives.

When she was 12 years old, Laura read the Japanese manga series *Naruto*, a comic series written and illustrated by Masashi Kishimoto that tells the story of Naruto Uzumaki, a young ninja who aspires to be the Hokage, or village leader.

Laura was inspired by fan artists to draw Kishimoto characters from her own perspective, which allowed her the space to think critically about the characters she loved and to think about these characters from her own perspective and not only the perspective of its canon, the collected source material of a certain fictional universe. Laura particularly enjoyed creating head-cans of *Naruto's* female characters, drawing them with more muscle and not just as a love interest to the male lead.



Head-canons are ideas and concepts fans believe in, outside the original material. They may not be accepted as a part of the general fandom community, but the process allows fans to be more critical of the original material they love. Laura moved away from the canon not to destroy the original material, but to allow the characters to grow outside their original boxes. Laura particularly enjoyed creating head-canons of Naruto's female character Sakura. Sakura was known as an annoying character whose story revolved around one of the male characters, but Laura loved to draw her with more muscle and not just as a love interest. Through the spectrum of fan creations, such as fan fiction and fan art, Laura began to accept that it is okay for a series you love to have flaws and that it's okay to want to see how it could be better with your own personal vision.

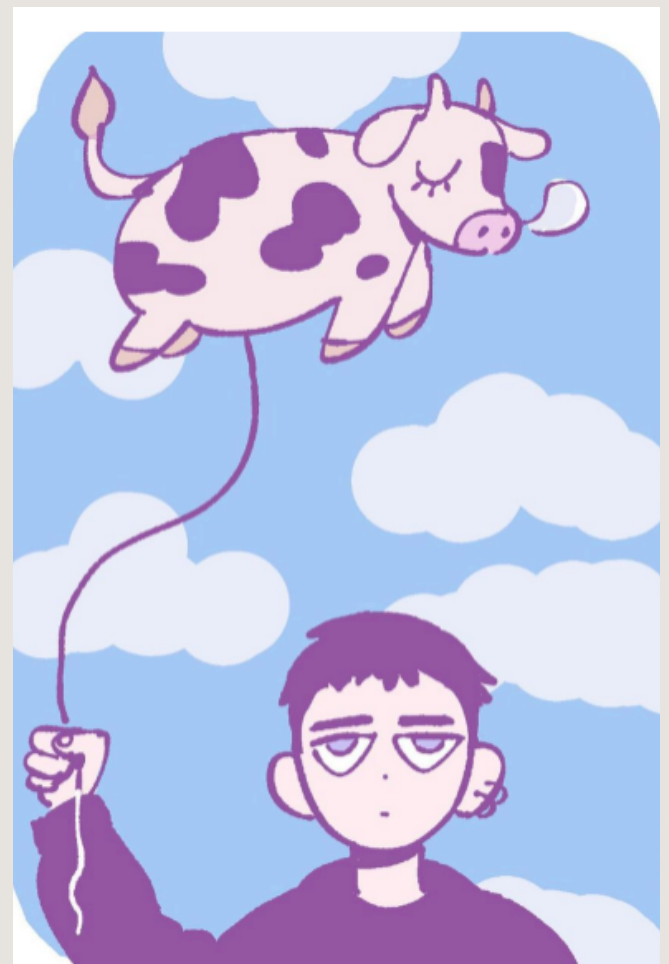
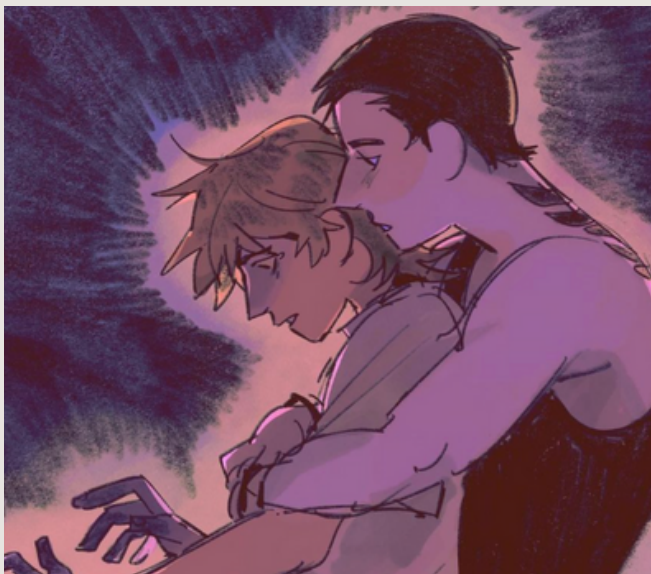
As mrotisky on Instagram, Laura started to post fan art about characters from Naruto and characters from the Maggie Stiefvater YA series The Raven Cycle, story that follows four private schoolboys, and a psychic's daughter to discover the legend of a Welsh King buried in the mountains of a Virginia town, and The Dreamer Trilogy, the companion series to The Raven Cycle that features Ronan Lynch as its central character. She hugely enjoys following fan artists and reading fan fiction as she has found safety, representation, compassion, and depth in the ideas of other creators. Laura says she draws to remember the characters outside the original material, but she posts her illustrations so that when it feels that no one in her real life can understand her drawings, at least she knows there is a community that can.





"I learned a lot about the queer community through fandom. I learned a lot about gender And sexuality. and through seeing characters that I loved represented in those terms, I feel like it opened doors for me that had been previously closed."

BOWEN



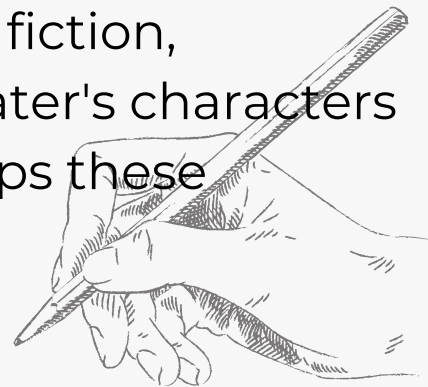


Soleil

Non-Binary Illustrator

Soleil is an accomplished aro-ace illustrator who creates fan art on Instagram. They love to draw and read, especially about their favorite characters. Soleil found fandom by looking through fan art of Rick Riordan's juvenile series, Percy Jackson, and the Olympians, and began drawing his characters in their own style. For a while, Soleil never posted their illustrations, drawing these characters only for themselves. But in 2022, after reading Maggie Stiefvater's YA series The Raven Cycle Soleil began posting their fan art on Instagram as theonlysoi.

