Grimm Trippin': An Alternate Reality Game with Elements of Experimental Literature

A Major Qualifying Project

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Abstract

Grimm Trippin' is a work designed for print and digital mediums that is overlaid with game design elements seen in similar alternate reality games (ARGs) and interactive works, like *S.* or *Building Stories*. The goal of this project was to create a deconstructed, layered novel designed for new, explorative reading. It is a literary experiment that explores issues with the digitization of the novel and historical aspects of the ARG.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

WPI offers a Storytelling class to all students to fill a core course or Interactive Media and Game Development major/minor requirement. The course requires students to explore the stories within games and other forms of interactive media. Starting with the Hero's Journey, a writing and storytelling technique that drives the plot of many well-known stories from *Star Wars* to *Lord of the Rings*, the course pushes its students to construct narratives that blend strong characters with provoking stories. Students continue throughout the course interacting with games and experimental literature. For many, the introduction to Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) is new and exciting, stimulating the student's hunger for creative exploration.

After taking Storytelling and co-producing an ARG, I got my B grade and went on thinking that was the last time I would be working to take part in an ARG never mind creating one. I was not invested in the ARG and felt as if I did not have strong connection with my team or the story. Jump ahead two years and I am submerged within my own brain baby, an ARG designed for Exploration Summer Programs. Explo, for short, is a summer school built around project-based learning, but is also the perfect place to develop and produce an ARG. During my junior year, I tacked on a second major in Literature and found myself writing and reading every day, preparing to write an ARG of my own. Given that chance at Explo, I exercised all of my knowledge of ARGs and built something that would be left behind for Explo to pick up in the years to come.

The ARG told a story of historical characters brought to Explo's campus through a time rift. It was the students' mission to stop The Department of Yesterday from capturing the characters and then returning them to their places in history. While creating and producing on the fly, I understood how this kind of interactive experience could be told in a multitude of ways.

My upcoming Major Qualifying Project would become not only the writing of an ARG, but a look into these ways that ARGs and experimental literature have evolved over the last century. During the creation of this project, I have explored a multitude of narrative creations, educating and informing me on how writers have developed and experimented with literature, influencing media to incorporate new narrative forms.

Some of the most popular and groundbreaking works include *Pale Fire* (1962) by Vladimir Nabokov, *House of Leaves* (2000) by Mark Z. Danielewski, and *S.* (2013) by Doug Dorst and J.J. Abrams. Each of these works take on the form of a networked novel, supplemental content, or an interactive transmedia experience beyond the print text. It was my intention to develop similar content within my work *Grimm Trippin'*. To do so, I had to familiarize myself with the aforementioned text and similar research that has been done.

Writing and designing a work with a similar structure and then attempting to digitize the work tested the flexibility of my text. The project continued in an effort to alter the physical text to allow a reader to reach the same level of immersion and interactivity.

Chapter 2: Literature Review
2.1 The Digitization of the Book

Within the last two decades, the book has been substituted with electronic versions and digitized for a new generation of readers who are more comfortable reading on a tablet than with print. With the evolution of literature and the physical form of prose, our interactions with the book have also changed. *Grimm Trippin'* was created to expose some of the pitfalls when attempting to convert a physical text to digital content and the challenges that creating an equally immersive digital and physical work can uncover. Over the past several years, scholars have tried their hand at exploring the digitization of the book, how the digital age will change the book and literacy. Despite a constant move towards digitization, the three major works studied are proof that not all work can be digitized. Rather, it is this type of literary work that requires print to be successfully read and interacted with.

In an attempt to further monetize the book, online distributers like Amazon started to offer ways to distribute the text, thus digitizing the economy. During the first phase of the digitization, the consumer could have a physical book sent to them. But while that channel of distribution became active, another digitization formed. Consumers were soon able to purchase an electronic book. This was no easy task as Rimscha and Putzig describe in their piece on the digitization of the book industry. "The belated digitization is not only attributed to the technical issues… but also to the long tradition of the industry."[1] Thus the digitization required great motivation to push the industry to make such a drastic change. Book culture trumped the Amazon Marketplace concept for decades before the book received its face lift.

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[1] M. B. von Rimscha and Sarah Putzig, "From Book Culture to Amazon Consumerism: Does the Digitization of the Book Industry Lead to Commercialization?" In *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2013), 318.

When the book did in fact receive its change in appearance from a physical to digital work, a disruption occurred within the industry that continues to impact book sellers and online markets. With the e-book in play and the creation of e-readers, the printed book has continued to fall short in sales. Readers of the digital generation have shifted quickly to reading entirely on a digital platform, while the physical books of the past culture have lagged behind the digital innovation. The shift cautions physical book sellers about "the extent to which e-books are substitutes for printed books."[2] If e-books are substitutes, then there is no need for physical books at all.

A substitution is a replacement of presumably equal value, yet many believe the physical book offers something more, and that following tradition, a book must remain between its physical bindings. John P. Feather writes, "Our understanding of the text is ultimately influenced by the physical form of its presentation."[3] Though written in 1986, Feather is aware of the technological innovations that have occurred throughout the history of the book. Further he continues to delve into the progression and evolution of publication and the availability of books. Despite this, there is no anticipation for the book to become anything beyond its physical form.

Knowing that Feather seemed to have completely excused the electronic book from the conversation, others were making great strides in discovering how the book could adapt to the technological innovations. Even in 1984, a journal entry exposed the differences between what fiction was to what it is to be. Niesz and Holland write, "[Traditional fiction] exists between the covers and the spine of the physical book… interactive fiction [is] displayed on a video screen or

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[2]Richard J. Gilbert, "E-books: A Tale of Digital Disruption." In *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*. Vol. 29, No. 3 (Summer 2015), 165.

[3] John P. Feather, "The Book in History and the History of the Book." In *The Journal of Library History (1974-1987)*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Winter 1986), 13.

terminal."[4] Some readers were already in tune with the form of the book and how it was changing. In 2013 and a team of five recognized the importance of the augmented interactions with physical books. "Augmented [books] provide users with a multi-sensory experience, which is difficult to achieve through other technologies" (474).[5] Not only did this study address the changes in form, but exposed the opportunities a creator has while creating technologically advanced books in comparison to a traditional print text.

Despite the changes that have been made since the beginnings of e-books, some remain adamant about print text. Ralph Raab writes on his relationship with books while surrounded by the digital versions. Raab's take on his infatuation with books may be reason enough that physical versions of text are still around today[6]:

> I'd like to admit something to you up-front: I love books. I don't mean the 'Isn't-the-new-Stephen-King-great?' type of love. I'm talking about a real passion here: I love the way the binding cracks the first time you open a new hardcover book; the little globules of glue that cling to the corners of the binding; the feel of a small book held in one hand, or the heft of a large book as it sits on your lap. But most of all—and I admit this without the least iota of shame—I love the smell of ink and paper, whether old or new. It's absolute olfactory heaven.

This opinion on books has not gone unnoticed as Amazon has started planning to expand their number of retail bookstores.[7] After successfully disrupting the retail book market, Amazon has

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[4] Anthony Niesz and Norman Holland, "Interactive Fiction." In *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (September 1984), 120.

