Social Facts - Paper 1
Lee-Sean Huang
26 February 2010

"I like just... Entwined": An Exploration of a Fan Fiction Archive Naming Decision

I worked in a group with my Social Facts classmates Cameron Cundiff, Sara Bremen, Monica Krishnan, and Mark Triant to study a Harry Potter fan fiction community now called Hawthorn and Vine. We observed the community's Livejournal-based decision making process where they discussed and voted on what the community should be called. While the discussion and decision making happened on Livejournal, the archive/community itself is now found at dramione.org.

Before diving deeper into the group decision making process at Hawthorn and Vine, let me explain how our group came to our own decision to study this particular fan fiction community. While our working group was assigned, we had a decision to make about what we were going to study. Mark sent out an email on January 29, 2010 with the subject line, "Our Clay's Class Group's Emails," with the short message, "see above. any ideas?" Cameron quickly clarified by saying that the "plan is to each come up with a group to examine and decide by Tuesday at the latest." The rest of us chimed in with our availability for a group meeting at ITP. Despite our busy schedules and travel plans that week, we quickly came to a consensus to meet on Monday night of that week. Because of the relatively small size of our group, we were able to schedule a meeting time relatively quickly via email without having to resort to endless back and forth or using a tool like Doodle.com. The one hitch was that the time did not work for Mark, who was in the process of moving apartments. Mark questioned the need for us to actually meet in person to make a decision about our study subject, but Cameron and I quickly chimed in saying that it was still quicker and easier for us to meet in person. Sara clarified the situation and presented a scenario that everybody could agree on:

What if we meet in person Monday night and each come with a couple of ideas of a group to follow. Mark, if you can email a few suggestions, that would be great. On Monday, we can make a decision. If we come down to two, maybe Mark can be our tie-breaker? I have a feeling it will be pretty easy choice...

Then, during the week, we can make observations on our own, maybe putting them all in a Google doc or emailing them to one person (I can volunteer to be secretary). Friday, we can organize the notes and email everything to Clay.

In the end, Mark's schedule cleared up and we were all able to meet in person on that Monday night. Members of the group trickled in slowly to the meeting. Cameron and I arrived first. We bandied about the idea of studying a particular conflict resolution on Wikipedia, but we were not sure of which particular article discussion thread to follow. Mark had the idea of following an open source community on Github, but the group did not seem to have a particular project we really wanted to follow. When Monica arrived, she quickly won us over with her knowledge and passion of fan fiction communities, so we decided to go with her idea, given the lack of specificity or passion around any of the previous ideas. As our resident fan fiction expert, Monica explained the historical context of the emergence of the group that would become Hawthorn and Vine:

The first moderated Draco/Hermione fanfiction archive "Coloured Grey" opened on Jan 2004. It shut down suddenly last year due to server issues namely the archive went over the file storage limit and the server host admins deleted the index file--killing the site, effectively anyway. The Coloured Grey archive was well loved, and seen to be a keystone in the Dramione fanfic community. It was the place that most people went to first with regards to reading good fanfic - and attracted an avid following in the Harry Potter community.

This new proposed archive "Hawthorn & Vine" is for the refugees of the Coloured Grey archive--and is hoping again to be the leading archive for well-written Draco/Hermione fanfic.

After agreeing upon the topic, we agreed we were going to split up and each read through the Hawthorn & Vine (H&V) naming discussion threads and post our comments and observations in a Google doc (copy and pasted as an appendix to this paper). Sara had previously volunteered to be the secretary, so she was going to summarize our individual notes into bullet points to make things easier to present in class. I found our group working process streamlined and efficient, given the small size of the group and our shared social context of all being ITP students. The ease of being able to meet in person made our own decision-making quicker, while the convenience of Google Docs made it simple for us to do the actual observations individually and to aggregate our research in a chronological and spatially asynchronous manner.

Now back to H&V. The H&V naming process itself began when the apparent group leader, who goes by the screen name floorcoaster, posted a message on January 8, 2010. He enlisted the help of the community with this call to action:

We need you!
A new dramione archive is in serious progress, but we need a name! Help us name the new archive! You've got 24 hours [later changed to 17 hours] to give us your suggestions and tomorrow we'll put up a voting poll. Join us for this exciting development for the dramione community!