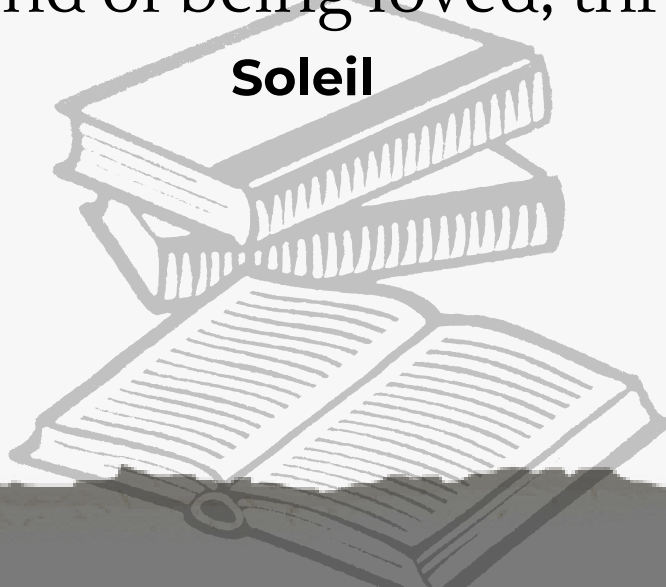
The Raven Cycle follows a group of teenagers on a quest to find the grave of a medieval Welsh king. They must fight to survive their quest while balancing family, life, school, and work— all the quirks of growing up. Being a part of the Raven Cycle has given Soleil a whole new perspective on literary fiction, something they are really grateful for. Soleil was drawn to Stiefvater's characters and embraced them as a muse, drawing them in a way that keeps these characters alive after the story's ending.

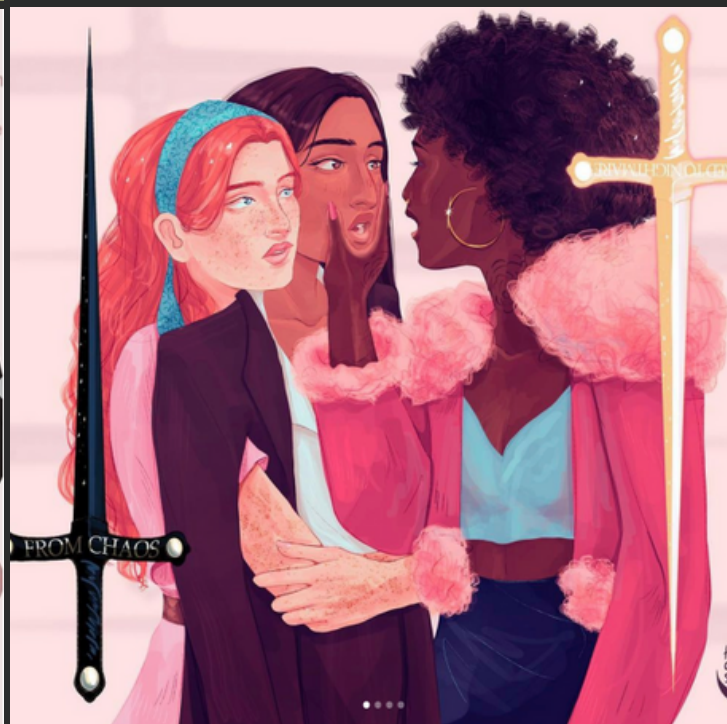
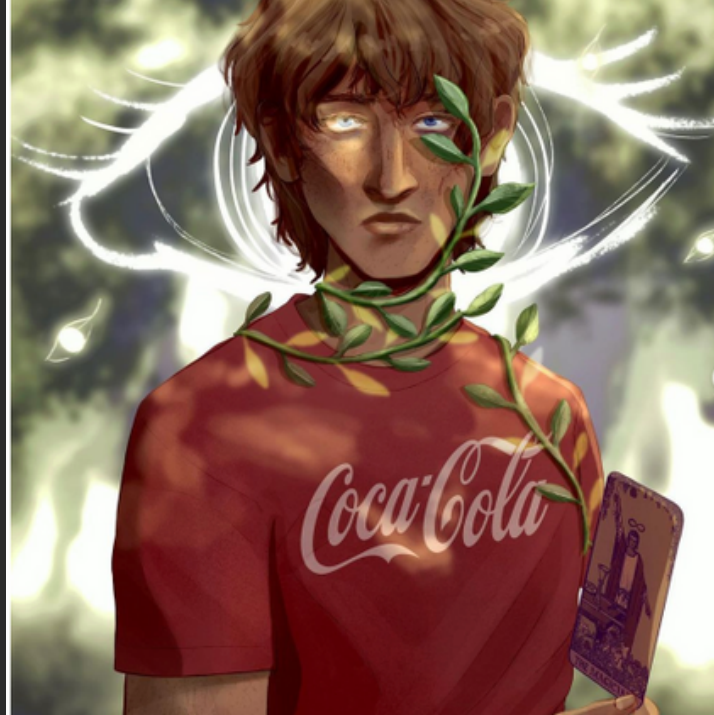
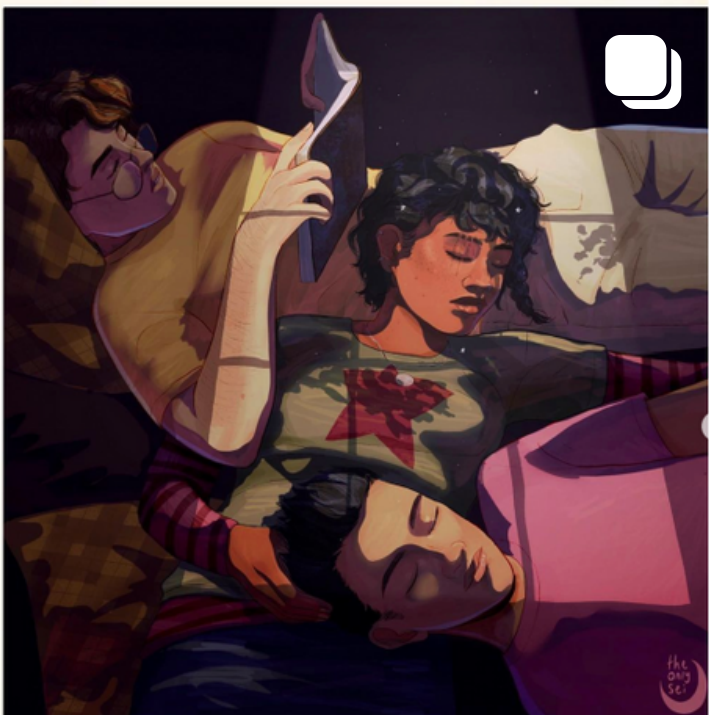


