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The Aces Come to Carolina



**Latest on
the Charlotte
Gaymers Network**

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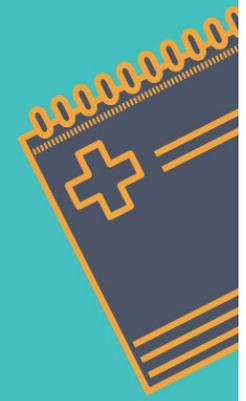
**Kamala Harris
becomes a
cultural phenomenon**

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Here we grow!!

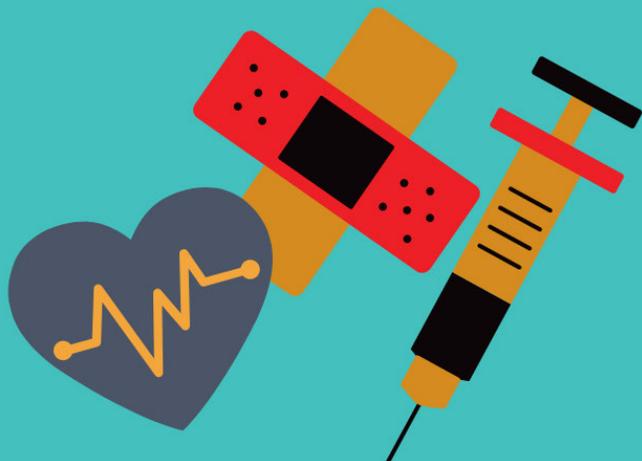


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Mission:

The focus of QNotes is to serve the LGBTQ and straight ally communities of the Charlotte region, North Carolina and beyond, by featuring arts, entertainment, news and views content in print and online that directly enlightens, informs and engages the readers about LGBTQ life and social justice issues.

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Exploring the world of fanfiction and its queer side

Fanfiction allows individuals to live vicariously through fan-created written works, which often use alternate universes or scenarios that may focus on a favorite character from film, television, literature and more. It can also provide readers the chance to reflect on themselves and their sexuality.

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A guide to kinks and fetishes

The LGBTQ+ community is a safe space to explore what you like (or realize what you don't like) when it comes to sexuality. Kinks and fetishes are concepts we tend to be more open-minded about than heterosexual culture. Here's our guide to some of the most commonly discussed topics.



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After Trump's near assassination, conspiracy theories spring from social media

Does speculation on such an attempt harm our nation and its legacy?



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

On Saturday, July 13, former President Donald Trump was campaigning at one of his trademark rallies right outside of Butler, Penn., when a series of gunshots rang out as Trump started to talk about immigration.

As shots were fired between the suspect and Secret Service, Trump was struck or grazed in the ear by one of the bullets intended to kill him. Experts have since said a last second turn of Trump's head saved his life.

One rally attendee was killed and two individuals other than Trump were injured in the incident. Authorities identified the shooter as Thomas Matthew Crooks, a 20-year-old man from the nearby town of Bethel Park, and have yet to determine a motive behind the attack on the former president and presumptive Republican nominee.

In the days following the attempt on Trump's life, many hopped onto their social media profiles and with speculation and their own theories regarding the botched assassination attempt. For many, these conspiracies have resulted in a massive onslaught of misinformation and untruths being spread to millions who have access to an internet connection. The impact of so many contradicting and misleading messages has already been shown to result in massive social divisiveness and potential violence.

What We Know About the Assassination Attempt

Information regarding the July 13 attempt has continued to come out in the days since Trump was whisked off the stage.

In order to get into one of Trump's rallies, attendees must go through an intense security screening process, which includes checking for prohibited items such as weapons. Secret Service also evaluates the venue and its surroundings to ensure the perimeter is secure.

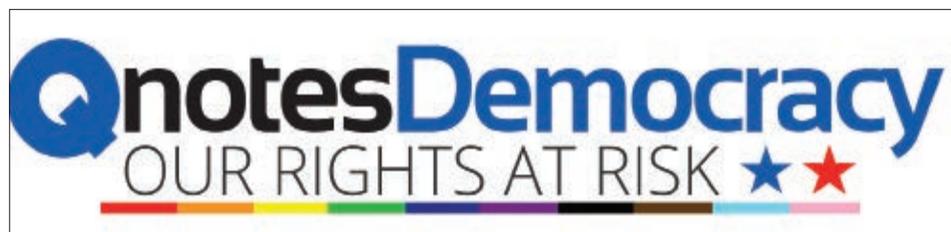
This event had four separate counter-sniper teams assigned — two from the Secret Service and two from local law enforcement. Prior to the Saturday rally, Secret Service had actually increased Trump's security after receiving intelligence indicating Iran was plotting its own assassination plot. The Iranian attempt theory has not been shown to have any relationship to the events that took place July 13.

On the day of the shooting, perpetrator Thomas Matthew Crooks borrowed his father's rifle—a DPMS Panther Arms-produced AR-15-style rifle (some sources



have reported Crooks' father gave him the gun as a gift or sold it to him). ABC News reported the father allowed Crooks to use his rifle for "target shooting" on occasion,

former president's right ear as he turned his head to look at an infographic. The gunman was killed by one of the four snipers set up around the



which was why the father didn't have any suspicions when Crooks asked to use the firearm that Saturday. Crooks also had explosive devices in the car he took to the venue, which law enforcement discovered after the shooting.

At 5:45 p.m., a member of the Beaver County Emergency Services Unit tactical team saw Crooks on a roof, notified other security services, and photographed Crooks. The officer saw him "scoping out" the rooftop of the building and carrying a golf rangefinder. Secret Service officers spotted Crooks on the rooftop roughly 20 minutes before the shooting. Reports indicated that several bystanders also witnessed a man on the roof carrying a rifle and alerted the police about him nearly a minute and a half before shots were fired at Trump.

A Butler Township police officer climbed up on the roof and tried to confront Crooks. When Crooks turned his weapon to the officer, he retreated back down, Butler County Sheriff Michael T. Slupe told ABC News.

Once Crooks was spotted by law enforcement, he fired several shots in the direction of Trump. One shot struck the

perimeter. The FBI is now the entity investigating the case.

What We Know (or Don't Know) About the Shooter

Crooks was from Bethel Park in Pennsylvania, about 43 miles from the site of the attempted assassination. He graduated high school in 2022 and worked in a local nursing home kitchen after graduating from the local community college earlier this year.

Voter records showed Crooks was a registered Republican, though he donated to a progressive campaign group, ActBlue, in 2021 according to an election donation filing and news reports.

Max Smith, one of Crooks' school classmates, told the Philadelphia Inquirer that his former classmate "definitely was conservative. The majority of the class were on the liberal side, but Tom, no matter what, always stood his ground on the conservative side," he recounted.

Some people who went to school with Crooks spoke to local news outlet KDKA, describing him as a loner and painting him to be a shy, quiet kid. Others shared that Crooks was seen as an intelligent kid

with a love for history, who was well-liked by his teachers.

The Big Question... Why?

Investigators are still trying to determine a motive for the attempt, which turns out, isn't as clear as law enforcement thought it would be.

Authorities on the investigation were able to gain access to Crooks' phone on July 15, and his family is cooperating with the FBI in its investigation.

It has since been revealed Crooks had visited the venue — Butler County fairgrounds, at least once in the days before the assassination attempt. He also had searched for symptoms of a depressive episode on his phone, according to reports from BBC News. They also found searches related to Donald Trump, Joe Biden, the Democratic National Convention and the rally in Butler.

More than 200 interviews have been conducted and 14,000 images reviewed, according to FBI Director Christopher Wray. As of this writing, it is believed Crooks acted alone.

The Conspiracies Come From Right and Left

People were quick to insert their own theories into the discourse surrounding the attempted assassination, some of which included the belief of the incident being completely staged.

Speculation online claimed the Trump campaign planned for this to happen, to show off "a resolute Trump surviving an attempt on his life," as one CNN reporter mentioned. Purportedly edited photos of the Secret Service appearing to smile during the shooting made their rounds online, adding kerosene to the pile of misinformation set ablaze by the unfiltered nature of social media.

On conservative social media spaces, the rumor was spread that Trump was also shot in the chest and was only saved by a bulletproof vest. This was accompanied with a photo where people claimed they could see a hole in Trump's clothes. However, reports released by investigators and the former president's team indicate the president only had a wound on his right ear.

The facts are simple: As of now, we don't know why Crooks shot at the former president. We don't know how much the Secret Service knew, or didn't know about Crooks' plans. That information will hopefully be revealed through the investigations being conducted by the Biden Administration, the FBI and Congress.

