

Meme Insider

A stylized illustration of Lady Dimitrescu from the game Resident Evil Village. She is depicted from the waist up, wearing a large, wide-brimmed, light-colored hat with dark horizontal stripes. Her hair is dark and styled in a bun. She has pale skin, red lips, and is wearing a light green, long-sleeved dress with vertical stripes. A large, dark purple flower is pinned to her chest. She is holding a thin, dark object, possibly a cigarette or a pen, in her right hand. The background is plain white.

LADY DIMITRESCU ON BEING A MEME

And How She Handled the
Influx of Memes

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JUL21

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A Know Your Meme Publication

www.memeinsider.com

WELCOME BACK!

TO MEME INSIDER

Well, I guess it's official. You're now reading Meme Insider. I really wasn't sure you were going to pick this magazine up at the start, but then that friend of yours said something that just made all kinds of sense. She said, "Think of it more as a shitpost." I like that. What you're about to find out on your own is that Meme Insider is wiping the walls out between you and me, and I really like that. It allows us into each other's worlds, or I guess in our case, between the pages of an overly niche magazine. When I think about all the things you're going to read in here, I think about the cool stuff, slick stuff, neat stuff ... but mostly I just think about all the raw stuff like this. Because that's just who we are. So, if this is truly a shitpost, then I say let the shitpost begin.

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Community in Context: The Lore, Memes, and Drama of the 'Friday Night Funkin' Fandom



HOW “FRIDAY NIGHT FUNKIN’” BECAME A WORLDWIDE PHENOMENON WITH ONE OF THE STRONGEST GROWING COMMUNITIES TODAY

By Phillip Hamilton

Only nine short months ago, Newgrounds creators Ninja Muffin and Kawaii Sprite created a simple rhythm game for the Ludum Dare game programming competition. The game, based on battle rapping and inspired by iconic rhythm games like “Parappa the Rappa” and “Dance Dance Revolution,” is called “Friday Night Funkin’,” and in less than a year it’s become one of the most modded, discussed and hyped video games of the year. The crowdfunding campaign was explosive, raising over \$2 million with a goal of only \$60,000. People are genuinely obsessed with “Friday Night Funkin’,” and the community surrounding it is one of the strongest online today, practically able to move digital mountains when they put their heads together.

Through the combined efforts of modding, memeing, and fandom love, “Friday Night Funkin’” has spawned its own massive subsection of memes, both original and recycled with a new, funkier coat of paint. It’s also inspired a lot of extended fan lore based on these mods and memes, including heaps of fanfiction, art, and animations featuring all these characters interacting, dating, fighting – you name it. It’s hard to grasp just how large this game has become in under a year, and it’s only set to keep growing with the game’s full release. Here’s a look into how the community has managed to become so strong in such a short span of time.

Original Fan Lore

The “Friday Night Funkin’” community is often flexing its creativity, and this leads to a lot of original characters and situations straight from

the minds of its fans. Many of these are played out via “full week” mods for the game, files that replace certain “weeks” in the game with fresh content. The most popular mods (and even some of the more mid-tier popular ones) inspire fan art, fiction, and animations, which often just keeps multiplying as the days go on and the downloads continue to stack. Members of the “FNF” community seem to have an unspoken agreement that all characters are up for grabs as far as fan content goes, and there seems to be a good amount of respect in the community. Much fan content comes with links that lead to the original artist or mod, resulting in some of the most popular modders gaining significant fanbases and followers from their creations. This, as we’ll learn later, is a bit of a double-edged sword.

Wattpad features over 1,000 fanfictions about the game. DeviantArt has over 9,000 results, and Twitter always shows fresh art and content with a simple search for “FNF” or “Friday Night Funkin’.” One of the most explosive spaces is YouTube, where animations, memes, and mod showcases gain millions upon millions of views. Then there’s the subreddit /r/FridayNightFunkin’, boasting over 86,000 members and some of the most dedicated memers in the community.

The “FNF” community is constantly creating its own lore with each new mod and character. They don’t need the official input of the creators anymore, or at least, they’re in no rush for it. Some of the most popular fan-made characters in the series include a character named Whitty

with a bomb for a head, a sketchy smoker named Garcello, and, particularly, a skeletal man named Tabi who is portrayed as Girlfriend's ex. They all often appear together in fan content, which often plays off unofficial lore that's basically become canon in the heads of the fans at this point.

Despite none of this lore being official, it hasn't stopped the community from going ballistic with it. It'll be interesting to see how the game's producers deal with this in the final version of the game. Will they ignore it, or will they include fan favorites and acknowledge the massive contributions of the community? They almost don't have a choice at this point but to roll with the latter, and ultimately, that could be a very good thing.

Matt From Wii Sports, Everything At The End of Funk

Remember Matt from "Wii Sports?" It's probably been a little bit since you've thought about him, huh? The OP jock was a big meme around 2018 and 2019 in memes joking about just how powerful the AI Mii is, imagining Matt as something of a "fight god." Well, now Matt is back and swinging, except this time he's swinging a microphone around in front of his face rather than a pair of boxing gloves.

The "Vs. Matt" mod, created by "Friday Night Funkin'" modder Sulayre, is considerably popular with nearly 500,000 downloads at the time of writing. The mod is fairly high-quality (despite some complaints about the tracking on some songs) and features a number of catchy original tunes and cutscenes. Like many "FNF" mods, the "Vs. Matt" mod has inspired a considerable amount of fan art, memes, and discussion about Matt and his place in the extended "FNF" fan lore. This all seems logical and fun when it's being applied to original characters, but when that character is Matt, a Mii from a 15-year-old Wii game, well, then it just becomes funny.

Matt is one of many inevitable mods adding

"THE 'FNF' COMMUNITY IS CONSTANTLY CREATING ITS OWN LORE WITH EACH NEW MOD AND CHARACTER. THEY DON'T NEED THE OFFICIAL INPUT OF THE CREATORS ANYMORE, OR AT LEAST, THEY'RE IN NO RUSH FOR IT."

characters from other games and properties to the world of "FNF." Other popular options include the "Vs. Shaggy" mod, adding "Scooby Doo's" Shaggy Rogers to the game, and a mod adding Isaac from "The Binding of Isaac."

One of the most impressive mods that plays off another property is the "Everything at the End of Funk" mod, a mod that sees Boyfriend go through the stages of dementia set to the album "Everything at the End of Time" about the same themes. This one sparked a little drama in the community when users started spamming the "#Dementia" tag on Instagram with art depicting Boyfriend suffering from dementia. Unfortunately, this would not be the only drama for the community, as we'll see later.

Newgrounds Galore: Pico, Tricky, Tankman, and More

“FNF” is heavily rooted in Newgrounds, a Flash game and animation website as well as an art community created by Tom Fulp back in the late ‘90s. The site was massively influential throughout the 2000s, inspiring tons of animators and entertainers today, including names like Psychicpebbles and Neil Cicierega. The site also spawned numerous popular characters, game, and animation series, including the “Madness Combat” series of games, “Castle Crashers,” and “Alien Hominid.”

“FNF” was developed by a number of Newgrounds artists, and notably premiered on the site along with its itch.io download. Many see the game as a love letter to Newgrounds games, from the art style to the attitude and the songs. Newgrounds fans have leaned into this, with many mods based on Newgrounds animations and characters. Further, the developers have officially included Newgrounds characters throughout their updates, such as Pico, a lovable school-shooter-savior-psycho from the Newgrounds Flash series “Pico’s School,” and “Tankman,” one of several Newgrounds mascots (including Pico). Notably, the site crashed for days following the release of the Tankman update.

The fandom went crazy when these characters were added to the game, particularly Pico. Everyone quickly forgot about the fact that Pico was a psychotic murderer based on his past Flash animations, distilling all that murder and chaos to cute “bad boy” behavior. Fans soon began shipping him with Boyfriend (the game’s protagonist) and imagining him as an ex-boyfriend of his. Pico was soon on top of the world once again, his Google search traffic soaring for the first time in years, albeit with an almost completely different, more cutesy coat of paint.

The psychotic clown character Tricky, most



famous for his part as an antagonist in the “Madness: Combat” series of Flash animations and games on Newgrounds, has seen similar treatment. The “Vs. Tricky” mod is very popular, with over 2.4 million downloads on Game Banana at the time of writing. Like Pico, his character traits have been exaggerated and made more cartoony, often showing him as psychotic but goofy. This is especially highlighted in the “Get the Sweet and Sour Sauce, Hank” meme that spawned from the popularity of the character in June. This meme saw Tricky replace Walter White in a reimagining of a climactic scene in “Breaking Bad,” screaming at Hank (in this case, the protagonist of “Madness: Combat”) to not forget the sweet and sour sauce. The scene was reimagined in countless memes and videos edits on both “Madness” and “FNF” spaces, and even Newgrounds itself, becoming a strong meme even outside the “FNF” community specifically.

In this way, “FNF” and its engaged community have awarded Newgrounds something of a golden age, suddenly propelling their most classic characters to newfound stardom for a new era of fans. Sure, they might not know everything about the characters. They might not even know where they came from in some cases. But hey, if one game can usher in a whole new era for one of the most nostalgic websites on the internet today, who can really hate?