[5] G. Margetis et al., "Augmented Interaction with physical books in an Ambient Intelligence learning environment." In *Multimedia Tools and Applications*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (2013), 473-495.

[6] Ralph Raab, "Books and Literacy in the Digital Age." In *American Libraries*, Vol. 41, No. 8 (August 2010), 34-37.

[7] Greg Bensinger, "Amazon Plans Hundreds of Brick-and-Mortar Bookstores, Mall CEO Says." The Wall Street Journal. February 2, 2016. http://www.wsj.com/articles/amazon-plans-hundreds-

reconnected the physical world with the digital with Amazon Books, located in Seattle. Amazon

has attempted to relieve the pressure between the book culture and digital generation by

emphasizing the positives of both in the company's bookstore. For example, Readers can browse

volumes of books while reading online reviews on their phone. Raab's writing still raises many

questions about what exactly defines a book and whether e-books are books at all. How

unprecise can the physical or digital form of a book be before it is no longer recognized as a

book at all? It is possible that Amazon's experiment and expansion as a retail book seller may

lead to new ways that books will be categorized and handled by publishers.

There are many design choices that must be made in order to uphold the requirements for

a book's form. In a journal on the contemporary design of the book: "the most important, and at

the same time the most subtle, element in book design is the 'feel' of the book."[8] The creator of a

book must address a number of design issues before a book can be called a book, while the

"feel" is just right. Authors, based on this assessment, must be aware of how everything interacts

from the proportions of the book to the type on the page.[9] Furthermore, the word "feel" suggests

that a book is required to take on a physical form, yet the trends in digitization test the book's

flexibility to be translated into a digital work.

Acknowledging the fact that there seems to be split opinion about what is physically

required for a book to be a book, this transformation continues to inform about the digitalization

of the book culture. "The digitalization of print resources may help disseminate information, but

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of-brick-and-mortar-bookstores-mall-ceo-says-
1454449475?mod=WSJ_TechWSJD_NeedToKnow.

[8] Joseph Blumenthal, "Contemporary Book Design: 2." In *Design Quarterly*, No. 31 (1954), 10.

[9] Ibid., 7-10.

it also changes how we experience knowledge".[10] The interactions that a reader has with a print text may guide the reader to information different from what another reader finds in an electronic version of the same text. More so, works like *S.*, *House of Leaves*, and *Pale Fire* request that a reader interact with the print text in a specific way. For example, *Pale Fire* asks that readers jot notes down and create their own marginalia for another to later read, *House of Leaves* experiments with the typography to convey both emotion and a physical place, while *S.* is riddled with physical inserts and layered with marginalia. All of these physically altering factors would not be available in e-book form.

2.2 The Unreliable Narrator in Modern Day Literature

In a novel, regardless of its complexity, the design of the story's narrator is vital to properly translating information to the readers. Without a well thought out narrator, there is a chance the reader will lose sense of the story and find themselves backtracking over information in an attempt to understand a story. Or, they may close the book as the narrator is too hard to follow. In Trollope's piece on unreliable narrators he states, "Unreliable first-person narrators are of course never simply unreliable, since they must be relied on to convey the meaning in words."[11] Thus, deduction within the narrative is vital to discovering a character's reliability as well as forwarding the story. A narrator's identity and writing must offer a reader with enough information for them to feel well-informed, regardless of the narrator's trustworthiness.

The reader must be willing to trust the narrator at the beginning of a story because the reader knows so little. As the reader continues to interact with the text, they gain new information. By returning to earlier text, the reader may gain a new perspective from which to

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[10] Fabio Rojas, "the library as (art)ifact." In *Contexts*, Vol. 8, No. 3. (Summer 2009), 68-70.

[11] Peter Allen, "Trollope to His Readers: The Unreliable Narrator of *An Autobiography*." In *Biography*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Winter 1996), 1-18.

perceive the information. The trust a reader initially has is with what Wayne C. Booth, author of

The Rhetoric of Fiction, defines as the implied author. The relationship that forms between an

unreliable narrator and a reader can quickly become sophisticated. Thus the "implied author who

carries the reader with him in judging the narrator" is formed.[12] A reader must not only detect the

unreliability of the narrator with help from the implied author, but also will themselves to search

for inconsistencies in the text and narrator's voice. To understand a narrator, reliable or not, a

reader must first understand what a narrator's job is.

In both literature and film, a narrator's job is to push a story forward as required for both

a reader and viewer of the medium. As stated previously, these readers or viewers are relying on

the narrator to receive information. They are expected to perform different roles throughout the

story that may or may not produce inconsistent information. In James Phelan's study of the

character narration, he identifies these roles as reporter, interpreter, and evaluator.[13] Once a

reader understands some strands of a narrator's perception or interpretation, a reader can then

evaluate a narrator's reliability. As more information is fed through the text or in a verbal

narrative, a person's view of said narrative can have a drastic difference from an initial

evaluation.

2.2.1 Unreliable Narrator vs Authorship
Roland Barthes is a French literary theorist who wrote thoroughly on the concept of

semiotics in literature, that is, the study of meaning-making or study of signs. In 1967. Barthes

wrote *The Death of the Author*, an essay on the symbol of the author and the disjunction that

occurs somewhere between the author, their writing, and the reader. Further, Barthes writes on

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[12] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. Print. 158.

[13] James Phelan, *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. 12.

the idea that the author is a "modern figure" on which critics and readers alike base their criticism and understanding of the related writing. The author should not have any hold on the reader's interpretation of a text if one wants to achieve literary freedom. When reading a text, an author's link with said text will only limit a reader's interpretations. Interestingly, Barthes left his name on this essay despite his objections to the author figure.

In the last 60 years, some authors have created works that are designed to hide the author behind a veil of literary art. Most commonly, the experimentation with story narrators has led to the creation of prime examples when considering an author's influence on the work's criticisms and interpretations. *Pale Fire* by Vladimir Nabokov was published in 1962. It is a poem by the fictional John Shade with a collection of footnotes written by the fictional Charles Kinbote. It has been regarded as one of the most effective implementations of an unreliable narrator. Kinbote's complexity and handling of John Shade's "Pale Fire" is deepened by Nabokov's understanding of how to work with an unreliable narrator. In 2000, Mark Z. Danielewski published *House of Leaves*, a novel with many layers of unreliability. Like Nabokov, Danielewski created Johnny Truant whose writing disguises Danielewski entirely. The question of authorship is utterly important, and more so as these type of narratives are layered into the work.

Michael Seidel reflects on the supplemental work in *Pale Fire* and its importance in the narrative. In this novel's case, there would be no story without the narrative footnoting and commentary on the poem by John Shade. With a foreword explaining how to read this novel, Nabokov's unreliable narrator Dr. Charles Kinbote suggests that a reader read the novel in full three times. Kinbote's recommendation is confusing as the commentary seems to have almost nothing to do with the content within "Pale Fire." Yet Nabokov has gone onto say, "Curiously enough, one cannot read a book; one can only reread it. A good reader, a major reader, an active

and creative reader is a rereader."[14] Seidel argues that the supplemental work connects Shade and

Kinbote through their imaginations. Kinbote's obsession is presented within the satirical

commentary on *Pale Fire*.[15]

Johnny Truant, the narrator in *House of Leaves*, writes his story in the footnotes as well.

