

“There’s No Such Thing as Too Many Books”:

How Exclusive Editions of Books Cause FOMO in the YA Community

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at how identities within the YA community are established and maintained through the affirmational practice of collecting, and how discussions about YA on social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube stem from social aspects of collecting. In addition, this article also examines the negative aspects of collecting. The rising popularity of YA book subscription boxes and Advanced Reader Copies highlights the increasing demand from collectors for limited, exclusive editions of novels. Fear of missing out is a significant driving force behind compulsive collecting habits within the YA community. This fear is exacerbated by the way in which some YA fans grant ‘authority’ to those who build the biggest collections and perceive large collections as a symbol of devotion to a particular author or series. Drawing upon a mixture of ethnographic experiences, analysis of social media posts, and Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, this article argues that collecting can be a positive way of bringing YA fans together on an international basis, while also unintentionally creating barriers for entry which may exclude others from the YA community.

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2020, UK YA subscription box FairyLoot announced they were selling signed, exclusive editions of American author S.A. Chakraborty's *Daevabad* trilogy (2017-2020). These editions were unique to FairyLoot and featured several design changes that made them highly collectible to many YA book collectors, including a signature from the author, unique endpapers, a "darker and more dramatic" design for the book jackets, artwork on the inside of the jackets, and stencil designs sprayed onto the edges of the pages to create a mosaic pattern (Sammer n.p.). Due to low stock and the unprecedented popularity of the series, FairyLoot sold out of the editions in under 20 minutes, leading to disappointed fans critiquing the company and sale on social media (FairyLoot, "*Daevabad* Sales Update"). Many complaints came from fans who claimed that the sale was unfair as emails containing a password to access the sale did not go out to all fans at the same time, and website crashes and slow loading pages prevented some individuals from being able to purchase the set before it sold out. One Instagram comment, left by user @thee_princess_of_books, lamented the fact that she had subscribed to FairyLoot to access the sale early, and that she had set her alarm for 05:00 to correspond with the UK sale, only to be unsuccessful, demonstrating the popularity of the special editions of Chakraborty's series and the lengths fans will go to in obtaining them (FairyLoot, "*Daevabad* Sales Update").

Although the *Daevabad* sale is only one example, it nevertheless highlights the increasing – and sometimes extreme – demand for limited, exclusive editions of novels by fans who wish to collect such products. Collecting may be a solitary practice, as the collector seeks to fill their living space with items that bring them joy, or chooses to collect for economic investment. YA book collecting has also shifted beyond being a solitary practice, serving as a nexus between likeminded fans. These connections are made even more possible by the rise of in-person events such as BookCon in New York, or Yall Fest in South Carolina, which seek to bring readers together to celebrate and promote YA books. Social media also has a significant impact of what Benedict Anderson calls an "imagined community" of YA readers (6). This imagined community typically encompasses all YA readers who wish to connect with other fans to discuss their shared enthusiasm for YA books. Under the umbrella term of YA community, there are also distinct sub-communities of fans that may form depending on specific tastes, personal identities, and social media platforms. These groups have their own hierarchies, behaviours, and tastes, and yet they all share an enthusiasm for YA literature. This article will primarily focus on two sub-communities underneath the larger umbrella of the YA community: content creators and book collectors.

In many ways, the networking and formation of an "imagined community" can be regarded as a positive development. Henry Jenkins suggests that fandom communities actively share and exchange knowledge, creating a sort of collective intelligence around an

object of fandom (*Textual Poachers* 139). This exchange of knowledge is visible through the discussions generated by YA fans. Additionally, the YA community fosters creativity through content production on sites such as YouTube, bringing people together on an international basis. To some extent, this concept of a YA community is rather utopian, suggesting access is permitted to anyone who shares a love of reading YA literature. Yet the rising visibility of large and valuable book collections and their importance within the YA community has led to some fans feeling pressured to maintain collections of their own in order to assert their social standing and identity within that community.¹ This article argues that fear of missing out (FOMO) is a significant factor behind YA book and merchandise collecting, and that it has an impact on both the promotion of YA texts, and the delineations between in-group and out-group dynamics within the YA community.

FOMO is defined as a psychological state of “pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent” (Przybylski et al. 1841). Popular social networking sites such as Instagram, which place emphasis on aesthetics, are frequently highlighted by scholars as exacerbating the rise of FOMO due to a photographer’s ability to mediate the image they present to the world, either through editing software such as Photoshop, or merely by deciding what should and should not be documented on their channel. YouTube, while offering more opportunities for discussion, also places significant value on aesthetics, particularly within the YA community. YA YouTube videos typically feature the content creator holding up copies of books. Many content creators will record their videos in a place they deem aesthetically pleasing, usually either in front of carefully curated bookshelves, which can be used to display a creator’s favourite texts, or in a ‘cosy’ space that they might choose to read in, outside of filming.

This focus on aesthetics can create issues of self-esteem and heightened anxiety. Amy Gonzales and Jeffrey Hancock contend that people tend to selectively convey the more positive and favourable aspects of themselves and their lives (79). Consequently, this can lead to viewers comparing themselves and their lives to the images they see on Instagram, without understanding the context of the image itself, and coming to the perception that the photographer is happier and more satisfied with their life than the viewer. As such, the viewer may attempt to emulate a lifestyle or aesthetic they find appealing on Instagram and may also experience higher dissatisfaction in their own lives. Adolescents, in particular, may experience FOMO due to their heightened use of social media, and their potential lack of real-world experience to compare to images on social media platforms.

