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Far From First Kill: Sapphic Fan Campaigns + the Fight for Queer Television

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Abstract

Over the decades, LGBTQ+ media has had a long history of, despite getting better, more popular, more powerful each time, being canceled, delayed, even simply never seen again. This has led to justified anger, sorrow, + distress from the queer fandom communities, who, already inspired by the sense of activism that their community is founded on, have created over 8 years of online fan campaigning to fight back, maybe even bring the shows from the grave to a new life. This case study will examine 6 of those campaigns, ranging from the birth of modern queer fandom in *We Deserve Better*, to the reinvention of the campaign in *Fight for Wynonna*, up to the present day *First Kill Forever*, among others. In the end, a success model will become apparent from the various wins + losses of each campaign, thus creating a blueprint from which future campaigns can pull.

Introduction

In August of 2022, the recently released TV teen drama *First Kill*, which follows two sapphic [meaning non-men who love non-men] teens falling in love despite them being a vampire and a vampire hunter, was suddenly canceled by Netflix after one season. The series had only been out for a mere few weeks, perhaps a month, before the announcement was made. Suffice to say, fans were angry. *First Kill* has been one of many television shows containing gay representation to be abruptly canceled with little to no explanation just in the 2022 to 2023 season alone. The show's cancellation failed to match the high levels of participatory culture in the fandom, with the series creating a significant community of fans online, making fan edits, art, plus asking for more

of the show immediately after watching. Extending from Henry Jenkins' theory was these same fans creating something bigger: online campaigning action.

Merely a week after the series' cancellation, after a successful community building effort alongside a billboard team, fans of *First Kill* kicked off the campaign with a billboard. They then created a social media hashtag, #savefirstkill, to advocate for the show's return. This action led to a website, followed by direct endorsements from the cast and crew of the show. Now, over a year later, savefirstkill.com continues to grow at a rapid pace, maintaining its sole goal of the show's return.

As a fan of the show, a queer person myself, and an advocate for queer representation on TV, I have kept a close eye on *First Kill's* fan base's efforts to turn grief into action. Moreover, I soon discovered that #savefirstkill represents just one example of sapphic fans working together to create change in media; better yet, prior campaigns were stepping stones to the communities being built, rebuilt, or brewing as 2023 began. This sort of audience case study, specifically focused on 2SLGBTQIA¹ media, has only been done in isolation, looking at each past campaign in its individual state and what they set out to do, while campaigns from the past year remain to be fully analyzed.

In this audience study, I first explain the full context of what came before; we'll look at the development of fan campaigns prior to Twitter's takeover of the space, study the events around *The 100* plus #LGBTDeserveBetter, as well as other, more intersectional campaigns that formed as a reaction to Black sapphic death/murder in television. Next, I examine a midpoint with *Wynonna Earp's* two campaigns, using them as both an example of success but moreover a study of how tactics changed over the years. After that, I examine #savefirstkill,

¹ This acronym stands for TwoSpirit Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual. For the rest of this paper, I will most often simply use the reclaimed term "queer" in place of the acronym.

#savewarriornun, plus the campaigns of *A League of Their Own*, with each representing the wide breadth that fan campaigns reached this year. Finally, I outline the particular tactics across these campaigns, what caused some to fail. All can point out what it all means for the future of queer fans and their online campaigns to preserve TV content that offers them characters and representations with which to identify.

The Clexa Reaction

According to scholar Annemarie Navar-Gill (2018), much to my agreement, the public understanding of the queer fan campaign remains relatively new. Although the “Save the Show” style campaigns, focused on bringing a television series back from cancellation, has its roots all the way back to *Star Trek* to save it after a two season cancellation, the majority of what came before 2016 often is somewhat mundane. Early campaigns were brought together by word of mouth, forming city wide pockets who knew each other, would send letters to those in charge, yet may never meet anyone outside of their pockets. There was perhaps a chance to meet others at an out of town convention, yet that opportunity required travel, planning, or luck. The rise of the internet made the window just a bit bigger, allowing for more people to engage with campaigns with often the same methods as before. At this moment in time, Twitter became the gathering space to bring the word to others, hitting trending through the new feature of hashtags to grab attention to the cause.

2015 became the year where things started to be modified for queer audiences in particular. A rising level of acceptance, as Navar Gill calls it, came with both increased visibility

as well as the success of Obergefell V Hodges, which legalized same sex marriage across the United States. Representation on television screens was way past due, resulting in just as much queerbaiting – using hints of queer representation to bring audiences in, only to reveal the representation was never there – as there were real, multidimensional queer characters on screen. Worse was the Bury Your Gays trope across all mediums plus identities, a unfair strategy for queer characters to be visible for minutes, then die in moments. Such was an old trope used since the 1800s in literature and in modern television to punish characters for queer identities; early literature like Oscar Wilde’s *Portrait of Dorian Grey* or Anderson’s *The Little Mermaid* could talk about their experiences as gay men through skirting censorship. Moreover, 1990s television staples like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* made the Bury Your Gays a household name. Simply put, these characters ended up being either irrelevant or plot devices more than people. For a community born out of activism creating survival + acceptance, queer fans’ move towards a higher level of participatory culture is not only unsurprising, it’s expected. Participatory culture thrives even more when boosting marginalized groups, therefore, the action carries into broader calls for change. That call brewed going into the 2016 to 17 season.

