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Flying Off-Canon: Queer Rewritings of *Top Gun* (1986) and *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022) through Maverick/Iceman Fanfiction on Archive of Our Own

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1. Introduction

Two fighter jets streak across the sky, engines roaring, locked in pursuit during a U.S. military training exercise simulating real combat (*Top Gun*, 00:29:50 – 00:32:45). This high-energy film sequence distills thrill, competitive masculinity, and U.S. military bravado into just a few seconds of screen time. It appears in *Top Gun* (1986), the highest-grossing film in the United States that year (Fleming 77). The film's popularity was such that, thirty-six years later, audiences still flocked to its sequel, *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022), which became the second highest-grossing film of 2022 (Xu 196). However, the *Top Gun* films are more than a commercial success, as they have been discussed for the cultural work they perform, particularly in relation to representations of the U.S. military. This becomes evident when considering the production context of both films: they were produced in close cooperation with the Department of Defense, which supplied financial support, logistical assistance, and access to military resources (Dreyer 74), thereby significantly reducing production costs (Robb 25). In return, filmmakers were required to submit their scripts for Pentagon approval and to adjust content in line with military expectations, a practice that scholars have noted tends to favor positive and sanitized representations of warfare (Robb 25; Martin 4). Within this context, *Top Gun* has been described as presenting the U.S. Navy in a highly favorable light (Suid 496) and as contributing to the rehabilitation of the military's public image after the Vietnam War (Suid 669). In addition, David L. Robb observes that the film's release coincided with increased enlistment interest in the U.S. military (155). *Top Gun: Maverick*, in turn, has similarly been discussed in relation to the promotion of U.S. military power (Loia 714). Within the films' narratives, this favorable framing of the U.S. military is articulated through the portrayal of fighter pilots as heroic and desirable figures. It is most prominently embodied by Maverick, played by Tom Cruise, who is depicted as emotionally disciplined, highly competitive, exceptionally skilled, and romantically successful with women. As influential U.S.-American popular cultural texts, the *Top Gun* films thus participate in the circulation of dominant models of masculinity, military identity, and heteronormative relationships.

At the same time, despite foregrounding militarized masculinity and heteronormative relationship structures, the *Top Gun* films have generated longstanding debates around their homoerotic subtext. This has been most famously parodied in Quentin Tarantino's

monologue in Rory Kelly's 1994 film *Sleep with Me*, which calls attention to the homosexual undertones of *Top Gun*, particularly in the relationship between Maverick and his rival-turned-friend Iceman (Modleski 102). As this thesis suggests, it is precisely this tension between the films' surface-level heteronormativity and their homoerotic undertones that makes the Maverick/Iceman relationship an especially rich pairing for fan reinterpretation.

One prominent practice through which such reinterpretation takes place is fanfiction. Fanfiction is a form of creative writing in which fans draw on characters, settings, and narrative worlds from existing films, television series, or books in order to develop new storylines and perspectives (Mattei et al. 284). In this sense, fanfiction can be understood as a space for fan creativity and engagement with popular media (Jenkins, "Fandom" 19). Platforms such as Archive of Our Own (AO3) have significantly expanded the accessibility and visibility of fanfiction by providing a dedicated online platform for fan-produced texts (Silberstein-Bamford 129). Within these digital environments, fan communities have emerged as spaces in which marginalized sexual identities can be explored, shared, and affirmed (Llewellyn 2348). One prominent way in which such explorations take shape in fanfiction is through slash fanfiction, which refers to texts that depict homoromantic or homosexual relationships (Hazra 109). Fanfiction can thus serve as a visualization of identities that are often excluded or misrepresented in mainstream media (Llewellyn 2352). AO3's tagging system plays a vital role in this process of visualizing queer rewritings, enabling users to signal narrative content and character pairings, while also fulfilling a communicative function that shapes reader engagement and expectations (Silberstein-Bamford 130).

In the case of the *Top Gun* films, Maverick/Iceman fanfictions on AO3 build on the films' homoerotic subtext by reimagining the relationship between Maverick and Iceman as explicitly queer, while remaining situated within the militarized setting of the films. In this way, these fan-created texts rework representations of masculinity, military identity, and relationships from within the *Top Gun* canon rather than rejecting it outright. As a result, such fan practices can open up space for resistant reinterpretations, as fans appropriate and rework existing media texts in ways that question dominant meanings and foreground marginalized perspectives (Reijnders et al. 2). This makes Maverick/Iceman fanfiction a

particularly productive site for examining how reinterpretation can operate from within dominant U.S.-American popular cultural narratives.

However, although both the *Top Gun* films and fanfiction have attracted scholarly attention, the reinterpretation of *Top Gun*'s canon narratives through Maverick/Iceman fanfiction has not yet been examined in detail. In addition, the role of tags on AO3 in framing and signaling such reinterpretations has remained largely unexplored. In response to these gaps, this thesis addresses the following two research questions:

RQ1: How do Maverick/Iceman fanfictions published on Archive of Our Own reinterpret the canon narratives of *Top Gun* (1986) and *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022) as acts of queer resistance by challenging traditional representations of masculinity, military identity, and relationships in U.S.-American popular culture?

RQ2: How do tags in Maverick/Iceman fanfictions on Archive of Our Own frame acts of queer resistance by signaling reinterpretations of *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* within U.S.-American popular cultural narratives?

Guided by these questions, this thesis argues that Maverick/Iceman fanfictions on AO3 reinterpret the *Top Gun* franchise by reworking its representations of masculinity, military identity, and relationships as acts of queer resistance. These reinterpretations foreground queer intimacy, emotional openness, and alternative relational forms while remaining situated within the films' militarized setting, rather than through a rejection of the canon's military framework. This thesis further contends that such acts of queer resistance are already framed at the paratextual level through tagging practices on AO3, which signal the reinterpretation of the films' canon narratives. To examine these processes, the study adopts a close reading approach that analyzes *Top Gun*, *Top Gun: Maverick*, a small corpus of selected Maverick/Iceman fanfictions, and their accompanying tags. By considering both narrative rewritings and paratextual framing, the thesis explores how fan practices rework heteronormative military representations in U.S.-American popular culture.

To develop this argument, the thesis is structured as follows. It first establishes its theoretical foundations by outlining key concepts in fanfiction, AO3, tagging practices, and queer resistance. It then contextualizes the *Top Gun* films within U.S.-American

popular culture by examining the relationship between Hollywood and the U.S. military, with specific attention to the *Top Gun* franchise, as well as the construction of militarized masculinity and the regulation of sexuality within the U.S. military. Building on these foundations, the thesis outlines its close reading approach to canon texts, fanfiction, and tags, before turning to a detailed analysis of *Top Gun*, *Top Gun: Maverick*, selected Maverick/Iceman fanfictions, and their accompanying tags. The subsequent discussion chapter builds on the findings of the preceding analyses by bringing the film and fanfiction readings into dialogue, extending the discussion to the tags accompanying the selected fanfictions, and addressing the limits of this form of queer resistance. The thesis then concludes by synthesizing the findings and outlining directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Foundations: Fan Practices, Queer Theory, and Queer World Building

This chapter establishes the theoretical foundations necessary for the subsequent analysis. It clarifies how fanfiction can be understood as a cultural practice, how Archive of Our Own (AO3) and its tagging system function, and how queer resistance is conceptualized within this study. Such contextualization is essential, as the corpus of this thesis consists of fanfiction hosted on AO3 whose meanings are shaped both by fan practices and by the platform's paratextual features, particularly its tagging system. Moreover, since the central concern of this thesis lies in the articulation of queer resistance, it is necessary to clarify how this concept is understood here and how it can be traced in fan-created texts.

2.1. Fanfiction and Slash Fanfiction

Fanfiction has been described in a variety of ways by fan studies scholars and is sometimes referred to as fan fiction, fanfic, or simply fic within fan communities (Sauro 143). One accessible definition frames it as a form of creative writing in which fans use characters and settings from existing cultural products such as films, books, or television series to develop new storylines, thereby providing an important outlet for fan creativity (Mattei et al. 284). However, fanfiction is not necessarily limited to fictional characters or worlds; while it often builds on such sources, it can also center on well-known public figures such as athletes, celebrities, or politicians (Sauro 143). Fanfiction has also been

defined as fiction written by fans “based on plot lines and characters from either a single source text or else a ‘canon’ of works” (Thomas 1). In her definition of fanfiction, Bronwen Thomas refers to canon, a term that, in fan studies, is frequently set in relation to fanon: canon refers to the events of the original source, which for this thesis are the *Top Gun* films, whereas fanon denotes details and events generated by the fan community that circulate widely within a fandom (Busse and Hellekson 9).

Canon, however, is not a neutral concept. In film and media studies, it has been described as a socially constructed category, tied to cultural power and authority, since some works are remembered as influential and enduring while others fade from attention (Stelmach 138). What becomes canon is the result of ongoing negotiations shaped by factors such as critical reception, institutional recognition, distribution, and popular appeal (Stelmach 138). In fandom practice, on the other hand, the term canon is used in a more straightforward way: it usually refers to the source text that serves as the foundation for writing fanfiction (Goldmann 78). This shared reference point provides what Sheenagh Pugh calls “the knowledge” of canon, built through repeated engagement with the material (26), and sets the boundaries within which fanfiction is written (40). At the same time, as Thomas notes, these boundaries are not absolute, and fan communities may establish additions or reinterpretations that were never part of the canon or even diverge from it (8). When such elements circulate widely, they are treated as fanon (Thomas 9).

The case of *Top Gun* illustrates how this dual perspective operates in practice. On the one hand, the films constitute the canonical source material for the fanfiction examined in this thesis. On the other hand, *Top Gun* has also acquired a broader cultural status: the 1986 film not only achieved immense popularity (Fleming 77) but also influenced public perceptions of the U.S. military (Martin 5), and its lasting relevance led to the production of a sequel decades later. This shows that canon must be understood both as the framework for fan engagement and as a cultural force with ideological implications.

Recognizing this also clarifies the importance of fanon, since fan-created elements develop precisely in response to canonical material, whether by filling perceived gaps, extending its narratives, or reshaping its ideological messages (Sauro 143). In this sense, fanon highlights the collective creativity of fandom, illustrating how fans expand and sometimes contest canonical material (Goldmann 17).

Moreover, this interplay between canon and fanon demonstrates that fanfiction is not simply about repetition but about rewriting, expanding, and sometimes openly contradicting the source material (Reijnders et al. 6). When applied to *Top Gun*, this means that readers approach the characters Maverick and Iceman not only through the lens of the films but also through the layers of interpretation that have accumulated in the fan community. Importantly, as Shannon Sauro notes, fanfiction does more than merely extend or celebrate its sources. It often serves a critical purpose, allowing fans to challenge, rewrite, or correct aspects of the original material that they perceive as problematic or incomplete (Sauro 143). This critical dimension is precisely what makes the study of fanfiction particularly compelling and analytically valuable.

The constant negotiation of fanfiction with its source text also explains why fanfiction is inherently intertextual, as it always retains some connection with the original text (Goldmann 43). This relationship is visualized in figure 1, which illustrates the process of fanfiction production as a network linking the canon, the author, the fan-written text, and its readers (Goldmann 44).

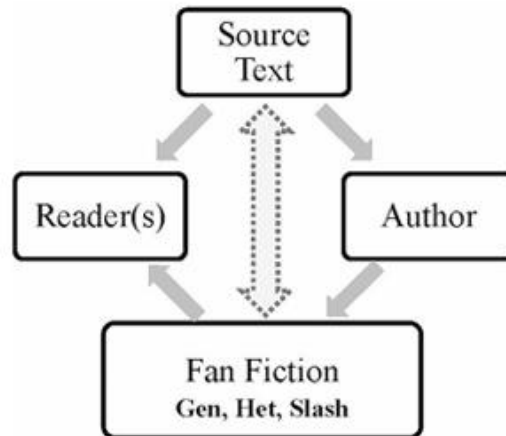


Fig. 1. The Process of the Production of Fan Fiction (Goldmann 44).

The model shows how authors draw elements from the source text, such as pre-existing characters and storylines, transform them into fanfiction, and how readers engage with these stories through their prior knowledge of the canon. In this way, both the creation and reception of fanfiction rely on a shared intertextual framework that shapes meaning within the fandom (Goldmann 43–44).

Within this intertextual framework, Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson identify Gen, Het, and Slash as the “main organizing principles” (10) of fanfiction, which function comparably to genres. According to AO3, Gen is defined as fiction without romantic or sexual relationships, or where such relationships are not central to the narrative, and in practice such works often foreground platonic bonds or everyday experiences. While AO3 and subsequent scholarship generally use only the abbreviation Gen, the definition and its usage in fandom indicate that the term likely derives from the word general. In contrast, Het designates narratives that develop heterosexual couples, whereas Slash refers to those centering on same-sex pairings (Goldmann 17). The practice of writing such stories enables authors to imagine alternative developments that hold particular meaning for them, and this often takes the form of shipping (short for relationshiping), where romantic plotlines are created for the protagonists (Reijnders et al. 6).

Beyond these generic distinctions, Julia Goldmann points out that fanfiction provides opportunities to explore themes that challenge dominant norms. Stories may foreground queer desire, non-normative bodies, or family structures that move beyond heteronormativity, made possible by online environments where authors can express themselves without facing the social consequences that might arise in everyday life (Goldmann 34). Additionally, Goldmann notes that by engaging topics such as sexuality, gender, or relationships, fanfiction creates a space for the discussion of socially conscious or personally relevant issues (44). These discussions are facilitated through the use of pre-existing characters from the source texts, recognizable to all fans (Goldmann 44). Fanfiction authors reimagine them to articulate their views, effectively turning them into mouthpieces of critique (Goldmann 44). Moreover, another defining characteristic of fanfiction communities is their strict non-profit orientation, which marks a clear contrast with commercially distributed media (Goldmann 44). In this sense, fanfiction not only expands storytelling but can also enable resistance, as fans appropriate alternative meanings from media texts to challenge hegemonic ideologies and create spaces for marginalized voices (Reijnders et al. 2). These forms of engagement provide a useful framework for understanding how fan communities engage with and reinterpret texts such as *Top Gun*.

In order to further understand fanfiction as a cultural practice, this thesis draws on Henry Jenkins' concept of participatory culture and his model of textual poaching. Jenkins describes fandom as a space of negotiation, where fans both affirm and transform dominant media texts. Through activities such as writing fanfiction or tagging stories, fans produce alternative readings that challenge dominant ideologies, particularly regarding gender and sexuality (Jenkins, "Fandom" 18–19). These practices align with Stuart Hall's model of reading as negotiation, in which media consumers reinterpret messages in ways that reflect their own social contexts (112). From this perspective, fandom cannot be understood as passive reception but as an active process of appropriation and transformation, in which cultural products are reshaped into new creations such as fanfiction (Reijnders et al. 1). Jenkins conceptualizes such practices as textual poaching, drawing on Michel de Certeau's notion that readers actively seize and repurpose cultural materials rather than consuming them passively (Jenkins, "Textual Poachers" 32).

Building on this notion of textual poaching, Jenkins further identifies fandom as encompassing five interrelated dimensions: a specific mode of reception, distinct interpretive practices, consumer activism, cultural production, and social community ("Fandom" 18). Participation is therefore always collective, since fans not only consume but also circulate, evaluate, and reshape media texts within shared networks of exchange (Jenkins, "Fandom" 23). This participation by fans is sustained because cultural materials are at once fascinating and frustrating: they invite identification but also demand reinterpretation (Jenkins, "Fandom" 16). In this sense, participatory culture transforms media consumption into the production of both alternative texts and new communities (Jenkins, "Textual Poachers" 39). Mélanie Bourdaa further points out that fandoms frequently function as safe spaces where participants rely on each other to articulate and debate social issues that may remain marginalized in other contexts (386).

Having outlined fanfiction as a cultural practice situated within participatory culture, it is now necessary to examine a subcategory central to this thesis. As the analysis focuses on the pairing Maverick/Iceman, an elaboration on slash fanfiction is therefore required. Slash fanfiction refers to stories that focus on same-sex pairings, more precisely on homoromantic or homosexual relationships (Hazra 109). While the term technically describes same-sex pairings in general (Reijnders et al. 6), it has come to be most

commonly associated with homosexual relationships (Hazra 109). A subcategory dedicated to women-loving-women relationships is known as femslash (Goldmann 18).

Slash fanfiction addresses gaps in mainstream culture by questioning heteronormative assumptions. Additionally, it provides audiences with a means of articulating desires and identities excluded from commercial media, while at the same time fostering communities built around shared acts of critical engagement (Reijnders et al. 6). In doing so, slash fanfiction opens up space for a far wider spectrum of relationships and family models (Goldmann 33). Crucially, slash is not simply an imposition of queerness onto heteronormative texts; rather, it builds on the homosocial dynamics of many media texts, which have encouraged the creation of slash fanfiction (Hellekson and Busse 12), as seen in *Top Gun*, whose homoerotic subtext has sparked longstanding debates (Modleski 102). In fact, many writers describe their work as drawing out existing subtexts or filling narrative silences left by the original material (Hellekson and Busse 76). Within such narratives, slash writers often create relationships that promise a form of equality rarely afforded to heterosexual pairings, portraying male/male couples as true equals through their blend of stereotypically masculine and feminine traits (Hellekson and Busse 11–12). Expanding on this, Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith emphasize the fluidity of roles in slash: both partners are shown to move between traits conventionally coded as masculine and those coded as feminine – for example, they may be heroic and sexual yet also vulnerable and altruistic (102). This fluid portrayal disrupts rigid gender hierarchies and contrasts with heterosexual romance, where the woman is typically positioned as weaker (Lamb and Veith 102). Gender roles are more explicitly addressed in Section 3.3. when the concept of hegemonic masculinity and masculinity within the U.S. military is discussed.

Building on this perspective, scholars have interpreted slash as a resistant practice. It unsettles the cultural presumption of heterosexuality by positing homoerotic bonds where audiences are conditioned to assume heteronormativity (Jones 118). Sara Gwenllian Jones further observes that slash continues to be theorized both as resistance and, implicitly, as deviance, a stance that highlights the ongoing reluctance to recognize the presence of queerness in popular culture (128). More broadly, fanfiction constitutes a space of intertextual creativity and critique, where fans negotiate between canon and fanon to challenge dominant norms. Within this, slash fanfiction is especially relevant for

this thesis, as it challenges heteronormativity, with Maverick/Iceman fanfiction developing the canon's queer subtext into explicit narratives.

2.2. Archive of Our Own and Its Tagging System

Archive of Our Own (AO3) is a major fanfiction archive created by the non-profit Organization for Transformative Works, which also maintains the digital fandom encyclopedia Fanlore and the peer-reviewed journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* (Silberstein-Bamford 132). Since its launch in 2008 (Fiesler et al. 2574), the platform has grown rapidly and established itself as a central site for the publication and consumption of fanfiction (Silberstein-Bamford 132). AO3 emerged from frustrations with content removal and policy changes on corporate-owned platforms, leading to the establishment of an archive run by and for fans (Fiesler et al. 2574–2575). Unlike platforms such as Wattpad, LiveJournal, or Tumblr, which host a variety of content types, AO3 was designed exclusively for the publication of fanfiction and quickly outpaced earlier archives such as FanFiction.net, established in 1998, in popularity (Silberstein-Bamford 132). Given this trajectory, AO3 has become a key site for reimagining popular cultural texts, including Hollywood films such as *Top Gun*.

What sets AO3 apart is its functionality, particularly its highly flexible tagging system. Readers consistently highlight tagging as one of the archive's most useful features, contrasting it with other platforms where tags are limited to pre-defined categories or small numbers of descriptors (Silberstein-Bamford 133). On AO3, authors can label their stories across several dimensions, such as rating, archive warnings, fandoms, characters, relationships, and a freeform field for additional tags, allowing detailed specification of genre, tropes, and themes (Silberstein-Bamford 133–134). To visualize this structure, figure 2 provides an example from a *Top Gun* fanfiction on AO3, titled "Take the Long Way" by kerbyfullyloaded, which displays the standardized categories together with the additional tags.

Take the Long Way

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/42934872) at [http://archiveofourown.org/works/42934872](https://archiveofourown.org/works/42934872).

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warnings:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings , No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	Gen , M/M
Fandom:	Top Gun (Movies)
Relationships:	Tom "Iceman" Kazansky/Pete "Maverick" Mitchell , Bradley "Rooster" Bradshaw & Pete "Maverick" Mitchell , Carole Bradshaw & Pete "Maverick" Mitchell , Ron "Slider" Kerner & Pete "Maverick" Mitchell
Characters:	Pete "Maverick" Mitchell , Tom "Iceman" Kazansky , Bradley "Rooster" Bradshaw , Ron "Slider" Kerner , Carole Bradshaw , Bernie "Hondo" Coleman , Jake "Hangman" Seresin , Natasha "Phoenix" Trace , Robert "Bob" Floyd
Additional Tags:	5+1 Things , DADT , Pete "Maverick" Mitchell is a Little Shit, but we (and Ice) love him anyway , Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD , Period-Typical Homophobia , Tom "Iceman" Kazansky Lives , no beta we die like goose , Between Top Gun (1986) and Top Gun: Maverick
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Hold on to me as we go
Stats:	Published: 2022-11-08 Completed: 2022-11-26 Words: 13,781 Chapters: 6/6

Fig. 2. Example of an AO3 header from the *Top Gun* fanfiction “Take the Long Way” by kerbyfullyloaded, showing standardized categories and additional tags; “Take the Long Way”; *Archive of Our Own*, 26 Nov. 2022, archiveofourown.org/works/42934872. Accessed 8 Feb. 2026.

These features make stories more discoverable and give readers considerable control in filtering for or against certain kinds of content (Silberstein-Bamford 135), echoing Genette’s idea of paratext as a threshold where readers can choose whether to proceed or withdraw (Genette 2). In this sense, tags also serve as advance signals of what a reader can expect from a story, sometimes even anticipating key plot elements (Silberstein-Bamford 137). Additionally, AO3 does not ban any genres or forms of fanfiction, thereby enabling writers to freely explore diverse subjects (Silberstein-Bamford 135).

Given these functions of tagging, it is useful to return to Gérard Genette’s concept of paratext, which offers an essential theoretical framework for understanding the role of tags. According to Genette, the paratext functions as a liminal space between the text and the outside world, encompassing elements such as titles, prefaces, and blurbs that guide and influence how readers receive and interpret the work (Genette 2). In online contexts, paratext encompasses multimodal elements such as hashtags or user-generated tags,

which shape how texts are accessed, navigated, and interpreted (Silberstein-Bamford 130). AO3, with its visible and highly elaborated tagging system, demonstrates how Genette's framework can illuminate the ways readers are guided through digital texts.