Drama

Many online communities succumb to drama when they reach certain heights, and “Friday Night Funkin’” is no different. The game began succumbing to drama around the beginning of the year with a few cancelation attempts towards the creator for past tweets and content making offensive jokes. Ninja Muffin apologized, and people mostly moved on. However, this was just the tip of the iceberg in what’s now a far-reaching tunnel of “FNF” community drama that’s honestly a little bit hard to keep up with.

The largest drama is arguably over something called the “Sky Mod,” created by bbpanzu and based on a character created by a 14-year-old “Friday Night Funkin’” fan. The character, Sky, is a 19-year-old girl with an obsession for the game’s protagonist Boyfriend. At least, that’s how she was originally imagined.

The full-week mod by bbpanzu became popular fast, and so did Sky. In typical “FNF” community fashion, the most rabid fans of the game got more than a little bit attached to the character. That meant a lot of fan art depicting the character, and where there’s fan art, there’s rule 34. On top of that, bbpanzu put out a tweet saying Sky was 12-years-old, contradicting the canonically correct age of 19 set by the character’s creator. This is where the trouble began.

Sky’s questionable age already made a lot of the art sus. Things got much worse though when somewhere down the line trolls got a hold of Sky’s original artist’s Discord server. They began

flooding it with Sky rule 34, as well as sending death threats and gore according to some posts on Reddit. This ultimately resulted in a lot of drama in “FNF” communities, and lead to bbpanzu removing the mod from Game Banana. Bbpanzu has since chalked up his tweet saying Sky is 12 to a misunderstanding in a YouTube comment.

The community seems to face a new drama every week now, with some new debate always ping-ponging around the subreddit and Twitter. Lots of the drama surrounds community harassment, such as in an incident between the creators of the “Whitty” mod (Sock.clip) and the “Tabi” mod (Homisky) who got in beef after Whitty’s creator accused Tabi’s of stealing animations from them. This inspired lots of unnecessary harassment towards Homisky, who it turned out did not actually steal the animations. The tide turned on Sock.clip after this, who ended up leaving the community and canceling the sequel to the Whitty mod.

The community hasn’t been entirely overtaken by drama, but drama has noticeably increased within it, showing a less-than-ideal pattern going forward. Hopefully, the “FNF” community can continue to focus its efforts on supporting the art and the passion behind the fandom rather than the disagreements and the drama between its creators. There’s a lot of real power and drive in the “FNF” fandom, and it would be a shame to see all of that get pushed under the rug.

Solve The Maze

START

I'm gonna make a maze out of this meme



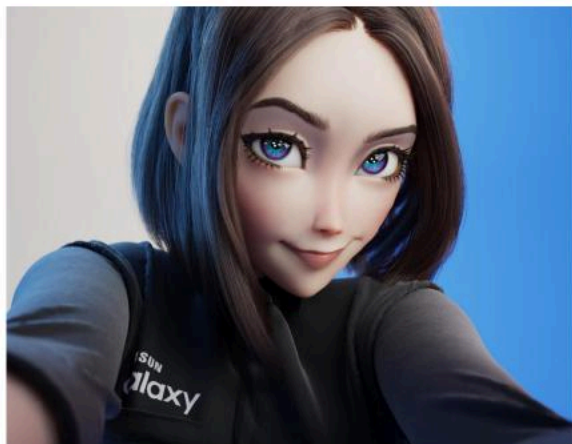
For the internet, right?

Find These Words

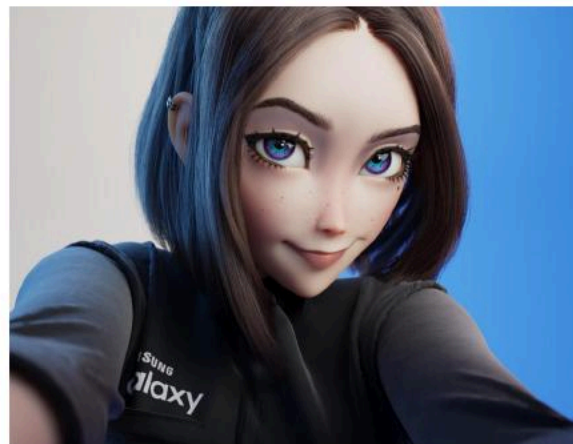


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GARLOID
NORMALPILLS
COPIUM
FINGERBOXES
JOEMOMMA

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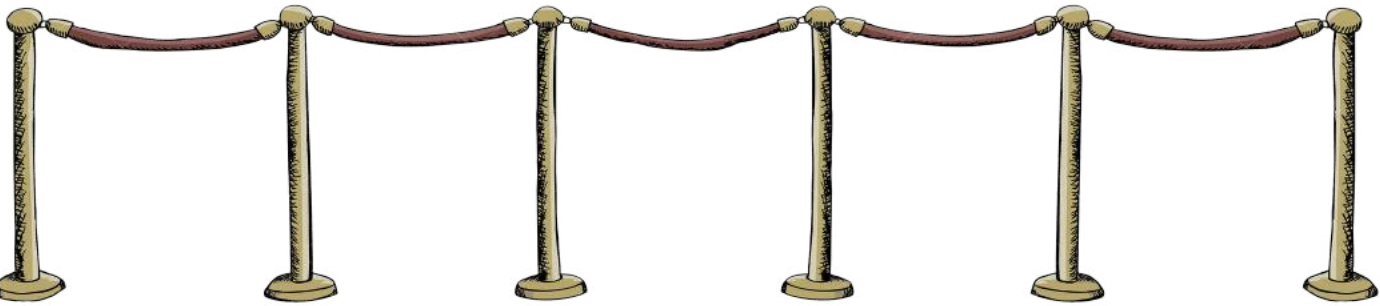


Spot
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Differences





**WHERE
DID OUR
CULTURE
GO?**



From 2016 Onward, Meme Culture Seemed to Be an Unstoppable Force of Creative Exploration Online, So Why Doesn't It Feel the Same?

Brandon Wink

While some may choose to ignore the following words, others may have been expecting to hear them for quite some time: our meme culture is dying. It has been stagnated for quite some time, though it roughly started around the time of the pandemic hitting. Was the cause of this stagnation the pandemic itself? No, it was merely one of the things that helped prepare for the death knell. The cause of the stagnation and slow decline isn't just one singular event or meme that turned normie too fast, but a growing, creeping, corrupting, of meme culture as a whole under the weight of outside factors.

When you look back at previous years of meme culture, you can typically point out a few classic examples of memes that stick out to you. Harambe, Dat Boi, Pepe, Wojak, Me Gusta, Prequel Memes, Doge, Return To Monke, Distracted Boyfriend — these are things that were culturally significant enough in their year to transcend the weekly meme format wars and become long-standing traditions. One thing that binds all of these memes together is that they were inherently brought up and made into what they were by the community. There was a spark that made a flash, and a quick meme fire was made that continued to burn bright for far longer than anyone thought it would.

NEW YEAR, SAME REHASHED MEMES

Taking a look at the current big memes of 2021 there's ... that animated show Amazon made, the Suez Canal Jam, the Josh Swain fight, and most notably, Samsung Sam. Were any of these memes one that came up naturally from some source of creativity within the meme system, or were they instead things that thrust themselves upon meme culture, or got big because of how starved it's been for fresh content?

Looking back at Know Your Meme's "Meme Of The Month" submissions in 2020, there were some that would still be recognized today. In April 2020, there was Coffin Dance, which had multiple variations posted on YouTube, as replies in tweets, and many more all over Reddit. You would see various mash-ups made of new ways to have a video start out one way then bait and switch into a Coffin Dance meme. Creatively speaking, it was a high point.

Contrast that with April 2021's "Meme Of The Month," which was the Josh Swain fight. Though many still consider it a big part of online culture, an Area 51 Raid-sized meeting of people named Josh who organized the event online, the fact that it is basically a carbon copy of the previously mentioned Area 51 Raid means that it's more of an older meme culture rehash instead of a

newer thing. An example of a newer meme from 2021 would be "For The Better, Right?," which itself is the same meme panels taken from the source of the 2018 Prequel Meme "I Don't Think The System Works," except the text itself has been edited to give a new four-panel meaning to it.



The sentiment displayed in For The Better, Right? is hardly a unique one, as four-panel memes expressing a misunderstanding or displeasure at a certain outcome have been in circulation for close to a decade. If anything, For The Better, Right? is the signal that meme culture has become like Hollywood, rebooting older classics to try and strike it hot again.



A similar trend was observed in the lead-up to 2021, where Wojak was inundated with new variations and subtypes every other month. Femjak, Soyjak, Trad Girl, Black Wojaks — Wojak was to 2020-2021 what Pepe was to 2015-2017. While it seems as though new breakthroughs in meme culture are happening and that the walls are expanding, in reality, we're just re-trekking over old territory. These are all concepts that have been done before.