What we do know is this attack confirms even more the increase in polarization in American politics: Something Trump has played an instrumental role in accelerating.

All acts of violence of violence should be condemned, but we also need to be sure to hold those people accountable who use rhetoric to encourage such actions ::

Who is JD Vance?

A look into Trump's VP pick



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

On the first day of the Republican National Convention, presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump made an official announcement confirming his running mate.

Meet JD Vance: a 39-year-old Republican senator from Ohio who has gone from being one of the former president's biggest critics to one of his most vocal supporters. Now, Vance could become the first millennial to hold the office of vice president.

But who, exactly, is this younger senator?

Vance first rose to fame when he wrote and published his bestselling memoir "Hillbilly Elegy," which follows the story of his family's experiences over generations of living in the Kentucky Appalachia. It was widely praised by critics and the public for providing context for the generational poverty often associated with Appalachian communities.

An excerpt from this book reads as the following:

"I may be white, but I do not identify with the WASPs of the Northeast. Instead, I identify with the millions of working-class white Americans of Scots-Irish descent who have no college degree. To these folks, poverty's the family tradition. Their ancestors were day laborers in the southern slave economy, sharecroppers after that, coal miners after that, and machinists and mill workers during more recent times. Americans call them hillbillies, rednecks or white trash. I call them



JD Vance was announced as Donald Trump's Vice President candidate on the first day of the Republican National Convention. CREDIT: Facebook

neighbors, friends and family."

He was born James Donald Bowman to Beverly Carol Vance and Donald Ray Bowman on Aug. 2, 1984, in Middletown, Ohio and grew up in an area 30 miles north of Cincinnati and 20 miles south of Dayton. His parents divorced when Vance was a toddler, and he was eventually adopted by his step-father Bob Hamel. Hamel and Vance's mother would eventually divorce over struggles she faced with substance abuse.

Vance was mostly raised by his grandparents, known as Mamaw and Papaw, who were union Democrats. In fact, Vance is quoted in his memoir as saying their political outlook was: "All politicians might be crooks, but if there were any exceptions, they were undoubtedly members of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal coalition."

After serving in the Marine Corps, Vance would go on to attend Yale Law School and join a venture capital firm run by the Silicon Valley scion Peter Thiel. He also started a nonprofit dedicated to "mak[ing] it easier for disadvantaged children to achieve their dreams."

While at Yale, Vance met his wife and the mother of his three children, Usha Chilukuri Vance. Usha, 38, a corporate lawyer who used to be a registered Democrat, is the daughter of Indian immigrants and a practicing Hindu, something a lot of MAGA supporters have voiced opposition to. JD and Usha married in an interfaith ceremony in Kentucky in 2014. In the same year, she worked in the influential DC circuit for Brett Kavanaugh, who would later be nominated by Donald Trump and confirmed to the U.S. supreme court in 2018.

Usha was also a law clerk to Supreme Court

Justice John Roberts during the 2017-2018 term. It was during that time Roberts wrote a 5-4 ruling upholding Trump's travel ban targeting several Muslim-majority countries.

"Usha definitely brings me back to earth a little bit, and if I maybe get a little bit too cocky or a little too proud, I just remind myself that she is way more accomplished than I am," JD told the Megyn Kelly Show podcast in 2020. "I'm one of those guys who really benefits from having, like, a sort of powerful female voice on his left shoulder saying: 'Don't do that, do do that' - it just is important."

One important aspect of Vance's political ideology to take note of is his sudden transformation from a "never Trump" conservative to a MAGA loyalist and Trump's VP pick.

During the 2016 Election, Vance told Charlie Rose he would never be "a Trump guy," and even went on to call the then presidential candidate "cultural heroin."

"I think that he's noxious and is leading the white working class to a very dark place," he said on NPR.

However during the Trump years, Vance appeared to have a shift in his political beliefs, claiming he came to support the MAGA movement after seeing what he thought was an overreaction from liberals across America.

In July 2021, Vance announced his campaign to become a U.S. Senator for Ohio, which would become the first public office he ever held. In a speech during his campaign, Vance said he "regrets being wrong" about Trump.

"I think he was a good president, I think he made a lot of good decisions for people, and I think he took a lot of flack," Vance said. He later added: "He's the best president of my lifetime."

Trump once described (rather, tweeted) Vance as someone who "is kissing my ass ... he wants my support so bad." Longtime Senator Mitt Romney also went on record and told his biographer in 2022 during Vance's campaign that he couldn't "disrespect someone more than J.D. Vance."

Since being elected to the U.S. Senate, Vance has become one of the most vocal defenders of the former president. Politico dubbed Vance as "the standard-bearer

of the New Right." Most of the legislation Vance has proposed since his time in the Senate have emerged from working with progressive Democrats, some of which include a railway safety reform bill co-authored by Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) and an executive pay claw-back provision drafted with Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.). Neither of these policies have had a vote on the Senate floor, however.

These aren't the only pieces of legislation Vance has tried to push through the Senate. He has also proposed a bill criminalizing and banning gender-affirming care for trans kids, a ban on federal mask mandates and getting rid of affirmative action policies at colleges and universities. He publicly supports a 15-week abortion ban with exceptions for rape, incest and threats to the life of the mother.

Vance is also one of the main opponents to sending financial assistance and weapons to Ukraine, a country that has been engaging in conflict with Russia since February 2022.

"I got to be honest with you, I don't really care what happens to Ukraine one way or another," Vance told Steve Bannon in a 2022 interview.

The Ohio Senator has also suggested a conspiracy theory implying the Biden Administration is allowing fentanyl to cross the U.S. Mexico border with the hopes of killing off Republican voters.

"If you wanted to kill a bunch of MAGA voters in the middle of the heartland, how better than to target them and their kids with this deadly fentanyl," Vance said. "It does look intentional. It's like Joe Biden wants to punish the people who didn't vote for him."

Vance has also stated the criminal proceedings against Trump were a "threat to American democracy," and has said in order to bring America to its fullest potential, it's going to have to get "pretty wild."

"We are in a late Republican period in America," he said on a podcast appearance in 2022. "If we're going to push back against it, we're going to have to get pretty wild, and pretty far out there and go in directions that a lot of conservatives right now are uncomfortable with." ::



Vance, is married to Usha Chilukuri Vance a Hindu woman who has led to substantial negative response from MAGA purists.
CREDIT: Screen Capture

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Mark Robinson flees reporters asking questions about controversial speech

The Republican nominee for governor said 'some folks need killing' during a public appearance earlier this month



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

Anti-LGBTQ+ Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson made headlines once again after suggesting "some folks need killing" during a public appearance last Wednesday. When reporters tried to question him regarding these comments a few days later, Robinson called them "shameful" and fled into an elevator.

The speech happened at Lake Church in White Lake, where he alluded that those who opposed him should be killed.

"We now find ourselves struggling with people who have evil intent. You know, there's a time when we used to meet evil on the battlefield. And guess what we did to it? We killed it!" Robinson said, continuing, "Kill them! Some liberal somewhere is going to say that sounds awful. Too bad. Get mad at me if you want to. Some folks need killing! It's time for somebody to say it. ... It's not a



Mark Robinson [left] standing with campaign manager Mike Lonergan as he avoids reporter's questions regarding a controversial speech earlier this month.
CREDIT: Screen Capture

matter of being mean or spiteful. It's a matter of necessity!"

Robinson also said leftists were always "watching" and "listening to" him and conservatives, waiting to pounce on every little thing they say.

"We need to start handling our business again," he said. "Don't you feel it slipping away?... The further we start sliding into making 1776 a distant memory and the tenets of socialism and communism start coming into clearer focus. They're watching us. They're listening to us. They're tracking us. They get mad at you. They cancel you. They dox you. They kick you off social media. They come in and close down your business. Folks, it's happening ... because we have forgotten who we are."

Robinson's rhetoric mirrors the trend of increasingly combative language from political candidates. Combative rhetoric has been cited as a contributing factor in recent acts of political violence, including the January 6th insurrection, the hammer attack against Nancy Pelosi's husband and the recent assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump.

A few days after the speech in White Lake, Robinson was approached by reporters after a ceremony at the state legislature honoring a Craven County police officer. When asked if reporters could ask Robinson a few questions, the Lt. Gov.'s campaign manager Mike Lonergan said they could only ask about the award ceremony.

However, WRAL reporter Laura Leslie

asked the gubernatorial candidate about his inflammatory comments from the White Lake appearance, to which Robinson fired back.

