

We Can Be Gay and Still Save the World

Exegesis

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Introduction

We Can Be Gay and Still Save the World is an exegesis accompanying the creative work *Perfect Weapon*, a New Adult modern-day science fiction novel, the first in a duology. Set broadly within the United States, it follows the main protagonist Angeline Donovan, aka Aella, throughout a very personal and painful transition. Angeline begins as a regular, if somewhat disordered, eighteen-year-old high school student with normal friends and family. However, a shadow agency employ a woman to infiltrate her school and to kidnap Angeline, faking her death, and convince her to join them by threatening said friends and family.

Angeline, now Aella, is physically, mentally and genetically transformed into a superhuman through technology unreleased and unknown of by the public, and is forced to work her way through torturous trials to emerge victorious, and unwilling to return to her previous life. She is placed into a team with her new friends Adam, Meg, Gabriel and TJ, and begins a new secluded life as a contract killer, though she soon begins to doubt her loyalty to the agency she works for, and the morality surrounding herself and her new life.

Through creating *Perfect Weapon*, I aimed to write a compelling and action-filled New Adult novel that examined morality and transhumanism, while normalising queerness and LGBT+ characters to be accepted by a wider audience.

LGBT+/Queer Representation

As a queer youth, I have always strived to see some of the most important parts of myself represented in fiction – my sexuality, my gender identity, and the types of

relationships that I could one day see myself in. Historically there has been a severe lack of popular queer fiction, with the exception of the gay and lesbian pulp fiction movement within the 60s, nearly all media is heteronormative and therefore does not feature queer characters. Though LGBT+ media is becoming more common, and has been within the past decade, the vast majority of that media is centered entirely around the main characters being queer, and little else. While any representation was important within the late 90s and early 2000s as LGBT+ individuals became more accepted in society through media, this form of poor quality representation is currently no longer desired by queer youth, including myself.

When browsing through the Young Adult, Science Fiction and Fantasy shelves within any library or bookstore, the amount of novels with LGBT+ themes or characters is still minimal, and when found, will usually be a story about a character realising their identity, struggling with coming out to friends or family, or delving into one of their first queer relationships. This can be seen throughout all types of popular media such as *Call Me By Your Name* by Andre Aciman, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *But I'm A Cheerleader* (1995), *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens' Agenda* by Becky Albertalli, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Sáenz, and *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* by Emily M. Danforth, to name only a few.

While media like this is incredibly helpful for young closeted LGBT+ youth to see themselves represented and accepted within society, as LGBT+ individuals are beginning to experience less oppression, we strive to see ourselves represented just as much, and within the same ways, as popular heterosexual and cisgender characters: saving the world, taking down a corrupted government, or learning magic, while happening to be queer along the way. Queer youth are “both grateful for the available texts, and wish that there were different texts available” (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2016). Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan also state that media focusing only on LGBT+ identities “ultimately limits the queer potential of texts.”

Some notable exceptions to this are the novels *Half Bad* by Sally Green, *Carry On* by Rainbow Rowell, *City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare, and *The Raven Cycle* by Maggie Stiefvater; along with the television series *The 100* (2014), *Gotham* (2014), and *Killing Eve* (2018), which all contain LGBT+ main characters without having their queer identities be the sole plot or main characteristic.

Within current popular fiction of science fiction and fantasy, it is unquestioned that the main characters are heterosexual, even with little to no evidence to prove one way or the other. Other media will blatantly make their protagonists heterosexual in response to queer fans publicly asking for representation or writing queer fan-fiction, while some media such as *Supernatural* (2005), *BBC Sherlock* (2010), *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016), and *Rizzoli & Isles* (2010) will use queerbaiting - a term that refers to authors and writers heavily implying their characters are LGBT+ to attract a queer audience while never actually having said characters come out, and never intending to elevate the subtext (Honderich, 2019).

