

#LGBTQIA+ Fantastika Graphics

#Fantastika2021

A Digital Symposium

20 November 2021

Panel 1: History of LGBTQIA+ Narratives - 1:30-2:00pm GMT

Chair: Nora Castle, University of Warwick, UK

Moderator: Chuckie Palmer-Patel, Canada

The Dystopian Horror of Homosexuality:

The Progressing LGBTQIA+ Narrative in *Battle Royale* and *Angels' Border*

Abstract: This paper will focus on representations of LGBTQIA+ students in two works of manga inspired by Koushun Takami's dystopian horror novel, *Battle Royale* (1999). The first part of this paper will focus on the manga adaptation of the same name with a focus on the harmful stereotypes portrayed through Sho Tsukioka, the only openly gay student in the class. There will be an examination of his portrayal as 'predatory' and the artistically exaggerated features of how effeminate he is, as well as the portrayal of his lifestyle as abhorrent. There will be an examination of how, despite his pride in his sexuality, the manga guarantees that if he does not die at the hands of his classmates, a footnote in his file indicates that he would be shot by a government official, indicating that LGBTQIA+ identities are not permitted any place in the dystopian world depicted. There will then be an examination of the depiction of a closeted lesbian student in *Angels' Border* (2012) in a side story written by Takami. There will be a focus on how her portrayal is less harmful and more nuanced, as well as how her internalised lesbophobia is informed by the country's disdain for the LGBTQIA+ community. There will also be a focus on how her story enriches the tragedy and horror of her death in the original novel. I ultimately aim to question if *Angels' Border* indicates a progression on the depiction of LGBTQIA+ students in a dystopian society, or if Takami believes that LGBTQIA+ stories are only acceptable if one is ashamed of their identity.

Bio: Laura Mulcahy (she/her) is a second year PhD student at University College Cork researching representations of trauma in the works of Stephen King. She has previously a first-class MA thesis on representations of trauma in Stephen King's *It*.

Queer History in *Marvel's Voices Pride*: Archive and Reclamation

Abstract: Marvel Comics has not had overt LGBTQIA+ representation until recently in large part due to its adherence to the Comics Code Authority until 2001 which prevented most characters from being openly queer. Despite this, the use of metaphor, subtext and, in some rare cases, rejection of the Code has created a rich, but complex, history of queer characters and narratives. In 2021, the company released *Marvel's Voices Pride*, an anthology of different writers and artists taking this history and reframing it through the lens of the queer experience, centring on both old and new characters.

In this paper, I look at the anthology as a form of queer history, acting simultaneously as an archive of struggle and a reclamation of formerly suppressed narratives. With the creators all being part of the LGBTQIA+ community as well, the stories feel authentically intersectional. In addition to actively rejecting erasure of bisexual, asexual, trans and non-binary lives, it also deals with trauma, immigration and refugee status, misogyny, racism, disability, body politics, and other multiple marginalisations.

By touching on some of the narratives in the issue and by reflecting on the queer identities of the creative team, I argue that the anthology fulfils an empowering function by speaking truth to power and offering meaning in absences – both key aspects of historical storytelling from marginalised perspectives. As such, I view *Marvel's Voices Pride* as part of the wider tradition of queer history, and a vital addition to the LGBTQIA+ canon.

Bio: Ibtisam Ahmed (he/him) is the Policy and Research Manager at LGBT Foundation, and has recently submitted his PhD thesis at the University of Nottingham. His work is included in [The Politics of Culture](#), [Ancillary Review of Books](#) and [Imagining the Impossible](#). He is also a member of the Beyond Gender collective and a former co-Director of the London Science Fiction Research Community.