The community quickly responded with various suggestions and comments on others suggestions in Livejournal's threaded response format. It is unclear from the Livejournal discussion who the "we" is in terms of the groups leadership, and whether floorcoaster is speaking on behalf of a group of leaders or is using a kind of "royal we" to lend legitimacy to his leadership. It was unclear to us why the new archive could not also be called Colored Grey or just Dramione. We also did not have access to any offline conversations and negotiations that may have taken place in the course of the decision making process. In any case, it appears that the process of coming up with a new name serves a function of legitimizing the new archive and a way of engaging the community,

so they have a sense of ownership of the new archive and so that they actually have something to do while the new site is being built before submissions and peer review of the fan fiction can happen again.

While theoretically members of the group could suggest any name, the function of the group is that of a Draco-Hermione fan fiction archive, so the proposed names would have to be somehow related to Draco, Hermione, or the Harry Potter canon in general. The fan fiction community is one accustomed to deliberation and written debate when it comes to rating and peer editing of content. However, the editorial process is usually not a democratic one. I am not all that familiar with the internal politics of these kinds of communities, but perhaps one of the motivations behind making the naming process more or less democratic was to build up the sense of community and a feeling of openness and trust. By the very act of participating and submitting content to a fan fiction community, the members are most likely creative people who want to express themselves in some way, so suggesting a name for the new archive provides just that kind of creative outlet. The other reward is simply "winning." Members can take pride in having their suggested or supported name chosen, and they can feel a kind of ownership in the process in participating, even if their name was not chosen.

After the suggestion and commenting time was up, floorcoaster made another post urging the community to vote on the top commented suggestions. There were a total of 72 suggested names, of which floorcoaster chose 11 to be included in the voting process. It is interesting to note that the commenting process had initially been set to 24 hours, but due to the volume of suggestions, the commenting period was shortened. Nobody protested this change in the procedure in the forum, which suggests a kind of general consensus to move things forward, or at least a general trust in floorcoaster's benevolent dictatorship. In the end, the name Hawthorn & Vine won out with a clear plurality of votes (48.5% or 72 out of 202 votes). There were some further technical discussions about whether "Hawthorn(e)" should be spelled with or without an "e," but otherwise, it was clear that the new name clearly had broad popular support.

In terms of optimizing the decision making process, there is not a whole lot I would suggest to change. The time limits placed on suggestions and comments and on the voting process helped to move things along, so did the general agreement with floorcoaster's procedural leadership. If there had not been a strict 24 hour timeframe to decide on a name, the process could have dragged on indefinitely and felt like a generic asynchronous online forum rather than the naming process as an "event."

Perhaps a technical tweak to streamline the process would be to use a Digg-like suggestion and rating system so that the process of suggesting, commenting and voting could be combined. In such a system, users could suggest a name and others could directly "like" or "digg" that name instead of saying that they like it in a text reply. Of course, the system would have to be designed so that members could not digg more than one suggestion, but then there would be the problem of members wanting to switch their votes if a better suggestion came along in the allotted 24 hour suggestion phase. If that were the case, perhaps it would be best to stay with the method that the group actually used. In another hypothetical scenario, if the members had been more divided in their opinions, there may have been the need for run-off votes to gradually eliminate less popular options before arriving at the final name.

My foray into the naming process of Hawthorn & Vine proved to be an interesting exploration of online social dynamics and the world of fan fiction communities. Based on our observations, the procedures and tools used to come to a decision seemed to have served the community well. Perhaps the very specialized and esoteric nature of the group creates an environment where the members tend to be self-selecting and relatively homogeneous in their opinions, or perhaps due to the traumatic loss of the previous archive, a new archive with any name would have been better than nothing, so the members were overwhelmingly cooperative and supportive.