Furthermore, as Fabienne Silberstein-Bamford highlights, AO3's tags function as more than navigational markers: they operate as interpretive cues that frame expectations, highlight themes, and influence how stories are read (130). Unlike tags on many other platforms, which remain hidden in the background, AO3 foregrounds them as an essential part of textual engagement, encouraging both authors and readers to treat them as communicative devices (Silberstein-Bamford 130). The functions of these tags are diverse; they can serve as warnings, alerting readers to potentially distressing content such as violence or character death, reflecting fandom's ethos of care (Silberstein-Bamford 134). They can also take playful forms, with additional tags often including jokes, disclaimers, or memes such as "no beta, we die like men" (Silberstein-Bamford 135), which refers to fanfiction's peer-editing culture. At the same time, tags capture the conventions of fanfiction genres and tropes, from "Hurt/Comfort" (plots built around injury and subsequent care) and "Domestic Fic" (stories highlighting everyday routines and family life) to "Mpreg" (narratives involving male characters who become pregnant) and "PWP" ("Plot? What Plot?", pieces structured entirely around sexual encounters) (Goldmann 18), each carrying particular narrative expectations. Readers rely on these conventions when selecting stories, making correct tagging crucial for satisfaction; a story mislabeled as slash but focusing on a heterosexual pairing would disappoint those seeking the promised trope (Goldmann 28).

Understanding these conventions, however, requires a degree of insider knowledge, as the effective use and interpretation of tags presupposes familiarity with fanfiction-specific tropes, genres, and formats (Silberstein-Bamford 136). The tagging system therefore relies on this shared cultural knowledge within the fan community, where users develop fluency in a fanfiction-specific vernacular (Silberstein-Bamford 136). For instance, tags such as "drabbles" (very short pieces often exactly 100 words) or "chatfics" (stories written in the style of digital chat exchanges), require insider knowledge to be interpreted correctly (Silberstein-Bamford 137). The same applies to symbols like the

ampersand (&), which indicates friendship rather than a romantic relationship between two characters (Silberstein-Bamford 137).

Furthermore, tags also enable writers to signal reimaginings of canon material. The genre of “fix-it fic” repairs perceived flaws or plot holes in the source text, while the genre of “alternate-universe (AU)” alters major elements or transposes characters into entirely new settings (Sauro 143). Such reconfigurations can involve changes to gender, race, or other fundamental traits (Sauro 143), forming acts of “restorying” (Thomas and Stornaiuolo 314) that assert alternative perspectives and underrepresented voices. By labeling stories in this way, authors use paratextual elements to announce interpretive positions that may challenge or subvert the source material, foregrounding readings, such as queer ones, that might otherwise remain implicit.

Ultimately, AO3’s tagging structure exemplifies how paratext in digital contexts functions as navigation, communication, and interpretation. Tags shape what stories are found and how they are understood, turning metadata into a site of meaning-making that can foreground subversive readings and frame acts of queer resistance. This framework, therefore, is central for analyzing how tags in Maverick/Iceman fanfictions on AO3 signal reinterpretations of the *Top Gun* films within U.S.-American popular cultural narratives.

2.3. Queer Theory and Practices of Queer Resistance in Fanfiction

Queer theory provides the foundation for examining how fanfiction destabilizes dominant cultural narratives by questioning the norms that shape cultural meaning. More specifically, it emphasizes the reinterpretation and deconstruction of dominant power structures (Kirsch 33). David Halperin adds to this understanding by defining queer not as a fixed essence but as “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (62), framing it as a stance of opposition rather than a stable identity. Building on these perspectives, queer resistance can be understood as a practice of cultural reinterpretation, described by Sander De Ridder et al. as a “queering of culture” (198), which seeks to dismantle dominant hierarchies and reveal alternative ways of being.

A pivotal contribution to queer theory, and to subsequent discussions of queer resistance, comes from Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity, developed in her

book *Gender Trouble*. Butler argues that gender is not an innate characteristic but rather a repeated set of social performances that produce the illusion of a stable identity (Butler 173). This perspective challenges essentialist views of masculinity and femininity and helps uncover how gender is regulated, policed, and resisted both in canon texts and in fan reworkings (Stanfill 312). Furthermore, Butler emphasizes that gender cannot be separated from the cultural and political intersections in which it is produced, as it always intersects with race, class, sexuality, and other modalities (6).

To understand how this thesis engages with gender, particularly in terms of how gender norms shape character behavior and relationships, it is therefore necessary to outline Butler's account of the relationship between sex and gender, which provides its definitional basis. Earlier feminist theory often drew on the distinction between sex and gender to challenge biological determinism, with sex understood as biological and gender as the cultural meanings attached to the sexed body (Butler 9–10). Butler, however, shows that sex cannot be treated as a neutral or pre-discursive category. Instead, sex is itself produced through the same cultural and linguistic processes that construct gender. In this sense, the opposition between sex and gender collapses, as both are effects of discourse rather than separate domains. There is, therefore, no stable distinction between sex and gender; both must be understood as discursively produced categories (Butler 11). This also explains why Butler cautions that if gender is framed as fixed by cultural norms, it becomes just as restrictive as the belief in biological determinism, only shifting the source of constraint from nature to culture (12). This understanding highlights the performative nature of gender: it is not a true or stable essence, but a construct maintained through sustained social acts. Consequently, ideas of authentic masculinity or femininity are part of the very strategy that conceals the performativity of gender and limits the possibilities for alternative configurations (Butler 180). Katie Wilson, drawing on Butler, further underscores this point by illustrating how societies condition individuals into performing gendered behaviors: women are socialized to act passive and compliant, men to act dominant and aggressive (Wilson 439). In the context of fanfiction, highlighting the performativity of gender functions as a strategy of queer resistance, opening space for reimagining and creatively rearticulating normative categories.

Building on this foundation, media and cultural studies scholar Frederik Dhaenens identifies two main strategies of queer resistance: deconstruction and reconstruction (521). Deconstruction aims to expose how identities presented as natural are in fact social constructs that sustain heteronormativity while marginalizing and excluding those who fall outside its boundaries (Dhaenens 523). Reconstruction, in turn, moves beyond critique to represent viable alternatives, where queer identities and practices are depicted as intelligible and desirable (Dhaenens 526). Both strategies are crucial for analyzing the fanfictions in this thesis, which often unmask the exclusions of canon texts while simultaneously creating new narratives in which queer lives and relationships can thrive. In this context, such strategies of queer resistance materialize when the presumption of heterosexuality no longer governs cultural interpretation, enabling marginalized desires and identities to gain visibility (Chambers 674). Dhaenens notes that in television this often happens through parody, the subversion of genre conventions, or shifts in narrative focus (520), and fanfiction may draw on similar techniques by reworking canonical tropes and perspectives to destabilize dominant discourses. In this way, queer resistance is not about erasing heteronormativity but about questioning and reshaping its codes from within, often through creative storytelling (Dhaenens 522).

The relevance of deconstruction and reconstruction extends beyond individual texts, since media more broadly does not simply reflect reality but actively reproduces and circulates norms of gender and sexuality that society accepts as natural (Goldmann 34). Despite increased diversity in representation, most mainstream texts remain bound by stereotypes, with women often depicted through the male gaze as objects of desire, leaving limited space for alternative identities (Goldmann 34). Additionally, Hollywood productions such as *Top Gun* exemplify how mainstream media not only reproduce gendered stereotypes but also convey broader ideological visions, including glamorized images of the military, which are translated into commercial spectacle (Suid xv). By contrast, as Silberstein-Bamford suggests, fanfiction emerges from participatory fan practices and has been transformed by the rise of digital media, which made publishing and circulating stories widely accessible (129). The shift from print-based fanzines to digital platforms has enabled fanfiction to reach a global readership and become deeply embedded in everyday cultural practice (Silberstein-Bamford 131–132). Within this environment, fanfiction reworks canonical material: characters may be placed in new

contexts, intimate relationships may be foregrounded, and masculinities may be rewritten in ways that resist the limitations of the source text (Goldmann 37). Positioned against the commercial frameworks of Hollywood film, fanfiction thus operates as a counter-discourse that both deconstructs and reconstructs normative portrayals.

This counter-discursive potential of fanfiction is closely tied to the practice of queer reading. Rather than rejecting a text outright, queer reading engages with gaps, silences, and ambiguities, transforming marginal hints into explicit queer possibilities (Duggan 152). Specifically, these practices take shape in fanfiction when authors revise canonical endings (Hazra 111), highlight overlooked dynamics, or develop relationships that remain unspoken in the source (Duggan 152). Neha Hazra describes “fix-it fics” as a form of reparative reading, rewriting heteronormative narratives to create healing and empowering spaces for queer audiences (111), a category already discussed in Section 2.2 in relation to tagging practices. Such interventions resist the erasure of queer identities in mainstream texts and instead normalize intimacy and vulnerability between gay characters, thereby destabilizing rigid masculinities (Hazra 119). A more detailed exploration of different masculinities is offered in Section 3.3.

Fanfiction also constitutes a spatial practice of resistance by creating heterotopic sites where queerness is normalized. As Llewellyn argues, fandoms function as counter-spaces that allow marginalized groups to visualize identities excluded from mainstream media (Llewellyn 2348). Through participatory practices, these communities challenge stereotypes and generate new imaginaries that resist normative dominance (Dym et al. 20). In this sense, queer resistance in fanfiction is not only textual but also collective, embedded in the shared practices of readers and writers who create spaces where non-normative identities can flourish (Llewellyn 2362).

In addition to these reading and rewriting practices, the concept of “World Building” further illustrates how fanfiction generates spaces of resistance. Marta Boni’s anthology *World Building: Transmedia, Fans, Industries* positions world building as a creative strategy that expands narrative universes across texts and media and shows how worlds function as collectively constructed realms essential for both the production and the interpretation of media (Boni 9–10). Jenkins notes that storytelling today often takes the form of world building, with creators developing expansive environments that go beyond

a single work or medium. These worlds often exceed the boundaries of individual films or even entire franchises, since fan elaborations and speculations further expand them in multiple directions (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 116). The *Top Gun* franchise itself illustrates this dynamic: it is not confined to the two films but extends into a broader world that encompasses examples such as the documentary *Danger Zone: The Making of Top Gun* and merchandise ranging from *Top Gun* coffee mugs to *Top Gun* dog tags (Grainge 207). Within this larger cultural world, (*Top Gun*) fanfiction creates its own sub-worlds, where alternative identities and relationships can exist, effectively queering the original narrative environment (Boni 17). As Boni notes, “worlds as artificial constructions are also dependent upon their explorers who, in turn, become world-builders” (10). In this way, worlds function both as springboards for creativity and as catalysts for shared linguistic and cultural systems characteristic of the contemporary media environments (Boni 10). A world is thus not only a narrative space but also a worldview that brings together communities while shaping conventions within particular cultural contexts (Boni 13). World building thus functions as both a creative and resistant practice, enabling fans to remake cultural texts in ways that challenge heteronormative constraints.

World building also manifests through hyperdiegesis, which Matthew Hills defines as the elaboration of detailed and extensive narrative realms that extend beyond what is explicitly shown in the source material (104). In films such as *Top Gun*, only fragments of characters’ personal lives are revealed, leaving off-screen gaps that fanfiction eagerly explores. Within the logic of hyperdiegesis, these gaps can be understood as openings that fanfiction fills, constructing richer worlds where queerness becomes central rather than peripheral and transforming implicit subtext into explicit representation. Jennifer Duggan conceptualizes this as a “queer world-making practice” (158), which reshapes cultural understandings of gender and sexuality while offering new horizons for identification (Duggan 158).

The practice of world building is also shaped by the medium in which it takes place, and as a result, narratives operate differently across platforms, with each medium emphasizing particular dimensions of a fictional universe (Ryan and Thon 3). In audiovisual formats such as film, world building takes shape through music, images, and language, which provide audiences with a concrete sense of characters and settings

(Ryan and Thon 10). Casting is likewise central to world building: in films such as *Top Gun*, the presence of widely recognizable actors like Tom Cruise brings with it established cultural associations that shape how audiences perceive the fictional world (Martin 3). These associations extend beyond narrative immersion, as such films also contribute to shaping favorable perceptions of the U.S. military and reinforcing its cultural legitimacy (Martin 3). By contrast, the textual medium of fanfiction does not confine characters to predetermined audiovisual representations but opens space for reinterpretation, drawing on gaps and unexplored possibilities left by the source material (Goldmann 81). Furthermore, since fanfiction today circulates almost exclusively in digital form, platforms such as AO3 make these works widely accessible within online communities (Silberstein-Bamford 131–132). This digital and textual environment provides a space where writers can explore non-normative identities and desires beyond the limitations of mainstream media (Goldmann 34).

Taken together, these perspectives establish a framework for identifying practices of queer resistance in fanfiction. By deconstructing heteronormativity, normalizing alternative identities, and creating new narrative worlds, fanfiction can resist dominant cultural narratives and generates spaces for representation, pleasure, and critique. This theoretical background helps to analyze how Maverick/Iceman fanfictions reinterpret *Top Gun*'s canon narratives and how their tags frame these interventions as acts of queer resistance within U.S.-American popular culture.

3. Situating *Top Gun* in U.S.-American Culture: Militarism, Masculinity, and Heteronormativity

This chapter provides the cultural and institutional background necessary for analyzing the *Top Gun* films and the selected fanfictions. It outlines how the collaboration between Hollywood and the U.S. military has shaped public perceptions of warfare and heroism, and how *Top Gun* functioned as soft propaganda to rehabilitate the military's image. It also examines how ideals of masculinity and sexuality are constructed within this context. This background is crucial for situating the *Top Gun* films within U.S.-American culture and for understanding the institutional ideals they reflect. Additionally, it provides

a basis for analyzing how fanfictions reinterpret these ideals, depicting masculinity, military identity, and relationships in alternative ways.

3.1. Hollywood and the U.S. Military: A Symbiotic Relationship

The collaboration between Hollywood and the U.S. military has a long history, one that has proven mutually beneficial for both institutions (Robb 13). While film studios gain access to expensive equipment, personnel, and locations that would otherwise be impossible to afford, the U.S. military in turn secures a powerful platform to present itself positively within “the most influential vehicle of popular culture: the movies” (Robb 13). As David L. Robb argues in *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies*, this cooperation is part of a broader propaganda system through which the Pentagon works to ensure that cinematic portrayals present the armed forces in ways that reinforce positive public perceptions (14). The institutionalization of this partnership dates back to the First World War, when the Committee on Public Information was tasked with sustaining morale and controlling media output (Powell 169). By the Second World War, cooperation between filmmakers and the armed forces had become routine, laying the foundation for the Pentagon’s later establishment of a permanent liaison office to regulate and support film productions (Thussu 123). This office ensured that films featuring the U.S. military would be vetted and, if necessary, altered to reflect the values that the Pentagon wished to promote (Thussu 124). Today, this function continues through the Department of Defense Entertainment Media Office and it remains a central mechanism through which the armed forces negotiate their portrayal on screen (Loia 714).

The mechanics of the partnership rest on a calculated exchange. Filmmakers are required to submit multiple copies of their scripts for approval, implement suggested revisions, and screen their films for military officials before release (Robb 25). In return, they are granted access to equipment and personnel that can reduce production costs by millions of dollars (Robb 25). This access is also crucial for achieving cinematic realism, as films like *Top Gun* would not have been possible without the use of real fighter jets, which explains why many large-scale productions comply with the Pentagon’s demands (Martin

4). The result, as U.S.-American filmmaker Oliver Stone points out, is that “most films about the military are recruiting posters” (Robb 25), a statement that underscores how Hollywood often sacrifices narrative independence and creative freedom when filmmakers accept portrayals favored by the U.S. military in order to secure support (Robb 17).

Although military representatives claim that their involvement is limited to ensuring accuracy, security, policy, and propriety, evidence suggests that the criteria for support often extend beyond such concerns (Dreyer 75). In principle, this would mean that films about the military should depict training and combat correctly, avoid revealing state secrets, follow Department of Defense rules, and respect the privacy of service members (Dreyer 75). Yet, the examples of supported and unsupported films show how inconsistently these standards are applied (Dreyer 75). Georg Löfflmann highlights the paradox with a concrete example. While the movie *The Hurt Locker*, which portrays a U.S.-American bomb disposal specialist in Iraq struggling with the psychological effects of war, was denied assistance for being labeled unrealistic, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, a movie about alien robots, received extensive backing because it reinforced ideas of American exceptionalism and military heroism (Löfflmann 286). This contrast indicates that what is prioritized is not factual accuracy but rather the perpetuation of a heroic image of the U.S. armed forces (Löfflmann 286). The potential consequences of these endorsed portrayals are significant: as Lawrence Suid records, Stone warned that such representations are “very sinister because [they] creep into the national consciousness. People start to think of war as not so bad” (505).

Moreover, by prioritizing this heroic image, the system of military-Hollywood collaboration produces a specific and distorted type of war story. Films assisted by the Pentagon tend to sanitize war, downplaying the results of experiencing violence, trauma, or long-term consequences such as PTSD (Powell 178). Instead, they present streamlined narratives of professionalism, heroism, and technological mastery, which can make military service appear glamorous and exciting (Martin 4). As a result, audiences are repeatedly exposed to portrayals of military life that normalize war and glorify military service, which not only fosters favorable attitudes toward enlistment (Martin 5) but also reinforces patriotic ideals within U.S. society (Martin 3).

By the 1980s, this pattern of sanitized and valorized portrayals was firmly established in Hollywood's collaboration with the U.S. military (Suid 502). At this stage, officials no longer rejected films outright but instead sought to negotiate portrayals that presented the armed forces in a positive light, encouraging Hollywood to use military settings across a variety of genres from dramas to comedies (Suid 502). The release of *Top Gun* in 1986 epitomized this cooperation, as it not only provided unprecedented access to Navy resources but also became the most successful collaboration between Hollywood and the Pentagon to date, making Paramount Pictures the military's favored studio according to Robb (154). *Top Gun* thus makes the collaboration between Hollywood and the U.S. military particularly revealing, and the following section therefore explores this dynamic in more detail.

Taken together, the partnership between Hollywood and the U.S. military has cultivated a carefully curated image of the armed forces that obscures complexity in favor of spectacle, shaping popular perceptions of war and U.S.-American national identity. While this relationship may not prevent the production of critical films, it consistently incentivizes and privileges those that cast the military in a positive light, thereby reinforcing the military's favorable standing in U.S.-American popular culture.

3.2. *Top Gun* as Soft Propaganda: Rehabilitating the Military Image

In the decades following World War II, Hollywood films played a crucial role in sustaining the image of the U.S. military as an invincible force, projecting narratives of victory, discipline, and national pride (Suid 501). This reputation, rooted in the overwhelming success of the armed forces against Germany and Japan, made U.S.-Americans confident in their military's ability to project national power anywhere in the world (Suid 501). That image, however, was profoundly shaken by the Vietnam War, where the United States suffered its first major defeat. The prolonged conflict, coupled with the rise of the anti-war movement after 1965, intensified public criticism and eroded faith in military leadership (Suid xi). On screen, films also began to reflect this shift, replacing the heroic soldiers of World War II with images that emphasized disillusionment, trauma, and loss (Suid xvi). The cumulative effect was a severe reputational crisis: the armed forces were

no longer perceived as all-conquering protectors but as institutions marked by failure and hubris (Suid xi).

After Vietnam, the U.S. military was therefore determined to restore its standing, recognizing cultural production as a key means of reshaping perceptions of service life, discipline, and honor (Robb 16). As Suid notes, this rehabilitation had already begun with films such as *Midway* (1976), but it was *Top Gun* (1986) that completed the process, transforming the image of the U.S. military from a Vietnam-scarred institution into a glamorous and heroic force once again (502). Emerging as one of the most influential collaborations between Hollywood and the Pentagon, the film not only revitalized naval aviation (Robb 154) but also reasserted the legitimacy of U.S. military power at a moment when it was still recovering from the trauma of Southeast Asia (Suid 502). In this sense, *Top Gun* was more than a blockbuster; it marked a cultural turning point in how the armed forces were imagined by the U.S.-American public (Suid 502).

This rehabilitative effect, I argue, can best be understood through the notion of soft propaganda. Unlike traditional propaganda, which is overt and directly state-driven, soft propaganda operates subtly, embedding ideological messages within entertainment (Robb 17). Films like *Top Gun* present military life as exciting and honorable while downplaying its dangers, ensuring that audiences absorb favorable images without recognizing them as propaganda (Martin 5). As Robb explains, the Pentagon does not directly produce these films but achieves similar results by conditioning access to equipment and locations on compliance with its demands (17). Donato Loia similarly observes that, despite the United States' self-image as a defender of freedom of opinion and press freedom, propaganda nonetheless operates, but in more subtle ways, blending ideology, information, and entertainment to shape public consciousness in ways that are not immediately visible (715). Due to this cooperation between the film industry and the armed forces, the Pentagon holds considerable influence over cultural production, allowing it to shape narratives that align with military interests and blur the boundary between entertainment and influence (Bayles 250). For many viewers, such military-Hollywood collaborations even serve as the primary source of knowledge about the armed forces and the wars in which they are involved, regardless of their accuracy (Suid

xv). Soft propaganda, therefore, achieves what overt messaging cannot: the effortless absorption of a state-friendly ideology under the guise of mere entertainment.

The mechanism of this soft propaganda becomes clear when examining the conditional nature of the Pentagon's support for *Top Gun*. The Navy provided unparalleled access to aircraft carriers, F-14 fighter jets, the Miramar Naval Air Station, and technical advisors, charging only for fuel costs (Suid 499). In total, Paramount paid \$1.1 million for this assistance, a fraction of the true expense (Suid 499). In turn, Paramount producer Don Simpson assured the Department of Defense that the film would portray pilots as "dashing young men" (Robb 201) and present naval aviation in the most glamorous light possible, a promise that secured him this extensive institutional support. The Navy viewed the project as a chance to highlight its most elite pilots, the top one percent trained at its Fighter Weapons School, while also avoiding explicit connections to unpopular conflicts such as Vietnam (Suid 496). Then-Secretary of the Navy John Lehman even explicitly encouraged such collaborations, believing they would offer direct benefits in public relations (Suid 495).

Furthermore, a remark by producer Jerry Bruckheimer illustrates how directly the military shaped the film's production: the Navy refused to permit filming at a San Diego base unless the female lead's role was altered, since a romance between two enlisted officers would have violated regulations against fraternization (Robb 94). Consequently, the character was rewritten as a civilian astrophysicist working as an outside consultant (Robb 94). This adjustment was not an isolated intervention but exemplified the Pentagon's broader policy of controlling representation; as Pentagon liaison officer Phil Strub made clear, any film portraying the military in a negative light would simply be dismissed as unrealistic and not receive any military support (Robb 18). Such interventions reveal how deeply entangled the film was with Pentagon demands.

Despite or perhaps because of these compromises, *Top Gun* became a massive cultural success. Its glamorous imagery of fighter jets, set to a popular soundtrack, transformed naval aviation into a spectacle of excitement and national pride (Suid 500). Critics even described it as both a love letter to fighter jets and a form of "war-nography" (Suid 499). *Top Gun* became the highest-grossing film of 1986 (Suid 499), and according to Navy statements, applications for naval aviation surged by 500 percent (Robb 182). Navy

recruiters even set up booths outside theaters and recruiters themselves testified that audiences came out of screenings ready to enlist, convinced that the film's glamorous images represented reality (Robb 182). For the Navy, the film was, therefore, nothing short of a "recruiting bonanza" (Suid 573).

