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Preserving Ourselves Through the Lawn Ring: *Homestuck* Fandom and Archival

1. 2023 Original

In recent years, archival of works of literature has gained a spotlight in the research community. This is not confined to just officially published works of literature; Johnson and Fong have researched the archival of Sherlockian fanworks that live on the internet, and Mora-Cantalops and Bergillos put their interest in the preservation community of a failed video game console. However, although there's been plenty of interest in the actual acts of preservation and archival, there hasn't been enough interest in the human element of archival; why do people take so much time out of their personal lives to archive things that seem so obscure? Why would two people write 100,000 lines of code so people can more properly experience a webcomic that ended seven years ago? This paper is the culmination of an ethnographic study conducted on the Homestuck Discord, a 42,000+-person community dedicated to said webcomic, including interviews with two archivists of *Homestuck*, the only other person who's written an ethnographic work on this very subject and community, and the owner of the community himself, who was instrumental in the creation of the largest archive of *Homestuck* fanworks. Throughout the course of this research, I discovered that all of these people, and many of the fans, stuck around because they just loved the comic that much, and wanted to see its legacy continue when most webcomics don't get that far.

It's fairly likely that you haven't heard of *Homestuck*. That's okay, let me tell you about it. *Homestuck* is a webcomic that ran from April 13, 2009 to April 13, 2016, that followed 13-year-old John Egbert and his three friends as they play a video game that ends up causing the apocalypse. Along the way, they end up meeting chess pieces, alien internet trolls, Betty Crocker,

and much more. This is only scratching the surface, of course, but one of its main draws was the plethora of Flash animations and games that turned *Homestuck* from a webcomic to a multimedia juggernaut. There's one small problem, though; Adobe discontinued Flash at the end of 2020. That made a lot of people very angry and has been widely regarded as a bad move. The author of *Homestuck*, Andrew Hussie, decided to "fix" this issue in 2018 by making a deal with Viz Media, known for licensing and publishing Japanese media in the United States. To give Viz credit, they did port *Homestuck* to a website that was not reliant on Flash, but it was widely regarded by fans as a severe drop in quality from the old website, which was self hosted by Hussie, and it also broke a lot of links to the original website (u/Makin-, May 2020; u/Makin-, October 2020). So one fan took it upon himself to recreate *Homestuck* the way he would've wanted it to be when he first joined the fandom in 2015, and in October 2020, the Unofficial Homestuck Collection (UHC) released, just in time to outrun the death of Flash. It was surprisingly fully featured, even at its original release; every Flash animation and game was included in their original quality, all were modified where practical to use the full-quality versions of their music tracks available from the official soundtrack releases, and it even had all of the supplemental material, including the bit about Hitler causing the Holocaust because he was jealous of Einstein's success. I'm not making that up, somehow.

Fans absolutely ate the UHC up, as expected. It quickly became the definitive way to read *Homestuck*, with it even being recommended by Hussie himself¹. And let's talk about those fans for a moment, shall we? Throughout its original run, one of the things *Homestuck* was most known for was its fandom. Fans would flock to conventions like Los Angeles' Anime Expo dressed as their favorite of the four—sorry, sixteen—twenty—forty-six primary characters.

1. Note that I'm referring to Andrew using he/him pronouns. Andrew identifies as "clowngender", a gender identity he made up that essentially treats the concept of gender identity as a joke, and uses any pronouns. However, he/him is what his legal team refers to him using, so that's what I'll go with.

Ok, well, I'm being slightly facetious; nobody cared about ten of those forty-six. They would fill an entire large staircase outside the venue with just themselves for photo ops; they would try to dye their skin gray using Sharpies and isopropyl alcohol; they would get unsealed body paint banned from conventions after rubbing it all over the place (clearly, they didn't learn from the Trekkies). The fervor bordered on religious at times, but as Davidsen suggests, there was still a healthy disconnect between the actual activities of the *Homestuck* fandom (roleplay, cosplay, etc.) and the fiction-based religions that sprang out of works like the *Star Wars* saga and the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, which are characterized by unironic beliefs in the religious undertones of the original works. *Homestuck*, although having undertones of religion, presents them entirely facetiously or in reference to existing religious or quasi-religious movements (e.g. the Mirthful Messiahs in reference to Juggalos, Troll Jegus in reference to Christianity), not even giving anyone the opportunity to "make a religion out of this", as Bill Wurtz puts it.

