

## ***When Worlds Collide: Harry Potter Crossover Fanfiction***

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Harry Potter fanfiction is popular. The numbers that can be tossed out as a snapshot of stories published on the internet in public archives at this time (spring, 2006) are mind-boggling: well over 77,000 at Skyehawke, FictionAlley and SugarQuill alone<sup>1</sup>. In this vast sea of fiction resides every type of story imaginable, including one of the "traditional" genres: crossovers, also known historically as cross-universe stories. Authors who choose to write crossovers take the unique path of drawing from not just one, but two or more pre-existing canon texts, or text and movie, as source material for her<sup>2</sup> fanfiction. Despite crossovers having the status of a traditional fanfiction genre, within Harry Potter fandom, the numbers of crossover stories is relatively small, especially considering that by nature it is less conventionally transgressive than a genre such as (tw)incest or real person slash. The reasons for this are myriad, but the key element comes back to the nature of a crossover: both author and reader are required to be familiar with multiple fandoms. Many fandom participants are active in multiple fandoms at the same time, or function more as "fandom butterflies," spending an intense period of activity in one fandom, reaching a saturation point, and moving on to a new fandom to begin again. To most fully appreciate a crossover, the author and reader must necessarily have chosen to become fluent in the canon materials of two universes, which may or not have additional layers of complexity in regards to expectations based on pre-existing fanfiction with its own intra-fandom histories, stereotypes and tropes.

In 2005 I published a crossover, a Harry Potter/Tolkien parody. I'm intimately involved in both fandoms as a fanfiction author and scholar, and I was intrigued by the story's reception by readers in the two fandoms. While much has been written about the slash genre in fanfiction, equal attention has not been focused on crossovers. I solicited the comments and thoughts of readers and writers of crossovers from three internet-based environments at the end of January, inspired in part by wishing to document my own experience. Those environments were Live Journal, personal email correspondence, and forums at SugarQuill.net. I received 29 distinct replies to my posited questions. This is too small a sample size on which to impose statistical analysis, but given the open-endedness of my questions, the results do provide some commonalities and themes of thought present at the time the questions were asked. This paper looks at Harry Potter crossover fanfiction as a unique entity within the greater fanfiction genre, introduces current fanfiction writers' and readers' commentaries on

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<sup>1</sup> On 2/2/06, Skyehawke had 6,916 Harry Potter stories archived; emails to the webmistresses at SugarQuill and FictionAlley revealed 2,557 stories at SQ; my email was not returned from FictionAlley. A November 29, 2005 post at a Fiction Alley Site Status LiveJournal account <[http://community.livejournal.com/fiction\\_alley/](http://community.livejournal.com/fiction_alley/)> stated this: "FictionAlley is currently conducting a migration of its 68,000+ existing fics to a new database-backed system." There is, however, a probability that not all stories are unique; many authors post stories to as many relevant archives as possible to secure the widest readership possible. As an author myself, I have my stories posted to multiple locations for that very reason.

<sup>2</sup> The realm of fanfiction writers traditionally has been, and continues to be now, a world nearly exclusively of women participants. For that reason, and personal experience as a fanfiction author and scholar, my default for the gender of the fanfiction writers discussed will be female.

the appeal or repulsion of crossovers, and discusses complications posed by a genre which extends beyond any one fandom into a nearly limitless realm of characters and situations.

**All fan fiction has a right to exist. Even the slash. Even the badly written stuff. Especially the crossovers, those are the best.**<sup>3</sup>

:~: Writers :~:

A skimming of Harry Potter crossover fanfiction reveals that many stories address the question: how would the characters in *this* world react if they met with the characters of *that* world? Henry Jenkins mentions this realm of intrigue in his chapter on fanfiction authors, 'Scribbling in the Margins: Fan Readers/Fan Writers': "Cross-over stories break down not only the boundaries between texts but also those between genres, suggesting how familiar characters might function in radically different environments."<sup>4</sup> This particular perception of crossovers is similarly explicated in Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women*: "In cross-universe stories, the purpose is not necessarily to permanently change any of the characters but to see how those characters would react with each other."<sup>5</sup> These types of crossovers lend themselves both to more serious fanfiction as well as parodies and comedies. There is often an intended element of comedy by placing a character from one universe and reality into one that is totally foreign to him/her, in a classic 'fish out of water' scenario.

