

Queer fans and the fight against “Cancel Your Gays” (Jan. 17, 2023, News is Out)



Queer fans are often finding themselves fighting to save their favorite shows. Photo: Canva/mrdoggs

Does this scenario sound familiar? You hear about a show with LGBTQ+ representation, binge-watch it and become a fan, only to have the show unceremoniously canceled after a season or two. This is a reality now for many queer television fans, primarily queer women, who have been watching their favorite shows disappear, some with a bang, but more often than not, a whimper.

Adding to the frustration of fans who spend time and money to support their shows is a lack of information about why their favorite shows were canceled. Streaming companies don't share much data on viewership, so while the support from fans on social media can be loud and proud, the reality of what's happening behind the scenes is often a mystery, [even to the people making the shows](#).

There are many factors that go into why a show is canceled—budgets, ratings, how a show could do internationally. However, none of these reasons work as a balm for the millions of queer fans who have spent countless hours supporting shows that help them truly feel seen. When you see yourself reflected in a way you haven't before, it can be life-changing. It's the power of art, of media. So, what happens when it feels like it's not just the show you love being canceled – you are also being rejected?

“Warrior Nun” fan Pietra, 27, of Brazil echoes what many queer fans are more frequently expressing. “Not only my story wasn’t worth being told but my efforts and demand as a customer was insignificant,” said Pietra.

According to GLAAD’s latest [“Where We Are On TV”](#) report, lesbian representation on streaming networks has decreased for the fifth year, with the 2021-2022 season making up 27% of streaming’s LGBTQ+ characters. Bisexual women characters make up 21% of the year’s streaming LGBTQ+ characters. Lesbian characters on network TV fare better, coming in at 40% of LGBTQ+ characters, with bisexual women at less than 20% of LGBTQ+ characters.

While lesbian and bisexual characters and storylines have increased significantly in the last decade, queer women fans are often left with tragedy as their legacy. While the term [“Bury Your Gays”](#) has been around for years, in 2016, killing off LGBTQ+ characters (often lesbian or bisexual women) in the name of advancing a story or character came to a head. That year, [25 queer women characters were killed](#), sparking outrage from fans and critics alike and bringing more awareness to the harmful trope. While fans now see much less death, they are dealing with another fatal blow: cancellation.

Fans have been referring to 2022 as the year of “Cancel Your Gays” with significant losses of queer women characters on streamers and network shows alike.

In 2022 alone, canceled shows with lesbian or bisexual women leads included “Batwoman” (CW), “Charmed (CW), “Derry Girls” (Netflix), “DC’s Legends of Tomorrow” (CW), “First Kill” (Netflix), “Gentleman Jack” (HBO), “Motherland: Fort Salem” (Freeform), “Warrior Nun” (Netflix) and “The Wilds” (Prime Video). While cancellation is far less bloody, it often has the same negative effect on LGBTQ+ representation and the morale of queer fans.

What’s a fan to do when their favorite show is canceled? Fans fighting back against cancellation is nothing new. Back in 2000, fans of “Roswell” sent [3000 bottles of Tabasco](#) to the WB Network in hopes of renewal. The campaign worked, and “Roswell” held on for another two seasons. Fans of NBC’s “Chuck” went the philanthropic route in 2009, raising \$17,000 for the American Heart Association in the name of their show and persuading “Chuck” sponsor Subway to stick by the series.



“Motherland: Fort Salem” imagines a world where witches serve as the nation’s first line of defense and stars (L) Jessica Sutton, Ashley Nicole Williams and Taylor Hickson. The series was canceled after its third season. Photo: Freeform/Disney Studios

More recently, fans of Freeform’s “Motherland: Fort Salem” launched numerous campaigns including delivering hundreds of balloons to the Hulu headquarters said fan Alicia, of Singapore, who helped organize the campaign along with other dedicated fans. The accompanying note read, “We will continue to fight with storm and fury, until you #SaveMotherlandFortSalem. If you need some convincing, we have left these balloons here... Just in case. Sincerely, The Spree.” Balloons are a calling card of the Spree organization in the series. As of publication, the series that ended in August 2022, has not been picked up by any other networks but fans are still campaigning to save the show.

After [financial issues at IDW Entertainment](#) threatened to derail the fourth season of the very queer “Wynonna Earp,” fans of the show, also known as Earpers, [launched a billboard campaign in 2019](#) to save the beloved SyFy show. Using a company called BigSignMessage, Earpers, like fan account [Nedley’s Office](#), purchased space on digital billboards in Times Square. At \$40 for 30-second spots, fans could send a loud and clear message: they weren’t giving “Wynonna Earp” up without a fight. Eventually, a fourth season happened, giving the “Wynonna Earp” team time to give fans a more satisfying end to the show.

Now fans of other queer-centric shows find themselves in the same position as Earpers, fighting to save the soul of shows that are more than just entertainment – they are a lifeline to positive representation and community. The trend of recent cancellations is troubling. Why are so many shows with queer women not getting time and space to develop, and why do queer fans have to expend time, energy and resources to be heard?

Fans of Netflix’s “First Kill” have been fighting back against the show’s abrupt cancellation in August 2022 after only one season on the streamer. Even though the show made Netflix’s Top 10 list and garnered 30.34 million hours watched, the show was still chopped, much to the surprise of fans who had fallen for the star-crossed lesbian lead characters of Calliope (Imani Lewis) and Juliette (Sarah Catherine Hook).

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Monica monroe

Monica Monroe, 38, of Los Angeles, is one of the forces behind [#SaveFirstKill](#), a fan campaign working to have “First Kill” reinstated or picked up by another network. Monroe was taken with the show and the positive representation she saw. “While watching ‘First Kill,’ I felt seen for the first time in a very long time,” Monroe said. “I see so much of who I am in Calliope and Jules. The further I got into this series, I realized how amazing it would’ve been to have a show like ‘First Kill’ around when I was in high school.”

