

**“Leave Us Alone, Mel Brooks!”:  
Gift Culture, Fan Exploitation, and What To Do About It**

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There is a term in fandom called fanwank. Questionable etymological origins aside, it's a useful word for encompassing all sorts of problems and altercations. It signifies that there has been some sort of upheaval or controversy within fandom. When an anonymous comment hurts the feelings of a well and widely known fan, there is fanwank. When an author posts questionable fic that engenders strongly worded debate over the validity and propriety over said fic, there is fanwank. When a fan asks an actor to sign hand-drawn pornographic art of their own character, there is fanwank. (If this were ever published, it would absolutely cause fanwank.) It's used as method for drawing attention to oneself as much as it acts as a social deterrent. The result of it often codifies the unofficial rules and regulations of fandom conduct and behavior. This is because much of the underlying issues repeatedly discussed and analyzed are at least tangentially concerned with the state of fandom. What fandom is and what it should or could be. What its limits are; what a fan's role is (both in public and within fandom), what's allowed in the space, and what actions shouldn't even be tolerated. The debate, over thousands of subjects and inciting incidents and perspectives, has been raging on for decades. There's never been any consensus, because there are always new challenges to the status quo. In some ways, although not all, 'fanwank' could be conceived of as 'the discourse.' The most common form of it stems from the relationship between the creators and fans of a work.

Fanwank serves as a strong example of the way social interactions within the fan community work. An incident occurs, an issue is made of it, the resulting discussions across all spectrum of media ripple in concurrence, disagreement, or qualifications. The wank is resolved

when a new event occurs, much like news cycles, or when reparations made are deemed sufficient by a majority of those involved. The events often have strong social repercussions within the fandom in which the wank originated. A big fan caught in a scandal could lose followers and support, a champion in the comments could gain a following, the trends and fashions that had so far been popular in the fandom could abruptly halt and change tactic. If anything else, fanwank proves one important factor. Fans are loud. They are passionate. The majority are hypervocal about what they believe and unafraid to argue an opinion. As the Kaiser Chiefs aptly summarize: “we like what we like, we hate what we hate, but we’re oh so easily swayed.” The fandom ‘safe space’ mentality opens the doors for all kinds of discussion and negotiation. This begs the question: why is there silence when it comes to fan exploitation?

### **Re: Gifting**

The question of fan exploitation is not clear cut or simple. Fans themselves question whether entering into the commercial system damages the purpose and systems of fandom already in place. Fandom runs on a gift economy, where works are circulated freely for the benefit of all fandomkind, but equally as a social economy, where the creators of popular works gain status and special recognition. The gift economy is generally defined as one where goods are given freely, without expectation of immediate reward. For the purposes of fandom, this gift economy functions in a multitude of ways. Participating in fandom is not a singular defined act. Fans edit each other’s works, attend conventions, discuss the show in detail on forums and social media, create icons and mixtapes, share art advice, fulfill special or anonymous requests as well as an infinite number of other activities. Works are often reciprocated equally with gifts of

comments, likes, recommendation, and praise, as well as gained social status within certain fandom spaces. These activities foster a sense of community and collaboration (Jones). When a gift is given, it's in contribution to the community, and therefore belongs to everyone who participates. Turk, in her piece on labor and worth in the fandom community, notes that "gifts within fandom are not simply given but distributed - and potentially, via links and reblogs, redistributed, sometimes well beyond the corner of fandom in which they first appeared. Fandom gifting is not just one-to-one but one-to-many." The default mode of fandom is "shareable."<sup>1</sup> The community also becomes a sounding board, one where ideas and popular concepts are traded freely. Integral to many ideas of fandom is the common language developed between the fans of specific work, which then easily transfers to other groups and then passes into fandom at large.