Danielewski adds another layer of complexity with his character the editors. The editors have

compiled the print edition of *House of Leaves* and organized all of Truant's notes along with the

other supplemental pieces into appendices. Readers are left in the trust of the editors whose

unreliability is unclear from the start. The hierarchy of unreliability is so complicated that it

nullifies Danielewski's influence on the reader. The editors handled Johnny Truant's writing, and

Truant who worked with the blind and late Zampano's *The Navidson Record*, which is an

account of a documentary by the same name. Finally, the documentary is about a house that no

longer stands or never did in the first place. A reader's engagements will all parts Danielewski's

work requires trusting the narrator in hopes to not be deceived.

Timothy F. Flower reports on the value of Nabokov's scientific persuasion throughout

the text. Most notably, Flower determines that Nabokov is deliberately preparing the reader for

deception, stating, "[Nabokov forces] *us* to make careful distinctions and avoid the simple

either/or labeling that separates *Pale Fire* and its Commentary."[16] Acknowledging Nabokov's

intentional data confusion is key to finding the so-called truth in Nabokov's characters, if there is

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[14] Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*. New York: Harcourt Brace
Jovanovich, 1980.

[15] Michael Siedel, "Pale Fire and the Art of the Narrative Supplement." In *ELH*, Vol. 51, No. 4
(Winter 1984), 837-855.

[16] Timothy F. Flower, "The Scientific Art of Nabokov's 'Pale Fire'." In *Criticism*, Vol 17, No. 3
(Summer 1975), 227.

any at all to begin with.[17] Similarly, Danielewski's characters are not all-knowing beings, reacting to their surroundings and interactions with others. However, the reader is expected to dissect the characters and analyze areas in *The Navidson Record* and Truant's story in the marginalia to expose the truth. Like Nabakov, Danielewski is challenging us to look beyond his name being attached to the book and look to the narrator for guidance through the work.

Reading *Pale Fire* requires a keen eye and understanding of how Nabokov was able to handle his narrator's complexity. There exists an obvious question of Kinbote's sanity that Nabokov directs his readers to in a way similar to Flower's analysis. His preparation for his readers' deception is more a preparation for their own realization. Exposing Kinbote as an obsessive narcissist will lead to the understanding of how to handle an unreliable narrator's story in a way that can influence the shape the final work takes on. Danielewski's narrative confusion is based in the multi-layered, multi-character work and the question of authorship is not as much about if Danielewski wrote the work, but in regards to which characters are real and whose story it truly is. The answers are suggested in the literal shape and form of the *House of Leaves* just like *Pale Fire*. In both works, the authors are no longer identified as the writers, but instead the narrators, unreliable or not.

2.2.2 Unreliable Narrator vs Form

Danielewski and Nabokov both took major liberties when considering how their final work should be formatted. As stated before, Nabokov's Kinbote suggests to literally take the novel apart and piece it back together as the reader sees fit. The building and destructive of a novel by the unreliable narrator gives reason to why the final print novel looks the way it does. As stated previously, the major goal for a writer is to hide themselves behind their narrator or

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[17] Ibid., 223-233.

characters. This disguise will affect not only the form of the writing, but the interpretation of the form by the reader.

Nabakov breaks his work down into four parts: the foreword, the poem, the commentary, and the index; Nabakov writes Kinbote to gradually expose himself as an unreliable, obsessed storyteller. Intentionally building his work to reflect the narrator's story and loss of sanity, Nabakov's work presented a new way to offer prose to his readers. As a reader reads through the commentary, they have the option to experience something similar to a "choose-your-own-adventure" story, selectively jumping from footnote to footnote. Thus, the form of the novel shifts based on a reader's exploration of the text. In that same vein, *House of Leaves* is broken into many parts that need to be pieced together in a way that reflects the protagonists' story (*The Navidson Record*, Truant's footnotes, and the appendices). The physical shape and order of the work is directly influenced by the unreliable narrator's actions.

Mark B. N. Hansen writes on the novel's topography and Danielewski's experimentation with media. He examines the relationship between the fictional authors in the text, Zampano and Johnny Truant, along with the messages they try to convey in the text. Hansen attempts to expose how and why Danielewski's medial influence shaped his writing as more than just a stylistic choice.[18] Despite Danielewski's fusion of medial influences, like his supplemental content and exploration of unreliable narrators, *House of Leaves* becomes physical evidence for what kinds of work can only be effective in print form. Although an author is expected to remove themselves from the writing, they should expect to handle how the final work is published as to allow their narrator to be fully recognized as the owner of the work by the reader.

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[18] Mark B. N. Hansen, "The Digital Typography of Mark Z. Danielewski's 'House of Leaves'." In *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Winter 2004), 597-636.

The form of a work emphasizes the control a narrator has over the work's final form. Jessica Pressman identifies *House of Leaves* as a networked novel, calling it "the central node in a network of multimedia, multi-authored forms that collectively comprise its narrative."[19] She later states that it is a "print novel for the digital age, a book that privileges print while plugging into the digital network."[20] Following this, Pressman studies the novel's supplemental pieces (www.houseofleaves.com (no longer active), *The Whalestoe Letters*, and the musical album *Haunted*).[21] Each of these pieces suggest that Danielewski was in search of some way to stretch the boundaries of his narrative. Danielewski exercised the multitude of options he had to see if there was some way to heighten the experience that *House of Leaves* offered beyond its strangely structured narrative. This kind of work and experimentation is seen regularly in ARGs, but not as often in combination with such a complex text. When *House of Leaves* was published in 2003, the internet was not entirely driven by social media technologies, so utilizing websites was much more uncommon, like in The Beast (2001).

Joseph B. Noah examines *House of Leaves* and Danielewski's intentional structure of the novel and how reading it can cause a "dizzying effect."[22] Although the thesis is founded in Danielewski's abandonment of postmodernism, Noah records his experience with reading the novel and interacting with the narratives, footnotes, appendices, and supplemental work. The work is also informative on the levels of postmodern language that Danielewski uses to create

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[19] Jessica Pressman, "House of Leaves: Reading the Networked Novel." In *Studies in American Fiction*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring 2006), 107.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 107-128.

[22] Joseph B. Noah, "House of Leaves: The End of Postmodernism." (2012).

his strange, terrifying love story.[23] With Pressman's identification of *House of Leaves* as a networked novel, it is understandable that Noah took to examining each part of the work's structure in order to see everything that Danielewski offers.

Similar to Noah's thesis, Will Slocombe argues for a nihilistic approach, that the novel is a warning to readers that the house and the story that comes with it is nothing more than a story. It is an interesting perception of nothingness finding its way into meaning. Slocombe reinforces this argument by stating that readers "can never grasp the absence within the House" and that the text and typography are a depiction of this absence and nothingness.[24] Further exposing the typography and the effect that Danielewski has created in the design of his novel, Slocombe suggests that the language's "(dis)appearance" is more important than the language itself, thus causing the "appearance of the *nihil*."[25]

Considering each of these reactions to *House of Leaves*, Danielewski's design played a vital role in the way that a reader interacts with and, more importantly, reacts to the novel. By manipulating the text's design, Danielewski was able to produce prose that took on the physical form of the house with hallways and staircases that are miles long and where sounds can only travel so far in the eerie and somehow thick, weighted darkness present. Much of these design choices offer a unique experience to reading text.