Without the Unofficial Homestuck Collection and the efforts of the fans to persuade Viz Media, the original form of *Homestuck* likely would've been lost forever, as the slow and inevitable march of bit rot sweeps the ephemera of the internet, and even the San Francisco-based archivists behind the Wayback Machine find themselves under siege from book and music publishers that are more interested in lining their own pockets than making knowledge freely accessible. As it is, the MS Paint Adventures Forums, the largest source of *Homestuck* fan discussion, abruptly went down in March 2016, with its permanent death due to data corruption being confirmed by the *Homestuck* team in 2019. Luckily, Makin, the creator of the forum dedicated to discussion of *Homestuck* and related works on the social news aggregator Reddit, had already created a server on the instant messaging platform Discord for coordination of an official gaming session in a *Homestuck* fan game, and both the subreddit and Discord server

quickly became de facto replacements for the MSPA Forums. Makin had originally created the subreddit because he wanted to get away from the draconian actions of the moderators of the MSPA Forums₂, and now that he had the keys to most of the forum diaspora with both the subreddit and the Discord server, he could do whatever he felt like. This includes gamifying his recommendations of works tangentially related to *Homestuck*, with titles on the list ranging from AI researcher Eliezer Yudkowsky’s “rationalist” fanfiction of *Harry Potter* to a really bad science fiction story that, somehow, only Makin and I ended up liking.

The subreddit itself is mostly irrelevant, however, as the focus here is on the Discord server. I originally joined the server in February 2022 to coincide with a reread of *Homestuck* that was being run in the two months before April 13, and I began to participate actively, first setting up a niche in the on-topic channel #homestuck, before moving on to greener pastures in the form of the politics threads in #media-culture and the unofficial moderator hangout/official “shills list” channel #mspa-lit. By some stroke of luck, I’ve also ended up ingraining myself into the official record of the Homestuck Discord with this project and my contributions to the political spaces. Said official record, of course, is Drew Linky’s *Several People are Typing*, an experiential log/amateur ethnography (my words on the latter) dating back to 2017, which starts, as all great works of media should, by recounting that time a user decided to try to get superglue off his hand by sticking it in a live electrical socket. Due to his contributions over the years, I deemed him a perfect subject for an interview. He’s the only other *Homestuck*-adjacent ethnographer, he’s seen basically everything that I haven’t, he’s worked alongside Makin; it’s perfect. Yes, he shows slight animosity towards Makin at times—who doesn’t, really—but he still respects the man, and he’s one more tick into the “I’m here because I just like Homestuck that much” column.

2. Said actions leading to the creation of “The Baby is You”, an mpreg rock opera that got interpolated in *Pokémon Sword and Shield*. Also, the guy who wrote that made *Undertale*.

As mentioned previously, there has been research into the activity of archival; that is, the actual actions that members of these fan communities take to preserve the works they've made. For people interested in the Sherlockian Great Game, that may manifest itself as posting the fanworks they've written to websites such as the Archive of Our Own, a non-profit-run repository of fanworks, or actively ensuring that their discussions are fully archived through things like the Internet Archive or the Organization for Transformative Works' Open Doors Initiative (Johnson and Fong). For fans of Nintendo's failed Virtual Boy in Spain, that may take the form of reverse engineering the hardware and software to allow players to continue developing for the system, bringing canceled games to a finished state for release, or even porting games from other platforms such as *Street Fighter II* (Mora-Cantallos and Bergillos). For *Homestuck*, of course, that has taken the form of the book releases by TopatoCo and Viz, and the Unofficial Homestuck Collection. The prevailing quality that all of these share is that these people want to make sure that the thing they love is open to new generations of readers, as short as a "generation" may be on the Internet.

And luckily, they've succeeded! The Archive of Our Own is likely the world's largest fanfiction repository, with its creators, the Organization for Transformative Works, being a pre-eminent voice for fandom and academic discussion surrounding it. Were it not for their journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*, I would've had a lot harder time writing this. It's not just the Holmes fandom that benefits from it, either; there's works on AO3 for things ranging from the Broadway musical *Hamilton* to the first responder procedural *9-1-1* (not like *9-1-1* needs fanfiction, it basically already is). The Virtual Boy has way more interest these days than it ever did back in 1995. And, of course, *Homestuck* is somehow at a point where there's official

content being made with regular updates, an official vinyl release of some of the music is being worked on, and the fandom, although very much diminished from its peak, is thriving.