Moreover, the film's appeal extended well beyond recruitment for the Navy, capturing a broader conservative desire to restore national pride and military confidence in the 1980s. It became part of a larger political and cultural resurgence that resonated with Ronald Reagan's emphasis on military strength, patriotism, and Cold War resolve (Löfflmann 282). By presenting an anonymous enemy, the film avoided divisive politics while restoring faith in America's military power (Suid 496), allowing audiences to indulge in spectacle without confronting the trauma of Vietnam (Suid 502). The widespread popularity of such patriotic films reflected not only their cinematic appeal but also a broader cultural climate in which displays of nationalism and support for the armed forces served to reassert national strength (Suid 500). In this sense, *Top Gun* helped rehabilitate a battered military identity, preparing the ground for renewed public support during conflicts like the Gulf War (Suid xvii).

At the same time, however, the film also carried unintended consequences more complex than what its celebratory image might suggest. While it provided the Navy with a recruiting windfall, it also shaped expectations among aviators in ways that later proved problematic. The Tailhook scandal of 1991, in which naval officers sexually harassed dozens of women at a convention, was linked to the film's glorification of aviator culture (Suid 501). Investigators argued that *Top Gun* had fueled arrogance and misconceptions among junior officers about acceptable behavior (Suid 501). As Donald Rumsfeld, then director of the Defense Criminal Investigation Service, observed, senior officers reported that younger aviators had developed "an impression of themselves which was built partially on the Tom Cruise image" (Suid 501). Plans for a sequel, initially under development by Paramount, were abandoned because the Navy no longer wished to celebrate a lifestyle associated with heavy drinking and womanizing (Robb 182). The Tailhook scandal illustrates the double-edged nature of soft propaganda: while enhancing recruitment and national pride, the film also reinforced problematic masculine ideals within the military (Suid 501). A deeper exploration of masculinities in

relation to the military can be found in Section 3.3. Ironically, decades later, when the scandal had faded from public memory, the sequel was finally produced, suggesting that the risks once deemed unacceptable had been overshadowed by the potential benefits of reviving the franchise.

This pattern of initially rejecting a sequel, only to embrace one decades later, is also mirrored by the film's own star, Tom Cruise. Although *Top Gun* was embraced by the military and celebrated by audiences, some critics nonetheless identified its patriotic narrative as overt propaganda (Suid 500). In response, Cruise distanced himself from such political interpretations, insisting it was merely "an amusement-park ride, a fun film with a PG-13 rating that was not supposed to be reality" (Suid 500). He even claimed it would have been irresponsible to produce sequels that might further mislead viewers about the realities of war (Suid 500). This denial exemplifies a key mechanism of soft propaganda: its capacity to be dismissed as mere entertainment allowing its ideological dimensions to go unquestioned. The irony of this dismissal became even more apparent years later. After publicly rejecting the idea of a sequel (Suid 500), Cruise ultimately returned for *Top Gun: Maverick* (Loia 714). Furthermore, not only did he reprise his role, but he also personally introduced screenings, promising audiences "real jets" and an "authentic" cinematic experience ("Top Gun: Maverick Exclusive"). Cruise's reversal underscores how the cultural prestige and commercial potential of the franchise ultimately outweighed any earlier reservations about its propagandistic influence.

Cruise's return to the screen for the sequel was also perfectly timed to address a different cultural crisis. While the original *Top Gun* was released in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, *Top Gun: Maverick* appeared in 2022, following the global disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic (Dreyer 1). The sequel was marketed as a return to theaters and to "real cinema" (Dreyer 77) after years of shutdowns. Like its predecessor, it was produced with military assistance, ensuring access to aircraft, aircraft carriers, and expert consultants (Dreyer 74). Although no specific script changes have been documented, the Pentagon's history of conditioning support makes it likely that adjustments were made to align with its criteria (Dreyer 76). This collaboration was fundamental to the film's central marketing strategy: an emphasis on physical authenticity (Dreyer 77). The marketing materials and reviews consistently highlighted that no CGI was used in the flight scenes and that the

actors experienced real aerial maneuvers inside fighter jets (Dreyer 77). This commitment to physical authenticity is even visible on screen: during high-speed sequences, the camera captures Cruise's face contorted by the force of gravity, reminding viewers that the scenes were filmed under genuine conditions (Loia 714). As Loia observes, this interplay between the fictional narrative and the nonfictional mode of production is central to the film's ideological power, as the spectacle of real jets and visible physical strain creates a sense of truthfulness that enhances the persuasive effect of an otherwise fictional story (715).

The effectiveness of this strategy is evident in the film's reception. *Top Gun: Maverick* became both a critical and commercial triumph, ranking as the second highest-grossing movie of 2022 and winning an Academy Award (Dreyer 2). Its resonance stemmed not only from its spectacular visuals but also from its ideological appeal. The film draws on 1980s nostalgia through its connection to the original *Top Gun* and evokes the conservative sense of order characteristic of that era's cinema (Dreyer 148). Paul Grainge notes that even the very premise of a *Top Gun* sequel responded to contemporary anxieties about the decline of traditional aerial combat in the age of drones and digitally coordinated warfare, allowing the franchise to adapt to new military realities while retaining its symbolic power (212). In this way, *Top Gun: Maverick* reaffirmed the ideological relevance of its predecessor, translating Cold-War-era heroism into twenty-first-century terms by re-centering the human pilot as the protector of national power in an age increasingly defined by technological warfare.

This re-centered heroism is also reflected in the sequel's narrative, which reveals a shift in how that ideology is expressed. Whereas the first *Top Gun* revolved around training exercises and an ambiguous enemy, *Top Gun: Maverick* introduces a concrete mission to destroy a foreign nuclear facility operated by an unspecified nation. This plot positions the United States as a guardian of international order (Loia 717). Although the enemy remains unnamed, the message is clear: America continues to claim the role of global protector, preserving the status quo against perceived threats (Loia 718). In doing so, the film reinforces what Loia calls the "myth of the American Empire" (714), portraying U.S. intervention as the defense of civilization rather than an act of imperial aggression. Such ideological messaging aligns with what Robert Stahl describes as the "military-

entertainment complex” (25) of the twenty-first century, which normalizes conflict while silencing political dissent.

Together, *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* illustrate the enduring power of Hollywood-military collaboration to shape popular perceptions of the armed forces. The first film rehabilitated the military’s image in the shadow of Vietnam, restoring public faith in U.S. power. The sequel, released more than thirty years later, revived this function in a new context, presenting the United States as a protector and morally indispensable force within the global order. Despite the decades that separate them, the ideological work of the two films remains strikingly consistent. They demonstrate how cinema, as soft propaganda, can obscure complexity, glamorize militarism, and normalize the idea of U.S. military supremacy as both natural and necessary. The *Top Gun* films thus provide a particularly compelling case for examining how dominant representations of military identity are constructed and sustained in U.S. popular culture. Placing them in dialogue with fanfiction is equally insightful, as this medium operates outside institutional control and offers space for alternative interpretations that challenge or reimagine such portrayals.

3.3. Masculinity and Its Construction in the U.S. Military

The U.S. military has long been intertwined with dominant cultural ideals of masculinity. In recruitment ads, it frequently depicts soldiers as “manly men” (Martin 2), linking military service to conventional ideals of masculinity centered on toughness and strength. Through the repeated circulation of such imagery, the military reinforces and normalizes this association, shaping how masculinity is perceived within U.S.-American culture (Martin 2). Examining how masculinity operates within this institution therefore helps clarify the ideological framework that films like *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* reproduce. It also provides a foundation for comparing these cinematic constructions with their reinterpretations in fanfiction, where the same characters and dynamics can be detached from institutional and heteronormative constraints.

This interconnection between masculinity and institutional power can be better understood through the concept of hegemonic masculinity, developed by R. Connell and later refined with James Messerschmidt in “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the

Concept”. Hegemonic masculinity represents not the experience of most men, but the culturally idealized form that legitimizes men’s dominance over women and subordinates alternative masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). It functions as a pattern of practice that maintains male authority through social institutions, persuasion, and cultural norms rather than constant physical violence (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). Importantly, the model is variable and context-dependent, meaning that hegemonic forms shift according to changing social conditions but always retain their legitimizing function (Connell and Messerschmidt 838). Furthermore, unlike earlier notions of a fixed “male sex role” (Connell and Messerschmidt 830), which treated masculinity as a stable set of traits, this model emphasizes the coexistence of multiple masculinities arranged hierarchically, with the hegemonic form occupying a position of cultural authority (Fox and Pease 19).

As Ramon Hinojosa notes, the U.S. military exemplifies this concept particularly clearly, serving as one of the most powerful institutional sites for producing hegemonic masculinity (180). Within this setting, traits such as bravery, emotional restraint, authority, and physical endurance are valorized as the foundation of soldierly virtue (Hinojosa 180). By embodying and performing these ideals, men entering the military service construct a distinct military identity grounded in symbolic dominance, presenting themselves as more disciplined, moral, and capable than civilians or lower-ranking peers (Hinojosa 179). This individual positioning is reinforced by the institution itself, which provides both the symbolic and material means such as training, physical strength, sanctioned violence, and heterosexual display, through which men can embody an idealized form of manhood legitimized by the state (Hinojosa 180). As these institutionalized ideals align closely with broader U.S.-American cultural definitions of hegemonic masculinity, the soldier comes to represent a socially recognized form of male power (Hinojosa 180). This dynamic reflects what John Fox and Bob Pease describe as the hierarchical organization of masculinities, mentioned earlier, in which those who fail to conform are rendered subordinate or inferior (Fox and Pease 19).

Understanding this hierarchy more closely reveals how different masculinities, namely the hegemonic, subordinated, marginalized, and complicit, are positioned in relation to power (Hinojosa 181). Subordinated masculinities, often associated with homosexuality

or immigrant status, are positioned as inferior to the dominant form, while marginalized masculinities, linked to race or class, remain peripheral to the hegemonic ideal (Hinojosa 181). Complicit masculinities do not actively embody dominance but still benefit from the patriarchal order because society privileges men as a group. In this sense, even men who do not fit the hegemonic ideal can share in its social advantages and uphold its legitimacy (Hinojosa 181). In the military, this hierarchy manifests in distinctions between combat and non-combat roles, ranks, or branches, with proximity to violence and leadership marking higher masculine status (Hinojosa 179). Elisabeth Klaus's typology of media masculinities further demonstrates that traditional masculinity (comparable to hegemonic masculinity) dominates mainstream representation, while queer masculinities remain marginal (qtd. in Goldmann 36–37). This multiplicity of masculinities is therefore particularly relevant when considering fanfiction, which often departs from hegemonic models by placing characters in reconfigured contexts that enable different expressions of masculinity (Goldmann 37).

Building on these hierarchies, it becomes essential to examine how hegemonic masculinity is continuously reproduced through socialization and institutional practices. Fox and Pease identify several key dimensions through which hegemonic masculinity operates, including its institutional embedding within social structures, its embodiment through physical conduct and discipline, and its capacity for change in response to shifting cultural conditions (19). From early socialization, boys are taught to equate independence and self-discipline with strength, while emotional openness is treated as weakness (Fox and Pease 20). The military builds upon these lessons, transforming stoicism and competitiveness into professional virtues that define both competence and identity (Hinojosa 179). This process produces what Hillary Schaefer et al. describe as military hypermasculinity, characterized by aggression, dominance, and rejection of vulnerability (612), which can be understood as an institutional realization of hegemonic masculinity. Recruits undergo rituals that “turn boys into men” (Schaefer et al. 612), learning to suppress emotion and equate emotional control with masculine strength (Schaefer et al. 613). Such ideals often sustain hostility toward women and queer men, normalizing harassment and silence around abuse (Schaefer et al. 612). Military culture further frames toughness and endurance as patriotic virtues, linking masculine strength to national identity and moral worth (Van Gilder 153).

While the military institution actively produces and enforces hegemonic masculinity, Hollywood cinema plays a central role in visualizing and popularizing these ideals. As Yvonne Tasker observes, in films depicting the military, the uniform becomes part of the visual construction of masculine authority, linking the male body to ideals of discipline and control (“Dumb Movies” 239). Additionally, heroism becomes a kind of costume, as the uniform and the muscular body together signify both strength and desirability (Tasker, “Dumb Movies” 242). The result is an eroticization of masculine strength, with the disciplined male body rendered as a spectacle of power and desirability (Tasker, “Dumb Movies” 230). This eroticized heroism is often situated within homosocial environments such as barracks or cockpits, where masculinity is continuously tested and reaffirmed through rivalry and camaraderie (Tasker, “Dumb Movies” 236). Furthermore, these all-male spaces sustain a form of misogyny that excludes women or frames them as obstacles to male unity, while men’s emotional bonds are redirected into competition that carries an undercurrent of unspoken desire (Modleski 101–102).

This dynamic reflects what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick conceptualizes as “male homosocial desire” (1), describing how institutions like the military organize relationships between men along a continuum of camaraderie, rivalry, and repressed eroticism. She argues that “obligatory heterosexuality” (Sedgwick 3) is embedded in and sustains patriarchal systems – shaping intimacy between men and turning this regulation into a means of social control (Sedgwick 86). The military exemplifies this dynamic particularly clearly, as one of the most intensely organized homosocial environments; it works to suppress any visible expression of same-sex desire to maintain institutional control (Sedgwick 222). In cultural representations such as *Top Gun*, this structure manifests visually: because the film’s all-male military setting fosters intense homosocial bonds, it simultaneously centers heterosexual relationships to contain them, while fanfiction later explores these repressed dynamics more openly. James Conlon’s reading of *Top Gun* further illustrates this mechanism, showing how the film merges combat and sexuality and links weaponry and male bodies in spectacles that conflate violence with virility (19). The film’s moral logic of winning versus losing further solidifies competition as a core masculine value (Conlon 20). Such cinematic conventions have profoundly shaped U.S.-American understandings of masculinity (Tasker, “Contested Masculinities” 111).

Building on this, war films and Westerns have traditionally linked heroism to white masculinity and violence, normalizing racial and gender hierarchies (Tasker, “Contested Masculinities” 112). The war film in particular constructs masculinity as collective discipline, emotional restraint, and loyalty to the group (Tasker, “Contested Masculinities” 114–115). Even moments of vulnerability or loss ultimately reaffirm white masculine authority, as films frame male suffering not as weakness but as moral endurance – a proof of strength that recenters the white male hero (Tasker, “Contested Masculinities” 116). Although more recent war films feature racially diverse casts, they often reproduce the same hierarchy by organizing multi-ethnic groups around a central white protagonist whose authority remains unchallenged (Tasker, “Contested Masculinities” 116). Ultimately, this enduring interconnection between whiteness and masculinity, which structures U.S.-American cultural identity (Hughey 98), is continually reinforced through intertwined cinematic and institutional mechanisms.

Taken together, these institutional, emotional, and representational dimensions form the foundation of a hegemonic military masculinity. It legitimizes aggression, discipline, heterosexual authority, and emotional control as patriotic virtues while marginalizing queerness and alternative forms of gender expression. Power is maintained not through individual violence but through cultural consent and institutional reinforcement, which are further circulated and normalized through cinematic representation. Ultimately, understanding these mechanisms provides a crucial basis for examining how such ideals are represented in the *Top Gun* films and how fanfiction reinterprets and challenges them through alternative constructions of masculinity.

3.4. Regulating Sexuality in the U.S. Military

Hegemonic masculinity, as discussed in the previous section, is central to the construction of identity in the U.S. military. Masculinity within this institution is tied to heteronormativity, since heterosexuality functions as the assumed and valued norm (Van Gilder 154). Although these discourses are not unique to the military, the institution has played a key role in maintaining dominant ideas about gender and sexuality within U.S. society (Van Gilder 152). Examining how sexuality and, by extension, relationships are regulated in this context is therefore essential, particularly in cultural representations

such as *Top Gun*, which reproduce the idealized image of military masculinity. Since this thesis analyzes Maverick/Iceman fanfictions that reinterpret this ideal through same-sex relationships, it is important to understand how the military has historically classified heterosexual and homosexual relationships as either legitimate or deviant, reflecting wider social hierarchies.

For much of U.S. history, homosexuality was officially prohibited within the military (Van Gilder 151). Those who were identified or even suspected of being gay were discharged or punished, with military leaders claiming that homosexuality endangered unit cohesion and combat effectiveness (Dunivin 535). These arguments aligned with the belief that the military should remain a homogeneous, masculine space, where relationships between men served the purpose of professional camaraderie rather than emotional intimacy (Dunivin 535). Service members who opposed homosexuality often framed their stance in moral or religious terms, reinforcing the view that same-sex desire was sinful and incompatible with discipline (Dunivin 535). Such exclusionary laws and customs were not merely administrative but reflected the cultural link between masculinity, patriotism, and heterosexual relationships (Allsep 390). As a result, this long-standing association between masculinity and heterosexuality defined who could belong to the military community and whose relationships were recognized as legitimate (Van Gilder 165).

Women, for instance, were long restricted from higher ranks and combat positions (Dunivin 538), as the military's construction of masculinity rejected anything associated with femininity and thereby positioned women as incompatible with the ideals of warfare (Allsep 385). Homosexual men were similarly marginalized, as their perceived femininity rendered them inconsistent with the military's masculine ideal (Digby 60). The advantages associated with masculinity in combat reinforced the idea that the soldier must be heterosexual, as same-sex attraction was thought to undermine the moral and emotional order of military life (Allsep 386). Homophobia functioned as a means of policing this boundary, ensuring that men who did not conform to dominant expectations were labeled effeminate or unmanly, often through terms such as "sissy", "wimp", or "fag" (Digby 60). Within this system of hegemonic masculinity, only relationships that conform to the traditional family model were accepted, in which the mother is expected to take responsibility for the household and the upbringing of children (Goldmann 37). However,

relationships between men were only permitted in the form of camaraderie and brotherhood (Fox and Pease 20).

The introduction of Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) in 1993 (Frank 161) marked a significant turning point in the regulation of sexuality and relationships in the military (Burks 605). Announced by President Bill Clinton, DADT was meant to be a compromise between inclusion and traditional military values (Frank 160). The policy allowed gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals to serve, but only if they kept their sexual orientation undisclosed (Burks 605). It defined sexuality as a private matter that had to remain hidden, as any statement or behavior suggesting same-sex attraction, such as mentioning a same-sex partner, was grounds for discharge (Burks 605). In this way, DADT appeared more liberal than previous bans but continued to prohibit openly homosexual relationships (Burks 605).

As Derek J. Burks highlights, in practice, DADT forced service members into silence about their identities and relationships, sending the message that same-sex desire was acceptable only if hidden (605). Although closeted individuals could serve, the policy demanded that they suppress personal aspects of their lives, creating a sharp divide between professional identity and private relationships (Burks 605). This secrecy came at a cost to self-worth and authenticity, as DADT reinforced the notion that homosexuality was incompatible with the values of the military (Burks 605). Moreover, the fear of exposure intensified vulnerability to harassment and sexual violence, since victims could not report such incidents without risking discharge (Burks 604). DADT therefore reinforced the military's defense of its heterosexual cultural status quo and the dominance of hegemonic masculinity (Allsep 390). While the policy was eventually repealed, the underlying cultural framework it upheld proved far more resistant to change (Allsep 390).

The repeal of DADT in 2011 ended the official prohibition of openly gay service members (Neff and Edgell 233). President Obama described the repeal as a major victory for his administration and as the fulfillment of a campaign promise (Frank 159). However, despite this political triumph, the Pentagon treated the change largely as an administrative matter rather than as an opportunity to challenge the military's entrenched culture of heteronormativity (Allsep 381). Training materials accompanying the repeal emphasized "Leadership-Professionalism-Respect" (Allsep 391) as guiding principles

but avoided addressing deeper issues surrounding masculinity, sexuality, and discrimination. These materials also stressed that the repeal was not intended to change personal beliefs, indicating that institutional attitudes toward homosexuality were expected to remain largely the same (Allsep 391). As a result, even after the repeal, the image of the heterosexual male soldier continued to define the U.S. military's identity (Allsep 383). This limited transformation revealed how deeply rooted hegemonic masculinity is within the military, as non-heterosexual service members still faced cultural barriers to full acceptance despite formal inclusion (Allsep 396). Fanfiction, particularly slash fanfiction (explained in detail in Section 2.1.), however, offers a cultural space in which these boundaries can be reimagined, as this genre portrays sexuality with much greater variation, enabling the depiction of relationships that go beyond conventional norms (Goldmann 33).

Overall, the regulation of sexuality and relationships in the U.S. military demonstrates how deeply heteronormativity is embedded within its cultural and institutional framework. Even after the repeal of DADT, hegemonic masculinity continued to shape ideals of discipline, loyalty, and belonging, marginalizing relationships that fall outside the heterosexual norm. Understanding this dynamic is essential for analyzing how cultural texts such as *Top Gun* reproduce ideals of military masculinity and how fanfiction reimagines these relationships in ways that challenge traditional constructions of gender and sexuality.

4. A Close Reading Approach to Canon, Fanfiction, and Tags

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in this study. More specifically, this thesis applies close reading as its primary method of analysis to examine how acts of queer resistance emerge through the reinterpretation of canonical material. Grounded in literary and cultural studies, and situated within the field of American Studies, this approach enables a detailed examination of how the *Top Gun* films, selected *Top Gun* fanfictions, and their paratextual tags construct, reproduce, or challenge dominant cultural norms in U.S.-American popular culture. The analysis focuses particularly on representations of masculinity, military identity, and relationships, and on how fan-created tags function as paratextual framings that signal and shape acts of queer

resistance. Chapter 2 established how fanfiction and their accompanying tags can function as a site of queer resistance, while Chapter 3 situated the *Top Gun* films within their cultural, historical, and institutional contexts. Building on these foundations, the close reading approach provides the analytical tools to examine how such resistance is articulated through narrative structure, language, framing, and the paratextual use of tags.

Close reading, long considered the foundational method of literary studies, entails sustained attention to rhetorical structure, linguistic detail, and thematic patterning (Smith 57). It requires multiple readings of a text, guided by analytical concepts and theories that provide direction and depth to interpretation (Ohrvik 249). This process moves beyond description, toward an informed analysis of how meaning is constructed within the text (Ohrvik 249). Crucially, close reading connects micro-level features of a text to broader philosophical and ideological questions (Ohrvik 249), making it particularly suitable for identifying and interpreting strategies of queer reimagining and resistance such as those found in fanfiction and their accompanying tags. The close readings in this thesis focus on key scenes and passages that most clearly resonate with the research questions, extending beyond textual analysis to include the films' visual composition, sound design, and character performances.

This project applies close reading across three layers of primary material: canonical films, the selected fanfictions, and the paratextual tags that accompany them. Thus, the order of analysis proceeds from canon to transformation to framing. More specifically, I will first analyze the source texts, then the transformative rewritings, and finally the discursive signals that shape interpretation.

4.1. Reading the Canon: Ideologies in *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick*

The first part of the analysis focuses on *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick*. These films are analyzed as cultural texts that articulate and reinforce dominant ideals of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity as inextricably intertwined with U.S. militarized nationalism. Through close reading, I analyze key scenes that epitomize these concepts to uncover their ideological functions. I pay particular attention to scenes that emphasize

competition, emotional restraint, military greatness, male dominance, and the narrative role of women. This reading is guided by concepts such as hegemonic masculinity, gender performativity, and soft propaganda in military cinema.