Historically, the relationships between creators and fans have been fraught. In many ways the capitalist and gift economies ran parallel to each other, but fan culture is dependent on the source for its inspiration. Many creators found the free rein with which fans manipulated their works to be disrespectful, companies with intellectual property concerns found it illegal. Some fandoms and creators are known for cheerful collusion: *Star Trek's* Gene Roddenberry actively sought out and encouraged fanzines and attended cons (in return fans became so involved that they're usually credited for reviving the series into a franchise), but others, like George Lucas, challenged and fought to control fandom output. In general, fandom obscurity prevented any discussion about labor and exploitation from occurring. While fans occasionally significantly helped or hindered the PR for a program, much of the actual activities of fandom remained hidden from the public eye. This ceased to be the case with the introduction of Web 2.0 in the

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<sup>1</sup> Tisha Turk, "Fan Work: Labor, Worth, and Participation in Fandom's Gift Economy," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 15 (2014): [3.1]  
<http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/518/428>.

late 1990s and early 2000s. Fan communities on the internet were drawing more interest and public interactions between fans and creators made relationships visible. As Jenkins notes, “the media industry is increasingly dependent on active and committed consumers to spread the word about valued properties in an overcrowded media marketplace, and in some cases they are seeking ways to channel the creative output of media fans to lower their production costs.”<sup>2</sup> As fans and creators interact in increasingly publicized and visible ways, the distinctive gift and capitalist economies have butted, bridged, and blended with each other. These new relationships have played out in a variety of ways.

In the modern media landscape, we can see that there are multiple iterations of fan labor. There is labor specifically solicited or sought after by properties, “policed playgrounds”<sup>3</sup> that attempt to contain and then profit off of fan creativity. This call to have fans submit works is often couched in some aspects of fandom, but is seen as stemming from outside the community itself. The *Battlestar Galactica* Videomaker Toolkit is often cited as a particularly strong example of this phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> A contest was held where fans were given excerpts of audio and visuals from the show and asked to create music video promotions for the show. Joss Whedon also called on his fans to help spread and promote *Dr. Horrible’s Sing Along Blog*, using his creator-fan social standing within the community to leverage support.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 134.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show sold separately: Promos, spoilers, and other media paratexts* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010), 165.

<sup>4</sup> Suzanne Scott, “Repackaging Fan Culture: The Regifting Economy of Ancillary Content Models,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 3 (2009): [3.3] <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/150/122>.

<sup>5</sup> Tama Leaver, “Joss Whedon, *Dr. Horrible*, and the Future of Web Media,” *Popular Communication* 11 (2013): 165.

Another form of labor is the works that are ‘picked up’ and celebrated by show creators. Actors, writers, and staff for the show will retweet popular fan art, making fandom visible. By taking works that already existed and were most likely intended for a different audience, these actions effectively decontextualize and exploit fan behavior. By highlighting these works, the show is essentially using fans as promotional agents, exhibiting the level of dedication, creativity, and buzz that the show engenders. This type of grassroots fan labor is translated into social currency within fandom, the artist chosen is of higher standing for being noticed by the powers that be. Fandom, and consequently fan labor, can be used as a way to generate interest in shows that normally would be overlooked, as Mark Andrejevic’s case study of the Television Without Pity message boards realizes.

Finally, some fans have also made efforts to commodify themselves. Academic fandom discussion trends toward a need for fans to commodify themselves before they are commodified by an outsider market force.<sup>6</sup> With the foregrounding of fan and geek culture in mainstream media, initially amplified by the visibility of media sites like Youtube, there has been increased stress about misrepresentation and decontextualization of fan language and subtexts.

Reactions to fans profiting off of fandom have been mixed. The most accepted forms have been artists and craft makers selling their wares at conventions in dealer’s room. Artists particularly benefit at conventions where they sell art prints, pins, chains, badges, bags, shirts and all variety of homemade crafts to other fans. However, since most of this art is digitally available across various platforms, it’s possible that fans are paying for the personal interactions, autographs from favorite artists, and physical copies, and not the creation of the art. It has also

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<sup>6</sup> Abigail de Kosnik, “Should Fan Fiction be Free?,” *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 123.

been noted that these monetary exceptions do not extend to the realm of fanfiction or, as I contend, purely digital graphics. There have been other notable exceptions to this rule, such as geek t-shirt sites that pair up with artists to sell custom shirts, usually with a pop culture twist, for a limited time.