Soleil takes creative liberties in drawing their favorite characters, conveying their image of the characters' personalities from their head to paper. Aside from drawing characters from Stiefvater's Raven Cycle series, Soleil felt a similar connection to Leigh Bardugo's New York Times bestselling duology Six of Crows. In the shared fictional universe of the Grisha-verse fandom, she feels a strong connection with Kaz Brekker, one of the story's protagonists, who even among the magical characters struggles with physical disability and mental disorders such as PTSD. Both these series feature the found family trope, a device in literature where a group of characters finds themselves united in a family bond based on shared experiences, and mutual understandings. Soleil values friends and the close bonds that can be formed with those who are not blood relatives. Being a part of these fandoms has given Soleil a place where they can find their own family, which has been difficult to come by.

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“It feels good to relate to a character that other people love so much, because then you're like, Oh I'm kind of being loved, through them.”





Writing the Story You Want to Read: An Interview with Author TJ Klune.



My life motto:

"Bloom where you
are planted."

For a very long time, fiction literature has featured mainly represented the heterosexual-cis population, while representations of minorities have remained static. But TJ Klune, a New York Times and USA Today bestselling author breaks down conventions to create space for people who feel there is an “otherness” about them. “As a kid, growing up queer— having ADHD, but it was undiagnosed — there was just an otherness about me, an otherness that I know so many kids in my position would've felt at the time, and that otherness,” Klune said in a recent interview. “It speaks to you. It separates you. It doesn't allow you to think that you can relate to your peers in any way, shape, or form.”

Klune was raised in a household where he couldn't be himself. He was mocked for reading, writing, and acting too feminine. When he couldn't sit still, his parents refused to take him to seek the care he needed for his undiagnosed ADHD. For a long time, he felt confined to a box that his environment trapped him in, and it wasn't until he was an adult that he had the power to break free.


He can empathize with children and adults who feel invisible in a world where differences are portrayed as something to be feared or repressed. Now that he is an adult, he wants to show the world how he has grown in his “otherness” by writing stories in which queer characters are the heroes of their own stories. TJ’s works highlight the concept of bigotry in the world, calling out those who have caused others suffering because they are afraid of others who are different.

The Meaning behind The House in the Cerulean Sea



The Alex Award-winning book *The House in the Cerulean Sea* follows Linus Baker, a chubby, fussy, queer man in his 40s who is a by-the-book case worker in the Department of Charge of Magical Youth tasked with evaluating whether six dangerous magical children will bring the end of the world. This story addresses themes of family, hatred, and fear of the unknown, and while the characters are clearly portrayed as magical beings, they represent a greater community of marginalized people.

Fear is often the root cause of intolerance, but ignorance is intolerance by association. Linus learned who the real monsters in the world are, and it is not children; in fact, it is children who will show the world that our differences can and should be celebrated. "Children, young people, they are the future. One day and one day, very soon, all these boomer politicians will be gone, and it's going to be left to the younger generations to make the world how it should have been and not how it's been for very long," Klune said.



TJ Klune noted on an interview that the story was inspired by the Sixties Scoop, which describes the nearly 20-year era in which Canadian social workers forcibly removed indigenous children from their homes and placed them with white families or in residential schools. When the Canadian government paid reparations for this in 2017, Klune wanted to tell a story that revealed the ugly realities of institutional racism. But some said Klune should not have told this story because he is not indigenous and had no right to turn an actual tragedy into a fantasy novel with a happy ending — since there was no happy ending in the story he was inspired by. Others supported Klune, believing he was depicting the struggle of a marginalized group, particularly children, who overcome challenges with the help and compassion of others.

The House of the Cerulean Sea does not actually depict the Sixties Scoop, but citing it on social media as his inspiration prompted criticism of the text. In the end, Klune's readers will need to consider his history of supporting marginalized voices on giving queer children a voice when judging this episode.



The Power of a Teen's Voice in The Extraordinaries



TJ Klune's Young Adult debut, *The Extraordinaries*, is a queer coming-of-age story about Nick Bell, a 16-year-old fanboy obsessed with *Extraordinaries*, a group of people with abilities beyond human capabilities. Although Nick does not have a superpower, he is the most popular fanfiction writer in the *Extraordinaries* fandom, writing steamy stories about himself and his crush, the local hero Shadow Star.

As Shadow Star saves Nick from a mugging, he realizes that the best love interest for a superhero is another superhero. By becoming extraordinary, he will not only be capable of fighting crime alongside his crush but will also be someone else—someone who will not disappoint. He'll be a hero and save those he cares about.

TJ Klune writes a happy queer story where boys with ADHD can get the big superhero epic that the hereto-cis world is too afraid to share. His own experiences as a teenager with ADHD inspired the details of Nick's personal experience with ADHD and how it affects his life, from his medicine to his interactions with family, friends, and school. TJ wanted to communicate through Nick how he discovered that his ADHD, like his queerness, is a part of him that he has grown to accept, and he wants to share that message with people who may not have been told these things.

"A lot of times, we see ADHD written as something to be cured, and I would not want to be cured," Klune said. "If I was a kid again like Nick is at the beginning of the first book, he doesn't like his ADHD. I didn't either, but I learned to accept it. I learned to have it be part of myself because it is part of me, like my queerness."