The analysis of the *Top Gun* films also serves as a baseline for comparison with fan-created texts. They establish how masculinity, military identity, and relationships shaped by heterosexual norms are encoded in the canon so that transformative strategies in fanfiction can be interpreted in direct contrast. This comparative function anchors the subsequent analysis of queer resistance in fan interpretations.

4.2. Reading Fanfiction: Queer Narrative Strategies in Maverick/Iceman Texts

The second layer of the analysis turns to a small corpus of Maverick/Iceman fanfictions published on AO3, selected according to the following criteria: they are written in English, marked as complete, tagged with “Iceman/Maverick” as the primary relationship, and published after the release of *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022). These parameters ensure both thematic relevance and comparability across texts, while situating the fanfictions within the contemporary reception context of the *Top Gun* franchise. Based on these criteria, I selected the following fanfictions as the corpus for analysis: “Take the Long Way” written by kerbyfullyloaded, “Time And Tide” written by DancingDisaster, and “good old-fashioned lover boy” written by doodlewrite. The full publication details, including URLs and access dates, are listed in Appendix A. This selection aims to provide a focused yet varied corpus that allows for detailed qualitative analysis and represents a manageable sample that captures both recurring tropes and innovative reinterpretations of the source material.

After this selection, each fanfiction is first read in full with a focus on the three central themes of this study: masculinity, military identity, and relationships. This thematic reading serves to identify key moments in the text where the canon is reworked or critically engaged with. Based on this preliminary reading, pivotal passages are then selected for in-depth close reading – specifically, moments where queer reimagining is most evident. These include, for example, emotionally expressive exchanges that contrast with the canon’s emotional restraint, or narrative framings that transform rivalry into romance.

This selective close reading approach ensures interpretive depth while remaining aligned with the research questions.

The analysis pays attention to narrative strategies, character arcs, emotional dynamics, and recurring tropes. It is informed by the theoretical and contextual foundations established in Chapters 2 and 3 – for example, Jenkins’s concept of textual poaching and Llewellyn’s framing of fanfiction as a space for queer identity exploration. The goal is to analyze how fan authors create spaces of queer world building by reworking characters, emotional scripts, and power dynamics.

4.3. Reading Tags: Paratextual Framings and Discursive Resistance on AO3

The third component of the analysis focuses on the tags of the selected fanfictions used by fan authors on AO3 to frame and categorize their works. Drawing on Genette’s theory of paratexts and its extension into digital culture by Silberstein-Bamford, as indicated in Section 2.2., tags are treated as interpretive tools that influence how a text is read before it is even opened. These paratextual elements help fan authors signal genre, tone, relationship dynamics, and thematic emphasis.

To address how tags frame queer resistance, this study first collects all tags used in the selected fanfictions. Appendix B documents the complete set of tags. The tags are then grouped thematically into broader semantic fields in order to identify recurring patterns relevant to answering the second research question, namely how tags frame acts of queer resistance by signaling reinterpretations of *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* within U.S.-American popular cultural narratives. The thematic analysis therefore focuses on tags that contribute directly to this aim. It does not include tags that do not help answer the second research question, such as archive warnings, completion status, or character name tags.

On this basis, from each thematic group, two representative tags are selected for close reading. These readings focus on the rhetorical, emotional, and ideological work performed by the tags. Rather than treating tags as data points or linguistic units, the analysis considers how they frame the narrative, signal resistance, and position the story within a queer interpretive community. Grouping the tags thematically helps structure the

material and provides a rationale for close reading, while keeping the analysis within the scope of American Studies and queer textuality.

By applying close reading across these three layers (canonical films, transformative fanfictions, and paratextual framings), this methodology enables a coherent, theoretically informed analysis of how the *Top Gun* films are reimagined through queer fan practices. It emphasizes the textual and cultural work of resistance, allowing for critical as well as nuanced insights into how marginalized identities claim interpretive space within U.S.-American popular narratives.

5. Queering *Top Gun* Through Fan Rewriting

This chapter examines how the selected Maverick/Iceman fanfictions and their accompanying tags reinterpret the canon narratives of *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* as acts of queer resistance. To do so, it draws on the theoretical framework established in Chapters 2 and 3 and analyzes both the narratives themselves and the paratextual function of tags.

The analysis is structured in three parts. First, a close reading of selected scenes from the films identifies the dominant ideological constructions of masculinity, military identity, and relationships that shape the canon. Second, the chapter turns to close readings of selected passages from the fanfictions, exploring how fanfiction writers negotiate with, transform, and resist these canonical patterns through queer reinterpretation. Third, it offers a close reading of representative tags accompanying these fanfictions, showing how AO3's tagging system frames acts of queer resistance by signaling reinterpretations of the canon at the paratextual level.

5.1. Canon Analysis of *Top Gun* Films

Before turning to the fanfiction rewritings, this section examines the *Top Gun* films as the canonical foundation for the analysis. In fan studies, canon represents both the narrative source from which fanfiction departs (Thomas 1) and a culturally constructed text tied to cultural power and authority (Stelmach 138). A close reading of the films is therefore necessary to identify the dominant representations of masculinity, military identity, and

relationships that Maverick/Iceman fanfiction later challenge through queer reinterpretation.

This analysis draws on several theoretical concepts introduced earlier. Connell and Messerschmidt's refined notion of hegemonic masculinity provides the central lens for examining how the films construct authority, emotional control, and competitiveness as desirable masculine traits. Tasker's work on war cinema further clarifies how these ideals are racialized, positioning white military masculinity as the normative center of the genre. Sedgwick's concept of male homosocial desire then explains how rivalry between men is bound to and constrained by heteronormativity within the military setting. The films' visual and narrative celebration of the U.S. military also reflects the dynamics of soft propaganda described by Robb and Loia, illustrating how Hollywood-military collaboration shapes public imaginaries of U.S. national power. In addition, Butler's concept of gender performativity informs the reading of how characters enact masculinity through repeated gestures and behaviors that the films present as natural. The following close readings examine selected scenes that best illustrate these masculine, militarized, and heteronormative ideals.

5.1.1. *Top Gun* (1986)

A close reading of key scenes from *Top Gun* reveals a world shaped by the intertwined ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and militarized nationalism. This dynamic is established early on in the film's introductory classroom sequence (*Top Gun*, 00:16:44 – 00:19:04). The sequence functions as a lesson not only for the pilots but also for the audience, setting the tone for what *Top Gun* celebrates: competition, dominance, and the pursuit of excellence within a strictly male hierarchy. As I suggest, the sequence also encapsulates the film's broader gender politics, foregrounding arrogance, discipline, and subtle misogyny as integral to the construction of its militarized masculine ideal. This reflects the film's emergence during the Reagan era, which saw a conservative resurgence and emphasized American military supremacy (Löfflmann 282).

The classroom sequence first frames the pilots in a wide shot that presents them as a single, orderly unit. Rows of men sit upright in a dimly lit room, their matching flight uniforms creating visual uniformity. With the exception of one Black pilot, the group is

presented as overwhelmingly white, thereby reinforcing a narrow image of who belongs in this elite military space and echoing Tasker's observation that war films often reaffirm racial hierarchies by centering whiteness in military settings ("Contested Masculinities" 112). An officer then announces the arrival of Commander Mike "Viper" Metcalf, "the very first man to win the Top Gun trophy" (*Top Gun*, 00:16:44 – 00:16:55), marking him verbally as the exemplary figure within this military hierarchy. In response, the camera shifts to a tracking shot that follows Viper as he strides down the aisle, a movement that visually stages the entrance of authority and briefly reorients the viewer's perspective toward him. The pilots' collective gaze towards Viper reinforces the aura of authority surrounding him, and the absence of background music heightens the solemnity of his arrival. The American flag is clearly positioned in the background throughout the shot, with strong shadows falling beside it. These shadows create bar-like shapes next to the flag, so that national symbolism appears visually intertwined with discipline and institutional control. The framing of Viper between the flag and these bar-like shadows (see figure 3) presents him as the embodiment of naval excellence and of the disciplined hierarchy of this elite military space (*Top Gun*, 00:16:44 – 00:17:06). This visual pairing of military authority with national symbolism also reflects soft propaganda, which embeds ideological messages subtly within entertainment (Robb 17), here linking naval authority to national identity.



Fig. 3. Viper framed against the American flag (*Top Gun*, 00:17:06)

As Viper begins his speech, the camera alternates between close-ups of him and reaction shots of the pilots, lingering most noticeably on Maverick and occasionally on Iceman. This visual pattern subtly establishes both men as central figures within the group, even as Viper's address positions the pilots collectively as "the elite". His opening line, "Gentlemen. You are the top one percent of all naval aviators... the elite... the best of the best" (*Top Gun*, 00:16:58 – 00:17:09), is delivered in a formal, direct, and repetitive cadence. The superlatives create a rhythm of command and affirmation that elevates the group above ordinary soldiers, defining their identity through hierarchy and exclusivity. Such an articulation of elite status mirrors the logic of hegemonic masculinity, which legitimizes authority and positions certain men as exemplary (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). This emphasis on collective excellence, however, contrasts with the camera's focus on Maverick, which individualizes ambition and gestures toward the rivalries through which male homosocial bonds are structured (Sedgwick 1). The focus on Maverick also signals how the film begins shaping him as an exceptional figure of white male heroism within the group, a pattern common to the genre's construction of military masculinity, as Tasker observes ("Contested Masculinities" 112).

Viper's later remarks extend this rhetoric of excellence into ideology, connecting the construction of hegemonic masculinity directly to militarized nationalism. His assertion that "We don't make policy here, gentlemen. Elected officials, civilians do that. We are the instruments of that policy" (*Top Gun*, 00:17:33 – 00:17:43) defines the pilots as tools of the state, simultaneously powerful and obedient. The continuous address of the pilots as "gentlemen" marks the group as exclusively male, and this term of civility clashes with Viper's message that they are tools of war. Furthermore, the phrasing "we are the instruments" erases individuality, transforming the men into extensions of military machinery. His insistence that "And although we're not at war, we must always act as though we are at war" (*Top Gun*, 00:17:44 – 00:17:48) expands this identity into peacetime, suggesting that aggression, vigilance, and readiness are permanent expectations of the ideal man.

The classroom sequence also introduces the *Top Gun* plaque, which records the best pilot of each class (*Top Gun*, 00:17:58 – 00:18:10). The camera shows the mantel of plaques framed by a U.S.-American flag, while the sound of jets is audible in the

background, linking individual achievement directly to the machinery and prestige of military aviation. A close-up of Maverick's face, his eyes fixed and expression determined, conveys his hunger for recognition and foreshadows his drive to prove himself as the best. When Viper asks the room, "You think your name is gonna be on that plaque?" (*Top Gun*, 00:18:11 – 00:18:13), Maverick answers immediately, "Yes, sir" (*Top Gun*, 00:18:13 – 00:18:16). Viper calls this confidence "pretty arrogant, considering the company you are in" (*Top Gun*, 00:18:15 – 00:18:19) yet his approving follow-up, "I like that in a pilot" (*Top Gun*, 00:18:24 – 00:18:27), confirms that arrogance is not a flaw but a desired quality. The exchange rewards boldness and reduces modesty to a disadvantage, reinforcing the idea that the ideal pilot is the one who believes in his superiority. In Butlerian terms, Viper's approval reinforces Maverick's arrogant confidence as a successful performance of masculinity, which the film frames as a militarized ideal.

After the pilots are dismissed by Viper, a comment from Iceman offers an explicit articulation of the film's gender politics. As Maverick walks past him to leave the room, Iceman remarks, "The plaque for the alternates is down in the ladies' room" (*Top Gun*, 00:18:47 – 00:18:51). The line equates failure with femininity and suggests that any position other than first place is inherently feminized and therefore ridicule-worthy. Women are not present in the room, yet they are invoked as the marker of what the men must avoid becoming. The insult relies on the assumption that being associated with women is shameful, which confirms that this masculine hierarchy is built not only on competition among men but also on the devaluation of the feminine. In this sense, this dynamic reflects the operation of hegemonic masculinity, which maintains male dominance by subordinating femininity (Connell and Messerschmidt 832).

This rejection of the feminine also implies an affirmation of heteronormativity, which becomes explicit in the bar scene (*Top Gun*, 00:19:04 – 00:19:32) that immediately follows. The sequence opens with an exterior shot of the bar's "Animal Night" (*Top Gun*, 00:19:04 – 00:19:07) theme, which explicitly frames the pursuit of women as a form of sport, parallel to their aerial combat. The camera then moves inside to reveal a crowded room, first focusing on women before settling on Maverick and Goose to capture their dialogue. Maverick's line, "This is what I call a target-rich environment" (*Top Gun*, 00:19:17 – 00:19:19), reduces women to objects for conquest, a sentiment echoed by Goose's

crude remark, “You live your life between your legs, Mav” (*Top Gun*, 00:19:20 – 00:19:22). Maverick then assures him, “Goose, even you could get laid in a place like this” (*Top Gun*, 00:19:23 – 00:19:25), treating the bar as a space where women are available prizes rather than agents in their own right. Goose’s own wish, “I’d be happy to find a girl who’d talk dirty to me” (*Top Gun*, 00:19:26 – 00:19:29), reinforces this framing of women as providers of sexual pleasure, whose primary value lies in their willingness to satisfy male desire. Even though Goose is married, his words reproduce the same logic of male entitlement that governs the classroom scene. While these lines are delivered with humor and accompanied by upbeat music, the visual composition reinforces the film’s masculine and heteronormative ideology.

After this, the camera pans across the bar to Iceman, who is leaning against a wall with sunglasses on, calmly sipping his drink as a woman stands pressed against him (*Top Gun*, 00:19:30 – 00:19:33), as seen in figure 4. Her presence functions less as an individual character than as confirmation of his heterosexual appeal within a male-dominated environment. Even in this social setting, the focus remains on the men’s performance of confidence and control. Furthermore, by anchoring the pilots to women, the scene reproduces the dynamic Sedgwick terms “obligatory heterosexuality” (3), which works to stabilize homosocial bonds by foregrounding heterosexual performance.



Fig. 4. Iceman positioned with a woman (*Top Gun*, 00:19:31)

The gendered hierarchy in *Top Gun* becomes even more apparent in the sequence that serves as the formal institutional introduction of Charlie, the film's female lead, to the pilot cohort (*Top Gun*, 00:25:42 – 00:28:41). The sequence opens with a wide shot of a hangar, where the pilots sit assembled for a lecture; the camera captures the American flag hanging overhead and fighter jets positioned in the background. This visually establishes the institutional and military setting before Charlie appears. An instructor announces that “you’ll also be trained and evaluated by a few civilian specialists”, and “One of the most qualified is our TAGREP, callsign Charlie. She has a Ph.D. in astrophysics, and she’s also a civilian contractor, so you do not salute her. But you better listen to her, because the Pentagon listens to her about your proficiency” (*Top Gun*, 00:25:43 – 00:26:04). During this introduction, the camera then shifts to Charlie’s entrance: the sound of her heels announces her arrival, followed by an upward pan from her high heels to her tights and skirt before revealing her face. Furthermore, the arrangement of the men’s chairs creates a corridor she must walk through, visually positioning her as an object moving through a male-dominated space (see figure 5). The contrast between this framing and her professional credentials undermines her authority before she even speaks, reducing her presence to both a spectacle and an object of the male gaze.



Fig. 5. Upward-pan framing of Charlie’s entrance, focusing on her heels and skirt (*Top Gun*, 00:26:00)

During her lecture, as Charlie outlines the technical limitations of the MiG-28, Maverick begins whispering with Goose, prompting her to stop and ask, “Excuse me, Lieutenant. Is there something wrong?” (*Top Gun*, 00:26:41 – 00:26:44). He replies, “Yes, ma’am, the data on the MiG is inaccurate” (*Top Gun*, 00:26:41 – 00:26:47), shifting the focus of the scene from instruction to confrontation. Maverick then provokes further with a teasing refusal to reveal details, “I could tell you, but then I’d have to kill you” (*Top Gun*, 00:27:08 – 00:27:09), turning secrecy into performance. When Charlie attempts to reassert authority by responding, “Lieutenant, I have top-secret clearance. The Pentagon sees to it that I know more than you” (*Top Gun*, 00:27:10 – 00:27:16), Maverick dismisses her claim with a confident, ironic retort: “Well, ma’am, it doesn’t seem so in this case now, does it?” (*Top Gun*, 00:27:18 – 00:27:21). His tone combines mock politeness and irony, using the formal address “ma’am” to conceal condescension. The phrasing deliberately undermines Charlie’s expertise, turning the exchange into a public display of wit and control. This direct challenge also aligns with Modleski’s observation that homosocial settings often frame women who enter male-coded spaces as unwelcome intrusions, leading to women being undermined or silenced (102).

Furthermore, the linguistic playfulness in Maverick’s speech, combined with his confident posture and grin, performs a type of masculinity that equates insubordination with charisma. Charlie’s eventual smile at the end of the scene marks her concession to his dominance: her initial professionalism gives way to flirtatious acknowledgment. The camera reinforces this shift by focusing on mutual gazes and subtle smiles, transforming a professional interaction into romantic tension. The sequence thus reveals how *Top Gun* neutralizes the threat of a competent woman by reabsorbing her into a heterosexual dynamic, ensuring that female intelligence is ultimately subordinated to the performance of male allure. This process, in turn, reaffirms a hegemonic masculine hierarchy.

The masculine ideal that defines *Top Gun*’s interpersonal dynamics also governs its aerial world, where competition and control are continually tested. This becomes most apparent in the training exercise that leads to Goose’s death (*Top Gun*, 01:04:01 – 01:09:17). The sequence demonstrates how the ethos of individual glory and rivalry, fostered by the institution itself, ultimately undermines the teamwork it claims to value.

The aftermath then prescribes a stoic, militarized method for processing this trauma, further cementing the film's ideological framework.

The sequence opens with aerial shots of the fighter jets, accompanied by the return of "Danger Zone", the film's anthem for the spectacle of aerial power, which already establishes a high-stakes atmosphere. While the camera stays on the jets, an instructor's voice is heard in the background announcing that the "Top Gun trophy is still up for grabs" (*Top Gun*, 01:04:07 – 01:04:10), reinforcing this competitive framing. Additionally, Goose's metaphor, "Well, it's bottom of the ninth" (*Top Gun*, 01:04:54 – 01:04:56), strengthens this framing by casting the exercise not as collaborative training but as a winner-take-all sporting event. The ensuing dogfight continues the earlier rivalry, with Maverick and Iceman's exchange, "You up for this one, Maverick?" (*Top Gun*, 01:04:58 – 01:05:00) and "Just a walk in the park, Kazansky" (*Top Gun*, 01:05:01 – 01:05:03), turning a routine training exercise into a contest of bravado. This competitive dynamic mirrors the structure of hegemonic masculinity within the U.S. military, where rivalry functions as a key performance of masculine authority (Hinojosa 180), while also reflecting male homosocial desire, in which bonds between men are structured through rivalry (Sedgwick 1).

As the exercise unfolds, the film alternates rapidly between cockpit shots, where radio communication takes place, and exterior shots of the flight maneuvers, creating a sense of tension. The pilots are aware that every point matters, and the competition for the trophy structures their choices in the air. Maverick first urges Iceman to make a decision, calling, "Ice, fire or clear" (*Top Gun*, 01:05:56 – 01:05:58). Iceman, however, insists that he needs "another twenty seconds" (*Top Gun*, 01:06:08 – 01:06:10) and then "ten more seconds" (*Top Gun*, 01:06:24 – 01:06:25) to get the shot. Maverick repeats his demand with "Come off high right, Ice. I'm in" (*Top Gun*, 01:06:33 – 01:06:35). Iceman finally breaks off with a frustrated "I'm off. Shit" (*Top Gun*, 01:06:36 – 01:06:37), but the decision comes too late. Maverick flies into Iceman's jet wash, which causes him to lose control of the plane.

The camera then cuts between the spiraling jet and close-ups of Maverick and Goose struggling to eject, the repeated calls of "Eject! Eject! Eject!" (*Top Gun*, 01:07:31 – 01:07:32) blending with the shrill beeping of failing machinery. Goose's death,

accompanied by subdued music and a slow-motion shot of his body falling into the sea, disrupts the film's rhythm of speed and triumph, yet functions primarily as a narrative device to test Maverick's resilience.

The hospital sequence that follows (*Top Gun*, 01:09:18 – 01:10:29) translates personal loss into a lesson in discipline. The camera shows Maverick standing in front of a sink as he washes his hands. Viper then enters the frame and tells him flatly, "Goose is dead" (*Top Gun*, 01:09:40 – 01:09:40). When Maverick replies, "I know" (*Top Gun*, 01:09:41 – 01:09:43), the exchange offers no emotional release. The dialogue denies catharsis: Viper explains, "Fly jets long enough, something like this happens" (*Top Gun*, 01:09:49 – 01:09:51). Developing this line of reasoning, he adds: "In my squadron in Vietnam, we lost eight of eighteen aircraft. Ten men. First one dies, you die too. But there will be others. You can count on it" (*Top Gun*, 01:09:59 – 01:10:13). His repeated command "You gotta let him go" (*Top Gun*, 01:10:16 – 01:10:22) reframes grief as something to be overcome quickly in order to remain functional. The mirror shot that follows shows Maverick's eyes filling with tears that never fall, capturing the suppression of emotion demanded by military masculinity.

Through this sequence, *Top Gun* reasserts the link between strength and stoicism. The loss of a friend becomes instrumentalized as another test of endurance, a trial through which Maverick must reaffirm his commitment to the military order. This emotional restraint reflects one way hegemonic masculinity is performed within the military, where such control is expected (Hinojosa 179). The scene conveys that loss is treated as an accepted part of military life, and in doing so, the film participates in a form of soft propaganda, presenting the rapid suppression of grief as both necessary and admirable within U.S. military culture. Vulnerability is therefore only acknowledged to be contained, ensuring that emotional expression remains subordinate to the performance of heroic composure.

To conclude, these scenes show how *Top Gun* constructs a world in which masculinity, military identity, and interpersonal relationships are tightly connected through rituals of hierarchy and control. The film presents a narrow ideal shaped by competition, emotional restraint, and the subordination of the feminine, defining belonging through dominance and loyalty to the military order. This close reading has shown how *Top Gun* fuses white

masculine identity with militarized U.S.-American nationalism and heteronormative desire, creating an ideal that leaves little space for vulnerability or emotional connection. It is precisely this configuration that becomes the point of departure for the resistant reinterpretations explored in fanfiction.

5.1.2. *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022)

More than three decades after the original, *Top Gun: Maverick* returns to a familiar ideological framework. Through a close reading of selected scenes, it becomes clear that the film both inherits and reasserts the core assumptions established in *Top Gun*. Masculinity remains defined through dominance and emotional control, and military identity continues to shape how personal relationships are negotiated.

This continuity becomes visible in the film's first major institutional sequence (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:32:55 – 00:35:03), which closely echoes the hangar introduction in *Top Gun* where Charlie is presented (*Top Gun*, 00:25:42 – 00:28:41). However, while Charlie's authority is immediately undermined in the original film, Maverick enters this space as someone whose expertise is already acknowledged, reinforcing a stable and male-dominated hierarchy. This reaffirmation of masculine authority also aligns with the film's reliance on 1980s nostalgia, recalling the conservative sense of order characteristic of that era's military cinema (Dreyer 148).