Homestuck is back from whatever lull it had over the last seven years, and this is one of many culminations of all the work that went into getting the fandom where it is today.

As I've said, the Organization for Transformative Works has been instrumental in both this project and the furtherance of fandom in general on the Internet. The intellectual property system is widely regarded as broken (Scott) due to various developments in the late 20th century, especially in the United States with the Copyright Term Extension and Digital Millennium Copyright Acts of 1998, and fan works that should fall under the Copyright Act of 1976's "fair use" policy for being transformative from their original material have been banned from publication due to lawsuits by the authors of the original material (Chan). OTW seeks to let fanworks be fanworks through legal advocacy against the expansion of intellectual property, as well as the aforementioned efforts to keep fan works alive on the Internet for years to come. It was born out of a desire to keep the interests of intellectual property holders away from those of the fans, and it has stayed that way (Lothian).

The *Homestuck* fandom is but one microcosm of the broader ideas of fandom and the archival that accompanies it. It has been severely impacted by failures to archive things that weren't thought of as all that important at the time, and the main way to consume the original work in 2023 is through an archival effort. In a world where movies like *Batgirl*, *Scoob! Holiday Haunt*, and *Coyote vs. Acme* can be canceled in completely finished states just so Warner Bros. can claim their production costs as tax write-offs and Disney can remove beloved series from streaming for seemingly no reason, archival of fan works is more important than ever, and the

Homestuck fandom represents just one of many places that has succeeded in keeping itself alive where so many have failed.

2. 2025 Update

The *Homestuck* fandom has had some interesting updates since November 2023. When we first left off, the official sequel *Homestuck: Beyond Canon* had recently resumed, and Viz's official website was functional. Since then, *HS:BC* has continued, but with a shake-up in leadership, a new officially-licensed fanwork collective known as Fruity Rumpus Asshole Factory has sprung up, complete with their own replacement for the MSPA Forums, and *Homestuck.com* has broken entirely. That's the most important development to the topic of archival. You'd think this would be easily fixable with the continued existence of the UHC, but now that's gone too. On August 8, 2025, UHC developer Gio released an article on his blog detailing that he had stopped development on the UHC and taken down its website as a result of threats of legal action by Andrew's team.

His story goes that the Homestuck Independent Creative Union, launched in 2023 as an independent collective taking charge of *HS:BC* and future official fandom development, reached out to him and co-developer Bambosh to make the UHC official shortly after my interviews with them. This was odd, as Gio had written exposés in 2020 and 2021 about the troubled development of spin-off video game *Hiveswap*, for which fans raised \$2.5 million in a crowdfunding campaign in 2012 and still have not received a finished product, and frivolous legal threats sent to YouTuber SarahZ by Andrew (through *Hiveswap*'s development company WhatPumpkin) after she made a video citing Gio's articles on *Hiveswap*. The fallout of these led to *Hiveswap* and *Homestuck*²: *Beyond Canon* (as *HS:BC* was known at the time) writer Aysha U. Farah labeling Gio as a stalker for the crime of making a tweet asking members of the team for clarification on something, a label he has not escaped, and Andrew holding a grudge against him, which his proxy Miles stated wouldn't affect the negotiations.

And that's just the underlying context! Throughout the course of Gio's article, it unfolds that Bambosh quits the project after signing an NDA that locks Gio out of negotiations (the HICU was trying to negotiate with Bambosh solely and wouldn't loop Gio in on the negotiations), the HICU turns out to only be nominally independent of Andrew (as evidenced by a DMCA takedown request by Andrew coming from the HICU's Discord account), and it turns out that Hussie didn't let go of his grudge against Gio after all, with one of the stipulations of the negotiations being to take down his earlier articles about *Hiveswap*. Eventually, Hussie throws two cease and desist orders at Gio: one for the UHC's asset pack (which Hussie was in his rights to, that is Hussie's IP), and one for the mentions and screenshots of Homestuck on the UHC's website (which Hussie was not in his rights to under nominative use and fair use respectively). Gio, not wanting his project to be entirely taken over by Hussie, racks up legal fees in trying to fight this, but is ultimately forced to stop maintaining the project he had put so much work into.

This isn't the first time Hussie and his proxies have made frivolous legal threats; Makin mentions in his interview that he had made them against fans in the early days of the fandom, and he notably did against Sarah Z back in 2021. It's also not the first time Hussie has reached out to people he doesn't like with the veneer of friendliness via one of his proxies only to have that slowly peel away, the same having happened to the HSD, including a demand for a "gender census" of the server's users.