The first meme of the month for January 2021 was Lamar Roasts Franklin, which was a minor hit meme in 2013 but saw a massive spike in appeal around late 2020 and really ramped up at the outset of 2021. What The Dog Doin? similarly was an older Vine from 2014 that had a surprise refresh this year, adding to

the growing list of rebooted memes.

Even within the Wojak revivalist time period there was also an explosion of Doge sub-types as part of the okbuddyretard trend. In the last year and a half, there was Quoge, Cheems, Dogelore (which used Doge as a variety Rage Face), Doge 2, and Swole Doge as notable examples among the hundreds of minor ones that were made as part of the Dogelore universe. Though Doge and Wojak were expanding like two separate movie franchises going off with movie after movie of new lore additions, the fact remains that both of these titans were much older memes that received new attention and went through a cyclical pattern similar to Rage Faces, only with much less sticking time. Doge itself as a meme is responsible for one other large factor in regards to the decline of meme culture.

STONKS AND CRYPTO

As for the potential causes in what has led to this stagnation of internet culture, where most things are either retreads of previous ideas or flat out corporate-appropriation, there are many. One of the prominent ones that can be backed up, in theory, is the rise of stonks and crypto as a now mainstream internet trend. Since January, every semi-large meme account up to actual celebrity like the CEO of Twitter Jack Dorsey, who is often considered a villain to meme content creators due to seemingly arbitrary enforcement of existing rules, has expressed a belief in a crypto or stock that is championed by "the internet meme mob" such as \$Doge or the ever-present \$GME and \$AMC. While actual syndicated television shows and news anchors will blame the WallStreetBets subreddit, the answer actually lies in all of us.

Stocks, at their core, function off what value you assign them. If a lot of people are telling you that a stock should be worth \$50, then much like an often repeated lie spread online, many people will start to believe the stock should be worth \$50. Then they'll proceed to buy it until the number rises to \$50, followed by others who will see it "mooning" and jump on board the ship under the guise of "well it's gotta be rising for a reason" when it, in fact, does not.

By gamifying stocks with meme culture, where making memes about a stock can actually help spread awareness and raise its value, it suddenly became in the best interest of every talented meme content creator to spend their time making three-minute edits of pop culture movies mixed with long-form original animation all for the dopamine of helping make the green candle show up over the red one.

Compounding the issue was Dogecoin, which is made in the image of a timeless meme, Doge, so everywhere you look online you will find some semblance of an ad for the coin and a community already exists that is prime for exploitation via doge memes. When you have multiple celebrities as well as normies (people who never looked deep into meme culture) openly discussing and debating the merits of Dogecoin in a public forum or newscast, you know that means the original spark of internet freedom died long before.

MISINFORMATION AND BAN WAVES

Misinformation is another reason for a marked decline in organic meme culture following the start of the pandemic. While memes have always been a way to poke fun at popular culture, create our own in-jokes within other in-jokes in a meta

contextual culture, COVID-19 forced a lot of social media platforms to change how memes and jokes about certain topics were handled. Where before memes attacking different positions of the government or calling for a strike and boycott against certain entities could be more readily shared, after the pandemic hit, many accounts were deleted in mass ban waves that targeted the use of memes as a source of misinformation.

While a public health crisis is certainly a real factor to consider when making jokes online, having a constantly changing line in the sand that if crossed at any point can result in your 100,000-plus-followed account being deleted by Facebook or Twitter does negatively impact the culture that thrived for years online in these platforms. Exacerbating this fragile relationship between memes, satire, misinformation, and news was the rise of QAnon. QAnon made memes, 4chan, generalized conspiracy and alternative thinking ways become very polarized, almost to the point where making memes that poke fun at political topics or saying that you go on 4chan could get you lumped into the same category as the Q fans, which over the course of the pandemic became increasingly stifled and regulated. It was easier for this type of misinformation and conspiracy to spread because of the next factor of meme decline: politics.

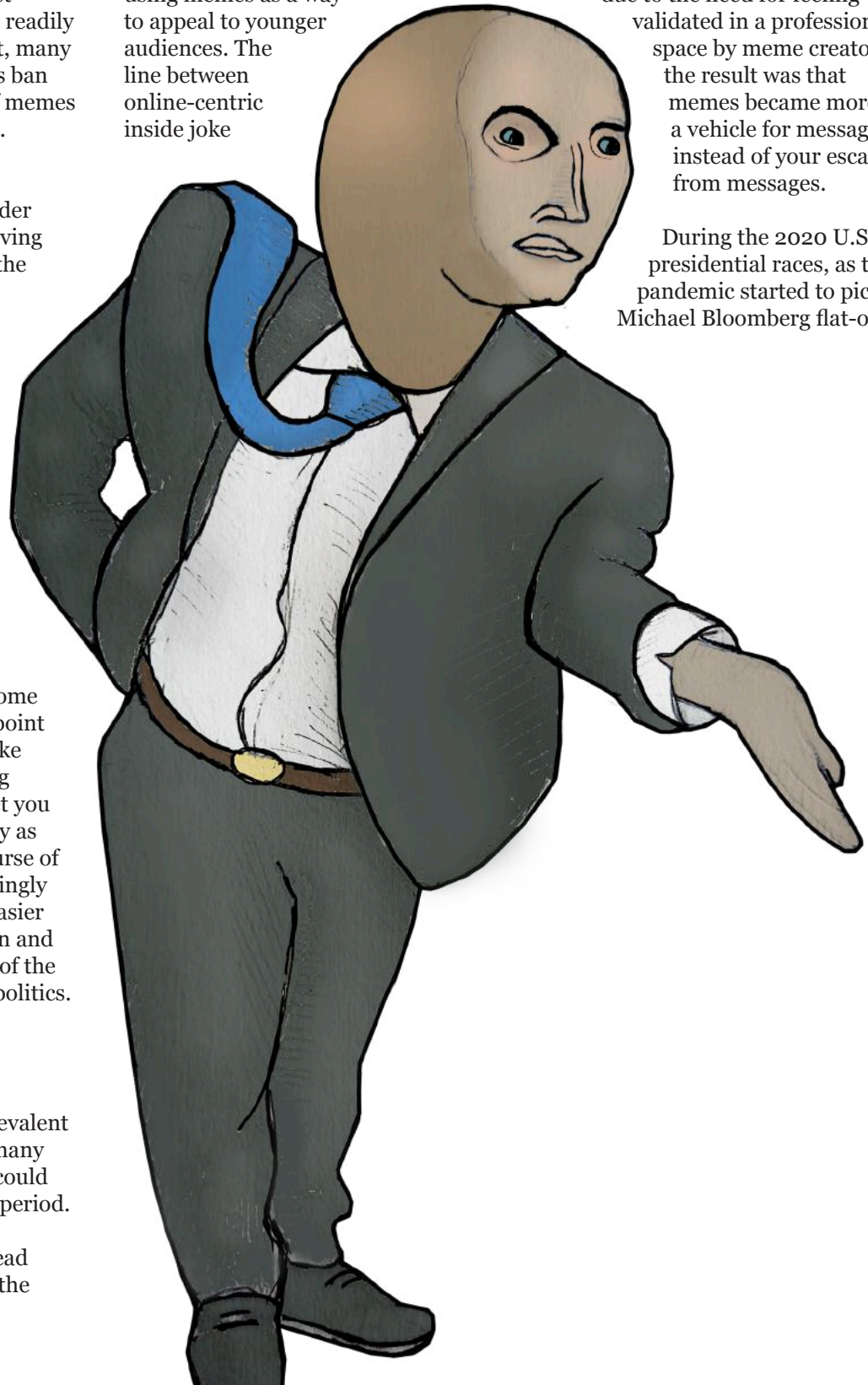
POLITICS

Although memes were still prevalent during Obama's presidency, many would agree that it was what could still be considered an infancy period. There were memes, but it was nowhere close to the widespread degree that there is now, and the

number of political memes is overwhelming. During Trump's presidency, naturally, there was a nonstop cacophony of memes about Trump, Hillary and other political figures, as well as politicians using memes as a way to appeal to younger audiences. The line between online-centric inside joke

meme culture and using memes as a way to spread political beliefs and make politically charged figures more likable was blurred and later erased entirely. Whether this erasure was purposeful, or an accidental oversight due to the need for feeling validated in a professional space by meme creators, the result was that memes became more of a vehicle for messages instead of your escape from messages.

During the 2020 U.S. presidential races, as the pandemic started to pick up, Michael Bloomberg flat-out



(without any attempt at subtlety) paid several high-profile meme accounts to shill promotional messages for his campaign. Whether you believe that it was good that several accounts were able to get the bag or not, in the background this signaled a massive shift in meme culture, where high profile pages could be considered akin to a Katy Perry political endorsement, which adds a substantial amount of weight to what meme influencers say and think. This made meme creation and exploration just another facet of a company, a political campaign, or a movement.