The sequence (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:32:55 – 00:35:03) begins with a wide shot of a hangar, framing the new cohort of pilots standing at attention in their flight uniforms while an overwhelmingly large American flag dominates the background (see figure 6). This immediately visually situates the group within a U.S.-American military and patriotic setting.

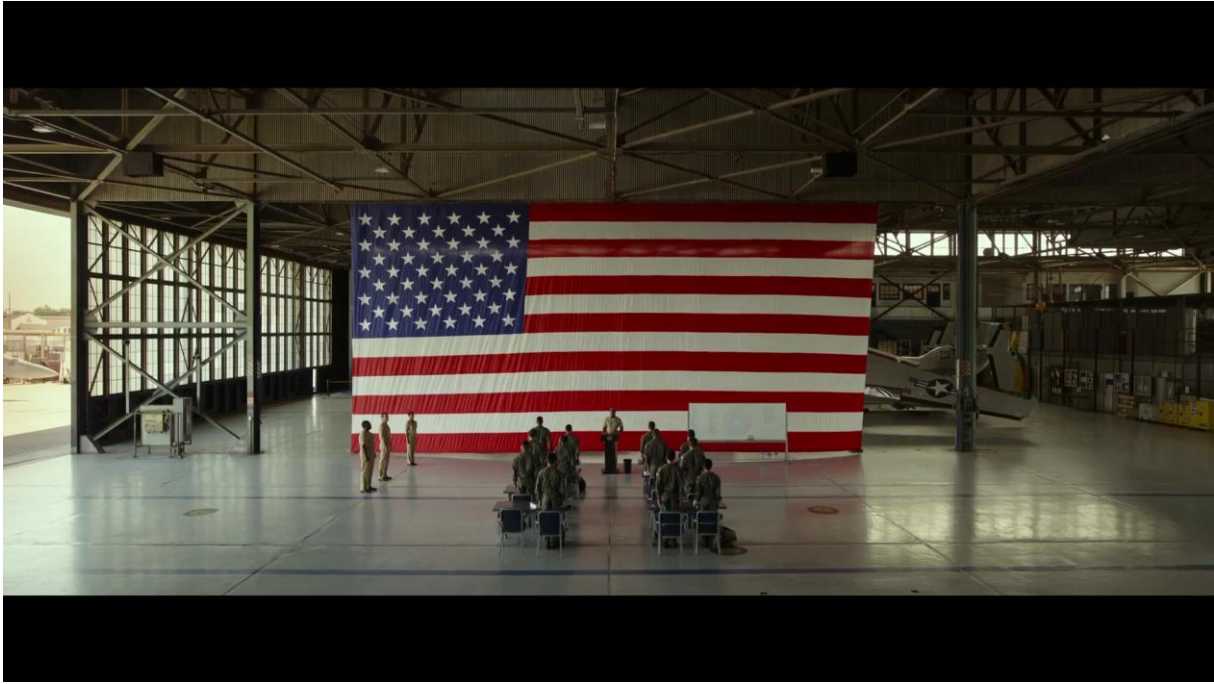


Fig. 6. The pilot cohort assembled in front of the American flag in a hangar (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:32:57)

The camera then moves from this collective view to a series of close-ups, panning across the pilots' faces. This progression highlights a visibly more racially diverse group than in the 1986 film, including one female pilot. As these faces are shown, Admiral Bates's voice-over declares, "You're all Top Gun graduates. The elite. The best of the best" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:33:02 – 00:33:07), a line that directly echoes Viper's rhetoric in the original film (*Top Gun*, 00:16:58 – 00:17:09). The repetition of this language reasserts the internal hierarchy of *Top Gun*, positioning the cohort as an exclusive group whose identity is built on distinction and superiority.

Bates then shifts from status to stakes, announcing that the enemy's "new fifth-generation fighter has leveled the playing field" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:33:11 – 00:33:14) and that technological superiority can no longer be assumed. As he adds that "Success, now more than ever, comes down to the man or woman in the box" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:33:19 – 00:33:25), the line responds to contemporary anxieties about digitally coordinated warfare (Grainge 212), reassuring the viewer that it is ultimately the human pilot who remains decisive (Dreyer 90). While the phrasing also acknowledges gender inclusion, the visual narrative that follows immediately narrows this gesture of inclusivity: as Bates states that "One of you will be named mission leader" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:33:28 – 00:33:30), the camera cuts to Hangman, and when he continues with "the

other half will remain in reserve” (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:33:31 – 00:33:33), it shifts to Rooster. This shot-reverse-shot pattern installs both men as the scene’s focal points and positions them as central rivals, inheriting the competitive dynamic associated with Maverick and Iceman in the first film. Rivalry is thus reasserted as an integral element of military masculinity, shaping homosocial bonds through competition.

After this, the camera pans back to Bates as he introduces the pilots to their instructor. The frame then widens to reveal Maverick approaching the podium, walking toward the same American flag seen in figure 6. The staging also recalls the institutional introduction of Charlie in the first film (*Top Gun*, 00:25:42 – 00:28:41), but whereas Charlie’s authority was questioned, Maverick’s entry is framed through unambiguous respect. Bates describes him as a pilot “with real-world experience in every mission aspect you will be expected to master. His exploits are legendary, and he’s considered to be one of the finest pilots this program has ever produced” (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:33:37 – 00:33:49), establishing him as the standard against which the others will be measured. This emphasis on his exceptional skill secures his position at the top of the hierarchy. Additionally, the fusion of individual military glory with the national symbolism of the American flag exemplifies the film’s soft propaganda, which glamorizes the military by presenting exceptional competence as inherently tied to patriotic service.

As Maverick then begins his introductory speech, he briefly holds up a flight manual before throwing it into the trash. The pilots freeze in stunned silence, yet no one challenges him. The gesture signals that his authority rests on lived experience rather than written instruction, and it positions his intuitive expertise as the standard the others must follow. Furthermore, although the whole sequence features a more visibly racially diverse cohort, its visual and narrative framing ultimately reinstates a familiar hierarchy by organizing the group around a central white protagonist whose dominance remains unchallenged, a pattern Tasker identifies in contemporary war cinema (“Contested Masculinities” 116).

A later sequence then shifts the film into a different, more intimate register, centering on Maverick’s visit to a sick Iceman (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:54:21 – 01:00:08). This sequence relocates the military narrative into a domestic setting, yet the bond between Maverick

and Iceman remains framed through their shared military identity, underscoring how their homosocial connection is sustained by the institution that shaped them.

The sequence opens with a shot of Maverick riding up a suburban driveway, where Iceman's children are playing outside, before Sarah, Iceman's wife, greets him at the door. This domestic scene subtly codes Iceman within a heterosexual family structure and reflects Goldman's observation that hegemonic masculinity is closely tied to heteronormative family arrangements (37). The camera then alternates between Sarah and Maverick as she explains that "There's nothing else they can do. Even speaking is painful now" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:54:59 – 00:55:04), establishing the seriousness of Iceman's illness. Maverick steps forward to comfort her while somber music underscores the emotional tone. The camera then shifts to a close-up of a framed photograph of Maverick and Iceman shaking hands in *Top Gun* (as seen in figure 7).



Fig. 7. Framed photograph of Maverick and Iceman shaking hands (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:55:17)

This shot not only visually anchors the moment in their shared military past but also deliberately activates audience nostalgia. By inserting an actual still from the 1986 film, it connects the two narratives, reinforcing the continuity of Maverick and Iceman's relationship across both films.

After this, the camera follows Maverick into Iceman's study, revealing a coughing Iceman. A shot-reverse-shot pattern between Maverick and Iceman establishes the emotional register of the scene. When the camera rests on Maverick, it highlights his efforts to control his emotions: his jaw tightens, his breathing becomes slow and deliberate, and a single tear escapes before he wipes it away quickly and forces himself back into composure. Iceman, despite his visible illness, remains comparatively composed. Maverick's grief about Iceman and his fear regarding the mission are therefore present but tightly contained, revealing his performance of a hegemonic masculinity shaped by the military framework's demand for emotional restraint, a standard mirrored by Iceman's own controlled posture.

The dialogue between them reinforces this dynamic by centering their exchange on military protocol and duty. Maverick greets him with "Admiral" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:55:32 – 00:55:33) and asks, "How's my wingman?" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:55:44 – 00:55:46), immediately framing the interaction in institutional language. Iceman replies by typing "I want to talk about work" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:55:53 – 00:55:55), signaling that even in terminal illness he remains committed to his role and prioritizes military responsibility over personal reflection. Maverick confides that "The mission is less than three weeks away. The kid's not ready" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:56:35 – 00:56:38), referring to Rooster¹, and Iceman responds with "Then teach him" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:56:41 – 00:56:44), insisting on Maverick's professional duty. When Maverick protests "Please don't ask me to send someone else to die. Please don't ask me to send him. Send me" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:56:50 – 00:56:59), Iceman simply types "It's time to let go" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:57:13 – 00:57:17), echoing Viper's instruction after Goose's death in the first film (*Top Gun*, 01:10:16 – 01:10:22) and presenting the need to let go of emotional attachments as a prerequisite for fulfilling military expectations of emotional control. Maverick has trouble accepting this, expressing his uncertainty about how to prepare Rooster for the mission, but when the camera returns to Iceman's typed message, "It's time to let go" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:58:54 – 00:58:56), he ultimately accepts it, reaffirming the military's demand for emotional restraint. Iceman then rises, coughing, to

¹ Rooster is the son of Goose, Maverick's close friend, who died in *Top Gun*. Maverick delayed Rooster's naval career by pulling his application papers at the request of Rooster's mother, which caused a long-standing rift between them.

tell him, “The navy needs Maverick. The kid needs Maverick” (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:59:13 – 00:59:23), explicitly tying Maverick’s sense of personal purpose to his institutional obligations. This framing also reflects what Tasker identifies in war cinema: even moments of vulnerability ultimately reaffirm white masculine authority, as films present male suffering not as weakness but as moral endurance, recentering the white male hero (“Contested Masculinities” 116).

The sequence then concludes with Iceman’s light-hearted question, “Who’s the better pilot? You or me?” (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 00:59:49 – 00:59:53), which shifts the tone back to their longstanding rivalry. A final cut to the same photograph of them shaking hands in *Top Gun*, as seen earlier (see figure 7), reinforces that their homosocial bond is sustained by the military institution that has defined both their identities.

Iceman’s storyline next appears through his military funeral (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 01:15:46 – 01:16:54), a sequence that ritualizes his death as a celebration of service. The scene opens with a close-up of his official portrait in full uniform, framed by the American flag. Somber music underscores the image. Then the camera slowly zooms out to reveal his casket draped in the American flag, surrounded by uniformed military personnel who begin to lift the cloth in preparation for its ceremonial folding. The combination of uniform, flag, and military ceremony positions Iceman as an exemplary American serviceman and the sequence immediately establishes the scene as a space governed by ritualized military protocol in which patriotic symbolism and institutional order dominate the visual field.

In the background, a command is heard: “Ready, aim, fire” (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 01:15:45 – 01:15:56), the only spoken words in the sequence. The camera then cuts to a row of uniformed riflemen standing at attention as they fire upward in unison before returning to the folding of the flag. A second round of commands and gunfire occurs offscreen, reinforcing the auditory weight of ceremony. The camera then shows Sarah receiving the folded flag, while an officer salutes her. This foregrounds the continuation of military protocol even in the context of personal loss, and positions Sarah within the expected role of the grieving military spouse whose mourning is absorbed into institutional honor.

The camera then cuts to the assembled group of *Top Gun: Maverick* pilots standing in formation with stern, controlled expressions before isolating Maverick who is also in his

formal uniform, his medals clearly on display. He steps forward and presses a pin from his own uniform into Iceman's casket. The choice to focus on this tactile gesture emphasizes how Maverick's grief is articulated through an act of military symbolism rather than open emotional expression. The camera then moves to a close-up of his face: his eyes are glassy, yet he does not allow the tears to fall, performing the emotional discipline expected within the military framework. The shot lingers long enough to register the strain of this restraint before briefly cutting to Penny, Maverick's romantic partner, a shift that subtly redirects the emotional focus toward a heteronormative anchor and away from any potential reading of Maverick's grief as intimate attachment.

The scene ends with a wide shot of the gathered military personnel as four fighter jets fly overhead in formation (see figure 8).



Fig. 8. A wide shot of Iceman's funeral with fighter jets flying overhead (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 01:16:43).

At this moment, the music fades and only the sound of jet engines remains. The shift from somber music to the sound of the jets reframes the moment of grief as an affirmation of military power and continuity, as the flyover visually and sonically reinforces the enduring presence of the institution even in the face of personal loss. Then the camera switches to Maverick, completing his salute to Iceman's casket as the jets pass, his posture mirroring the disciplined composure expected within military masculinity. This sequence thus

translates Iceman's death into a demonstration of institutional order, where grief is tightly regulated and expressed through military ritual rather than emotional release, while simultaneously subtly promoting military service as a heroic and patriotic ideal.

While the funeral sequence foregrounds ritual, restraint, and institutional order, a later combat scene returns to the high-intensity environment of the cockpit, where military identity is enacted through action rather than ceremony. In one of the film's final dogfights (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 01:49:23 – 01:53:40), the camera alternates between tight close-ups of Maverick and Rooster inside an old fighter jet and wider shots of the two approaching enemy jets. The enemy pilots appear only in black helmets with opaque visors, and the camera never offers identifying details, rendering them faceless and anonymous. This visual opposition foregrounds Maverick and Rooster as the humanized center of the narrative while casting the enemy as an abstract threat with no moral or personal specificity. As the enemy jets move into firing position, Rooster asks, "Mav, can we outrun these guys?" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 01:50:19 – 01:50:21), to which Maverick replies, "Not their missiles and guns" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 01:50:21 – 01:50:23). The somber background music underscores the severity of the situation. From here, the camera shifts from alternating between the pilots and the enemy aircraft to focusing exclusively on close-ups of Maverick and Rooster, emphasizing their exchange and the gravity of the decision ahead.

Rooster's line, "Then it's a dogfight" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 01:50:28 – 01:50:30), is followed by Maverick's question "An F-14 against fifth-gen fighters?" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 01:50:31 – 01:50:33), to which Rooster responds, "It's not the plane, it's the pilot" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 01:50:35 – 01:50:37). This statement articulates the film's recurring message that technological sophistication is secondary to exceptional piloting skill, elevating the human pilot as inherently superior. Rooster continues, "You'd go after 'em if I wasn't here" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 01:50:38 – 01:50:40), and Maverick replies, "But you are here" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 01:50:41 – 01:50:42). When Rooster insists, "Come on, Mav. Don't think. Just do" (*Top Gun: Maverick*, 01:50:44 – 01:50:49), the line directly recalls Maverick's mantra, repeated three times earlier in the film whenever Rooster hesitated. The phrase functions as a condensed expression of the film's militarized ethos: instinct over deliberation, action over doubt. Rooster's use of it here marks the moment he fully

internalizes this ideal and is therefore able to succeed within the military framework that the film constructs. Additionally, this moment reinforces the film's recurring demand that Maverick let go of personal attachment and control his emotions in order to act effectively, embodying the form of masculinity demanded by the military.

After Rooster delivers Maverick's mantra back to him, the camera moves into a close-up of Maverick's face, capturing three deliberate breaths before he begins to take action against the enemy jets. This moment shows him suppressing emotion and shifting into the state of embodied discipline that the military requires. As the fight then unfolds, Maverick and Rooster manage to destroy the enemy pilots despite their technological disadvantage. This outcome reinforces the film's framing of the human pilot as the decisive element in air combat and as superior to new technologies. This speaks to broader cultural unease about technological advancement, as Dreyer observes (90). Notably, the pilots who secure victory are two white U.S.-American servicemen who, against all odds, overcome a nameless and technologically superior opponent. The scene therefore also echoes what Loia identifies as the "myth of the American Empire" (714), framing the United States as a stabilizing force whose pilots prevail against external threats (718). Furthermore, the heroization of Maverick and Rooster reflects what Tasker identifies as the war film's tendency to privilege white masculinity and therefore reproduce racial and gender hierarchies ("Contested Masculinities" 112). Ultimately, by framing the victory through the superiority of U.S. pilots over a nameless and technologically advanced enemy, the sequence operates as a form of soft propaganda, subtly naturalizing American exceptionalism and military legitimacy.

To conclude, these scenes show how *Top Gun: Maverick* sustains the ideological foundations of the original film by once again fusing white masculine heroism with U.S. military power, presenting endurance, restraint, and patriotic duty as defining virtues of the ideal U.S.-American pilot. The close reading has demonstrated how masculinity, military identity, and relationships are shaped through emotional restraint, institutional loyalty, and performances of controlled, disciplined behavior. Additionally, Maverick and Iceman's homosocial bond remains central to the narrative, and their connection is consistently framed within familiar heterosexual and military conventions. It is precisely

this dynamic that fanfiction takes up and reworks, using their relationship to explore queer possibilities that the film's militarized framework does not allow.

5.2. Fanfiction Reinterpretation

Having established how *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* construct white masculinity, military identity, and relationships within a heteronormative and militarized framework, this section now examines the selected Maverick/Iceman fanfictions on AO3. It analyzes how the fanfictions reinterpret these dynamics as acts of queer resistance against the films' ideological framework. In doing so, the analysis also attends to how this resistance is articulated through different narrative strategies. In particular, it considers how the selected fanfictions frequently engage with the *Top Gun* franchise from within its established military setting, reworking its meanings rather than rejecting it outright. This mode of intervention is conceptualized as soft resistance in this thesis. Across the selected fanfictions, queer resistance thus emerges as soft resistance, which does not entail a rejection of the military world of *Top Gun*, but a reorientation of its characters, relationships, and emotional norms.

The analysis draws on several theoretical concepts introduced earlier, most importantly in Section 2.3. Jenkins's understanding of fanfiction as a participatory and transformative practice provides the basis for reading these stories as negotiations with, and rewritings of, the canon. Building on this, Dhaenens's account of deconstruction and reconstruction in queer fanfiction clarifies how fan authors unsettle the ideological assumptions of the films and rebuild narrative spaces in ways that foreground alternative forms of intimacy. Butler's notion of gender performativity further informs the analysis, allowing attention to how fanfiction exposes and reconfigures the performative norms of masculinity established in the canon. In addition, Llewellyn's view of fandom as a counter-space in which marginalized identities can be imagined beyond the limits of mainstream media offers a useful lens for understanding the transformative potential of these fanfictions. Finally, Boni's concept of world building and Hills's idea of hyperdiegesis further highlight how fanfiction expands the narrative universe of *Top Gun*, creating sub-worlds in which queer relationality becomes central.

Each of the following subsections offers a close reading of one selected fanfiction, examining how narrative choices and characterizations rework the canon's ideological limitations by expanding subtext, foregrounding emotional expression, and creating queer narrative spaces foreclosed in the films. The analysis focuses on excerpts from these fanfictions that most clearly demonstrate how these stories challenge the films' representations of masculinity, military identity, and relationships in U.S.-American popular culture.

5.2.1. "Take the Long Way" by kerbyfullyloaded

"Take the Long Way" by kerbyfullyloaded employs the "5+1" narrative format common on AO3, a structure signaled in the fic's tags. This format presents five variations of a recurring situation followed by a final decisive shift; here as stated in the fic's summary, it centers on "Five times Iceman tried to get Maverick to come home and the one time he finally did" (kerbyfullyloaded). Each chapter takes place in a different year (1987, 1996, 2003, 2012, 2019, and +2019), offering snapshots of how the two navigate intimacy, distance, and the pressures of military service under Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) and after its repeal. This chronological span allows the narrative to systematically rewrite the canon, transforming their military rivalry into a sustained, secret, and later open romantic partnership. By foregrounding the tension between queer intimacy and institutional repression, the fic also provides a strong foundation for examining fanfiction as a mode of queer resistance.

A passage from the first chapter already demonstrates how the fanfiction begins to challenge the canon, particularly the military expectation of emotional restraint that governs Maverick's response to Goose's death in *Top Gun*. Whereas the films frame grief through stoic composure and demand that Maverick "let go" in order to remain functional, the fic constructs a narrative space in which vulnerability becomes possible and not constrained by the military. Set one year after the events of the first film, the passage depicts Maverick at Goose's grave, openly crying. The intensity of this grief is conveyed through expressive and affectively charged verbs and participles such as "Tears welled up", "guilt filling him up", and "unable to stop the sobs rising up" (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 1). These linguistic choices reveal the emotional cost of loss rather than glamorizing its

suppression. Furthermore, by portraying Maverick's survivors' guilt through lines like "It's all my fault, I killed him [...] it should have been me" (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 1), the passage reworks the canon's expectation that grief be swiftly contained and instead represents it as a prolonged process.

Iceman's behavior in the passage further destabilizes the hegemonic masculinity upheld in the films by replacing rivalry and emotional control with verbal reassurance and sustained physical closeness. When Maverick expresses guilt and self-blame, Iceman responds first with the line "Hey, don't talk about my wingman like that" (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 1), a phrasing that draws on military terminology but reworks it into a term of endearment. In this context, the technical term is repurposed as an intimate form of address, transforming a role defined by operational duty into a gesture of emotional reassurance. This verbal reassurance is then expanded through embodied action: Iceman pulls Maverick into a one-armed hug and later runs a hand down his back as Maverick cries. These gestures move the relationship away from the canon's model of disciplined homosociality and toward a more openly intimate dynamic. This contrast between the films' stoic model of masculinity and the fic's emotionally expressive alternative supports Butler's argument that gender is performative rather than innate (180). In doing so, it reveals the canon's version as only one possible script and shows how the fanfiction performs another.

The excerpt also expands the narrative gaps left by the films regarding Maverick's relationship with Carole and Bradley², an example of hyperdiegesis (Hills 104). While the films briefly acknowledge these bonds, they offer no clear sense of how this relationship evolves after Goose's death. The fanfiction reconstructs this absence by positioning Maverick as an integral part of their family, as reflected in Iceman's remark "I know you took your leave now so you could be with Carole and Bradley for today so go be with them" (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 1). In this way, the fic contrasts with the canon by defining Maverick's relational identity through emotional responsibility and care rather than competitive individualism.

² Bradley, referred to by the callsign Rooster in *Top Gun: Maverick*, is the son of Goose and his wife Carole.

A passage from the second chapter, set in 1996, shifts the focus from emotional vulnerability to the institutional pressures shaping queer relationships under DADT. The excerpt follows Maverick's return from deployment and his immediate confrontation with rumors circulating on base about his closeness to Iceman. Slider, who was Iceman's closest friend in *Top Gun*, warns Maverick that "There's been some scuttlebutt around base about you two" (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 2), making the threat of exposure explicit. The use of "scuttlebutt", a distinctly naval term for gossip, reinforces how deeply military discourse structures the characters' everyday lives; even informal talk is framed through the institution's own vocabulary. By retaining this terminology, the fic therefore remains tied to the military setting of the canon and does not shift into an alternative universe detached from its institutional context. This anchoring makes it possible for the story to construct a queer narrative space within the military institution.

