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"I don't need to be carried, bro." Survivor Edgic, Knowledge Communities, and Narrative Pleasure

For the past few decades, we have been living a new digital age, in which viewers are no longer passive but active participants in shaping and decoding the media they consume—through their demands placed on producers and in their pooling of knowledge within digital forums and platforms. Some of the most engaged participants are what Henry Jenkins refers to as "knowledge communities," which are "held together through the mutual production and reciprocal exchange of knowledge" (27). While other scholars have examined the knowledge communities that Jenkins discusses at length in *Convergence Culture* (2006), fewer have picked up the thread of his examples regarding the American reality television show Survivor (US 2000– , Creator: Charlie Parsons), which I find worth revisiting for two reasons: first, because of the unique ways the show's devoted fans interact with each other and with the producers; second, for the ways in which the Survivor fan community has evolved since Jenkins wrote about it.

Survivor premiered on CBS in the summer of 2000 and was an immediate success. According to Nielsen Media Research, 51.7 million viewers tuned in for the first season finale, more than for any telecast of the season except for the Super Bowl (Johnson). The concept of the show is simple: sixteen US Americans (in later seasons, up to twenty) are stranded on a deserted island and divided into two teams, or "tribes." They work together to build camp, survive on limited rations, and try to win challenges. The tribe that loses an "immunity challenge" must go to "tribal council," where they are forced to vote out one of their own tribe members. This process continues until "the merge," when the remaining contestants in both tribes are combined into a single tribe. At this halfway point in the game, immunity challenges become individual. Contestants form "alliances" with each other to vote others out, until finally, when two or three contestants remain, a "jury" of eliminated contestants votes for the winner to receive a million dollars at the final tribal council. The editing style of the show, which has become common in the "gamedoc" subgenre of reality television (Oullette and Murray 3), features documentary-style footage of contestants interacting on the beach and in challenges. The edited narrative is punctuated by interviews with contestants,

or "confessionals," in which contestants speak directly to the camera and share their thoughts and feelings about other contestants, their personal struggles, or their strategy in the game.

As Jenkins explains, when the show first aired in the summer of 2000, Survivor fans took to the internet in order to "spoil" the show by identifying filming locations through satellite photographs, looking for episode clues frame by frame, and digging for information on cast members in online forums. Jenkins argues that knowledge communities allow fan culture "to exert greater aggregate power in their negotiations with media producers" (27). This was clearly the case with Survivor, in which producer Mark Burnett had to fight against the unexpected collective power of the spoiler community by planting false information and red herrings to derail them from discovering the winner of the first season (Jenkins 46). From that point on, a cat-and-mouse game developed between the producers and the fans. However, as Jenkins points out, the fun of this game was ruined in the show's sixth season, Survivor: The Amazon (US 2003), when an online participant named ChillOne suddenly released information that included, among other crucial spoilers, the identities of the final two contestants. Although the online Survivor fan community was engaged in a collective search for spoilers, ChillOne went further. While vacationing with friends in Rio de Janeiro, they made their way to the Amazon and discovered that the production staff was staying at Ariau Amazon Towers while filming the current season of US Survivor (Jenkins 32). ChillOne gathered information while staying at the hotel, thereby skipping the steps of the traditional online spoiling process. Their unorthodox methods only served to anger the fan community:

> As one participant grumbled, "We have turned spoiling into a non-cooperative game.... 'Winning' means spoiling the whole season; hiding how you know about it and making others second guess you all season so you can humiliate them. ChillOne won. Everybody else lost." (Jenkins 51)

According to Pierre Levy, whom Jenkins quotes, knowledge communities in the digital age are "central to the task of restoring democratic citizenship" (Jenkins 29) because everyone is allowed to participate; however, Jenkins argues that ChillOne's disrupture of this democratic process by "[dumping] information out there without regard to anyone else's preferences holds a deeply totalitarian dimension" (55). As a result of ChillOne's "totalitarian" disruption, the Survivor spoiler community was forced to redefine its purpose. Nearly twenty years later, these communities have found homes within various media, including podcasts such as *Rob Has a Podcast* and *The Tribe*, forums on *Reddit* and *Survivor Sucks*, cast members' *Twitter/X* feeds,

Facebook pages, fantasy Survivor game sites, and other websites dedicated solely to the discussion and analysis of Survivor. But even now, ChillOne's disruption of the spoiling game between the producer and the Survivor fan community calls into question the purpose of the game itself. Is it a zero-sum game of "winning" at all costs, or is it a collaborative effort that relies on the reciprocal exchange of information within the knowledge community?