Flashes of this were seen before, with Bernie Bros and candidates like Vermin Supreme or the New York Meme, but those were more organic in nature, with Vermin

doing it before it was considered a “clout chase,” and Bernie Bros being labeled that by the mainstream media, not attempting to create a brand on their own to sell. While these political figures have been useful in the creation and expansion of meme culture into other areas, the opposite is also true, as they can start to weaponize memes and create miniature cultural proxy wars online where the aim of the game is just to get a bigger brand and audience than your opponent because larger audiences translate to larger leverage against websites to shut out competition via mass reporting and causing a commotion. This slowly caused memes, which were fun, frolicking escapes from the world, to be something to gamify and exploit for personal and political need, which led to the pushback from various social media sources and a souring of the culture overall for many people.

THE RISE OF TIKTOK

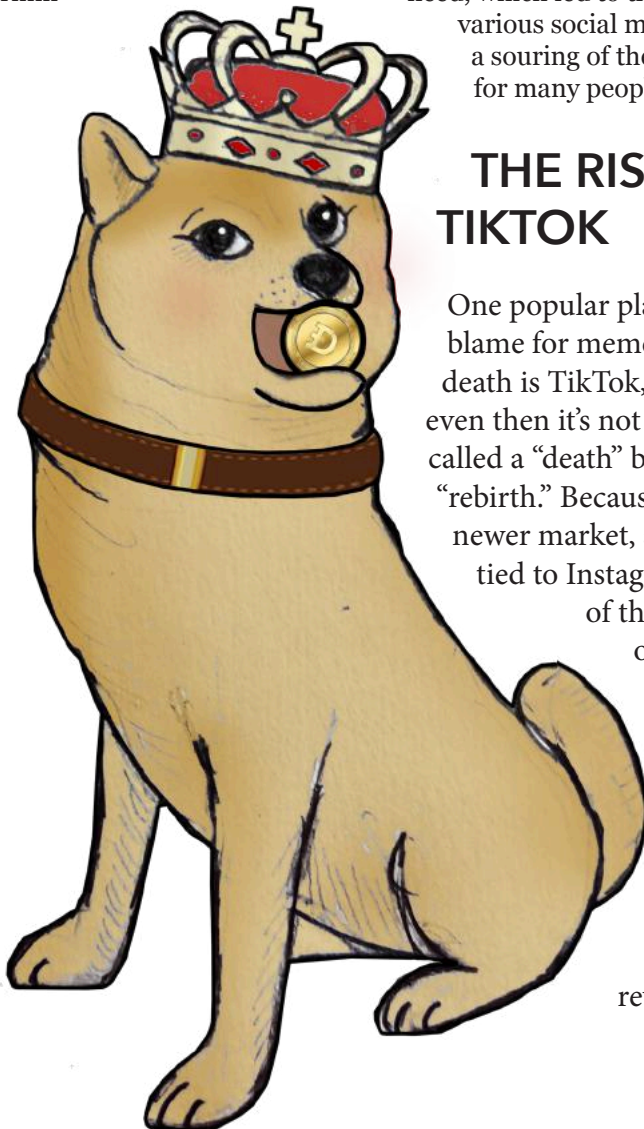
One popular place to lay the blame for meme culture's death is TikTok, although even then it's not necessarily called a “death” but more of a “rebirth.” Because TikTok is a newer market, and it's mostly tied to Instagram instead of the traditional old vanguard of meme sites.

This newer generation of meme content creators naturally would cause revivals of older

things, bringing them to the forefront as they discover them. This is especially true with TikTok, which promotes reposted/remixed content above original due to how the system is made — it's just a lot easier than other sites to throw your own rendition of a popular trend into the pool of content. This can be seen with the rise of three separate songs from “The Backyardigans” becoming popular choices for TikToks, as well as old Vine creators like King Bach having resurgences of their own.

It is not controversial to blame newer members of a group for the loss of potency in the group, but it is incorrect in this instance. While the newer TikTok ecosystem might be currently contributing and influencing the greater meme system in a way that brings upon a downward stagnation, it is crucial to the constant evolution of memes that it continues to grow and expand. Growing pains have always been experienced when a large influx of users get invested into meme culture through an app, and it wasn't too long ago that Snapchat and Instagram were considered taboo in the greater meme ecosystem, although some meme elitists still feel as if they are taboo.

Between stocks, politics, newer userbases and platforms, there's a lot of factors that went into the slow decline of meme culture. Clout chasers who try to get viral to sell a shirt, corporations who try to manufacture viral moments to help sell a car or sign a kid because



of a video of him yodeling in a Walmart went big, these types of things have existed for longer than the pandemic, but what was it about it that helped bring us to the brink?

Many people stayed inside, unable to go out and enjoy the now-closed shops and bars, working remotely from home or not at all, which should have led to a sudden surge of creativity as meme creators used the time to make memes. In reality, everything just got more watered down. Memes became more mainstream because people offline became more online, and people online became more aware of the online space they used to occupy in a more professional manner. As memes reached the masses, the masses wanted more memes, which meant the lowest common denominator had to keep decreasing because it's human nature to want the biggest spread and attention possible, especially when having a webcomic hit big can help redirect people to your Patreon ... or OnlyFans. Hobbies that people would enjoy doing, like streaming art-making, webcomics, crafts and home goods, were shifted into becoming full-time jobs that paid the bills, which means that being relatable and well-received online was directly responsible for you eating food later that day.

Meme culture isn't dead, but it's nowhere near the state it was two years ago where the passion was for the craft itself instead

of the clout, but it was also less accepted back then. Although memes are much more recognized and accepted into non-meme culture than they have ever been before, this has slowly pushed meme culture to the edge of a cliff, where once silly jokes online have become more serious and business-oriented.

Where did our culture go? We pushed it off the cliff while cheering.



Fancy Rex

While Mr Fancy T. Rex has small arms, Meme Insiders' print copy is still just the right size to enjoy as a light read in-between ripping the flesh off his unsuspecting victims.

Meme Insider Premium. For the sophisticated dinosaur.

How the Wolf Girl of TikTok Found Confidence in Cringe Humor

**AUDRA
JOHNSON
RECAPS HER
JOURNEY OF
BECOMING
THE 'WOLF
GIRL' OF
TIKTOK AND
EMBRACING
THE CRINGE**



II

I THINK,
IN ORDER
TO BE AS
BOISTEROUS
AND KIND
OF CRAZY
AS THE
WOLF GIRL,
YOU CAN'T
REALLY
CARE WHAT
OTHER
PEOPLE
THINK.

II

We all knew a “wolf kid” in middle school. The one who wore a tie-dyed shirt with a howling wolf on it and growled at you during recess. Many comedians on TikTok parody everyday archetypes that most of us are familiar with, such as complaining Karens or Monster-drinking Kyles, but there is only one who parodies the wolf kid perfectly ... and her name is Audra Johnson.

Johnson is more popularly known as the “Wolf Girl” of TikTok, and her videos are the dictionary example of cringe comedy with unabashed growling and hissing. Johnson embraces her past as a real-life wolf kid at recess and bases her videos on childhood experiences. She has 2.1 million followers, affectionately referred to as her “wolf pack,” who hype up their Alpha in the comments section.

Recently, we sat down to speak to the infamous Wolf Girl of TikTok to talk about finding confidence in cringe humor and what her plans are for the future.

MI: Can you start by introducing yourself and what you're known for?

Audra Johnson: My name is Audra Johnson, I'm 18 years old, from New York, and I'm known for being the Wolf Girl of TikTok.

MI: When did you first start being a wolf girl?

AJ: I first started being a wolf girl in about April of last year during the first stage of quarantine. I think I was just sitting bored on my couch one day and I was thinking back to elementary or middle school memories. One of them was how I used to role play as a wolf and different animals at recess. I thought it would be a pretty funny idea to recreate the experience into a TikTok, and Wolf Girl was born.

MI: Can you tell us a little bit more

about that childhood experience of being a wolf girl at recess?

AJ: There would always be a group of popular kids walking around the field or playing basketball. So, I and the wolf kids would just crawl on all fours hissing at them. Or one of the people would start biting at them and throwing sticks or we would make dens out of just grass and hide in the woods. Recess monitors would come up to us and say, “You guys need to stop chasing people,” but we would do it anyway.

MI: What was the inspiration behind your first “wolf girl” TikTok?

AJ: It was like last summer in May 2020. I just was standing in my room and I remembered those elementary school experiences that people have and I was like, “What if I applied that to wolf kids?” since I was one of them.

So, I started making it. And originally it was just at normal speed. It was stuff like, “Hey, are you intruding in our territory,” but I've definitely changed the character a lot since I first started it. I think just part of that has come with confidence.

MI: What was the transition from wolf girl on the playground to wolf girl on the internet like?

AJ: I feel like becoming the wolf girl online definitely has given me confidence. It's just been a form of self-acceptance. I started making these videos in the middle of my junior year after the pandemic began. It was just me trying to figure out who I was and trying to repress exactly who that person was. I would try to fit in with the popular kids. I would try too hard to make myself look pretty according to their standards. But now that I'm just able to do what I want, I genuinely just don't really care about what other people think about me. And I think, in order to be as boisterous and kind of crazy as the wolf girl, you can't

really care what other people think.

MI: How have you noticed fans reacting to your TikToks?