But where does that leave *Homestuck* from an archival perspective? Well, the UHC isn't completely down. It is still up on its GitHub, and the required asset pack is floating around from various sources, including one set up by the HICU during the course of the negotiations/takeover attempt (which, funnily enough, Andrew now calls the "legal version", despite not being entirely legal for him to host either). There have also since been two online mirrors set up; one as a direct

mirror of the Viz site, updated to make Flash pages fully functional using the Ruffle emulator, and one that adapts *Homestuck* to be more readable on mobile devices. Additionally, in September 2025, the official homestuck.com website began a phased rerelease of the comic after Hussie and the HICU regained control of it, with the promise of the release of the commentary which he had written but didn't release due to the Viz deal falling through.

Do Andrew's renewed attempts to reach out to the fandom, including the creation of FRAF, partnering with Internet-famous animator Vivienne Medrano to create an animated *Homestuck* pilot, the creation of an official Discord server, and the launch of a fifth MS Paint Adventure, read as him trying to save his public image in the wake of the Gio drama? Yes, but they have the added effect of bringing a whole new generation of fans (those of Medrano's previous works mostly) to the fandom, leading it to new heights I never thought possible.

Another semi-noteworthy development, that I'm primarily including here to note a potential conflict of interest, is that on September 23, in the wake of some intra-mod team drama, the Homestuck Discord held a "reckoning", an event where the entire moderation team is removed and new ones are put in by user consensus. Apparently, user consensus can mean one person, if they have enough spite. That's speaking from experience; that reckoning event led to my installation as a moderator, which is really weird but also hilarious. That's all I've got for now, but this document will continue to be updated with future developments.

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Appendix A: Field Notes (taken November 1, 2023)

This will take the following format:

#channel-name: A description of the channel. Goings-on over the observed period.

Channels listed in the order they are in the server.

#news: Updates related to Homestuck and official works in the franchise. Most recent post was a summary of the most recent news post posted to the Homestuck: Beyond Canon website.

#announcements: News related to the server. Generally used to announce things related to the community, including a movie watching stream for the 12th anniversary of the “[S]: Cascade” update to Homestuck.

#shilling: Announcements from Makin relating to his personal blog, and whatever people have paid him to promote through his Patreon.

#homestuck: Discussion specifically confined to Homestuck and related works. Recent discussions include a character in the web animation series *Helluva Boss* that takes design inspiration from the character Karkat Vantas, and discussion over when users first read Homestuck.

#homosuck: The off-topic channel that’s technically related to Homestuck. Discussions flip-flop wildly, but primary discussion at the period observed was the *Five Nights at Freddy’s* video game franchise.

#mspa-forums: A forum-like board where users can make threads with individual topics. Active channels include “Homosuck SBURB session”, where users from #homosuck put their own characters into a session of the central narrative game, “Fantrolls and Fankids”, a discussion thread around original characters, “The Shipyard”, where people talk about romantic relationships they want to believe in, and “Classpecting Containment Thread”, which is hell disguised as discussion around one specific game mechanic.

#general: Discussion without a specific topic. Topics vary widely; some observed include some meme posts, including an African-American man dressed as a vampire reading slam poetry and memes in Swedish, a user complaining about the cost of getting his passport renewed, and a user’s attempts at designing a jersey for a fictional sports team.

#fathusky: A channel dedicated to posting photos of dogs, with specific focus on one overweight Siberian Husky that has become a mascot of the server.

#altgen: The primary “off-topic” channel of the server; common topics are mostly just memes of all kinds. [Pic related.](#)

#serious-discussion: The exact opposite of altgen, for discussions that require more civility. Primary topic at the period observed is relationship advice for a user, helping him figure out what he wants out of a relationship.

#bot-commands: A dedicated channel for users to use the server’s various “discord bots”, programs designed to work hand in hand with the server.

#art-cosplay: A channel for users to post art or cosplays (usually that they made), and for discussion and feedback thereof.

Appendix A: Field Notes (taken November 1, 2023)

#gaming: Another forum, this one dedicated to discussions around video games. Active threads include the *Sonic the Hedgehog* franchise, the Homestuck-adjacent *Undertale/Deltarune* franchise, and a catch-all discussion thread.

#media-culture: A catch-all area for media and popular culture, both western and eastern. Recent discussions include the death of Matthew Perry and the anime *Demon Slayer*.