Slider then elaborates that "A few people have noticed how much time Tom spends with you when you're around, and how often you two speak on the phone. That's too vague to do much with now, the whole don't-ask thing, but people have been paying closer attention to Tom" (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 2). These comments establish a climate of surveillance in which everyday gestures of closeness become potential risks. The explicit reference to DADT links the scene to the real conditions queer service members faced under the policy, which defined sexuality as a strictly private matter and treated any indication of same-sex attraction as grounds for discharge (Burks 605). Seen against this context, the fic stands in stark contrast to the films' glamorous portrayal of military life as patriotic service marked by heroism and exceptionalism, foregrounding instead an institution that polices affect, monitors social proximity, and renders queer intimacy dangerous, offering a far more precarious picture of U.S. military culture than the canon allows.

Maverick's response to Slider's warning further exposes the extent to which military scrutiny forces him into a performance of heterosexual normalcy. Rather than returning to the home he shares with Iceman, described as, "a nice house they had fixed up together during a shared leave", he chooses to stay in the "small apartment he rented off base for appearance's sake" (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 2). The apartment functions as a physical marker of the role he is expected to inhabit: a space maintained not for comfort

but for plausibility, allowing him to appear as a single officer whose private life aligns with institutional expectations. His quiet admission that he “probably should have been using it more” (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 2) highlights how concealment becomes a routine obligation, something he must treat as part of his professional identity. In this moment, the passage shifts from depicting external surveillance to showing how that surveillance shapes self-presentation, as Maverick performs the version of himself that the military permits.

The passage then shifts to a phone call in which Iceman contacts Maverick after noticing that he has not come home. Although they have not seen each other in six months, Maverick chooses distance in response to the rumors circulating on base. His suggestion that “it might be best to stay at my own place this leave, maybe go to Austin to stay with Carole for a bit too” (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 2) shows his effort to place himself in situations that appear unremarkable within the military context. Both options draw on expected heterosexual or family-related explanations and demonstrate how navigating DADT involves constant awareness of what will seem plausible to others. Iceman pushes back, noting that “there’s nothing solid for them to point to” (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 2), and points out that his daily contact with Slider never raises suspicion. Maverick’s reminder that this is because Slider is married highlights the double standard at work: Slider’s marital status shields his closeness to Iceman, while Maverick’s lack of such markers makes his presence more noticeable.

It is against these institutional pressures that the emotional strain becomes clear when Iceman says he wants to see “the man I love more than once a year” (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 2) a desire that directly conflicts with Maverick’s fear of harming Iceman’s career. Maverick’s final apology, “I’m sorry Tom, I love you” (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 2) for not returning to their home underscores how their relationship is shaped by the need to balance affection with the risks created by institutional surveillance. The excerpt therefore presents emotional intimacy as openly expressed but ultimately confined by military regulation. In doing so, the passage moves beyond the films’ idealized framing of masculinity, patriotism, and duty and instead constructs a queer narrative space within the military institution, expanding the relational possibilities beyond those presented in the films’ heterosexual framework.

A later excerpt from the final chapter, set at a point when DADT was no longer in effect, rewrites the ending of *Top Gun: Maverick*. Here, Iceman survives and waits for Maverick after the mission, allowing the fic to imagine a future in which their relationship is no longer restricted by military policy. In this post-DADT setting, queer intimacy is no longer something that must be concealed, as in earlier chapters, but becomes a visible part of their everyday life, marking a shift from the secrecy that shaped their relationship under military regulation. Maverick's teasing remark, "Aren't you lucky to be married to such a highly-decorated pilot?" (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 6), establishes the two men openly as a married couple and marks a clear departure from the films' heterosexual trajectories. This reflects what Llewellyn describes as fandom's capacity to create counter-spaces in which identities excluded from mainstream media can be visualized (2348).

The excerpt not only firmly establishes Maverick and Iceman as a married couple, but also centers their reunion with Bradley. While the rift between Maverick and Bradley is resolved by the end of *Top Gun: Maverick*, the fic expands this relationship by positioning Bradley as part of a family unit with Maverick and Iceman, referring to him as "their boy" and "their kid" (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 6). This creates an alternative family structure outside the heterosexual framework that governs the canon. Building on this reframing, the fic also fills narrative gaps between *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick*, since the canon only establishes that Maverick and Bradley became estranged when Maverick pulled his papers but offers little sense of what their relationship looked like before or during that break. The passage expands this unexplored period by suggesting long-standing closeness: Bradley's embarrassed comment, "Sorry, but I'm just having flashbacks to high school" (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 6), implies that Maverick and Iceman were consistently present during his adolescence. His later apology, "I got your letters and messages, and I should have come back. Especially when you were sick" (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 6), further indicates that communication continued even after the estrangement, providing detail that the canon does not develop, and strengthening the queer family dynamic the fic builds around the three characters.

In addition, the physical and emotional closeness shown in the reunion deepens the bond between Maverick, Iceman, and Bradley and differs from the canon's more restrained model of military masculinity. When Iceman "lunges forward to pull him into a hug"

(kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 6) and wipes Bradley's tears, the fic highlights forms of care and emotional openness not associated with the canon's depiction of military men. Furthermore, Maverick's reflection that holding "the remains of his family" mends "a jagged piece of his heart" (kerbyfullyloaded, ch. 6) illustrates how the fic centers queer intimacy and chosen bonds in ways that contrast with the emotionally restrained and heteronormative model of military masculinity constructed in the *Top Gun* films.

The close reading of selected passages from "Take the Long Way" shows how the fic enacts queer resistance by first deconstructing key elements of the *Top Gun* canon and then reconstructing them into a queer alternative. It deconstructs the films' model of military masculinity by foregrounding emotional openness, care, and prolonged grief, countering the canon's association of masculinity with stoicism and control. It then challenges the films' glamorous portrayal of U.S. military life by revealing the pressures queer service members faced under DADT, including surveillance, self-monitoring, and strategic concealment. Finally, the fic reconstructs a post-repeal future in which queer intimacy is openly lived. In fact, a family forms around Maverick, Iceman, and Bradley, expanding relational possibilities the canon restricts to heterosexual frameworks. Across these reworkings, the fic remains firmly situated within the military world of *Top Gun*, keeping its structures and symbolic vocabulary in place while enabling queer intimacy and relationality. Thus, through these interventions, the fanfiction challenges traditional representations of masculinity, military identity, and relationships in U.S.-American popular culture and exemplifies Jenkins's account of fanfiction as a participatory and transformative practice ("Fandom" 18). In doing so, it creates an alternative, resistant queer narrative space that challenges the canonical narratives of *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick*.

5.2.2. "Time And Tide" by DancingDisaster

Following the close reading of "Take the Long Way" by kerbyfullyloaded, which situates Maverick and Iceman's relationship between *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* and extends into the end of the latter film, this section turns to a fic with a different chronological starting point. "Time And Tide" by DancingDisaster is an eleven-chapter fanfiction that reimagines the relationship between Maverick and Iceman across several decades. It

constructs an extensive backstory in which the two men meet prior to the events of the first film and already share a complex romantic involvement when they enter the *Top Gun* program. The fic focuses on the years leading up to and during *Top Gun*, while also including brief glimpses into the future. Each chapter opens with a date marker, covering a time span from 1979 to 2016, which orients readers within a non-linear but coherent life narrative. The story centers on recurring cycles of sexual and emotional intimacy, separation, and reunion, with the relationship breaking under military pressure and institutional homophobia before later being rekindled. It foregrounds queer intimacy and vulnerability between men, challenging the films' emphasis on heteronormative romance and stoic masculinity. In doing so, it offers a clear example of canon being rewritten through queer reimagining as a form of queer resistance.

A passage from the second chapter demonstrates how the fic challenges the films' heterosexual dynamics by presenting Maverick and Iceman as lovers rather than rivals. Set in 1979, almost a decade before *Top Gun*, it situates their relationship within explicit sexual intimacy. The scene opens after "three rounds" (DancingDisaster, ch. 2) of sex, with Maverick described as "dazed and satisfied" and "fucked out and boneless" (DancingDisaster, ch. 2). This diction emphasizes male bodily pleasure and renders same-sex intimacy visible, deconstructing the films' heterosexual framework. By placing the two men in a post-coital setting rather than in competitive interaction, the passage simultaneously reconstructs a narrative in which intimacy, rather than rivalry, shapes how Maverick and Iceman relate to one another. Furthermore, this reconstructed intimacy is established not only through sexual closeness but also through acts of care rather than competition, exemplified when Iceman is described as "very considerate" (DancingDisaster, ch. 2), fetching a towel to clean them both after sex. In this sense, the passage enacts what Dhaenens identifies as the two main strategies of queer resistance, deconstruction and reconstruction (521).

This passage also replaces the canon's emotional stoicism with a relational dynamic in which anxiety and uncertainty can be expressed and actively supported. Iceman's anxiety about staying the night stems from the presence of Maverick's roommate, whom he has not met before and therefore cannot know whether he can trust her to keep their relationship private, highlighting how queer relationships are shadowed by the possibility

of exposure within a military environment. Even after Maverick's reassurance that "she won't care" (DancingDisaster, ch. 2), Iceman presses the question of whether she can be trusted. His body is described as "wound tight" and he is "stiff as a board" (DancingDisaster, ch. 2), bodily markers that underscore his anxiety about being seen and the potential consequences of exposure. Maverick responds not as a rival but as a partner, offering certainty and touch: he "trusts [Carole] with his life", explains their shared history as "two orphans who grew up together" (DancingDisaster, ch. 2), and physically pulls Iceman closer. In doing so, the fic presents an alternative performance of masculinity, one in which care, reassurance, and the expression of vulnerability are not only allowed but central rather than disqualifying. This reframes masculinity as compatible with vulnerability and mutual care in a way that the films largely foreclose.

Furthermore, Carole is also reimagined in this passage. Rather than being confined to the role of wife and mother as she is in the films, she is given a shared orphanhood with Maverick and defined as "kinda my sister" (DancingDisaster, ch. 2). This creates a sub-world within the *Top Gun* universe where such a reconfiguration of her character can exist, reflecting Boni's view of fan audiences as world-builders who remake existing narrative universes and generate new configurations of characters and relationships (17).

Moving from this moment of post-coital emotional and sexual intimacy, the fic turns to the institutional pressures that threaten it. This shift becomes particularly visible in a passage in chapter four, set in 1982, that deconstructs the films' heroic image of military belonging. Whereas *Top Gun* celebrates Navy aviators as "the elite... the best of the best" (*Top Gun*, 00:16:58 – 00:17:09) and frames military service as honorable, the fic exposes the costs of that identity for a queer officer. Iceman receives a phone call from his father, a general, which reveals the extent of institutional surveillance surrounding him; his father already knows, via Captain Ferguson, that Iceman "requested an August API start date" (DancingDisaster, ch. 4), a change he made in order to remain close to Maverick. His father, however, automatically assumes the reason must be a woman, insisting that "if this girl is important enough to be taking you away from your responsibilities" (DancingDisaster, ch. 4), she must be introduced to the family. This heteronormative presumption triggers Iceman's panic, since what is actually at stake is the potential exposure of a same-sex relationship. His classmates imagine that it "must be nice to be

a legacy” (DancingDisaster, ch. 4), but the narration counters this fantasy by emphasizing the “looming shadow” (DancingDisaster, ch. 4) under which he lives, “with people watching and waiting to pick apart [his] every flaw” (DancingDisaster, ch. 4).

Iceman’s internal monologue then directly confronts what being queer in the military entails: “The service simply isn’t kind to men like him, men who want like him” (DancingDisaster, ch. 4). Queer desire is thus depicted as unwelcome within military life. Iceman recognizes that he “has a place here, respect here, a fucking future here” (DancingDisaster, ch. 4), but “only so long as he doesn’t get caught” (DancingDisaster, ch. 4). His belonging is therefore conditional on concealment. In this way, the fic presents military identity as something that must be continually performed in order to be maintained.

As a result of this realization that he cannot sustain a queer relationship within the military, Iceman breaks up with Maverick, describing their relationship as “a death sentence for us both” (DancingDisaster, ch. 4) that would result in “a dishonorable discharge” (DancingDisaster, ch. 4). In the 1980s context in which this passage is set, this fear is realistic rather than exaggerated, as men found to be gay in the U.S. military faced discharge (Burks 604). The passage therefore exposes military life as dangerous for queer people, challenging the films’ presentation of military service as heroic and honorable.

After depicting the pressures that force Iceman to end the relationship, the fic later imagines how the men find their way back to one another. A passage in chapter ten, set in 2016, shows them as having been together for “almost thirty years” (DancingDisaster, ch. 10). It depicts Iceman in a hospital, connected to a ventilator, while Maverick remains at his bedside. Maverick is “absolutely terrified” (DancingDisaster, ch. 10), pleading, “Don’t you dare leave me, Ice” and “I can’t do this alone, Tom” (DancingDisaster, ch. 10), openly expressing fear and emotional dependence instead of suppressing it. The passage thus reworks the films’ model of stoic masculinity and instead presents masculinity as compatible with vulnerability, rather than treating vulnerability as a threat to it.

Furthermore, by portraying Iceman in the hospital fighting for his life, the excerpt also expands a narrative gap left by *Top Gun: Maverick*. While the film only briefly represents Iceman’s illness before moving quickly to his death, the fanfiction lingers on his illness by depicting him in the hospital on a ventilator. In doing so, the fic extends the films’ story

and gives emotional weight to Iceman's illness, creating a world in which Maverick can openly show his fear of losing Iceman, an example of hyperdiegesis (Hills 104).

Alongside this focus on illness and vulnerability, the passage also looks back across their shared past, as Maverick recounts the life the two men have built together. He reflects on their relationship, remembering "quiet Sunday mornings and late-night arguments and a home that had seen everything in between" (DancingDisaster, ch. 10). The fic repeatedly uses the term "wingmen" to describe this history, but not in the films' sense of aerial combat. Instead, "wingmen" becomes a term of intimate partnership: "Wingmen looked like holding him steady when his brother died", "Wingmen looked like thirty-five years of sharing a heartbeat" and "Wingmen looks like not knowing who he is without Tom" (DancingDisaster, ch. 10). Military language is thus repurposed to name a queer life built together, contrasting with the homosocial bond constructed in the films.

Additionally, the reference to "fifteen years of carrying mismatched dog tags" (DancingDisaster, ch. 10) further situates their relationship within a military frame while simultaneously resignifying their meaning, as the tags no longer mark individual soldiers but instead symbolize a shared life and partnership. In doing so, the fic imagines a version of military life in which queerness and military belonging are compatible, in contrast to the films' overwhelmingly heterosexual framework. This aligns with Llewellyn's argument that fanfiction functions as a counter-space in which marginalized sexual identities can be imagined beyond the limits of mainstream media (2348).

Taken together, the close readings of selected passages from "Time And Tide" demonstrate that the fanfiction reinterprets the *Top Gun* canon as a sustained act of queer resistance that operates from within the military setting of the *Top Gun* films. The fic deconstructs canonical representations of masculinity and relationships by replacing stoic emotional restraint and competitive rivalry with sexual intimacy, care, fear, and emotional dependence between men. This directly challenges the films' emphasis on heterosexual romance and emotionally controlled masculinity. At the same time, it exposes military identity as structured by surveillance, heteronormativity, and institutional pressure, foregrounding the constant risk of exposure that renders queer desire incompatible with the figure of the ideal Navy aviator celebrated in the films. Importantly, however, the fic does not end with institutional exclusion. By extending the

narrative across several decades, it reconstructs an alternative future in which Maverick and Iceman survive these pressures and build a shared life together. Even as this future remains embedded in military language and symbols, it is no longer governed by heterosexual norms. In doing so, the fic reworks the canon narratives of the films as acts of queer resistance by challenging traditional representations of masculinity, military identity, and relationships in U.S.-American popular culture.

5.2.3. “good old-fashioned lover boy” by doodlewrite

Following the analysis of “Time And Tide” by DancingDisaster, this section turns to the final selected fanfiction, “good old-fashioned lover boy” by doodlewrite. This three-chapter fic is set primarily during and shortly after the events of *Top Gun: Maverick* and constructs a reworked version of the canon in which Maverick and Iceman have been married since the repeal of DADT. The narrative follows the pilot cohort’s attempts to identify Maverick’s spouse after they notice a ring worn on his dog tag chain. By placing a long-term same-sex marriage at the center of the story, the fic challenges the films’ heteronormative framework and their association of military masculinity with emotional restraint and self-control. Instead, it presents a world in which emotions do not have to be controlled and men within the military can be vulnerable and openly care for one another. This shift rewrites the canon to make sustained queer life possible within a military setting and frames the fic’s intervention as a series of acts of queer resistance against the heteronormative conventions of the films.

A passage from the first chapter already illustrates how the fic challenges the emotional restraint that structures masculinity and military identity in the films. The excerpt expands Maverick’s confrontation with Rooster in *Top Gun: Maverick* (01:14:05 – 01:15:47). It initially reproduces parts of the film’s dialogue, closely following the canon scene, but then continues the moment beyond the point at which the film cuts away. This continuation exemplifies what Jenkins describes as fanfiction’s participatory and transformative engagement with existing texts, in which fans extend and reshape canonical moments rather than merely reproducing them (“Fandom” 18). Instead of moving on to Iceman’s funeral and Maverick’s controlled public composure, the fic shifts attention to the immediate aftermath of the argument and depicts Maverick alone in the

prep room, unable to regain composure and experiencing a panic attack. The use of sensory and affective expressions such as the “rushing in Maverick’s ears”, his “shaky steps”, and his collapse against the wall with a “breathless whine” (doodlewrite, ch. 1) foreground a loss of bodily and emotional control. By lingering on this emotional breakdown, the fic replaces the films’ emphasis on restraint and professionalism with an image of masculine vulnerability and loss of control.

The reaction of the other pilots to Maverick’s panic attack further challenges the canon’s model of emotional restraint as a military ideal. In the films, Maverick is repeatedly encouraged to suppress emotional distress and “let go” in order to remain operational. In contrast, the fic stages a response centered on care rather than discipline: Payback speaks to Maverick calmly, Fritz fetches the medics, and Fanboy calls Maverick’s speed-dial contact, Iceman. Instead of demanding composure, the pilots prioritize his safety and emotional well-being, reimagining military conduct as compatible with vulnerability and mutual support.

This reconfiguration of masculinity and military conduct is further reinforced by Iceman’s arrival. He is introduced explicitly as “COMPACFLT”³, addressed as “Admiral Kazansky” (doodlewrite, ch. 1), marking his highest military rank and situating the moment firmly within an institutional hierarchy. Yet rather than responding with authority or reprimand, he kneels beside Maverick, asks for consent to touch him, guides his breathing, and holds him until the panic subsides. This interaction illustrates Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity (180), as it stages a form of masculinity grounded in tenderness rather than control and replaces their on-screen rivalry with care and emotional dependence, thereby exposing the canon’s model of stoic masculinity as only one version among others.

A later passage from the second chapter builds on this reconfiguration of masculinity by shifting from emotional loss of control and mutual care to openly expressed romantic attachment. Set after the final mission in *Top Gun: Maverick*, the passage rewrites the film’s post-mission celebration by imagining Iceman waiting for Maverick on the carrier, thereby diverging from the canon in which Iceman has already died. Through this rewriting of Iceman as alive and waiting for Maverick after the mission, the passage also

³ COMPACFLT refers to the Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, one of the highest operational commands in the U.S. Navy.

reconfigures the film's heterosexual framework by rendering a same-sex relationship publicly visible: Maverick moves through the crowd of pilots until he reaches Iceman, who immediately pulls him into a "firm embrace" (doodlewrite, ch. 2), with Maverick described as being "firmly folded into Ice's arms and tucked up against his shoulder" (doodlewrite, ch. 2). Locked in their embrace, Maverick reflects that he "didn't have full control over the mission" and that things "could have gone wrong" (doodlewrite, ch. 2), foregrounding his lack of mastery and certainty, countering the films' construction of the military pilot as consistently composed, decisive, and in control. This awareness of vulnerability makes his emotions impossible to contain: "the longing, the love, everything he felt for this man just couldn't be contained" (doodlewrite, ch. 2). The moment then culminates in a public "searing kiss" (doodlewrite, ch. 2), departing from the heterosexual structure of the films, in which intimacy between men is restricted to homosocial bonding. Significantly, the kiss is met not with shock or sanction but with celebration: "behind them, the cheers and the laughter increased" (doodlewrite, ch. 2). The fic thus constructs a sub-world within the *Top Gun* universe where queer intimacy is not only possible but openly accepted within the military context. In this sense, the passage illustrates Boni's argument that fan audiences function as world-builders who actively reshape established narrative universes (17).

This public expression of intimacy is further intensified through the verbal exchange that follows the kiss. Maverick's declaration, "I love you", and Iceman's response, "I love you more" (doodlewrite, ch. 2), transform a familiar competitive pattern from the films into a distinctly queer register. In the canon, their relationship is structured by competitive rivalry, repeatedly framed through questions of who the better pilot is. The excerpt reworks this dynamic by turning competition itself into a declaration of love rather than a struggle for dominance. This shift thus reframes a relationship shaped by military competition into one defined by intimate same-sex partnership.

A passage from the third chapter then shifts the focus from the post-mission reunion on the carrier to the physical consequences of the mission itself. Set the following day in the medbay, the excerpt opens with Maverick and Rooster lying in hospital beds, recovering from their ejection. In contrast to *Top Gun: Maverick*, where both pilots emerge from the mission without visible harm, the fanfiction explicitly details the injuries they have

sustained. Iceman lists that both men have “concussions” and “various contusions” (doodlewrite, ch. 3), while Maverick also has a “sprained ankle” and “cracked ribs”, and Rooster has a “dislocated [...] shoulder” (doodlewrite, ch. 3). This emphasis on injury deconstructs the films’ glamorized portrayal of military heroism, where pilots survive extreme missions without visible physical consequences. Instead of the untouchable action hero celebrated by the canon, the fic presents Maverick as physically vulnerable and visibly affected by combat. By foregrounding physical injury, the passage reframes military service as materially costly and destabilizes the image of the U.S. fighter pilot as invulnerable, thereby revealing aspects of military life that the films largely foreclose.

Simultaneously, the passage reconstructs the films’ narrative framework by replacing its heteronormative family model with a queer family structure, as Rooster introduces Maverick and Iceman to the visiting pilot cohort as his “uncles slash pseudo-dads” and casually explains the “Bradshaw-Mitchell-Kazansky family tree” (doodlewrite, ch. 3). This stands in clear opposition to the canon, where Iceman is positioned within a heterosexual family and Maverick is paired with female partners such as Charlie and later Penny, reinforcing heterosexuality as the only recognized model for intimacy and domestic life within the military setting.

The normalization of this queer family structure within the military is reflected in the pilots’ reaction to Rooster’s disclosure, which takes the form of amused chaos, including the revelation that Phoenix has won the bet about who their instructor’s spouse is. Maverick and Iceman observe this scene with “bemused smiles” (doodlewrite, ch. 3), which softens the rigid hierarchies associated with military authority and depicts them not only as officers but as partners and parental figures. In this way, the fic reimagines the *Top Gun* universe as one in which queer family formations coexist with military life.