The formatting and typography within *House of Leaves* require a reader to interact with the physical book. Because the digitization of the book is so prevalent in the modern day, it is

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Will Slocombe, "'This is Not for you': Nihilism and the House that Jacques Built." In *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Spring 2005), 106.

[25] Ibid, 105-106.

interesting to see how the novel changed to accommodate for its audience of digital readers. Though there once was an Amazon Kindle version of the text, it no longer exists, as the time and effort that the formatting took to reproduce *House of Leaves* was not beneficial. The complexity of the novel is the possible cause and proof of books being required to be published in print form in order to deliver the author's intended experience. The author's initial intention matters little though, as readers will engage with the work and interact with the narrative in whatever way seems most appropriate, based on its forms and design.

2.3 The History of the ARG

In 2001, the first widely spread and commercial alternate reality game began. The Beast, created by Microsoft, ran for twelve weeks and influenced all ARGs moving forward. It was supervised by Jordan Weisman, who went on to do design work for a number of ARG-like projects, including *Cathy's Book* (2006) and *Personal Effects: Dark Art* (2009). Unfiction, a site dedicated to the discovering, creation, and solving of ARGs, defined ARGs as "an interactive fusion of creative writing, puzzle-solving, and team building, with a dose of role playing thrown in."[26] It is possible to date the prehistorical influence of the ARG back to the early 1900s. During this past century the design and concept of the ARG has evolved to not only become massive multiplayer-centralized games, but introduced new techniques in storytelling, intertwining the real with the artificial. These explorations in ARG-like literature have exposed flaws in both physical and digital forms of storytelling.

In 1905, G.K. Chesterton's wrote short story "The Tremendous Adventures of Major Brown" for a collection titled *The Collection of Queer Trades*. The short story tells the tale of a

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[26] "History." Unfiction. Accessed March 24, 2016. http://www.unfiction.com/history/.

military man caught in the story of another man by the same name.[27] The Club of Queer Trades invites people whom have devised financially productive plans in weird businesses. The Adventure and Romance Agency was created by an early member of the club that would create fantastic tales for his clients to live. The story is similar to the film *Total Recall* (1990), which involves a business that can send a person through a virtual action, romance, or other dramatic experience. Thus, Chesterton predicts the creation of alternate reality games, investigating role playing as well as comparing the truth with the artifice.

Though Chesterton seemed to be the first aware of the coming of the alternate reality game, his short story is not as well-known for its fits with alternate reality. In fact, the next work to predict the concept of the ARG is John Fowles' novel *The Magus* (1966). The story is based in part on an account of his experiences on the Greek island of Spetses called "The School & The Island: 1952".[28] While on the island the protagonist Nicholas Urfe meets a Greek recluse Maurice Conchis, and then soon finds himself in Conchis' psychological games. Similar to Chesterton's story, Urfe is unable to comprehend what is the truth and what is fiction.

In that same year, Thomas Pynchon released *The Crying of Lot 49*, a postmodern novel about Oedipa Mass, who finds herself as co-executor of her ex-boyfriend's estate, what may or may not be a conspiracy about two mail companies. The introductions of the Adventure and Romance Agency, the psychological games, and soon conspiracies slowly built the foundation for alternate reality games. In each of these works, there is some trickster or mastermind that is

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[27] Gilbert K. Chesterton, *The Club of Queer Trades*. Accessed March 11, 2016. http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Gilbert_K_Chesterton/The_Club_of_Queer_Trades/index.html.

[28] John Fowles, 1996. "Behind the Magus". *Twentieth Century Literature* 42 (1). [Duke University Press, Hofstra University]: 58–68. doi:10.2307/441675.

working the game from behind the curtain. In alternate reality games, the mastermind is also called the puppet master, as they are metaphorically pulling the strings of the game, deciding where the narrative is headed. Further, these works also show when there is a need for actors to help intertwine the artifice with the truth even more.

While the ARG's influential base was forming from the early 1900s to the end of the century, technology was also transforming. With the new media and modes of communication being released, early ARG-like creations were starting to take form. This includes the marketing for *The Blair Witch Project*, which took advantage of different forms of campaigning to insert the fictional characters in the real world. People started to believe that the three college-aged characters were real, and on top of that, missing and presumed dead. When the film came to theaters, many were still unsure whether what they saw was real or fiction. It was an unusual stunt, but laid more of the foundation for ARGs to come.

In a study on ARGs and its medial influences, Jeffrey Kim and his team studied ARGs between 2001 and 2009.[29] The team recognized that technology enabled much of an ARG to happen, allowing easy distribution to the player base. Therefore, ARGs may not have expanded to massive-scaled communities in the time before that because of the inefficient technology. That being said, not all of the parts of an ARG require this technological advantage. *Cathy's Book* is an ARG that starts in the context of the traditional narrative and then follows into a deeper experience outside the novel. Game designers must be aware of the different modes of communication, while accessing multiple forms of technology to develop an effective ARG.

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[29] Jeffrey Kim et al., "Storytelling in New Media: The Case of Alternate Reality Games, 2001-2009." *First Monday* 14, no. 6 (January 1, 2009). http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2484/2199#p2.

2.3.1 Interacting with S. / My Exploration of S.

Having read *Pale Fire* and *House of Leaves*, along with *S.*, written by Doug Dorst and created by J.J. Abrams, I am now familiar with this form, one required to meet the same sense of interactivity a reader may pursue while reading these works of fiction. Recognizing this requirement, the project is proposed as a work similar to *S.*, which is no doubt inspired by Nabokov's work. Dorst has drawn on many of the similar literary techniques that *Pale Fire* thrives on: the unreliable narrator, a fictional author and characters placed within the real world, and supplemental narrative to expose more of the story.

What *Pale Fire* and *House of Leaves* both lack, and where *S* shines, are physical items to play into the narrative. This includes a weathered copy of *Ship of Theseus* written by the fictional V.M. Straka along with inserts throughout the book and even a compass decoder ring. The book is just the beginning as it expands into a mystery beyond the pages, asking help from the readers to solve the mystery of Straka's untimely death before his final novel *Ship of Theseus* was completed. Although *S.* is written as the start of a more expansive alternate reality game, Dorst, Abrams, and Bad Robot created the book to be a standalone novel, by offering enough that a casual reader believes the ending to be sufficient and looks no further.

All of the supplemental content in the book allows a reader to gain more evidence about the main story of Straka and the two students, Jen and Eric. A reader's interpretation of the story and other content offers one of many possible outcomes for the main characters of the novel. This book design is similar to that of game called *Her Story*. The game is a search engine that allows a player to search through a database of short clips from the protagonist's interview. Though not required first term the player is asked to search is "murder". As the player watches and listens to the clips, they may continue to search to find new videos, trying to put the pieces together. The primary game mechanic of searching is blocked to only allow up to five videos to show at once,

so the investigation becomes more intricate. By the end of the game, a player may or may not have seen all of the clips, but will have some interpretation of what exactly happened with the protagonist.