The Harry Potter books can be considered wainscots fantasy, as defined by *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*: "[...] invisible or undetected societies living in the interstices of the dominant world — normally but not necessarily human [...]"<sup>6</sup> From the very beginning, there are Wizarding/Muggle interactions, which appear to be increasing in frequency and malevolency as the yet-incomplete series continues. Because the two worlds already co-exist within this universe, Harry Potter is a more permeable world than other, closed, universes, lending itself more readily to crossovers. Harry Potter crossovers can be envisioned in two primary ways. One is that the two pre-existing universes are suddenly interposed. For example, Harry Potter spends a couple of hours in Oxford while the Durselys are out at age-relevant social events and Harry stumbles across Will Parry of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series. Due (presumably) to being a Wizard, he's able to see Will's *dæmon*<sup>7</sup>. The second interpretation is that the intertwining reality was in existence from the beginning, and it was the

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<sup>3</sup> ZachsMind <<http://whedonesque.com/?comments=9832>> accessed 25 March, 2006. User information: <<http://whedonesque.com/user/16>>. While this comment was made in reference to an anti-fanfiction rant (<http://www.robinhobb.com/attic.html>, accessed 25 March, 2006; go through the door and click on the red shoe to read the author's opinion on writing fanfiction) posted on a 'WHEDONesque,' a Joss Whedon (X-Files; Buffy the Vampire Slayer) site, I found this comment intriguing as it blazingly illustrates the polarities of opinion on crossovers. Whedon encourages his fans in their fanfiction writing pursuits: from an interview between Joss Whedon and About.com contributor Fred Topel- *What should fans do now that they'll have an extra hour free in their schedule? What should they do with that hour? Write fan fic.* <<http://actionadventure.about.com/cs/weeklystories/a/aa041903.htm>>, accessed 1 April, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual poachers : television fans & participatory culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 171.

<sup>5</sup> Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising women : television fandom and the creation of popular myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 58.

<sup>6</sup> John Clute, John Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 991-992.

<sup>7</sup> "Harry Potter and the Subtle Knife" <<http://www.fictionalley.org/authors/katya/HPATSK01.html>>, accessed 15 February, 2006. Work in Progress.

limited perspective of the characters' own realities that prevented them from realizing such: Rupert Giles and Ethan Rayne from Joss Whedon's "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" TV show are in England in 1981 and stumble across Death Eater activity, bringing the two storylines and two distinct kinds of magic together.<sup>8</sup> The story just described, "The End of the Beginning" by Marina Frants, appears to be a 'classic' within Harry Potter crossovers. It was mentioned as recommended reading by multiple participants in my solicitation for reader and writer commentary. What is particularly interesting about this crossover is the author's acknowledgement and discussion of magic in both worlds; the magic experienced by the Wizards of J. K. Rowling's creation is different from the magic conjured by Giles and Rayne, who are Muggles to the Wizards' eyes. The discovery of each others' abilities (and in Giles and Rayne's cases, the very existence of the Wizarding world) causes the characters to re-evaluate their realities, while also inviting the reader to do the same, as she considers the possibilities of varying and exclusive types of magic which exist in these fictional realms.

Given the innate complicatedness of the wainscot world of Harry Potter, why add further complexities by interpolating the characters into another world, and vice versa? Why write Harry Potter crossovers at all? Writing a 'good' crossover is commonly perceived to be one of the most difficult pursuits in fanfiction. The words *challenge*, *difficult*, and *hard* appeared again and again in the responses to this particular question. Many individuals stressed that the difficulty was a positive force, suggesting that the inherent increased thought in regards to canon viability and creative manipulation of universes provided a welcome means to stretch and grow as a writer.

*Crossovers are probably the most difficult genre to do well, for reasons I'll get into later, and I'm a glutton for challenge.*<sup>9</sup>

*I enjoy reading crossovers if they're well done. [...] I think, though, that they're often harder to read and to write than normal fics.*<sup>10</sup>

*Crossovers are difficult to write well. I guess that's what it boils down to.*<sup>11</sup>

Several respondents indicated that they assumed their crossover(s) would have a lower readership than their other monofandom stories, regardless of the perceived need for increased attention to detail, wordcraft and creative essence required to combine the two universes. Despite that, the potential for fewer readers did not appear to be at all a deterrent in writing a crossover. A theme echoed by many respondents was that she wrote crossovers for herself, a personal mission of sorts to push her usual writerly boundaries.

*Well, why do we write anything? My main audience for most of my fanfic is ME.*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "The End of the Beginning" <<http://www.sff.net/people/frants/hlfanfic.htm#eob>>, accessed 3 March, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Respondent 7

<sup>10</sup> Respondent 18

<sup>11</sup> Respondent 26

<sup>12</sup> Respondent 9

*I love pushing myself and I find it challenging to try writing a cross-over that's believable and maintain as much 'canon' factors of the two (or more) fandoms as possible.<sup>13</sup>*

*[...] it (writing a Tolkien/HP crossover) turned out to be a wonderful occasion for a bit of theorising about magic, a look at the HP series from the POV of an 'alien' outsider, a discussion about time, fate and choice, and even a bit of meta-thinking about the relation between reality and fiction, by writing about a "book within a book".<sup>14</sup>*

*I write/made these cross overs for myself really, knowing few people would be interested in them. (they do get the least # of hits of my work on my site)<sup>15</sup>*

The answers I received to my initial query of why write crossovers fell predominantly into three categories: the sheer challenge of combining two universes and making such a combination believable; to see how disparate characters would react to each other; and to focus on how particular characters would react when suddenly put in an alien or unfamiliar environment. The first response, rising to the challenge, is perhaps unsurprising in that it has to do with the creative process.