Panel 2: Recovering History – 2:10pm-2:50pm GMT

Chair: Stephen Curtis, University of Central Lancashire, UK

Moderator: Kerry Dodd, Lancaster University, UK

**“Sweet tits of Billy!”:
Reclaiming Queer History in *Exit Stage Left: The Snagglepuss Chronicles***

Abstract: This paper examines DC’s adaptation of Snagglepuss, a character that made his debut in 1959 and eventually became part of Hanna-Barbera’s *Yogi Bear Show*.¹ Mark Russell and Mike Feehan’s 6-issue series (2017-2018) builds an origin story for the eponymous animated character by emphasizing his initially coded queerness and transforming him into a famous gay playwright who is blacklisted during the McCarthy era. *The Snagglepuss Chronicles* builds a storyworld that borrows characters both from contemporary literary, popular, and political culture (from Dorothy Parker to Marilyn Monroe and Nikita Khrushchev), as well as from *The Yogi Bear Show* and related animated series, such as *The Huckleberry Hound Show*. In Russell and Feehan’s adaptation, whose storyline develops between 1953 and 1959, humans and anthropomorphic animals live side by side during a dark time in American history, when alliances are fragile, conformity is brutally preserved, and difference is swiftly punished. In this context, Snagglepuss is not so much queered as recovered as a canonical queer character with added flamboyance, swagger, and a penchant for spending time at The Stonewall Inn. In a chilling atmosphere where self-preservation tests human/animal connection, salvation is finally to be found outside of the world of high art and in the “low” medium of animation, where the slightly elitist blacklisted Snagglepuss finds a home as a cartoon character.

In conversation with scholars such as Henry Jenkins, Pamela Demory, and Ramzi Fawaz, we are interested in answering questions such as: how does the recuperation of the original quirky and swishy Snagglepuss as a “sexy gay daddy” (as *The Advocate* described him) contribute to our understanding of McCarthyism, the Stonewall Riots, and present-day events from American history? Also, by suggesting that “low culture” forms like animation were able to provide valuable protection for “subversives,” how does the comic contribute to current debates about the status of comics in the cultural hierarchy? Finally, what does the mixture of human and animal characters bring to the storyworld of Snagglepuss?

Bios: Mihaela Precup (she/her) is Associate Professor in the American Studies Program at the University of Bucharest, where she teaches American visual and popular culture, contemporary American literature, and comics studies. She has co-edited (with Rebecca Scherr) three special issues of the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* (on *War and Conflict* and *Sexual Violence*). She is the author of *The Graphic Lives of Fathers: Memory, Representation, and Fatherhood in Autobiographical Comics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

¹ Snagglepuss’s famous catchphrase, “Heavens to Murgatroyd!” becomes the still whimsical but more subversive “Sweet tits of Billy!” in the DC comics adaptation.

Dragoş Manea (he/his) is a lecturer at the University of Bucharest, where he teaches courses in American literature, cultural memory studies, and film studies. His main research interests include the adaptation of history, cultural memory, and the relationship between ethics and fiction. Relevant publications include “Western Nightmares: *Manifest Destiny* and the Representation of Genocide in Weird Fiction” (*Studies in Comics* 8:2, 2017) and “Infantilizing the Refugee: On the Mobilization of Empathy in Kate Evans’s *Threads from the Refugee Crisis*” (with Mihaela Precup, *A/B Auto/Biography Studies* 35:2, 2020). He is a recipient of the Sabin Award for Comics Scholarship (2017).

**Queer anarchism and punk commons:
being-with *The Invisibles* and *V for Vendetta***

Abstract: This paper will analyse the rethinking of subjectivity and sociality in two texts, Alan Moore/ David Lloyd’s *V for Vendetta* (1982-9) and Grant Morrison’s *The Invisibles* (1994-2000). Both texts portray a conflict between a dystopian state and ‘secret’ antagonists. Both texts also narrate the induction and education of a new, young associate or member into an alternate sociality based upon anarchist principles and an ‘underground’ cultural commons, occluded by the state. In Evey Hammond and Dane McGowan, the texts narrate the construction of a new subjectivity in which prior forms of individuality and being are abolished in favour of a revolutionary not-yet. The paper will work through two queered figures, V and Lord Fanny, to explore what Jack Halberstam calls ‘a queer anarchism’, ‘a theory of anarchism that departs from the usual accounts of it as a political philosophy and that instead culls a theory of chaotic creativity from the unmoored, hyperkinetic, sonic traces left by a series of unconventional, hard-to-classify punk divas’ (‘Go Gaga’). The paper will read both V and Lord Fanny in this lineage, and use Jose E. Muñoz’s concept of the ‘punk commons’ to explore not only the (counter-) cultural heritages that inform both V and the Invisibles but the importance of music to both texts. V’s Shadow Gallery and the sociality of the Invisibles cell (King Mob/ Lord Fanny/ Ragged Robin/ Boy) will be connected to what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney articulate as the ‘undercommons’, a space and practice of fugitivity. A ‘queer commons’, ‘a nonexploitative utopian collectivity that is nevertheless grounded in punk’s politics of the negative’ (Millner-Larsen and Butt) is both the ground and the ‘not-yet’ of both texts.