This brings us to one show in particular: *The 100*. Airing on the CW starting in March 2014, researcher Kira Deshler describes the show like this:

The show takes place in a dystopian future where the earth has been destroyed by nuclear warfare, and the remaining survivors have been living aboard a space shuttle called the

Ark ever since. After three generations of living in space, the leaders of the Ark decide it’s safe enough to send down a few people to see if the earth is habitable once again.

They choose to send 100 juvenile delinquents down to the ground, among them the show's main protagonist, 18 year old Clarke Griffin (Deshler 35).

After trials (aka the first season of the show) of learning how to survive, the group learns that they were never alone in episode 6 of the second season; in fact, hundreds of those known as Grounders have been living there the whole time, led by solemn Commander Lexa. Most of the show's third season delves into the new dynamic these groups must face, Clarke with Lexa in particular. Unlike previous representations of sapphic women on television, the main plotlines of both are in fact not their sexualities; rather the focus is on the ongoing survival needs, with the attempts to forge an alliance. However, their budding relationship is just as much treated with respect, given equal screen time to any of the other romantic plotlines that came before. Moreover, what started as justified fears of queerbaiting became genuine signs of flirting between the women, a confirmed past girlfriend of Lexa's, plus hints of more to come from the show's stars. Things were truly looking up for fans, who were excited to finally have something to celebrate.

That is, until the night of March 3, 2016, when the latest episode of season 3 was to air. The night started joyously, as the couple termed Clexa by the fans– a “ship” name made from the combination of the two women's names – finally shared their first kiss. Minutes later, after finally figuring out a way to unite the two groups the women lead, the scene jumps to the two in bed together, another huge moment for fans. That night started with enthusiasm across Twitter, finally feeling, as Deshler explains, that showrunners had gotten something correct.

Exactly one minute later, after Clarke is left alone to be attacked by Lexa's trusted advisor, Lexa literally walks into a bullet meant for her lover, dying in Clarke's arms.

The online response across Twitter, along with Tumblr, very quickly changed in the minutes, hours, the night that followed. Many fans spoke of crying, feeling numb, anger at the show; Deshler speaks briefly on many fan pages receiving anonymous messages from people experiencing suicide ideation, who were fortunately able to get resources from said accounts. By the time the sun rose in the morning, something had shifted. This group of distant fans became a community of mourners.

Campaign One: We Deserve Better

While it is more than true that fans anticipated that more characters would die through *Bury Your Gays*, the fact that it happened to Lexa created a shock wave to the fandom. The grief that followed quickly turned to anger; anger at this happening again, but more importantly, anger at the showrunner Jason Rothenburg for allowing it to happen. Prior to the rise of social media, these emotions would often be scattered off into the real world, shred among close friends then released never to be touched again. Lexa's death, coupled with the fandom on social media, changed something. Deshler accounts for the weeks, then months that followed, "Unexpectedly, queer girl TV fans were able to bond over Lexa's death and the many other reiterations of the *Bury Your Gays* trope, displacing pain from an internal phenomenon to an external and communal one" (Deshler 46). To be placed in a community where hundreds, even thousands, of people like you are feeling what you're feeling is not only validating, it's also a call to action in a way no one would expect.

The immediate aftermath was somewhat contained, with many fans of the show proclaiming their grief in a more public way simply by posting about it, already creating a large effect as more then even more began to join in. Things began to change however, when some

fans began to post the number of days since Lexa's passing, often paired with the hashtags #lgbtfansdeservebetter #wedesevbebetter. As more began to count the days, soon weeks, the more the hashtag became a unified space, a sort of calling card. This moment is when the first major fan campaign of sapphic media was born; "rather than simply reject the show altogether², fans engaged in a united effort to change the discourse about television representation and assert their [need] to not only exist but thrive in the world of fantasy" (Deshler 53). The main two hashtags priorly mentioned became organized fandom websites, made with the purpose of gathering the cause into one place, then to get the hashtag(s) trending as quickly as possible. This already broke a mold that many other fan campaigns had set online. Not only was this campaign designed to make changes to the industry as well as the show, but this use of the single hashtag as a calling card directly went against rules set by Save the Show campaigns, who often would change hashtags week by week to ensure that they were never out of the trending limelight. First, the goal was to create a noticeable reaction, with a show boycott that led to viewership for the episode after Lexa's death to drop from 1.39 million to 1.25 million (Deshler 55).