This continues to perpetuate the idea that queer characters cannot be brave, or selfless, or heroes, because we are never seen within any of those contexts. We are only, ever, represented as being LGBT+, and nothing else. This is worsened in media where LGBT+ characters do exist outside of their sexuality, and fall victim to the Bury Your Gays trope, wherein the only, or one of the only, queer characters are killed, such as in the films *Atomic Blonde* (2018), *Cloud Atlas* (2012), *Goldfinger* (1964), the television shows *In The Flesh* (2013), and *Person of Interest* (2011), or the novel *Half Lost* by Sally Green. Queer individuals such as myself see ourselves represented as people where our only defining personality trait or purpose is being LGBT+, and in the few occasions where that is put to the wayside in regards to a larger heroic role, we are killed or given an unhappy ending (Wells, 2018).

Though the inclusion of LGBT+ characters and media representation is becoming more common, it is still incredibly important to continue to increase these representative rates, as LGBT+ youth within New Zealand are over-represented in negative wellbeing statistics, with the suicide rate of LGBT+ youth being five times higher than mainstream. Within the 2012 Youth survey of secondary school students carried out by the University of Auckland, it was revealed that almost half of queer youth had seriously contemplated taking their lives (Harris, 2017). Another survey revealed that over half of queer youth in New Zealand had self-harmed, and 41.3% had significant depressive symptoms, which is a significant difference from the rates of their heterosexual counterparts – 23% and 11.4% respectively – which also was an increase from the previous 2001 survey (Lucassen, Clark, Moselen, Robinson & The Adolescent Health Research Group 2014). This is surprising as the amount of LGBT+ literature, especially within the Young Adult genre, has increased within those years. This shows that the need for even more media to normalise queerness is needed in order for LGBT+ individuals to be more accepted within our society. While the general population appears to be more accepting of queer identities, the pervasive culture of heteronormativity that exists within society can lead to LGBT+ individuals still feeling ‘Othered’. The most heteronormative of fiction still remains to be childrens’ media, such as Disney films, where all characters are assumed to be straight or unquestioningly enter heterosexual relationships, despite many of the characters being teenagers or older; for example, take Disney princesses: Snow White, Rapunzel, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Pocahontas, Belle, Jasmine, Ariel – all of them enter heterosexual relationships, and this is never questioned. Critics argue that children need not be exposed to queer identities as it is ‘inappropriate’, which is problematic in itself as said critics associate queer identities with being inherently sexual and deviant, and therefore inappropriate for children.

In a study conducted by Gomillion and Giuliano (2011) in regards to the influence that LGBT+ media had on queer individuals, they wanted to discover how influential media was to the self-realisation of queer identity, the decision to come out, and the comfort levels with LGBT+ identities. Participants stated that watching characters struggle with their queer identities related to them on a deep level, and that having positive role models within media let them know that they were not alone, and inspired them to feel pride about their identities rather than fear or uncertainty. However when these participants were asked about what portrayals of LGBT+ characters they would like to see within future media, some of them said that they would like to see more realistic portrayals of queer individuals, and one participant in particular said that they wanted to see “normal people with normal jobs who just happen to be gay”. There is a clear link between queer media becoming popularised and mainstream, and the mental health of queer individuals in terms of their own acceptance and pride within their queer identities. I myself understand this, as I only realised my own queerness when I was fourteen years old and encountered the couple of Alec and Magnus in Cassandra Clare’s YA series *City of Bones*. This was the first time I had ever seen realistic queer individuals, and a queer couple, depicted positively in media, despite the societal struggles that the two characters go through to be accepted by their families. From that moment I devoured queer literature in the hopes of reading about others like myself and to develop a deeper understanding of my own identity as represented in the world as a whole.

Nearly a decade later I am proud and vocal about my own identity, and I know this is mainly due to the support of my family and the acceptance of my identity within society as a whole. There is another aspect of my sexuality that, however, is not represented often - if at all - in popular media, and I know there is a direct correlation between my confidence in publicly identifying myself as this and the significant lack of representation. Queer is an umbrella term I use to describe my attraction to individuals of any gender, but also my

asexuality, which is a lack of desire or need to be sexually active. Currently I can name only one asexual character in the media, which is Raphael Santiago in the *Shadowhunters* television series. I can say with certainty that the normalisation and acceptance of identities in media, and therefore society as a whole, is absolutely crucial to one's mental health and overall happiness. This is why I believe that having strong queer characters within *Perfect Weapon* is so important, but also to have that be an accepted and unquestioned aspect of the world building, where sexualities are accepted in a way that I dream of in my daily life.