*I find them fascinating and fun to write, like many others, because of the intriguing challenge of bringing two worlds together. You say to yourself, "how can I possibly make this work? Or "what if...?" Some of that is inherent in all fanfiction ("what if Harry went back in time?" is not really all that different from "what if Sirius fell through the veil into Willy Wonka's chocolate factory?").<sup>16</sup>*

The compelling scenario of being able to allow one's favorite characters in disparate worlds to meet was mentioned several times. This, too, is unsurprising. Any fanfiction author, by having taken the step to produce her own work within fandom culture, obviously has a sense of shared but personal ownership of the characters. This can be exclusionary, as described in the chapter 'Our Characters' in Sheenagh Pugh's work on fanfiction: "Indeed, for some readers, the so-called 'character junkies', a particular character or set of characters will be key to their enjoyment, to the point that they may not want to read anything in which that character is not involved or where he acts in a way they can't see as true for him."<sup>17</sup> As part of this sense of character ownership a writer may become inspired to create a scenario in which her beloved characters that exist in exclusive universes are able to meet one another.

*I think, for me it's mostly to see the characters interact with each other (in a strictly platonic sense). I mean, wouldn't it be GREAT to see what Snape and Grima had to say to each other? Or Mulder and Giles (Buffy)?<sup>18</sup>*

*I wrote it (Harry Potter/Queer as Folk crossover) because I wanted two of my favorite characters just to interact with each other. I wondered what kind of conversation Brian Kinney and Sirius would have, so I wrote it. lol. There was really no other reason other than that.<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> Respondent 14

<sup>14</sup> Respondent 16, parenthetical comment mine

<sup>15</sup> Respondent 17

<sup>16</sup> Respondent 11

<sup>17</sup> Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a literary context* (Bridgend, Wales: Poetry Wales Press Ltd, 2005), 70.

<sup>18</sup> Respondent 27

<sup>19</sup> Respondent 1, parenthetical comment mine

*[...] I have had the urge to have Turin Turambar meet Elric of Melnibone. [...] So the answer to that question is that I think the characters would have useful things to say to each other (something like the old comment that if all the heroes of Shakespeare's tragedies had exchanged places, all would have been well [...]).<sup>20</sup>*

In conjunction with the desire to see one's favorite characters interact with each other, the desire to write stories focusing on how a particular character would react if put in a foreign environment was another popular response. From personal experience within various fanfiction communities, it is apparent that many fanfiction authors are well read outside of the fanfiction realm, and the creativity needed to write a 'fish out of water' story runs rampant for many authors.

*I'm also a huge fan of the fish out of water idea, sticking somebody in a completely unfamiliar setting where they don't know the rules. In crossovers, you often get the best of both worlds - you can see the characters being astonished and at the same time, you get to guess how the rules change. So one of my favorite things is the combination of 'magical' fandoms with non-magical.<sup>21</sup>*

*The fun part of crossovers is [...] to get that newcomer's perspective on something (how would River fit in at Hogwarts?), or to learn something about a character by dropping them into a completely new situation and seeing how they respond.<sup>22</sup>*

#### **:~: Readers :~:**

There was a marked contrast between the enthusiastic verbiage about the compelling reasons to write crossovers and the responses to my second question: why, as a reader, would you be interested in seeing characters from multiple fandoms interact? In fact, of the 29 replies, 14 either didn't reply or indicated that they rarely or never read crossovers. Perhaps paradoxically, the reason most frequently given for not reading crossovers was that they are poorly written. The three most common reasons given for seeking out a crossover to read were to see how particular characters acted outside of their usual environment, for the humor element, and because a particular story was recommended and/or the author was already known to the reader.

*I very very rarely ever read crossovers, unless it's one that someone has recommended as being great. They have to be really well-written, and believable in BOTH fandoms for me to want to read them. And that's just about impossible for many people to pull off.<sup>23</sup>*

*I rarely read crossovers; the very few I have read have been by authors whom I already liked, where I knew that they knew both fandoms well [...].<sup>24</sup>*

*As a reader, and it really depends on what fandoms are involved, but mostly I'm only interested in the humor potential.<sup>25</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Respondent 20

<sup>21</sup> Respondent 22

<sup>22</sup> Respondent 23

<sup>23</sup> Respondent 1

<sup>24</sup> Respondent 3

<sup>25</sup> Respondent 5

*I will occasionally read crossovers where I only know one fandom, if I trust the author [...].*<sup>26</sup>

*I love the wackiness of many crossovers, because it's a built in sort of gentle comedy. [...] the funny comes because of the bizarre juxtaposition of the fandoms, not because you're beating up on one of the characters.*<sup>27</sup>

Three of the respondents indicated that they actively sought out Harry Potter crossovers, a lean ten percent of the total.