Simultaneously, the same night came with a Trevor Project³ fundraiser that raised just under \$45,000, as well as the voices of thousands of pages. Users, by the rules of the campaign, were asked to only use the hashtags selected by the community (often the two mentioned prior), never any created by the show's official pages. This was specifically designed to bring attention away from the show, thus furthering the boycott.

As Tumblr users began to move to Twitter to ensure a broader reach, so did a new goal We Deserve Better had in mind: get the attention of *The 100* showrunner Jason Rothenburg.

² Often queer fans would participate in rejection discourse, completely leaving the media in question behind knowing that it no longer serves them/the queer community.

³ The Trevor Project is a nonprofit focused on queer mental health, especially suicide among LGBTQIAP+ teens.

Rothenburg, who had made fans feel excited about Lexa's role in the show, had then taken her away in a second. There are multiple times during the filming of season 3 that the showrunner denied Lexa's death being even a possibility, then proceeded to actively live tweet during the episode's airing to emphasize on the event. Fans' reaction was more than precedent to feel betrayed, thus combining the show boycott with another of his twitter pages. Moreover, those who decided not to boycott did so to directly contact the page with posts asking for an apology, for change, for some sort of remorse.

Only 3 weeks after Lexa's death, Rothenberg appeared alongside other writers, in a panel at Wondercon. In the days prior, those writers had apologized for any involvement in Lexa's death, while others had emphasized (with proof) that they had spoken out against the death, without much they could have done otherwise. Rothenberg, however, had sent out conflicting statements of both apology yet a claim that "given the chance, I wouldn't have changed any of it". Finally, fans waited in their seats for an official public statement. Instead of clarity, fans got minutes of the showrunner stating he had no idea the trope even existed, which the writers had stated was not the case. No other comments were made in the matter.

So, the campaign grew in size, gaining the attention of broadcast news, as well as other fandoms who began to use #LGBTfansdeservebetter to emphasize on the queer characters they had lost both before or during the 2015 to 2016 season, 26 of which were Lesbian or Bisexual women. More importantly for our next section, 5 of them were Black queer women. After months of campaigning, We Deserve Better had become more of a broader community space rather than a fighting space for Clea, so the fansites went inactive by April 2016, while the campaign itself went down in history.

Campaign 1.5: #BlackLGBTDeservetoLive

In June of 2016, only 3 months after Lexa's death, the newest season of Netflix's *Orange is the New Black* ended with the sudden, unexpected death of Poussey Washington. Poussey was not only one of the few Black sapphic characters on screen at the time, let alone a character with an important romantic plot; Poussey was the first queer character to die in the 2016 to 2017 season, not even a week into the season's start. To make matters worse, the showrunners, when asked why Poussey had to die – fans directly pointed to all the facts that We Deserve Better had pointed out – the reply was that her death was designed to teach viewers about the reality of police brutality, in an harmful move that killed a fictional Black queer woman. Black fans were outraged, setting up their own, independent hashtag #BlackLGBTDeservetoLive to emphasize the statistics of Black queer characters falling to the wayside if not dying.

The campaign itself broke many of the 'rules' that We Deserve Better set up. Firstly, the group separated itself from WeDB from day 1, as their objectives were different in the type of queer representation, let alone the shows that they were focused on. Secondly, where WeDB had become a rallying cry for direct change in the shows affected to bring characters back/get apologies, #BlackLGBTDeservetoLive sought out to change the future of Black queer representation by pointing out the complete failures of the representation in the present, whether lacking or dead. The campaign lasted only a short time, living as a one week hashtag spree across Tumblr as well as Twitter starting July 11, 2016, before disappearing from feeds. To this day, little to no evidence of this campaign remains, having only entered this research through a small mention in Deshlar's work on We Deserve Better. It hints at the campaign's failure to reach out to a broader community just as much as the broader community's failure to act on this issue.

Campaign 2: #fightforwynonna

Ironically enough, for a social media campaign that wouldn't start till 3 years after *We Deserve Better* had gone down into history, we actually need to jump back into the moment it was still alive: March 28, 2016. Merely a day after the previously discussed interview at Wondercon, another show that was premiering later that week had an exclusive premiere of its first two episodes for their new fans at the convention. The show's name was *Wynonna Earp*, and much like its companion at the con, it wasn't explicitly queer at first; however, it would soon bring a new wave of sapphic fans to band together once again in a new era of fan campaigning.