This paper focuses on a controversy that erupted during the 32nd season of Survivor in 2016, which shares similarities with the ChillOne incident in 2003. A comparison of these two important moments that polarized the Survivor fandom sheds light on the various ways fans interact with a show and with other members of the fan community, which can at times come into conflict with each other. One particular knowledge community that became the focus of the 2016 incident are Edgic users, who use a fan-made system for analyzing and decoding the editing patterns of the show. A portmanteau of "edit" and "logic," Edgic was created in 2002 by fans on *Survivor Sucks*, the original internet forum (now defunct) for Survivor fandom, to not only predict the winner of the season but to construct that season's narrative.

The Edgic system, which is easy to use and accessible to all Survivor fans, includes three major criteria for analyzing and decoding the editing patterns for each contestant: character rating, visibility, and tone. Edgic users assign their own ratings using these criteria, which are largely subjective, and they often post their ratings on forums to share with other Edgic users. Sometimes Edgic users disagree with each other on certain ratings, but most ratings tend to be agreed-upon by a majority of fans based on discussions on social media platforms, comment boards, forums, and podcasts. For instance, as Ben Lindbergh of *The Ringer* website points out, the different Edgic charts made by the Survivor Edgic *Reddit* thread *r/Edgic*, *Unspoiled Edgicers Unite*, and *Inside Survivor*[1] all differed slightly for season 39 in 2019, but there was broad agreement across communities that Tommy Sheehan would be the winner based on his consistently high ratings in the Edgic system throughout the season (Lindbergh).

Within a given episode, each contestant is assigned an Edgic score based on these three measurements that allow Edgic users to follow editing patterns over the course of the season. Some of the factors Edgic users examine: which contestants receive more screen time than others, which contestants are portrayed more positively, and which contestants are more central to the

1 Survivor Edgic *Reddit* thread (www.reddit.com/r/Edgic/); *Unspoiled Edgicers Unite* (www.tapatalk.com/groups/unspoiledgicersunite/); *Inside Survivor* (insidesurvivor.com).

season's overarching narrative. These criteria make it easier for Edgic users to not only make sense of the unpredictable narrative but to also predict the outcome of the show more accurately. Due to the deeper levels of analysis required to use Edgic, Edgic participants tend to be devoted "super fans" of the show, even more so than fans who listen to an occasional podcast, read the occasional recap online, or even participate in online fantasy drafts.

Despite its requirement for more active engagement with the show, Edgic fits the description of Levy's democratic knowledge community because it is open and accessible to anyone who wants to join in the game. This makes it different from the spoiling community in the early days of Survivor described by Jenkins, which was essentially a gated knowledge community led by brain trust factions. Spoiling the show is generally not why fans participate in the Edgic community: instead, it is the *process* of assembling and arranging an orderly and linear story out of the show's unpredictable and seemingly random plot structure that gives the participants a sense of narrative pleasure. Ironically, however, Edgic users were accused of threatening the narrative pleasure of other Survivor fans in 2016 during the 32nd season of the show.

Survivor: Kaoh Rong Edgic Controversy

A controversy similar to the 2003 ChillOne incident erupted in 2016 during the show's 32nd season, Survivor: Kaoh Rong (US 2016), in which Edgic users correctly predicted the season's winner, Michele Fitzgerald, despite denial from the rest of the Survivor fan community. Most non-Edgic fans were predicting a win for the more popular Aubry Bracco, and to the non-Edgic viewer, her edit, which was often central to the narrative of the season, seemed to support that assumption. When the self-proclaimed "Michele truthers"[2] were proven correct in the season finale, they were met with outrage from the rest of the fans, who claimed that Edgic users had ruined their enjoyment

2 Sean Richey explains that "Trutherism" has its roots in the "belief that Bush had foreknowledge of the 9/11 attacks and that they were allowed or even surreptitiously committed by the United States" (466). Although "truther" typically refers to one who believes in conspiracy theories, Survivor fan HowlingMermaid points out that "Survivor the TV show, and even the most salacious rumors about production don't really border on conspiracy. Truther is just a hyperbolized term to be silly and have fun" (reddit.com/r/Edgic/comments/18d4hun/truthers/). See the following Reddit thread for an example of how this term is used playfully and ironically by certain members of the fan community: "My Fellow Michele-Truthers, who are you 'truthing' this season?" (www.reddit.com/r/survivor/comments/54sd8k/my_fellow_micheletruthers_who_are_you_truthing/).