When Nick learns to accept himself, he also learns to acknowledge and grow from his faults. Nick is the son of a police officer who has lived his entire life blindly behind his white privilege, unable to recognize police corruption. Yet as the story goes on, Nick begins to question the authority of these agencies and begins to think more critically about the world he lives in.

TJ Klune writes about children in these real-world situations because he believes the world underestimates what young people are capable of accomplishing. They may be writing smutty fanfiction about their favorite superheroes or jumping into a river of raw sewage, hoping to gain magical powers. They may act like a mess, but they can break down the mold society has built for themselves and create a world that is more than the heterosexual-cis perspective.

So many untold stories get buried under the voices of the majority. It's rare when forty-year-old chubby queer men or queer teens with ADHD are the main characters of their story, and it's creators like TJ Klune who make it their mission to write these stories.



UK Edition of *The Extraordinaries*. Cover art by Chris King. Design by Natalie Chen.


He has written almost two dozen novels and has no plans to stop. He is also a big supporter of fan culture and a member of the Star Wars Fandom, being a big Poe and Finn shipper himself. In fact, as part of his research for his character Nick, a prolific fanfiction writer, TJ wrote a one-shot fanfiction of Poe and Finn under a pen name on the fanfiction site Archive of Our Own. To this day, no one knows which of the thousands of Poe and Finn stories was written by this New York Times Bestseller author.

In his interview, he talks about his experience, the message he hopes *The House in the Cerulean Sea* and *The Extraordinaries* series would convey, and his experience with seeing fan art of his work.

"Children, young people— they are the future. One day, and one day very soon, all these boomer politicians will be gone, and it's going to be left to the younger generations to make the world how it should have been and not how it has been for very long."

TJ KLUNE





FEELING SEEN IN FICTION: MY FANDOM EXPERIENCE

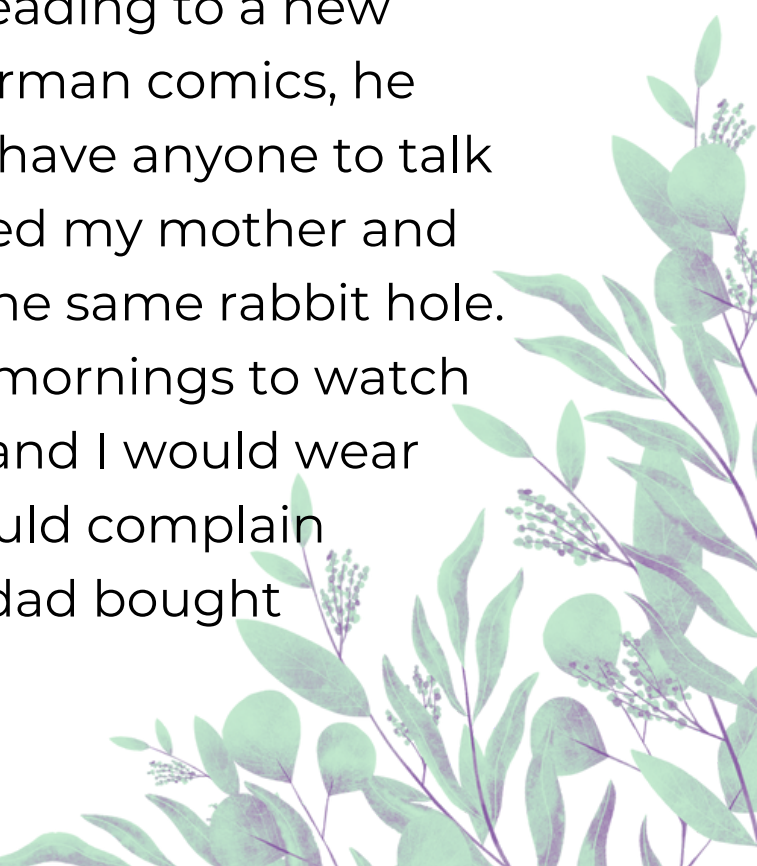
The story of how I discovered fan culture starts with my dad, who is Superman.

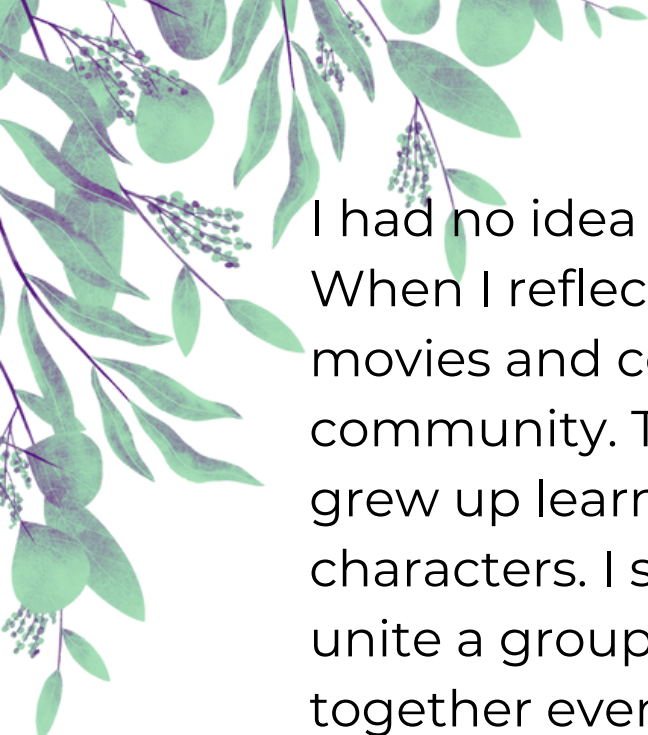
Or so he likes to believe.

My dad was eight years old when he watched Christopher Reeves star in the film Superman. After watching the movie, he ran around the house, arms stretched out before him, imagining how it would feel to soar high above the clouds. He would punch neighborhood bullies, feeling like a hero. When Superman struggled with loneliness, identity, and the pressures of responsibility, the hero would always overcome these obstacles, which was very empowering for a young boy facing similar difficulties.