The show is as weird to describe as it is to watch, so bear with what I can offer. Airing on Syfy, the series was based on the IDW comic series of the same name. The show's first season follows Wynonna, descendant of the gunslinger Wyatt Earp, returning to her hometown of Purgatory after years of trying to stay away from it. While most in town think she was escaping being part of a family legacy, or her numerous teenage crimes, in reality Wynonna is avoiding the familial responsibility of the Earps: return the resurrected demon forms (Revenants) of Wyatt's original criminal foes to the underworld, done only with Wyatt's enchanted gun, Peacemaker. The responsibility is only broken if all of the Revenants are killed before the Earp dies; no one has been successful thus far. Only the remaining members of Wynonna's family know about this task, a task that took the life of older sister Willa (sort of – a story for another day). Wynonna worries most for younger sister Waverly Earp, who, unlike the reluctant hero, wants to be as involved in breaking the family requirement as possible. Soon, a solemn Detective Xavier Dolls arrives into town after the Revenants end up a bit too public, with Dolls informing

the Earps that he acts as a part of the Black Badge division of the US government⁴, designed to investigate any supernatural threats. The trio teams up throughout the season to kill Revenants.

Oh, did I mention that Wyatt's companion, Doc Holliday, has been trapped in a well for over 100 hundred years without aging, now running around the Ghost River Triangle in love with Wynonna? That's just the first season, as new demons, mysteries, plus romance all brew within the town of Purgatory.

The last piece of the show that I am yet to discuss acts as the reason it's here in the first place. When the audience first meets Waverly Earp, they find an excited, analytical little sister who wants to fight for the cause Wynonna despises; that is, despises almost as much as Waverly's boyfriend, the ridiculous town heir Champ. The young Waverly sees no better in this explicitly silly hockey player of a man; moreover, there's few people other than Champ their age, with most having left town for college, never to return. That remains true until someone does return to town: Nicole Haught, a new deputy looking to make a name for herself. After an infamous first meeting, the two begin to grow closer after Haught almost dies at the hands of a Revenant while on duty. Waverly begins to find that her feelings match the openly gay Nicole's identity, so only one episode later, the two are kissing in Haught's office for audiences to celebrate. It only took 9 episodes for the show to seal the deal with queer fans, especially sapphic fans who had just lost Clexa. With the drive to find something real, showrunner Emily Andrias created Wayhaught as something free from dead lesbian tropes, a promise kept. In the season one finale, Haught is shot by the *very much not dead* Willa Earp, leading to Waverly coming out in the process of asking Wynonna to save her girlfriend. However, Nicole is in fact fine, wearing a

⁴ I will choose, for now, not to discuss my opinions on the media representation of the FBI, police, etc [here in Dolls + Haught], versus the reality of the harms these same groups have waged against Queer Trans People of Color; unfortunately, this is not the point of this thesis.

bulletproof vest in anticipation of something going wrong. In a moment of victory, the tide began to change for fans. The couple would over the next two seasons fall in love, nearly die multiple times, help Wynonna through a surprise pregnancy, propose in the Season 3 finale, then—

Before Nicole could say yes to Waverly's marriage request, the youngest Earp would end up stuck in the Garden of Eden then—! Audience would have to wait till the next season to see what happened next. So the fans waited after that fateful September airdate, then waited, then waited some more. By January, there was no indication that filming of the new season had even begun, let alone had entered any sort of production at all. By February, fans, many of them having gathered together in the spaces that WDB had created before them, began to ask what had happened, if there was any news. On February 21, 2019, Wynonna Earp herself, Melanie Scorfano replied to a fan tweet to state that filming had indeed not begun... she had no idea why. Fans immediately began to pick up on this; what needed an organized front before was simply second nature to fans at this point, thus the newest hashtag was born. #FightforWynonna was trending by that evening, with fans quickly ready to act, to prevent another disaster. Notably, 2018 had brought a huge increase in positive, lasting representation, including Wayhaught. Sapphic character deaths had declined steadily post-Clexa, so the slight possibility that something was starting to go wrong necessarily meant a "fight", to take from the hashtag.

Only a day later, a representative from Syfy reported that there was one 'culprit' to the delay: IDW Studios, in the midst of hiring changes as well as paying back a 'hefty loan' taken out to cover all of its project, was in financial trouble. Simply put, lack of funding for the show was in route to killing it quickly.

Just as importantly, Syfy was as distressed as the fans were, alongside the show's players themselves. Unlike everything that was We Deserve Better, where the people in charge were the

problem, Fight for Wynonna was one of the best examples in the 2018 to 2021 shift to them being part of the solution. These are their jobs at stake, plus with increased number of queer stories being told by queer people⁵, the need to keep these stories on screen becomes deeply personal. So, in lieu of the hashtag already going around, Andras confirmed that a fight was needed to keep the story alive.

That fight came in the form of classic public relations tactics directly approved by IDW, Andras plus the cast: get as many people to talk about the show as possible. If the studio wanted to truly put the funding behind *Earp*, they needed the numbers to prove it would be a worthwhile investment. So therefore the game plan started out like that; with a game plan taking from both past plus present, fans began to tweet, email, even mail nonstop support to IDW, explaining what the show had done for them. With the high number of queer fans in the ranks, what started out as a broad “what has the show done for you?” quickly became a standard “what has the show done for the queer community?” This is a bold go, considering both sci-fi and IDW are smaller companies compared to some of their counterparts. Thus the task of getting fans to rally around the campaign is both a daunting task, yet a true testament to the worth of the success of this campaign later on.