Appendix

Our group's raw observations about the H&V naming process:

Observations on a Group Making a Decision
Cameron, Lee-Sean, Mark, Monica, and Sara

"I like just... Entwined": An Exploration of a Fanfic Archive Decision

http://community.livejournal.com/hawthorn_vine/603.html *comments and discussion for **slogan** decision*

http://community.livejournal.com/dramione/2195049.html *official **title** suggestion call*
    108 comments
    around 59 unique participants

http://community.livejournal.com/dramione/2198182.html *official **title** poll*
    202 participants
    11/72 suggestions were voted on
    Hawthorn and Vine received 98 votes

1. What are the obstacles to the group you are observing coming to a decision?

- the polite environment requires everyone be heard and considered (SB)
  - time is taken to make sure everyone is thanked or praised or respectfully disagreed with
- time: the organizers are ultimately in charge and can change the rules when it is convenient and without notice (SB)
- winning title has to represent a very particular population (can be used as a mechanism, see CC's note below) (SB)

2. What mechanisms, formal or informal, does the group have to overcoming these obstacles?

- polls (CC)
- group discussion (CC)
- constraint/shared reference of Harry Potter books acts as an anchor for discussion (can always refer back to the literature for validation/critique) (CC) - (LSH) - groups bound together by a narrative ("canon") like the Bible or something.
- administrators (SB)
- everyone takes the time to read everything so that suggestions and 'seconds' are valid and don't overlap too much (SB)

3. What patterns do you see that are similar to, or different from, the process of deciding who to write a check to in week 1?

- similarly strong focus on legitimization (CC) √√
- people on Hawthorn and Vine are more likely to put out their suggestion, even with "softening techniques" like apologizing or self-deprecation (SB)
  - maybe the format of writing, as opposed to talking, makes it easier to write it down and be done?
  - the volume of suggestions makes it easier to hide--because we had rounds, more suggestions was rarely better

- - Even though the medium is writing, the tone is still conversation to create an emotional safe space for discussion, as opposed to a lowest-common-denominator efficiency in writing. (LS)

Cameron, Lee-Sean, Mark, Monica, and Sara
Social Facts
Shirky
February 5, 2010

"I like just... Entwined": An Exploration of a Fanfic Archive Decision

These notes explore some specifics of the dissolution and rebirth of a Harry Potter FanFic archive. In particular, we focused on decision making around a new name and slogan. We observed a group that is polite yet decisive, guided by strong moderation, social currents, and the canon of Harry Potter.

Context of "Dramione," a Draco/Hermione [Relation-]Ship Archive
   The first moderated Draco/Hermione fanfiction archive "Coloured Grey" opened on Jan 2004. It shut down suddenly last year due to server issues namely the archive went over the file storage limit and the server host admins deleted the index file--killing the site, effectively anyway. The Coloured Grey archive was well loved, and seen to be a keystone in the Dramione fanfic community. It was the place that most people went to first with regards to reading good fanfic - and attracted an avid following in the Harry Potter community.
   This new proposed archive "Hawthorn & Vine" is for the refugees of the Coloured Grey archive--and is hoping again to be the leading archive for well-written Draco/Hermione fanfic.
From the Coloured Grey Administration:

"CV went down first because we went over our file storage limit on our old server and, rather than dealing with that in any normal, sensible way, the server admins (NOT the CV staff) began randomly deleting files, which included our index file, killing the site, effectively anyway. We don't know why on earth they would have done that, but they did it all the same. Thankfully they didn't touch the database, so no data in the database was lost, but without the index page, it couldn't be displayed. Amura, our webmisstress, began trying to sort it out and, when that failed, she started looking for a new server - one with more helpful staff."

A conversation during the site's downtime shows a strong commitment to the site and each other, but also begins to devolve into suspicion and doubt. One member points people to a new site and tries to gain momentum there.

Observations on the Decision of a New Name
The community is generally polite, friendly, and jokey, if deferential

- *I second these titles and not those, but those would make a good tagline!*
- "FERRET/OTTER! If they don't use this one, you and me Pokey, we gotta start a comm or something if only to use that title."
- "Love your idea of converting unsuspecting fans! Seconding BookMark for the evil scheme :)"
- *comment*: So, I didn't know if you guys knew this [...abridged...] Isn't that fascinating?
  response: That IS interesting! HMM! Thanks for sharing!
- "PureMud (just kidding!)"
- "Total Eclipse Of the Heart (Not really, I know, I just think of them when I hear this, I don't know why)"