Superman made my dad feel seen and empowered, leading to a new hobby for him: reading comic books. Along with Superman comics, he read Justice League and the X-Men comics. He didn't have anyone to talk with about these things for a long time until he married my mother and had his three children. Then he dragged us all down the same rabbit hole. My brother and my dad would wake up early Sunday mornings to watch Justice League reruns on Cartoon Network. My sister and I would wear pink Supergirl pajamas to bed. All three of his kids would complain about being dragged to collectible shows, where my dad bought the newest comics and action figures.

Without realizing what was happening, I became an expert in DC comics before learning my address.



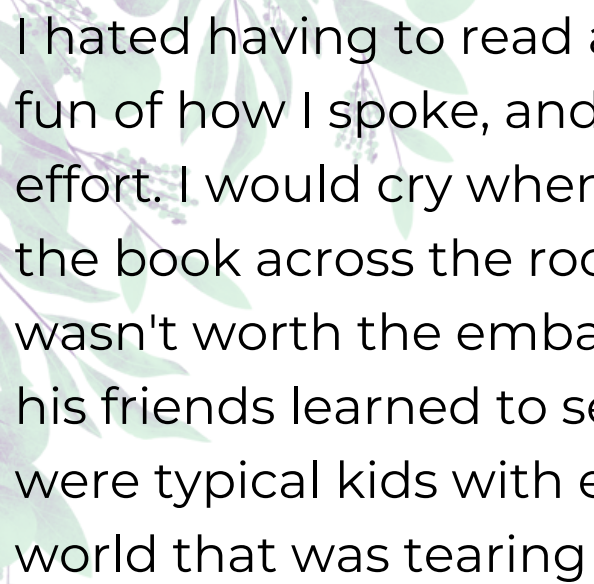


I had no idea what Fandom was or that it was a community at the time. When I reflect on my childhood, which was filled with superhero movies and comic books, I can only describe it as a private fandom community. This, I believe, is why I become so absorbed in fan culture. I grew up learning and witnessing the impact and power of relating to characters. I saw how discussing and criticizing a fictional world can unite a group. We are blood, but these superheroes have kept us together even when things weren't going so well.

My dad has never heard of Fandom. And even if he were to learn how to work Instagram, he has no desire to consume fan content; being surrounded by his action figures and watching his movies provided him with enough of an escape from reality. With other people, though, that's not always the case.

I read Rick Riordan's award-winning series Percy Jackson & the Olympians when I was 12. The five books follow 12-year-old Percy Jackson struggling with ADHD and dyslexia in school. Unbeknownst to him, he is also the son of a Greek god and is stuck in the middle of a civil war. In Percy's world, most of his demigod friends have dyslexia and ADHD. And according to the logic of the series, they have trouble making sense of English because their brains are "hard-wired for ancient Greek," and their ADHD is a result of a heightened sense that will ultimately save their lives in battle. A condition that serves as a point of humiliation for Percy in the mortal world ends up being one of his greatest strengths in the world of Greek monsters and gods.






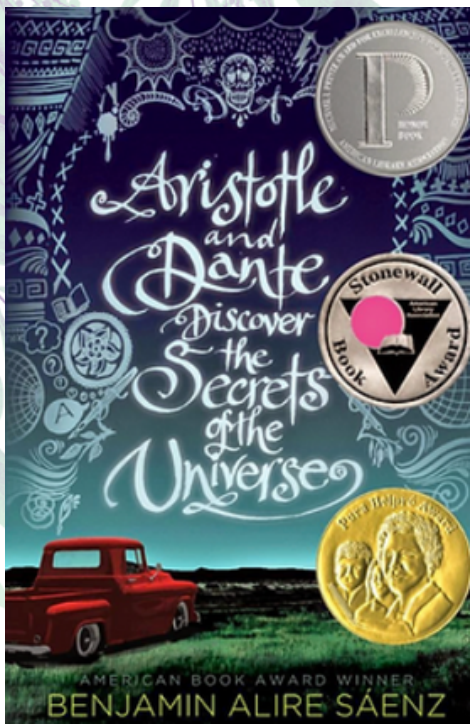
I hated having to read and talk when I was in elementary school. Kids made fun of how I spoke, and teachers thought all I needed to do was put in more effort. I would cry when I couldn't read the words out loud, and I would fling the book across the room in frustration. I avoided reading and talking; it wasn't worth the embarrassment of being considered stupid. But Percy and his friends learned to see themselves as more than their shortcomings. They were typical kids with extraordinary abilities, just trying to grow up in a world that was tearing itself apart.

Percy Jackson showed me I wasn't alone in my difference, making me feel seen. We were different people, but we both struggled to fit in. And when Percy found his family, a group of people who accepted him for who he was, it gave me some comfort back when I was a lonely 12-year-old.

There were no action figures of Percy and his friends, and the movie based on the books couldn't compete with the intensity of the book series. And because my family were not big readers, I couldn't go to them like I could if I saw a superhero movie. But, somehow, I discovered a plethora of fan content about Percy and his friends: fan art, fan fiction, and head-canons, all of which were conveniently available on Tumblr and Instagram.

Like Superman for my dad, Rick Riordan's series led me to a new hobby: reading young adult fiction. I didn't know what book to read after Percy Jackson, so I asked the fandom community for recommendations. I read Cassandra Claire's *The Mortal Instrument* series, every John Green standalone, and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*. All were good books, but none touched my heart as Percy did, and it wasn't until I read Benjamin Alire Sáenz's queer romance *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* that I discovered a community I could relate to.





The novel follows Aristotle "Ari" Mendoza and Dante Quintana, two Mexican-American teenagers who struggle to understand who they are and where they fit in the world, a process that I, as a 16-year-old, could relate to. The novel explores the experience of Mexican-American teenagers, a demographic that I had never seen in literature before. The novel navigates the complexities of living between two cultures, capturing that feeling of belonging to both while also feeling like outsiders. As a Mexican-American teen, I, too, felt torn between my Mexican heritage and my American identity, and I had never seen this feeling portrayed anywhere outside of my home.