of the show. For instance, Survivor fan Ian Walker shared his reaction to the Survivor: Kaoh Rong season finale, which speaks for much of the fan community's reaction:

> Throughout the entire season, I had been an Aubry person. From early on in the season, I latched onto her, and as the season went along and her story gained more traction as she emerged as a real power player, I became pretty convinced that she would be the eventual winner. But how could you ignore the "Michele truthers," you ask? I was certainly aware of them and did think that their argument held a lot of merits. But I never fully committed to the idea for one simple reason: Michele wasn't the focus of the overall arc of the season and, therefore, I believed, didn't have the narrative support like Aubry did. ("Why Michele Didn't Have a Winner's Story (Even Though She Won)")

It was not the surprise of Michele's win that disappointed Walker and a large population of Survivor fans, but more the fact that she was not the "focus of the overall arc of the season," as Aubry had been.

While at first glance, this controversy seems to mirror the ChillOne incident described by Jenkins, the difference is that Edgic users who predicted Michele's win did not have special access to spoilers like ChillOne had: instead, they simply cracked the editing code and used their collective intelligence to make a correct prediction. A deeper look into how Edgic users were able to correctly identify Michele as the winner may shed light on how this led to a fracture within the fan community. I will explain in more depth the three main Edgic criteria of visibility, tone, and character rating, and compare Michele's and Aubry's edits to show how Edgic users predicted a Michele win, which, like ChillOne, disrupted the narrative pleasure of the non-Edgic Survivor fan community.

Visibility

Visibility is the most straightforward data point in the Edgic system because it tracks a contestant's visibility within each Survivor episode on a scale of 1 to 5. Edgic users count visibility as screentime, which can mean anything from a contestant shown engaging in dialogue with another contestant on the beach to receiving prominent focus during a challenge. However, "confessionals," personal interviews in which contestants break the fourth wall and speak directly to the camera about their feelings or plans within the game, hold the most weight in terms of visibility.

Fig. 1: *Visibility Scale*. Survivor contestants are rated on a scale of 1 to 5 for each episode, depending on how much screentime they receive. Retrieved from insidesurvivor.com/survivor-Edgic-an-introduction-3094

If a contestant receives low visibility throughout the season, then he or she is not likely to win the game or even to play an important role in the season's narrative. Contestants who are central to the narrative will obviously receive more screen time than those who are not. Also, contestants who are not necessarily central to the narrative but give entertaining "sound bites" or provide funny, shocking, or compelling material will likely receive more visibility. However, perhaps most telling is when a contestant scores high on the visibility scale even when he or she is neither particularly entertaining nor important to the episode's narrative. This is the case with Michele, who was not an important factor in the story until the final few episodes of the season. Knowing that Michele would win the season and not wanting the audience to forget that she was on the show, the editors chose to include random confessionals or moments involving Michele that reminded the audience of her presence. For example, in episode 3, none of the storylines directly involved Michele, yet she was given two confessionals commenting on the relationship between her tribemates, Caleb and Tai:

> Michele (1/2): They're just two totally different personalities that you wouldn't think connect, and somehow, they just get each other.
> Michele (2/2): The bromance is real out here. They bicker like a married couple, and then they kiss and make up.

Although Julia, Michele's other tribemate in her "Beauty alliance," also received a similar confessional commenting on Tai's and Caleb's "bromance," the fact that Michele received two confessionals indicates that the editors wanted her to be more front of mind, even when she was not directly involved in the narrative. Moments such as these were flagged by Edgic users, leading them to believe that Michele was a likely winner within the first few episodes.

In comparison to Michele, fan favorite Aubry received a higher visibility rating overall, especially in the first half of the season. However, when we

compare the visibility of Aubry and Michele throughout the season, some interesting patterns emerge. The following chart tracks visibility for both Michele and Aubry over the course of the 15 hours of the show. The transcripts of all the confessionals for the entire season were uploaded into Voyant, an open-source, web-based application for text analysis. When "Michele" and "Aubry" were input as whitelist words, the following visualization appeared:

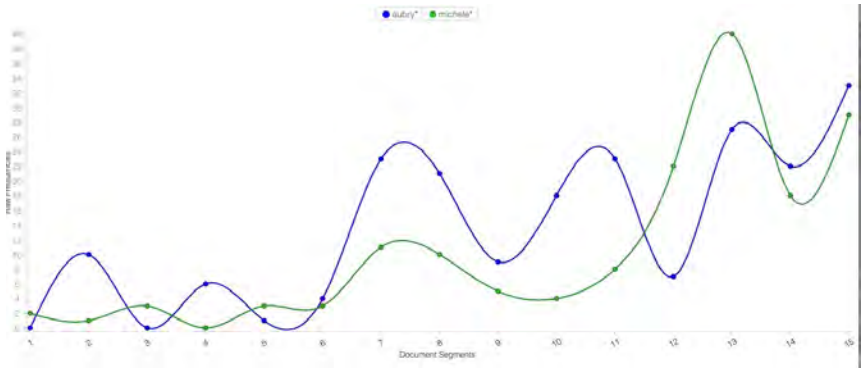

Fig. 2: A comparison of Michele's and Aubry's visibility throughout the season based on dialogue tags, created using Voyant

The transcripts uploaded into Voyant include the contestant's name before every confessional. Therefore, analyzing the transcripts can accurately show the number of confessionals throughout the season. In addition, a contestant will appear more frequently on the graph if another contestant mentions her name during a confessional. Both instances of names relate to visibility, since the name of a contestant is not likely to be mentioned if she is not involved in the episode's narrative. The graph shows that Aubry is more visible throughout the season, especially during episodes 7 and 11, which comprise a bulk of the postmerge game, sometimes referred to as "Act Two" of the show's three-act structure: this is the phase of the game in which the competing tribes merge into one tribe and the gameplay shifts to an individual mode, with strategy becoming more important than physicality. Aubry, because she originated on the "Brain" tribe and values logic and strategy over athleticism, comes into her own after the merge. The narrative often centers on Aubry's strategic decisions as she grapples with how to defeat the Brawn alliance, whether to betray her ally Debbie, and how to sway Tai to join her alliance.

Michele, by contrast, is shown as a more passive player who is sometimes unaware of the strategic conversations between the other power players. However, her visibility spikes between episodes 12 and 15, the final stretch of the game, in which she wins multiple immunity challenges and emerges from the shadows as an actual threat. Because Michele becomes more central to the narrative at the end of the season, her visibility spike makes sense. However, what is most striking about Michele's edit is her consistent visibility earlier in the game when she is not an important player within the narrative. Her comment about the Tai and Caleb bromance in episode 3 has already been mentioned. Another example is in episode 8, where Michele has no central role in the main story yet has two confessionals reacting to Jason and Scot's decision to hide the tools in retaliation against the women's alliance:

> Michele (1/2): The boys think that they can break us down and keep us down by doing these things, but we just use our smarts and figure out another way. We don't need you big burly men to do it for us. We can figure it out. Within twenty minutes, we figured out a new method.
> Michele (2/2): I just don't like that kind of behavior. I don't tolerate it in my regular life, and I d-- I don't want to tolerate it out here either. So they can keep the power struggle going on, but we're not going to back down. You know, we're always going to find a way.

Because Michele is not involved in the strategic conversations in the episode, the editors decided to show her personal reactions to Jason and Scot to remind the audience of her presence on the show and place her in opposition to the antagonists to gain favor with the audience. While these confessionals paint her in a positive light, it is not enough for the audience to necessarily root for her to win, since she is still only a supporting character and not all that essential to much of the season's narrative. However, Michele's consistent visibility, despite her nonessential role in the story arc, is one of the ways Edgic users picked up on a potential winner edit.

Tone

Tone is another factor used by Edgic users to determine how a contestant is portrayed by the editors. A contestant's edit within a given episode can receive a Super Positive (PP), Positive (P), Neutral (no value attached), Mixed (M), Negative (N), or Super Negative (NN) score.

TONE	DEFINITIONS
PP super positive	The character is so unbelievably and overtly positive that it deserves special recognition. The character may get special, rare, heroic, soaring music. Other characters may refer to them in terms that make them seem saintly, heroic, or sympathetic.
P positive	There is significant evidence of editorial footage for the character in the positive direction. Positive (e.g., sympathetic) music paired with a character's words/actions. Other characters speaking about the character in an unambiguously positive way.
Neutral	The edit pairs the character's words/actions with no special musical cues, other characters do not comment on the character in an evaluative way, and the overall narrative does not convey anything about the character that is inherently good or bad.
M mixed	It technically is a type of Neutral Toned edit, but where the player has amounts of notable negative and positive scenes in the same episode. There should be a notable amount of P and N manipulation.
N negative	There is significant evidence of editorial footage for the character in the negative direction. Negative (e.g., "dopey"/"evil") music paired with a character's words/actions. Other characters speaking about the character in an unambiguously negative way.
NN super negative	The character is so incredibly vile that it deserves special recognition. The character may get special, rare, "evil" music. Other characters may refer to them in terms that make them seem incredibly terrible to coexist with.