- *very few 'ugly' comments like krissa27's. she says one disparaging thing-- hadn't spoken up in nomination process and doesn't speak again:*
- -- "ugh, none of the above... why can't we just call it dramione and be done with   it? :("
- *show of difference:*
- -- "What would be cool is if people could find lines from fics they like as a   slogan. Just a thought. It would make it more unique and true to the pairing."
- -- *after listing 12 suggestions, atlanta84 wants no responsibility for losing:* "Bah, I   really can't think of anything good right now. I totally second the Hawthorne and   Vine idea though. That one is made of win! :D"
- *there is a lot of appeal (though usually implicit) to civility of interchange. a member's credibility in the conversation is going to be influenced by her success at adhering to and leveraging this standard of conduct. credibility in this respect bears on the decision process because the ideas, endorsements, and arguments made by someone who maintains credibility in this regard will be better-received, both in an explicit way ("that is a good point" - i.e. their words are taken as valid) and in more unconscious ways (via an air of authority, or just getting a 'good feeling' from the person).*

  *Case study: silvia_elisa and Hawthorn and Vine
  silvia_elisa came up with the title that ultimately won the vote. It was pretty clear as   soon as she suggested it how popular the name was.

- Modest and grateful
  -- "*blush* I'm flattered." "I honestly did not expect this degree of popularity!   O.o"
- Makes clear her support for other (obviously worse) suggestions
  -- "Beast & Beauty Ah! I like that you inverted them! :)
  -- "Thanks! Breaking Down Walls I can just picture them facing the the wall   between them, determined to break it down. Good one!"
  -- even after the decision is made: "I fell for Smirks and Swots too, it has so many   great qualities!"
- As more and more people support her suggestion, she takes on a more authoritarian tone
  -- "Just to save somebody some time, my favourites so far are these."
  -- *on message boards, personal credibility and authority is largely established and   maintained by posting frequency and seniority. someone who posts frequently and/or has   been an active member for a long time becomes a defining factor in the group's sense of   identity, for good or ill, and other members will take cues from them, often unconsciously.   even 'unpopular' posters who maintain a high level of engagement carry authority - they   are not ignored but rather are 'notorious', and even if the majority diverges from them,   they serve as points of reference and set the terms of the discussion*

It's not just an archive, it's a community; and the community is well-defined by their own vocabulary, inside jokes, and geekdom pride.

- "BookMark is freaking inspired. So, I totally second it. Totally."
- "Hawthorn and Vine (because of the wands obviously)"
- "Catullus would soooo have been a Dramione shipper."
- "[...] All about the oxymorons, kids."
- "The truly forbidden forest is made of Hawthorn and Vine." This is so cheesy it's excellent. :D SECONDED.
- "Dramione." I would have no idea what this meant if Monica hadn't given context.
- *source/origin of suggestion is really important, people want to explain why they came up with what they did*

-- "But I do miss the Latin/spell-esque sound of Contra Veritas.
-- "UNTIL WE BLEED Inspired by Lykke Li's song" (and goes on to post the entire   song)
-- "All bits of Romeo and Juliet, of course."

- *the community as such is already established in terms of its membership, structure (in the sense of hierarchy and organization of members), purpose, functions, customs/conventions, "personality", position in the greater fanfic community, etc.*
- ***at the core, this is primarily a rebranding effort.*** *brand is essentially a group's persona. and especially in the case of a noncommercial entity like this, the brand's functions largely pertain to self-representation (who are we, what do we do here, what do we stand for, how do we think of ourselves, etc.) and publicity (what is distinctive about us, what is our style/flavor, what are our tastes, how do we prefer to see ourselves / prefer to be seen, etc.).*

Despite a constant appeal to universality and agreement, the site is heavily moderated and controlled.