Offering enough to a player to make them feel comfortable with their interpretation of the outcome is vital. More serious players will then try to delve deeper into the work to find content that is not so important to the casual player. During my interactions with *S.*, I was originally overwhelmed by the amount of content. I realized that I needed to take my time through the novel and pick a reading strategy. Some readers suggested to read the inner work *The Ship of Theseus* and then reading the footnotes and inserts, but I found that strategy too difficult to wrap my head around. I needed context for each of the footnotes, so I read the supplemental content and narrative all at once.

While reading *S.*, I also opened up every database and forum on the puzzles and content within *S.*, so that I could follow the story and ARG at the same time. The ARG was and still is at a standstill, with many of the possible endings of the story undiscovered and Abrams holding out on giving the players a clue as to what the truth is of Straka. So, I was able to read and catch myself up completely without having to fall further behind. While the ARG was more active, a radio station called Radio Straka released historical information about the fictional author in its broadcasts.

Each part of *S.* allows for an even more immersive experience. Dorst and Abrams took advantage of many forms of communication and technology to widely spread the story of V.M. Straka. But after not touching *S.* for some time, I thought back to questions relating to the unreliable narrator, authorship, and form. V.M. Straka is this complex figure that no one knows to be one person or many. Readers discover that *S.* is uncovering the love story of the translator F.X Caldeira.

The text was designed as tool for readers, *The Ship of Theseus* written as jumping off point for the puzzle creations and connected supplemental pieces. Abrams and Dorst's efforts to disguise the real with the fictional nears and sometimes surpasses the attempts made within *Pale Fire* and *House of Leaves*. *The Ship of Theseus* and Straka have been so well integrated into the world, blurring the lines of reality. The production value of *S.* is much greater than Nabokov's and Danieleski's works, where Abrams pushed to expose *S.* in every way possible. Since its release in 2013, *S.* remains unsolved, but has inspired new ways of creating and writing.

2.4 Looking Ahead: The Technology of Writing

In the age of digitalization, media and other technologies have adapted based on popularity and rising trends. Writing, as Walter J. Ong establishes in *Orality & Literacy*, is a type of technology.[30] Ong argues that the word is being destroyed by the technology of writing itself. If the word is a technology, writing destroys the spoken word. To expose a technology of its pitfalls one requires another, higher technology. This attempt reinforces the idea that technology will continue to trump itself in an endless fight to stop it. To reach an audience that uses a specific technology that is being critiqued, the critic must use that technology. *Orality & Literacy* was written in 1982, but the argument is still as effective today and will remain as all other technologies develop.

Ong also wrote on the interactions that readers have with writing and the information that will be transmitted to the reader. Like Roland Barthes, Ong plays with the idea that an author can only expect so much from a reader when interpreting the author's text. If someone is to find meaning in information, it might be best to go directly to the source for a true interpretation. But

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[30] Walter Ong, *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Londres: Routledge, 1982. Print. 80-85.

if you are Ong or Barthes, there is no true interpretation of the writing. A story's narrative must be crafted to allow for multiple interpretations, with each being correct. Considering the ongoing digitization of media though, it is now possible that a person may receive the same information over multiple forms of media. This exposure to the same information may not yield the same interpretations though. Thus, writing as a technology can be transformed and shaped by the next level of technology that the writing is being sent through.

In each of the three main texts analyzed above, the authors play with both supplemental content and unreliable narration. Those are each two technologies that are layered on top of the technology of writing. Alone, the writing stands as an intermediary or in-between for the author and the writer. Once more technologies are introduced, the distance between the two grows. When the supplemental content is pipelined through digital forms of media, the ambiguous space between the author and reader is now even harder to interpret. Experimentations with transmedia cause writing to become disfigured and challenges readers to take the physical and digital objects they are presented with, and translate it into something cohesive and sensible.

Using words like object and interpret keys the important study of semiotics, or the study of signs, as noted above. Saussure and Pierce were semioticians who pioneered the main understandings of semiotics, dyadic and triadic, respectively. Dyadic semiotics is the belief that the interpretation of a sign is based on a signifier and signified. Triadic signs are distinguished in three parts, the sign, the object, and the interpretant. Discussing the space between the author and the reader is similar to how signs are translated in a triadic expression. The triadic point of view also validates the argument that the ambiguous space between an author and reader is harder to interpret when newer technologies are introduced.

This first interactions that a reader would have is with a signifying element of the sign. That is, there is an element that most is most easily recognized to identify the sign. In the case of a novel, with the written word as a signifying element, it can then go through modifications based on the different forms of transmedia that the element is then funneled through to the reader. With many different technologies in place to transform the written word, the original signifying element is now even more difficult to identify.

A reader's engagements with a novel's text which goes under the transformations seen in work in *House of Leaves* or *S.* are also guided by a reader's ability to identify the appropriate object. The object is a technological equivalent to the parameters by which a sign must fall under. In the case in the cases of the three main texts, a reader who identifies the text as a signifying element of an unreliable narrator, must then follow through to uncover the narrator's unreliability. Though it is the author's duty to write well enough for a reader to identify the text of an unreliable narrator, the reader still has a job to complete.

The last piece in triadic semiology is the interpretant. The interpretant connects the sign and object and it could even be a sign. So, a reader translates an unreliable narrator's text through different forms of media, and the object in which the text is perceived determines the text-unreliable narrator relationship to be the interpretant. This representation of the text is now completed through a triadic understanding. Due to the nature of transmedia and the multiple ways the text is being funneled to the reader, the interpretant can change based on the specific interactions the reader made with the text and media (or object and sign).

As writing evolves along with the ways that it can be translated to readers, the meaning and understanding of said writing may change based on multiple factors. These include: the types of media that are being utilized to write and also print text, the non-text pieces of

information that is included in a work, and readers' understanding of how to engage with new media and technologies in writing.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Grimm Trippin' required precise planning and adherence to tasks in order to achieve a fully functioning piece of transmedia. As seen in the Initial Plan (Appendix C), I read *Pale Fire*, *House of Leaves*, and *S.* closely to get a better sense of how to create and write for an effective unreliable narrator. The reading also provided examples of unique typography within print text and puzzle design. To further my understanding of this work, I wrote reflections of my reading experiences.

By not replicating, but rather reimagining the work done in these pieces, *Grimm Trippin'* became a work of fiction that experiments with transmedia. In order to complete this project, I needed to have a working understanding of world building, narrative writing, game theory, and game design. I created visual components both in the digital realm and print copy to complement the narrative's complexity. Acknowledging the important of reader engagement with the text, I included multiple forms of media to introduce different entry ways of immersion.