The close readings of selected passages demonstrate how “good old-fashioned lover boy” consistently reinterprets the canon narrative of the films as a site of queer resistance. By extending canonical scenes to foreground emotional collapse, mutual care, and physical vulnerability, the fic challenges the association of masculinity with stoicism, control, and professional detachment, as well as the films’ construction of the U.S. fighter pilot as invulnerable. At the same time, the fanfiction reframes military identity by depicting institutional authority as compatible with tenderness, dependency, and

same-sex intimacy rather than rigid hierarchy and emotional discipline. Finally, through the public articulation of romantic attachment and the normalization of queer family structures within the military setting, the fic reorients the films' heterosexual relational model into one centered on enduring same-sex partnership and care. In this way, by remaining situated within the military world of the *Top Gun* films rather than rejecting it outright, the fanfiction challenges traditional representations of masculinity, military identity, and relationships in U.S.-American popular culture. This challenge, in turn, exemplifies what Llewellyn describes as fandom's function as a counter-space where queer identities can be imagined beyond the constraints of mainstream media (2348).

5.3. Tagging as Paratextual Resistance

The preceding sections have shown how Maverick/Iceman fanfictions reinterpret *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* as acts of queer resistance through their narrative choices, character relationships, and thematic reconfigurations, often by reworking the films from within their established military framework rather than rejecting them outright. Such practices of resistance, however, do not operate only within the stories themselves. They also emerge at the paratextual level, most visibly through the tagging system on AO3. Following Genette's understanding of paratexts as interpretive thresholds and Silberstein-Bamford's application of this concept to digital culture (see Section 2.2.), tags function as framing devices that guide reception, shape reader expectations, and position texts within specific cultural and discursive contexts. This theoretical framework guides the following analysis of tags as tools of queer resistance.

In order to examine how this paratextual framing operates in practice, the analysis grouped the tags into thematic fields based on their discursive functions. This grouping revealed three recurring patterns: tags that rework the films' heteronormative relationship structures, tags that reshape canonical timelines and endings, and tags that foreground experiences of homophobia and mental health within a military setting. The full thematic grouping of the tags is provided in Appendix C. Together, these thematic fields show that queer resistance is not only articulated within the narratives themselves, but is already signaled and structured at the level of tagging.

Building on this thematic structure, the following subsections examine this process in more detail through close readings of two representative tags from each thematic field. This approach illustrates how tagging practices contribute to framing queer resistance by signaling reinterpretations of the *Top Gun* films within U.S.-American popular cultural narratives.

5.3.1. Queering the Films' Heteronormative Framework

The first theme focuses on how tags reinterpret the heteronormative relationship structures established in *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick*. In the films, Maverick and Iceman are primarily defined through competition, and their emotional bond is framed as homosocial rather than romantic. At the same time, both characters are situated within explicitly heterosexual trajectories: Maverick through his relationships with Charlie and later Penny, and Iceman through his marriage to Sarah and their children. These narrative choices anchor the characters firmly within a heteronormative framework. The tags grouped under this theme, however, challenge this framework by signaling queer relational possibilities, particularly a romantic partnership between the two men. In doing so, they announce a queer reinterpretation of the franchise at the paratextual level and frame the fanfictions as acts of queer resistance. While the following analysis focuses on tags that explicitly establish Maverick and Iceman as a queer couple, the theme also encompasses tags that reconfigure family roles by situating a queer Maverick in a parental position, thereby challenging the films' heteronormative model of family formation.

One of the clearest paratextual signals of this reframing of Maverick and Iceman's relationship appears in the tag "Tom 'Iceman' Kazansky/Pete 'Maverick' Mitchell", which is used in all three selected fanfictions. Within fanfiction conventions, the slash (/) between two character names indicates that the characters are written into a homoromantic or homosexual relationship (Hazra 109), in this case between Maverick and Iceman. The tag therefore does not merely identify which characters appear in the story but explicitly categorizes the nature of their relationship. As a result, it signals a clear reinterpretation of the canon by positioning Maverick and Iceman not within a homosocial bond, as in the films, but within a homosexual one.

Furthermore, the use of the slash is deliberate, as using an ampersand (&) instead would indicate friendship or another non-romantic association between two characters (Silberstein-Bamford 137). The tag “Tom ‘Iceman’ Kazansky/Pete ‘Maverick’ Mitchell” thus signals to readers that the narrative will depart from the films’ heterosexual relational framework and instead center on a queer relationship. In this way, the tag exemplifies Silberstein-Bamford’s argument that tags are deliberately chosen by users to guide readers’ expectations about a story (130). Moreover, the tag also preserves the characters’ military callsigns, “Maverick” and “Iceman”, which firmly situates their relationship within the recognizable symbolic world of *Top Gun*. The queering of their bond thus does not take place outside the franchise but emerges through a reworking of its established character identities, recasting figures defined by rivalry in the films as partners in a same-sex relationship.

Whereas the “Tom ‘Iceman’ Kazansky/Pete ‘Maverick’ Mitchell” tag establishes Maverick and Iceman as a same-sex pairing, other tags further shape the narrative framework through which their relationship is presented. One such example is the tag “A romantic dramedy about two Idiot Flyboys”, used for the fic “Time And Tide”. The term “romantic dramedy” signals a generic shift away from the action-oriented military drama that characterizes the films. Rather than foregrounding military action, the tag situates the story generically as a romance with both comedic and dramatic elements. By naming romance as the dominant genre, the tag therefore reframes the story’s priorities away from the military spectacle and toward a queer relationship.

At the same time, the phrase “two Idiot Flyboys” preserves a clear connection to the films’ symbolic universe. The term “flyboys” directly refers to the fighter pilot identity central to *Top Gun*, indicating that the story remains situated within this military setting despite its shift in genre. The adjective “Idiot”, however, modifies this figure by introducing a humorous tone that contrasts with the films’ portrayal of elite, controlled, and heroic pilots. Together, the terms “romantic dramedy” and “two Idiot Flyboys” reframe the figure of the fighter pilot by shifting emphasis away from heterosexual romance and military excellence toward Maverick and Iceman’s romantic relationship. In this way, the tag signals a queer reinterpretation of the films while remaining clearly situated within their military setting.

Taken together, the tags “Tom ‘Iceman’ Kazansky/Pete ‘Maverick’ Mitchell” and “A romantic dramedy about two Idiot Flyboys” signal a clear departure from the films’ heteronormative framing. By marking Maverick and Iceman as a same-sex pairing and situating their story within the conventions of romance rather than military action, these tags reinterpret the canon’s relationship model by recasting rival characters as participants in a queer relationship. In doing so, the tags grouped under this theme show how heteronormative relationship structures are reworked at the paratextual level, placing queer relationality at the center and thereby framing this reinterpretation of the films as an act of queer resistance within U.S.-American popular culture.

5.3.2. Reshaping the Films’ Timelines and Endings

The second theme focuses on tags that signal a reworking of the canonical timelines and endings of the *Top Gun* films. The tags grouped under this theme indicate that the fanfictions reinterpret and rewrite the canon in order to challenge the heteronormative framework of *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* by asserting a queer relationship between Maverick and Iceman as narratively central. By announcing these changes at the paratextual level, the tags reshape the films’ original narrative structures and thus function as signals of queer resistance.

One of the most explicit examples of temporal and narrative intervention within this thematic field is the tag “Tom ‘Iceman’ Kazansky Lives”, which appears in the fanfiction “Take the Long Way”. The tag directly contradicts the canonical ending of *Top Gun: Maverick*, in which Iceman dies following a prolonged illness. By stating his survival in the paratext itself, the fic signals to readers in advance that this narrative will depart from the film’s ending and replace Iceman’s canonical fate with an alternative outcome. The tag therefore marks a clear reinterpretation of a key plot event from the film. This intervention positions the fanfiction within the genre of so-called “fix-it fic”, which, according to Sauro, “repairs something in the source text (e.g. the ending, plot holes, mischaracterization, the death of a beloved character) that the fan was not happy with” (143). In this case, Iceman’s death is treated as an element requiring correction. As a result, the tag frames the fanfiction as offering an alternative version of the film’s conclusion and presents the rewritten ending as a deliberate response to the perceived limitations of the source text.

This also highlights Silberstein-Bamford's argument that tags function as deliberately chosen paratextual framing devices that alert readers to major departures from the source text (130).

Furthermore, keeping Iceman alive makes a queer relationship between him and Maverick narratively possible. In the film, his death forecloses any future development of their bond. By contrast, the tag signals that Iceman remains present within the story's timeline, creating the possibility for a sustained romantic relationship between the two men to exist. In this way, the tag not only revises a key plot point but also creates the conditions for a queer love story to unfold within the framework of the *Top Gun* universe.

Another example of how tags reshape the films' timelines and endings is the tag "slight canon divergence in that mav and ice have been married for multiple years", used in the fanfiction "good old-fashioned lover boy". By explicitly using the term "canon divergence", the tag signals that the story will depart from the narrative framework established in the films, while the modifier "slight" frames the change as a limited modification rather than a wholesale departure from the canon. Additionally, this wording not only makes the act of rewriting visible but also indicates that the author is aware of the canonical trajectories and has decided to change them.

The second part of the tag, "in that mav and ice have been married for multiple years", then specifies what exactly is being rewritten. In the canon, Iceman is married to Sarah and Maverick is first involved with Charlie and later enters a relationship with Penny, while Maverick and Iceman's bond with each other is framed as homosocial and shaped by competition. The tag, however, signals that these heterosexual trajectories will be overwritten and replaced by a long-term same-sex marriage between the two men. In doing so, it retrospectively queers the franchise's timeline and reframes their relationship as romantic rather than competitive. Through this paratextual declaration, the tag frames the rewriting of the characters' relationship history as a reinterpretation of the films' timelines and narrative outcomes.

Taken together, the close readings of "Tom 'Iceman' Kazansky Lives" and "slight canon divergence in that mav and ice have been married for multiple years" show how tags grouped under this theme signal temporal and narrative rewriting at the paratextual level by reshaping the films' timelines and endings. These alterations, such as Iceman's

survival or a long-standing marriage between the two characters, announce revisions to the canonical relationship outcomes of *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* before the stories themselves begin. In doing so, they frame such reinterpretations as acts of queer resistance to the heteronormative resolutions of the *Top Gun* films within U.S.-American popular cultural narratives.

5.3.3. Foregrounding Homophobia and Mental Health in the Military Context

Following the analysis of tags that queer the heteronormative relationship structures and reshape the films' timelines and endings, this final theme turns to tags that foreground experiences of homophobia and mental health struggles within the military setting of the *Top Gun* franchise. While the films largely present the U.S. Navy as a space of heroism and emotional control, the tags grouped under this theme signal a shift in emphasis toward structural discrimination and psychological vulnerability. In doing so, the tags either draw attention to the institutional conditions that regulate queer existence in the military or rework the ideal of the emotionally stoic fighter pilot that underpins the films' portrayal of military masculinity. These tags therefore position the fanfictions as reinterpretations of the films' idealized portrayal of U.S. military life and present this shift as another form of queer resistance at the paratextual level.

One explicit example of this reframing appears in the tag "DADT", used in the fanfiction "Take the Long Way". The abbreviation refers to the U.S. military policy Don't Ask, Don't Tell, which permitted queer individuals to serve only as long as their sexuality remained hidden, while any open expression of same-sex desire could lead to discharge (Burks 605). By mentioning this policy directly in the paratext, the tag situates the story within a historical context of institutionalized homophobia and signals that queerness will be central to the narrative, not merely as a personal identity, but as something regulated and sanctioned by the U.S. military.

This stands in contrast to the *Top Gun* films, which do not address sexuality as a source of structural exclusion and instead depict their central characters as heterosexual, a position that is portrayed as unproblematic and compatible with military life. Moreover, military life in the films is portrayed as glamorous and heroic, associated with elite status.

By invoking DADT, the tag shifts attention away from this idealized image and toward the constraints placed on queer soldiers, whose identities are rendered precarious within the institution. The tag therefore functions as a paratextual signal that the story will reinterpret the *Top Gun* universe by foregrounding the realities and costs of serving as a queer soldier within the U.S. military, thereby challenging the films' glamorous depiction of military life.

While the "DADT" tag foregrounds institutional regulation and structural homophobia, other tags under this theme shift attention to mental health struggles within the military context. One such example is the tag "Panic Attacks", which appears in the fanfiction "good old-fashioned lover boy". This tag signals that the narrative will address experiences of acute psychological distress, thereby challenging the films' construction of the fighter pilot as emotionally controlled and unaffected by fear or vulnerability. In the *Top Gun* films, emotional struggle is largely subordinated to professional performance, contributing to an image of military masculinity grounded in restraint and stoicism. By foregrounding panic attacks, the tag reframes this model of the elite fighter pilot as psychologically vulnerable and shaped by anxiety, thus challenging the hegemonic form of military masculinity promoted by the films.

Furthermore, drawing on Genette's concept of the paratext as a threshold, the tag functions as a point at which readers can decide whether to proceed with the story or withdraw before engaging with the narrative (2). In this case, by explicitly naming panic attacks, it alerts readers to the presence of potentially distressing material and allows them to decide whether to engage with the story. In this way, the tag also reflects what Silberstein-Bamford describes as fandom's ethos of care, in which tags serve not only to frame interpretation but to protect and accommodate readers' emotional boundaries (134).

Together, the close readings of "DADT" and "Panic Attacks" illustrate how the tags grouped under this theme signal reinterpretations of the *Top Gun* films, directing attention to structural discrimination and psychological vulnerability within the military. By naming institutional homophobia and mental health struggles directly, these tags mark a shift in emphasis away from the films' glamorous portrayal of military life and their stoic model of masculinity. They thereby frame the fanfiction as interventions into U.S.-American

popular culture representations of the U.S. military, positioning such reinterpretations as acts of queer resistance to the films' idealized, hegemonic model of soldierly identity that privileges heterosexuality.

6. Beyond the Text: Fanfiction as Cultural Critique

The previous chapter has demonstrated how the selected Maverick/Iceman fanfictions and their accompanying tags reinterpret *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* as acts of queer resistance at both the narrative and paratextual level. This chapter builds on these findings by shifting from close textual analysis to a broader discussion of what such rewritings represent within U.S.-American popular culture.

It first considers how the films' function as soft propaganda is transformed through fanfiction into a form of soft resistance, as militarized masculinity and heteronormative relational models are reinterpreted from within the canon. It then conceptualizes these narrative interventions as a form of queer world building that simultaneously operates as cultural critique, while also addressing the limits of such resistance. Finally, the chapter turns to the paratextual level to show how tagging practices on AO3 frame and reinforce these interventions by signaling queer reinterpretations of the franchise before the narratives themselves begin. It also examines how these tagging practices shape and limit how such resistance becomes visible and accessible to readers.

6.1. From Soft Propaganda to Soft Resistance: Reframing the Narrative

Top Gun was the highest-grossing film of 1986 (Suid 499), but its significance extends far beyond commercial success. The film shaped public perceptions of the U.S. military by presenting military life as exciting and honorable (Martin 5), which contributed to a noticeable increase in enlistments (Robb 182). As Robb notes, cinema functions as “the most influential vehicle of popular culture” (13) through which the military gains access to the civilian imagination. In this sense, *Top Gun* came to occupy a distinctive position within U.S.-American popular culture, not only as a blockbuster but as a highly effective medium for constructing and circulating idealized images of U.S. military identity (Suid 502). This cultural impact was renewed decades later by *Top Gun: Maverick*, which

achieved comparable success and cultural visibility, ranking as the second highest-grossing film of 2022 and receiving an Academy Award (Dreyer 2). The sequel expands the ideological function of the original film by also serving, in part, as an advertisement for the U.S. military (Loia 714). Together, the two films therefore operate not merely as entertainment but as cultural texts that actively participate in shaping representations of the U.S. military.

This representational power is not incidental but operates through what this thesis conceptualizes as soft propaganda. Unlike traditional propaganda, which is overt and directly state-driven, such propaganda operates indirectly, as the military shapes the ideological messages embedded in entertainment through its influence on production processes (Robb 17). Both *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* were produced in close cooperation with the U.S. Department of Defense, which supplied financial support, logistical assistance, and access to military resources (Dreyer 74). However, such support is conditional, as films portraying the military in a negative light would not receive institutional backing (Robb 18). This logic is exemplified by the production of the original *Top Gun*, in which producer Don Simpson explicitly assured the Department of Defense that naval pilots would be portrayed as “dashing young men” (Robb 201) and that naval aviation would appear glamorous and heroic.

The close reading of the films demonstrates how this logic is enacted narratively and visually. Military identity is consistently framed as elite status: the pilots are introduced as “the best of the best”, and Maverick in particular is repeatedly positioned as exceptional. Furthermore, throughout both films, the U.S. flag dominates classrooms, hangars, and funerals, visually linking military excellence to national identity. Even moments of loss are absorbed into institutional order. Goose’s death and Iceman’s funeral are staged as scenes of disciplined mourning followed by a return to duty, reinforcing emotional restraint as a military virtue.

At the same time, the franchise produces intense bonds between men. Competition over who is the best pilot structures Maverick and Iceman’s relationship, yet their bond is kept strictly homosocial through the constant centering of heterosexual romance. Maverick’s relationships with Charlie and Penny and Iceman’s marriage function less as emotionally complex narratives than as stabilizing devices that reaffirm hegemonic masculinity and

contain the erotic potential of male intimacy. Heterosexuality thus operates as ideological closure, ensuring that homosocial intensity never destabilizes the patriarchal order embedded in the military setting. Through this framing, the ideal U.S. soldier emerges as patriotic, superior, emotionally controlled, and heterosexual.

Such representational patterns, however, do not remain confined to fiction but intersect with broader cultural understandings of military identity and masculinity. Suid links the cultural success of *Top Gun* to the Tailhook scandal of 1991 (501), during which eighty-seven women were sexually assaulted by U.S. Navy pilots at a convention (Robb 182). Suid argues that the film contributed to a culture of arrogance among young aviators, many of whom modeled their self-image on Tom Cruise's character (501). While such developments cannot be attributed to only a single film, the incident illustrates how soft propaganda in *Top Gun* does not merely shape public understandings of the military but can also reinforce behavioral norms, including dominance and entitlement as markers of masculine authority within military culture.

Against this cultural backdrop, Maverick/Iceman fanfiction can be read as a counter-narrative that reconfigures the ideals of masculinity, military identity, and relationships promoted by the films. In the three analyzed fanfictions, homosocial bonds become homosexual bonds, emotional restraint becomes vulnerability, and military service is no longer framed as purely heroic but as a space structured by risk, exclusion, and emotional cost for queer characters. Grief, panic attacks, and care replace the canon's emphasis on stoicism, constructing forms of masculinity compatible with dependence and intimacy. The heterosexual family model is displaced by a queer family centered on Maverick, Iceman, and Bradley, redefining kinship beyond heteronormative marriage. Taken together, these reinterpretations observed in the analyzed fanfictions align with Goldmann's argument that fanfiction offers a space to challenge heteronormative frameworks by foregrounding queer relationships and forms of intimacy that are marginalized in mainstream media (34).

It is within this broader potential of fanfiction to challenge dominant norms that the analyzed fanfictions enact what can be described as acts of queer resistance. The analysis shows that the three fanfictions enact this resistance primarily through the reinterpretation of the *Top Gun* canon. However, rather than rejecting the films outright,

the fanfictions intervene from within it. They retain the military setting and symbolic vocabulary, but rework how these elements function and what they signify. Terms such as wingman or objects like dog tags are not abandoned as military symbols but are reworked to carry additional meanings within queer relationships, functioning as terms of endearment and tokens of affection.

Precisely because this form of queer resistance operates through reinterpretation rather than explicit rejection, the fanfictions' intervention can be understood as what this thesis conceptualizes as soft resistance. The fanfictions do not dismantle the military world of *Top Gun* entirely. Instead, they repurpose its characters and military setting to tell a different kind of story, one centered on queerness. Where the films normalize emotional restraint, competition, and heterosexual romance as markers of military life, the fanfictions foreground vulnerability, care, and sustained queer relationships within the military context. Queer resistance thus emerges not through open confrontation but through narrative reinterpretation. By working inside the cultural framework of *Top Gun*, the fanfictions thus transform a story of militarized masculinity and heterosexual order into one that makes space for queer lives and relationships. The move from soft propaganda to soft resistance therefore illustrates how U.S.-American popular culture can simultaneously reproduce dominant ideologies and offer resources for challenging them from within.

6.2. Fanfiction as Queer World Building and Cultural Critique

The previous section has shown that the selected Maverick/Iceman fanfictions do not simply reproduce the *Top Gun* canon but actively rewrite it. In line with Reijnders et al.'s understanding of fanfiction as a practice of transformation rather than repetition (6), this process involves turning elements that remain only implicit in the films into explicit narrative foundations. This is particularly evident in the three fanfictions' decision to depict Maverick and Iceman as romantic partners. As Modleski observes, *Top Gun* constructs an intense homosocial bond between the two characters that can be perceived as having homoerotic undertones (102). However, as the analysis of the films has shown, this potential is repeatedly neutralized through the continuous emphasis on

heterosexual romance, which reasserts Maverick's and Iceman's heterosexuality. The fanfictions reverse this logic: they take the homoerotic tension that remains implicit in canon and develop it into an explicit, sustained relationship. In doing so, they shift queer desire from the margins of the *Top Gun* universe to its narrative center. This, in turn, positions fan writing as a practice through which marginalization in popular culture can be challenged (Reijnders et al. 6).

Moreover, this process of rewriting the canon can be understood as a form of queer world building. As Boni argues, fictional worlds are not fixed entities but are continually reshaped by those who engage with them, turning audiences into "world-builders" (10) who participate in expanding and collectively reconfiguring the world's meaning. The three analyzed fanfictions exemplify this dynamic by constructing a shared sub-world within the *Top Gun* universe in which Maverick and Iceman are written as romantic partners and queerness becomes a central organizing principle.

At the same time, this form of queer world building also functions as a form of cultural critique. All three fanfictions address, to varying degrees, the institutional discrimination of homosexual people in the U.S. military. The fic "Take the Long Way" by kerbyfullyloaded explicitly refers to DADT and makes visible the surveillance and constant fear of exposure faced by queer officers during that period. "Time And Tide" by DancingDisaster, while not directly naming an official regulation such as DADT, nevertheless illustrates what it means to be queer in the U.S. military, a reality that ultimately leads Maverick and Iceman to separate temporarily to avoid exposure and possible discharge. "good old-fashioned lover boy" by doodlewrite does not foreground institutional constraints in the narrative itself, but notes in its summary that "Icemav has been married since DADT was repealed" (doodlewrite), thereby situating the story within a concrete historical framework. In doing so, the fanfictions connect their narratives to real political conditions and expose a far more precarious image of military life than the glamorous portrayal offered by the films. This corresponds to what Dhaenens describes as deconstruction and reconstruction, two strategies for queer resistance, in which dominant norms are questioned while alternative ways of living are represented as viable (521). In this sense, the fanfictions deconstruct institutional regulation and structural homophobia while simultaneously

reconstructing queer relationships as sustainable within a military context, as all three narratives ultimately imagine Maverick and Iceman in a committed partnership.