"You want to come out here and besmirch that lady's award by coming out here and asking me that silly question?" Robinson said walking into an elevator without answering questions. "That's what you got out of this? There's your answer. Shameful, that's what it is. Pure shameful. And you should be ashamed."

Leslie went on the air and the record, clarifying for viewers the normalcy of asking elected officials questions at public appearances.

"It is a routine thing for reporters to ask elected officials questions after public events," she explained. "We do that all the time, especially when those officials are hard to get access to otherwise."

Lonergan replied to WRAL's request for an interview with Robinson, stating "You will not be getting an interview today and probably not anytime soon either."

N.C. Democratic Party Chairwoman Anderson Clayton addressed the situation in a press conference, saying Robinson "makes North Carolina less safe."

"It's jarring and irresponsible for the sitting lieutenant governor and the Republican nominee for governor to say something so reckless and so clearly intended to incite violence," she said.

According to the latest polling data from fivethirtyeight.com, Robinson is leading Democratic opponent Josh Stein by four percentage points. ::



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Charlotte Pride Drag Pageant set for August 17

The Charlotte Pride Drag Pageant is a vibrant and inclusive event held annually as part of the Charlotte Pride Festival. Scheduled for Aug. 17, 2024, it celebrates drag performers from various gender identities, competing for the titles of Mr., Ms. and Mx. Charlotte Pride. Contestants are evaluated on interviews, talent showcases and creative interpretations of Pride, reflecting the diversity and talent found in the drag community.

The pageant started in 2005 and has become an integral part of the annual Pride festival.

“It’s one of the biggest draws to Pride,” said Liz Schob of Charlotte Pride. “Because there are a lot of prides that either don’t have drag pageants, or they don’t have them as front and center within their festival like we do.”

Contestants must meet the following criteria in order to participate in the 2024

Charlotte Pride Pageant:

- They must be at least 18 years of age.
- They must reside within a 100-mile radius of Charlotte.
- They can’t be a current or former Charlotte Pride titleholder in any division.

This event serves as a platform for LGBTQ+ visibility and empowerment, aligning with the broader mission of Charlotte Pride to foster an inclusive and supportive environment. By participating, winners not only earn prestigious titles but also take on the responsibility of promoting and supporting Charlotte Pride’s initiatives throughout the year. The pageant is free for both participants and attendees, making it an accessible celebration of drag culture and community spirit.

“Drag is under attack — our whole community is under attack,” Schob said. “I

think it makes a pretty big statement, having drag at the forefront of our festival so visible in terms saying we are not ashamed of our community — we’re proud of them.”

The Charlotte Pride website reads:

“Our pageant winners are more than title holders ... They envision a world in which all LGBTQIA+ people are affirmed, respected and included — free from any discrimination, rejection or prejudice. They commit their volunteer work, time and energy to the Charlotte Pride mission to enrich, empower, strengthen and make more visible the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people in Charlotte and the Carolinas.”

The Charlotte Pride Drag Pageant is more than just competition; it is a celebration of identity, creativity and community. It provides a space for performers to showcase their talents and for the community to come together in support and celebration of LGBTQ+ pride. The event highlights the importance of visibility and representation, offering a stage where diverse voices and talents can shine.



More than a dozen queens, kings and icons will take to the stage Aug. 17 for Charlotte Pride’s annual Drag Pageant. CREDIT: Courtesy of Charlotte Pride

“Come with an open mind and be ready for a really fun show,” Schob said. “Come ready to witness performers who give their heart and soul to what they do and lay it all out on the stage for the audience.”

For more information, visit the Charlotte Pride Drag Pageant page. ::

—Taylor Heeden Larkins

LGBTQ+ advocates comment on Title IX rollback

House Republicans passed a new act which would allow for congressional representatives to stop the enforcement of “major rules,” including Title IX.

“In their relentless campaign to push LGBTQ+ children back into the closet, House Republicans have passed another futile bill that would erase civil rights protections and tie the hands of federal enforcement agencies charged with ensuring safe schools,” said Melanie Willingham-Jaggers, the GLSEN Executive Director. “If the Congressional Review Act resolution becomes law, essential updates to Title IX will be undone, leaving LGBTQ+ youth without vital protections against bullying, harassment and assault.”

The Congressional Review Act (CRA) was formed in response to recent additions to

Title IX protections from the U.S. Dept. of Education. The department announced its plan to extend Title IX protections to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity explicitly, part of which includes allowing trans students to use the bathroom of their gender identity.

Earlier this month, a federal judge struck down recently installed Title IX protections. This temporarily blocked its enforcement across the country and marked a victory for more than a dozen Republican-led states who challenged the rules.

Now, the Republican-majority House of Representatives passed the CRA, which requires all federal agencies to submit a report on each new rule to both houses of Congress, as well as to the U.S. Government Accountability Office’s (GAO)

comptroller general for review before the rule can take effect.

“Major rules,” which would include Title IX related amendments, must have a report created and submitted by the GAO to Congress. The report from the GAO would determine if the requesting agency complied with the required procedural steps. Once Congress receives that report, it can determine whether it approves or disapproves the proposed rule. If there’s a consensus in favor of disapproval, Congress can enact a “resolution of disapproval,” which would make the proposed rule unenforceable.

“Repealing protections for LGBTQ youth, in particular trans youth and those whose safety is compromised on campuses and other spaces is unconscionable and hateful,” said Allen Morris, the National LGBTQ Task Force Policy Director. “Congress must act swiftly to overturn this dangerous ruling and



reimplement the protections established by the Biden Administration. We also implore the Senate to hold the line for transgender lives and the larger LGBTQ+ community.

“Now is not the time to fold to political pressure or give extremists a platform for hatred, discrimination and violence to thrive.” ::

—Taylor Heeden Larkins

Early ticket sales now available for Charlotte Trans Health fundraiser on Oct. 19

Prepare to strut your stuff and walk down the runway this fall when Charlotte Trans Health hosts its annual “Trans Health Is for Everyone” (T.H.E.) fundraiser from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Oct. 19 at Diamonds Direct Luxury Lounge at Truist Field.

The theme for this year is “T.H.E. Night Hits the Runway,” promising an evening filled with vibrant drag performances, an open bar, and heavy hors d’oeuvres. Attendees can also look forward to dancing and a night of celebration and solidarity with the transgender community.

The fundraising goal is \$75,000, which would be used to pay for gender-affirming treatments for the Charlotte

Trans Health patient network. Hormone therapies, gender-affirming procedures and other treatments are under attack in North Carolina, as the General Assembly voted to instate a ban on providers’ ability to offer essential healthcare to trans people under 18. The bill, also known as House Bill 808, punishes doctors who continue to provide such gender-affirming care by revoking the individual’s license. In addition, state funds for North Carolina Medicaid participants can’t be used to pay for gender-affirming medical care to minors.

The Charlotte Trans Health Group focuses on providing accessible, compassionate and affirming healthcare

services to the transgender community by working to bridge gaps in healthcare access and quality, advocating for better resources, support and education for both patients and healthcare providers.

Through events like T.H.E. Night, the Charlotte Trans Health Group raises funds and awareness to support its mission of equitable healthcare for everyone, regardless of gender identity.

This event is more than just a fundraiser — it serves as a vital platform to highlight the importance of accessible, compassionate healthcare for transgender individuals. By bringing together community members, healthcare providers and allies, T.H.E. 2024 aims to encourage a supportive environment, underscoring the significance of gender-affirming care. The event



CREDIT: Courtesy of Charlotte Trans Health

underscores the collaboration and unity required to ensure that all individuals have access to the healthcare they need, regardless of their gender identity.

For information on tickets, visit the Charlotte Trans Health website at <https://charlottetranshealth.org/the-night/>. ::

Charlotte 'pups' look for inclusivity and acceptance

The LGBTQ+ community is known for being a place where folks can explore and learn who they are, but within that umbrella lies a world of sexual exploration.

Some of these sexual escapades could involve engaging in some role-playing or engaging in fetishes. Sometimes, those two could be combined, such as the case in a fetish community known as "the pups."

Pups, which could also be called "pup play," are a part of a subculture within the fetish world. People who are active in these pup communities will engage in "play" sessions, recreating canine-like behaviors in consensual adult role-playing scenarios. This can be done in both a sexual and non-sexual context.

Sexual scenarios will often have a dominant partner who's the "handler," who is in charge of the pup's activities and well-being. However, according to Greensboro-based pup Chance Thee Pup, these relationships aren't the only ones you see in these fetish groups.

"Most people think it is all solely about sex," Chance explained to Triad City Beat. "It's more about the group and the people you feel a bond with. People create packs which are basically family-like situations."