Grimm Trippin' allows for people who interact with the work to become a user, player, or reader. When an interacting party is involved with *Grimm Trippin'* there are moments that present whether the party is playing, reading, or using the material to further the narrative. The choices they make will be based in the separate physical and digital components of the text. The story is written to have one layer of Jason Guile's life fully contained within the box of *Grimm Trippin'*. If a reader wants to uncover other secrets about Jason and the 12 Steppers, then they must solve the puzzles in the text, thus causing them to take on the role of a player.

The reader-player that takes shape once they start solve puzzles can only be identified this way if they continue to play. From my point of view and from experience in games, to be a player means to be actively or currently participating in a game world associated with it. A player is connected with particular experiences that occur in a set time. A player transitions to a user when considering lifetime statistics of a gaming experience. So, when considering these verbs, *Grimm Trippin'* is a work that can be read and played at the same time, while the supplemental components can be used to push forward an overall experience. Despite my intentional design, it is possible to entirely avoid the narrative within *Grimm Trippin'*. I have no handle on whether a player decides to solve the puzzles within the text and disregard the novel piece entirely.

Regardless of which path reader-players take, I wanted both players and readers to communicate freely, so when I designed *Grimm Trippin'* I built something that would encourage both parties to move to the internet and social media platforms to discuss Jason Guile's story and the truth of his life. To solve the puzzles, readers and players are required to go online. I believe this first engagement with digital technologies may open up strict readers to communicate with the player side. Even if readers are not directly solving the puzzles, they may be part of open board discussions that help uncover the truth behind each solution.

Writing and creating a part-deconstructed, part-layered narrative left *Grimm Trippin'* as a work that cannot be categorized any other way beyond a piece of interactive media. The multiple technologies that a reader or player are exposed to in the work prevents it from being solely recognized as a novel.

3.1 Conception of the Work

The original plan was to outline and write a novel that was then overlaid with virtual and real-world elements in an alternate reality. Throughout the writing process, puzzles were to be carefully inserted into the story, whether this included physical artifacts or works of art in the

marginalia (See *S.* by Doug Dorst and J.J. Abrams). Once readers began to sink into the narrative, they were to be given the opportunity to delve deeper, testing their puzzle solving skills. The readers would then able to coordinate with other players who are trying to solve these puzzles in order to progress further, uncovering the mystery of the main protagonist Jason Guile.

The combination of game design elements with the story creates an interactive experience that allows for readers to hopefully feel immersed. Developing tangible puzzles tested my knowledge of game design, game theory, and narration. I realized early in the planning process of this project that giving readers a chance to handle and inspect the items in a companion kit added a level of immersion that could not be reached through a digital copy of the novel. But then I asked "why is that?" Soon, the project became a study on the digitalization of the literary world, leading to questions like:

- Will there be a point when publishers are not printing books anymore?
- If publishers are continuing to print books, then for whom are these books being printed for?
- Why are there books that cannot be digitized and to what extent does a book's design affect a publisher's choice to publish in only electronic or print form?

If a novel or the book has been defined as a medium in which alternate reality games (ARG) cannot be properly translated to a digital form or digitized, then the project becomes a test of theory. Understanding the project's added goals, more questions revealed themselves through the research and development processes. In the past, there have been successful

electronic book versions of classic print texts, but that has not been the case for many of these ARG-like novels.

Grimm Trippin' is a story of a neo-hippie, gruesome fairytales, and dark secrets. I planned to engage my readers and guide them to discover everything they can about an augmentation of the real world around them. Writing the novel was only one step in a much more laborious editing process. The project required me to tend to every bit of text in the pursuit of create digitized elements that captures the same adventure and thrill of discovery.

This project impacts the readers who make an effort to explore any of the novel's many parts. The readers become players once they are fully engaged with the text, taking part in puzzles and interacting with other fellow players whom are trying to do the same. Player progression would later lead to my understanding of how the project could be improved upon in the future. Properly play-testing, writing clearly, and developing this project has led me to better myself in creative augmentation and interactive design.

3.2 Behind *Grimm Trippin'*

In 2015, I took Advanced Creative Writing (EN 3219), in which each student was required to create a final portfolio comprised of work that was somehow connected. There did not need to be a story at play, but we were required to engage with a theme and or form of work throughout. My portfolio was titled *Sweets*; below is the description:

> The following is a collection of tales, disclosing the story of the interwoven lives of man and creature in a world twisted and stretched by imagination. A giant whose life is corrupted by the sweet taste of victory becomes an infamous criminal. His death leads into a string of seemingly unrelated events. As the tales are presented, the timeline will unfold. These have been written to be read in any order, so have it.

Sweets emphasized the conflict of man vs. creature and posed a question to the readers: "How much matters if these stories are about a bunch of animals or a bunch of humans?" There was

never a clear indication if the characters in the stories were actually animals, or just humans whose characteristics reflected that of the different animals.

Sweets was built on a deconstructed narrative. It was the first time that I had written something that could be broken down and "read in any order" as the description suggests. My professor, now advisor, Jim Cocola recommended that I consider removing the staple connecting each of the stories together. We chatted briefly about how to present a portfolio, but it was enough to invigorate a powerful motivation to create something grander and beyond the boundaries of the portfolio, the novel, or the book. The conversation about pulling literary work apart like this inspired the search for novels and other works of the sort and led to the design and creation of *Grimm Trippin'*.

After gathering information about the aforementioned novels and similar works, I had to write the first draft of my manuscript. As seen in my plan, I wrote for National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) under the handle 'sryanmccarthy'[31]. NaNoWriMo, an online creative writing project, began in July 1999. It was created by Chris Baty who developed a place for writers to get the first 50,000 words of their novel down in only 30 days. He recommended, as the site still does, that a writer reach 1667 words each day to make it to 50,000 on time. Having had successfully written for NaNoWriMo in 2014, I believed it was the best way to start writing. The time restraint forces a writer to produce and write down as much as possible with no place for heavy editing.

The gamification within NaNoWrimo is pivotal to the design and writing process when completing a 50,000-word manuscript in 30 days. Gamification is the establishment of game principles and game elements within a non-game system or application. While writing towards

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[31] http://nanowrimo.org/participants/sryanmccarthy

hitting the daily goal of 1667 words, a writer can achieve badges to mark their progress. There are Participation, Writing, and Personal Achievement Badges. Each of them gamify the writing process, but also promote a community-driven experience. There are also goodies for hitting 50,000 words, like discounts on software and free print books. While writing a novel on NaNo, a writer participates in an online experience, kind of like a game or new movement.

In preparation for writing using NaNo for this project, I wrote a novel in 2014 titled *Insanity Crawls*. I interacted with a NaNo Mentor, someone who participated in NaNo in the past. My mentor answered my questions throughout the 30 days in case I was having any issues trying to find inspiration or how to frame my novel. Similarly, each day the community of NaNo staffers would send a note to all of the writers to push the writers to continue creating, so everyone could reach 50,000 words. Popular authors contributed to these letters and notes as well, as to further push the aspiring writers to achieve their goals. The connection that the members made with the authors and staffers led to the growth of a community that thinks more about writing than the gaming aspects of the site. The community holds events at real world locations to promote this constant conversation about writing as well. Just as ARGs utilize the digital and physical realms of the world, NaNo takes advantage of these similar opportunities.