However, the scope of this critique remains selective. Although the fanfictions thematize the emotional and institutional costs of military regulation, they ultimately resolve these conflicts through romanticized depictions of long-term queer relationships. This stands in contrast to historical realities. Even after the repeal of DADT in 2011 (Neff and Edgell 233), which had previously prohibited queer service members from serving openly in the U.S. military (Burks 605), structural and cultural exclusion rooted in hegemonic military masculinity did not simply disappear (Allsep 390). As Allsep notes, the repeal was not intended to transform personal attitudes within the military, and heteronormativity continued to function as a dominant model of legitimacy even after formal inclusion (Allsep 391–392). The fanfictions therefore offer symbolic repair and emotional closure through their queer happy endings, rather than a fully realistic representation of institutional change and ongoing discrimination within the U.S. military.

Similar limitations emerge in the representation of gender. The analysis of the films has shown that women in *Top Gun* occupy secondary roles and primarily facilitate male-centered narratives. This pattern is particularly evident in the treatment of Charlie in the first film, where her professional authority is repeatedly undermined and gradually displaced by her repositioning as Maverick's romantic and sexual conquest, thereby reaffirming hegemonic masculine hierarchies. This aligns with Modleski's observation that homosocial settings often marginalize women who enter male-coded spaces by sexualizing them and stripping them of narrative authority (102). In the three fanfictions, female characters such as Carole are written with greater narrative presence; nevertheless, they remain secondary figures whose primary function is to support or contextualize the relationship between Maverick and Iceman. While this focus is partly inherent to slash as a genre centered on male/male relationships, it also means that the queering of the canon does not fundamentally challenge the gender hierarchy embedded in the source material.

A further limitation becomes visible in the treatment of whiteness. As the analysis of the films has shown, *Top Gun* constructs military heroism around a model of white masculinity, centering Maverick as the idealized U.S.-American white male hero. This

framework is not directly challenged in the fanfictions, which focus primarily on queering the relationship between Maverick and Iceman without substantially reworking the films' centering of white masculinity. The queer futures imagined in the stories are therefore largely futures for white queer men. This becomes particularly evident in the repeated use of long-term partnership and same-sex marriage as narrative closure. While these endings disrupt heteronormativity, they also reflect what Shannon Winnubst describes as the racialized and classed character of marriage as an institution, whose extension through same-sex marriage risks reproducing existing systems of domination rather than undoing them (202). Queer belonging is thus reimagined in the fanfictions, but largely within culturally familiar frameworks of legitimacy.

Taken together, the three analyzed fanfictions construct a queer sub-world within the *Top Gun* universe by transforming the films' displaced homoerotic subtext into an explicit relationship between Maverick and Iceman. This form of queer world building enacts resistance by challenging heteronormative military identity and by exposing the fear, surveillance, and exclusion produced by institutional regulation and structural homophobia. At the same time, this reimagined world remains shaped by the canon, as seen in the continued centering of white masculinity, the marginal position of female characters, and the reliance on long-term partnership or marriage as narrative closure, resulting in queer happy endings that also sideline ongoing institutional discrimination. The three fanfictions thus both queer the *Top Gun* films and reveal the limits of how far such resistance can move beyond the ideological frameworks from which it emerges. Queer resistance is thus articulated in tension with, rather than fully outside of, the dominant frameworks of U.S.-American popular culture.

6.3. The Role of Tagging Practices in Reinforcing Queer Interventions

The previous two sections have shown that the selected fanfictions articulate queer resistance by rewriting the films' heteronormative relationship structures and reimagining military identity and masculinity, thereby constructing a queer sub-world within the *Top Gun* universe. These interventions, however, do not begin only at the level of narrative content. They are already signaled before the story itself is read, through the tagging

system on AO3. As Silberstein-Bamford argues, unlike tagging systems that remain largely invisible on other platforms, AO3 places tags at the center of textual engagement, encouraging both authors and readers to treat them as communicative devices (130). This foregrounding thus allows queer reinterpretations of the *Top Gun* franchise to be signaled even before the narrative begins.

The tag analysis has exemplified how these paratextual elements function as more than technical metadata: by signaling the queering of the films' heteronormative framework, announcing canon divergence from the films' timelines and endings, or foregrounding homophobia and mental health, tags frame the selected fanfictions in advance as queer reinterpretations of the *Top Gun* films. The tag "Tom 'Iceman' Kazansky/Pete 'Maverick' Mitchell", which is used in all three fanfictions, for instance, immediately signals to the reader that the central relationship between Maverick and Iceman will be romantic or sexual, rather than homosocial. In this way, the queering of the canon is not left to emerge gradually through the narrative but is declared at the threshold of the text. This supports Silberstein-Bamford's argument that tags function as a form of narrative preview, signaling to readers what they can expect from the story (137).

Furthermore, the tagging system not only makes these queer reinterpretations visible but also accessible. This is made possible by the platform's filtering functions, as tags on AO3 can be filtered for or against certain kinds of content (Silberstein-Bamford 135). Readers who are specifically looking for queer narratives can therefore filter for the Maverick/Iceman pairing, allowing them to locate stories that challenge the films' heteronormative framework. This offers a form of orientation within a large archive, making resistant reinterpretations easier to find. At the same time, this filtering function can also be limiting, as focusing on specific tags may lead readers to overlook other stories that engage in queer reinterpretation in less explicit or differently tagged ways.

Moreover, because tags present selected aspects of a story in advance, they guide not only discovery but also reading decisions. In this sense, they function in line with Genette's concept of paratext as a threshold at which readers decide whether to proceed with or withdraw from a text (2). While this allows readers to avoid unwanted content, it can also shape expectations in ways that do not always reflect how a theme is actually developed in the narrative. For instance, the tag "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD"

used in the fanfiction “Take the Long Way” alerts readers to the presence of psychological distress, but it does not indicate how briefly or sensitively this experience is portrayed, nor how central it is to the plot. A reader might therefore decide against engaging with the story based on the tag alone, even though the depiction may be less distressing or more nuanced than expected.

Additionally, tags such as “DADT,” used in the fic “Take the Long Way” require historical background knowledge on the part of the reader. Therefore, for readers without this knowledge, the significance of certain tags may remain opaque. Furthermore, as Silberstein-Bamford notes, understanding and using tags correctly also requires familiarity with fanfiction-specific conventions and genres (136). Tags are therefore often not fully self-explanatory but depend on shared knowledge within fandom. For example, recognizing that the slash symbol in a tag such as “Tom ‘Iceman’ Kazansky/Pete ‘Maverick’ Mitchell” signals a romantic or sexual same-sex pairing presupposes prior experience with fanfiction practices. Readers who are new to fanfiction or unfamiliar with these conventions may not immediately grasp this meaning and may therefore overlook or misunderstand the story’s queer focus. This reliance on insider knowledge means that queer resistance is not only articulated through tags but also mediated through community-specific literacy, which can implicitly exclude those unfamiliar with these conventions.

In sum, tagging practices on AO3 do not merely accompany queer reinterpretations of *Top Gun* but actively participate in framing and reinforcing them. By signaling slash pairings, canon divergence, and themes such as homophobia or mental health at the paratextual level, tags position the selected fanfictions as acts of queer resistance before the narrative itself unfolds and make queer reinterpretations of *Top Gun* more easily discoverable to readers. At the same time, their reliance on selective labeling and community-specific knowledge reveals that this resistance is unevenly accessible and shaped by platform conventions. Tags on AO3 thus function both as tools that amplify queer interventions within U.S.-American popular cultural narratives and as mechanisms that structure how, and by whom, such interventions can be recognized and engaged with.

7. Conclusion

This thesis examined how Maverick/Iceman fanfictions published on AO3 engage with and rework the *Top Gun* franchise through reinterpretation. Taking *Top Gun* (1986) and *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022) as its point of departure, it explored how fanfiction rewrites the films' canon narratives as acts of queer resistance by challenging traditional representations of masculinity, military identity, and relationships in U.S.-American popular culture. At the same time, the thesis investigated how tagging practices contribute to this process by signaling and framing these reinterpretations at the paratextual level. Through close readings of the two films, three selected fanfictions, namely "Take the Long Way" by kerbyfullyloaded, "Time And Tide" by DancingDisaster, and "good old-fashioned lover boy" by doodlewrite, and their associated tags, the analysis focused on how queer resistance is articulated both narratively and through paratextual framing.

In the films, both *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick* portray the U.S. military as a space of prestige, discipline, and emotional control, supported by spectacle and heroic framing that contribute to a glamorized image of elite fighter pilots. Military identity is closely associated with a model of hegemonic masculinity shaped by competition, emotional stoicism, and heterosexual display, embodied by the white male hero Maverick. Alongside this, the films also construct an intense rivalry between Maverick and Iceman that produces a close and charged bond, while keeping this relationship within a homosocial frame. This framing is achieved through the repeated use of heterosexual romance, which positions women as objects of desire and therefore reaffirms heterosexual masculinity.

Building on these filmic representations, the three analyzed fanfictions engage directly with the homosocial dynamic between Maverick and Iceman and rework it into an explicitly queer relationship. Where the films frame rivalry and emotional restraint as defining features of the ideal fighter pilot, the fanfictions rework these dynamics by foregrounding desire, emotional openness, and intimacy between Maverick and Iceman. Rather than being shaped by stoic self-control, the characters are depicted as openly longing for one another, expressing vulnerability, and developing emotionally and physically intimate relationships. In this way, the fanfictions rewrite the heteronormative

framework of the canon by imagining a romantic relationship between Maverick and Iceman and extending this relational focus to broader forms of family and care, particularly in relation to Bradley. At the same time, the fanfictions do not present the military as an uncomplicated space of belonging; instead, they make institutional constraints on queer lives visible, particularly through secrecy and fear of exposure.

To make these reinterpretations possible narratively, the fanfictions construct extensive backstories, elaborate on narrative gaps left by the films, and, in the case of *Top Gun: Maverick*, keep Iceman alive in order to imagine a shared future. Crucially, this transformation does not occur through a rejection of the military world of *Top Gun*. Across all three texts, Maverick and Iceman remain embedded within military structures. What changes, however, is the meaning attached to that world: military service is no longer solely associated with emotional suppression and heterosexual masculinity but becomes a space in which queer attachment and care can be imagined and sustained. In this sense, the fanfictions create a sub-world within the military context that allows queer relationships to exist without abandoning the institutional framework in which they are situated. Through this approach, the fanfictions articulate queer resistance by working within a U.S.-American popular cultural text and transforming its narrative possibilities rather than rejecting them. This mode of engagement constitutes a form of what this thesis terms soft resistance, which operates through reinterpretation rather than overt opposition.

Acts of queer resistance are, however, not only articulated within the narratives themselves but are already framed at the paratextual level through tagging practices on AO3. The tags accompanying the selected fanfictions signal a reinterpretation of the *Top Gun* canon by indicating how these texts rework canonical relationships and narrative trajectories. By foregrounding Maverick and Iceman as a romantic pairing, the tags make the queering of the canon explicit before the narrative begins. Other tags point toward a reshaping of the films' timelines and endings, preparing readers for narrative revision in ways that enable queer relationships and outcomes. In addition, tags that highlight homophobia or mental health frame the fanfictions as reflective engagements with the franchise by drawing attention to aspects of military life that the films largely leave unexamined. Through this paratextual framing, tags make acts of reinterpretation visible

from the outset and signal how these fanfictions rework the *Top Gun* films as sites of queer resistance within U.S.-American popular culture.

At the same time, however, the analysis also highlights the limits of this form of queer resistance. While the fanfictions challenge heteronormative masculinity and center a queer relationship, they resolve their narratives through happy endings, which can partially obscure the institutional constraints faced by queer service members. Furthermore, female characters remain largely marginal, and the stories predominantly center white male experiences. Similarly, tagging practices depend on shared platform knowledge and conventions, which enable queer reinterpretation but can also constrain how resistance is framed and accessed. These patterns suggest that while fanfiction reworks elements of the *Top Gun* canon as acts of queer resistance, it remains shaped by the ideological frameworks of the source text and the platform on which it circulates.

Taken together, these findings show that the thesis contributes to Fan Studies by demonstrating, through close readings of the *Top Gun* films, selected fanfictions, and their tags, how fans negotiate a U.S.-American popular cultural text through narrative and paratextual practices. It also contributes to Queer Studies by showing how Maverick/Iceman fanfiction articulates queer resistance through reinterpretation of a heteronormative and militarized framework rather than through overt opposition. Moreover, the thesis contributes to American Studies by examining how a culturally influential U.S.-American media franchise participates in the circulation of dominant models of masculinity, military identity, and relationships, and how these models become sites of reinterpretation within participatory culture. The analysis of Maverick/Iceman fanfiction thus highlights how audiences engage with and renegotiate elements of U.S.-American popular cultural narratives.

Building on these contributions, the thesis opens up further avenues for research. While the present analysis centers on a small, curated corpus focused on the Maverick/Iceman pairing on AO3, future research could extend this approach by examining other pairings within the *Top Gun* fandom or by exploring queer reinterpretations of militarized frameworks in other U.S.-American popular cultural texts. Such work could further investigate how narrative and paratextual strategies articulate queer resistance across different contexts. Overall, this thesis demonstrates how the selected fanfictions and

their accompanying tags rework a U.S.-American popular cultural text from within, thereby articulating a form of queer resistance.

31971 words

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10. Appendix A: Corpus of Selected Fanfictions for Analysis

DancingDisaster. "Time And Tide." *Archive of Our Own*, 27 Apr. 2024,
archiveofourown.org/works/40669764. Accessed 8 Feb. 2026.

doodlewrite. "good old-fashioned lover boy." *Archive of Our Own*, 26 July 2022,
archiveofourown.org/works/40443033. Accessed 8 Feb. 2026.

kerbyfullyloaded. "Take the Long Way." *Archive of Our Own*, 26 Nov. 2022,
archiveofourown.org/works/42934872. Accessed 8 Feb. 2026.

11. Appendix B: Tags Used in the Selected Fanfictions

“Take the Long Way” by kerbyfullyloaded

- Teen And Up Audiences
- Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
- No Archive Warnings Apply
- Gen
- M/M
- Top Gun (Movies)
- Tom “Iceman” Kazansky/Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Bradley “Rooster” Bradshaw & Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Carole Bradshaw & Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Ron “Slider” Kerner & Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Tom “Iceman” Kazansky
- Bradley “Rooster” Bradshaw
- Ron “Slider” Kerner
- Carole Bradshaw
- Bernie “Hondo” Coleman
- Jake “Hangman” Seresin
- Natasha “Phoenix” Trace
- Robert “Bob” Floyd
- 5+1 Things
- DADT
- Pete “Maverick” Mitchell is a Little Shit, but we (and Ice) love him anyway
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD
- Period-Typical Homophobia
- Tom “Iceman” Kazansky Lives
- no beta we die like goose
- Between Top Gun (1986) and Top Gun: Maverick
- English
- Part 1 of Hold on to me as we go
- Published: 2022-11-08
- Completed: 2022-11-26
- Words: 13,781
- Chapters: 6/6

“Time And Tide” by DancingDisaster

- Mature
- No Archive Warnings Apply
- M/M
- Top Gun (Movies)
- Tom “Iceman” Kazansky/Pete “Maverick” Mitchell

- Minor or Background Relationship(s)
- Background Carole Bradshaw/Nick “Goose” Bradshaw - Relationship
- Background Bradley “Rooster” Bradshaw/Jake “Hangman” Seresin
- Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Tom “Iceman” Kazansky
- Bradley “Rooster” Bradshaw
- Carole Bradshaw
- Nick “Goose” Bradshaw
- Sarah Kazansky
- Ron “Slider” Kerner
- Charlotte “Charlie” Blackwood
- Idiots in Love
- Breaking Up & Making Up
- Getting Back Together
- Developing Relationship
- Established Relationship
- Ice Lives By Popular Demand
- Period-Typical Homophobia
- This Time With A Deep Dive Into IceMavs Relationship
- A romantic dramedy about two Idiot Flyboys
- 1980s Edition
- English
- Part 3 of Men Like Us
- Published: 2022-07-30
- Completed: 2024-04-27
- Words: 59,558
- Chapters: 11/11

“good old-fashioned lover boy” by doodlewrite

- General Audiences
- No Archive Warnings Apply
- Gen
- M/M
- Top Gun (Movies)
- Tom “Iceman” Kazansky/Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Bradley “Rooster” Bradshaw & Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Tom “Iceman” Kazansky & Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Tom “Iceman” Kazansky
- Bradley “Rooster” Bradshaw
- Natasha “Phoenix” Trace
- Jake “Hangman” Seresin
- Javy “Coyote” Machado

- Mickey “Fanboy” Garcia
- Billy “Fritz” Avalone
- Robert “Bob” Floyd
- the rest of the dagger team is also there
- Sorry guys, anyway
- Parental Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Protective Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Pete “Maverick” Mitchell Acting as Bradley “Rooster” Bradshaw’s Parental Figure
- Team Parent Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- slight canon divergence in that mav and ice have been married for multiple years
- Team as Family
- team dad pete mitchell
- mav and ice are stupid and in love, but the team is dumb and chalks it up to just Really Good Friends
- Panic Attacks
- panic attacks and anxiety mentioned
- Detailed description of a panic attack
- pete mitchell is a wackjob of a pilot
- I still know nothing about how the military works and yep it will still stay that way
- this is both soft and angsty :) the best combo
- hangman is still a jerk kinda, but I have a hard time writing that so he's nicer than canon, probably
- chalk it up to they've bonded and are friends ish now
- English
- Part 1 of Bob’s Top Gun Conspiracy Board Cinematic Universe
- Completed Works 1
- Miscellaneous movie fics
- Published: 2022-07-22
- Completed: 2022-07-26
- Words: 17,667
- Chapters: 3/3

12. Appendix C: Thematic Analysis of Tags Used in the Selected Fanfictions

The tags presented below are taken from the three selected fanfictions: “Take the Long Way” by kerbyfullyloaded, “Time And Tide” by DancingDisaster, and “good old-fashioned lover boy” by doodlewrite.

Queering the Films’ Heteronormative Framework

Tags:

- M/M
- Tom “Iceman” Kazansky / Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Idiots in Love
- Developing Relationship
- Established Relationship
- Breaking Up & Making Up
- Getting Back Together
- This Time With A Deep Dive Into IceMavs Relationship
- mav and ice are stupid and in love, but the team is dumb and chalks it up to just Really Good Friends
- A romantic dramedy about two Idiot Flyboys
- Parental Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Protective Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Pete “Maverick” Mitchell Acting as Bradley “Rooster” Bradshaw’s Parental Figure
- Team Parent Pete “Maverick” Mitchell
- Team as Family
- team dad pete mitchell
- Pete “Maverick” Mitchell is a Little Shit, but we (and Ice) love him anyway

Reshaping the Films’ Timelines and Endings

Tags:

- Tom “Iceman” Kazansky Lives
- Ice Lives By Popular Demand
- Between Top Gun (1986) and Top Gun: Maverick
- 1980s Edition
- slight canon divergence in that mav and ice have been married for multiple years

Foregrounding Homophobia and Mental Health in the Military Context

Tags:

- DADT
- Period-Typical Homophobia
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD
- Panic Attacks
- panic attacks and anxiety mentioned
- Detailed description of a panic attack

13. Appendix D: Use of AI

The artificial intelligence tool ChatGPT was used to support language refinement, particularly by identifying grammatical errors and issues related to cohesion and coherence. No AI tool, including ChatGPT, was used to generate or develop the content of this thesis or to engage with the primary or secondary source material. The following prompt was entered into ChatGPT: “I am a student at University and I am currently rereading my master’s thesis to look for mistakes. Please review the following text for grammatical errors; also look out for cohesion and coherence mistakes. The text should flow nicely. Do not rewrite the whole text! Just point out mistakes/sentences and transitions that could be improved. Also, please check that U.S. spelling is used consistently instead of UK spelling. Here is the text: [...]” ChatGPT provided suggestions for improvement, and I reviewed and selectively implemented some of them based on my own judgment. For the sake of transparency, the conversation link is included here: <https://chatgpt.com/share/698625b5-1b2c-8004-a333-dc91d6072531>

14. Appendix E: Abstract English

This master's thesis explores how Maverick/Iceman fanfictions published on Archive of Our Own (AO3) reinterpret the films *Top Gun* (1986) and *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022) as acts of queer resistance. Taking the *Top Gun* franchise as its point of departure, the study examines, through close reading, how the films construct ideals of masculinity, military identity, and relationships, and how fan-produced texts engage with and rework these constructions through queer perspectives. While the films construct the U.S. military as a space defined by ideals of heroism, emotional discipline, and heteronormative masculinity, they also produce an intense homosocial bond between Maverick and Iceman that has long been associated with homoerotic subtext. Focusing on three selected Maverick/Iceman fanfictions, the thesis analyzes how these texts transform this homosocial bond and its underlying dynamics. In the films, this bond is shaped by rivalry and competitive masculinity; in the fanfictions, it is reworked into queer intimacy, emotional openness, and care. Rather than rejecting the militarized framework of the franchise, these reinterpretations imagine queer relationships within it, thereby reshaping the meanings attached to masculinity and military service. In addition, the thesis examines how tagging practices frame these fanfictional reinterpretations at the paratextual level by signaling the queering of canonical relationships, revisions of canonical narrative trajectories, as well as themes of homophobia and mental health within the military context. Taken together, the analysis shows how Maverick/Iceman fanfictions and their tags articulate queer resistance through reinterpretation within a dominant U.S.-American popular cultural text.

15. Appendix F: Abstract German

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht, wie Maverick/Iceman-Fanfictions auf Archive of Our Own (AO3) die Filme *Top Gun* (1986) und *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022) als Akte queeren Widerstands reinterpretieren. Ausgehend von den beiden Filmen wird mittels Close Reading analysiert, wie die Filme Vorstellungen von Männlichkeit, militärischer Identität und Beziehungen konstruieren und wie fanproduzierte Texte diese Konstruktionen aus queeren Perspektiven aufgreifen und neu deuten. Während die Filme das US-Militär als einen Raum darstellen, der von Heldentum, emotionaler Disziplin und heteronormativer Männlichkeit geprägt ist, erzeugen sie zugleich eine intensive homosoziale Bindung zwischen Maverick und Iceman, die häufig mit homoerotischem Subtext in Verbindung gebracht wird. Anhand von drei ausgewählten Maverick/Iceman-Fanfictions zeigt die Arbeit, wie diese Texte die homosoziale Bindung reinterpretieren. Während die Beziehung in den Filmen vor allem durch Rivalität und kompetitive Männlichkeit strukturiert ist, wird sie in den Fanfictions zu queerer Intimität, emotionaler Offenheit und Fürsorge umgeschrieben. Diese Neuinterpretationen bleiben im militarisierten Kontext der Filme verankert und machen queere Beziehungen innerhalb dieses Rahmens sichtbar, wodurch sich Vorstellungen von Männlichkeit und militärischem Dienst verschieben. Darüber hinaus untersucht die Arbeit, wie Tags diese fanfiktionalen Neuinterpretationen auf paratextueller Ebene signalisieren, indem sie die queere Umdeutung kanonischer Beziehungen, Abweichungen von den Filmverläufen sowie die Thematisierung von Homophobie und mentaler Gesundheit im militärischen Kontext kennzeichnen. Insgesamt zeigt die Analyse, wie Maverick/Iceman-Fanfictions und ihre Tags queeren Widerstand durch Reinterpretation innerhalb eines dominanten US-amerikanischen popkulturellen Textes artikulieren.