Moreover, the shift from grassroots to full show support truly began when the reach to IDW needed to get bigger. After only about a week of the campaign being alive, a passionate fan named @Lorenzos_world purchased a billboard in Times Square, New York City, publicly explaining the need to support the show. The traction began to pick up almost immediately, with a total of 49 billboards being put up in Times Square alone by March 12, including a single night where Andras, Scorfano, as well as Doc Holliday actor Tim Rozen all bought billboard time to

⁵ Although Andras has not stated her sexual orientation, many writers, showrunners, etc on other shows have been public about how their identities have informed their work.

thank the fans with a new call to action, “Fight Like an Earper”. That took the campaign over the edge into press attention, being covered by numerous entertainment publications across the nation. A 3 week slotted billboard went up in Los Angeles, CA shortly after, which members of the cast took pictures with to boost support. Time then time again, this collaboration within all levels of the fandom lead to quicker, more significant success. The pool got bigger, moving from simply IDW Studios onto the whole of the company as well as streaming partner Netflix who held the release of all seasons.

The battle raged every day for nearly 6 months, 100 billboards in Times Square, until July 2nd, 2019, when IDW announced that production would begin immediately with an expected release date of summer 2020. The community fight continued to advance what We Deserve Better did before by becoming #WinforWynonna, a space of celebration united with the show’s team all throughout. Andras personally thanked fans for their work, then continued to thank them as the filming turned into a real season of the show they all loved. Just as importantly, the fans made sure to thank the very people they had been contacting during the whole campaign, telling IDW that their action would change so many lives.

Then sure enough, 2021 brought the continued change that fans hoped it would. Not only did Wynonna Earp return for a dramatic, strange new season, it all ended with a new milestone in sapphic TV history: the wedding of Waverly to Nicole, a finale event to end all finale events. Again, it is noteworthy that a project that gained infamy through its representation on a small TV network was able to succeed so thoroughly solely due to fan interaction. This attests to the power of fandom online as it is able to fully resurrect a show that almost died due to budgeting.

At the same time, the unfortunate keyword here is finale, as despite the signed contract for both two more seasons, IDW could not later fund the fifth season of *Earp*. A new, revived

#BringWynonnaHome started, trying to find a new service, channel, anything that could house the true final season of the show. There had been quiet pushes from the most loyal fans, along with crew + cast, ever since 2021, though often reserved to Con Earp the past couple years. There was little indication of any success until February 2024, when Andras announced that a 90 minute special on Tubi would begin filming with the entire cast later that month.

Cancel Your Gays: The short joys of 2022

As the world entered the middle of 2022, sapphics across the board were being welcomed to a packed year of content unlike anything seen before. Adaptations of beloved comics, movie revivals, plus indie projects alike all sprung from the ground in dozens, all for audiences to feast on. Moreover, these projects were being, more often than not, honestly advertised as projects with queer characters, a huge step from the misleading tropes of before. Some even were surprises that got fans even more excited to spread the news through word of mouth advertising. However, that unfortunately did not mean that the Kill Your Gays trap has ended; rather it had taken a new form that went beyond watching a queer character die on screen.

One after the other after the other, these shows, all queer with varying levels of critical success, were axed. The shows themselves were getting killed suddenly, without warning.

Among the list that could scan a whole page of this research, three television shows stand out from the crowd not only for their sheer power in the market, but moreover how distinctly different the results of each of their campaigns, despite all existing at the same time.

First in cancellation order, the namesake of this thesis: *First Kill*, which as I discussed earlier, follows the blooming love of vampire plus vampire hunter. The show boasted numerous pieces of representation, Black sapphic women, a healthy depiction of a Black family, a Black

Asian side character, as well as an overwhelming amount of queer joy as opposed to pain. The conflict is the monsters, the struggle between families, not that they're lesbians. The single season *First Kill* had was marked by both overwhelming praise but also critics latching onto its low budget.

Shortly before, the second season of *Warrior Nun* was released: the show follows Ava, who is unwillingly made into the Warrior Nun⁶ by a group of Catholic sisters/assassins trying to stop a demon incarnate from destroying the church from the inside. The show had flown under the radar during its first season, finding new life with Ava's growing flirting with devout, loving Beatrice. The two were never able to confess to one another properly before the second season looked to become the show's last. This end came as a shock after having the best rated second season of a Netflix show up to 2022's end, plus holding a 100% on Rotten Tomatoes upon release.