Bio: Brian Baker is a Senior Lecturer in English and Creative Writing at Lancaster University. He works critically on science fiction and masculinities. He has just completed an MA in Art Practice, and is developing his practice in relation to site, transmissions, sound, text and image, and time travel.

Panel 3: Interrogating Space and Place – 3:00pm-3:40pm GMT

Chair: Josephine M. Yanasak-Leszczynski, USA

Moderator: Rebecca Jones, De Montfort University, UK

**“Are You Woman Enough to Survive?”:
Transgender Segregation in *Bitch Planet***

Abstract: Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro’s American comic book series *Bitch Planet* (2014–2017) has been celebrated for its depiction of intersectionality, its subversion of the comic book form and even for its use of trigger warnings. The current state of the literature derived from this work has yet to address the portrayal of transgender characters in the comics. A satire of exploitation comics and films, *Bitch Planet* presents a dystopian future where women are exiled and imprisoned for being “non-compliant”, deemed as such by a patriarchal Protectorate that has taken over most of the world. Transgender women were introduced in Issue #8 and further developed in Issue #9, when the Auxiliary Compliance Outpost—the official name of the prison—is revealed to have more than one facility with different types of populations. This paper is set to address this literature gap in the assessment of *Bitch Planet*’s speculative fiction, relying on a sociolegal analysis that focuses on the prison industrial complex’s function as enforcer of a rigid sexual dichotomy. By integrating transgender prisoner perspectives with the legal bases for sexual segregation a fuller understanding of the comic’s choice to create a trans-only prison facility will be provided. This paper will argue that, within the context of the comic’s dystopia, segregation exacerbates the “otherness” of transgender women: their crime is “gender falsification” by presenting as female yet they are still deemed non-compliant, a female-only crime. This paradoxical scenario is solved in *Bitch Planet* with a secondary facility, which contrasts with the PIC’s struggle to accommodate trans prisoners. The result is an intersectional premise that challenges the normative conceptions of gender, sex, and incarceration that can be extrapolated to other aspects of human life.

Bio: Verónica Mondragón-Paredes is a senior studying International Relations (BA). She studied English at Yale University during the summer of 2019 under a Banco Santander grant and worked on young-adult literature as a MITACS Globalink Research Intern at the University of Alberta in the summer of 2021.

Ichthyology of the Closet

Abstract: From Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid” (and its inspirations such as Undine) to modern depictions including *The Shape of Water* (del Toro 2017), *Luca* (2021), and *The Girl by the Sea* (Ostertag 2021), merfolx have embodied a liminal and queer narrative space. Monstrous in their hybrid appearance and nature, the fish-

people inhabiting this narrative tradition contend with notions of belonging/home, desire, and a binary divide of land and sea.

This paper, inspired by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's landmark study *Epistemology of the Closet*, examines graphic representations of merfolk in light of the critic's assertion that "categories presented in culture as symmetrical binary oppositions... actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation" (9-10). The binary of heterosexual/homosexual that Sedgwick deconstructs stands in parallel to that of land/sea and man/animal in these stories as merfolk attend to their desires and transcend these boundaries.

Over time, this strand of queerness in literature and visual culture has been used to cope and illustrate various aspects of LGBTQ+ experiences. This presentation will offer a brief, reflective historiography of how these narratives illuminate queer subjectivity from Andersen's mermaid experiencing sensations of bleeding and burning on her enchanted legs as she walks on land in pursuit of the story's prince to the almost nonchalant "outing" of the protagonists of *Luca* as they collapse the boundaries between life above and under the sea.