An interesting comment from one of the respondents quoted earlier well illustrates Pugh's 'character-junkie' comment and further reinforces fanfiction authors' proprietary stance about the characters: "I do find that sometimes crossovers just don't work for me, [...] it could just be that my pairings are being messed with, and I dislike that."<sup>28</sup> Further commentary reveals that some crossovers are actively avoided by readers solely because of the perceived wrongness of breaking up a particular pairing, whether canon or fanon: "A lot of people are OTP (one true pairing), and if a crossover breaks their OTP they won't read it. Not all crossovers pair characters from the two universes, but many do."<sup>29</sup> Given the very relationship-centric focus to much Harry Potter fanfiction, this reveals yet another stumbling block to crossovers and their reception within fandom.

In analyzing the responses to the issue of reading crossovers, a paradox emerges. There are seemingly vast numbers of poorly-written crossovers, which has given rise to the perception that most crossovers fall into this sub-par fanfiction category. This makes the well-written crossovers all the more appreciated when stumbled upon, as exemplified by this comment: "*Of the cross-overs I've read, the good ones were very good. The bad ones were unspeakably awful.*"<sup>30</sup> This "norm" must be juxtaposed against the equally recurring comment that people don't usually read crossovers. Even in my small sample size, the accepted bias that 'most crossovers are poorly written' was evident. Given that so many respondents didn't admit to reading them in the first place, whence came this stereotype, so succinctly stated in these comments from the prior respondent: "*I've never written a cross-over and I've read very few [...] I would only be interested if the interaction of the two worlds offered some illumination about one or both of the worlds, or about the characters. **Which rarely happens, in my experience.***"<sup>31</sup> (emphasis mine)? Where are all of these awful crossover stories housed? Fanfiction.net was listed as a culprit, sometimes perceived as a dumping-ground for all qualities of fanfiction as it has no moderator beyond its non-acceptance of NC-17 rated material: "FFN (FanFiction.net) is filled with loads of fail [sic] attempts in crossover fiction."<sup>32</sup> One may presume that the others are scattered throughout the Harry Potter archives that allow crossovers, as well as individual authors' websites and Live Journals, where Harry Potter fanfiction communities thrive. Per

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<sup>26</sup> Respondent 23

<sup>27</sup> Respondent 11

<sup>28</sup> Respondent 23

<sup>29</sup> Respondent 8

<sup>30</sup> Respondent 20

<sup>31</sup> Respondent 20

<sup>32</sup> Respondent 6

the comments I received, I would conjecture that many more Harry Potter crossovers are being written than read, and that they are of a more personal interest to the author than to the reception of fanfiction readership as a whole.

Within the Harry Potter fanfiction community, there are few public archives where crossovers can be found as a cohesive group, and crossovers are in the minority of other genres of fanfiction at these archives. In researching this paper, I was unable to find any exclusively Harry Potter crossover archives on the internet, as opposed to Buffy the Vampire Slayer fandom, which has "Twisting the Hellmouth." According to the website, their rule Number One as to what can be posted is such: "This site is for Crossover Fanfic pertaining to Buffy The Vampire Slayer and/or Angel only."<sup>33</sup> Buffy appears to be the most popular fandom with which Harry Potter is crossed; at Twisting the Hellmouth, out of 5,401 crossover stories listed at the time I accessed the site, 1,320 were Harry Potter oriented, nearly 25% of the total. At the time this paper was being written, FictionAlley, a Harry Potter exclusive archive, had 137 crossover categories, with Buffy stories clearly dominating the numbers at 120 posts, some including posts to multiple stories.<sup>34</sup> There are a few possibilities as to why these two universes are interposed most often. One is that magic appears in both canons, though as discussed earlier, the magic manifests itself in very different ways. The closeness in age of the characters may also be compelling, especially if an author sets the crossover later in Harry's years. Both universes also have a school setting in common, at least at the beginning of the Buffy series.

Another deterrent to reading crossovers included in the repetitive claim that they are, as a whole poorly written, was a desire for specific crossovers which weren't perceived to be available.

*I've never read any crossovers, partially because I've never found any that I wanted to read about.*<sup>35</sup>

*I wish there were more meaty HP xovers out there, but so far I've seen only a few that are more than a chapter or two. Maybe I'm looking in the wrong place, or possibly it's because I'm not overly into Buffy and a lot of them seem to be crossed with that.*<sup>36</sup>

*I'd love to read a good Star Wars/HP crossover. The emphasis, unfortunately, on the word "good," since the majority of all crossovers I've ever read... weren't so good. A SQ-worthy crossover, if SQ accepted them.*<sup>37</sup>

There are several elements of note in these responses. One is the poor quality perception, brought up again and again. Another has to do with the idea of the genesis of much fanfiction, the idea that "I wanted to read 'X' and couldn't find it, so I wrote it instead." This may explain the stated differences in perception between those who write crossovers and those who read them. The implied bias against

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<sup>33</sup> Twisting The Hellmouth, accessed 7 April, 2006 <<http://www.tthfanfic.com/>>. On the front page, however, a caveat is given that they allow the posting of non-crossover stories by authors who archive their crossovers at the archive.