- "I think that's sort of elitist looking if you did it that way (line from a fic). Because then it singles out one fic and one writer which could leave a lot of hurt feelings."
- "There are already WAY too many to do a single poll tomorrow, so we'll use the suggestions with the most seconds/thirds/etc"
- *Is floorcoaster a manager of some kind? S/he takes on a very supportive, background role:*
  -- "You know, not a single person suggested Dramione!" (after krissa27's annoyed   post)
  -- "There was discussion in the comments between people, and there was a lot of   support for the e at the end of Hawthorn. However, the actual wood name has no   e... Hmm. Something to think about if it wins."
- There is a 24 hour window for decision making to help keep things moving forward:
  -- "We closed the suggestions early"
- *the admin/non-admin division in membership creates a power disparity which is ratified and tolerated (beyond the fact that it holds precedent) by the explicitly communitarian disposition of the admins (e.g. allowing the community to decide on matters of group identity, openness to dialogue and engagement, fostering civil and conscientious discussion). this power disparity (i.e. that the admins make all the infrastructural decisions) structures and constrains the community's avenues of action (e.g., it was mentioned that the board reply format influences the nature of the discussion; and while in this case it's livejournal that sets the rules here, there are probably some elements of the configuration here that have been set by the admins, and if the hawthorn&vine website has a forum, its form will presumably be decided upon by the admins. and then you have things like the admins deciding when the polls close, what makes the cut, etc.).*

What matters in making the decision?

- because it is a question of group identity/persona, rationales ushered forth often have to do with style, taste, and personal resonance. lots of "i like this"-type justifications.
- After it is obvious that Hawthorn and Vine should win, the conversation turns to specifics (like spelling) and confirmation of the how great the title is
  -- "it's abstract enough to get people thinking about its significance, but it's totally   unique to our pairing."
  -- "I read many suggestions and I although I like a lot of I think some good points   were already made, Hawthorne & Vine does not come up a lot when googling   and it sounds very neutral where others sort of put a label on it like "Turning   Tides" or reminded me of already existing sites (i.e. Burning Ice reminded me of   the site Fire and ice> also Hawthorne & Vine does not include the obvious like   "ferret", "bookworm", "silver", "gold", "snake", "lion" etc."
  -- "Well, given that with more than a hundred votes cast, Hawthorn & Vine has   more than 4

times the votes of its nearest competitor, BookMark (which I still   think is an absolutely inspired title) I'm guessing that the name is all but a done   deal.)"

- *'canon' is a clear source of authority here, which is ironic considering the inherently non-canonical nature of any Dramione story (and the explicit rejection of the authority of canon by the community, c.f. atlanta84's avatar: a pic of draco & hermione with the words "Screw Canon" overlaid), but that's just the point: this is not some kind of willy-nilly harry potter butcher shop - deviation from canon is actually highly constrained. this not only manifests on the level of serving as a group identity marker*
  -- "Hawthorn and Vine" is a good name because it is a reference to the canon and has a special significance in that context as well as merely sounding good)
  -- the canon also functions as a constitutional constraint of sorts. the name as originally proposed was "Hawthorne and Vine", but people eventually noticed that in the books it's spelled "Hawthorn", and despite nobody seeming to have much personal stake in that   spelling, a consensus was easily arrived at that it should be spelled "Hawthorn and Vine"

Context of "Dramione" *Draco/Hermione* Ship Archive

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http://raffyv.livejournal.com/30366.html