Bio: Corey D Clawson (he/him/his) is a PhD student in American Studies at Rutgers University-Newark. His main research project, *Archivepelago.org*, maps queer artistic influences using digital humanities methods. The project parses archival finding aids for instances of LGBTQ+ writers corresponding with one another and translating one another's work.

Detoxifying Male Fantasy: Genre-Savviness and Desire in the Worldbuilding of *DIE*

Abstract: This paper will examine how the worldbuilding of *DIE* (2019-) by Kieron Gillen, Stephanie Hans, and Clayton Cowles attempts to detoxify fantasy: that is, how it challenges male-dominated fantasy canon and gatekept fantasy fandom.

Pitched as 'Goth Jumanji', *DIE*'s premise – where teenagers disappear into their fantasy tabletop roleplaying game (TRPG), and are then forced as adults to return – allows for a self-conscious and self-reflexive approach to the tropes of gaming and fantasy.² By utilising TRPG fan culture as a framework, *DIE* is allowed to build genre-savviness into its worldbuilding. Ryan Vu argues that, by formalising genre convention into game systems, TRPGs provide players with 'an unprecedented set of tools for analysing their

² 'Series: *DIE*', *Image Comics*, Para. 1, Retrieved from: <https://imagecomics.com/comics/series/die> [Accessed: 03-08-2021].

[own] genres'.³ Gillen's description of *DIE* as an exploration of fantasy and gaming's history seemingly supports this reading: 'there's a lot of history, postmodernism and even nostalgia [...] but it's not a book which is interested in being comforting'.⁴

I wish to examine how successfully *DIE* utilises 'uncomfortable' reflexiveness to deconstruct the toxic, typically cis- and straight male image that fantasy fandom often projects. The focus of this will be the bisexual protagonist, Dominic Ash: an AMAB person who, when in the secondary world of *DIE*, inhabits a cis female body and conducts relationships with men, something they do not do in the 'real' world. Although the main character can also be read as trans, I will be focusing on their bisexuality. I will examine Ash's negotiation of their sexual orientation, and their relationship to *DIE*'s gamemaster, Sol, as a representation of fantasy and TRPG culture's changing relationship to toxic masculinity.

Bio: Emma French (she/her) is currently studying for a PhD in Fantasy Literature at the University of Glasgow. Her thesis examines how *Dungeons & Dragons* consolidates notions of fantasy, while also giving players agency to subvert genre convention. She is a member of the Glasgow International Fantasy Conversations committee, and an editor at *Mapping the Impossible: Journal for Fantasy Research*.

Panel 4: Intersectional Approaches – 3:50pm-4:20pm GMT

Chair: Joy Sanchez-Taylor, LaGuardia Community College, USA

Moderator: Larry Eames, Kraemer Family Library, USA

An intersectional approach of Octavia Butler's *Kindred*

Abstract: Through Butler's graphic comic *Kindred*, numerous tensions are raised around the notions of accessibility, disability, equality and inclusion exposing the crisis of black futures. My analysis focuses on the way that Dana's positioning as a queer subject is informed by race and disability. My analysis focuses on the way that disability informs Dana's experiences in the context of slavery and her positioning in the contemporary discourse of neo-liberalism. Very few scholars perceive Dana's subjectivity as an actual state of being that carries value both materially as well as metaphorically. The materiality of disability has not constituted part of the larger discourse of the American slave system. The different figurations of space and time exposed through Dana's time travelling help conceptualize her accessibility in different structures. Through rendering disability both figuratively and materially, I establish a connection between the past, the present and the

³ Ryan Vu, 'Fantasy After Representation: D&D, Game of Thrones, and Postmodern World-Building', *Extrapolation*, 58 (2-3), pp.273–301, p.281.

⁴ Kieron Gillen, 'Into the Dungeon', 'Essays', *DIE Volume 1: Fantasy Heartbreaker*, (Portland: Image Comics, 2019).

future. The different figurations of space and time exposed through Dana's time travelling help conceptualize her accessibility in different structures. Previous scholarship has been extensively focusing on the origin and legacy of trauma, inflicted on the black female body of the twentieth century, however there has been too little, if any criticism in relation to the active construction of black female subjectivity, located at the level of the body. I wish to explore how spectacles of violence against black female bodies function in the wider political imagery of the twenty-first century. The physical and psychological displacement of Dana, as a black queer female body exposes her traumatization and the difficulties she faces in order to reclaim her subjectivity in a society burdened by a history of violence and exploitation. Even though *Kindred* was written before the black lives matter movement emerged, it could be analyzed in a way that asserts the continuity of African-American trauma, the perpetuation of systematic racism in USA and the crisis of blackness in the future.