#media-threads: A forum for when #media-culture is too broad for you. Active threads include United States and global political discussion, western cartoons, the HBO original series *The Sopranos*, science fiction franchise *Stargate*, and the franchise centered around the shows *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul*.

#mspa-beyond-shills (commonly known as #mspa-lit or simply #shills): #general but with a specific culture behind it. This is my main stomping ground, and it also serves as an unofficial moderator chat at times. Common topics include works on the Makin's "shills list", other popular culture, and twitter posts that seem just slightly off.

#Science-math: Exactly what it says on the tin. Discussion related to STEM fields, including the webcomic *XKCD*. Most recent topic of discussion was weird trends in tides in certain places.

#Coding-tech: Again, exactly what it says on the tin. Discussion related to technology and its advancements, including computer programming. Sometimes devolves into complaints around a specific program.

#voicechat-1 and #voicechat-2: the server's two "voice channels", where people can talk to each other using their real voices.

#writing: A channel set up by user Bolas for discussion around creative writing, including feedback on works posted by users. Current discussion is around projects related to the National Novel Writing Month competition.

#hobby-corner: A generally inactive channel related to creative outlets and hobbies that aren't within the confines of #art-cosplay or any other channel. Some discussions include coin collecting, miniature painting for a strategy game, and clay molding.

#speak-nonenglish-and-post-pictures-of-wizards: I don't really understand what's going on here, mostly because it's not in english. It seems to be like #altgen or #general, but for languages that aren't english.

#music: Where people talk about what music they're listening to and talk about music as an art form. Fairly laid back.

Appendix B: Interview with GiovanH

The following is a transcript of my interview with Unofficial Homestuck Collection developer GiovanH, performed on November 2, 2023. Presented entirely unedited, except for style corrections.

Starfang: When did you first learn about Homestuck?

GiovanH: I think when I started reading the comic was at A4/A5A1, but I'm not sure exactly because I started at the beginning. I remember Homestuck was everywhere on the internet at that point, but I actually didn't know that's what I was getting into. True story: when they first revealed the Karkat sprite, I assumed that was a one-off reference to the grey-alien-with-horn media franchise I had seen so much in people's avatars; I didn't know that was homestuck!

S: What got you to start reading Homestuck in the first place?

G: I think the thing that actually got me reading was a discussion thread on a web forum for a video game I got because they ran a banner ad on newgrounds. Peak early internet. I don't really have a detailed recollection of what about it specifically appealed to me at the time, really. I was a ravenous consumer of fiction and I liked the story/characters/art/mechanics/world and just "got into it".

S: Why did you stick around through Homestuck's worst bits?

G: I don't totally understand this question. During the mainline comic, there was never an obvious "oh, it's bad now" off-ramp. I was into the story and wanted to see what happened to the characters and universe and everything, and during the hiatuses there was still enough fandom activity that it never really died out. I think tumblr and the MSPA forums and MSPFAs get a lot of credit for providing a vibrant fandom community and a really engaged creative space even when there wasn't active activity from the comic. The forums especially. This has always been

Appendix B: Interview with GiovanH

my big soapbox, but the death blow to the OG homestuck fandom was the forum shutdown. It really cannot be overstated what an important community that was, and it really kept momentum going, for lack of a better metaphor.

S: Do you think you had a major role in the development of the fandom to where it stands today?

G: Me? Nah. Most of my big contributions came relatively late, any significant impact I had would have started at, like, 2020, earliest. Now between the hiveswap writing, and the folks I know, and various archive work, and a ton of behind-the-scenes coordination I do with people, I'm probably a kevin-bacon-esque pillar of the late-modern homestuck fandom, but mostly not in "creative" ways. The biggest impact there is definitely the UHC work.

S: Why take the time out of your own schedule to pursue this project?

G: This one I have a very good answer to. I sit at this really special intersection between having a lot of personal experience with Homestuck, and maintaining an interest in the fandom, and having a strong interest in archive work in general, and having the technical skills to preserve web content, that I am really uniquely qualified to be **extremely** good at this. So of all the things I can do with my time, UHC work turns out to be something I'm extremely good at that's extremely useful to a lot of people. So it's kind of a no-brainer!

S: How did you end up meeting Bambosh, and what got you to collaborate with him?

G: There are better answers to this on the sahcon interview I pointed to you earlier, but the abbreviated version is Bambosh released the first version of the collection while I was already working on something similar, and then we got together after to compare notes.