For the last six months, Monroe and fellow fans have been working daily to reignite interest in “First Kill,” including creating a merchandise line and securing a billboard directly across from Netflix’s headquarters with a personal message to CEO Ted Sarandos.



“First Kill” fans launched a billboard in LA, right across the street from the Netflix headquarters. Photo: Monica Monroe

“While we could continue to do fundraisers and GoFundMe campaigns to further fund our efforts, I wanted this fandom who has worked so hard from day one to have something to take away from this campaign, to physically have something in hand,” she said.

Fans can purchase merch including stickers, shirts, bandanas and clothing. “I’m hoping someone will spot a ‘Save First Kill’ hoodie in the wild, become curious about what it means, and want to help save our show.”

“First Kill” fan and LGBTQ+ ally Liv H., 28, of Oregon, has been active on the #SaveFirstKill front, hosting Twitter Spaces and “First Kill Friday” events where fans could gather to connect and commiserate. For Liv, it’s not just about saving her favorite show but also creating a community of support.

“As I’ve now spent several months in the trenches of trying to save this show, I have met many different folks from all walks of life and they all could relate to at least one character in ‘First Kill.’ I’ve made a great deal of new friends that normally I don’t think I would have had the chance to talk to had it not been for this,” she said.

A more recent Netflix cancellation was for the fan favorite “Warrior Nun,” leaving fans with a brutal cliffhanger after the two queer women leads finally declare their feelings for each other. Fans like Pietra were taken aback by the cancellation just a month after season two dropped.

“I couldn’t believe it,” Pietra said. “I allowed myself to believe that after everything that had happened with sapphic couples/series in 2022, and after all the great work we had put into promoting it and getting people to watch it, that we were going to succeed.”

“I think there was just this genuine collective shock spreading through the fandom.”

Kavisha F.

Kavisha F., 21, of the United Kingdom, wasn’t prepared for the fallout of the show’s cancellation either.

“I think there was just this genuine collective shock spreading through the fandom,” said Kavisha. ‘Warrior Nun’ not being renewed was something that we weren’t necessarily prepared for.”

Kavisha recalls the day fans gathered in Twitter Spaces to comfort each other and were joined by one of the show’s stars, Kristina Tonteri-Young. Tonteri-Young, who plays one-half of the popular queer romance, Avatrice, spent an hour speaking with fans.

“It was exactly the kind of uplifting, genuine, safe space needed by the fandom to grieve, mourn, and celebrate what warrior nun had brought us,” Kavisha said.

The loss of queer shows like “Warrior Nun” impact fans in ways that a typical cancellation may not.

“When the news sunk in, I just felt hollow, hopeless and worthless,” said Pietra.

For Kavisha, the cancellation only emboldened the fandom to fight for the show’s future and the future of queer women-led shows.

“We held on to that season 3 with such iron conviction that has transformed into this passionate, committed outcry. For most people this was never the turning point, this was the last straw.”

“Warrior Nun” fans worldwide have been participating in social media campaigns, starting discords and petitions, reaching out to other networks, even trying to get talk show host Kelly Clarkson to join the cause.

A “Warrior Nun” fan who uses the handle [Jereczko](#), a Polish fan, has become an unofficial statistician for the fandom, gathering real-time information about the fandom’s social media campaigns. Historically shows with fewer than 100,000 tweets in the first 24 hours after cancellation tended not to be saved or picked up elsewhere, so Jereczko was thrilled to see the #SaveWarrirNun tweet campaign reach 340,000 in the same time period.

“It was very optimistic and seeing more and more tweets every day motivated the entire fandom,” Jereczko said. “It is important for the whole campaign.”

An example of one of Jereczko daily tweets, sharing statistics with other fans of “Warrior Nun.”

Knowing that data can be a motivating factor, and in an effort to keep up morale, Jereczko began compiling hourly Twitter info. Jereczko now compiles 10-19 reports a day to keep “Warrior Nun” fans in the loop.

Fans of “A League of Their Own” on Prime Video are dealing with not a cancellation but months of uncertainty which has inspired fans to take things into their own hands while they wait for word on renewal. The show, inspired by the 1992 film and led by queer creators Abbi Jacobson and Will Graham, debuted on the streamer in August 2022 and has yet to be issued a renewal or cancellation. The fan-led team of [ALOTOHomeRun](#) has been running campaigns for “A League of Their Own” for months.



Fans sent out their own “For Your Consideration” PR boxes for “A League of Their Own.” Photo:

[ALOTOHomeRun](#)

“It started with a letter-writing campaign to the heads of Amazon, both based on previous campaigns to get shows renewed and because letter writing was obviously a major form of communication in the 1940s. In addition to the letters, some of us sent baseballs with “RENEW ALOTO” written on them,” the group tweeted back to News is Out.

Concerned with the lack of “For Your Consideration” promotion to critics, fans of “A League of Their Own” took matters into their own hands. They sent out fan-created PR boxes that included swag like tumblers and baseball cards, but also a letter from fans and a booklet that included printouts of the over 100 “Best Of” lists that “A League of Their Own” landed on.

While the future remains uncertain for these shows, dedicated fans are a constant. However, will fans want to show up for future series with queer representation if there is the fear that another thing they love will be taken away from them?

“Warrior Nun” fan Olyvia Freeman, 35, of Connecticut, sums up what a lot of fans are feeling. “Honestly I’m scared to invest in a new show with queer characters,” Freeman said. “I mean, ima watch it. Sadly not hopeful.”