AJ: It's been very good. At first, when I began the videos, people were like, "What is this? This is so cringe. Is she doing this on purpose?" But I was like, I'm just going to keep doing it anyway. And then it's slowly transitioned to, "Oh my god this is so funny! You need to make more! We love wolf girl! Ruff!" People were barking in my comment section and I embraced that and built off of it.

MI: Do you feel like you're empowering the weird kids to embrace their cringe?

AJ: Yeah, because I was one of them for sure. I'm not one of the popular kids. So,

if I can relate to the weird people because I was a weird person, then maybe they'll feel more confident and happier and like themselves instead of feeling like they have to belong to the sports kids or the popular kids throughout high school. They can do their own thing and feel like they belong that way.

MI: What's it like to be so young and TikTok famous?

AJ: It's been insane. It's been pretty cool and pretty crazy. It's not a lot of pressure, but at the same time, you have to know how the algorithm works. You've got to take into account when to post, what to post, how a video looks, everything. You know, like I said, there's pressure, but at the same time, you're working on your own terms.

You know, if I'm getting paid for barking and hissing at a camera, I would consider that a pretty great job.



Audre Johnson is graduating high school this year and attending her dream school at the Fashion Institute of Technology. She hopes to continue making Wolf Girl content when she moves to New York City in the fall. You can follow her @audra.johnson on TikTok.



THE TASTIEST
FLUID FROM
THE INTERNET!

MEME
JUICE

EXPIRES AFTER
15 MINUTES!

STAY HIP!
STAY HYDRATED

M

An artistic illustration of a woman, likely a witch or sorceress, wearing a large red cloak and a black hat. She is holding a long, thin wooden staff or wand. The background is dark, and the overall style is painterly and dramatic.

An interview with

Lady Dimitrescu



Lady Dimitrescu's Actor,
Maggie Robertson, From
'Resident Evil Village'
Chats About The Popularity
Surrounding Her Character
And How She Handled The
Influx Of Memes

Anytime a new hyped-up video game is released, you can pretty much guarantee that there will be a flood of memes. But when Lady Dimitrescu's character was revealed for the first time during a teaser for "Resident Evil Village," the internet responded with one of the most notable influxes of memes, fan art and tributes to a video game character ever ... not to mention the immense amount of hornyposting.

We caught up with Maggie Robertson, the actor who played the part of Lady Dimitrescu in "RE8," to see how she reacted to this massive influx of attention toward her and her character over the last few months, as well as how the role came about. During our lengthy discussion, Robertson shared her thoughts on acting in a video game for the first time, dealing with her newfound fanbase and even some of her favorite Lady D memes. So without further ado, here's the scoop on the tall vampire lady from Lady Dimitrescu herself.

MI: Hey there, Maggie. Thanks for joining us to chat. Start us off by introducing yourself and what you're known for in the meme world.

Maggie Robertson: Hello there. I'm Maggie Robertson and I play Lady Dimitrescu in "Resident Evil Village." Lady D, or as I like to call her, "Alci," has caused, shall we say, quite the stir in the meme community and the interwebs. There's an infinite number of tall jokes and people being thrown into horny jail. So, that just about sums it up.

MI: How would you explain what Lady Dimitrescu memes are for those unfamiliar with them?

MR: I'd say the Lady Dimitrescu memes are mostly preoccupied with her height. And yes, it is the subject of much admiration and consternation [laughs]. So, I think people are trying to process what to do with a character who is 9'6".

MI: Before we dig into more about the recent memes featuring your character from "RE: Village," can you tell us a bit about how you became an actor early on? What did you do before your role in "RE8?"

MR: I studied theater in college and then was working professionally in regional theater for many years. Then I went off and got my graduate degree in classical acting, AKA lots and lots of Shakespeare, from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, AKA LAMDA. I was living in London and then went straight from that to LA in 2019, and then booked the role of a lifetime not too long after that. So, it's been a wild ride.

MI: So fast-forwarding

to this year, you played the role of Lady Dimitrescu through voice-over and motion capture in the game "Resident Evil: Village." How did this role come about?

MR: This is a crazy story, and very much feels like one of those moments where that phrase people say, "Luck happens when preparedness meets opportunity." It really was luck that I found this audition. I had just moved to LA, I was an unrepresented actor, and I was submitting myself for auditions on these various casting breakdown services and happened to see this voice-over audition that I fit the specs for. Voice-over had not been a thing that was on my radar prior to this, but I was like,



"Okay, well, I might as well give it a shot." So I applied on a whim essentially, and then a couple of weeks after I applied, I found out that I got an audition. So then I went in for the audition, which felt very similar to a theater audition, so immediately I was like, "Oh, okay, this feels really good and natural." And I felt like, "Oh, I got this." Then I was just able to have fun and play around and move about the space and make it my own, which felt really good.

But then you leave and you're like, "Oh, nice, that was fun." And then you set it and forget it and you move on with your life. A month after that maybe, I get the call that I have a callback, and I'm like, "Oh okay, that's really awesome and unexpected, but awesome." So I go in and same deal, it's just fun, it felt very much like theater. They had me do some improv-based stuff, just interacting with the space, different objects, exploring character movement. So then I left again feeling like, "Well, that was a blast." And then months after that, almost to the point where I had forgotten that I even auditioned in the first place, I then get the call that I booked the job, which was really exciting and felt really good, but I had no idea what that job was. I was just like, "Oh great, I booked something."

MI: Did they have the character named already, or was it just kind of a loose concept back then?

MR: Well, a lot of the information

that I had for the audition and the callback was fake information. I think they keep a lot of that stuff secret purposefully, so nothing gets leaked. So it wasn't really until I booked the job that I found out actual facts about the character.

MI: Right, that makes sense.

MR: But yeah, the table read was a pretty "momentous moment" for me because it wasn't until that moment that I started to figure out that this might be a big deal. I walk into the room and there's just this palpable excitement in the air and people are whispering to each other excitedly in corners and I'm

looking around and thinking,

"Huh, that's weird. I think this might be a big deal."

I think I might have booked something really big."

And then, of course, I hadn't received my paperwork, I hadn't received the script prior to that table read, so then I went home afterward and furiously researched everything I could based on the clues I had to figure out what the fricking game

I was in. Then figured out that it was "Resident Evil" and had one of those like, "sit back in your chair and process and breathe for a minute" moments because it's such a huge

franchise.

I'm not even a gamer, but I have heard of "Resident Evil."

MI: What was it like working on a video game? We read this was a new experience for you in your career



as a classically trained actor, so I imagine working in the mo-cap suit and doing all that must've been strange.

MR: The suit is such a funny thing to me. When you're in the suit, it does feel like you are an astronaut, and I felt like walking on the moon, about to take off into space. It was pretty surreal, but once you put that on, you're like, "Oh wow, I'm doing it. We're here." You feel how special it is, and all that jazz. But it's interesting, a lot of people ask me about that, of how different performance capture is from everything else I've done thus far. And it is very different. It was certainly a new experience for me, but also in a lot of ways, it is quite similar and it feels very much like the perfect blend between theater and acting, which is what my background is in. The theater portion of it is really about imagination, and you are solely reliant on your imagination to endow the world and space and these physical objects and make them feel real because you don't have these external storytelling visual cues to help you along the way. You don't have props, makeup, costumes, none of that, it's just you, so you have to be able to fully invest in these worlds that you're building in order to tell the story. So that feels similar.

My Shakespearean background I think helped me a lot because Shakespeare is incredibly heightened both in language and in world-building. These are extraordinary circumstances that Shakespearean characters are going through. The stakes are high, so that certainly applies to horror, and it certainly applies to fantasy, sci-fi, all of these things that are about world-building and operating in these heightened spaces where you really get to investigate extremes like that. So all of that felt fairly similar to me.



Then, of course, you have the on-camera portion, which is a little bit more technical and "hit your mark," make sure you do this da-da-da-da. So it was so new and different, but at the same time, it was this weird kind of lightning bolt moment where everything just clicked into place and made sense because I had already done all this stuff. And now finally, I had found the thing that allowed me to do them all at once, which was really exciting. So I was jazzed, I was jazzed the whole time. I never really used the word "jazzed" before in my life, but I remember sitting in traffic on my way home ... because this is LA.

MI: Right, [laughs]. Typical LA stuff.

MR: Yeah, exactly. As I'm sitting in traffic, I call my mom, and I can't tell her anything about the game, but I'm just like, "Oh my gosh, I just did this thing, and I'm just so jazzed. I'm jazzed, jazzed, jazzed, jazzed, jazzed." And I don't know why. I just kept saying "jazzed," and I've never really used that word before. But apparently, that's the only thing I could use to describe it. I was so "jazzed."

MI: Are you a big gamer at all? Have you played "Resident Evil: Village" yourself? What did you think of it?