Since adolescents are the intended audience of YA novels, it is unsurprising that the publishing industry and content creators have shifted their attention to social media sites

1 In this article, ‘valuable’ is used to refer to collections that contain hard-to-obtain and rare novels such as Advanced Reader Copies and subscription box exclusive editions. These books are likely to have a high resale value to other YA collectors, but are not necessarily of significant monetary value outside of the YA community.

such as Instagram and YouTube in order to connect with fans and create networks of YA audiences. At the same time, the promotion of YA content and discussions on platforms that frequently celebrate large and valuable book collections and emphasise the “aesthetics and visibility” (Lo 614) of books has led to the increased commodification of YA and, arguably, mounting pressure for some readers to emulate others in order to create a space for themselves within the YA community.

Fear as a motivation for collecting it is often regarded by scholars as “terror management”, meaning that “people are motivated to participate in culturally approved activity in order to ward off the awareness of their own mortality” (McIntosh and Schmeichel 87). This idea of terror management does not appear to fit with the practice of collecting YA novels and merchandise. YA literature has often been dismissed as ephemeral popular fiction by critics such as the late Harold Bloom and by the larger publishing industry which often positions YA as akin to children’s books, infantilising it in the process. While this may change over time, there are relatively few novels or series that could be obtained by collectors that might – in the distant future – be regarded as worthy of a museum exhibition or of passing down as a valuable family heirloom. In contrast to terror management, fear of missing out has received very little attention in the academic fields of fandom studies and collecting.

Addressing this critical lacuna, this article argues that FOMO has a significant impact on both the YA community, and on the way in which the publishing industry markets and promotes YA literature. To examine the effects of FOMO, this discussion will be divided into four sections. The first section will analyse how content creators on YouTube are elevated to the status of tastemakers within the YA community due to their ability to appear passionate about YA through their access to Advanced Reader Copies (ARCs). ARCs are circulated by publishers prior to a novel’s official publication, with the intention of generating reviews, excitement, and attention leading up to the release date. These books are free and are distributed in three ways: competitions; physical book events such as conventions or publishing parties; and through publishers sending ARCs to content creators to review. The scarcity of ARCs of books by popular authors, in particular, has led to members of the YA community valuing these editions as treasured collector’s items. Furthermore, content creators are able to read a book ahead of its publication, affording them knowledge that can be used to influence others’ perceptions of the novel prior to its release. Consequently, social standing and identities within the YA community are shaped according to access to ARCs. The second section will examine how issues of access may prevent content creators from being able to obtain ARCs. These issues of access include economic and racial barriers to participation, which may further prevent content creators from growing their channel and influence to become tastemakers. The third section will look at how ARCs have developed into desirable collectible items and how this can generate FOMO due to the way that hierarchies within the YA community work. The final section will examine how the

publishing industry and booksellers have capitalised on the YA community's desire to collect books. By looking at the increase in special editions of books, and the rise of book subscription boxes such as FairyLoot, Owlcrate, and Illumicrate, which work with publishing companies to create merchandise and exclusive editions of texts, this section will analyse how the publishing industry uses FOMO to market books. Due to the exclusivity of such novels and their limited availability, collectors may feel pressured to purchase an item which could later become difficult, or perhaps even impossible, to obtain. Those who miss out on items may make compulsive purchasing decisions in the future to avoid further disappointment and a fear of missing out on similar opportunities.²

TASTEMAKING ON BOOKTUBE

YouTube is one of the social media spaces where book collecting has a clear, visible effect on the social hierarchy of the YA community, and where fans may experience FOMO as they encounter content creators with more status within the community. YA content creation on YouTube is by far the most academically discussed area of YA on social media, likely due to the prevalence of YouTube as a social media platform and the visibility of the YA community on the site. This group of content creators are commonly referred to as BookTubers by themselves, their audience, and by scholars. BookTube is an ever-evolving, US-dominated platform, and what constitutes a BookTube video "continues to be collectively defined and refined over time" (Ehret et al. 154). Current trends include: book reviews; 'to be read' videos, where the creator discusses books they anticipate reading soon; bookshelf 'tours', where the creator walks their camera around their shelves to discuss their collection; and 'hauls and wrap ups', where the creator lists what they read and purchased within a month.

The presence of book reviews on YouTube long predates the rise of BookTube. Yet scholars such as Katheryn Perkins maintain that the social media site became a source for communication amongst the YA community in the 2010s, when the first recognised BookTuber Christine Riccio of 'Polandbananasbooks' began to upload videos of her reactions to novels and YA film adaptations (352). In the wake of Riccio's growing popularity, others – mainly white and middle-class – took to the platform and garnered large audiences, including Jesse George, Emma Giordiano, Sasha Alsberg, and Natasha Polis. Although many new BookTubers have begun creating content in recent years, the majority of popular BookTubers began uploading content shortly after Riccio. It is this rise in the popularity of

2 It should be noted that some of the knowledge in this article comes from the author's own experiences as a YA book blogger. While this is not intended to be an ethnographic article, the author's participation in the YA community as a content creator has allowed for a unique insight and understanding of both the community and the relationships that exist between the publishing industry and content creators.

this first wave of BookTube content creators that has made BookTube’s “role as a conduit in marketing and in the publishing landscape [...] more noticeable and significant”, as publishers attempt to capitalise on the word of mouth, grassroots publicity that BookTube offers (Lo 613).