After "winning" or hitting my 50,000 words, I was notified by my advisor of an Open Door submission to Angry Robot Books (http://angryrobotbooks.com/opendoor/). The submission period is for Angry Robot to publish as part of its regular schedule and the final submission were due on 31st January 2016. The requirements, as noted above, detailed the length, audience, subject, and submission content. Though I did not complete the novel in time for submission, I did write and complete a synopsis for submission. Due to the later changes, the

synopsis for the submission in Appendix A is slightly inaccurate. Fortunately, engaging with the text in order to create a synopsis helped during the editing process.

3.3 Designing and Building the ARG Components

Writing the physical and all-encompassing, exhausting text, and after organizing the novel for print as the ARG, I also incorporated digital content for the final work. The digitization involved a moderate understanding of how books are read and interacted with differently over an e-reader, computer, and or tablet in comparison to a printed text. Considering the engagements that my readers would have with my work, I was sure to use as many outlets as I thought necessary to create a more interactive reading and playing experience. *Grimm Trippin'* as a print text was built using The Game Crafter[32], a site dedicated to printing custom tabletop games and game pieces.

Bringing *Grimm Trippin'* to life presented many challenges, but of the most difficult was the puzzle design and creation. *Grimm Trippin'* is intended to offer a full experience to all readers and game players, while also including gated pathways that would not hinder a reader versus a player experience. I created puzzles that would gate off areas of information; the information could only be reached if a reader-player solved the puzzles. The puzzles that I designed required some difficulty, but not so much that non-gamers would lose interest in the Jason Guile's story. In hopes that the community of readers and players took to discussing *Grimm Trippin'* online, I believed that the puzzles would be solved in forums or in gaming communities. If a reader could not solve the puzzle, they could navigate the web in search of the solution.

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[32] https://www.thegamecrafter.com/

There are four puzzles in *Grimm Trippin'*, each of which task a reader-player to interact with Jason Guile's stories titles *The 12 Steps* and the companion website at the12truths.wordpress.com. I plan to keep the site active, but if for whatever reason, this is not possible, I hope to publicly archive all of the information that can be accessed through this medium. The puzzles were designed with the products that The Game Crafter offered in mind. Knowing that I could create a custom deck of playing cards, I created a puzzles that could be identified by the scene in the card. The card connected to a story in *The 12 Steps* and a reader or player could later find the sections more easily by bookmarking each puzzle with the cards. *Figure 1* presents each of the illustrations created for the deck (starting with the back of the cards), while *Figure 2* identifies the first puzzle in *The 12 Steps*.

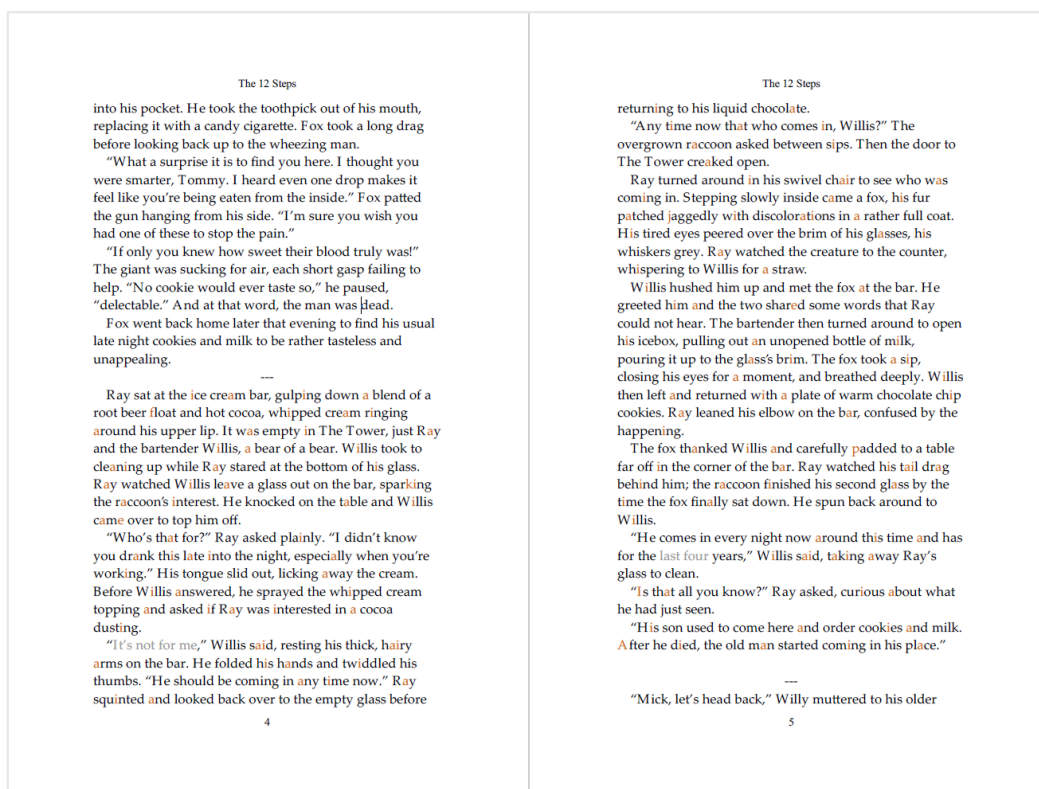*Figure 1: The images created for the deck of cards.*

into his pocket. He took the toothpick out of his mouth, replacing it with a candy cigarette. Fox took a long drag before looking back up to the wheezing man.

"What a surprise it is to find you here. I thought you were smarter, Tommy. I heard even one drop makes it feel like you're being eaten from the inside." Fox patted the gun hanging from his side. "I'm sure you wish you had one of these to stop the pain."

"If only you knew how sweet their blood truly was!" The giant was sucking for air, each short gasp failing to help. "No cookie would ever taste so," he paused, "delectable." And at that word, the man was dead.

Fox went back home later that evening to find his usual late night cookies and milk to be rather tasteless and unappealing.

Ray sat at the ice cream bar, gulping down a blend of a root beer float and hot cocoa, whipped cream ringing around his upper lip. It was empty in The Tower, just Ray and the bartender Willis, a bear of a bear. Willis took to cleaning up while Ray stared at the bottom of his glass. Ray watched Willis leave a glass out on the bar, sparking the raccoon's interest. He knocked on the table and Willis came over to top him off.

"Who's that for?" Ray asked plainly. "I didn't know you drank this late into the night, especially when you're working." His tongue slid out, licking away the cream. Before Willis answered, he sprayed the whipped cream topping and asked if Ray was interested in a cocoa dusting.

"It's not for me," Willis said, resting his thick, hairy arms on the bar. He folded his hands and twiddled his thumbs. "He should be coming in any time now." Ray squinted and looked back over to the empty glass before

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returning to his liquid chocolate.

"Any time now that who comes in, Willis?" The overgrown raccoon asked between sips. Then the door to The Tower creaked open.

Ray turned around in his swivel chair to see who was coming in. Stepping slowly inside came a fox, his fur patched jaggedly with discolorations in a rather full coat. His tired eyes peered over the brim of his glasses, his whiskers grey. Ray watched the creature to the counter, whispering to Willis for a straw.