Here, we can see that the parallel and occasionally intersecting economies of fan gift culture and producer monetary culture are much more complex than a simple yes or no answer to paid fan labor. There are fans who wish to engage with both economies, taking jobs relating to fandom or publishing original work with clear ties to fandom. There are other fans who prefer to remain within the gift economy, and see no need to blend the two economies.<sup>7</sup> While they are performing certain kinds of fan labor, maintaining websites and organizing communities, these are labors they see as giving back to the fandom, as well as the show that spawned such activities. The wide variety of identities, activities, and customs available within fandom means that fans can act as prosumers, PR agents, activists, ascended fans, inside agents, or choose to simply observe as lurkers. Additionally, each fandom's current and historical relationship to its source material is unique. Fans take multiple positions regarding the commodification of fan labor - whether or not fans feel exploited sometimes rests in a gray area where solutions are not comprehensive. The complicated hierarchies and customs of fans, then, necessitates a versatile solution and structure that can accommodate multiple modes of fandom and fan/creator interactions.

## **Fifty Shades of Morality & Kindling Controversy**

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<sup>7</sup> Bertha Chin, "Sherlockology and Galactiva.tv: fan sites as gifts or exploited labor?," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 15 (2014): [4.9]  
<http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/513/416>

It's clear that the relationship between fans and creators is rapidly changing. With the shift, the distinction between the two economies is becoming increasingly nebulous as different attempts at combining them garner mixed results. While the question of fan labor was still not on the table, there were early attempts by creators and third-parties to commodify fans and fanworks. By using a fanfiction-based case study from each economy, the tensions between the two are more easily delineated. By examining the reasons each backfired within the community, the need for a solution to the problem becomes evident.

*Fifty Shades of Grey*, by E. L. James, has become an infamous novel within and without fannish spaces. James was originally known as SnowQueens IceDragon, the fanfiction.net user who authored "Master of the Universe," (MOTU) a *Twilight*-based story set in an alternate universe. Eventually the story was moved to James' private site, but the story remained free online for two years, from 2009 to 2011. On fanfiction.net it gathered 56,000 reviews from fans and critics, while Jones' research into the subject suggests there were tens of thousands of readers.<sup>8</sup> Fans of the author even organized a three-day convention in her honor. In 2011, James took MOTU offline, changed the names of the characters, and distributed her new trilogy through independent publisher Writer's Coffee Shop, before the series was sold to Random House imprint Vintage in 2012, where it garnered astronomical commercial success in the public market. Vintage published the book, downplaying its fandom roots. They claimed that the two stories were distinct pieces of fiction, but a comparison between the two works shows an 89%

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<sup>8</sup> Lord Kelvin, "FFN in Numbers," (2011): #7  
<https://www.fanfiction.net/topic/61196/36425067/1/FFN-in-Numbers>

compatibility.<sup>9</sup> The *Fifty Shades* wikia only lists six narrative differences between the two stories.<sup>10</sup>

Reactions to James' commercial success were characteristically mixed. Kosnik identifies a problem in the decontextualizing of fan work for mass market:

That *Fifty Shades of Grey* is now equated with fan fiction by many nonfan readers is problematic because of its publication as a unique text rather than a text deeply embedded in a larger archive of fictions produced by a particular community.<sup>11</sup>

Fans operate on the belief that fanfiction will never be intended for public audiences, where it can be misconstrued and dissected.