Fig. 3: *Tone*. Six different tone ratings applied by Edgic users to contestants, based on "positive" or "negative" edits. Retrieved from insidesurvivor.com/survivor-Edgic-an-introduction-3094

The tone is determined by the choices a contestant is shown to make, whether they are positive (i.e., performing well in a challenge, bonding with another contestant, or sharing their genuine feelings in a confessional) or negative (i.e., performing badly in a challenge, clashing with another contestant, or speaking badly about another contestant in a confessional). As suggested by the chart above, music also plays an essential role in the tone. For instance, in Survivor: Game Changers (US 2017), the show's 34th season, inspirational music is used to underscore four-time contestant Cirie Fields's physical struggle to walk a balance beam over the water, which influenced Fields's tone rating towards a Super Positive (PP) score. By contrast, in Survivor: Caramoan (US 2013), the show's 26th season, dramatic music plays as contestant Brandon Hantz, who later is taken out of the game due to his unstable mental state, loses his temper and dumps out all the tribe's rice. Instead of underscoring the tragic event of an unstable contestant's struggle with mental health, the music serves to paint Hantz as the villain of the season. Unsurprisingly, Edgic users gave Hantz a Super Negative (NN) tone rating for the episode.

For Edgic users, tone is used to distinguish between the contestants who are portrayed in a positive light versus those portrayed in a negative light. For example, both Aubry and Michele mostly receive positive, or at least neutral,

edits for most of their episodes. By contrast, contestants such as Nick, Jason, and Scot receive negative edits, since they are often shown boasting about themselves, bashing other contestants in their confessionals, or even bullying or clashing with contestants during scenes on the beach. In one scene in episode 6, Michele is speaking with her ally Nick about who to vote for if their tribe loses the next immunity challenge. Nick comes across as condescending and rude, both within the scene and in his confessional:

> Nick (6/6): I have to almost coach Michele in this game. She's young and she doesn't really know how to manipulate. So that's going to be my job from here on out—making sure Michele is under my wing and making sure she says the right things and comes across the right way.

While Nick's disrespectful treatment of Michele was already apparent from his interactions with her, the inclusion of his condescending confessional paints him in an even worse light. He becomes an antagonist who "mansplains" to Michele because he does not believe she can think for herself. Although Michele does not confront Nick directly, she also receives her own confessional, in which she shares her feelings about their conversation:

> Michele (6/6): Right now, what I'm gonna do is just let Nick baby me and make him believe that I need all the help that he can offer, like the innocent little girl, like I'm stupid, but actually, I'm a strong, independent woman, and when it comes time to make a move, then I will. I don't need to be carried, bro.

In contrast to Nick, Michele is portrayed in a positive light, not as a victim, but as a "strong, independent woman," who is clearly annoyed with his behavior but will continue to use him for her own personal gain, until the time is right to make a move against him. As shown in this scene, tone is used to distinguish between the contestants we are supposed to root for (such as Michele) and those we are supposed to root against (such as Nick).

Some recent winners have received an overall "mixed" tone rating: for instance, Adam Klein in Survivor: Millennials vs. Gen-X (US 2016), who often fumbled his way through the season by voting incorrectly in a handful of episodes and even tripping goofily when searching for an idol in the season finale. But the contestants with overtly negative edits are (usually) ruled out by Edgic users as potential winners because the editors of the show want the audience to be satisfied with a winner they were rooting for throughout the season.

Character Rating

Character rating is perhaps the most important tool utilized by Edgic users to define each contestant's role within the season's narrative. A contestant may be assigned a variety of character ratings throughout the season, depending on how he or she is portrayed within different episodes. However, as the season progresses, certain patterns emerge, allowing Edgic users to see how a contestant fits within the overarching story. The character ratings are Invisible (INV), Under the Radar (UTR), Middle of the Road (MOR), Complex Personality (CP), and Over the Top (OTT).