<sup>34</sup> Of note, many posts were links to stories offsite, often hosted at FanFiction.net, but also at Twisting the Hellmouth. Data accessed 22 March, 2006.

<sup>35</sup> respondent 25

<sup>36</sup> Respondent 15

<sup>37</sup> Respondent 28

the crossover genre as a whole is surreptitiously mentioned in the third comment above. 'SQ' refers to SugarQuill.net, a public Harry Potter archive which is moderated and has an author accept process to support its self-professed aim: "To maintain an archive of well-written stories and essays that provide entertainment for readers and inspiration for writers."<sup>38</sup> While not as formally strict as Henneth-Annûn,<sup>39</sup> a Tolkien-focused fanfiction archive, there are particular author submission periods and once accepted, a beta reader is assigned to the new author, thereby furthering the perception that stories found at this archive will be of a particular, superior quality.<sup>40</sup> In addition to not allowing adult content for the purposes of creating an archive that would host content available to readers of any age, the archive also does not allow crossovers.<sup>41</sup>

A further reason listed for not reading crossovers surprised me. Multiple times a factor of fear in that it might encourage the reader to become interested in a new fandom was mentioned. This was seen both as a negative and a positive; one respondent even indicated that she felt a particular crossover story was an improvement on the canon material, thereby endorsing it to anyone unfamiliar with the non-Harry Potter universe, in this case, Anita Blake.

*On the other hand, some multifandom people get into new fandoms this way.<sup>42</sup>  
[in reply] That's how I got into HP, after years of denial. The immersion provided by a well-written crossover can give you a feel for a source that isn't always readily accessible by reading its fanfiction -- or in HP's case by reading the source material, as I loathe Ms Rowling's prose style.<sup>43</sup>*

*Reading crossovers can be work. It can also lead to getting sucked into new fandoms. Risky all around.<sup>44</sup>*

*There was a while there I refused to read Harry Potter at all. Then I decided, seeing as HP crossovers severely [sic] outnumbered West Wing ones on Twisting the Hellmouth [...] I would read HP crossovers only.<sup>45</sup>*

*A very, very good HP/Anita Blake crossover can be found here: [...] It's not only good HP, it's an improvement on AB.<sup>46</sup>*

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<sup>38</sup> [The Sugar Quill](http://www.sugarquill.net), sentence three of the website's mission statement. Accessed 22 March, 2006

<<http://www.sugarquill.net/index.php?action=ask>>.

<sup>39</sup> Henneth-Annûn Story Archive (<http://www.henneth-annun.net>) is a Tolkien-based fanfiction archive which enlists a nine-member, self-selected reviewing process for any story to move from the private to the public side of the archive. I was an active member in this archive for a couple of years and wrote a paper on how members of the archive viewed themselves, titled "Under the Waterfall: A fanfiction community's analysis of their self-representation and peer review."

<sup>40</sup> In the interest of disclosure, I should allow that I am an archived author at The Sugar Quill, and I found my relationship with my beta reader to be a marvelous one that spilled over beyond mere author/editor interaction.

<sup>41</sup> According to respondent 13: "They don't allow crossovers *now*, but I'm a longstanding member and for a time back when we were all waiting for OotP to come out, they permitted cross-universes (four years ago?). Once the story was underway, they allowed those of us working on them to keep on updating them. I think they put the 'no x-over' rule in place after OotP [...]."

<sup>42</sup> Respondent 8

<sup>43</sup> Respondent 4

<sup>44</sup> Respondent 18

<sup>45</sup> Respondent 12

<sup>46</sup> Respondent 2

There were some enthusiastic replies in reading crossovers, primarily concerning the very wide canvas available once two or more universes have been intertwined, and an appreciation for the undertaking of the author.

*To see how someone else solved the puzzle, of course. And then for the same reason as I'd read any other AU-- to see how the new events will affect the direction of the canons involved.<sup>47</sup>*

*Secondly, it can be vastly entertaining. [...] I've seen everything from Artemis Fowl/HP crossovers to Ghostbusters/HP crossovers to Gone With the Wind/HP crossovers, and they've all been fabulous and broken many parts of my brain, but I wouldn't have passed reading them up for ANYTHING. Sometimes the premise is so outrageous that you HAVE to read it to believe it's possible!<sup>48</sup>*

*If it's a writer I like, I'm willing to support her experiments by reading whatever she wants to try. I think it's another way to use fan fiction writing to sharpen our chops.<sup>49</sup>*

In sum, at least from the responses I received, the reasons for reading and writing crossovers is quite varied. Writers of crossovers appear greatly to outnumber readers, yet these same readers in their own words indicate that they've read a lot of them, continuing to seek them out in the hope that they will be well written.