While most fanfic is published on easily accessible platforms, it's often posted with the tacit understanding that it will only be read by its target audience - and for the most part, it is. Fanfic authors are definitely not expecting their writing to be scrutinized by people who aren't familiar with the source material or with fandom in general.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, when authors 'file off the serial numbers,' they are simultaneously relinquishing their fandom ties, an act of shame, while capitalizing on fannish practices to make money. James "deleted a part of the cultural heritage of her fellow fans to the detriment of their community,"<sup>13</sup> but simultaneously raised concerns from fans over authorship of the work.<sup>14</sup> The main contention regarding *Fifty Shades* is one of ethics over finance. At the heart of the problem

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<sup>9</sup> Jane, "Master of the Universe versus Fifty Shades by E.L. James Comparison," *Dear Authors* (2012): <http://dearauthor.com/features/industry-news/master-of-the-universe-versus-fifty-shades-by-e-l-james-comparison/>

<sup>10</sup> [http://fiftyshadesofgrey.wikia.com/wiki/Master\\_of\\_the\\_Universe](http://fiftyshadesofgrey.wikia.com/wiki/Master_of_the_Universe)

<sup>11</sup> Abigail de Kosnik, "Fifty Shades and the Archive of Women," *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 3 (2015): 121

<sup>12</sup> Baker-Whitelaw, Gavia. "What Not To Do When Teaching Class About Fanfiction." *The Daily Dot*. (2015): <https://www.dailydot.com/irl/berkeley-fanfiction-class-backlash/>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 122

<sup>14</sup> Bethan Jones, "Fifty Shades of Fan Exploitation: Fan Labor and Fifty Shades of Grey," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 15 (2014): [3.4]

<http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/501/422#note4>



are questions over who owns or gets to profit off of works that are generated by and then given freely to communities that operate primarily through social currency. Switching directly from one economy to another, while certainly potentially profitable for the individual, seems too morally dubious and culturally insensitive to be a lasting solution for fandom.

On the other side of the divide lays the case of Kindle Worlds. Launched in May 2013, Kindle Worlds is an ongoing initiative to cultivate fanfiction for profit. Amazon advertises the publication platform as a place for writers to “write new stories based on featured Worlds, engage an audience of readers, and earn royalties.”<sup>15</sup> The company paired with Warner Bros. to secure licenses for properties such as *Gossip Girl*, *Pretty Little Liars*, and *The Vampire Diaries* with the promise of more licenses becoming available soon. Guidelines for literature were strict, especially by ‘safe space’ and speculative narrative fandom standards. General rules regarding content bans pornographic and offensive content, without clear definitions of what constituted either. Individual properties became even more limited in possibilities. *Veronica Mars* restrictions required stories “to fall within the timeline of the original series, which covered, in more or less real time, 2005-2007, and depicted Veronica’s last two years of high school and her first year of college. Speculation regarding the characters following the time of the series, including Veronica’s once-planned internship with the FBI and subsequent career, is not allowed.”<sup>16</sup> On top of that, interaction between the Worlds are not allowed, barring crossover stories. Once published, authors forfeited all creative rights to Amazon, and received a paltry 35% in revenues for longer works, and 20% for short stories.

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<sup>15</sup> Kindle Worlds, *Amazon*: <https://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html?ie=UTF8&docId=1001197421>

<sup>16</sup> Cait Coker and Candace H. Benefiel, “Authorizing Authorship: Fan Writers and Resistance to Public Reading,” *Txt 2016: Powerful Readings* (2016): 25.

Reaction to Amazon was almost universally negative. The implication that making money is a main goal in creating fanfiction chafed against popular interpretations of fandom practices. Additionally, fans felt as though they were being set up to be exploited by the company, positing that the initiative is a cost-cutting measure on the part of Amazon to find cheap labor. The platform also eschewed any sense of community or collaboration between the writers, effectively asking for the end result profitability of fanfiction but disassociating from the customs and traditions that go into its creation. As a method of dissent, fans took to the streets, so to speak, in essays and comments that articulated their offense or apathy:

[t]otally aside from how monetizing fic for profit is a shit in the face of communities that thrive on free exchange of labor for sheer love of the product, I don't like it when I feel like The Man is trying to make my people suckers...One of the things I love about fandom is the fierce resistance to monetization<sup>17</sup>

I never trust corporate America sniffing around fanfic. While I'd love to get paid for my fanfic (joy and love is great, but there's always those pesky monthly bills!), the terms are awful. You get a pittance for writing and any original characters are Amazon's and the license holder's...Doesn't seem like a good idea for writers to me. I do wish fanfic could be unknown to the general public again, but that genie's out of the bottle. It just smacks of corporations trying to exploit fancickers, most of whom are women. Surprise!<sup>18</sup>