S: And do you think you'd work with him again if your paths cross for something similar?

G: Sure!

Appendix C: Interview with Bambosh

Same format as the interview with GiovanH. Also performed November 2, 2023.

Starfang: When did you first learn about Homestuck? What got you to start reading Homestuck in the first place?

Bambosh: I was a TV Tropes kid when Homestuck was at peak popularity in 2012-2013, so it was pretty hard to avoid hearing about it. I wasn't actively interested in picking it up at the time, but I was aware that it existed. I think I tried it a couple of times, but I got filtered hard by Act 1 and never made it too far. I only really got into it in 2015 -- I'd just read Prequel (<https://www.prequeladventure.com/>), and found out it was a fanventure after the fact. That got me interested enough in the format to go back and give MSPA a shot, so I went and started reading from the very beginning. Going through Problem Sleuth first made the earlier chunks of Homestuck a lot more entertaining!

S: What did you observe as ways the fandom stayed engaged, even during the various pauses?

B: So. When I caught up, [S] Terezi: Remem8er was only a couple of days old, meaning I got to experience the final eight month hiatus pretty much in its entirety. I'd say the mood was best described as... Some form of purgatory? One of the things that made Homestuck's community such a big deal was the momentum it had. The constant stream of new content was directly responsible for the staggering quantity of fanart/memes/community events/fandom interactions that was generated. When the official content stopped... The fan response stopped. Most of the content you saw during hiatus years fell into the category of "absolutely deranged shitposting", with actual high quality stuff becoming a rarity. I don't think any fanbase can persist without new content without going a little insane. Or more accurately, I think any fanbase that tries to exist beyond its expiration date must become pit of endlessly self referential

Appendix C: Interview with Bambosh

hallucinations. You can't riff off the same content forever, so "riffing off content" becomes the content you riff off. The only winning move here is not to participate.

S: What were big blows you observed to fandom engagement?

B: There was a pervasive sense that "the glory days" were over, and that people were dispersing into other spaces. Kinda like when you stick around at the mall too late. Most of these people were part of the original community that experienced Homestuck as "something that happens around you", and weren't having that need fulfilled anymore. Counter to that, I ended up joining in as one of the first waves of people who experienced Homestuck as "something to be discovered". To an archival reader, all the stuff that older fans lived through is ancient history that you have to actively seek out (it's also all in varying states of decay ha ha). I don't believe it's possible to read the same Homestuck that people read in 2013. The social phenomena is gone. The best you can do is read about what those people got to experience - which I think is fascinating in its own way.

S: Do you think you had a major role in the development of the fandom to where it stands today? Why take the time out of your own schedule to pursue this project?

B: It's tough for me to really comprehend the impact the collection has had on the community, mostly because I haven't made a point of looking for it. The collection was a project that I pursued almost exclusively out of personal interest. The idea was to make the version of Homestuck that I wanted to read, with all the content and features that I wished I had access to in 2015. I'm happy that it became as popular as it did, but the attention ended up being too much for me and I kinda retreated back into my hole. Is Homestuck gaining popularity again? Is the collection responsible for that? Would the fanbase look the same today if it didn't exist? I have

Appendix C: Interview with Bambosh

absolutely no clue man I've been too anxious to log into my main Twitter account for years. My finger isn't really on the pulse of this stuff.

S: How did you end up meeting Gio, and what got you to collaborate with him?

B: This one was answered in the sahcon panel, so you can check that out for a more detailed answer. Short version is that he approached me, offered to contribute, and I was Super Burnt Out after so I was not gonna turn down the help. Since then, he's done so much work through the entire project that it's just as much his baby as it is mine.

Appendix D: Interview with Drew Linky

Same format as GiovanH and Bambosh, I was given the answers early on November 3, but I posed the questions on November 2.

Starfang: When did you first learn about Homestuck?

Drew: I first learned about Homestuck in October 2012, during my first semester of undergraduate school.

S: What got you to start reading Homestuck in the first place?

D: I made a friend in one of my classes and we had a project together; she said she thought I would enjoy the story and recommended I check it out. I was hooked immediately.

S: What did you observe as ways the fandom stayed engaged, even during the various pauses?