When I finished the book, I went on Instagram and Tumblr and searched every fan art site I could find about these boys. I then found artists who only drew fan art from books that explored the experience of demographic groups that are often underrepresented in literature. I saw fan art of Ronan and Adam, two queer characters in Maggie Stievater's Raven Cycle, and I fell in love with their story. I saw fan art of Miles Morales, a 13-year-old biracial teenager known as Spiderman, and I read his comics. Through fan art, I not only began to discover my own identity, but I also began to discover what it meant to be seen.



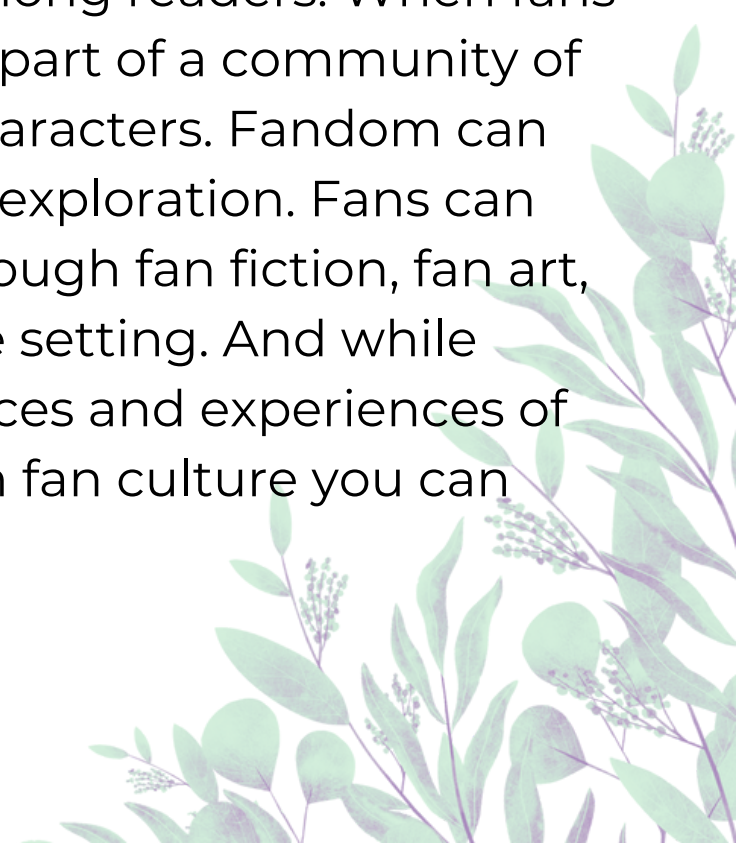
"Fandom Lore" creator Viviana Bustamante, with her Dad

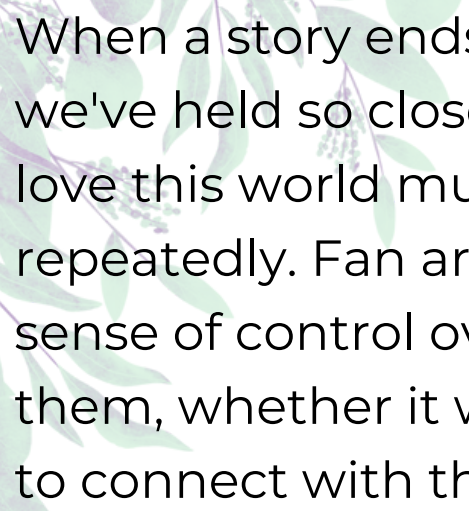


Art of Ari from Aristotle & Dante
by kidovna

I felt less alone and more validated when I read books that I could relate to, and I felt seen and heard when I saw that I wasn't alone in this feeling. Fandom has created a shared cultural experience among readers. When fans read and engage with a book or series, they became part of a community of people who share a love for that story, or for those characters. Fandom can act as a platform for creative expression and identity exploration. Fans can explore and experiment with their own identities through fan fiction, fan art, and other fan works in a supportive and collaborative setting. And while literature can challenge stereotypes by lifting the voices and experiences of marginalized and underrepresented groups, through fan culture you can spread this idea to a wider audience.

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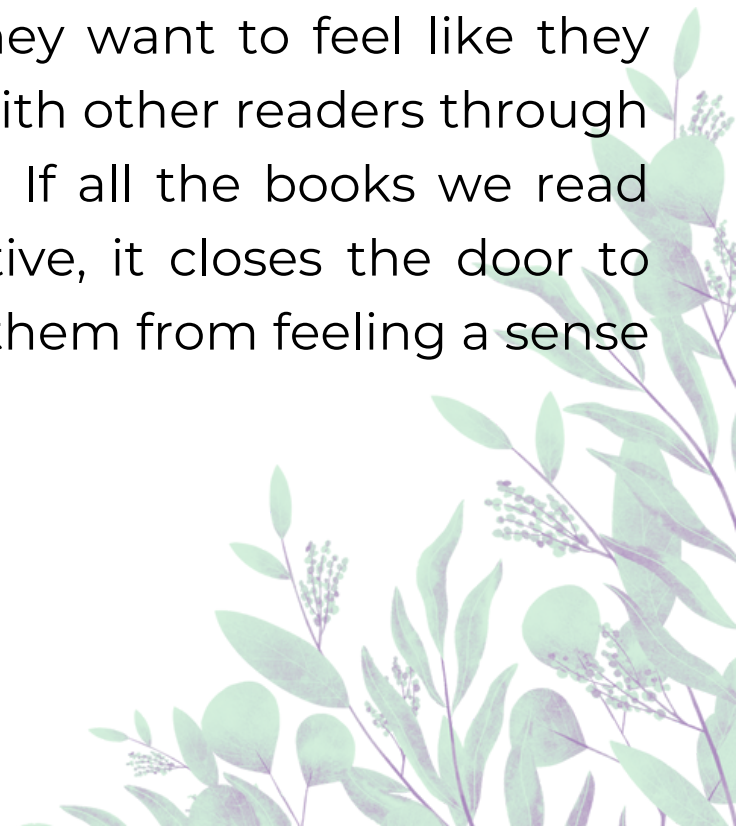




When a story ends, reaching its last lines, or its last dialogue, the characters we've held so close to our hearts are gone. Their story is over, and readers who love this world must be content with only seeing them in a single setting repeatedly. Fan art adds a new dimension to these characters, giving fans a sense of control over their world. Whatever aspect of the story resonated with them, whether it was the setting, the lore, or the characters, fan art allows fans to connect with these aspects on a deeper level that is uniquely their own.