The presence of LGBT+ characters within media is increasing in recent years. GLAAD (2019) surveyed the majority of cable and streaming services throughout the United States and discovered that the number of LGBT+ characters present on screen was raised from 8.8% in the 2017-2018 period, to 10.2% in 2019. However, the desire for cross-genre LGBT+ media is reaching a peak, and my aim with *Perfect Weapon* is to create a majority of diverse characters in regards to sexuality, gender identity, ethnicity and religion, and having that be entirely normalized in the background of the greater overarching story. The main character Angeline/Aella is queer and asexual, as shown by her attraction to Ms Merillier/Stella and Meg, and her multiple statements that she is entirely uninterested in sex. TJ is also asexual, while her other teammate Meg is bisexual, and Gabriel and Rob are both queer transgender males. I also utilize the singular gender-neutral they/them pronoun throughout the novel to refer to certain characters who are non-binary or whose gender is never identified. For people outside of the LGBT+ community, having a single group of individuals or friends with such a vast spectrum of queer identities may seem unrealistic and 'pandering' to queer audiences; however this exact combination of sexualities and gender identities form my own immediate friend group. Adhering to the old adage of 'birds of a feather flock together', I find this also to be true with LGBT+ individuals.

My goal was to have these characters be very overtly and unquestionably LGBT+, while having that remain just one aspect of their personalities in regards to the main story. This is also why I chose to not have a romantic love interest or plotline within my novel, which is relatively rare for a Young/New Adult novel currently, especially one involving LGBT+ characters. Instead I wanted my main characters to form bonds of close friendship and family, while being queer, and allowing themselves to be defined by that instead of romantic attraction to each other.

In addition to LGBT+ characters having little to no story outside of their queerness and/or being killed off, many villainous characters are ‘queer-coded’, a term that Fanlore (2019) defines as characters being given “traits/behaviours to suggest they are not heterosexual/cisgender”, and that “feminine mannerisms and melodramatic attitudes characterize antagonists such as Jafar from *Aladdin* and Scar in the *Lion King* ... by using queerness as a defining feature of large portion of Disney villains, the company fuels childrens’ association of those characteristics with evil figures or immorality”. More examples of queer-coded villains include Ursula from *The Little Mermaid* (1989), HIM from *The Powerpuff Girls* (1998), Hades from *Hercules* (1997), James from *Pokémon* (1997), Raoul Silva from *Skyfall* (2012) and Xerxes from *300* (2006). Although these villains, usually in children’s cartoons, are not confirmed to be LGBT+, they display very obvious characteristics of being so, from Ursula being modelled off the drag queen Divine, to HIM having a feminine voice, high heels and a pink tutu.

I have subverted this trope by having one of the antagonistic characters, Adam, who becomes the main antagonist by the end of the novel, be the only main character who is never explicitly stated as LGBT+, and therefore by society’s current heteronormative assumptions within media, could be identified as heterosexual. Meanwhile the main ‘good’ characters

Aella, Rob, Meg, Gabriel and TJ all have very overt LGBT+ identities that the reader cannot deny. Another layer on top of this is having all members of the team, minus Adam, be a 'minority' identity as represented within most media. Adam, the antagonistic member of the group, is a cisgender heterosexual white male, while the other more empathetic members are not. Aella is asexual, queer and mixed race Irish-Latina, Meg is pansexual and Korean, Gabriel is an Indian bisexual transgender male, and TJ is an asexual aromantic African-American male. Therefore all of my main characters represent a diverse range of sexualities, gender identities and ethnicities.

To further subvert the queer-coded villain trope, I have intentionally made nearly all of the heterosexual men in the novel sexually aggressive towards the female main characters, as many women of colour experience within their lifetimes, especially within the United States (Chadwick & DeBleare, 2019). The first is Matthew Trent, a student at Angeline's school, who fetishizes her due to her unique and 'exotic' appearance being a half-Latina woman; the next is Director Reid, who treats Angeline, along with other assets, as literal objects, and aims for Angeline to understand that he 'owns' her as part of the agency. The next is the bodyguard of Elijah Beck, who wilfully ignores Aella's attempts at rejecting him when he flirts with her, and furthermore sexually harasses her in the concert by grinding aggressively against her when she is unable to get away. The last of these men is Mateo Herrera Cifuentes, the target in Madrid, who slaps Aella on her behind when she asks if she can drive his car.