Pups are often recognized by the neoprene and spandex "hoods" they wear, which are made to look like a dog's head. These mask-like accessories come in a range of colors, have features such as a protruding muzzle, defined eyebrows and floppy ears. Some of these hoods are decorated with artificial piercings or even synthetic hair. This is a part of what pups call their "gear," which can also include tails, paws (leather mittens) and a collar.

Most pups find their safe havens in online spaces, especially on apps such as Telegram and Reddit. However, there are groups and organizations working to provide a meeting place for these folks.

One of these groups is The Howling based in Charlotte, and according to social media, the group is still working to actively



meet across the Mecklenburg area.

According to their website:

"Our goal is to provide safe spaces for critters and pet players to socialize and come together as a community. We try to provide some events that allow guests to wear gear and have a space to mosh. All of our events are open for people of all identities no matter their gender, orientation, race and beliefs. We also try our best to provide accessibility to our events."

There is an event scheduled for Oct. 3

called the Camp Paws Fall Ball 2024, which will run from Oct. 4 through Oct. 6. This is a 21+ only event at an LGBTQ+ and nude safe campground and will feature a Pet Play 101 discussion panel hosted by The Howling that anyone can join to learn or give their experience and tips.

More information can be found at https://www.eventbrite.com/e/camp-paws-fall-ball-2024-tickets-785219030257?aff=ebd_soporgprofile.

—Taylor Heeden Larkins

'Kamala IS brat:' understanding the memes behind the movement

If you've hopped onto social media in the days following the announcement of Kamala Harris becoming the presumptive Democratic nominee, you were probably greeted with Harris rambling about falling out of a coconut tree. You also were probably bombarded with hues of blinding chartreuse and people talking about Charli XCX tweeting "kamala IS brat."

Edits, memes and official posts from Kamala HQ have resulted in the vice president achieving viral status within 24 hours of becoming the unofficial nominee.

But why coconut trees? Why green? What does "brat" even mean?

The answer is found in various pop culture references and phenomena, specifically in queer and Gen Z spaces.

The phrase being "brat" comes from Charli XCX's sixth studio album with the same title. According to the singer, "brat"

is to be "that girl who is a little messy and likes to party ... Who feels herself but maybe also has a breakdown ... is very honest, very blunt, a little bit volatile."

The memes of Harris with the distinct "brat branding" — which include bright chartreuse, black text and music from Charli XCX's album — had been circulating the internet in the weeks prior to Harris's nomination. However, it wasn't until Charli XCX herself endorsed the idea of "kamala IS brat" that the posts really started to hit the mainstream.

Harris's campaign has taken the "brat" aesthetic and turned it into their branding — with all social media pages having "kamalahq" written in the style of the album cover as the profiles' cover image.

The coconut and palm tree emojis, however, are in reference to a speech Harris gave at the White House last year.



She quoted her mother speaking about younger generations, where she said: "You think you just fell out of a coconut tree? You exist in the context of all in which you live and what came before you."

Some online users have taken the liberty to create remixes of video game music as well as pop music, including "365" by Charli XCX and even "Look What You Made Me Do" by Taylor Swift.

Harris's campaign has even gotten in

on the viral action — the social media page has continued to post their own original edits of the vice president. From using clips of her saying she'd "wipe the floor" with Trump in a Jimmy Fallon interview to her shutting down Mike Pence with the phrase "Mr. Vice President, I'm speaking," the campaign is using this online momentum in hopes of electing the country's first female president. ::

—Taylor Heeden Larkins

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Why did Equality NC fire a Black Trans employee?

Latest dismissal adds to growing list of organization's terminations since January



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

Almost two weeks ago, Equality NC (ENC) terminated the last Black trans person employed there, adding to the growing list of layoffs at the organization. Celeste Jones served as ENC's executive assistant, but prior to that she served as an organizer there for almost three years.

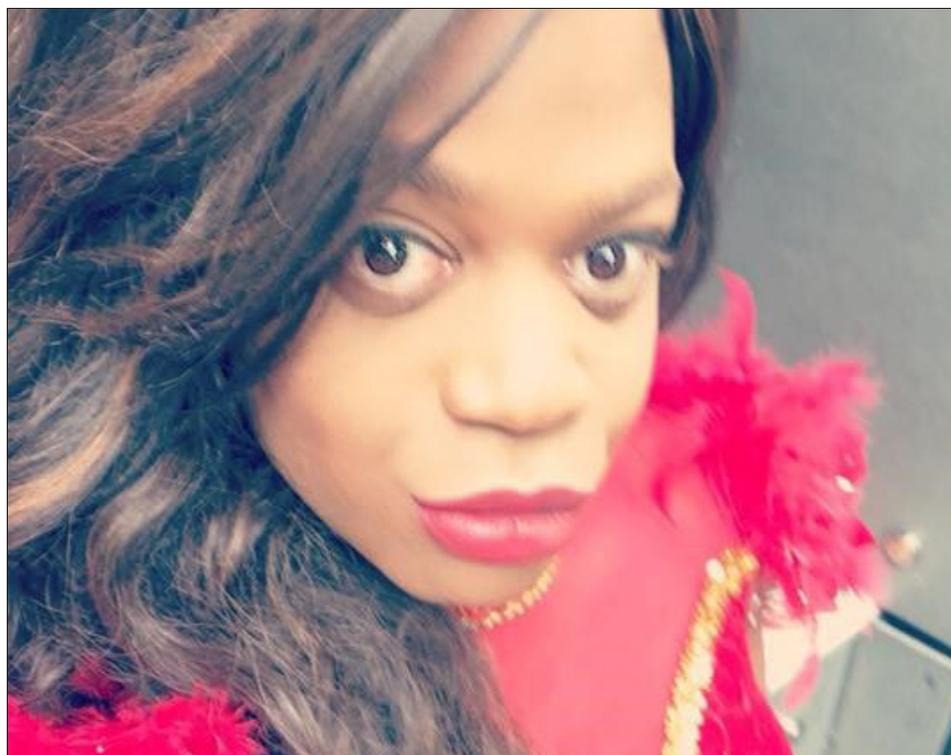
"I came to Equality North Carolina at the height of the ongoing pandemic, hoping to find asylum from the hatred and bigotry that would later evolve into a nationwide anti-LGBTQ and anti-trans campaign that would sweep the nation," she recounted in a statement sent to QNotes. "I hoped that if I [was] lucky, I'd gain the skills I would need to finally stand up to those who would otherwise see us eradicated from this earthly plane at best, or shoved back into hiding at the very least."

Jones said she was terminated from ENC without a severance package, something she and former ENC Charlotte-Metro Organizer Xzavier Boston said others who were terminated received.

Another Black Trans individual who was laid off served as the director of education policy, Reby Kern worked for EqualityNC for just under five years. According to Boston and Jones, Kern did receive a severance package.

"It seemed they built a new severance policy so they could get rid of people and those people got severances," Boston explained in an interview with QNotes. "Celeste did not, and we want to know why."

Jones said when she asked why she was being terminated after almost three-and-a-half years with ENC, she was told it was partially due to her "unresponsiveness." However, Jones said she had to return her work equipment almost three months ago for repairs, and since then she had to rely on using her friend's technology to do work because



Celeste Jones served as an organizer and executive assistant at EqualityNC for three years.
CREDIT: Facebook

ENC didn't provide her with a replacement.

"Equity means that you even the playing field for folks who would otherwise not have the resources or privileges they need to succeed ... I was given none," Jones said.

Boston said layoffs had happened nearly every week shortly after Executive Director Eliazar Posada was moved to the interim position. Once those layoffs started, Boston said the work began to pile up with no one able to take over the extra duties brought on by the sudden departure of ENC's only employees.

"Tasks got dropped, our partnerships just got dropped, our showing up at certain events just didn't happen because we just didn't have the manpower and the people to do it," Boston said.

Boston's resignation from ENC came about over the changes they were seeing in the organization. It got to a point where Boston said they didn't want to represent ENC, not even as a private citizen.

"We weren't showing up in our community, and we were lying about our money problems," Boston claimed. "They were not giving us any information, and so I submitted my resignation in April."

Jones corroborated Boston's experiences, saying her last seven months at ENC were toxic and hostile and the work environment had become "culturally unbearable."

"I explicitly stated that said changes would impact our work and its effectiveness in the community during probably one of the most consequential governorship races this state has seen,"

she explained. "I have been fired without so much as a write-up and have given ENC and my community three and a half years of service ... is that what we were fighting for?"