MR: I didn't really play games growing up, but again, I am a huge fantasy and sci-fi nerd. So not a gamer, but I am definitely familiar with a lot of the archetypes that are in play in games. I just finished the playthrough. I actually streamed it on Nicole Tompkins's stream who plays one of my [Lady Dimitrescu's] daughters. So she had me on and she was playing, but I just got to watch and explore the castle and I loved it. Capcom I feel like

has really outdone themselves. The castle is so ornate and so detailed. You can really feel the labor of love that went into making it because everything is thought out. I just discovered that Lady D has an opera room in her castle, which I think is so fabulous and so clearly in line with her character. I was like, "Of course she does."

MI: Do you have a favorite Lady Dimitrescu moment from the game? We remember reading about the "ducking under the door" and "desk throw" scenes as two favorites.

MR: Oh, yeah. Those were fun. I mean, who doesn't want to throw a desk? That was definitely a bucket-list item for me. So once I found out I got to do that, I was like, "Really?" I think I freaked some people out a little bit because I was just really into it. They were like, "No, Maggie. We've got it. We don't need to do it again, actually." "We don't? You're alright? You're sure? 'Cause I'm happy to do it again" [laughs]. So that was definitely really fun for me. I think one of the other amusing little mo-cap anecdotes is that you are wearing these helmets with head cams in front of you, which means that you can't actually put anything in front of your face if it's gonna block the head cam 'cause that would prohibit the data from being captured. So anything I'm doing, like smoking a cigarette, has to happen on the outside of the headcam.

MI: That sounds like it would be weird or difficult to do.

MR: Putting on the lipstick has to happen on the outside of the headcam or sucking Ethan's blood has to be outside of the head cam, which is a very strange thing to try to mime [laughs]. With a camera right here in front of your face like, "Oh, God. This is probably gonna give people nightmares ... This is too close for comfort."

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I was like,
'Of course
she does.'
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MI: So as you know, even before the release of the game when Lady Dimitrescu's character was first introduced, she became an immensely popular subject in memes, fan art, etc. At that time, did you think Lady D would ever become such a fan favorite and huge meme?

MR: No, I never expected anything like this to happen. I didn't enter into this experience with any expectations and didn't have any idea. I didn't go into it trying to achieve a certain outcome, I was just happy to be there and to be working and having the time of my life, and so I really wasn't even thinking about what this opportunity could potentially mean for me down the line. I think it really was our producer, Rosanna Sun, who started to clue in and give me like the "wink, wink, nudge, nudge" of like, "Maggie, I think your character is gonna be a fan favorite. I think she's gonna be pretty big." And I would always just reply to that being like, "Well, okay, sure, whatever, that sounds great." And then once she exploded the internet, I had to send her an email and I was like, "Gosh, darn it, you right. You were right!" [laughter].

MI: Combined with that initial hype surrounding Lady Dimitrescu and then her massive popularity upon release, her character became the subject of many memes throughout the last few months. When did you begin noticing some of these memes, and what was your reaction to seeing your character being used in such a fashion?

MR: I think it was certainly very strange to be witnessing all of this still under NDA and not able to say anything. So I was definitely a lurker in the dark corners of the interwebs where I was just trying to absorb everything that I could, but never able to say anything. I think Nicole Tomkins actually was the first person

that alerted me to her big blow-up. She sent me a text that was like, "Oh, by the way, you're blowing up. Do you know?" And I was like, "No." And then we just started sending each other fan art and memes back and forth, and so I think that's how I first came to know.

The memes are very funny, all the tall jokes, they're real to me, that's my real life, it's not a fictional character, so I can relate. It's very funny, I think it took people by surprise and all of the tall girl memes and whatnot. People seem to want to have her go up against a wide variety of other massive video game characters, so everyone just wants to see her throw down [laughs].

MI: Yeah, it's funny how creative people are with these things nowadays.

MR: That's so, so true. It really does blow my mind, especially like the fan art, the cosplays, the memes, there's so much creativity out there on the internet and in the fan base, it's really quite inspiring, actually, to see them. You're also like, "How much time do you guys have? Like, my goodness! Must have some time on your hands." But it's really, really quite cool, and it makes me laugh, so I'm happy that it's there. I enjoy it.

MI: When you began noticing the memes of your character, were you particularly savvy with internet culture, or was the experience a new one for you?

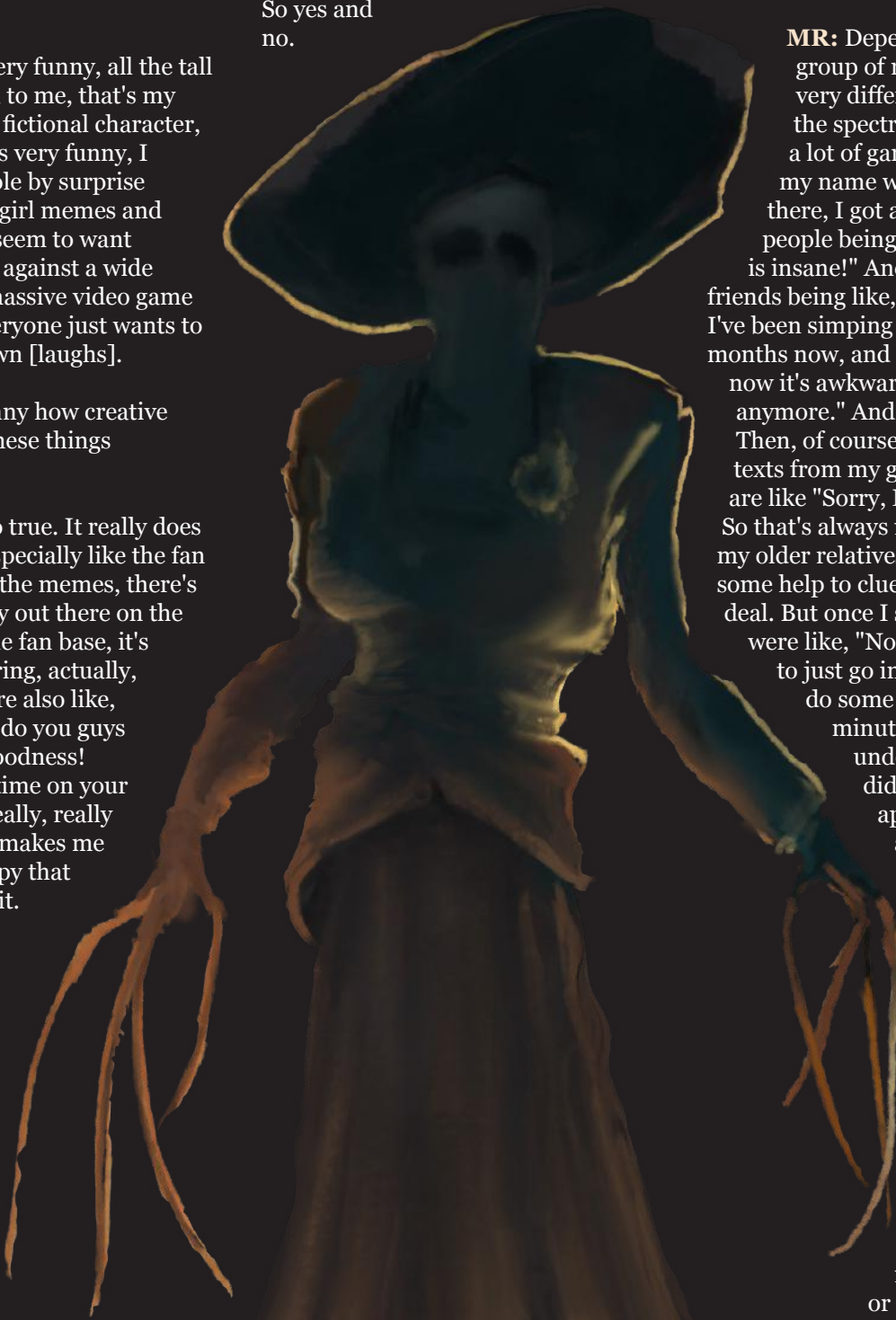
MR: Yeah, no. I like

to call myself a geriatric millennial [laughs]. I just kind of sit on the periphery of meme and internet culture. I'm aware of it, but then I'm also still the girl that has to Google "What does SMH mean? What does that TTYL mean?" So yes and no.

MI: Since Lady Dimitrescu and her memes have become such a prominent online, can you tell us how some of your family and friends reacted to it? What did they think of your character becoming a viral sensation?

MR: Depends on the age group of my friends. It's a very different answer across the spectrum there. I do have a lot of gamer friends. Once my name was released out there, I got a lot of texts from people being like, "What? This is insane!" And a lot of texts from friends being like, "Oh gosh, darn it! I've been simping over Lady D for months now, and now it's you, and now it's awkward. I can't do that anymore." And I was like "Sorry." Then, of course, I get a lot of the texts from my gamer friends that are like "Sorry, I just killed you." So that's always fun. And certainly, my older relatives or friends needed some help to clue in that it was a big deal. But once I sat them down and were like, "No, no, no, you need to just go into the internet and do some research for 30 minutes and then you'll understand." Once they did that, they were appropriately wowed and impressed.

MI: Lady D memes have continued to evolve and morph over the last few months with formats like "Lady Dimitrescu on the Phone" spreading just recently. Do you have any favorite meme formats or trends of your character that you think are the best?