RATING	DEFINITIONS
INV invisible	A character, within the episode, that is edited to be irrelevant or insignificant to any of the stories. No confessionals or tribal council questions. Almost absent from the episode. No complexity and no development.
UTR under the radar	A character, within the episode, that is edited to be either under-utilized or deliberately hidden. They may have a role in the story but are being kept out of focus. When the episode ends, the character's overall development is virtually unchanged.
MOR middle of the road	A character, within the episode, that says and does more than a UTR edit, but is lacking in character development. In terms of story, these characters tend towards being a supporting character. Receives moderate levels of game relevant development.
CP complex personality	A character, within the episode, that emerges as a "personality" that is well-rounded and well-developed. We see their strengths and weaknesses and their choices are presented to the audience so that we get an insight into their thinking.
OTT over the top	A character, within the episode, that is over-simplified or presented as one-dimensional. In terms of story, these characters are usually used to create drama. They are the ones we love to love or love to hate.

Fig. 4: *Character Rating*. The most subjective of the three criteria, these five character types are assigned by Edgic users to Survivor contestants in each episode. Each character type takes into account the quality of content in the confessionals and the overall narrative. Retrieved from insidesurvivor.com/survivor-Edgic-an-introduction-3094

Although visibility is related to character rating, character ratings have more to do with how much character development the contestant receives within the episode. This is mostly determined by players' confessionals. A confessional itself does not determine a contestant's character rating, as it does with visibility; instead, it is the content of the confessional that counts. For example, if a contestant admits in a confessional that she misses a family member and begins to cry on camera, then that contestant will most likely receive a CP rating for that episode. Martin Holmes, the manager of the fan site *Inside Survivor*, points out that a CP rating is the "sweet spot" since it is typically a good indicator that the contestant is a winner candidate (Holmes,

"Survivor Edgic—An Introduction"). An MOR isn't bad either since an MOR can change into a CP later in the season. An OTT rating is reserved for characters who are generally underdeveloped or stereotypical but provide a lot of drama or entertainment value. Finally, UTR and INV ratings are indicators that the contestant is not important to the episode's narrative, and if a contestant receives a lot of UTR or INV ratings, then that contestant is ruled out as a possible winner. The following chart from *Inside Survivor* shows the "postmerge" contestants (the final eleven contestants that made it to Act Two of the game) and their assigned character rating values for each episode, combined with visibility ratings (indicated by a number between 1 and 5) and tone ratings (indicated by the shade of each color).

Fig. 5: An Edgic chart for the final eleven contestants of Survivor: Kaoh Rong, which combines visibility, tone, and character ratings. Retrieved from insidesurvivor.com/survivor-kaoh-rong-Edgic-episode-14-12975

As shown in the chart, a contestant may receive a variety of character ratings throughout the season. However, Redmond assigned an overall character rating to each contestant at the end of the season. According to the key, regular and super positive CP (Complex Personality) character ratings are in dark

blue and light blue. The only four contestants to receive overall CP ratings that do not include mixed or negative tones are Michele, Aubry, Cydney, and Julia. When comparing Michele's and Aubry's character ratings over the course of the season, it becomes clear that, although Aubry is slightly more visible in more episodes, her edit is not as consistent as Michele's. For example, Aubry has a mixed-tone OTT rating in episode 1, in which she experiences an anxiety attack. And in episode 2, she disappears entirely and receives an INV rating. While Michele receives a few UTR (Under the Radar) and MOR (Middle of the Road) character ratings throughout the season, she never receives an OTT or an INV, so her character rating is generally more consistent than Aubry's overall.

Crucially, because the editors show Aubry's flaws and struggles throughout the season, and because she was more central to most of the narrative throughout the season, a majority of viewers aligned themselves with Aubry as the protagonist of the show and expected her to overcome her obstacles and claim the title of Sole Survivor. On the night of the season finale, fans took to comment boards and subreddits to express their shock and dismay at the reveal of the winner. On one Survivor subreddit thread, a fan named Lenian wryly noted, "I felt a great disturbance in the subreddit, as if millions of Aubry fans suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced," to which FancyBBQ responded, "they are anything but silent." Tabloid journalists also expressed their disappointment; for instance Daniel Fienberg, writing here for *The Hollywood Reporter*:

> Michele won 5-2 and … Yeah. I don't get it. The problem is that almost none of that was what Michele presented at the jury. She had no strategic resumé and so she relied on talking about being underestimated and playing the game as an underdog. In contrast, Aubry carefully went through all of the things she'd done to get the game to this point.

Even viewers who were not self-proclaimed Aubry fans were surprised by the reveal. One fan, Kapono24, admitted, "I'm not even an Aubry fan but I simply don't understand how Michele won." Despite the editors' efforts to involve Michele within the narrative, she still came off as a mostly passive and unengaging character who was not driving most of the decisions. This is part of the reason the larger audience of Survivor was upset with Michele's win over Aubry: they weren't involved in her journey like they were with Aubry's. The Michele truthers, because they were so adamant about being right, only served to pour salt in the wound of an audience of already bitter viewers. In other words, the Michele truthers ruined the narrative pleasure of the non-Edgic fan community.