Jones and Boston both have stated staff approached the Board of Directors at ENC multiple times trying to get answers regarding the organization's financial status, as well as urging them to pick someone to lead the organization who understood what it's like to be trans in North Carolina. What they said they were met with: inaction and indifference.

"A budget [wasn't] presented to any of us about what we actually spend and what we actually bring in," Boston claimed. "We've only ever been able to look at the 990s, and for a 'transparent organization,' that's extremely troubling."

Jones and Boston are both concerned about the future of North Carolina's oldest LGBTQ+ advocacy organization, both claiming the organization's presence in this election will be next to nothing compared to previous years.

"I still hope and want the oldest LGBTQ organization in the state to do better and to understand their role," Boston said. "ENC is used to having a platform where they are speaking with the legislature, but they're not telling people that's not what they're gonna be able to do ... ENC will not have any impact on this election whatsoever."

QNotes previously attempted to speak with ENC officials about the layoffs in April, when Posada said the organization was "restructuring." When questioned about the topic three months ago, Posada was vague.

"So, I'm not able to go too deep into it ... [but] these changes in ... leadership ... who makes sense to hold what in this moment? And that's the part we're still kind of in the middle of, so I can't really speak too much about it." ::

... who makes sense to hold what in this moment? And that's the part we're still kind of in the middle of, so I can't really speak too much about it." ::

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Charlotte Gaymer's Network provides a growing community for queer gamers

The nonprofit was founded during the COVID-19 pandemic



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

The world of video games hasn't always been an inclusive space for members of the LGBTQ+ community. Throughout the 2000s and into the early 2010s, video game voice chats were filled with homophobic slurs and misogynistic comments geared at anyone who dared to sound or present "feminine."

Now, according to reporting from NPR, close to 1 in 5 American gamers identify as LGBTQ+, representing nearly 20% of all gamers nationwide. Research from GLAAD indicates around 52% of LGBTQ+ gamers faced harassment while playing online, and over 40% have avoided a game because of threats or harassment.

Take note: There are safe spaces for LGBTQ+ gamers here in the Carolinas. Welcome to the Charlotte Gaymers Network, an inclusive community group based in Charlotte, dedicated to bringing together LGBTQ+ gamers and allies. Founded by current Executive Director Jonny Saldana and former director Zach Smith, CGN has grown rapidly since its inception, providing a safe and welcoming space for individuals to connect through their shared passion for gaming.

"For me, growing up and getting bullied as a gay kid, video games were a safe haven — an escape to sort of not face the kind of cruddy reality I was facing at the moment," Smith told QNotes in an earlier interview about CGN's founding. "I think that's why they became so important to me."

CGN's mission goes beyond just gaming. It encourages connections, promotes inclusivity and supports the LGBTQ+



CGN has hosted the popular monthly event Gamer Gathering every week since October 2020. CREDIT: Screen Capture

community in various ways. The network hosts a range of events, from casual meetups and game nights to larger-scale gatherings and charity events. These activities not only provide entertainment but also serve as crucial support systems for many members, helping them build friendships and find a sense of belonging.

"I think we all remember when we picked up our first controller, we all remember the very first video game you played," Saldana said. "Being able to enjoy that in a space with other people is something that's very profound."

The network also addresses broader issues in the gaming industry. For instance, CGN has been involved in discussions around the representation of LGBTQ+ characters in video games. This advocacy is crucial, as inclusive representation can have

a profound impact on players' experiences and sense of identity.

"Until very recently, most game developing houses were primarily staffed by straight white men," Saldana explained. "So now that these spaces are being filled with more people of color, more queer folks, all of that, you're seeing a lot more often authentic storytelling or genuine [representation] within this world."

Charlotte Gaymers Network Deputy Director David McRae said the move towards more inclusivity in the narratives of video games has been a long time coming.

"Nobody's there to make you uncomfortable, that is not our goal," he explained. "We have more in common than you think, we're just trying to get through life. Queer people are always around you, so now we're finally seeing

our stories being told."

Specifically, there's been a rise in openly queer or gender-nonconforming characters where the character's existence in the story plot isn't driven by their sexual orientation. Some titles the two have noticed increased representation on include Last of Us series (the main protagonist is a lesbian and there are LGBTQ+ storylines), Boulder's Gate 3 (a Dungeons and Dragons inspired story-driven game), Overwatch (a first-person shooter team game) and more.

Despite these efforts, the broader gaming industry still has a long way to go in terms of LGBTQ+ representation. According to a 2024 NPR report, about 20% of gamers identify as LGBTQ+, a significant increase from previous years. However, representation in video games remains lacking. Only a small fraction of games feature LGBTQ+ characters or storylines, and when they do, these representations are often stereotypical or tokenistic.

"I can't wait for the day when I watch a film or I play a video game, and the character is gay or trans or lesbian or non-binary, and it's not made into such a big thing," Saldana said. "Because when we watch movies or play games and it's straight people, they're not like, 'Oh, I'm straight, and this is my straight girlfriend,' ... just to be able to watch or participate in an artistic medium where the LGBTQ character just exists and that's just normal, that's what we're working toward."

A proactive organization, it works to ensure that all members feel welcome and respected, regardless of their background or gaming experience. This approach has resonated with many in the community, making CGN a popular and well-regarded group in the Charlotte area.

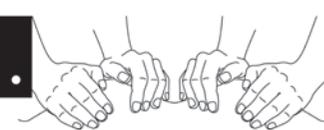
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organization presents on a regular basis is Gamer Gathering, which has been held every week at 1300 South Blvd. since October 2020.

"We typically have between 200 to 300 people that attend this event," Saldana said. "We have PlayStation fives, Nintendo switches, and we just launched a full sized retro arcade, where people can come in and play Pac Man Galaga, Simpsons, Marvel vs. Capcom two — retro games that they grew up and played."

Saldana says around 60% to 70% of the folks who come to the monthly gathering identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community, but there are others who come that are straight allies.

"We have a very, very diverse crowd," Saldana said. "[We] have Black, trans women, Asian folks, people across the socioeconomic spectrum who are there. It's truly a melting pot of diversity and belonging, and it's something that's truly unique, I think, to the city of Charlotte."

Saldana continued by saying the organization also involves itself in community events. In fact, CGN had its own stage with a DJ, activities and vendor booths at Charlotte Pride last year.

Now, CGN is traveling to conventions and panels across the country sharing their mission and providing their services. From attending anime conventions in Hawaii to setting up an "activation" area at Creating Change (the largest LGBTQ+ conference in America), CGN has hit the national stage in only a matter of four years.

"We have really tapped into this very non-traditional fundraising method,"

Saldana explained. "We're really hoping that in the next year or two we can expand into the development of actual satellite locations and chapters throughout the country. We're targeting locations to open in New York, Miami and Pittsburgh by the end of next year."

CGN is then able to use the money generated from attending these conferences and providing services to invest back into their home — Charlotte.

New philanthropic efforts are now in motion, starting in some Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. One initiative — Project Blue Shell — awards high-achieving school students with Nintendo Switch consoles, video games, school supplies and \$500 for their families. Saldana said CGN also set up a children's learning competition at Ridge Road Middle School, where students combine learning in the classroom with their favorite pastime.

"I just talked to the principal a couple of weeks ago ... He has told us that because of our projects from this year compared to 2023, there's been a 77% reduction in suspensions due to violence, there has been a 30% increase in attendance school wide and there has been a 15% increase in standardized testing scores," Saldana explained.

The CGN also has a program for high school students called Project Saturn, where low-income students can learn skills such as game design, web development, coding — free of charge.

"A lot of these kids want to become the next Mr. Beast — they want to become the next professional esports player, all of that



Members of CGN volunteered at Charlotte Pride last year. CREDIT: Charlotte Gaymers Network

and just like any other sport, it's very hard to get to that level," Saldana said. "So we're giving them the skills to go into careers where they can be successful in that world."

CGN also recently secured the largest amount of funding it has ever received — a multi-year \$35,000 grant from the NC LatinX collaborative. The organization also received \$24,000 from the city of Charlotte infusion fund, and both of those grants are locked in to be used for local initiatives.

"The most exciting news that we have is we budgeted this year to raise \$142,000 operationally, and due to a significant amount of investment and some really great work through the organization's fundraising and grant

writing, were actually on track to raise \$310,000," Saldana said. "While the organization is growing and is likely to take a more nationwide approach, he said there will always be an emphasis on the Charlotte community.

"All of our projects are executed in Mecklenburg County," Saldana said. "We reinvest all of this money right here in Charlotte ... Those are the ways that we try to give back and we try to show Charlotte as much love as possible because we're only here and possible because of this city.