MR: I think I'm probably pretty behind trends [laughs]. Story of my life. But what I will say is that I always love a good crossover, and I am a "Game of Thrones" fan myself, so I loved all the Tormund Gianstbane ones. "Is the big lady still here?" I loved all of that stuff. I really enjoyed a poster that someone made of "Godzilla versus Lady D" and ... man, I would watch that movie. I think that looks like a great movie. My money is on Lady D, that's just me.

MI: Though your likeness isn't pictured in memes with Lady Dimitrescu or the game, how do people typically respond if you mention your role as the character either online or in-person? Did the release have a big impact on your following?

MR: If they're a gamer, they are floored [laughs]. My online presence is now through the roof. I had six Twitter followers before the game was released, and now I have something like 23,000. Opening weekend, I think I got like 6,000 overnight or something crazy. So it's been an absolute roller coaster online of just a massive blow-up of awareness and presence, and I'm not this anonymous, invisible person anymore. I'm much more visible and what I say and do matters. People care about what I say and do, which is mind-blowing to me.

This is going to live on forever, and Lady D will be with me for the rest of my life. This game really has changed my life and it has given me a global reach and a global impact, and I think that's been one of the coolest things actually. You hear from fans all across the world about how much this game and this character mean to them. I get letters from people telling me how much Lady D has changed their life

or has helped them through a difficult time, or tall women who are like, "Thank you, this makes me feel sexy and confident and powerful for once." So I love that stuff. It's very special and very humbling to hear from the fans in that way, and I don't think that's ever something I will take for granted.

MI: So speaking of fan interactions, as you know, Lady Dimitrescu has quite a "thirsty" fan base online as

am getting have been really, really positive and about my work as an actor and the character, which is really what it's all about and the thing that I wanna talk about anyway. In terms of the thirst, I don't know, I mean, I get it. She's a very sexy, confident, powerful, badass woman, so I'm like, "Yeah, of course people think she's sexy. Duh, she is. They think she's sexy because she is sexy."

MI: Similar to Lady Dimitrescu fans and their fervent obsession with the virtual character, "Samsung Sam" popped up recently and saw a rapidly growing fanbase. Are you familiar with this recent meme?

MR: I only just kind of familiarized myself with that 'cause I saw your question about it, so it's all new to me. I'm not invested in it in any particular way. But yeah, I think every woman, fictional or not, knows what it's like to be a woman on the internet. So, in terms of Lady D, I think Lady D would welcome Samsung Sam into the fold, take her under her wing and offer her refuge from the simping internet [laughs].

MI: Since you enjoyed your time becoming Lady Dimitrescu while working on "Village," do you know if you'll work on any future "Resident Evil" titles or other video games in the near future?

MR: I have no clue, but, of course, I have absolutely loved working with Capcom and have such immense respect and love for them and everything that they've done with this game. It's been such a pleasure. So, of course, I would love to come back for more "Resident Evil" games in the future.

MI: So what other upcoming projects do you have in the works that we



well,

so have you ever had any awkward or negative experiences due to this side of the "Tall Vampire Lady" fandom?

MR: Well, yes, certainly that stuff exists, and also, I guess what I will say to that I'm not really paying that much attention to it. I know that it exists, but it's kind of "over there a little bit," because overwhelmingly, the responses that I personally

should keep on our radar? Anything cool coming up this year?

MR: I don't have any acting projects that I can talk about just yet, but coming up, I'm doing a lot of different Streamily signings with various members of the "Resident Evil" cast. So we get some live-autograph signings done through our platform on Streamily. You can go to streamily.com/ResidentEvil or streamily.com/MaggieRobertson to get those prints, and then we will be signing them live.

MI: Now that you're a little bit more knowledgeable about memes, do you have a favorite meme of all time or any that stick out to you?

MR: Oh, I love Grumpy Cat. Anything with a cat, I'm here for it.

MI: Before we go, the last thing we'd like to ask is if you have a favorite moment from this whole experience of becoming a meme and viral sensation. What's the experience been like for you overall?

MR: It's been wild. I think it is so crazy the way that she has permeated pop culture, you see her everywhere. I think opening weekend, my friend sent me a picture, this is not a meme but, my friend sent me a picture of her weather app, and her weather app had something along the lines of, "If being chased by a tall hot vampire lady is wrong, then I don't wanna be right." Or like Domino's Malaysia did some marketing with her [Lady D] holding a pizza. Or that McDonald's sign that went viral where they were like, "Sorry for the delay, our staff have called out sick to go chase a tall hot vampire lady around a castle." So all of that has been crazy to see.

MI: Thanks a lot for sitting down with us Maggie. Got anything else to add before we go?

MR: I guess, socially, you can follow me on Instagram and Twitter

@MaggietheBard. And then I guess my closing remarks will be from Lady D, which is not a line that she says, but a line that I say now, which is, [in Lady D's voice] "Bring honor to House Dimitrescu" [laughs like Lady Dimitrescu]. Thanks for having me.

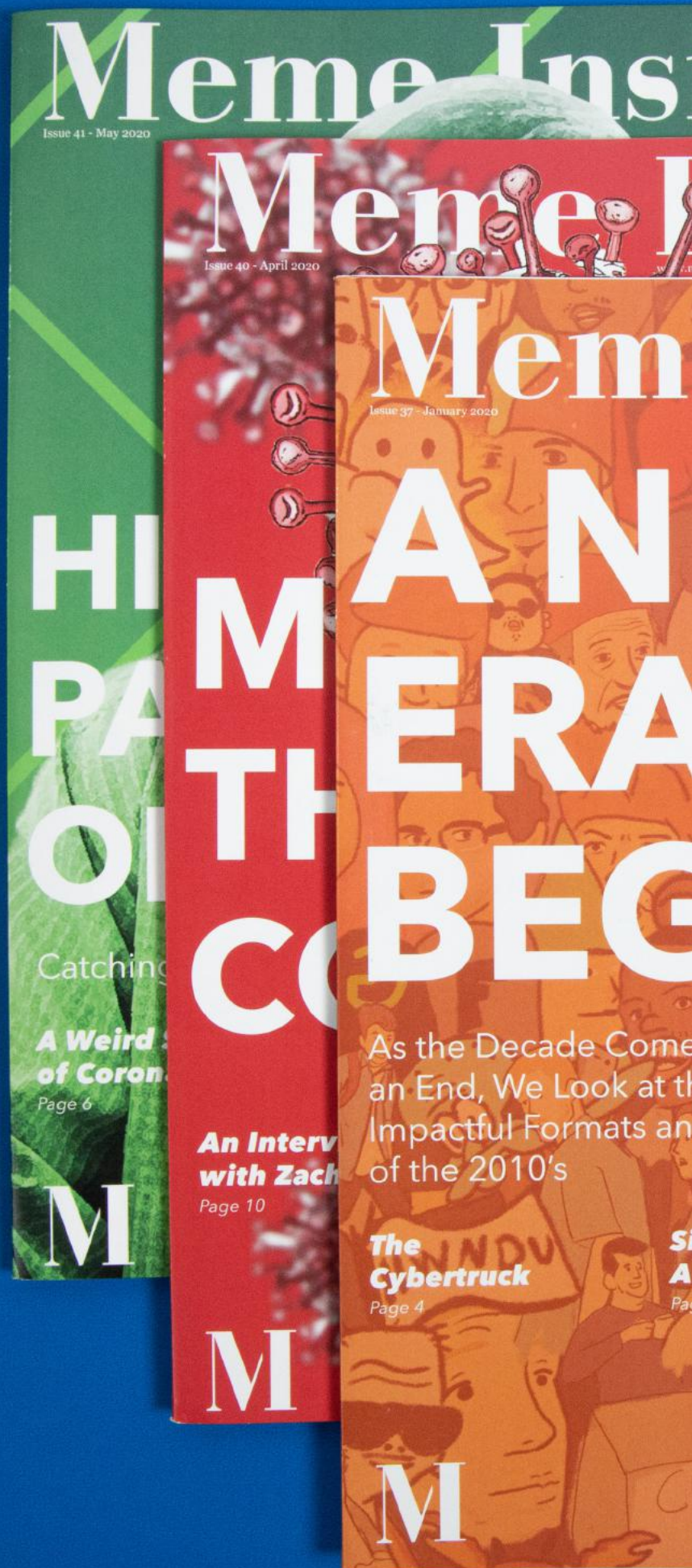


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**A LOOK
AT TIME
TRAVEL IN
INTERNET
CULTURE, AS
EXPLAINED
BY MEMES**

ALLY DINNING

It may be an oddly specific theme, but there's something about time travel that memers find irresistible. We take a look at how this has played out over the years and attempt to discern why time travelling is so prevalent in meme culture.

As a pursuit primarily intended to entertain and distract, memes have a monopoly on the escapism business. It's no surprise that they commonly experiment with the realm of the impossible. With its sci-fi leanings and promise of the unknown, time travel has proved to be a consistent source of material for a long time. Worlds of possibility are condensed into these two small words, and it's made them into a well-loved content mine.