Many of these first wave BookTubers were able to develop close working relationships with publishing companies and YA authors. Due to these relationships, these content creators are elevated to the position of tastemaker and granted ‘semi-celebrity’ status within the community. As Nicole Brinkley astutely notes, “the YA publishing industry made its target audience – its readers, its bloggers, its BookTubers [...] part of its professional network [...] in doing so, they invited readers into industry conversations as equals” (n.p.). These BookTubers have the ability to discuss their opinions about a book to a large audience, get free novels from publishers, attend exclusive events, and even interview popular authors or be invited to appear in YA film adaptations. Furthermore, many of the first wave of BookTubers rarely discuss their careers outside of BookTube, potentially giving viewers the impression that BookTube is their full-time profession. These factors have led to others attempting to emulate popular BookTubers, in the hopes of also reaching this semi-celebrity influencer status within the YA community. Those who are unsuccessful may experience FOMO regarding the opportunities offered to popular BookTubers. Additionally, viewers may feel pressured to keep up with BookTubers’ often extreme reading and purchasing habits out of fear of being excluded from discussions about texts.

One way in which BookTubers are elevated to the status of tastemaker is through their access to ARCs. As previously noted, ARCs are distributed by publishers to reviewers and readers in a variety of ways. While it is possible for non-content creators to gain access to ARCs through competitions and physical events, ARCs are typically reserved for reviewers and booksellers who may have some kind of influence over the sales of the novel. Physical ARCs of an upcoming series that is highly anticipated may also have a very limited circulation to prevent piracy or illegal sales of copies prior to the publication date. For example, in the UK, ARCs of Samantha Shannon’s *Priory of the Orange Tree* (2019), an adult fantasy novel with significant crossover appeal for a YA audience, had a very small circulation, to the extent that Bloomsbury set up a separate email address and request form for those enquiring about ARCs, after they were “inundated with requests” (Bloomsbury Publicity, email to author). For UK reviewers, the only other legitimate way to receive a copy of the book prior to release was to win a copy in a competition. Due to the limited availability of these pre-release copies, those interested in reading reviews were repeatedly directed to the same few content creators who were able to acquire copies, undoubtedly increasing traffic for BookTubers who secured an ARC. As such, those who acquired the ARC were able to influence people’s first impressions of the novel, potentially convincing fans to either purchase the book when it came out or to avoid it.

The scarcity of ARCs of *Priory of the Orange Tree* in the UK is one extreme example. Nevertheless, it demonstrates how some content creators who are consistently able to acquire ARCs of YA novels are elevated to the status of tastemakers. The YA community often looks to sites such as BookTube for “de-professionaliz[ed]” book reviews, ones that come from fellow fans rather than newspapers or professional reviewers (Albrecht 3). According to Katharina Albrecht, content creators “need to become and stay appealing, relevant, creative, keep up with the trends and goings-on in the community and know about new publications” (25). ARCs are one way in which creators can maintain their relevancy, and through this their social position within the YA community. Given that ARCs are usually distributed months before the official publication, the BookTubers with access to them are not only able to keep up with the trends of the community, but are also able to pre-empt them and shape them as tastemakers. If the audience trusts the opinion of the BookTuber, they may revisit their channel in the future, giving the BookTuber an opportunity to continue to communicate their opinions to others. Thus, a continuous stream of ARCs is one way in which a content creator might ensure the growth of their channel, as people seek out their opinions on novels prior to purchasing for themselves.

This influence that a popular content creator gains through receiving ARCs is a form of cultural capital. First used by Pierre Bourdieu in 1984, the theory of cultural capital posits that an individual’s tastes are a marker of their social class, and that these tastes are a product of “upbringing and education” (1-2). For example, a child who is taken to visit art galleries, either by their guardian or school, is more likely to develop a taste for traditional forms and schools of art than a child who has never had a similar opportunity. The theory suggests that cultural capital is treated as an asset. Bourdieu’s research primarily focuses on highbrow arts or forms of art that are at the supposed top of the hierarchy. Nevertheless, it is possible to apply this theory of cultural capital to fandom groups such as the YA community. John Fiske maintains that fans are “active producers and users of cultural capital” and notes that the highly organised structure of fandom “echoes many of the institutions of official culture” such as those Bourdieu discusses in his theory (33). ARCs are cultural capital in the sense that they physically represent a content creator’s relationship with a publishing industry, signalling to fans that the creator is informed and upto date with goings on within the community. Additionally, Bourdieu argues that tastes and habitus are based on a combination of social, cultural, and economic capital (101). This essentially means that those at the top of the social hierarchy, such as content creators, are able to control the habitus of a society or community by deciding what is and is not worth consuming.

Furthermore, the knowledge that a content creator receives from reading an ARC ahead of a novel’s publication is also a form of cultural capital, because it ensures that they know something that their audience, and other content creators, do not. The cultural capital gained from an ARC is therefore translated into higher audience numbers for a content creator, as readers seek to make an informed decision prior to purchase, or merely seek out

the latest news about an upcoming series they are excited to read. Additionally, BookTubers can choose which books are, and are not, featured on their channel, potentially influencing their audience's opinions and knowledge of releases according to their own tastes. The more viewers a channel has, the greater this influence becomes, and the more likely readers are to seek out the opinions of the BookTuber as a trusted source of information. Thus, the ARC is a form of cultural capital because it is an asset that is intended to market both the book itself and the reviewer who promotes it.