For more information, you can visit the nonprofit's website at <https://www.charlottegaymersnetwork.com/> .:

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From sci-fi beginnings to LGBTQ+ representation: understanding the world of fanfiction

Fan-created works have brought many a sense of community and acceptance



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

At 10, and in the beginning year of being a *fangirl*, this writer had just finished the “Harry Potter” and “Percy Jackson and the Olympians” series. Both fictional worlds provided a sense of freedom not yet experienced personally in life at that time.

The characters seemed to jump right off the page and come to life. Percy and Annabeth’s happiness and Harry Potter saving the world meant everything. When reading the books in both series (for the time being) were completed, a deep need arose to find a way of continued engagement with those beloved characters. There was also the desire to see them go through scenarios not explored in the main plot.

Stumbling across a blogging platform called Tumblr — which has been an instrumental part of many teenage lives — led to the discovery of other people who shared the same feelings. They wanted to explore their favorite fictional universes beyond what was in the original source material.

That led to the ultimate discovery: fanfiction. These fan-created written works will often use alternate universes or scenarios to explore the relationship between fictional characters outside of their original source material.

Fanfiction not only allows folks to continue to live vicariously through their favorite characters, but it also can provide newbies and seasoned readers the chance to discover more about themselves and *their sexuality*.

A Brief History on Fanfiction

Fanfiction has grown rapidly in popularity since the 2010s, but its roots can be traced back to the original 1960s Star Trek television series. Starting in the mid 1970s, fans of the sci-fi franchise published “fanzines” with content centering around the show’s two male protagonists: Spock and Kirk. On some occasions there were even romantic interludes between the two male characters.

In more recent years, however, fanfiction has turned into a business — one that can be lucrative if your fanfiction is popular enough. An example of a successful fanfiction was E.L. James’s, “Master of the Universe,” a “Twilight” fanfiction picked up by a traditional publisher and turned into the still popular “Fifty Shades of Grey” series.

Most authors aren’t paid to publish these stories — in fact, for the majority, it’s a way to practice their writing skills and engage with the media they feel passionate about. For most on platforms like Wattpad and Archive of Our Own



(AO3), fan fiction is about community.

Who Reads Fanfiction?

According to data collected by AO3, over 80% of AO3 users are female, with a significant percentage identifying as LGBTQ+. Over 100 million people read and publish fanfiction, and on the platform fanfiction.net, there are over 700,000 published works just about Harry Potter characters.

AO3 releases the top “ships” — character pairings or groupings fans like to imagine in romantic relationships — every year based on the amount of works published, times certain categories (in fanfiction it’s called tags) were searched and how many times people sought out content with those specific characters. And before you ask, yes, there are also fanfictions for celebrities, musicians and bands. It’s actually a highly debated issue in online spaces on if it truly counts as fan created fiction since it involves real people.

AO3 just released its data for 2024, and the top 10 ships were all same-sex pairings. In addition, all of the top 20 ships but one were male/male pairings. The top 10 were:

1. Dean Winchester/Castiel of Supernatural
2. Derek Hale/Stiles Stilinski of Teen Wolf
3. Sherlock Holmes/John Watson
4. Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter from Harry Potter
5. Bucky Barnes/Steve Rogers from Marvel
6. Aziraphale/Crowley from Good Omens
7. Sirius Black/Remus Lupin from Harry Potter
8. Steve Rogers/Tony Stark from Marvel
9. Bakugou Katsuki/Midoriya Izuku from

10. Harry Styles/Louis Tomlinson of One Direction

The LGBTQ+ Community and Fanfiction

It’s very clear there is a queer aspect to fanfiction — the data proves that in itself. Because of the nature of each of these pairings, it allows for the readers to experience LGBTQ+ representation in a way often neglected in mainstream forms of media.

That can allow readers to see love through other perspectives and help affirm your own identity by providing a story with characters who experience the same inner dialogue select personas already loved and connected to.

Many fanfiction aficionados feel this way. A VICE contributor Satviki wrote about their experiences with coming to terms with their sexuality, saying fanfiction provided them a place to navigate their inner conflict.

“If I was choosing the ones, which solely had queer couples, it wasn’t anybody’s business,” they wrote in a 2020 article. “Before I knew it, I had started subconsciously associating myself with the characters ... So as the discovery of my own sexuality crept in, relationships in fanfictions kept showing me the light and letting me know the things that went through my mind also went through the minds of my favorite characters in some other dimension. And that it was okay.”

In the article, the author spoke to another person named Khushi, a second-year philosophy student and fanfiction devotee. They shared how they had felt for their entire life: They thought they disliked the romance genre all together. It wasn’t until they read their first queer fanfiction when they realized that wasn’t the case.

“Like all teens, I wanted the joy of

the sweeter moments, but as a young queer person, I could either read tragic homosexual stories or go through unnecessary heterosexual drama to get that one interaction between queer characters, which honestly wasn’t worth it,” Khushi explained. “And that’s where fanfiction saved me. Since I enjoyed reading fanfic, I looked up lesbian stories. With so many options out there, I could find the exact romantic story I was looking for, and between two women.

“And to be honest, the giddiness I felt reading them assured me that *I did* like romance.”

A lot of fanfiction, especially on AO3, contains sexual content. It can range in regards to tropes seen, including but not limited to first-time sex or hardcore ones like bondage and submission, and even harder and niche tropes like Alpha/Beta/Omega dynamics.

“While it’s perfectly okay for people to just seek out fanfics to titillate themselves, to me, these smutty fics were for more than just getting off,” Satviki wrote. “As someone who was new to sex, especially queer sex, they essentially gave me an idea of what sex would look like. And unlike porn, they emphasized on the importance of condoms, lubes and STD testing.”

Fanfiction provided a place for Satviki, and many like them, to truly learn and understand what queer experiences can look like. And because of that, they believe they’re better off in sexual encounters partially because of fanfiction.

“As much as I believe fanfics shouldn’t be the only source of sex education,” Satviki explained, “I stand by the fact that they genuinely did a better job than my parents, society, sex education at school and porn combined,” they explained. ::

From fanon to canon: a glossary of fanfiction terms

Understanding the online lingo of the fanfiction world



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

Fanfiction has become an easily accessible option for folks who are seeking out happily ever after endings for some of their favorite and beloved characters. Platforms such as Tumblr, Wattpad and Archive of Our Own have become safe spaces where individuals can publish their works of fiction using the characters and worlds they love.

These works often center around LGBTQ+ pairings and storylines, allowing for fans to seek these alternative endings where their favorite characters finally get their happy endings.

Within the fanfiction sphere, there are certain words or phrases used that may be hard to understand upon first encounter. QNotes has created our own guide to fanfiction lingo, so here's what you need to know:

Fandom

Fandoms refer to groups of people who enjoy a certain franchise, story or fictional world. The term fandom can actually be traced back as far as 1903, and a more rarely-used synonym for "fandom" in modern times is "fen," a playful faux-pluralization of "fan" that mimics "men," the plural form of "man."

Canon

Canon refers to what happens in "official" source material in a fandom. For a fandom surrounding a television series, the "canon" events would be those that take place within the show itself including character interactions, major plot points, etc.

Fanon

Fanon refers to fan-made scenarios or situations which take place within a fandom's world or "canon" universe. They become memetic within the fandom as many writers and fans adopt the same fanon, often within a relatively short time frame. An example of fanon includes a common theory believed by most Marvel fans that the child Tony Stark saved in "Iron Man 2" was Peter Parker, who would go on to become Spider-Man.

Alternate Universe, also known as AU

An alternate universe, mostly abbreviated to AU, is when fans will create alternate realities within the canon of a fandom's universe or storyline. This universe can be different in a few ways, such as AR (Alternate Reality), AT (Alternate Timeline) or AH (All Human) in the case of fantasy or science fiction works.

A story can also be termed AU when the author makes major changes to the canonical storyline or premise, such as killing off a major character, changing characters' motives or alliances, annulling major events or changing the setting.

AO3

The shortened abbreviation for

Archive of Our Own, a popular platform to access and publish fanfiction.

Hits

Hits are the number of times a work has been accessed. Used on the platform AO3.

Kudos

A kudos is a digital token left on a work to let creators know the work was enjoyed. Used on the platform AO3.

Jossed

A term that refers to a fanfic made incompatible with canon by later changes to the canon postdating the authorship of the fiction. The term was named after Joss Whedon, creator of Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

Kripked

A term that refers to a fanfic made compatible with canon by later changes to the canon postdating the authorship of the fiction. This came from/was named after Eric Kripke, creator of Supernatural.