D: The first four years of my involvement in the fandom were strictly local encounters. I dabbled on the subreddit for a little bit but largely did not look at it. Back when the fandom was larger it was predominantly oriented towards Tumblr or Facebook groups, at least in my experience. Smaller, locally based communities can be great but are very hit and miss. The one local (St. Louis) Facebook group for Homestuck that did well thrived mostly on the back of a very active and engaged leader who took it upon themselves to organize get togethers. These gatherings usually consisted of casual hangouts where we would eat somewhere in the city or have a picnic in casual cosplay at a park somewhere, though we even did a canned food drive at some point.

S: What were the biggest blows to fandom engagement?

D: Engagement naturally took a hit each time there was a hiatus during the initial run of the story, but these hits weren't as clear cut as people like to think--those members of the fandom who were already less engaged were the first ones to go, so while in terms of pure numbers it

Appendix D: Interview with Drew Linky

could be painted as a sort of exodus, to people who are more present all the time it just seems like a slow dribble of people who already weren't talking much. The biggest hit by far actually took place when the comic ended; we've talked about what a disappointment Act 7 was as a conclusion, because Homestuck as a fandom experience was driven by the sense that the story was building up to something. The main story ending in such an anemic fashion not only turned off casual fans but several hardcore members too, which scarred the fandom in ways that we're still feeling all this time later.

S: Do you think you had a major role in the development of the fandom to where it stands today?

D: By the time I rolled around onto the scene in October of 2016, the shape of things more or less resembled what we have seven years later. Specifically: the subreddit and thus the Discord server were the only centralized fandom spaces of any merit (the MSPA Forums having been obliterated some years prior) and they were/are growing somewhat consistently; Tumblr was already dead or would be summarily executed by the porn ban; Twitter was pretty much unusable for serious conversation; local communities pretty much ceased to exist sometime before the comic properly ended.

To answer the question: no, I don't feel like I was a guiding force in any of that. Outside of a couple freak incidents which are notable but not ultimately impactful, my involvement has been of much more limited importance, mostly in terms of light adjustments to the HSD and mostly just keeping it clean. A glorified janitor, if you will.

S: Did you expect that HSD and the subreddit would get this big?

D: Part of me feels like describing them as "big" is a bit of a misnomer; they are firmly "medium-sized" communities for their respective platforms. Putting pedantry aside, I figured the

Appendix D: Interview with Drew Linky

subreddit would be alright but I actually somewhat expected the HSD to collapse by this point. Its activity is tapering off slightly year over year but it's still ridiculously active in comparison to other servers of its size; I'm astonished by its persistence.

S: How did you end up meeting Makin, and what got you to collaborate with him?

D: I don't think I can say I've ever "met" Makin, because I know next to nothing about him in reality. Strictly in terms of interacting on the internet, I first asked him about whether he needed help with modding the server sometime in late 2016 or early 2017, citing my experience modding previous internet communities like the Twitch Plays Pokemon subreddit. He declined at the time, but increasing activity and bot raids demanded expanding the mod team rather aggressively, and he invited me to be a moderator a couple months afterward. I asked to help in the first place because I was enjoying my time here so much; it filled a void that made me miserable after the decline and fall of Twitch Plays Pokemon and the Sydlexia community before it.

S: If you were able to go back and choose whether or not to work with Makin, would you do it again?

D: I still maintain that Makin knows what he's doing in terms of keeping a community engaged or how to structure one, but I think it's difficult for him to take things seriously if he isn't already convinced of the need to *be* serious. This bothers me less now that I've gotten experience working alongside him on stuff and know what to expect, but it's been a source of significant stress and irritation trying to understand him over the years. Using the benefit of knowing just how difficult it can be to work with him, I would probably still do it again... but if I couldn't convince him to chill out, I would probably maintain a bit more distance just for my own health.

Appendix E: Interview with the Fat Husky (Makin)

This one was a lot harder to get. I originally asked Makin if he was up to an interview on November 2, and he said no. I asked again on November 6th, and he originally (semi?)-facetiously asked me to pay him \$20,000, the amount that Foundr Magazine recommends that social media influencers with over 100,000 followers charge for public speaking, for the chance to interview him. He later agreed on the condition that he could run all of his answers through GPT-4 to reword them (he's big on AI). In the end, he ended up doing neither, and below is the transcript of the interview that did happen.

Starfang: When did you first learn about Homestuck?

Makin: Summer of 2010, around the early stages of Hivebent¹.

S: What got you to start reading Homestuck in the first place?

M: I shared one of those old general-topic forums with a bunch of Homestuck fans, who kept using HS images in their forum signatures. I became a fan when they started featuring the intriguing troll cast. This sounds like the virtual version of "I saw a ton of cosplayers at an anime convention and googled it when I got home".