Lastly, adapted from the popular 1992 film, *A League of their Own* follows the Rockford Peaches, an all women's baseball team fighting to become seen as equals when the league is created while the men fight in the second World War. Behind the scenes, the team deals with the realities of queer players having to stay in the closet, the rejection of Black players from the team, transgender issues of the early 20th century, plus even more regarding women's sports, the Latine community, the list goes on. The show appeared to skyrocket upon release, bringing in fans new as well as old into the story.

⁶ A note: Ava is disabled at the beginning of the show, then suddenly no longer disabled when the Halo artifact is placed into her back, leading to her new role as warrior nun; this trope of suddenly not being disabled has a harmful history within media, thus it needs pointing out.

Three shows, three campaigns, all in the 2022 to 2023 space of time; this seems like a recipe for success; yet, what we have come to discover is that each one has had drastically different endings to their stories, despite all using similar tactics to do their work.

#SaveFirstKill

The immediate reaction from a fanbase was not a surprise considering the reactions that *100* as well as *Earp* received upon their trials. Founding member of the campaign @Princess Kobe noted, “After it was canceled it felt like I had taken a gut punch to the stomach, and I was absolutely devastated. I honestly can’t remember much from that evening because I tried to block it from my memory, but I do remember the fandom having a Twitter Spaces that night and just crying and mourning the loss of yet another [wonderful] sapphic show.” Add onto that the immense amount of positive representation that this show brought, only then will the sheer number of immediate action through grief can be understood.

However, the campaign known as Save First Kill did not begin as organically as its predecessors, or even modern collaborators, did. Again, Kobe:

“I’ve actually been involved in the Save First Kill campaign since the very beginning, which was August 4th, 2022, which was the day our billboard team and discord server launched. However, since that time, the billboard team has evolved into an official campaign and throughout that time we have hosted a multitude of events and activities in order to further the impact of the campaign's message ... However, after the billboard, we decided to take the campaign in our own unique direction and weren’t really influenced by any previous campaigns.”

It's important to note that Kobe is correct; the billboard action outside of Netflix's homebase preceded the campaign, even so far as having nothing to do with a campaign in general. However, despite not being influenced by any prior campaign, *Save First Kill* unknowingly used every tactic that WeDB birthed, which FFW then expanded upon. All that to say, it stands to reason that the online sapphic community that WDB created lives in its foundation, thus most likely inspiring this campaign subconsciously.

In another bout of good timing, the show's end came shortly before the 2022 Clexa Con, another positive result of *We Deserve Better*. The cast of *First Kill* almost became the headliners of the convention overnight, receiving attention that, during an Instagram Live afterwards, stars Imani "Mocha" Lewis + Sarah Catherine Hook said was absolutely important to show how much their show was loved. The space allowed for stars to indirectly advertise the campaign with every gift they talked about, as well as a weekend for fans to discover the campaign in person, building an even stronger sense of community.

Crew endorsements of the campaign came soon afterwards, as well as minor funding of actions done in the name of the show. This campaign took new risks throughout early to mid 2023, forming online chat groups for organizing, as well as watch parties to replace FFW's letter sending efforts.; however, nothing seemed to create any sort of reaction from their streaming service in question. On one hand, the show gained more attention than it ever had before in a positive light, allowing the series to live on in infamy. On the other hand, none of this was actually making a difference, unlike *Fight for Wynonna*.

In June 2023, one year after the show's release to the world, the founding leader/spokesperson of the campaign had to step down due to life responsibilities, passing the torch to Kobe. The summer months were marked by a strange, sudden shift in direction in what I

followed; the website in which all community efforts were held suddenly changed all focus to the WGA + SAG AFTRA strikes, while the twitter page was left in disarray. This left my early research to indicate that the campaign was either dead, or stuck in a stagnant period. As a result of an interview with Kobe, she revealed that a campaign revamp (pun intended by the now First Kill Forever) had occurred, plus, “All statements or tweets from the @SaveFirstKill twitter account or the savefirstkill.com website since June 2023 have no association with our campaign or our mission. I, nor anyone directly associated within our campaign, have any control on what was posted on those pages or accounts, and it is completely separate from anything we are doing.” Simply put, in order to streamline the campaign’s actions moving forward, a new, centralized campaign was needed, with the old website + socials left in the dust. All operations would instead come out of a (currently closed to new members) online group chat.

#SaveWarriorNun

The news of cancellation for *Warrior Nun* came around December of 2022, as Save First Kill reached its first plateau in attention. Compared to the other two campaigns, SWN stuck to its roots from the very start, utilizing a lot of the campaigns before it to try to build a grassroots call to action. A petition was created almost immediately, then spread throughout the immediate community that had already been formed out of the grief of cancellation. Much like We Deserve Better, Save Warrior Nun operated from a place of true fandom in the beginning, born from a place that was tired of being let down by companies who failed to see why positive queer representation was so important. Moreover, many of the fans operating here also were supporters of Save First Kill, if not other campaigns before it. Thus, the combined power of all these people who knew the strategies since day one would create a truly stronger base. What Save First Kill

had in organized action, Save Warrior Nun created in communal spaces through word of mouth (again, much like We Deserve Better *as well as* Fight For Wynonna). Simply put, this campaign blossomed through continued use of community resources, as well as continued access to what WDB created before in their ways of bringing people together.