Oneshot

A oneshot is a fanfic that consists of only one chapter and/or is first published in its completed form, as opposed to a fanfic consisting of multiple chapters which are published over time.

A/N

An acronym for "author's note." These are typically placed at the very beginning or at the end of a chapter of a fanfic when the author wishes to convey their own thoughts to the reader.

Tags

A tag is a keyword or phrase that is added to fanworks or bookmarks to provide information about them and make them easier to find. These are mostly used on the platform AO3 to alert readers to what's in each work, whether it's in regards to its contents, romantic tropes, characters involved, fandom names, etc.

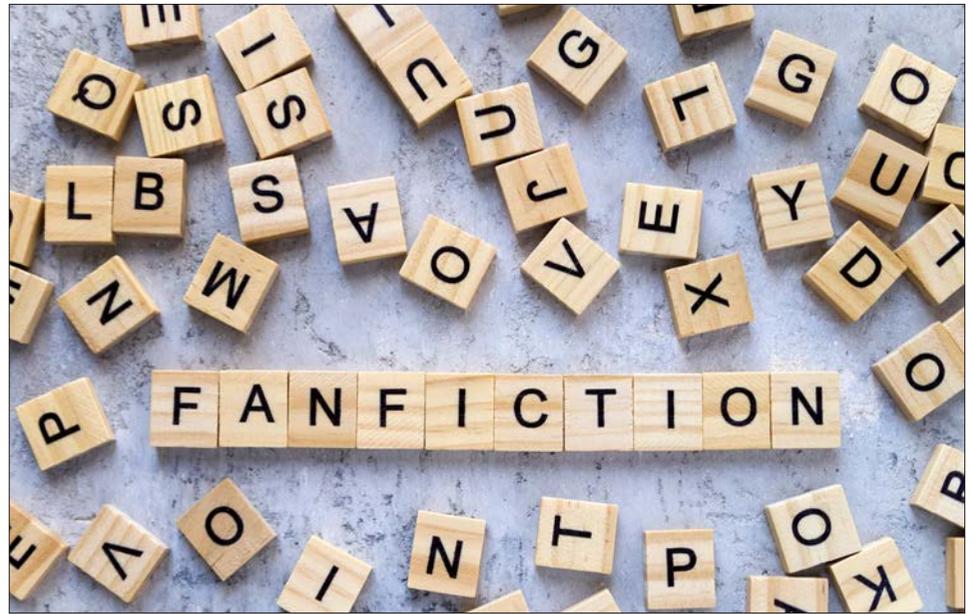
H/C

H/C, also known as "hurt/comfort," is where one character experiences pain (physical or emotional) and another character offers comfort. If one character is being comforted from severe trauma, an HC fiction may also be a darkfic depending on the origin and amount of focus on the "hurt" aspect of the story.

HC fics may also qualify as a lemon, lime or PWP if the "comfort" is provided sexually; fics in which sexual comfort leads to the injured character's immediate recovery are sometimes called "healing cock" fics.

PWP or "Plot? What Plot?"

"Porn without plot" or "Plot? What plot?" are terms used to indicate that a story contains little or no plot and, instead, contains little more than sexual



interactions or pornography; PWP is also called smut.

Lemon, Lime, Citrusy

Lemon features explicit sex stories, and they sometimes fall under the broader PWP umbrella. The name derives from a term which comes from a Japanese slang term for "sexy" that itself derives from an early pornographic anime series called Cream Lemon.

The term lime is used to describe a story that has sexual themes but is not necessarily explicit. Authors may call their stories "citrusy," indicating their story is a lemon or lime to varying degrees.

Slash Fiction

Slash fiction is a subgenre of romance fan fiction which exclusively deals in homosexual relationships, especially males.

Lesbian relationships are often referred to as "femslash" or "femmeslash" to distinguish them from the male/male pairing stories, though some fans prefer to use the term "Saffic" (a portmanteau of "Sapphic" and "fiction").

Sometimes when a pairing is written in the name/name format, it follows either a male/female convention (for heterosexual pairings) or a dominant/submissive (or in-charge/following) convention (for either heterosexual or homosexual pairings).

Omegaverse

Omegaverse is a subgenre of slash fiction, though it has taken to heterosexual pairings in recent years. Its premise is that a "dominance hierarchy" exists in humans, which are divided into dominant "alphas," neutral "betas," and submissive "omegas." This hierarchy determines how people interact with one another in romantic, erotic and sexual contexts.

Mpreg

Often found within omegaverse fanfics (though not always), mpreg is short for male pregnancy. Stories that involve this trope will either provide

an explanation for the male pregnancy that is reasonable within the bounds of canon (only applicable in canons that include magic or fantasy elements, or for canons set in a future where medicine may conceivably enable male pregnancy), attempt to provide a pseudo-scientific explanation (for canons that are otherwise subject to real-world laws of biology), or provide no explanation whatsoever.

Non-Con

Short for "Non-consensual." When a character in the story is forced or coerced into sexual activity. Precise definitions of this term vary as it may be considered synonymous with "rape," or is often distinguished from rape by the fact that the character, though not having wanted the sex, does experience pleasure.

There is also "dub-con," or "dubiously consensual," in which the character's consent is at least questionable.

Crack Fic

Crack fics are identified by its absurd, surprising or ridiculous premise. The plotline might be twisted into a knot, the fic might be a thick parody, or the fic might feature an unlikely or rare pairing ("crack pairing"). Sometimes random, nonsensical or stream-of-thought fics are termed crack, but other crack fics proceed logically, in character, and with internal consistency from their bizarre starting points.

OTP

Acronym for "one true pairing." It can refer to a canon couple or two other characters that the fan would like to see in a romantic relationship.

Fluff

A genre in which the story is devoid of angst and takes on a mood of light-hearted romance. ::

A guide to kinks and fetishes

From BDSM to wax play



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

The LGBTQ+ community has always been a safe space for folks to explore what they like (or realize what they don't like) when it comes to sexuality. Kinks and fetishes are concepts queer-identifying folks tend to embrace and be more open-minded to, rather than shy away from the "shame" heterosexual culture often places on sex.

But what are some of these kinks and fetishes? Here's a guide with some of the more common terms and most talked about kinks and fetishes, along with definitions to help guide you through this world.

BDSM

Standing for "bondage and discipline; dominance and submission; and sadism and masochism," there are entire communities for those who wish to engage in BDSM. Examples of BDSM related kinks will be below.

Age Play

Acting or treating someone like they're younger or older than their actual age.

Blindfold Sex

This kink or fetish is all about preventing yourself or your partner from seeing, which can be achieved with blindfolds or a dark room. Some say restricting one's vision calms anxiety, insecurity or feelings of religious guilt. It can also heighten the other senses, and is a common BDSM kink.

Bondage

It's one of the most popular kinks — being bound, using handcuffs or tying up your partner might make you feel safe, dominated or powerful.

Claustrophilia

The desire to have sex in small, tight spaces.

Cuckolding

Historically, a cuckold was basically a man scorned — usually a husband with an unfaithful wife. As a kink, cuckolding



is watching a partner of any gender have sex with someone else can be a massive turn-on.

Degradation and Humiliation

A common BDSM kink, degradation and humiliation is very common in dominant/submissive relationships. The dom will often do things to dehumanize or humiliate the sub, which turns on both parties.

Gagging

When one likes the sound of one choking or when one likes to gag or be gagged. This can be achieved by ramming something down one's throat or by placing a device over one's mouth.

Masochism

The act of enjoying pain in a sexual encounter, and it could be physical or emotional. Being spanked, whipped, spit on, choked or what is generally perceived as culturally negative name-calling are all examples of masochism.

Orgasm Control

This includes forced orgasms, orgasm denial and edging (repeatedly stopping just before climax to encourage increased arousal).

Sadism

The opposite of masochism; getting

enjoyment from inflicting pain on others while engaging in sexual activities.

Urophilia

Getting aroused by sexual acts involving urine, including golden showers and watersports.

Wax Play

When one gets enjoyment from having hot wax poured onto or pouring hot wax onto someone else. There are specialty candles made to burn at a safe temperature for skin, as well as candles when burned turn into massage oil that can be put on the body. ::



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SYA COX O'HARA
LILI FROST

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DEV

- BASS DOWN LOW
- IN THE DARK
- LIKE A G6

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KIARA MEL

““The Guncle Abroad”

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer
Qnotes Staff Writer

“The Guncle Abroad” by Steven Rowley
c.2024, Putnam
\$29.00
307 pages



The cake’s going to be magnificent. You must’ve tasted fifteen different samples and a dozen frostings, and considered five unique looks before settling on a showstopper. Next, you have to get invitations addressed and in the mail. You have to confirm the tuxes. You have to get flowers and centerpieces ordered. As in “The Guncle Abroad” by Steven Rowley, you have to get everyone on-board.