S: What did you observe as ways the fandom stayed engaged, even during the various pauses?

M: Fanworks, duh. While fanfiction on AO3, Wattpad and the like helped, I've always thought of that as "empty calories" for a fandom, especially the one-shots and short fics, bonfires that run out of oxygen quickly. Fanventures are a bit better due to the regular updates. More important are group projects, like fanmusic teams (Cool and New Music Team, Unofficial MSPA Fans), group animations (Homestuck Reanimated, Rex Duodecim Angelus) or games (Genesis, Overseer Project).

1. Hivebent being the comic's term referring to Act 5 Act 1, the introduction of the troll characters.

Appendix E: Interview with the Fat Husky (Makin)

There's also always a background level of activity just from new fans catching up and asking questions or relitigating old scissor statements like "did Vriska do anything wrong?"². There are some fan activities I've continued to run since the comic ended, like movie streams on the fandom's meme dates (4/13, 10/25, etc.), and sometimes game servers, but those keep the local part of the fandom engaged more than maintaining it at large. Regularity is the most important factor in online activity. The content doesn't even need to be good, people *will* hateread as long as you keep it coming fast enough.

S: What were the biggest blows to fandom engagement you observed?

M: What Pumpkin, Andrew Hussie and Cindy Dominguez sending frivolous legal threats to popular figures like Octopimp and fan-merch makers early on. In general, many of the PR people WP has hired have been inexplicably hostile to the fans. Most famously, the comic pauses caused by the Kickstarter and the Act 7 development hell. Obviously the fandom thrives on new content, but it was extremely short sighted to simultaneously stop fan content from being created, even in minor ways, AND stop creating their own. News were sparse and undetailed, which made a lot of fans give up.

S: Do you think you had a major role in the development of the fandom to where it stands today?

M: Sure, but I don't think I'm in the top 10 of fans that did. The fandom is tiny now, every early big name fan did more to contribute just because every action they took made more shockwaves, and the subreddit wasn't really relevant until 2014 or so (and only cemented in 2016 when the forums died and it became the only sane alternative). I have also done some community-unrelated work in the background, like coding for games or helping with fanmusic projects

2. Vriska Serket is a troll notable for spider-themed imagery, as she represents the Scorpio Zodiac sign. In the comic, she *does* do a lot of things that are "wrong", but common fandom discourse (known as Vriscourse) revolves around whether she was justified in doing them.

Appendix E: Interview with the Fat Husky (Makin)

S: Why did you decide to start this fan community (referring to both HSD and the subreddit as one entity here)?

M: Same motivation Toby Fox had for creating The Baby is You. The admins of the MSPA Forums were really, really bad. Draconian to put it lightly. I didn't exactly want a lawless place like the 4chan HSG threads, but I wanted something in the middle, a place for fans to speak their mind casually without having to deal with people who didn't even read the comic removing their posts because it made merch margins lower or whatever. One of the old MSPAF admins now runs campaigns for politicians, which doesn't surprise me in the slightest.

S: Did you expect that HSD and the subreddit would get this big?

M: Yes, subreddits and discord don't tend to get smaller unless you really screw up. The bigger you get the harder it is to fail, because being the biggest is itself a positive quality. Truly, the Titanic got it right.

S: How did you end up meeting Drew, and what got you to collaborate with him?

M: I feel you're only asking me this because you've asked Drew the opposite, or Gio/Bambosh about each other. Obviously Drew just joined the Discord and kept being a good productive fan, dunno what else I could say here.

S: If you were able to go back and choose whether or not to work with Drew, would you do it again?

M: Sure. I would also make sure to invest in NVIDIA though.

S: Why did you decide to take on the archival project through Homestuck.net?

M: Usually bit rot affects every fandom to some extent, so it'd be worth for that alone, but for Homestuck, the IP owners are actively trying to delete historical context, understandably, since it doesn't make them look good. It's common for Hussie to purge his entire online presence

Appendix E: Interview with the Fat Husky (Makin)

over and over. The company accounts copy that pattern. The MSPA Forums were also not brought back for years, until the data had been corrupted and it became impossible. All of this is vital context for the comic, and while most of the important stuff was preserved by other people, like wheals and MrCheeze, I wanted to make sure fans had a quick, permanent access to it (the torrent for the archive hopefully will make it ACTUALLY permanent) by putting it all together with the most important past and present fanworks.