To an audience who are ethical 'minorities' or female, this will be somewhat of an accurate representation of the struggles that they face within their day-to-day lives. As I intend for this novel to be seen as a New Adult modern science-fiction, not an LGBT+ novel, a wider audience of non-LGBT+ individuals may come to understand the reality of life for

minorities, and/or experience the uncomfortable realisation that a large amount of villainous characters are meant to represent oneself and others one identifies with.

The combination of all of these tropes and subversions is incredibly important to the central aim of the manuscript: to normalise queerness, but to have it almost fall into the background in relation to the main story and plotlines. *Perfect Weapon* contains LGBT+ characters, but is not necessary an LGBT+ fiction work, as none of the main plot points centre wholly around an individual's sexuality or gender identity.

Tone, Transhumanism & Training

Perfect Weapon is intended for two different audiences. The first is that of LGBT+ individuals who are interested in science-fiction and fantasy who wish to see themselves represented within popular fiction that normalizes themselves and their identity. The second audience is the broad New Adult age group, along with individuals who enjoy science-fiction, and modern-day alternate universe science-fiction, who may not necessarily identify as LGBT+. I am also writing *Perfect Weapon* from the perspective of a millennial.

The light-hearted, comedic tone of *Perfect Weapon* could be considered somewhat jarring in contrast to the heavy, morbid and morally-questionable content of the novel. The main characters often react flippantly to serious scenarios that they find themselves in, such as Angeline automatically reverting to sarcasm and pop culture references upon finding herself kidnapped and taken hostage by Merillier. As the novel progresses, the assets all treat their jobs with an almost inappropriate level of humour, creating competitions amongst themselves over who can kill their target in the 'funniest' way, and placing bets on who will accomplish

their mission – murder of a human being – before the others in their team. This is intentional on my part, both as an homage to the author Derek Landy, whose writing style has influenced me greatly, but also due to the context of being written by a millennial, for a millennial audience. Millennials often, if not always, deals with serious and depressing situations with humour that is accepting of the situation at hand but in a comedic way, such as turning something morbid into something light-hearted and funny. Koltun (2018) argues that this is due to millennials growing up within a society that “promised them everything but neglected to deliver”, and that this absurdist sense of humour “provides the millennial generation with a much-needed trivialization of all the stressful factors in their lives ... [the] philosophy encourages disenchanting youth to respond to that which they cannot change with irony, laughter, and a sense of absurdity.” Millennials such as myself have been born into a world with vast problems caused by the older generations that we are unable to change due to how wide-reaching said issues are, such as climate change, unemployment rates, housing crises, and healthcare and education costs (especially within the United States). As a young generation, with the eldest millennials currently being 28-30 years old, these problems are inescapable and mostly impact young adults, but due to being too young to be within positions of power, we are unable to do anything. This has led to a very fatalistic, often inappropriate level of humour in regards to terrible things that we are unable to change, and can only accept, and make light of.

There is a potential for this very specific tone to alienate older audiences of another generation, who may find the characters’ reactions unrealistic or confusing. However as this is a New Adult novel, most of the readers within and around that age category will likely be able to understand the tone.

In addition to the importance of normalizing queerness, one of the central themes of *Perfect Weapon* that I explored was that of transhumanism. The Cambridge Dictionary (2019) defines transhumanism as the belief that “science and technology can help human beings develop beyond what is physically and mentally possible at the present time.” Transhumanism through genetic modification, scientific experiments and technological augmentation is a popular trope and theme within much science-fiction, and I have based my concept of transhumanism in *Perfect Weapon* from media such as *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *Doom* (2005), and the novel series *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld. Within the *Captain America* films, the two main characters gain enhanced senses and abilities via technological experimentation and serums, which are kept secret from the public at large and are used by governments or shadow organizations. In *Doom*, a group of humans living on Mars genetically altered their own DNA by adding an extra chromosome that gave them enhanced abilities such as strength, speed and intelligence. In *Uglies*, everyone in society would undergo surgery at age sixteen to remake their image, but a special government sect of agents known as ‘Specials’ would have extreme surgery such as hollowing out their bones to make them faster and lighter.