Patrick O’Hara couldn’t believe how his life had changed.

A few short years ago, he was living in Palm Springs, having “retired” from making films. He was in love, happy and he had temporary custody of his niece and nephew, Maisie and Grant. Life was good.

Now... oh boy. Patrick and Emory had

split-ish (Emory was still living in Patrick’s California home). Patrick was living in Manhattan, making a movie in London, looking for another role soon; and the kids were four years older. Maisie was an attitudinal teen now, Grant was nine and too wise for his age.

They weren’t the cuddly kids Patrick once knew – especially since their dad,

Patrick’s brother Greg, was getting married again, and the kids didn’t like Livia, their wealthy socialite stepmom-to-be. Patrick suspected it was because Grant and Maisie still missed their Mom. It hadn’t been all that long since Sara died. Was a new marriage an insult to old memories?

Patrick didn’t think so, and he’d prove it. While Greg and Livia were last-minute wedding-planning, he bought three Eurail passes, one for him and one each for the kids. He’d give them some culture and some new Guncle rules about love. Maybe – was it possible? – he’d even become their favorite GUP again.

But Maisie and Grant had other ideas. They agreed to go on the stupid trip around Europe with their GUP if Patrick agreed to talk to Greg about calling off the entire wedding. Something old (memories), something new (stepmother), something borrowed (trouble) and something blue (two kids) just had to be undone, and soon.

There’s an old saying, to paraphrase, that if the wedding is perfectly smooth, the marriage won’t be. With this in mind, “The Guncle Abroad” is covered: Add a

snarky lesbian with an entourage, a tipsy sister on a manhunt, a Lothario who doesn’t speak English and lost love, all at a lakeside hotel, and yeah, we’re good.

But here’s the thing: Author Steven Rowley doesn’t just make readers laugh. We’re covered on that part, too, because the whole pre-wedding scene in this book is pure chaos and LOL funny. Long before that, though, you’ll be charmed by Rowley’s main character and his desperation to stay relevant, to avoid-not-avoid love, and by his efforts to connect with his brother’s kids. And after the not-so-storybook wedding, well, you know how those things are.

Bring tissues, that’s all you need to know.



If you’re in need of a rom-com this summer, just bring the bubbly, pop a cork and make it this one. Reading “The Guncle Abroad” is best for the beach, a bench or your own backyard.

Loving it? Piece of cake. ::



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The Aces hold all the cards

Lead vocalist Cristal Ramirez talks about music and queer culture influence in their sound



by Gregg Shapiro
Qnotes Contributing Writer

Three-quarters of the all-female band The Aces are queer. It's not four of a kind, but it's pretty good odds, regardless.

The Aces' latest album "I've Loved You for So Long" (Red Bull Records) features some of the catchiest and queerest songs you are likely to hear. In other words, there's no question that these are same-gender love (and love lost) songs, beginning with the title track, featuring the lines, "You're taking me back babe to where it all started/Wearing your hair up in your New York apartment." When lead vocalist Cristal Ramirez sings "I don't know when I fell/She doesn't know as well," there's no doubt about what she's singing on "Girls Make Me Wanna Die."

That same openness is found on "Not the Same," "Person," "Suburban Blues" and "Attention." Sonically, The Aces' pop style could qualify them as a queer Haim. In 2024, The Aces are embarking on a multi-city tour beginning with a set at the West Palm Beach music festival SunFest and continuing through the years. Cristal generously made time for an interview in advance of the tour dates.

Take note: They'll be performing Sept. 7 at Rabbit Rabbit in Asheville and Sept. 10 at Red Hat Amphitheater in Raleigh.

Gregg Shapiro: Cristal, for those not in the know, please say a few words about the formation of the band The Aces.

Cristal Ramirez: The Aces are a four-piece band from Orem, Utah. All women. Three of the four of us are queer. We make indie pop rock music, I would say. We started together when we were really young. I'm 28 now, we started when I was like 10 years old. We grew up and went to school together. We started playing music in our small suburban town because we were drawn to it individually. We've been playing together for almost two decades.

GS: What are the best and worst parts about being in a band with your sister Alisa?

CR: [Laughs] I think the best part is that we're so close. The difference in our ages is barely even a year and a half. We've grown up inseparably. It feels like we're almost twins, in a way. We understand each other better than anybody in the world. That synergy between each other aids the way we write music, the way we play, how we show up in the band. It's like we can read each other's minds, which is an amazing quality to have in a creative partner. The downside is that it's your sister. We can drive each other a little



The Aces will perform in Asheville and Raleigh in early September. CREDIT: Julian Burgueño

crazy sometimes. But there's [a] comfort, although sometimes that can be a little smothering. I think we've done a good job together at learning how to navigate times where maybe our relationship is a little more strained.

GS: What is the story behind the band's name?

CR: There's really not a great story. As I said, we were young, 10 years old. We had booked this show in our community, probably at a flea market or something, and we needed a name really bad. Originally, it was The Blue Aces, and then it turned into The Aces, years later. I thought it sounded like a rock 'n roll band. We needed a name for that show, and then it just stuck.

GS: Who are your top three musical influences and how do your influences align with the other band members?

CR: I think band influences are different than personal influences. Alisa and I, being sisters, grew up in the same household, so a lot of our influences were the music our parents listened to growing up. A lot of '80s pop, disco and feel-good music that you wanted to dance to: Whitney Houston and The Pointer Sisters. Also, our dad is Honduran, and so there's the Latin influence like Selena and Marc Anthony. We grew up dancing a lot. Our relationship to music was influenced by dance music and disco. Katie (Henderson) and McKenna (Petty) grew up with classic rock and '80s new wave and alternative bands. I think the marriage of those influences is what The Aces are: disco indie pop. You hear a lot of disco influence across much of our music but paired with alternative influences like The Cure and Depeche Mode.

GS: The Ace's songwriting is

credited to the band and Keith Varon, who also co-produced and plays on the band's most recent album "I've Loved You for So Long." How does the songwriting process work?

CR: It changes. We've made three albums and each album has a different approach. "I've Loved You for So Long" was just the four of us and one main collaborator. We'd go in and write songs together, and he'd mainly produce. A song like "Suburban Blues" was written in a room and played, like we did when we were kids. Then there's other songs where maybe Keith had a guitar idea and we started writing on that. We're very involved in our writing and we write everything that we put out.

GS: As you mentioned, 3/4 of The Aces' members identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community, and songs such as the title cut, "Girls Make Me Wanna Die," "Suburban Blues" and "Not the Same," directly address queerness. How important is it to you to include that content in your songs?

CR: It's kind of innate in a way. At the end of the day, it's really who we are. It's a part of our lives and how we identify, how we show up in the world within a romantic relationship. It's a massive part of what we're inspired to write about: our relationships and love and romance. At the same time, I think it's super important to be out and show up as our authentic selves because I think that saves lives. I think the more visibility you have, and the more vulnerable and brave you can be in sharing every part of yourself, that's the part of you that society might deem less commercial, less sellable. That's a very big aspect in the music industry. That's the reason why we've been able to create such a strong

fan base and a strong culture around our band. I think that that authenticity really resonates. The people that really get our band: It's a deep connection to the music and to the artistry and to who we are as people. I think visibility is super important because visibility saved my life as a young kid in suburban Utah. Getting on YouTube and getting on the Internet and trying to find people that look like me, talk like me and love like me. That was so crucial in life as a person and as an artist. I hope that our band can do that for other people.

GS: Have The Aces ever played any Pride Fests?

CR: Oh, yeah! We did a whole Pride tour in 2022. We played eight different Pride Fests across the country.

GS: In September and October, The Aces will be on tour with Goth Babe. What are you most looking forward to about those shows?

CR: Goth Babe is a good friend of ours. We met him at a festival a few years ago in Iowa, I think. He's been supportive and sweet. He's so kind to bring us out on tour with him. We're really looking forward to playing Red Rocks. I'm excited for all the venues we're playing with him. Some of them are truly iconic.

GS: Have The Aces started writing songs for the follow-up to "I've Loved You for So Long?"

CR: Yes, we have. I'm about to go into a session today. We haven't stopped writing since we came back from Japan and Australia in November. We immediately started writing again. I'm excited about the direction we're taking and the kind of music we're making. Yes, more music is in the works. ::

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