I was intrigued at first, but then realized this is far from the kind of thing I've wanted for fandom -- I don't care about making money on my stuff, I'd rather have ten nice comments than a ten dollar royalty pittance...<sup>19</sup>

I have never taken issue with people making money off their fanfic or other derivative work, although usually what you see is authorized tie-ins or people "filing off the serial numbers" so that it gets rewritten from fanfic to "original," like E.L. James did with *50 Shades of Grey*. This, I think, is something a bit different... The whole thing strikes me as impractical from a business perspective, but then again, many fans do seem happy to give financial support to authors they

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<sup>17</sup> Sunny Morain, *A Trick of Light* (2013):  
<https://sunnymoraine.com/2013/05/22/what-fresh-hell-is-this-amazon/>.

<sup>18</sup> bradygirl\_12, Livejournal comment (2013):  
<http://superhero-muses.livejournal.com/139618.html?thread=2797410#t2797410>.

<sup>19</sup> sophia\_felix, Dreamwidth comment (2013):  
<http://hesychasm.dreamwidth.org/261679.html?thread=3572015#cmt3572015>.

love when those authors start charging money for writing what was previously free...And there may also be some purchaser bias in people thinking that if something has a price tag on it, it's superior in quality to free stuff.<sup>20</sup>

Kindle Worlds, while still up and running, has by most estimates failed to engage fans for profit. The site currently hosts 2550 stories, compared to Archive of Our Own's 436,000 and fanfiction.net's 119,000 works for *Supernatural* alone. The continued attempts at decontextualization and commodification of fan practices ran afoul of decades of previously established litanies. Fans don't wish to be courted with the prospect of money.

Significantly, though, this altercation also shows the ways fan discourses shape action. From its inception, Kindle Worlds received 'bad press' from fan spaces, and fandom defined itself as a community separate from that of capitalist interest. Discussion and debate within fandom are crucial elements to fandom's self-interest and longevity. These qualities must be allowed to flourish under whatever new system is devised.

Both examples show how interactions between the two economies have been highly controversial. While there are always a variety of opinions on both sides, these cases exhibit a misrepresentation, misunderstanding, and misuse of fandom activities. For fandom to avoid being exploited, either from within or without, these past failed interactions must be recognized and steps taken to avoid similar outcomes.

## **Helping the Helpless**

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<sup>20</sup> hesychasm, Dreamwidth blog (2013): <http://hesychasm.dreamwidth.org/261679.html>.

Fandom has always been on its back foot when dealing with the industry. Before geek culture became popularized, zines and other fans vehicles were under fire for infringing on trademarks and copyrights. Part of the reason why fans came to organize under a gift economy system was to establish a partial alibi to prevent their work from being taken down by the powers that be. Unsurprisingly, fans were also devalued and pathologized by the media. Later, as highly engaged viewers became a valuable commodity in an increasingly segregated market, they were similarly helpless to defend themselves. Creators had mostly changed their position on the efficacy of fans, some even positioning themselves as fans as well. However, if fans ever felt uncomfortable or unappreciated, they had no basis from which to speak out. Many fans still adopt the viewpoint that being noticed by a creator is an honor, and that their payment can come in the form of exposure to other fans. While fans can decide for themselves whether or not they feel exploited, they shouldn't be forced to accept a single resolution to a notoriously complicated problem. There should be another way. In order for fans to come to the table, however, they need legal and cultural protection. This is where the Organization for Transformative Works proves vital.

The Organization for Transformative Works (OTW) functions as a protector of fan spaces and works toward creating fan equality in public spaces. Established as a non-profit formal group “to serve the interests of fans by providing access to and preserving the history of fanworks and fan culture in its myriad forms,” and as a reaction to the FanLib controversy (shockingly similar to that of Kindle Worlds), the Organization uses a number of methods and procedures to advocate for and house fan works, particularly fanfiction. Their non-profit structure is run and funded by fans who feel that fanfiction, and any number of ‘transformative’

works, are legally valid exercises of fair use. The organization serves as a place for fan culture to flourish and be stored through a number of different ventures that the OTW created and supports. While the projects are too numerous and varied to comprehensively account for in this paper, there are three of particular importance that seek to establish fandom as being on equal ground as their capitalist counterparts.