Consequently, those without access to ARCs – particularly of popular, highly anticipated novels – may find themselves struggling to remain relevant within the community, as they are considered less influential by readers seeking to pre-order new titles, discover new books, or keep up to date with information about their favourite authors' upcoming releases. While some publishers will contact book reviewers to pitch novels to them for review, most content creators will take the initiative and email a publishing company to request a specific title. Emma Giordiano, a popular BookTuber, explains how to request ARCs in a video entitled "How to Get ARCs: BookTubing 101". This sharing of knowledge is hardly exclusive to Giordiano; a quick search on YouTube for "Advanced Reader Copies" unearths thousands of similar instructional videos. Not all who request ARCs are successful, and rejections for ARC requests can be vague. On the website *Netgalley*, which allows booksellers, educators, and content creators to request e-book ARCs of novels, publishers such as HarperFiction list several reasons why a person may have had their request rejected. These reasons include: a lack of information in a *Netgalley* profile; a reviewer's response feedback being too low; a reviewer requesting from outside of the geographical region; or the publisher reaching the limit on how many copies they can distribute (HarperFiction, email to author). A content creator receiving a rejection for a book they have been anticipating may find the rejection difficult to accept, particularly when other reviewers are making videos where they demonstrate that they have been successful in their request for the same title. BookTubers who have been rejected for a title may experience envy and FOMO directed towards other channels and creators, as they seek to understand the reasons behind their rejection. In doing so, they compare themselves and their content to others who they perceive to be more successful, leading to higher dissatisfaction with their own selves. Furthermore, those without access to ARCs may find themselves excluded from conversations or content regarding the narrative of an unreleased book, owing to the fact that they have not read the book yet. The early distribution of ARCs can lead to discussions that involve 'spoilers' – disseminated summaries or descriptions of plot elements that may reveal aspects of the novel such as plot twists or the conclusion. Therefore, those wishing to avoid spoilers may find themselves retreating from discussions of novels prior to their release, and thus lack the knowledge and cultural capital that others gain from these conversations.

ISSUES OF ACCESS

The exclusivity of ARCs enforces invisible barriers to entry within the YA community and allows some content creators and collectors to gatekeep access to the community. For collectors especially, this gatekeeping is tied to the issues outlined above – primarily the idea that someone who does not own ARCs of particular books cannot be considered as a real fan because they have not tried hard enough to prove their enthusiasm for that series, book, or author. The ability to access ARCs is deliberately limited by publishing industries in order to prevent piracy. Thus, those who are able to access ARCs typically fall into three categories: those who work within the publishing industry, either at publishing houses, or as booksellers; those who are content creators with a large enough platform; and those with the financial capacity to buy or trade ARCs as collector’s items.³

For those trying to obtain ARCs through content creation, there are several key barriers to entry. As explained in the previous section, ARCs are typically distributed to BookTubers with large audiences, meaning those with smaller channels may be overlooked or ignored by publishers. Furthermore, the barriers to channel growth that prevent the formation of these professional relationships can be deeply rooted in inequality. One of the most frequently discussed barriers for channel growth on BookTube is race. In an article on *Huffpost* in 2019, Jolie A. Doggett maintains that it is difficult to find Black BookTubers and suggests that a lack of “exposure and promotion” is one of the main factors in this lack of visibility and, ultimately, channel growth (Doggett n.p.). Christina Marie, a Black BookTuber, concurs, noting that “for the person being introduced to BookTube for the first time, especially if you’re a Black viewer, the first thing that I always say is just be prepared to have to look for yourself” (Marie qtd. in Doggett n.p.). This lack of exposure that Black BookTubers receive on the platform is clearly reflected in subscriber numbers. In 2019, Nai’a Kamehanaokala Perkins, of NayaReadsandSmiles, one of the most popular Black BookTubers, had just over 56,000 subscribers: “not even a fourth of the most popular BookTuber, Christine Riccio [...] who [had] 400,000 subscribers” in 2019 (Doggett n.p.). NayaReadsandSmiles has been active on BookTube since 2014, demonstrating how long her channel has taken to grow. Christine Marie, who has been on BookTube since 2006, had only 8800 subscribers in 2019 (Doggett n.p.). While there are numerous reasons why a BookTuber may be unsuccessful on the platform, including their content, their presentation, and their tastes, it is worth noting that the size of these Black BookTubers’ platforms are representative examples of how the wider Black BookTube community struggles to receive the same kind of exposure and promotion that white BookTubers often enjoy.

3 Booksellers and publishing industry insiders will not be discussed in this article, in part because those who work with YA in a professional capacity do not necessarily fall under the banner of ‘YA fans’.