Once the petition had reached social media attention, the main fan website was created to offer a simple space for campaign communication. Oddly, the website acted as the central location more than the Twitter page connected to it, sending out community calls to continue talking about the show, speaking on its importance, as well as working with crew to lift up their requests for more. Specific rules around the central hashtag were created, asking that a hashtag never be posted in isolation, always with some sort of quote, message, or image to ensure that it would be boosted by the Twitter algorithm in getting more eyes on it. A market survey was created through the website for fans to fill out; as Fight for Wynonna proved, studios react with money when audiences prove that their show(s) had a direct effect on consumers. Simply put, what FFW had to prove through months of continuous demand, SWN could lay out for Netflix in a singular document.

With about a month of organizing under their belt, a billboard placed just outside of Netflix headquarters, plus a full week of action in early January, the campaign soon went silent in February. Anything that came from fans after that month was done independently from their campaign, though still using its hashtag, fighting for its goals. In June 2023, the news finally broke from showrunner Simon Barry: the show was back, directly due to their campaign's efforts. Fans leaped for joy as the news broke out of nowhere, then were surprised even further when Barry updated the public again in August that the show had not technically been renewed, but in fact picked up by a different distributor to become a trilogy of films. In a way, the

campaign was a complete success, having achieved exactly what it set out to do. However, it did not do so as originally intended, with no word from Netflix during the entire ordeal. Consistent strategizing, as well as public attention, seemed to catch the eye of new distributors, leading to success. It didn't matter how much they talked to Netflix, having true community access and boosting led to success in the end.

#MoreThanFour

In March of 2023, as the television season began to draw near its close, *A League of their Own* finally received a renewal... sort of. The second season of the show that had broken records would only be receiving a four episode run, then ending for good. As we understand well by now, fans, crew, plus cast were far from pleased with this news, all were shocked by the breaking of the news as well. A show that they had put life into was being shortened with no further word on why.

In what could be called a true full circle moment in the development of sapphic campaigning on Twitter, showrunner Will Graham saw the community of anger already forming, a community that already united under the show's message of strength + inclusion, then asked them to fight as hard as they could. Simply put for emphasis: the creatives asked for the campaign to begin, wanting to be as involved as they possibly were allowed to be.

An organized, singular hashtag was created, #MoreThanFour, as well as a central community Twitter page where all posts created under said hashtag would be reposted alongside any updates cast or crew would make on the new season's development. Presenting itself accidentally as an opposite to SWN, this campaign, almost isolated its community, didn't allow

for spread of word-of-mouth, and was very relegated to a platform that sometimes is hostile to the very community this show supports.

Moreover, unlike campaigns prior as well as current, money was pooled together in March to have a plane fly across Los Angeles with a banner asking for More than Four (as opposed to the usual billboard, a more ‘permanent’ fixture with more eyes on it); fortunately, the plane flew on March 15th to local as well as online news attention.

Past that day of biggest action, much like some of its contemporaries, the campaign hit a silent period, operating solely on grassroots stamina, trying to continue to build up viewership of show, posts, anything that would prove to Amazon that the show was worth making longer.

By summer, the work seemed to be failing, though with some hope left. The deal was signed that the shortened season would remain only the four episodes, leaving fans grateful they at least had something. Objectives shifted by June into bringing some sort of spinoff series, another season, something. In September 2023, with a blame on the SAG-AFTRA strikes of the year, the show was canceled indefinitely, with the season left unfilmed. Graham went on Twitter to thank fans for all their hard work, regardless of the fact that it didn’t pay off, telling them that without their collaboration, hope would have truly been lost. As of writing, no further updates have been made to the campaign.

What We Know: The Success Model

With that being said, by examining all the campaigns, there remains a rocky yet clear success model these campaigns must follow in order to be considered a winner, whether by achieving what they set out to do, maybe even changing the industry in the process.

Firstly, in my November interview with now named First Kill Forever campaign ‘leader’⁷ Princess Kobe explained,

“I think from the very beginning we followed the blueprint of how all successful fan campaigns start, and that was by getting a billboard. If a campaign is able to get financial support from fans around the world in order to get a billboard, then you know that you have an audience that is willing to fight for the show alongside you, which gives you a fighting chance to be successful.”

Prior to said interview, I had been able to track how the campaigns had been born, grew, even influenced those that followed; however, the various results, good or bad, that the campaigns of 2022 to 2023 had been experiencing left me puzzled. Kobe unlocked the first puzzle, providing the billboard throughline I didn’t notice before.