Much of this currently exists strictly within the realm of science fiction, but with the recent discovery of CRISPR-Cas9, which is a technology that allows “genetic material to be added, removed or altered at particular locations in the genome” (National Institute of Health, 2019) gene editing is now a reality, and the possibility of creating ‘superhumans’ has become closer to real life than fiction. The discovery of CRISPR-Cas9 and the potential it carries was one of the main influences for *Perfect Weapon* and the surgical processes that the assets go through, though CRISPR-Cas9 itself is not mentioned by name. As stated within *Perfect Weapon*, technology within the novel as a modern day alternate universe of our world is always decades further ahead than the public is led to suggest, and is utilized by shadow

organizations, governments and militaries until it is released to the public when they are believed to be prepared for such advances. In regards to CRISPR-Cas9, the technology would have been discovered in the *Perfect Weapon* universe far earlier than within our own, and therefore is much more advanced and refined than it currently is for us.

Science-fiction as a genre is very much rooted in theoretical science that is likely probable, but not with our current day technology. By using CRISPR technology that is becoming more common knowledge, I wanted to make sure that the basis for this alternate scientific modern day would still be recognisable as parallel to our own universe, but that also the scientific advances within *Perfect Weapon* were not so outlandish as to break the suspension of disbelief of the audience. The aspect of *Perfect Weapon* most likely to do this was the concept of touch telepathy, which allows the assets to communicate large amounts of information instantaneously, and also elevates them from 'regular' members of society. It was important to me that the reader does not immediately dismiss this as entirely implausible and therefore becomes disinterested in the novel. This was how I came up with the concept of the T-921 'Vulcan' gene and the Tactus Region – the idea that tens of thousands of years ago, before humans developed the concept of language, we as a species communicated through touch. This skill became less useful as verbal communication rapidly became more practical, and eventually completely died out within our species, with only a small section of dead neurons within every human brain where the communication used to lie. Therefore only some people, born with the incredibly recessive T-921 gene, would actually have the ability to have this area of the brain reawakened, and would be able to utilise touch telepathy, and could also use this to further their understanding of multiple spoken human languages. The creation of this aspect of *Perfect Weapon* I believe sets it apart from other sci-fi novels that include transhumanism, and is a unique technique that is utilised many times by the characters

throughout the novel, creating interesting challenges and situations for the audience to observe.

As the assets in *Perfect Weapon* are transhuman in nature, I thought it important that as operatives they would be able to do things that regular, highly-trained individuals cannot - both physically and mentally. For this, I researched the physical training and mental conditioning aspects from elite military units around the world as influences for the asset torture and training, such as the United States Navy SEALs, Israel's Shayetet 13, and Spetsnaz operators within multiple post-Soviet countries. The Spetsnaz concentrate on "units that are able to operate independently and with initiative, especially in reconnaissance, diversionary and intelligence roles" (IHS Global Ltd., 2019), though these commandoes do not operate network or assassination missions, and mostly handle politically and operationally complex situations. The Shayetet 13 endure long and comprehensive training in order to acquire a wide range of abilities that make them useful in many military situations, and specialize in "infantry fighting, counter terrorism and guerilla warfare, operational parachuting, and naval assault methods" (Israel Defence Forces, 2019), and it is this training that mostly influenced the respective section within *Perfect Weapon*, along with the popularised and commonly known BUD/S U.S. Navy training.

I combined this with research on psychological conditioning techniques most commonly used by cults to recruit members, such as forced depersonalisation and a lack of self-identity; I also built the agency that recruits Aella based on Hassan's (2012) Behaviour, Information, Thought, and Emotional (BITE) Model of cult mind control. From this model, the agency in *Perfect Weapon* is built upon promoting obedience and dependence, modifying behaviour with rewards and punishments, dictating where and with whom the assets will live, deliberately withholding and distorting information, forbidding the assets to speak with

outsiders, instilling 'Us vs. Them' thinking, changing identities and names of the assets, instilling fear about leaving, and threatening friends and family.

The combination of all of these aspects not only utilize transhumanism, but also transform the main characters into people existing outside of regular society, further ostracising them and their transhuman traits, making it difficult for them to ever reintegrate.