#### :~: Anomalies :~:

As though it weren't enough that crossovers as a genre are often preconceived to be 'terrible until proven otherwise,' their very nature makes them less conventionally accessible than other standard fanfiction genres. My question as to why crossovers have a smaller following elicited a near-identical response from the 18 respondents who addressed it: the reader needs to know, or at least be passingly familiar with, both fandoms, or multiple fandoms as the case may be. While I assumed this would be an answer, as a multi-fandom participant whose friends and fellow fanfiction writers are also decidedly not monofannish, I was surprised that this was *the* primary reason for crossovers' limited readership. Several respondents had indicated that they would be more likely to read a crossover written by a trusted author, yet they held out a caveat that they might skip reading it if they weren't familiar with both fandoms. This appears to be self-explanatory: a thoughtful author, when combining universes may assume that her reader only knows one of the fandoms. To fill in the gaps, she would need to explain the basics of each world so as not to leave her reader confused. Doing so runs a risk of boring the reader, however, as the fan of the one universe doesn't need the background information, and the same for the reader from the other fandom. Additionally, a reader may be wary of reading a story in which she suspects she's missing the subtleties within the characterizations and worlds of the fandom with which she isn't familiar.

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<sup>47</sup> Respondent 24

<sup>48</sup> Respondent 29

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*I think that one reason that the following is smaller on such genres is simply that one, a lot of times in order to fully appreciate the story, you need to have experience in both fandoms. Even if that's not always the case, the IDEA that maybe you aren't getting something out of it is present.<sup>50</sup>*

*[...] crossovers have a smaller audience because you have to have people from both fandoms, usually, and that's guaranteed to be a smaller group to draw from.<sup>51</sup>*

*The stories may have a slightly lower fan following because as a prerequisite the reader needs to be at least somewhat familiar with all the universes going into the story. And I have seen some fans declare they will not read cross-universe fics. I am unsure as to why. To me, a good story is a good story.<sup>52</sup>*

Respondent 29, one of the outspoken supporters of crossovers, addressed several of these reasons and perceptions in her reply, including the concept that reading crossovers may tempt the reader into new fandoms.

*Honestly, I'm disappointed that crossovers don't receive a lot of attention. I believe they don't simply because the mindset is that people write crossovers to suit their own needs and desires and it isn't a work that the author spent a lot of time planning, preparing, and perfecting, which is completely outrageous. While often times crossover fics are written to solely scratch an itch the author had been having, this is not different from 'regular' or 'uncrossed' fanfiction... is it? Additionally, people may be turned off from reading crossovers of fandoms with which they aren't familiar. Even if a person is familiar with one of the crossed fandoms, he or she will likely pass the fic on by if they do not recognize the second fandom in the story. This is a shame, because crossovers have the potential to open up new doors to a reader, doors they otherwise wouldn't have opened in the first place.<sup>53</sup>*

It is impossible to determine the percentage of fans who consider themselves to be monofannish versus multifannish, but logically it can be assumed that readers and writers of crossovers fall into the multifannish category. Yet even one of these people may be dissuaded from reading a crossover that combines two fandoms she knows simply because she has no interest in seeing them intersect. An engaged reader of a crossover must be not only enticed by the premise of the two worlds combining, she needs also to care about how such a juxtaposition has been achieved in order to actually read it. Doubtless this has been a contributing factor to the representatively small number of enthusiastic readers of Harry Potter crossovers. From the responses I received, it appears that it's not that crossovers are more transgressive or necessarily off-the-wall that makes them less popular, it is their inherent dualistic nature that makes them less accessible to wider readership. Within the Harry Potter fanfiction community, fanfiction readers seem to have a definite focus on the characters, even to particular exclusionary "ships" (short for 'relationships,' or pairings). Or readers may be looking for particular situation- or character-driven stories. This possessive quality does not necessarily lend itself to the adage of 'if one is good, two is better,' as many readers do not seek out crossovers that combine favorite fandoms, even if the reader enjoys the multiple fandoms separately.