Bio: Marietta Kosma is a first year DPhil student in English at the University of Oxford at Lady Margaret Hall. Her research interests lie in twentieth-century American literature, post colonialism and gender studies. Her research focuses on the construction of African American female identity in contemporary neo-slave narratives. She has written in a wide variety of journals and newspapers. She is a peer-reviewer and an editor for academic journals.

Rites of Passage: Worldbuilding of Inclusive Societies in Far Future SF

Abstract: My 15 minutes would start the conversation about the representation of relationships in the far future. I'm in the process of writing a generational ship narrative that includes a 'thruple' and for this society, it's not considered anything remarkable. It's not remarked upon by anyone. Is that a general expectation of the future? What will be considered the 'norm'? Will an LGBTQIA+ designation be understood in the same way and if it isn't, what about the world that is built would be powering that change? Does creating a future in which labels no longer exist just brush over the struggles of now? Is it better or worse to imagine a future without it? How would humanity evolve when and if we are space dwellers? Is there such a thing as 'the perfect genetic make up' or what genetic iterations do we need to live on another planet? I would also want to consider the process of 'coming out'. For some, it's a massive moment and others don't see the need. What would a new rite of passage be for the community?

My 'thruple' consists of two men and a woman. One of the men is Black and that leads to questions of race in the LGBTQ community. How important is representation in this sphere and is SF the best place to start the debate because the future is fantastical enough to not lead to anger, while at the same time being familiar enough to inspire change? Is the representations due to a lack of diversity in the writer (and consumers of the genre) and if so, how do we build a world that inspires inclusivity now and in the future

I don't expect to come with or leave with any definitive answers, but I am curious to hear and share thoughts on the subject and also consider the role SF can play in shaping our world now and in the future.

Bio: My name is Afia Graham (she/her) and I'm a PhD student at Lancaster University. I'm devoted to my family and I am the Reviews Editor for *Shoreline of Infinity*, in Edinburgh. I'm obsessed with comics in TV and films, with a soft spot for the MCU, SG1 and *Battlestar Galactica*.

Panel 5: Defying Patriarchal Expectations – 4:30pm-5:10pm GMT

Chair: Alison Baker, University of East London, UK

Moderator: Ciarán Kavanagh, Ireland

Lesbians in Space with Swords: Sapphic Representation in Contemporary Graphic Narratives

Abstract: This paper will discuss the ways lesbians and queer/sapphic female characters are represented in three speculative works – two graphic novels, *Cosmoknights* by Hannah Templer and *On a Sunbeam* by Tillie Walden, and one animated series, the rebooted *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* – and how these modes of representation combine specific aesthetic and symbolic elements to produce certain political framings of lesbian and sapphic identities as emancipatory. The modes of representation are tied to the specific worldbuilding of the graphic narrative, and notably to the question of whether patriarchy and gendered oppression are structural elements or not: *Cosmoknights* depicts patriarchal feudalism in space, while *On a Sunbeam* portrays a world with seemingly only female and non-binary characters, and the world of *She-Ra*, while clearly contending with imperialism, does not seem to feature patriarchy as part of its hegemonic system. Depending on each narrative's political structures, lesbian relationships may be a form of dissidence or the norm, but in all cases, the sapphic main characters are always positioned as resisting hegemony and as subverting categories of gender and sexuality, and thus contributing to a more expansive vision of what womanhood or lesbianism entails. This is underscored by the visual representative choices of each graphic narrative, from the characters' gender presentation (physical appearance, clothes, etc.) to color palette and drawing style. I will thus argue that these three graphic narratives can provide us with multiple new ways of thinking the lesbian (/queer/sapphic) as a politically crucial figure of subversion and liberation.