The Question of Morality

As *Perfect Weapon* is a New Adult novel, the time of being within late teens and early twenties are formative years as youth leave high school and enter the 'real world', where wider-reaching implications of their actions are realised. To me during this time the concept of morality, especially in regards to the justification of violence, is incredibly important. I wanted to explore the morality of killing others to save one's self and loved ones, and the justification of that.

Sherman (2017) explores the question of how an honourable individual prepares oneself for battle when the cause of the war itself is not fully embraced. This is reflected in Angeline's position where she must kill to save herself and her family, though she does not agree with contract killing and assassination as a whole, and yet it is to become her sole reason for existence for the rest of her life. As a Buddhist, my personal belief is that violence is never acceptable under any circumstances, unless it is in direct self-defence; I believe that violence does not improve the world or situations, and that it only perpetuates negativity and harm. Yet in Angeline's situation, having to kill to protect herself and her family could be considered self-defence, as she is backed into a corner and forced to choose whether she is willing to kill others as a living to keep herself and her mother safe – she is made to weigh the

lives of her loved ones against the lives of strangers, both innocent and guilty, and must decide which she finds more important.

Sherman (2017) quotes Walzer (1977) with the following statement:

"By and large we don't blame a soldier, even a general, who fights for his own government. He is not the member of a robber band, a wilful wrongdoer, but a loyal and obedient subject and citizen, acting sometimes at great personal risk in a way he thinks is right."

This implies that even though soldiers are the ones to sign up for war, they are not to be blamed for the moral decisions they are forced to make – often culminating in the deaths of others – as they as a single individual are not to be blamed, but rather the organization that requires the use of soldiers in the first place. However, the situation in *Perfect Weapon* is not a war, as there is no open battlefield wherein the targets are made aware of the situation at large, and instead deals with discrete and secretive assassination operations. Though Angeline did not choose to be abducted and turned into a killer, she continues to make the decision throughout the novel to carry out the tasks asked of her, and does not decide to reject them and leave until she has killed a significant swathe of innocent, unaware people. Does this make her complicit and selfish, for choosing the lives of her loved ones over strangers, or is she simply an unfortunate individual stuck between a rock and a hard place, who is only doing what she must out of self-preservation? I want this to be a question for the audience to think over as they read *Perfect Weapon* and Angeline's justifications for what she and her teammates do.

One of the main contexts and settings of *Perfect Weapon*, which is information hidden from both Angeline and the reader, but will become more overt within the sequel, is that of conspiracy theories, and specifically the New World Order. Conspiracy theories are prevalent

both in real life and within multiple mediums of fiction, and the New World Order theory that relates to a shadow government or organization that manipulates the direction of society on a global scale can be seen in media such as the Illuminati in Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*, the Cabal in television series *The Blacklist* (2013) and *The X-Files* (1993), as well as the organization HYDRA within the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and Marvel Comics. These works have taken inspiration from the popular real-life conspiracy theory wherein the world is supposedly being controlled by a New World Order such as the Illuminati or even reptilian aliens, as purported by David Icke in his 1999 book *The Biggest Secret*. The conspiracy states that a shadow organization only known to a select few have complete control over all political, economic and governmental aspects worldwide and affect these things accordingly in order for human society to change and progress as a whole. While Angeline is informed in *Perfect Weapon* that they are a neutral agency that is subcontracted out to the highest bidder, this is in fact a lie told to her, and she will discover this in the sequel when she realises that the agency she worked for was in fact part of a shadow government seeking to shape society in a way that profits themselves at the cost of others.

Though this is not directly mentioned within *Perfect Weapon*, the setup of this conspiracy theory is central for the sequel where the theme will be explored in much more detail.

Relationships

The relationships between my main characters within *Perfect Weapon* are central to the novel, more specifically the relationship between Angeline and her mother Katherine, which was the basis for the novel being created. In 2013 while walking to school I had a sudden idea in my head of what would happen if I knew that the next time I saw my mother

would be the last time I would ever see her. I thought about what I would say, what she would say, and the context in which it could happen. By the time I got to school and to a computer in my first period class I started loosely writing a scene with only dialogue, which in the final thesis became the scene between Angeline and her mother on the hiking trail at the end of act one, chapter four.