In a video from 2019, “Being Black on BookTube: A Discussion”, Perkins attempts to address her own experiences within the YA community. She acknowledges that some of the opportunities she has been given, which have led to “exponential growth” in her channel, were not often offered to other Black BookTubers (NayaReadsandSmiles n.p.). These opportunities, such as working with the bookseller Book Outlet, and being invited to panels, allowed Perkins to network and grow her channel through these connections.⁴ Jennifer Baker, a writer, editor, and host of the podcast *Minorities in Publishing*, suggests that book publishers also contribute to this lack of exposure for Black BookTubers, who “aren’t getting access to [review] materials because to publishers, they’re not seen as a viable marketing tool. The industry is not even reaching out to the alternate communities that are available and [is instead] focusing on the large, white dominant ones” (Baker qtd. in Doggett n.p.). Statistics from Lee & Low Books from 2015 suggest that only one percent of book reviewers used by publishing houses identified as Black (Lee & Low et al. n.p.). This suggests that there is a vicious cycle in BookTube that prevents to growth of Black BookTubers, which in turn makes publishing companies reluctant to work alongside Black content creators. Without access to content such as ARCs to boost channels, Black BookTubers are forced to work harder to grow their platforms, meaning there are additional barriers to entry for Black BookTubers that may prevent them being able to participate in the larger YA community.

There are also invisible barriers for entry that restrict people with less disposable income from being successful in the BookTube community, which ultimately prevents channel growth and may exacerbate FOMO. Scholars such as Jenkins suggest that online cultures can be “characterized by their low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement” (*Confronting the Challenges* xi). Yet, as more and more content creators join BookTube, the barriers for entry are frequently raised as expectations on what a content creator should contribute to the YA community shift. One of these economic barriers is the start-up cost incurred by a BookTuber. While it is possible to record footage on a camera phone or laptop webcam, most “big BookTubers have really amazing cameras and lightboxes and don’t just use a webcam and natural light” (Emmmabooks n.p.). Most new BookTubers are not expected to invest heavily in equipment early on in their online careers. However, popular BookTuber Giordiano suggests that those who want their channels to receive views should invest in a “good” camera, as viewers will be more compelled to watch videos where audio is clear and the image is not blurry (Emmmabooks n.p.). This demand for audio and video quality may prevent some aspiring content creators from being able to start and grow their channels, thus creating an economic barrier to BookTube.

These barriers to BookTube may exclude content creators from gaining full entry into the YA community, and may also prevent them gaining channel growth, which ultimately is

4 Perkins severed this relationship with Book Outlet in June, 2020, citing issues regarding the company’s alleged colourism. She alleges that the company had selected her as a representative due to her paler skin, over other Black BookTubers who had darker skin.

likely to cause publishing houses to overlook or ignore smaller channels. In turn, this lack of connection to publishers means that smaller content creators do not receive access to ARCs, which means they may struggle to remain relevant and to grow, as viewers turn towards larger creators for their information. Consequently, there is pressure on content creators to remain relevant and popular by establishing these relationships with publishers and earning ARCs. Those who are unable to do so may experience FOMO, judging their own content harshly, and comparing their channel's growth with others', without realising that other content creators may have received different opportunities or may have privileges which enable their BookTube success.

ARC BOOK COLLECTING

The exclusivity of ARCs has also resulted in the editions being treated as collector's items by many within the YA community. Beyond the cultural capital they afford, there are several other reasons why ARCs are valuable additions to a collection, including: their limited print run; potential errors and changes found in the original editions that have been fixed in final copies; and the difficulty in obtaining them, particularly if the collector is not a content creator, or if the book is highly anticipated. The re-sale of ARCs on sites such as eBay is discouraged. Several YA authors including Jay Kristoff, co-author of the sci-fi novel *Illuminae* (2015), have criticised the practice of re-selling pre-sale copies. In a blog post from 2015, Kristoff argues that the "certain breed of person who heads to [...] book fairs, takes the ARCs that publishers are giving away for free, and despite that they're clearly marked [...] as NOT FOR SALE, then go off and sell them" are not entrepreneurs, but "thieves" ("A Cordial Invitation" n.p.). His reasoning for this frustration stems from the fact that publishers, authors, and booksellers do not make money from the re-sale of ARCs, because the value of these novels is in their ability to promote the author's work. Regardless of authors' disdain for the black-market sales of ARCs, such practices continue to occur at an alarming rate. At the time of writing, a search for 'Advanced Reader Copy' on eBay in the UK brings up 265 search results, many of which are for YA novels. These range from ARCs which have been included in subscription boxes, to copies of Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008), a rarity which is currently listed at £679.22 by one seller ("ARC- The Hunger Games").

Hard to obtain or highly anticipated ARCs are often referred to as 'unicorns' on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter by those hoping to find them. Unicorn status is often at the discretion of the collector; what one YA fan might consider a unicorn may be of less value to another reader. Yet, the majority of ARCs commonly referred to as unicorns are novels by some of the most popular American, English, and Australian YA authors. These authors include Cassandra Clare, Holly Black, Sarah J. Maas, V.E. Schwab, Leigh Bardugo, S.A. Chakraborty, and Jay Kristoff. While owners of these books are discouraged from selling

them, trades for other novels are commonplace on Facebook groups such as “FairyLoot B/S/T”. On these groups, those looking to trade books upload photos of their items, describing any damage, and include either an open request for offers, or a ‘wish list’ of novels and editions they would be willing to trade for.

In one such post from November 2020, a member of the group has uploaded six photographs of ARCs and special editions of novels from book subscription boxes. Accompanying these images is a list of items and editions they would be willing to trade these books for. Images One, Two and Three are of valuable, hard-to-obtain, editions of YA novels, including some unicorns (Santos). These include ARCs of the popular *Daevabad* trilogy and *Priory of the Orange Tree*. For these more valuable editions, the collector is requesting specific books of similar value as trades. For images Four, Five and Six, which the seller deems less valuable as collectible items, the collector is willing to part with books in exchange for merchandise from subscription boxes (Santos). Posts for sought after ARCs and special editions, such as the one described above, often attract a large volume of comments as people attempt to barter and trade for items in their own collection. In some instances, those whose offers are rejected by the original trader may find other collectors commenting on their offer, leading to a separate trade. While these interactions are limited to trades and sales, they demonstrate the network of communication methods amongst collectors in the YA community. Since the sharing of private information is necessary to complete these trades, it is also possible that further, private conversations have taken place amongst traders, making these trades a social activity.