http://www.fanhistory.com/wiki/Draco/Hermione

Definition of Fanfiction - http://fanlore.org/wiki/Fanfiction

Sara's notes
Title Suggestions
• highly curated process: "There are already WAY too many to do a single poll tomorrow, so we'll use the suggestions with the most seconds/thirds/etc"
• generally supportive: I second these titles and not those, but those would make a good tagline!
• source/origin of suggestion is really important, people want to explain why they came up with what they did: "But I do miss the Latin/spell-esque sound of Contra Veritas." "UNTIL WE BLEED Inspired by Lykke Li's song" (and goes on to post the entire song), "All bits of Romeo and Juliet, of course."
• Jokes! "PureMud (just kidding!)" "Total Eclipse Of the Heart (Not really, I know, I just think of them when I hear this, I don't know why)"
• Level of familiarity and comfort: "FERRET/OTTER! If they don't use this one, you and me Pokey, we gotta start a comm or something if only to use that title." "Love your idea of converting unsuspecting fans! Seconding BookMark for the evil scheme :)"
• Inside jokes much: "BookMark is freaking inspired. So, I totally second it. Totally." "Hawthorn and Vine (because of the wands obviously)" "*Catullus would soooo have been a Dramione shipper."*
• The favorite suggestions get more conversation (see Hawthorn and Vine--ultimate winner--thread): "*it's abstract enough to get people thinking about its significance, but it's totally unique to our pairing."*
• Modesty (from ultimate winner, silvia_elisa): "*blush* I'm flattered." "I honestly did not expect this degree of popularity! O.o"
    -- silvia_elisa is sure to make clear her support for other (obviously worse) suggestions: "*Beast & Beauty* Ah! I like that you inverted them! :)"
    -- after listing 12 suggestions, atlanta84 wants no responsibility for losing: "Bah, I really can't think of anything good right now. I totally second the Hawthorne and Vine idea   though. That one is made of win! :D"
       * Ooh! And silvia_elisa responds (bold!): "Thanks! *Breaking Down Walls* I can just picture them facing the the wall between them, determined to break it down. Good one!"
       * Ugh! And silvia_elisa won't shutup: "Just to save somebody some time, my favourites so far are these."
       * And then gets shut down (a little): silvia_elisa: "Isn't it supposed to be 'thy'? marmaladefever: "Actually, according to the rules of Middle to Early Modern English grammar, "thine" is used before words that start with vowels, sort of like "an."" silvia_elisa:"Thank you!! I've always wondered about that."
• As the discussion goes on, more reasons are given for favorites, like Hawthorn and Vine: *"I read many suggestions and I although I like a lot of I think some good points were already made, Hawthorne & Vine does not come up a lot when googling and it sounds very neutral where others sort of put a label on it like "Turning Tides" or reminded me of already existing sites (i.e. Burning Ice reminded me of the site Fire and ice> also Hawthorne & Vine does not include the obvious like "ferret", "bookworm", "silver", "gold", "snake", "lion" etc."*

Title Poll

• silvia_elisa continues to annoy me: "I fell for Smirks and Swots too, it has so many great qualities!"

• Is floorcoaster a manager of some kind? S/he takes on a very supportive, background role: "You know, not a single person suggested Dramione!" "There was discussion in the comments between people, and there was a lot of support for the e at the end of Hawthorn. However, the actual wood name has no e... Hmm. Something to think about if it wins."
• After the decision is obvious ("Well, given that with more than a hundred votes cast, Hawthorn & Vine has more than 4 times the votes of its nearest competitor, BookMark (which I still think is an absolutely inspired title) I'm guessing that the name is all but a done deal."), conversation turns to spelling and then reinforcement of the perceived winner's awesomeness

• krissa27 comes out of nowhere being super ugly. She says one disparaging thing--never spoke up in nomination process: "ugh, none of the above... why can't we just call it dramione and be done with it? :("

------------------------CAMERON'S NOTES------------

GENERAL

The backstory behind the takedown of the original site sounds fishy. Did the site admins really have no backup of the index.html? And besides, it's a CMS, the posts are stored in a database, not in html files.

Here's a discussion between members of coloured grey during downtime between sites: http://community.livejournal.com/dramione/1902768.html

Shows a strong commitment to the site and each other, but also begins to devolve into suspicion and doubt.

also, statement from admin, **4 months later**!

http://raffyv.livejournal.com/30366.html

SLOGAN DECISION

comment: *What would be cool is if people could find lines from fics they like as a slogan. Just a thought. It would make it more unique and true to the pairing.*

*Just a thought" shows deference to others

response: *I think that's sort of elitist looking if you did it that way (line from a fic). Because then it singles out one fic and one writer which could leave a lot of hurt feelings.*

*Demonstrates desire for universal satisfaction, equality

comment: So, I didn't know if you guys knew this [...abridged...] Isn't that fascinating?

response: *That IS interesting! HMM! Thanks for sharing!*
*Very polite thread!

comment: [...] All about the oxymorons, kids.

*toung-in-cheek, attempt at humility

Overall the thread is very polite and deferential. However, there are a bunch of posts that seem maybe to have been pulled? Maybe those were more edgy. I wonder to what degree the moderators curate the response.

It is a strange dynamic, since all the power is in the hands of the moderators (comment vetting, design decisions, slogans, etc), and yet they are taking community input. I wonder to what extent they will or have used veto power against the consensus.