We Deserve Better was indeed a community space with communal effort, so the goal was just as much repair for the community as it was directly getting an apology from Rothenberg, if not more. Monetary support for a billboard came much later after campaign start, with 3 confirmed billboards purchased in May, well after Rothenberg’s statement at Wondercon in March. Yet, the minimal attention they received by the public still was enough to bring more to the broader WeDB community. Similarly, First Kill Forever, as well as Save Warrior Nun, maximized the tactic of focused billboards outside the Netflix offices, ensuring that their target audience [the producers at Netflix] would be the eyes to see their call to action.

Alternatively, Fight for Wynonna took a different approach to getting key players’ eyes on the campaign; quantity, numbers means everything, so with the help of the first 7 billboards in

⁷ In said interview, Kobe states, “I’ve also taken on more of a leadership role, but I would never call myself the main leader of the campaign because we operate as a team, everything we do, we do together.”

one of the most famous places in the nation, the reasoning is to not quit while you're ahead. The 100 billboards that followed matched exactly what the campaign was asked to do, to prove that there was a large enough audience that cared about *Wynonna Earp*, that wanted to see more. Every dollar spent was another piece of proof that people would place time + money behind bringing the show back, so IDW followed suit. Simple as that.

Secondly, the overall campaign tactic needs to be housed in a central community space, most likely a fan website in the history we have looked at today. We Deserve Better wouldn't have had the impact it still has on how queer people interact online if not for the central website for everyone together, discuss how things are progressing, connect with one another, the list goes on. Simply put, I wouldn't even know as much as I do for this study if not for fan websites. Fight for Wynonna became a news site in itself during the campaign's biggest moments, cataloging exactly what was happening in the Earper community at large, even after the campaign's success. In turn, by being the most up to date place, fans could truly work on their feet to ensure that the campaign ran quickly, smoothly, + without fail. Moreover, regardless of the fact that the website didn't offer much on top of the social media pages being used, Save Warrior Nun wouldn't have had the success it did without the communication model it offered.

Many of these campaigns utilized a new mixture of social media tactics like use of ever changing hashtags, word of mouth discussion, etc with older models of fan campaigning, like phone calls to producers or the previously mentioned billboards. By combining these, especially among Save Warrior Nun more recently [knowing that these tactics had worked for their predecessors], each campaign maximized the reach they had to albeit guarantee that attention would be paid to them, especially at the size that campaigns like WDB + FFW would grow to. By that time, these campaigns would gain the final requirement of the success model through the

attention of mainstream journalism, who would discuss the campaign in an objective existence story at the minimum. New eyes would see the campaign for the first time, or even the show, thus allowing the effort to gain more followers in the process. Moreover, if the campaign targets hadn't heard before, they certainly would once it's on their TV screens in the morning.

What We Know: Alternatively, the Model for Failure

So, the flip side presents itself quite clearly. It's important to realize what does not work and what prevents success?

As we saw early, when cast and/or crew were directly involved in the creation, maintenance, or strategic planning for the campaign then success tended to follow. For a variety of reasons, that involvement may not be necessary for a successful campaign. We Deserve Better not only had little to no show connection, albeit on purpose for the sake of the campaign, but still inspired massive communal success. Moreover, campaigns like MoreThanFour literally were flagshipged by Graham, the entire cast, and more, yet failed to the level it did simply because Amazon didn't care to listen. Even First Kill Forever sits stagnant despite show support across the board.

Secondly, a campaign fails when the community does not engage with a wide variety of platforms, or worse, sits relegated to one social platform. Note how when stuck in just one service like #BlackLGBTDeservetoLive or More Than Four, the campaign indirectly shuts out numerous numbers of fans who could have helped the campaign towards success, but were instead distanced by not being able to participate in the one community area. First Kill Forever appears to be planting seeds of this as well, as their central hub of communication is a group chat made back during the creation of Save First Kill, a group chat that I am unable to find/access.

The Future of Queer Fandom Campaigns

With the SAG AFTRA as well as the Writer's strikes now over, with production on new movies + shows now in full swing, we enter another set of TV seasons where new queer media will be introduced. Just as likely, considering the track record, is a continued trend of cancellations, although this is something I far from want to see. For that reason, we as fans, creatives, whoever need to learn from those like us who fought to keep our lives on the small screen. The past seven years is a testament to the power the queer fan community has at large, let alone online spaces in isolation. It's communities like these that change the way representation is written, that create space for queer creatives to become showrunners, head writers, to tell their stories. We need to utilize the power of a billboard, targeted to capture attention. We need to gather a community from as many places as we can, spread as many voices as possible, as well as capture as much attention as we can. That is how our message of love, representation, true queer joy spreads, through the telling of what these pieces of media mean to us. If we lose that drive, that hope, we lose.

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