The collection of ARCs plays a significant role in the social interactions of YA community members, and as a result, in the formation of social identities within the community too. Social identity is defined as “the *part* of the individuals’ self-concept that derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group” (Tajfel 255). Numerous studies by scholars such as Jenkins and Cornel Sandvoss have proven that fandom communities aid identity building and self-reflection. Fans will often define themselves as such, incorporating their interests into their identity. For example, fans of *Harry Potter* may describe themselves as ‘Potterheads’, fans of the US musician Taylor Swift may refer to themselves as ‘Swifties’, and fans of the TV show *Star Trek* will frequently call themselves ‘Trekkies’. Such names are a form of social identity formation, since they imply that an individual belongs in a specific fandom community.

Identity construction within these fandom communities, including the YA community, is “largely other-directed and requires interaction and negotiation in its social context” (Seregina and Schouten 107). Fans may seek out or form fandom communities in order to have a safe space in which to explore or celebrate aspects of their identity that may not be expressed in other areas of their lives. Some fans may even reinvent themselves entirely, presenting a mediated version of their identity to others within the community. Identity and status are constantly renegotiated in a fandom space as people compare themselves to others

within the community, and individuals' symbolic capital (capital based on a person's prestige or recognition) fluctuates. As a result, hierarchies naturally emerge within fandom communities as people compare themselves to others and renegotiate their own status within the group. Having a sense of one's place within this hierarchy is vital to identity construction. According to Anastasia Seregina and John W. Schouten, "gained status, or symbolic capital, legitimizes and contextualizes identity construction, alleviating the stress and anxiety associated with identity ambiguity", or the idea of losing the boundary between oneself and others within a community (108). Within the YA community, ARCs are a status symbol, a physical representation of an individual's ability to maintain a relationship with authors and publishers, who are situated at the top of the YA hierarchy. Thus, those without access to ARCs may experience FOMO as they struggle to grapple with their own identity ambiguity and status within the YA community, while others are acknowledged, recognised, and elevated within the same hierarchy.

THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY AND THE MARKETING OF FOMO: "GOTTA COLLECT 'EM ALL"

In recent years, the publishing industry has capitalised on this formation of a YA community and the identities and hierarchies emerging within it. This is in part due to their professional relationship with content creators and the resulting visibility of YA novels on social media platforms that I have already discussed. Marketing manager for Sourcebooks Fire, Beth Oleniczak, suggests that a lot of marketing is shifting to digital spaces: "so much of what we do is digital now; advertising, paid social, influencer promotions, etc. We're always iterating our efforts in order to meet readers where they are" (qtd. in Nee 28). Additionally, publishers are specifically marketing YA books towards collectors in ways which may exacerbate FOMO amongst some fans. We can see this through the ways in which reprinted novels – particularly by popular authors – are growing increasingly more elaborate in terms of design, and through the publishing industry's relationship with subscription book boxes.

Reprints of novels are nothing new. With limited space available in bookshops, books that are not selling or are considered outdated will have a limited shelf-life before going out of print. Yet, trends in publishing can change, and books that have initially received little recognition may become valuable property as author careers develop. It is also worth noting that in bookshops it is all too easy to judge a novel by its cover or spine, due to the sheer number of books in the space and the way they are displayed to show off their covers. This means that the success of a novel often depends on several things: the brand name of the author; the amount of publicity a book receives; and the design of the cover. As Yampbell argues, "reissuing books with new covers is a popular and often successful marketing attempt" that recognises "the necessity of visual appeal to succeed within the difficult arena

of the teenage consumers” (360; 348). Michael Stearns, former editorial director of HarperCollin’s Children’s Books similarly suggests that cover design changes are essential to the sales of a novel, observing that “if a cover has been out there long enough, the eye passes over it as something known [...] if you can change the look and give books bright new packaging, people will look at them anew” (qtd. in Maughan n.p.). Often, this bright new packaging needs to vie for attention with other texts within the YA genre, meaning that publishers frequently attempt to redesign covers in alluring new ways. These have grown increasingly more elaborate as YA has grown as a genre, becoming “more abstract, sensational, unusual, and eye-catching” with designs featuring digital art, metallic jackets and sprayed page edges in order to capture the attention of potential readers (Yampbell 348). Therefore, in the publishing industry this repackaging or branding of previously released novels was initially an attempt to keep older texts in circulation, ensuring the books found new readers through redesigned covers and other elements intended to pique interest.

More recently, however, the publishing industry’s repackaging of texts appears to have found a keen audience – book collectors. Previously, books were mostly reprinted because of renewed interest in an older, backlisted text, and because a publisher felt they could capture new interest in a text based on a new development in an author’s career, such as a TV or film adaptation, a recent award, or an anniversary of a specific novel. However, repackaging seems to be shifting to encompass newly released texts, as well as backlisted novels, likely in order to appeal to book collectors. Many bookshops in the US and UK such as Barnes and Nobles, Waterstones, and online retailer Goldsboro offer exclusive editions of upcoming releases which are only available to purchase from their stores.