Fandom is shaped by you, the readers, the viewers, and the fans. Seeing characters who look like them or share their experience is an inspiration to those who feel small. My dad has never been exposed to fan culture in the way that I have. He has never seen Superman drawn as a Hispanic man or has learned much about cultures outside his own. He's not interested in learning about things beyond his own world and identity. But if he had been given access to these things at a younger age, I wonder if he would have become more open to others in the world.

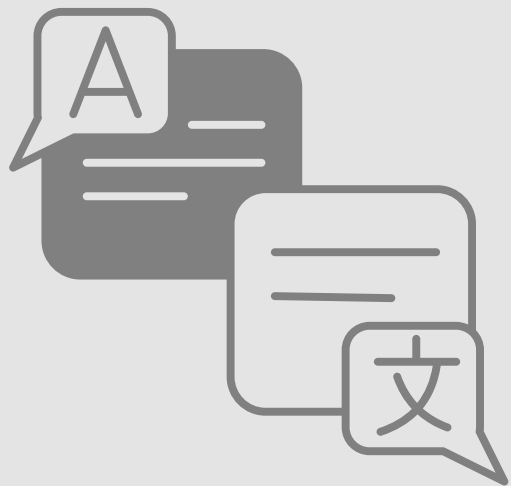
Readers assimilate into fictional groups because they want to feel like they have a place to call home where they can connect with other readers through relationships with their favorite fictional characters. If all the books we read are written from a white heterosexual-cis perspective, it closes the door to others, to those who don't fit that norm, preventing them from feeling a sense of belonging.



Maybe it comes from being raised by a superhero, but there is a little bit of the “I want to save the world” in me too. That's why I created this project with the help of UC Santa Barbara’s Raab Writing Fellowship program. If I can help uplift marginalized artists and readers, I may open a door for more people like me. And I hope I am doing that in my fellowship project Fandom Lore: Finding Identity in Fandom.

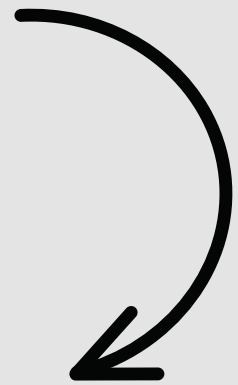


An illustration of Viviana Bustamante by thecaprica



GLOSSARY:

A LIST OF TERMS FOUND IN FANDOM COMMUNITIES.



ADHD: A chronic condition characterized by difficulty paying attention, hyperactivity, and impulsiveness. ADHD is a common childhood disorder that can last into adulthood. It may contribute to low self-esteem, strained relationships, and academic or occupational difficulties.

Angst: A term often used in fandom to characterize things that are intended to provoke a feeling of unrest and uncertainty in readers. Angst in Characters: When an author puts the character through emotional, mental, or even physical ordeals.

Angst in the Story: In a story, the protagonist may be sick, dying, or surrounded by death. They could be having romantic or familial problems, which often provoke sympathy from readers.

Anime: Anime is a Japanese style of hand-drawn and computer-generated animation. It is distinguished by brightly colored graphics depicting vibrant characters in action-packed plots, which frequently have fantastic or futuristic themes.

Example:

Neon Genesis Evangelion: a Japanese animation series that explores the story of human-made machines, known as Evangelions, who battle beings known as Angels to decide the fate of humanity.

Archive of our own/AO3: A non-profit free collection of fanfiction and other fan works submitted by users.

Aro-Ace: Someone who is asexual or sex-repulsed; Aro lies within the umbrella term for those who do not experience romantic attraction.

Alternative Universe/AU: A setting for a fan fiction work that deviates from the canon of the fictional universe on which the fan work is based.

BIPOC: Stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. This is a term unique to the United States, intended to highlight the experiences of Black and Indigenous communities and demonstrate solidarity among communities of color.

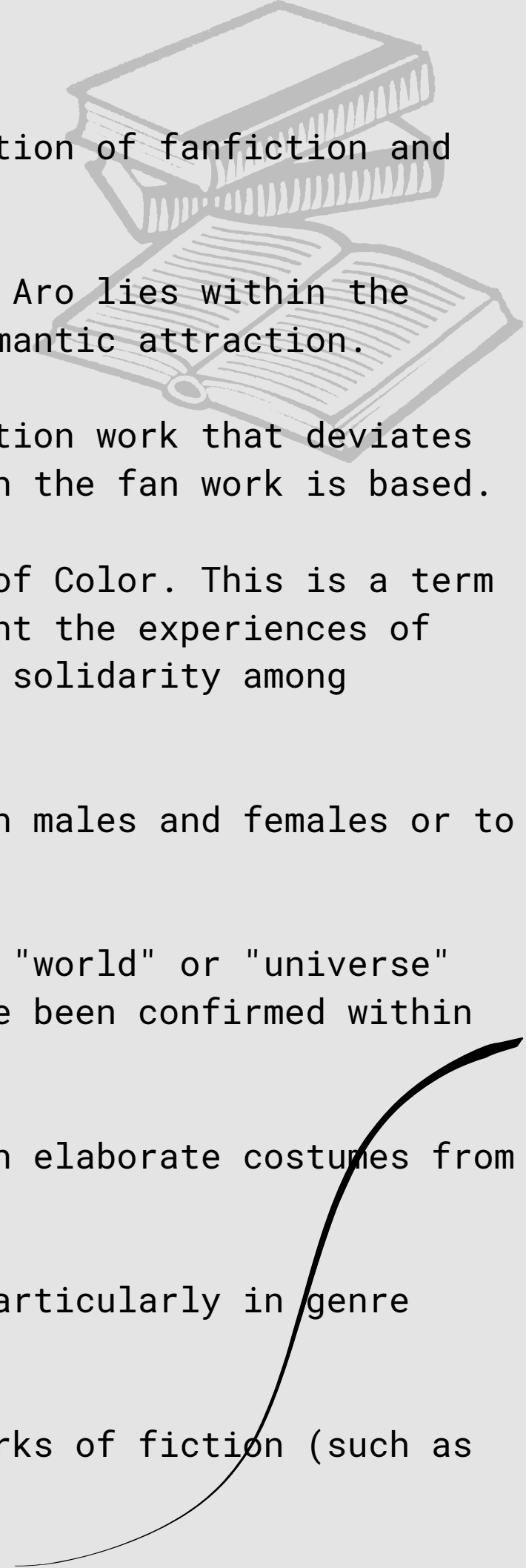
Bisexual: A romantic or sexual attraction to both males and females or to more than one gender.