The relationship between Angeline and Katherine is nearly entirely based off my own with my mother, with changes made in regards to their personalities and ethnicities. As an only child raised by a young single mother, we developed an incredibly close bond very early on, to the point where we will jokingly refer to our near-identical thought processes as a ‘psychic link’. For Angeline, her mother and that relationship is absolutely central to who she is as a person, and removing that point of stability for her is akin to destroying the foundation upon which her house stands. Though the agency try their best to replicate this familial closeness with her teammates Adam, Gabriel, Meg and TJ, ultimately it is Angeline’s memories of her mother and that tie between them that breaks her conditioning and allows her to leave the agency at the end of *Perfect Weapon*. This is reflected in Meg’s relationship with her mother, who gets shot and killed by Adam, and as a result she immediately breaks free of her conditioning with just a single act despite not showing any outward signs of doubt like Aella throughout the novel. This is because to Angeline and Meg, their ties to their single mothers who raised them is so strong that it is able to overcome anything.

I intend to make a sequel to *Perfect Weapon*, and within that sequel Angeline will be on the run from Adam and the agency with her mother by her side. Many Young Adult and New Adult novels contain dysfunctional family dynamics, especially with teenagers who tend to rebel against their parents or feel disconnected from them, which is reflected in relative media. I wanted to set up a strong connection between Angeline and her mother so that in the sequel to *Perfect Weapon*, their relationship will be somewhat put to the test when Katherine

realises how different her daughter is now, and that despite their unconditional bond, the dynamic between them will forever be changed due to the transformation that Angeline has gone through. I believe that being able to show a direct comparison of Angeline's character before and after said transformation through the lens of her mother will be interesting for the audience, and will also help to push forward one of the main themes of morality.

According to Just (2010) a large percentage of YA fiction include parents who are either absent, neglectful, or irresponsible. For myself personally my mother has always been my closest friend and a source of inspiration and support, and I wanted to reflect this within *Perfect Weapon* to show a teenage and young adult audience that contrary to popular media, it is not always expected to have a dysfunctional relationship with one's parents. I do however somewhat apply this trope with the absence of Angeline's father, Emiliano Reyes, who left when Angeline was young to re-marry in Mexico and have another family, though this was mostly so I could concentrate on the strong bond between Angeline and Katherine.

To me, Angeline and Katherine's relationship is the backbone of *Perfect Weapon*, which bookends the plot on both ends and will continue on to be the main theme of my planned sequel.

Conclusion

The question that I posed for this Masters thesis was whether it was possible to create a New Adult science-fiction genre novel with LGBT+ themes and characters that does not overwhelm the plot, and if it could be enjoyed by non-queer readers. At the end of the writing process of *Perfect Weapon*, I believe that I have accomplished what I set out to do.

I normalised queerness within the universe of *Perfect Weapon* by having characters outwardly speak about their attraction and gender identities without anyone confronting or

questioning them about it in a discriminatory or heteronormative manner. By doing this I allowed the LGBT themes to become a background element to the novel, still being entirely obvious while not obfuscating the main plotline surrounding Angeline and her struggles as she is forced to become a killer to protect herself and her family. I explored themes of transhumanism and morality through character dialogue, Angeline's inner monologue, and the processes through which the main characters go.

Weaving together context and technology grounded in reality and entirely fictional concepts, I believe that I have created a compelling, thought-provoking work that will appeal to queer and millennial audiences with a light-hearted dark sense of humour, and I am very pleased with the result.

I believe that it is so important to get more LGBT and queer media out into a world where it is still dangerous and harmful for individuals to identify as such, and where queer youth and suicide rates are so high. Furthermore, creating fictional universes where homophobia and transphobia do not exist is vital to provide a framework for which, hopefully, our own society will follow. I have a hope that *Perfect Weapon* will start a wave of science fiction and fantasy starring more LGBT+ protagonists and themes, that will lead toward a healthier and more positive future for LGBT+ youth.

I intend to work further on *Perfect Weapon* after I finish the Master of Creative Writing, further developing and editing it, in preparation for submission to publishing agents. I also hope to start writing the sequel to *Perfect Weapon* within the next few years.

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