The first, and the most recognized, project is the Archive of Our Own (AO3). The site plays host to all number of fandom works - primarily fanfiction, as well as art and videos. The Archive “opened beta” in 2009, but rapidly gained popularity and widespread usage in 2015. As of April 2017, it has hit 3 million works hosted and has become a main hub of fandom activity.<sup>21</sup> Significantly, AO3 does not claim ownership or copyright over any of the works hosted, protects against plagiarism, has no regulations on ‘offensive’ content, and clearly labels and itemizes all other restrictions.<sup>22</sup> Because of the other work that OTW has been able to do, much of the work at AO3 has no fear of being taken down for violation of copyright. Additionally, the website is equipped with a variety of features designed specifically for fandom use, such as an extensive tagging system, the ability to easily disown fanfiction without deleting it, grouping multiple fanworks into a series, and providing works in a variety of easily downloadable formats.

Another important project OTW hosts is Fanlore. Fanlore is a wiki dedicated to accumulating the knowledge and history of fan practices and culture. The front page statement of purpose calls on individual engagement to accomplish its goals: “[At Fanlore] you can read about fan activities, fannish vocabulary, and the histories of fan communities - and add your own voice, memories, and experiences to our collective story.” The wiki serves as an integral nexus

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<sup>21</sup> “AO3 Reaches 3 Million Fanworks!” *Archive of Our Own* (2017): [https://archiveofourown.org/admin\\_posts/6984](https://archiveofourown.org/admin_posts/6984).

<sup>22</sup> “Terms of Service,” *Archive of Our Own*, accessed 2017: <https://archiveofourown.org/tos#content>.

of fan data and resources, while also providing proper context of fandom to those unfamiliar. The collaborative nature of the project encourages and reflects the fandom sense of community. The wiki is for fans, so contributing to it is an act of giving back to others. The existence of Fanlore helps establish fandom as an historical and active community, with its own customs, preferences, and systems. By establishing a stable and visible encyclopedia, the site validates fandom as a legitimate practice.

Crucially, OTW also does legal advocacy on behalf of fandom interests. The Legal Committee provides and spreads educational material on current developments, assists fans whose works have been targeted, as well as answers questions and aids fans in finding counsel, partners with other legal advocacy groups, and “advocate(s) for laws and policies that promote balance and protect fanworks and fandom.”<sup>23</sup> The legal aid rendered by the Organization validates fan creative activities, helping to recognize the labor that fans put into making their art. It assuages fan fears of looming Cease & Desist letters, freeing time up for other, more productive ventures.

The Organization for Transformative Works exemplifies multiple paradigms of fan activism done well. Fans saw a lack in the community and built a structure that could serve public interest. This was successful because the fans in charge already appreciated and were knowledgeable in fandom. Through AO3 pledge drives and responsive staff, OTW stays in touch with the community and is always readjusting itself to fit current needs. This type of responsiveness is a natural occurrence in fandom, but rarely found in other businesses.

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<sup>23</sup> “Legal Advocacy,” *Organization for Transformative Works*, accessed 2017: <http://www.transformativeworks.org/legal/>.

The Organization is good at what it does. It protects fans from being essentially attacked from corporate interests on a legal playground. However, it doesn't go far enough in actually negotiating lasting arrangements that will satisfactorily broker peace between the two economies. OTW sets an important precedent for fans who no longer want to fear that their favorite pastimes will cost them life savings, but recent interactions between creators and fans necessitates a new course of action. Fans can no longer simply be protected, they must participate in the conversation and demand equal treatment. In order to do this, I propose that fans organize themselves to meet with creators and industry professionals and discuss prescient issues.