These editions may be slightly different to the original cover designs, featuring a blue cover rather than the original purple one, for example, or they may be entirely repackaged with exclusive paratextual features such as stained page edges, patterned endpages, illustrations on the removable dust jacket, foiling on the cover, different artwork on the cover, or an illustration on the book which is commonly referred to as a ‘hidden cover’ due to it only being revealed once the dust jacket is removed. They may also, in some cases, feature bonus content such as letters from characters, removed chapters, or short stories. Often, these novels are available for pre-order months ahead of the publication date, and usually have very limited print runs. They are also, it is worth noting, almost always hardcover editions of the novel. This is significant as paperbacks typically sell more copies. As Yampbell notes, “although the quality and feel of a hardback may lead to its desirability, rising production costs and related cover price increases make hardcovers unaffordable to many” (349). In addition, hardbacks are also competing with e-books. Due to the uniqueness of these store-exclusive editions, some book collectors will not only feel compelled to purchase a hardback edition of a text but may also choose to buy multiple copies of the same book from different stores in order to collect all the editions.

A recent example of this is US author Cassandra Clare's latest series, *The Last Hours* (2020-present). The first novel in the series, *Chain of Gold* (2020) was initially released in North America as a hardback and marketed as a "collector's first edition" (front cover). Although not store specific, this collector's edition featured an exclusive bonus short story and art featuring the main characters, and was only available "while supplies last" ("Everything You Need to Know..." n.p.). This limited window of opportunity may have compelled collectors to purchase quickly in order to secure their copy of the novel, or risk it selling out. Furthermore, Waterstones in the UK simultaneously offered their own exclusive collector's edition of the same novel, which boasted a "stunning foil cover design, beautiful salmon endpapers" and the same bonus chapter and art ("The Last Hours..."). US BookTuber Giordiano showcases various editions on her shelves, which are visible in many of her videos, including an ARC of the novel and the Waterstones exclusive edition. Like Giordiano, many fans will have purchased multiple copies of the same book in order to collect the different editions and to show their appreciation and dedication to the author and her work.

Similarly, in 2017, Hodder and Stoughton published *Caraval*, a YA fantasy from debut author Stephanie Garber. The UK hardback editions featured hidden covers, with four 'standard' hidden covers depicting symbols from the novel, and one featuring a top hat image which was exclusive to the UK supermarket, Tesco. Inevitably, these hardback editions have become collector's items, with fans attempting to collect all the editions of the novel. At the time of writing, there are currently eleven special editions of *Caraval*, including the UK hardbacks, subscription box exclusives, Goldsboro exclusives, and paperbacks with different coloured stained edges that could only be purchased at specific UK stores ("Special Editions Are Out of Control" n.p.). While *Caraval* appears to be an exceptional example, given the sheer amount of special editions available, the marketing of the book with multiple hidden covers demonstrates an awareness of the novel as a desirable object amongst collectors.

Book subscription boxes have also gotten involved with exclusive editions of novels, particularly as the amount of subscribers increases.⁵ Subscription boxes have enjoyed a surge of popularity in recent years, and book subscription boxes are no exception. Cratejoy, a marketplace frequently used by companies to launch boxes, currently lists around 170 book boxes using their site to launch and maintain their companies ("Book Subscription Boxes" n.p.).⁶ Not all of the book boxes listed on Cratejoy are YA, and many of the larger boxes such as Illumicrate and FairyLoot in the UK and Owlcrate in the US do not use Cratejoy's services. Book boxes often operate using a monthly subscription model. Many boxes include a book and several items related to the general themes of the book. These items may be of practical or aesthetic value, and commonly relate to a general sense of cosiness that a reader may

5 Many larger subscription boxes such as Illumicrate and FairyLoot have waitlists for subscribers.

6 Figures are not listed via Cratejoy's website. As a result, this figure is taken from the author's count of links provided by Cratejoy on their list of book boxes. Any inaccuracies with this figure are the author's own error.

wish to experience while reading. Common items included in boxes are candles, cushion covers, tea, bookmarks, mugs, and art prints. Some companies also offer book-only options for those who do not want additional goods.

The books included in book subscription boxes are almost always new releases. FairyLoot states on the FAQ section of their website that books which are selected must be published “not more than 5 weeks prior to our monthly shipping dates” to reduce the risk of customers already purchasing the novel featured in their box (FairyLoot “FAQ”). Prior to the sales of boxes, companies will announce some hints as to which book will be included by describing some of the plot of the novel and the themes that it covers. Except for some rare announcements of highly anticipated novels, most boxes will not reveal the title or author of the book, leaving the text a surprise for the customer. Larger boxes may also do ‘special editions’ boxes – one off boxes which are not part of the standard subscription which include a revealed novel, often by a popular YA author. According to an email from Illumicrate, dated 28 July 2021, subscription boxes “usually ask publishers for a list of what they’re publishing, and then we decide from that what we want to read”. Illumicrate specifically attempts to focus on books from “marginalised creators where possible” and UK boxes typically have an agreement with a publisher that only one box will feature a given book in a monthly box, preventing overlap with other boxes (Illumicrate, email to author).