This has been especially true recently with the advent of the "Time Traveler / Timeline" meme. Drawing upon the Butterfly Effect, the time-traveling protagonist inadvertently does something that adds a bizarre change to the timeline with unexpected outcomes. The result is remix culture on steroids — combining specific cultural cues in strange ways because the format demands it. Taking a cue from surreal memes, the effect is jarring, although its impact is more through its perspective change than weirdness for its own sake.

Time Traveler / Timeline gives an alternate viewpoint on a meme that has been spread in preceding years. Time Traveler Conversation expands on another sci-fi plot point, in which the eponymous individual accidentally hints at their identity when they learn which year they're in. Its more direct approach

showcases a watershed moment as opposed to a more seismic change.

These formats take obvious cues from movies and TV on the subject, which are ingrained in internet culture through things like Back To The Future Day or the Doctor Who fandom. Their ability to compress their knowledge into these soundbites depends on them, but it's also a departure. Dealing with profound, complex and somewhat fantastical ideas within the constraints of the form, the focus is on the whiplash — despite the fact that their tropes are so well worn in pop culture, the execution is more important than the moment.

This is something that other memes on the theme have departed from, as in the Wojak comics format Men With A Time Machine. Comparing how men and women might take the opportunity of time

travel differently, its original iteration operated hypothetically instead of presenting its events as reality.

That is not the only way it is characteristic of many contemporary Wojak formats. The imaginative leap is made by the protagonist themselves, leaning into the fantasy rather than the logistical issues of other time travel memes and presenting itself as if proving a point. The element of surprise may still be there, but it is given a deliberately ridiculous, bogus social-science coating that moderates the weird factor.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is also the type of content that does not focus on these inspirations but has taken the genre to its most self-referential point. Taking things to a meta-



level, time travel memes have even focused on the memes themselves. At the height of its popularity, This Meme Is From The Future took on a trend-forecasting role by claiming to present parts of memes to come.

Much like Time Traveler / Timeline, the emphasis is on being purposefully strange, except the focus is on what is yet to happen. Its seemingly inconsequential subject matter both highlights the stupidity of the premise and makes a case for its novelty. Like most time travel memes, it satisfies the question of "what if" that no one particularly wanted to ask, but everybody ends up knowing the answer to.

Memes about time travel rely on the promise of an open-ended universe, but they remain confined by the rulebook of memetic thought. References become more potent and creative appreciation is heightened, but every example remains a reminder that we're forever stuck in the present. However, that doesn't have to be a completely bad thing. The current times still offer us the near-infinite possibility for variation, which allows these kinds of memes to be refreshed again and again.



Does TikTok Deserve the Hate?

*THE MEME COMMUNITY'S DEBATE
BEHIND ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR
SOCIAL MEDIA APPS OF ALL TIME*

By Rebecca Rhodes

TikTok may be one of the most popular social media platforms in the world, but it's far from everyone's favorite. Whether you have and love the TikTok app or won't download it no matter how many of your friends beg you to, you've still seen these short videos everywhere you look. Love it or hate it, it's inevitable. From cringeworthy ads to controversies, TikTok hasn't fared well in the minds of everyone involved in the mainstream media. In fact, much of the meme community actively hate it. Why is this, and is the hatred something TikTok's actually earned?

To anyone who doesn't know what TikTok is, it's clear that you've just woken up from a three-year coma Rick Grimes-style and have emerged from your hospital room to watch the remnants of society disintegrate around you. Maybe if you go back to sleep, 2021 will be over, COVID-19 will be eradicated, and you won't have to see another horrible clip of a greasy teenager popping their pimples for social media fame. But to summarize, TikTok is a Chinese video-based social media platform that took the place of Musical.ly and has grown a massive following. It is estimated to have roughly 700 million users worldwide (not including China where it operates under a different name) and caters primarily to a Gen-Z demographic.

By now, you've definitely seen a divide between TikTok users and TikTok haters, the latter of which tend to reside on Reddit and other meme-based platforms. While TikTok offers its fair share of memes and has an elusive "meme side," it is still not the main producer of memes worldwide, with most of the crop yield coming from Reddit and Instagram, where simple image and GIF memes are harvested daily. Not everyone has the patience to sit through longer video-style memes, and even when Vine was huge, Vines were still not as popular as standard memes. Watching TikToks rival the popularity of the formats we were so used to may contribute to the meme community's overall hatred of TikTok. However, there is a larger reason at play.

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... *DIVIDE* *BETWEEN* *TIKTOK USERS* *AND TIKTOK* *HATERS...*

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Picture this — it's 4 a.m. in the more peaceful era of 2018. You're scrolling through YouTube, and somehow you end up watching an extended montage of a man mowing his lawn via tractor while AC/DC's "Thunderstruck" plays in the background. Just as you're about to click on the next video of a man playing the guitar accompanied by the drumming baseline of his broken washing machine, an ad interrupts your refined viewing experience. In it, a preteen girl is doing a bad dance while Doja Cat blasts through your headphones at full volume. The TikTok logo mocks you from the corner of the screen, and as you click out of this video and onto the next, you are disappointed to find yet another ad, this one of a grown woman lip-syncing to an anime intro. You cringe and try again, only to find that every single YouTube video now contains TikTok ads of a painful nature.

The saying is true — the first impression matters most. Perhaps the worst way an app or social media platform could enter your life is through an uncomfortable advertisement, and for many of us, this is how we were first exposed to TikTok. It was once (and often still is) impossible to make it through a session of meme browsing without running into an ad for TikTok. Unfortunately, TikTok ads are notoriously bad. Not that anyone particularly enjoys advertisements in the first place, but the last thing you want to see when you're scrolling through social media is a video of a teenager attempting a DIY septum piercing with a rusty sewing needle as part of TikTok's special "Piercing Roulette" challenge.

Perhaps the best example of hate toward TikTok comes from Reddit. First of all, take everything Reddit says with a grain of salt — it's not a happy place depending on where you're browsing. Given the platform's past feuds with other sites, it shouldn't be a surprise that Reddit meme fans will proceed to start an internet turf war with anyone who mentions they have the TikTok app. Truthfully, Reddit's sense of humor isn't all that different from TikTok's, provided you're looking in the right places on both platforms. No matter what site you're on, you're going to find some weird middle schooler humor that was better left to be scratched onto the school bathroom wall. Since TikTok is so big, there's bound to be a lot of cringeworthy content, which is simply due to the fact that a lot more people are making use of the video (and meme) creation tools provided by the app, and not all of them are going to be experts.

Ironically, Reddit's memes often come from TikTok's trends and formats. One example would be Trade Offer memes, which have been particularly popular for the last few months. This started in the huge political side of TikTok and spread after a user named bradeazy reinvented it. After the watermark was cut out to hide its ugly TikTok origins, it became a well-known template on Reddit. If you dare mention that it came from TikTok, Redditors will reject the very idea. After three years of overwhelming popularity, TikTok

is still hated just as much by many users loyally devoted to only one platform.

Once TikTok became so popular, many people resolved to give it a try anyway, and most of them found themselves addicted to it. Others only downloaded it to report That Vegan Teacher for feeding her dog vegetables. Both are fair reasons, and since one's entertainment tastes can vary greatly, there's no reason to judge someone on whether or not they enjoy mainstream TikTok content. However, if the TikToks you enjoy happen to be those videos of the awful couples (you know the ones) who talk to each other in ear-splitting baby voices and film themselves doing partnered yoga, then your opinion is not going to be respected. There are some things that are too cringeworthy for us to ignore.

TikTok has also faced quite a few controversies, including an incident where it was approaching "banned status" in the United States. There are concerns about the app tracking data of users, particularly when it comes to users who are under the age of 18. At one point, the app was banned in India for allegedly encouraging inappropriate content, and it remains so today. Though TikTok has listened to many of the viewers who reported conspiracy-related content, there are quite a lot of TikTokers out there who are trying to use the platform to push anti-mask and COVID-denying mindsets onto the young audience.

Many of these controversies were never really resolved, particularly in terms of politics. In a world that's been trying to be less political since the 2020 U.S. election, there's no reason why TikTok of all places has increased as a source of political discourse. When the vast majority of the app's users still have many years until they can vote, there's no reason why political content is recommended so freely and becoming such a large part of TikTok culture as if we're back on your weird uncle's Facebook. TikTok users didn't come here for this. They came to watch videos of kids named "Braiydenne" getting their head stuck in-between the railings on the stairway

and crying while their mom laughs. They turned to TikTok for a break from politics, and now it's catching up to them anyways.

So, does TikTok deserve the hate? There's no clear answer, but both sides of the argument are compelling, just like that of any platform that contains memes. Overall, no, TikTok itself is not responsible for the cringeworthy excuses for memes and entertainment that are dredged up from its worst parts, and just like any platform, you can easily find the content you'd enjoy on it. However, if you'd rather not download TikTok and prefer to look at TikTok memes reframed for Reddit, we still respect that opinion, because in the end, it's the internet, and nothing really matters when we can drown our sorrows in cat videos, online shopping and memes.



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