### **The Feneration Generation**

Fans now have to actively protect themselves from corporate interests. In order to maintain stability within the now vulnerable gift economy, fans must find a method of interacting with creators and industry professionals in a way that benefits fan self-interest. The groundwork for such activism has been laid by the Organization for Transformative Works, which position fans as creating works that are legally viable, allowing them to enter disputes on equal terms. The history of gift-capitalist interactions illuminate the problems of such different economies coming together, but also point to ways in which these issues may be avoided in the future. The strategy must fit multiple criteria in order to successfully navigate these waters:

- 1) The strategy must be a grassroots campaign. The new system must come *from* the fans, not be put upon them.

- 2) There must always be room for debate and discussion. The nuances of fandom means there are always multiple positions to consider, and the gift community is built on the sharing of ideas. For these traditions to continue, the strategy must incorporate multiple avenues and opportunities for open discourse.
- 3) The strategy must not infringe on any current or ongoing mutually agreed upon systems between fans and creators. The purpose is not to dictate or legislate what is right or not, but to provide a voice in fandom for those who are not sure.

For these reasons, I propose fans create a homegrown coalition whose purpose is to educate, mediate, and vocalize issues pertaining to the nascent problematics between gift and capital economies. I have dubbed this coalition the Feneration because, much like its *Star Trek* precursor the Federation, it is an entity dedicated to garnering universal liberty, rights, and equality, sharing knowledge and resources, and still allowing each individual to maintain their own basic autonomy. In the show itself it's presented as a utopian United Nations. This is a status I believe fandom is capable of achieving for itself.

Taking advantage of OTW's resources and social platform, the Feneration would be an offshoot or side project comprised of volunteer fans. It would act as a recourse for fans who feel they have been unjustly exploited by the industry. Volunteers will be skilled in mediating fraught conversations between creatives and fans, amicably ending most confrontations before they escalate or blow out of proportion. Functionally, the way issues are brought up and decided upon might closely resemble that of fanwank. The difference here is that the controversy would have a directed purpose, and would occasionally involve those outside fandom. They would also work



at educating other fans in issues of fan labor and exploitation that often go overlooked within fan spaces.

In practice, the coalition may not be uniform in its goals. While fandom as a whole may share general qualities and traits, each individual fandom has their own style and relationship with their parent work. High rates of cross-pollination makes it impractical to consider a different coalition for every fan group, but the larger organization could be loosely divided up into medium, fandom platform (aka tumblr vs twitter), or even genre. These modular sections would act as outposts for the larger coalition, attending to the more specific needs of immediate fans.

Detractors might be quick to point out that fans, even with legal standing, have very little power against giant corporations. While this is certainly true, and the scale of the industry's resources and influence might at first glance seem overwhelming, fandom has already proven their worth to the industry over and over again. Fandom support of shows such as *Chuck* and *Roswell* have brought them back from the brink of cancellation on multiple occasions. Fan solidarity groups, such as Fans4Writers lent support during the 2007 WGA strike. Shouldn't the industry return the favor? Fan charities raise thousands for those in need, ranging from Youtube Project4Awesome annual marathons to the Harry Potter Alliance. Fans already know how to organize and activate; it's time that we do it for ourselves. Additionally, fans have incredible social power. Vocal upset across social media over mistreatment of women, LGBT, and PoC characters don't always change the minds of the writers, but do get noticed by dominant media. Fandom now has the power to make people pay attention when we want them to.

It's important to emphasize that the purpose of the Feneration is not to secure worker's rights or a minimum wage for fan labor, although these may be by-products of specific negotiations, but to protect fandom works and fans from being co-opted for a monopolizing capitalist system. The goal is to keep fandom spaces and practices as intact as possible. The coalition would act as the currently absent voice for fandom in public spaces. It would cut down on the decontextualization and misconstruing of fan culture, by creating forums for those curious to ask questions and confronting those who refuse to ask.

Fandom gift culture is unique - it should be protected and given a voice. If fans don't take action now, we fall under the threat of industry commoditization. In order to preserve our gift economy without being taken advantage of, we must organize and fight for what we want.

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