---------------------END CAMERON'S NOTES--------------------

<<LS NOTES>>

Right off the bat, I noticed the use of "in-group" language, i.e. "Dramione." I would have no idea what this meant if Monica hadn't given context.

It's not just an archive, it's a "community."

There is a 24 hour window for decision making to help keep things moving forward.

elyaeru:
"The truly forbidden forest is made of Hawthorn and Vine."
This is so cheesy it's excellent. :D
SECONDED.

Demonstrates that members are self-aware of their own geekdom and use humor to mitigate critique.

Thread structure allows users to comment specifically on what others have said.

"We closed the suggestions early" - somebody has the executive power to amend/abridge the process as necessary.

<<END LS NOTES>>

[[mark]]

what is being negotiated here is an element of the group's identity:

- the community as such is already established in terms of its membership, structure (in the sense of hierarchy and organization of members), purpose, functions, customs/conventions, "personality", position in the greater fanfic community, etc.
- at the core, this is primarily a rebranding effort. brand is essentially a group's persona. and especially in the case of a noncommercial entity like this, the brand's functions largely pertain to self-representation (who are we, what do we do here, what do we stand for, how do we think of ourselves, etc.) and publicity (what is distinctive about us, what is our style/flavor, what are our tastes, how do we prefer to see ourselves / prefer to be seen, etc.).

as far as how this decision is mediated:

- as the rest of you have observed, the admin/non-admin division in membership creates a power disparity which is ratified and tolerated (beyond the fact that it holds precedent) by the explicitly communitarian disposition of the admins (e.g. allowing the community to decide on matters of group identity, openness to dialogue and engagement, fostering civil and conscientious discussion). this power disparity (i.e. that the admins make all the infrastructural decisions) structures and constrains the community's avenues of action (e.g., it was mentioned that the board reply format influences the nature of the discussion; and while in this case it's livejournal that sets the rules here, there are probably some elements of the configuration here that have been set by the admins, and if the hawthorn&vine website has a forum, its form will presumably be decided upon by the admins. and then you have things like the admins deciding when the polls close, what makes the cut, etc.).

- as has also been observed, there is a lot of appeal (though usually implicit) to civility of interchange. a member's credibility in the conversation is going to be influenced by her success at adhering to and leveraging this standard of conduct. credibility in this respect bears on the decision process because the ideas, endorsements, and arguments made by someone who maintains credibility in this regard will be better-received, both in an explicit way ("that is a good point" - i.e. their words are taken as valid) and in more unconscious ways (via an air of authority, or just getting a 'good feeling' from the person).

- on message boards, personal credibility and authority is largely established and maintained by posting frequency and seniority. someone who posts frequently and/or has been an active member for a long time becomes a defining factor in the group's sense of identity, for good or ill, and other members will take cues from them, often unconsciously. even 'unpopular' posters who maintain a high level of engagement carry authority - they are not ignored but rather are 'notorious', and even if the majority diverges from them, they serve as points of reference and set the terms of the discussion. i don't have the familiarity with this community to know which posters exert this kind of influence, but i'm willing to bet that their contributions to the decision-making process had a significant influence on the outcome (even if the things they voted for weren't picked).

- beyond these more personal sources of weight that a proposal/endorsement/argument might carry, we can look at the way the content of a proposal relates to its validity as a choice.
    - because it is a question of group identity/persona, rationales ushered forth often have to do with style, taste, and personal resonance. lots of "i like this"-type justifications.
    - 'canon' is a clear source of authority here, which is ironic considering the inherently non-canonical nature of any Dramione story (and the explicit rejection of the authority of canon by the community, c.f. atlanta84's avatar: a pic of draco & hermione with the words "Screw Canon" overlaid), but that's just the point: this is not some kind of willy-nilly harry potter butcher shop - deviation from canon is actually highly constrained. this not only manifests on the level of serving as a group identity marker ("Hawthorn and Vine" is a good name because it is a reference to the canon and has a special significance in that context as well as merely sounding good); it also functions as a constitutional constraint of sorts. the name as originally proposed was "Hawthorne and Vine", but people eventually noticed that in the books it's spelled "Hawthorn", and despite nobody seeming to have much personal stake in that spelling, a consensus was easily arrived at that it should be spelled "Hawthorn and Vine".

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