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<sup>50</sup> Respondent 22

<sup>51</sup> Respondent 11

<sup>52</sup> Respondent 13

<sup>53</sup> Respondent 29

:~: Archivists :~:

My concluding question had to do with the very nature of crossovers and into what niche in greater fandom they belong. No matter what other type of story it may be, or what warning labels a crossover may have — hurt/comfort, mpreg (male pregnancy), non-con (non-consensual sex), chan (one or more characters is under legal sexual age; conventionally aged 15 or younger) — that it is a crossover is tantamount. Even for fandoms in which the characters frequently jump around in time, to label a story as a crossover indicates that two particular fandoms have been blended in one way or another. To my mind, this singular defining element posits crossovers as their own entity outside of any given fandom. It is an implied restrictor applied to any fanfiction story whether or not the author has indicated such: the story is a crossover, or canon-centric. Canon is a difficult, if not impossible, term to which to give full definition within the fanfiction genre. For my purposes, I define crossovers as fanfiction in which at least one element of two or more fandoms are intermingled. A canon fanfiction story, then, is one in which only the elements of the one fandom are referenced and drawn from. The inadequacy of these prosaic definitions come to the fore if one is brazen enough to try and define an AU, or alternate universe, story. My suspicion is that for as many AU stories as exist, there are an equal number of definitions. At its core, I would venture that what makes an AU an AU and not a crossover — even within such fandoms in which fandoms can, and have, been crossed as part of the creator's universe, such as Matt Groening's *The Simpsons* and Chris Carter's *The X-Files*<sup>54</sup> — is that an AU begins with the canon text, or film, and distorts or morphs that reality into something different and unexamined by the originator. Common AU tropes within *Harry Potter* fandom include House-changing (Harry is sorted into Slytherin, or Draco into Gryffindor, or both); dystopic past, presents and futures in which Voldemort triumphs; or key characters have survived (the Potters, Sirius) or perished (Harry, Severus). I must admit that I was disappointed in the lack of offered insight into this subject of the placement of crossovers within fanfiction as a whole. Of the 29 responses I received, 17, or nearly 60%, didn't address this particular question in my survey.

A few individuals were of a similar mind to me, expressing the viewpoint that crossovers stand on their own outside of any one particular fandom, adding to the difficulty in finding particular enclaves for solely *Harry Potter* crossover-oriented fanfiction.

*I think crossovers do occupy a unique class of fanfic.*<sup>55</sup>

*Oh yes, I think very much so (they are their own, unique entity). I don't know if there are any sites dedicated exclusively to crossovers or not, but there probably should be. It would be much more fulfilling for people who like to write crossovers.*<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *The Simpsons*, "The Springfield Files," original Airdate 12 January, 1997. Summary and stunning detailed analysis available at The Simpsons Archive. This episode accessed 23 April, 2006 <<http://www.snpp.com/episodes/3G01.html>>.

<sup>55</sup> Respondent 13

<sup>56</sup> Respondent 27, parenthetical comment mine

*I think it should be treated as a new fandom altogether. Still, I don't think it's removed from any fandom, but it's kinda hard to shelve.*<sup>57</sup>

One person, in expressing an opinion contrary to mine, ended up making the exact case that I had proposed; crossover as a label tells the reader only that the story will not be canon-centric and that it will combine another fandom into the story.

*My answer would be no. There's not enough coherence to make it a viable genre. What more does a LotR/Star Trek X-over have in common with a HP/Buffy X-over, than the mere technicality of combined fandoms? IMO, Crossover is a label like AU, not an entity. It doesn't tell you anything about content.*<sup>58</sup>

Where this gets even more complicated is in regards to all crossovers being AUs, as one respondent indicated.

*I think the main point with crossovers, and the divide between the lovers and haters of the genre, is that they are inherently out of canon. There's no way Buffy and co were ever at Hogwarts, and no way Harry ever went to Sunnydale.*<sup>59</sup>

Another respondent was of the opposite opinion, that an author could conceive that the two universes did already coexist, it was just that the characters, and, by default, the universe creators, didn't realize such.

*[...] I don't think that writing a crossover implies the characters aren't really in the same universe. A lot of people here said they liked writing crossovers to see how characters react to a different universe, and I'm exactly the opposite: I like to make people think that two fandoms are in the same universe. Someone mentioned Sirius falling through the veil into Willy Wonka's factory — I would have made Wonka a wizard pretending he's a Muggle. Maybe he's got problems with the wizarding authorities because of that. Maybe Dumbledore is his best client. Maybe he's so famous world-wide that the owners of Honeydukes hate his guts.*<sup>60</sup>

I also voiced a general question as to why so many public archives didn't have explicit labeling options for crossovers, despite them being a 'standard' genre, one which has been around since at least 1979 when a Star Trek/Sherlock Holmes crossover was published in the Star Trek fanzine *Delta Triad 5*<sup>61</sup>. A common answer to the archive question ("why is there a dearth of crossover labeling in crossover archives?") came down to HTML coding difficulties, rather than a perceived bias against crossovers as a genre.

*[...] there are a finite number of characters in a particular show, even if it has a huge cast with guest stars. But once you add crossovers to it, the number is impossible. And then – do you*

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<sup>57</sup> Respondent 14

<sup>58</sup> Respondent 16

<sup>59</sup> Respondent 12

<sup>60</sup> Respondent 19. This response is fascinating on several levels, but one that jumps out to me is the interplay between authors and contributors to this discussion as it occurred. This person illustrated a point eloquently and vividly, while referencing prior entries in this discussion thread.