Canon: Refers to aspects of a story or fictional "world" or "universe" that are considered "official"—that is, they have been confirmed within the story or in another way.

Cosplay/ Cosplayers: Is someone who dresses up in elaborate costumes from their favorite books, movies and TV shows

Duology: A book series comprises of two parts, particularly in genre fiction

Fan Art: Fan-created artwork based on popular works of fiction (such as books, movies, and so on).



Fanon: Elements introduced by fans that are not in a fictional world's official canon but are widely believed to be, or treated as if they are.

Fan Fiction: Fan-written fictional stories involving popular fictional characters.

Fan Fiction.net/ FF. net: A website containing a collection of fanfictions. It's one of the oldest and largest fanfiction archives and forums, attracting writers and readers from all over the world.

Fandom: A group of people who all admire or support a particular aspect of a subculture.

Fluff: A term frequently used to describe any pleasant, feel-good work. Fluff illustrates the affection between two or more characters, whether romantic or not.

Genderbending: A term for someone who actively breaks down, or "bends," gender roles.

Grisha: are humans in Leigh Bardugo's Shadow and Bone series who can manipulate the "Small Science". They are traditionally classified as Corporalki: manipulating the living or dead; Etherealki: summoners of elemental sciences; Materialki; manipulation of materials.

"Grisha-verse" fandom: The glamorous fantasy world where science and magic collide. The Grishaverse is home to fan-favorite characters from Ravka, Ketterdam, and more. It was established in Leigh Bardugo's Shadow and Bone Trilogy and expanded in the Six of Crows duology.

Suli: a nomadic people who primarily live in Ravka. Suli people generally have bronze or brown skin, black hair, and dark eye. Zoya Naylor Jenkins, Jade Deo's favorite character is half-suli

Head-Canon: Refers to fan theories that are not explicitly supported by the original material.

Lesbian/Gay: Refers to a woman or man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation toward the same sex.

Manga: A style of comics or graphic novels originating from Japan.

Example:

Naruto: An anime produced by Pierrot Co. based on a Japanese manga series written and illustrated by Masashi Kishimoto. It tells the story of Naruto Uzumaki, a young ninja who aspires to be the Hokage, or village leader.

Non-Binary: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn't fit within either 'man' or 'woman.'

Not Safe for Work/ NSFW: Used to warn someone that a website or fan material is not suitable for viewing in most workplaces.

Original Character/ OC: A fictional character created by an author or artist, usually from fanwork not included in the official canon.

One True Pairing/ OTP: The couple that a fan or group of fans prefers over all other 'ships (relationships).

Own Voice Authors: Books written by underrepresented and marginalized writers.



Queer: A word that describes sexual and gender identities other than straight and cisgender.

Queer-coded: When a character's sexual orientation is implied rather than explicitly stated, allowing the audience to identify with the character as queer.

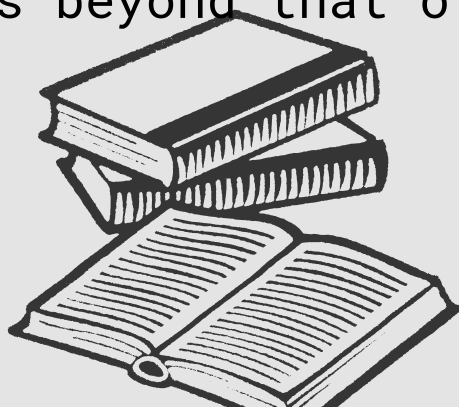
Queerbaiting: A fiction and entertainment marketing technique where authors allude to same-sex relationships or other LGBTQ+ representation but fail to include it in their works.

Shipping: Derived from the word relationship: It is the act of wanting or supporting a specific romantic or platonic relationship between real-life celebrities or fictional characters.

Smut: Fan material that is explicit and erotic, focusing on sexual activity without regard for context or plot.

Young Adult genre: A subgenre of fiction written for readers aged 12 to 18. Despite the fact that the genre is primarily aimed at adolescents, almost half of YA readers are adults.

Wattpad: A free online platform that allows people to read and publish original stories beyond that of fan fiction



Acknowledgments



I never imagined I'd be able to say I created a website, and it wouldn't have been possible without a group of incredible people, who I had the pleasure of meeting and working with throughout the course of this project.

Thank you to Diana Raab for supporting the Raab Writing Fellows program for seven years, during which you have given students the opportunity to learn about the power of writing and how it has helped us find our voices.

Dr. Ljiljana Coklin, thank you for guiding me as an instructor this year. You've given me a chance to do something I didn't know I was capable of. Thank you for your advice and support.

Thank you to those who I had the honor of interviewing for this project: Karen De LaVega, Jade Deo, Brune Gonda, Bhavna Madan Mohan, Bowen McCurdy, TJ Klune, and Laura Sanchez, and Soleil. I am so grateful to you all for allowing me the chance to tell your stories. You have all contributed to the success of this project.

And I am eternally grateful to my mentor, Nomi Morris, for being with me every step of the way. Your advice and encouragement have given me the confidence I needed to trust my creative instincts to create a project I can be proud of. It has allowed me to hone my skills and create a beautiful project that means everything to me.

Finally, I'd like to thank the site visitors. Whether you're new to fan culture or an experienced participant, I hope you can learn something from this project. I hope Fandom Lore can help to lift each of your individual voices and make you feel seen in this complex world.