As with bookshops, larger subscription boxes such as FairyLoot are able to redesign and repackage elements of a book in order to make their editions exclusive by working with printers and publishing houses on changes. Again, these can differ significantly from the original hardcover editions of novels. In the FAQ on their website, Illumicrate explains that they “aim to offer an exclusive finish for each book such as sprayed edges or a different cover” (Illumicrate “FAQ”). Due to these exclusive finishes, and the fact that larger subscription companies frequently work with some of the most popular YA authors such as Holly Black, Leigh Bardugo, and V.E. Schwab, the editions of books included in these boxes can be highly sought after by collectors, as they seek out hard to find and valuable editions. Furthermore, while there are some social media groups devoted to attempting to guess the books included in popular boxes, the unknowability of the novels included can lead to additional anxiety and FOMO for consumers as they cannot be certain which novels will be valued collector’s items. There is little academic research on book subscription boxes. What exists is ethnographic research conducted by scholars, many of whom also subscribe to boxes. One scholar, Sabrina Shen, explained how her research interests were inspired by her compulsion to buy boxes and her “incredibly strong impulse to make a purchase so that [she] can own it [herself]” (7-8). ‘Skipping’ a month may mean missing out on a popular book or valuable edition of a novel. Similarly, as the *Daevabad* incident highlights, special editions boxes can sell out quickly, meaning buyers may have to make an impulse decision on whether they wish to make a purchase. Buy/Sell/Trade groups on social media encourage consumers to take calculated risks on boxes, since they enable collectors to sell and trade

unwanted books. Although group members may buy books in these groups, it is impossible to ensure that the desired text is available for purchase, or that the price set by the seller meets the expectations of those seeking that edition. Thus, book boxes use this sense of mystery – and the resultant fear of missing out – to maintain their customer bases.

This FOMO that may emerge with the increase in special editions released through bookshops and subscription boxes can again be linked back to the concept of identity formation within the YA community, and the way in which collectors may reflect aspects of their own personality through what they choose to collect. Many scholars, including Lincoln Geraghty, theorise that collecting is, at its core, about the “formation of the self” both as an individual, and as part of the community (Geraghty 4). Fans often collect texts which hold some significant meaning to them, favouring books that they feel have impacted on their lives, reflect elements of their own identities or idealised identities, or which are written by their favourite authors.

This is particularly worth exploring as authors are becoming “the commodity, the ‘real estate,’ the brand names” (Yampbell 360), with special editions often packaged to reflect these brands. Authors now have social media platforms, and it is easier than ever before for fans to communicate with them. While fan communication with authors has always been possible through written letters and face-to-face interactions, sites such as Twitter and Instagram allow for quick communication and, if desired, a sense of anonymity, allowing fans to form ‘parasocial’ relationships with authors. The term, coined by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl in 1956, is defined as a psychological relationship experienced by an audience in their encounters with performers in the mass media (215). Sadhbh O’Sullivan explains that social media helps to forge these relationships, and suggests that “the potential to form parasocial relationships is like DNA of sites like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube” helped, in part, by the author themselves, who is often trying to grow their ‘follower’ or ‘subscriber’ number by sharing “their thoughts and talks apparently directly to you as an individual” (O’Sullivan n.p.). Parasocial relationships can have a significant effect on fans, who may feel a sense of community with authors and may choose to collect books by them in order to support and celebrate that author’s works. Since it is possible to display these texts via social media, it is also a way for fans to signal to others in their community that they are a fan of this author, creating opportunities for conversation and further connections between readers.

A fan may feel internalised pressure to purchase special editions in order to feel as though they are truly a fan of an author or text. This internalised fear is a form of FOMO, as the reader fears that they will miss out on relationships with other fans within the community and potentially interactions with the authors themselves if they are unable to obtain specific editions of books. Many special editions are signed, giving an additional sense of connection between author and reader. Furthermore, many subscription boxes offer virtual interviews with authors, affording their customers an opportunity to ask a

question directly to the author. Missing out on special editions may also leave some fans believing that they are somehow less of a fan because they do not have as large a collection as other fans, therefore implying that they do not care about the author or text as much as others. Naturally, such fears may lead to impulsive and compulsive decisions to purchase special edition novels in order to assuage these fears and reaffirm one's sense of identity as a fan.

CONCLUSION

The affirmational act of collecting within the YA community has helped individuals to form and shape their own identities as fans. Through their passion for YA, many collectors have become content creators on sites such as Instagram and YouTube. While these individuals may not have turned to social media in order to increase their collections, it is clear that maintaining social media platforms allows content creators access to ARCs, thus enabling them to build their collections. At the same time, the growth of content creators' collections grants authority within the YA community via cultural capital, which in turn allows them to extend their social media channels further. In addition, discussions surrounding collecting have enabled YA fans to create a community online, connecting readers to one another through a mutual interest in reading and obtaining books. While there are many instances such as these where collecting has a positive influence on the YA community, there is a tendency amongst many in the YA community to treat book collections as indicators of cultural capital or to use them to gatekeep the community, leading to some collectors experiencing envy and anxieties over being alienated from the community which may cause compulsive, negative, collecting habits. FOMO is a significant side-effect of this treatment of books as symbols of authority, as collectors and content creators feel pressure to increase and maintain collections of rare and valuable books in order to prove that they truly belong within the community. Book subscription boxes and the growing visibility of ARCs have undoubtedly exacerbated these fears of alienation, granting easy access to exclusive and hard-to-obtain collectible items only to those with enough time and disposable income to acquire them.

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