Narrative Pleasure

Narrative pleasure, which depends on a carefully designed plot structure, and games, which depend largely on the unpredictability of chance, seem at odds with one another. However, Survivor combines narrative pleasure with a game structure, and as a result, offers two levels of pleasure for viewers—unpredictability and a satisfying narrative of a contestant overcoming external and internal obstacles in her pursuit of victory. Marie-Laure Ryan contends that a "necessary condition [of games] is the pleasure dimension: games are freely played, and played for their own sake" (177).[3] Ryan's point about pleasure as an essential component of games seems self-evident, yet pleasure more broadly construed is distinct from *narrative* pleasure, which is the expectation of a story unfolding before the viewer's (or participant's) watchful gaze. Mary Beth Haralovich and Michael W. Trosset, writing about the pleasurable viewing experience of watching Survivor, place unpredictability at the forefront of that experience. They claim that narrative pleasure, at least in the case of Survivor,

> stems from the desire to know what will happen next, to have that gap [between cause and effect] opened and closed, again and again, until the resolution of the story [...]. In Survivor, unpredictability whets the desire to know what happens next, but how that gap will be closed is grounded in uncertainty due to chance [...]. In its invitation to prediction, Survivor is more like a horse race than fiction. (9–11)

Although Haralovich and Trosset are correct in identifying unpredictability as an important factor in the narrative pleasure of watching Survivor, the comparison of the show to a horse race ignores that the show has a narrative in the first place. While fans tune in to be surprised by a sudden turn of events, especially when a contestant is unexpectedly blindsided, if a shocking moment without cause and effect occurs, the narrative ceases to be pleasurable. In other words, the outcome of the show cannot be determined by a simple roll of the dice. A good season of Survivor combines *agon*, the category of competitive games where "rivals seek to excel one another in pursuits requiring physical skill or ingenuity," with *alea*, a category of games "that invokes an element of chance," typified by games such as roulette, lotteries, and dice (Carlisle 108). The ideal winner in agonist play is "someone who conquers by pure merit," while *alea* "invokes an element of chance and therefore seemingly negates the skill and practice of *agon*" (108). In Survivor,

3 See also Tobias Unterhuber's chapter on spoilers in games.

winners are typically those who both merit a win through strategic game play and who are favored with good fortune at crucial points in the game. Some winners are more dominant in their gameplay, while others seem to rely more heavily on chance, which of course leads to heated debates about whether a winner "deserved" their win. The most important aspect of the editing, however, is that the contestants' motivations, though at times surprising, need to make sense within the context of the episode, or else the audience is left confused or even angered. Due to this audience expectation, the editors of Survivor are tasked with striking a balance between unpredictability and narrative pleasure.

An example of this balance between unpredictability and narrative pleasure is the season finale of Survivor: The Australian Outback (US 2001), the show's second season, cited in Haralovich and Trosset's essay. The final three contestants were Keith, Tina, and Colby. The winner of the final immunity challenge would be able to choose which of the other two contestants would be voted out and which contestant would stay in the game to compete in the final tribal council. Due to Colby's strong immunity challenge track record, most fans predicted that Colby would win the final immunity challenge, vote out Tina because she was a much bigger threat than Keith, and go on to win the game against Keith. Based on these assumptions, the predicted boot order was Tina-Keith-Colby. While the fans were right about Colby winning immunity, they were wrong when it came to Colby's decision. They assumed Colby valued winning the game above all else; however, they failed to consider how highly Colby valued his friendship with Tina. In a shocking move, Colby voted out Keith instead of Tina and lost to her by one jury vote at the final tribal council. The actual elimination order turned out to be Keith-Colby-Tina. This example shows that despite the shocking outcome, Colby's decision wasn't based on a simple roll of the dice: it was based on human motivations that were true to his character. If the editors did their job right, the fans who had a firmer grasp on Colby's character could have at least entertained the possibility of his decision to keep Tina in the game. Thus, the show is less of a horse race and more of a hybrid between game shows like Jeopardy (US 1964– , Creator: Merv Griffin) or Family Feud (US 1976– , Creator: Mark Goodson) and scripted dramas such as Lost (US 2004–2010, Creator: Jeffrey Lieber, J. J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof) or Yellowjackets (US 2021– , Creator: Ashley Lyle and Bart Nickerson), where a blend of unpredictable game elements and compelling human drama both contribute to narrative pleasure.