Bio: Héloïse Thomas (she/they) is getting ready to defend their PhD dissertation on history, futurity, and the apocalypse in contemporary North American literature. She has authored articles on the poetics and politics of memory, pandemic imaginaries, and lesbian representation, and currently teaches in the English department at Lyon 3 University.

**But Where Do The Babies Come From?:
A Look at Recent Retcons of DC's *Wonder Woman***

Abstract: What happens in a world where there are no men or patriarchs? How are relations formed? And where do the babies come from? These are some of the questions posed in the origin stories of DC's *Wonder Woman* (1941-). As a comic book series, one written and rewritten a number of times by a variety of authors, DC's *Wonder Woman* (1941-) has a long and complicated history. This paper will consider three later additions to the cycle, all written by male authors (that is, it will not include the latest instalment by G. Willow Wilson). While in the original *Wonder Woman* comics, Hippolyta creates her daughter Diana from clay Brian Azzarello's retcon (*The New 52*, 2011-2015) changes this parthenogenetic birth so that Diana is created from the union of Zeus and Hippolyta, reaffirming the role of heterosexual parentage. Although relatively recent, this version has quickly become canonical as the 2016 film adaptation focused on this relationship. Azzarello's recon is also problematic because, although the original matriarchal Amazonian society is based on peace and serenity, *The New 52* presents Amazonians who are more aggressive, warrior-like, and ultimately, portray a 'man-hating' view of feminism. Greg Rucka's retcon (*Rebirth*, 2016-2017), while still presenting Amazonians as warrior women, undoes this misandrist interpretation of feminism. Alan Moore's *Wonder Woman: Earth One* (2016-2018) returns to misandrist nuances, but also considers a more sensitive depiction of lesbian relationships. While these texts are still fairly conservative (as they do not engage in sustained conversation about transsexuality, intersexuality, pansexuality, etcetera), each narrative still reveals fruitful insights into binary power structures, family dynamics, and female relationships. This paper will begin this dialogue as the first steps of a larger project examining power and gender roles in fantasy fiction.

Bio: Charul ("Chuckie") Palmer-Patel is founder of *Fantastika Journal*. Her first monograph, *The Shape of Fantasy* (2020) investigates the narrative structures of Epic Fantasy, incorporating ideas from science, philosophy, and literary theory. Her next research project, *Mothers, Maternities, and Matriarchs* examines systems of power and oppression in American Fantasy. You can find out more about Palmer-Patel at www.doc-fantasy.com.

**"Mom, it's not you":
The Owl House, validation seeking, and the queerly-othered mother figure in
children's fantasy media**

Abstract: This paper seeks to analyze and advocate for an often-overlooked form of queer representation in children's fantasy media: that of the queer, socially awkward, adult mentor/ mother figure. This paper's primary focus is Eda 'the Owl Lady' from Dana Terrace's ongoing animated Disney show, *The Owl House*, but it will situate her in

comparison to her precedents, including Eleanor West from Seanan McGuire's *Wayward Children* series, Miss Peregrine from *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*, and Miss Honey from *Matilda*. By 'queer' this paper refers to both explicitly LGBTQIA+ adults, and those who embody more metaphorical forms of non-conformity, such as an inability to exist in their fantastic society in a 'normal' way, i.e., lacking magic. This paper also draws from M. Remi Yergeau's concept of "neuroqueerness."

The particular power of queerly-othered magical adults, like Eda, is that they are able to validate the child protagonist in a way their 'real' parents cannot, because of shared experiences of queer otherness and/or trauma. Eda represents – for both young queer viewers and chronically invalidated adult ones – an authentic, vulnerable, empowering queer adult who is capable of change and deserving of family. But in many narratives, the queer child feels they must choose between their 'real' parent and their magical 'found' one. *The Owl House* engages directly with the pain of this perceived ultimatum, through Luz's human mother, Camila. *The Owl House* therefore provides crucial representation that could help normalize conversations about queer and neuroqueer children who seek diverse mentors.

Bio: Elizabeth Boothby (she/they) is a Master's student at Memorial University of Newfoundland. She did her undergraduate work at Queen's University and the University of Edinburgh. Her research explores queer and ecocritical SF/F, particularly narratives of apocalypse, magic, mutation, and monstrous children. She lives in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada.