

Confronting Enterprise slash fan fiction.(Short Story)

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Summary: A slash writer comes out of the closet and reveals all. Or if not all, some.

Beta: Kim, The Grrrl, and Sarah, as usual. They are flexible in terms of genre. Thanks much!

Disclaimer: The usual. Paramount (<http://www.paramount.com/>) owns the world, and I adore and worship them, as should we all, in hopes that they won't sue me and all my friends because we feel the urge to write this stuff.

* I've never written fiction, really, or had the desire to write fiction. I've never really felt I had that much to say, and in addition, I'm too pragmatic. Were I to write, say, a romance novel, I wouldn't be able to handle the misunderstandings so necessary to drive the plot, and the thought of making up a bunch of characters and throwing them into unlikely situations didn't sound like fun as much as a chore. So it came as a complete surprise to me when, after viewing a Star Trek Enterprise episode entitled "Silent Enemy," inspiration struck. Frankly, that had never happened before. It was the first time where I felt absolutely compelled to write fiction.

Enterprise, which went on the air in September 2001 and as of this writing has just begun airing its second season, is the latest television program in the Star Trek franchise. It is set in time before the original series. I have to admit that the first few episodes I saw were simply not very good. As an avid Star Trek fan, I had high hopes for the show, although they were dashed in the first few episodes, several of which were frankly bad. But with "Silent Enemy," I saw subtext. I saw, god help me, sexual tension zinging from two of the characters that was just begging to be explored. And out of subtext came a piece of fan fiction (fanfic)—fiction written about a television program featuring the characters in that program. I sat down at my keyboard, and I wrote. I described what I saw on the screen: the intensity between the two characters. And I wrote a story to explain what I saw on the screen. I embedded the story inside "Silent Enemy" and just after the action in that canon episode, to deal with the repercussions of what happened in my version of events. I wrote this:

When Reed took the glass from his hand and set it next to his on the ground near the couch, Tucker did nothing. When Reed took his hand, he let him. When Reed, eyes locking with Tucker's, moved his body to straddle Tucker's seated body, he let him. When Reed leaned in close and brushed his cheek against Tucker's, he let him. And when Reed's mouth gently, persuasively closed on his, he kissed him back.

And then I wrote this:

Tucker didn't shut his eyes as he and Reed kissed. It was a light kiss, an exploratory kiss, to test reaction. He slid his hands up Reed's thighs, settled on his hips, and then urged him slightly closer. Reed pulled his head back and opened his eyes. The intensity was still there, and the visceral link Tucker felt as their eyes met made him catch his breath. Reed slid his body forward. Tucker, hands settled lightly on Reed's ass, was dimly aware of Reed's erection pushing against his stomach, and his own cock stirred. They stared at each other, face to face, Reed breathing heavily, for a long moment. Reed's pupils were huge.

And let me just say that I didn't stop there. In some detail, I described Tucker and Reed's first sexual encounter, although the story, entitled "Acceptable Risk," does not end with them together as a couple. I posted it on the Internet to an Enterprise archive site for fanfic. I got good feedback. I wrote a sequel, then another, and then a bunch more--a total of nine stories in this arc. I wrote an entire backstory, which came to be known as the Acceptable Risk series, to Season I of Enterprise that was based on the premise that Commander Charles "Trip" Tucker, the chief engineer aboard the starship Enterprise, and the British armory officer, Lieutenant Malcolm Reed, were having an intense secret homosexual relationship. I gave them posttraumatic stress disorder (canon source inspiration for this: "Shuttlepod One"). They admitted their love for each other. Then I broke them up. Thanks to "Desert Crossing," I got Captain Jonathan Archer in on the action. I managed to explain away Tucker and Reed's overt heterosexuality in "Two Days and Two Nights," and I included some Bondage Lite when they got back together. (1)

Oh, yes.

I write slash.

Slash is, for the uninitiated, a genre of fanfic that posits a homoerotic relationship between two characters, usually male. The term "slash" comes from the punctuation (the / symbol, also known as a virgule or a solidus) used to separate the initials of the pairing. "Acceptable Risk" is Tucker/Reed slash, or T/R. The very first slash couple was none other than Kirk/Spock, or K/S, and such fanfic dates to 1976 (Penley 483). Although the notation is used to contextualize any fanfic story that features a romantic relationship between any two characters, of whatever sex, in order to be in the genre of slash, a story has to feature a same-sex pairing, although female/female slash is rare. Slash is very often sexually explicit. It's mostly written by straight women, although of course plenty of gay men and lesbians read and write it too. And there is a lot of it out there. After I saw "Silent Enemy," before I drafted "Acceptable Risk," I surfed the Internet and in an hour, I had more Enterprise slash than I knew what to do with. In fact, one discussion group, the now-defunct Entslash, was set up as a forum for slash fanfic before the show even aired, in anticipation of slashiness to come.

Of course, Star Trek is not the only show slashed. Other popular shows to slash include The X-Files, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Oz, Starsky and Hutch, and Andromeda. But slash has moved beyond television fandom: there is Holmes/Watson slash out there, and, yes, Harry Potter slash, although I personally think that Harry Potter slash is just wrong. Slash has moved outside the science fiction media fandom world, the result, I suspect, of the Internet. Slash does not even stop with texts, literary or otherwise: there is a subgenre of slash called real person slash, or RPS, that is slash written about real people. Members of the Backstreet Boys, for instance, are often slashed to good effect, although many fan fiction sites, including FanFiction.Net (<http://www.fanfiction.net/>), the largest one-stop shop for fanfic, prohibit RPS for legal and moral reasons. It's considered okay to play with characters, but not with real people.

Although I began the Acceptable Risk series in a vacuum--I hadn't read much Enterprise fanfic at that time (April 2002)--the people who wrote me feedback were encouraging and nice. One told me about the Entslash group, a discussion group for Enterprise slash. I signed up. Discussion groups are online forums on a particular topic. Yahoo! hosts a number of them (<http://groups.yahoo.com/>), including Entslash before its demise, and it now hosts another Enterprise slash site, EntSTSlash (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/EntSTSlash/>), as well as number of discussion groups about Enterprise in general and the individual Enterprise characters and actors in particular. Before I knew it, I had a tiny fan club of people who liked my writing. I got a few betas (people who read fanfic before it's posted, to make comments and corrections). I became a beta myself. I got feedback, generally positive. I got inquiries to archive my work. (2) And I read a lot of slash. I discovered that The Grrrl writes the best, sexiest PWP (PWP stands for "Plot? What plot?"), (3) that Macx writes incendiary sex within an emotional context inside an action-adventure story, that MJ writes the kind of plotted story that would be on classic Star Trek, that Kalita writes good alternate universes, that Ana just writes damn well, and that Kipli writes hot, hot playful stories (and she writes in one of my favorite pairings, Reed/Mayweather).

When the Entslash list went down, the victim of hurt feelings and infighting, I spent two days furiously helping create the new list, EntSTSlash. In just a few months, the slash community had become tremendously important to me, and I hadn't quite been aware of it until that community was threatened. I'm defining the Enterprise slash community as expressed through the discussion lists with which I happen to be familiar, but there are of course many other articulations of slash fandom: many people go to conventions, with several conventions existing just for slash; some stories aren't posted to the list or on the net but go to old-fashioned print fanzines instead. (4) But the Internet has revolutionized fandom, as others, such as Andrea MacDonald, have described. Although MacDonald describes a USENET

group and e-mail list of Quantum Leap fans and quotes USENET posts from 1990-1991 and e-mail messages from 1993 and 1994, she describes a relatively small group of fans, about 24, that posted a mean of 17.91 messages a day, although the fans deliberately shifted name and venue to maintain their exclusivity (141). Thanks to list server technology and services such as Yahoo! groups, the world of fandom--and the slash world--is now a much larger one, when the groups so choose. As of this writing, the following slash Yahoo! groups, to which I happen to subscribe, have the following membership numbers: EntSTSlash, 260; Allslash, 816; Complete Kingdom of Slash, 422; Archer's Enterprise, 465; and StarTrek_EnterpriseSlash, 38 (the latter is a relatively new group). And this is just the tip of the iceberg. To give you an idea of how much posting goes on, here are the numbers for EntSTSlash, which was founded on July 15, 2002: In July, there were 1329 posts; in August, 1895, and in September, 1443. This particular list is overwhelmingly active. A big part of the list's activity is related to providing a forum for reading and commenting on fanfic and for providing feedback, so the community acts much like a supportive writers group. The Internet has been particularly helpful in this regard: Arctapus (5) writes, "It makes feedback immediate. It gives you a base that is there, you don't have to depend on snail mail and you get to share quicker and in more depth."

Although I did some work with slash in the early 1990s and read some Kirk/Spock slash at that time, until I became involved in Enterprise fandom, I hadn't really thought much about the genre. Elfin, who writes in a variety of fandoms, writes, "Slash was underground on the net when I became involved--it's become a lot more outspoken, with the slashers being more active in the fandoms than the 'shippers' [worshippers]." I suspect that as communities were built, any residual reluctance or shame at being labeled a slasher couldn't last. There is a kind of anonymity on the Internet that makes writing, posting, and critiquing slash even easier. I write and post under another name, as do most others. The practice of the use of pseudonyms is not new with the Internet; Henry Jenkins, for instance, in "Welcome to Bisexuality," discusses pseudonyms in fanzine fandom as a kind of clever play, as does Constance Penley in "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Popular Culture." Penley directly links the use of pseudonyms to the writers' having "something to hide": "It's one thing for your co-workers, domestic partners, or children to know you're a 'Trekkie,' it's another to know you're a producer of pornography with gay overtones" (494).

Pseudonyms are also important because the clandestine nature of slash and fanfic in general: nobody wants to hear from Paramount with a cease-and-desist order, so nobody can make money off her work. Everyone scrupulously includes a disclaimer on their fanfic, and on their Websites. Although some fans are associated with their pseudonyms and their identities are open secrets, others, such as WPAdmirer, one of my questionnaire respondents, are under deep cover. When WPAdmirer went to a convention, for instance, she felt she couldn't reveal herself as a fanfic writer to the other fans, and she felt cut off as a result: she notes, "I wished I could be more open about my involvement. The lack of being able to do that made it less pleasurable." She felt, in short, cut off from a supportive community. I myself use a pseudonym to protect my privacy for the sake of my family, and I've published under my real name and I want to keep my slash separate, so that Internet hits on my name for my literary criticism or medical publications won't hit on slash sites. I also have (ridiculous, I've been told) fears of anybody in the Star Trek world, such as the writers or producers, becoming aware of my existence, although those employed by the Star Trek franchise do not read fanfic for creative-control reasons (all ideas must be theirs, and they don't want to be influenced by fans or fanfic). It strikes me as amusing that I do not know the real names of the women I regularly correspond with and whom I consider friends.

This notion of clandestineness implies that we members of the slash community are doing something weird, perverted, or wrong, and that our product, the fanfics, are things that should be hidden. Critic and science fiction writer Joanna Russ, for instance, notes that her response to K/S slash zines was to get "embarrassed (because, I think, the stuff was so female and my response to it so intense)" and she "hid it away--in the closet of all places!" (96). E-mails to me from readers of my work have often spoken of how they had to hide the texts from their children, coworkers, or significant others as they compulsively finished reading a fic. If I'm writing slash and my husband comes in, I flip the computer screen to something else and won't return to it until he leaves, even though it drives him crazy and he says he won't look at it. It's gotten so that when I'm writing slash and I hear his footsteps walking up and down the steps right outside my door, I have to shut the door, for fear that he will stick his head in. I simply can't relax and write when he's lurking.

This notion of secrecy, of slash having to remain hidden, was something I had to overcome before I could write. When I sat down and wrote my very first sex scene, thus moving once and for all into the slashfic camp, I literally paused for a minute before I set my fingers on the keyboard and started typing. It was like I had to take a deep breath, consider it, and then give in. There was a very real moment of decision there. I've loosened up a lot since then. Now I write sex scenes without setting them up, just because I think of a position or a situation I think would be pretty hot, or just because I'm thinking about the boys as I'm doing something else and I just have to stop a minute (well, an hour) and write a 2000-word graphically sexual depiction of what I'd like to see these guys doing to each other. I file these random sex scenes and embed them in a fic later, editing them to another pairing if needed. Now, there is no hesitation. But slash writers are very aware that what we write is objectionable, that many people are freaked out by it and just don't get it. Slashers who post work online often get flamed (6) (that is, they receive hostile, mean e-mails); rare is the slasher who has never experienced this. In fact, A. Kite says, "There's only 2 kinds [of slash writers] you know? Them that's been flamed and them that are going to be."

Wendy writes,

When I first discovered my own interest is slash, I felt that it was wrong, or rather that it was a sign of some kind of self hate. I mean, why fantasize about a relationship that downplays the role of, or completely ignores, women. It was a relief to discover this community 2 1/2 years ago shortly after I got a computer. It showed me women who seemed quite happy with themselves and their lives but who still enjoyed in/in.

The whole notion of male/male desire as forbidden, and slashers as somehow pathological as a result, is a common point of view, both in the academic treatment of slash and among slashers themselves. Academics who study slash speak of their response to slash: they study texts that they find arousing, and they have to come to terms with that (Jensen, interview, 272-73; Russ 95; Penley 484). Joli Jenson, in "Fandom as Pathology," notes that fans themselves are characterized as extreme fanatics, thus implying that fandom as a whole "is seen as excessive, bordering on deranged, behavior" (9). Jenson goes on to argue that by "[stigmatizing] fandom as deviant, we cut ourselves off from understanding how value and meaning are enacted and shared in contemporary life" (26). This notion of deviance is only reinforced when one piles slash, with its graphic depictions of male/male sex, atop fandom. And this notion of deviance is implicit in, for example, Squeaky's understanding of the slash community:

It's a safe, friendly place to discuss the issues that reading/writing slash deal with, and having the community helps to both 'normalize' the love of slash fiction and the acceptance of homosexual relationships. It validates that we are 'righteous, y'all,' and tptb [The Powers That Be--the writers and producers] are wrong and closed-minded. Ergo, the community is empowering to its members and validating about the values we share.

In slash fic, homosexuality and homosexual relationships are generally presented as something normal, as something sexy and loving. The slash community takes this as a baseline given.

Because of this notion of slash as extreme and wrong, (7) the slash community's biggest role is to provide the simple comfort of dealing with like-minded people. Arctapus sums it up: "I love the sense of total understanding of at least the interest in slash you find there. People get it." It's comforting to be able to talk to people about it without having to first provide context and then justify your interest: The Grrrl speaks for slashers everywhere when she admits of slash, "It really turns me on. Makes me feel warm and squishy inside. Two (or more) hunky men wanting each other, lusting after each other, having sex with each other is just a beautiful thing." WPAdmirer notes, "The function [of the fan community] is to bring together people who enjoy the same sort of things, find the same things (essentially--even if pairings are different) erotic, and have a community in which one is free to enjoy it without feeling strange, or being accused of perversion." Slashers have moved beyond this, but at the same time, we can't exactly have conversations about it with our neighbors or coworkers. To them, we are simply avid Star Trek fans. When I tell people I write fanfic, I say, smiling, "I write in a genre called slash," in complete confidence that they have no idea what I'm talking about. (8) Usually, I'm asked if it's violent, and I just say, "No, not really." I haven't shared my pseudonym with many friends, just a few who are particularly close who know my writing in other contexts. Among my family, only my husband knows. Like many slashers, I have real life, and I have slash, and the two don't really meet.

In an interview, Henry Jenkins, an academic who is also a fan, speaks of "confronting" slash and becoming implicated in his own fantasies in relation to slash. He notes, "It was when I confronted slash, when I read slash and found out that I really was getting turned on by this--that this was not just a simple academic object of study--and as I began to rethink fantasy in relation to slash and what it meant to have erotic fantasies and how one relates to one's erotic fantasies, that I began to move away from a theoretical and abstract proposition" (272-73). Jenkins' interest in slash led to his realization that he was bisexual, and he came out as bi at a convention, thus completing his move from the theoretical to the concrete.

Although my own engagement with slash isn't nearly as interesting, one important part of my engagement with slash is desire: desire for pleasure, desire for titillation. I very much enjoy the sexy aspect of slash, and for scenes like- well, like this one:

Groaning, Trip began to rock his hips. Malcolm eased himself up and down in counterpoint, shifting his weight until he found a position where Trip was reaching deep into him, filling him. Groaning with delight, Malcolm reached down with a hand and stroked himself. He watched his lover's expressive face, seeing the control slip away and the pleasure build until the man convulsed beneath him and came with a deep, throaty cry. His lover's frantic thrusting was more than he could bear. He stroked himself faster; then the pleasure swept over him and he too was climaxing, seed filling his hand. (The Grrrl, "The Wager")

And this:

"Fuck yes Jon." Trip redoubled his efforts, reaching around with his free hand and pumping Archer's straining erection. He leaned up and switched to holding onto Archer by his left shoulder. For a moment he had an out of body experience, picturing what they must look like with jumpsuits tangled around their ankles, Tucker riding his Captain, his best friend. How the hell had this ever managed to happen? Archer was panting harshly and Trip leaned in to murmur huskily into Archer's ear, "Let go Cap'n. Come for me."

A deep growl of a moan was his only reply. Trip repositioned his angle and hit Archer's prostate. That was it. Suddenly the man in front of him became pudding and his legs gave out. Trip struggled to keep them both standing as Archer came gasping his name, Trip pumping him with abandonment as seed splattered onto the lift door. Contracting clenching muscles pulled Trip into his own climax and he shuddered with the release, panting with his face buried against Archer's back as the release rolled over him. (Kipli, "Releasing Tensions")

And, of course, this:

It was all Tucker needed as he thrust in, hard and deep. Malcolm immediately began to push back and his fingers tried to dig into the surface of the desk. Trip began to kiss and suck at his lover's neck and back, thrusting faster and deeper.

He couldn't last long. He knew it. Had known it right from the start. He tried to pleasure his lover, grasping his hardness, and he was dimly aware of Reed coming with a gasp, but he was too far gone anyway. He wrapped an arm around Malcolm's stomach and pulled him up, toward him, changing the angle of entry. Reed gave an inarticulate cry that mixed with Trip's as he finally reached climax. (Macx, "Moments")

In short, slash is incredibly hot. However, for me, writing slash isn't like reading it. When I read it, I devour it--I don't notice technical errors, and I don't pay attention to narrative structure or other formal elements of the story, unless there is something unusual about it. For instance, fanfic is rarely written in the first person, and such stories jump out at me. I read it for the transcendent experience, for the emotional context the writer articulates, for the sex.

But when I write slash, the opposite is true. Unlike many other slash writers, who just sit down and let it flow (some slash writers speak of the story writing itself, or the characters hijacking the story and taking over), I approach writing slash formally. When I write, I think about structure, literary devices, symbolism, and the like. I try to fit in canon. I try to involve Enterprise characters other than the ones I am slashing in their regular roles. And I try to make all the sex scenes exist for a reason--I don't write it gratuitously unless I'm writing a PWP. Sex has to advance the plot or reveal something about the characters. In my header to one story, "Heat," a riff on the canon episode "Desert Crossing," for which I wrote three explicit sex scenes, including an extreme one with elements of dominance and submission, I noted that I couldn't tell whether the sex was hot, but that one beta, The Grrrl, said it definitely was. I got amused responses from people confirming The Grrrl's take on it. Kim said of the story, "The extreme heat of the desert in 'Desert Crossing' comes nowhere near the HOTNESS of this story!" (post to EntSTSlash list, July 14, 2002). Leab wrote of "Heat," "I also can't get over how brave you are (or seem to be to me, at least) when it comes to the unflinching description in the sex scenes. I still blush when I describe kissing... :-)" (post to EntSTSlash list, July 18, 2002). I don't know about bravery, but I try to write honestly, not metaphorically or poetically. In my writing, sometimes this involves hot sex; sometimes this involves pain; and sometimes this involves power plays. In addition, I try to go for realism. I research sexual positions to ensure that they are physically possible; nobody comes twice in a row; and if anal sex is involved, lube is used or its lack is addressed.

I read "Heat" again a few months after I wrote it and thought, "Oh, my god." It was indeed hot. I didn't remember it being that explicit, and the dominance/submission sex scene between Archer and Reed was pretty extreme. When I reviewed all my fic, I realized that I had escalated. I had become more and more adventurous, more and more playful, more and more graphic. Writing is not easy for me, and many stories go through revision after revision. My betas patiently put up with me, and I incorporate their suggestions into my fic without hesitation, only rarely making the authorial decision to override. Part of the difficulty is incorporating canon source. I had Tucker and Reed all set to be together when "Desert Crossing" aired, and the slashy subtext between Archer and Tucker in this episode absolutely had to be dealt with. I had to break up a committed pair and get Archer and Tucker together, and I had to make it all believable and fit it into canon. I had trouble seeing Archer and Tucker together sexually--they've always struck me as just friends--and there was a long delay while I got my head around it and wrote in an Archer/Tucker pairing. But on the whole, it's gotten easier to write, and my stories, already long for fanfic, are getting longer.

Although my motivation for writing the story was, as always, to explain the slashy subtext I saw on screen, another motivation is to please the fan community. They read my stuff, they write me nice notes with feedback, and they like the sex, although fanfic readers much prefer sex inside an emotional context. I responded to feedback by having the boys actually declare their love for each other in words, something I am reluctant to do because I have a hard time seeing the characters, as portrayed in canon, doing this. However, I have also discovered that the fanfic audience needs to have things spelled out overtly; simply implying emotion, or using physical gesture to stand in for a declaration, is not enough, and my betas invariably call me on it when I try to do this, forcing me to spell it out. But I must say that it's very fulfilling to write for an appreciative audience. I post my stories to the list and to archives because I greatly enjoy the feedback. I still get notes from people who have just discovered the Acceptable Risk series, for example, saying how much they liked it, even though the series has been completed for several months and I've closed the canon.

The question, of course, arises: why do I, a member of the slash community, write slash? Much criticism on slash has focused on appropriation and power. Henry Jenkins, in "Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten," uses de Certeau's notion of poaching, arguing that slashers are "'poachers' of textual

meanings," that "fandom is a way of appropriating media texts and rereading them in a fashion that serves different interests" (174). Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith argue that slash posits a loving relationship between two equals, and by removing "gender as a governing and determining force in the love relationship," unequal power between men and women is negated (254). Constance Penley argues that "the slash phenomenon [was] one of the most radical and intriguing female appropriations of a popular culture product that I had ever seen," noting that it illustrates how "women, and people, resist, negotiate, and adapt to their own desires this overwhelming media environment that we all inhabit" (484). Lawrence Grossberg comments that in consumer culture, "the transition from consumer to fan is accomplished," and it is here "that we seek actively to construct our own identities, partly because there seems to be no other space available... The consumer industries increasingly appeal to the possibilities of investing in popular images, pleasures, fantasies, and desires" (63). The fan is active, the consumer passive. And because of this activity, Grossberg argues, the fan is affectively empowered. He concludes that "Fans' investment in certain practices and texts provides them with strategies which enable them to gain a certain amount of control over their affective life, which further enables them to invest in new forms of meaning, pleasure and identity" in order to cope with the world (65). And John Fiske notes that slash (although he doesn't use that term) writers "fill the gaps in the original text" and write "elaborated and public versions of the interior, semiotic productions of more normal viewers, many of whom might imagine for themselves similar 'extra-textual' relationships among the crew of the SS Enterprise" (46). Fiske suggests, in short, that slashers imagine themselves to have relationships, likely sexual ones, with the characters, and that these relationships are simply articulations that many viewers ("more normal viewers"? what the heck does that mean? have I been insulted?) hold.

Thus, according to these notions, I write slash because I want to place the characters in romantic positions of equal power; because I want to engage actively, rather than passively, with media, in this case Enterprise; because I have an agenda, such as rewriting the canon source with a preferred reading; because I have desires that I want to articulate; because the stories I see on the screen contain gaps that I feel motivated to fill; and because I myself want to engage in sexual relationships with the crew, and thus writing slash is just an expression of this sexual fantasy. But when I confront myself as a member of the slash community, it comes down to pleasure—the pleasure of the text, if you will, both canon source and slashy rewriting.

Because of slash, engaging with the canon source has become a true joy. When I watched "Minefield," an early Season 2 episode, I rewound and rewatched the incredibly awkward breakfast scene between Lieutenant Malcolm Reed and Captain Jonathan Archer—three times. This scene alone will spawn dozens of slash stories. This kind of active watching is tremendously satisfying. It's a lot of fun to study facial expressions, gestures, the actors' use of props, physical proximity. It's even more fun to read into them: in this example, I like Archer's pouring Reed some orange juice, and I like Reed's hands as he carefully sets his padd down as Archer attempts to force him to engage in chitchat about sports, Reed's discomfort plainly evident. And yes, I feel motivated to rewrite this text, to explore the relationships between the men, to fill in the gaping gaps in the characters' private lives—Enterprise is, after all, about a bunch of people who work together, and I'm interested in what they do off duty. The canon source is rich; there's a lot to play with here.

But the pleasure is more than my delight in watching the canon source and spotting slashy subtext. There's the pleasure of watching a television program with a cast of incredibly attractive, buff men. There's the real pleasure of creating the slash text itself. There's the literal physical pleasure of arousal as one writes or reads. Then there's the giddy pleasure of getting e-mails from people saying they really liked your work—e-mails that make me laugh out loud in delight.

So why do I write slash? I write it because I feel compelled to. In the fan community, this is known as getting bitten by a plot bunny. I write it because it's hot and sexy and fun. I enjoy the steamy sex—quite a bit, in fact. I write it because I want to read the kind of stuff I write, but few people write it: stories that are as true as possible to the characters as they are presented on the screen—but with that slashy twist (and hot sex). I do not violate canon when I write. Ever. And I prefer to set the stories within or on the peripheries of canon episodes, rather than making up my own action-adventure stories. It's my niche as a writer. No doubt it's my literary criticism background: I am critiquing texts, only slash is far more fun than deconstruction, even if they're basically doing the same thing. (9) And it's a good fit for me as a writer: I like having the boundaries of the situations and the characters set for me.

But the primary reason I write slash? That one's easy.

It just makes me so damn happy.

Notes

(1.) In self-defense, I remind you that Tucker and Reed were tied up in that basement in "Two Days and Two Nights." In their underwear. And people say they don't see the subtext?

(2.) I archive my fanfic at a number of places, including the Complete Kingdom of Slash (<http://www.ckos.net/>), the Wonderful World of Makebelieve (WWoMB; <http://www.sphosting.com/daltonavon/>), Situation Room (devoted to Enterprise's Tucker, Reed, and slash; http://www.trekslash.com/tucker_reed/), Luminosity (<http://www.luminosityent.com/>), and EntSTSlash's archive (<http://www.entstcommunity.org>). I archive at these places in addition to my own site (<http://www.geocities.com/kylieleel000/>). I do not post to FanFiction.net (<http://www.fanfiction.net/>) for

two reasons: first, as of September 2002, they have prohibited NC-17 stories; and second, slashers tend to get flamed. I'd rather post in a forum where people know, expect, and like slash.

(3.) For slash, PWP can stand for "porn without plot."

(4.) For hard-copy slash fanzines in a variety of fandoms, try Agent With Style (<http://www.agentwithstyle.com/>). With the advent of the Internet, fanzines are careful to ask for previously unwebbed stories, although Agent With Style is reprinting my Acceptable Risk series as its own zine. Rush out and buy your copy today!

(5.) To prepare to write this essay and others on slash, I distributed a questionnaire and collated responses. I quote from these filled-out questionnaires, which were returned via e-mail. I have not corrected the e-mails except to normalize presentation of em dashes. I make no claim that my research has any kind of statistical or scientific rigor. Rather, the responses can serve as a snapshot of a particular point in time of members of the slash community. Each person who sent in the questionnaire granted me permission to quote from it. In addition, when I quote from e-mails and posts to lists, I have requested and obtained permission from the writer.

(6.) Here's a sample flame for a slashfic, written anonymously at FanFiction.net in response to T'Pau Silver's fic "Late to Rise": "What's with all this awful faggoty? What makes you want to write about two men doing something so disgustingly unhealthy and unnatural? I don't care about what they do at home, but it makes me sick to my stomach to have to see them kissing and the like in public or on TV. You really ought to think it over before encouraging this kind of shit by writing such things. You know that that little NC-17 pop up doesn't stop kids from reading this sort of vileness."

(7.) The extremity of slash is symbolized by its presence online: slash fanfic sites on the Internet have big NC-17 warnings. Most have portals that provide a warning and you have to click to proceed, thus indicating that you read the warnings and that you are old enough to read sexually explicit material. But of course, plenty of readers and writers of slash are technically underage. One respondent to my questionnaire, Laura Hale, writes of slash's presence on the Internet, "I've seen it from about 1996 on-line when I couldn't get on slash and adult lists as a 16 year old to now when any 15 year old can create a slash list and discuss graphic sex between males." And one respondent to my questionnaire freely admitted she was 16 years old and a virgin.

(8.) This backfired on me when I told one of my science fiction students that I write fanfic, although I don't give out my pseudonym. He presented himself as a lover of fanfic and demanded some URLs. I said, "You understand I write slash," and he said, "What's that?" So I figured he didn't know as much about fanfic as he said. But he kept bugging me for a URL and wouldn't let it go, so finally I wrote down the URL for the portal for the Complete Kingdom of Slash (which has a very nice picture) and told him that if he was still interested, we could talk. He checked out the site, came back the next class period, took me aside, and said, "Um, never mind."

(9.) This is why slash has gotten so much critical attention: slash is to the canon source what critical theory is to literature: a subversive rereading dependent on subtext. Henry Jenkins, in an interview, notes that queer theorists such as Alex Doty or Eve Sedgwick are slashers: "They are writing academic slash in the ways in which they are reading the text and constructing these relationships that other readers are reluctant to see" (269).

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