In the case of Michele's edit, one of the problems may have been that the audience was unable to firmly grasp her character or her role within the narrative, despite the editors' attempts to make her a complex character. One of the limitations of reality television storytelling is that the editors only have a certain amount of material to work with. As one fan on the *r/Survivor Reddit* thread, treeshugmeback, observed, "Imagine if they edited the season without knowing the winner. We would have seen next to nothing of Michele, and when she won, people would have said 'who the fuck is that?'" In Survivor: Kaoh Rong, they couldn't change the outcome; Michele had already won. Therefore, their job was to make the audience feel satisfied with Michele winning. However, despite the editors' best efforts, there just wasn't enough material available to make Michele's win narratively satisfying for most of the audience, especially compared to Aubry, who was a much more complex and visible player throughout the season.

Haralovich and Trosset also take for granted that Survivor is like any other formalized game, overlooking the combination of narrative with a game structure and the fact that the show invites participation from its audience. That participation can take a variety of forms. Casual viewers can participate in the action through "armchair quarterbacking," a term borrowed from sports fan terminology to describe fans who root for their favorite players or teams but who do not necessarily invest their time in fantasy football leagues. These viewers, Ryan explains, "imagine scenarios for the action to come and make strategic decisions for the participants. This activity is made possible by the rigidity of the rules that determine the range of the possible" (141). Casual Survivor fans have an investment in their favorite players, and they not only root for specific contestants but debate with other fans those players' strategic gameplay and their chances of winning. These discussions typically center on winning as the end goal. In this respect, these viewers are not all that different from traditional sports fans watching a football game.

Edgic fans, however, participate at a deeper level, focusing not only on the end result but on the unfolding of the narrative itself. These fans are less like spectators at a sporting event and more like detectives attempting to decode and solve a mystery. By searching for clues in the editing patterns and sharing their discoveries with other fans, Edgic users experience a sense of narrative pleasure, even as they play the game on a higher level than the casual fans. The rooting interest in the participation of the Edgic game is not economic or social capital but the ability to take part in a specialized knowledge community, similar to how Survivor fans pooled their knowledge in their competitive interplay with the producers during the early seasons. As

Johan Huizinga in his seminal work *Homo Ludens* points out, a formalized game must have "no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it" (13). In addition, it "proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner" and "promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise and other means" (13). Roger Callois adds to Huizinga's theories of participatory game play, arguing that "play creates bonds between players, giving rise to collectives of like-minded persons who tend to exclude the uninitiated" (qtd. in Carlisle 107). Instead of competing with one another in an agonistic game of one-upmanship, Edgic users often share their knowledge with each other in order to collectively decode the story of the show, which includes not only identifying the winner but also deciphering the patterns and themes of the narrative of that particular season.

Conclusion

While it is true that consumers can be actively engaged in playing a game with the producers in the construction of the narrative, as shown by the devoted Survivor fan community, there are various levels of active participation. This leads to a wide variety of knowledge communities, each with its own level of participation, even within a single fan culture such as the Survivor community. Edgic users are perhaps one of the most active knowledge communities within Survivor fandom. While the unsatisfying conclusion to Survivor: Kaoh Rong can be linked in part to the limitations of reality TV storytelling, the Michele truthers only exacerbated the pushback against Michele's win by broadcasting their predictions across the internet throughout most of the season. Unlike ChillOne, who threatened the democratic system of the knowledge community by spoiling Survivor: The Amazon, the Michele truthers did not spoil the show in the traditional sense because they did not have access to true spoilers. Their transgression of the unspoken democratic rules within Survivor fan culture was to leave their own Edgic knowledge community and infiltrate other non-Edgic knowledge communities with their findings. What this incident shows is that for democratic citizenship to thrive within knowledge communities, each community must respect the other communities' boundaries and preferences of media engagement. Transgressing those boundaries can jeopardize the narrative pleasure experienced by other communities through varying levels of participation, thereby threatening the democratic citizenship of the collective intelligence.

Filmography

Family Feud. Creator: Mark Goodson. US 1976– .

Jeopardy. Creator: Merv Griffin. US 1964– .

Survivor. Creator: Charlie Parsons. US 2000– .

Lost. Creator: Jeffrey Lieber, J. J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof. US 2004–2010.

Yellowjackets. Creator: Ashley Lyle and Bart Nickerson. US 2021– .

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