<sup>61</sup> Joan Marie Verba, *Boldly Writing: A Trekker and Zine History, 1967-1987* (Minnetonka: FTL Publications, 1996), 48.

*create a category for each fandom that it intersects with? Figuring out that sounds incredibly tough.*<sup>62</sup>

*I think that it might come down to coding difficulties -- it's trickier to code in the possibility for multiple fandoms than just one. That's certainly why Espresso recs treats crossovers as having a single primary fandom.*<sup>63</sup>

*Having worked on some archives, I'd say it's 1. an issue that there's so many different fandoms to cross, its [sic] impossible to predict every choice an author may need [...] Also, I think its [sic] issue of a flaw in the software design- the software often hard-codes fandoms- such as organising character names under their respective fandoms instead of making them openly accessible to any fandom – [...] this still usually limits a cross over to 2 fandoms, rather than leaving it open to as many as the writer wants.*<sup>64</sup>

Beyond the technical reasons listed, given the repeated negative commentary about crossover quality in general evident even in the small selection of responses received for this particular paper, I believe that such a bias does exist within the Harry Potter fanfiction community against crossovers. This was evidenced in this respondent's comment: "I think there should be a category for crossovers in archives like Skyhawke [sic], since 1) they are challenging to do well, and a good one is worth a lot and 2) some people hate them and need a warning!"<sup>65</sup>

Respondent 29 took issue with the concept that the label 'crossover' was enough to remove a story from that fandom altogether.

*I do not believe that crossovers remove a fic or piece of artwork from a particular fandom altogether. While there is a subculture strictly devoted \*to\* crossovers, crossovers themselves still have a place in their original fandoms. [...] People are still reading crossovers in their own fandom, and that reinforces my position — a piece that is labeled a crossover is not removed from its fandom(s). Only when people in a said fandom cease to read the crossovers or view the crossover art is when one can consider crossovers entirely removed from its original fandom.*

As part of her musings on the topic, it is her last sentence that I found especially telling when referencing a comment by respondent 13, quoted earlier ("And I have seen some fans declare they will not read cross-universe fics.") who indicated that this exact phenomenon is already at work in fandom. Some readers do, indeed, refuse to read a crossover in her fandom simply because it is a crossover.

### :~: **Conclusions** :~:

Crossovers are a standard genre in the realm of Harry Potter fanfiction, yet their perceived status is decidedly mixed within the community. They can be challenging to find, as there are currently no Harry Potter crossover-exclusive archives in which to house them. In addition, many public archives

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<sup>62</sup> Respondent 22

<sup>63</sup> Respondent 4

<sup>64</sup> Respondent 17

<sup>65</sup> Respondent 10

are not set up to label crossover stories as such, and at least one chooses not to accept them at all. This combination of factors does not explicitly reveal a fandom-wide bias against the genre, but it does illustrate that crossovers are not as popular as many other types of stories, even genres which could be considered far more controversial in regards to content. In surveying writers and readers of crossovers, they appear to have distinctly different motivations for writing crossovers versus reading them. While there are fanfiction readers who embrace a mixing of characters with other known fandoms, the wider enthusiasm for crossovers appears to reside with authors, those who wish to create the particular new universe or new palette with the combined pre-existing realms. Authors write crossovers for a wide variety of reasons, including: putting favorite characters together to explore how they react to each other; placing favorite characters in an alien universe, but one known to the author (ie. a separate fandom), to see how the character copes in the situation; and as was often stated in this survey, to challenge oneself as a writer. The reasons why crossovers tend to have fewer readers are varied, but primarily it comes down to the fact that most readers want to be familiar with the two fandoms that have been combined. There are nearly an infinite number of possible fandoms that can be combined with Harry Potter, and even for a potential reader who knows the two or more combined fandoms, she has to possess the interest in wanting to see the two universes combined. Familiarity alone does not necessarily lead to the desire to read how the fandoms have been crossed, especially if the author is not someone known to the reader.

I believe that to label a story a crossover implies that it is in its own genre, outside of any one fandom, while not exclusionary to that fandom. They are non-canonical in that the creators of the various universes did not have their characters interact when originally written or filmed. To the mind of at least one respondent in my survey, however, simply because the author or producer didn't specifically have the characters meet one another in his/her published or filmed works doesn't mean that the universes truly are exclusive from one another. Finding a home for a Harry Potter crossover can be a challenge, as the fanfiction community as a whole has archives and Live Journal communities dedicated to nearly any pairing and genre, but there are very few focusing exclusively on crossovers. Despite the stated bias against them, Harry Potter crossovers continue to be written by enthusiastic authors and sought out by hopeful readers. Perhaps as the Harry Potter fandom itself ages over time, crossovers will come more into their own, to the delight of those who enjoy them.