Willis hushed him up and met the fox at the bar. He greeted him and the two shared some words that Ray could not hear. The bartender then turned around to open his icebox, pulling out an unopened bottle of milk, pouring it up to the glass's brim. The fox took a sip, closing his eyes for a moment, and breathed deeply. Willis then left and returned with a plate of warm chocolate chip cookies. Ray leaned his elbow on the bar, confused by the happening.

The fox thanked Willis and carefully padded to a table far off in the corner of the bar. Ray watched his tail drag behind him; the raccoon finished his second glass by the time the fox finally sat down. He spun back around to Willis.

"He comes in every night now around this time and has for the last four years," Willis said, taking away Ray's glass to clean.

"Is that all you know?" Ray asked, curious about what he had just seen.

"His son used to come here and order cookies and milk. After he died, the old man started coming in his place."

"Mick, let's head back," Willy muttered to his older

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Figure 2: Example puzzle created for Grimm Trippin'.

In order to create effective puzzles, I researched what similar works and ARGs have utilized in their design process. I concluded that the most effective designs included word puzzles, so I did not need to create puzzle content that was disconnected from the writing I completed. Thus, much of the other visuals that I created were to fulfill The Game Crafter's requirements to publish a game on its storefront.

The Game Crafter offers many options to produce different kinds of content along with other customizations to create a staple tabletop game. The custom items the company prints are items that fit in the most common titles and genres of board games, so the choices are still limited. Unfortunately, the site is not designed to print something as long or complex as some pieces of *Grimm Trippin'*, like Jason Guile's *The 12 Steps*. So, I printed the work on BookBaby

as a one-off version of *The 12 Steps*. It was difficult trying to fill the box from The Game Crafter

with enough custom pieces that the work felt full and complete. In hopes of fixing this issue, I

also created a custom piece printed using Staples' Copy & Print services. By the end of the

printing process, I used three different sources to have the one physical text printed. The final

product looked more complete, as seen in *Figure 3*, but could not be replicated easily by

someone trying to purchase *Grimm Trippin'* off of The Game Crafter.

Figure 3: Contents created using The Game Crafter, BookBaby, and Staples Copy & Print.

I added all of the content available in the final product to store page on The Game Crafter. As seen in *Figure 4*, the content that is not printed is available for download at the time of purchase. So, reader-players may start interacting with Jason Guile's world before the box even arrives. Players will also have access to the WordPress site from the store page, so even the puzzles can be solved. Below is list and descriptions of the content in *Grimm Trippin'*:

- **The *Grimm Trippin'* box:** contains all of the printed content, but also has the link to the WordPress page on the outside of the box.

- ***The 12 Steps* by Jason Guile:** The stories of [insert name of fantasy world] and the animals, written by the fictitious Jason Guile. Currently, only available by download as a .pdf file.

- **Jason, The Barista:** Notes written by Jason in reaction to reading *The 12 Steps*.

- **Jason, The Journalist:** Notes written by Jason during the time of writing *The 12 Steps*. Currently, only available by download as a .pdf file.

- **Dear Jason:** A note written by Jason, The Journalist to Jason, The Barista warning himself of the 12 Steppers.

- **Animal Card Pack:** Cards depicting scenes of the main characters from *The 12 Steps*.

Despite some of the content only being available in digital form, the files are ready for printing if a buyer is interested in filling the rest of the box with physical versions of those texts. The total game cost came to $17.19. *Figure 5* details the cost of each printed piece of *Grimm Trippin'* along with some insight on larger production costs within the Bulk Pricing section.
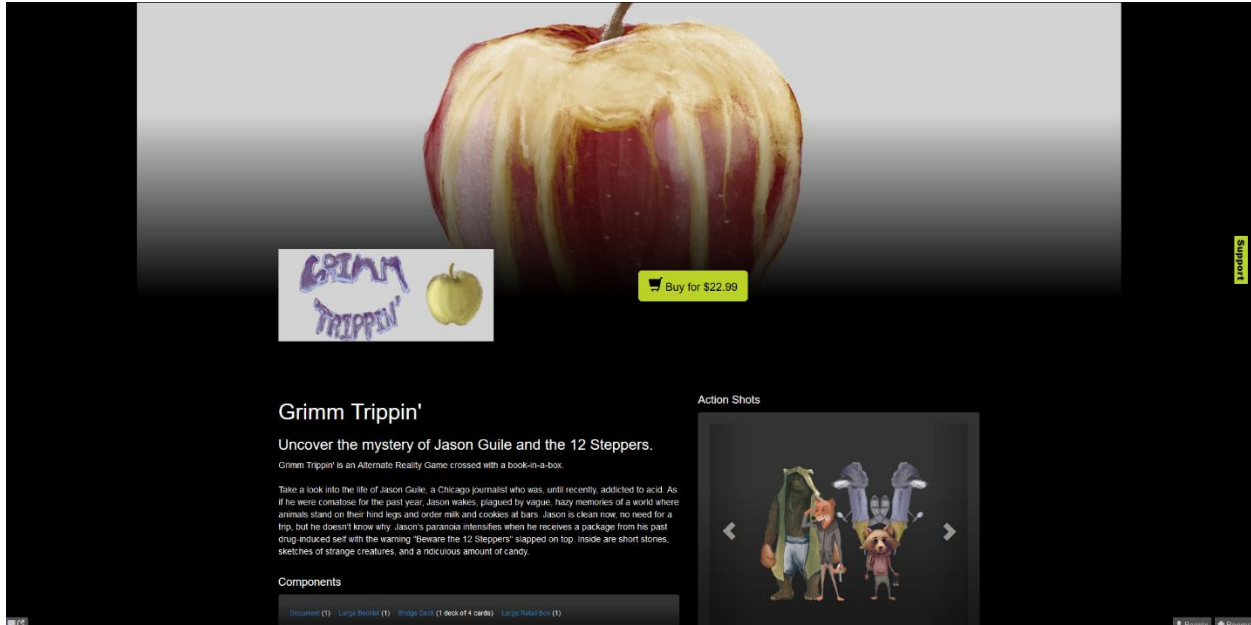
Figure 4: Published page on The Game Crafter's storefront.

Figure 5: Pricing Guide

I worked on *Grimm Trippin'* for a limited amount of time, so there are pieces in the final

product that could have been created differently, had I worked with these printing services

before. Regardless, all of the writing that I completed was somehow worked into the printed

pieces or supplemental digital content. In the future, if I were to create something like *Grimm*

Trippin', I would be further prepared to execute a smoother process.

Chapter 4: Analysis, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Within an academic year and with a low budget, I produced a polished work that explored a number of transmedia trends in ARG culture while educating myself on the digitization of the novel. My interactions with many technologies in writing also provided insight on how to better create and develop my work. This includes the works I read that introduce unreliable narration, while also delving into the inclusion of supplementary pieces. Inspired by these works, I created *Grimm Trippin'*, which exposed some flaws in the digitization of media and linked the age of digitalization with current methods for telling stories.

Grimm Trippin' was not completed without its flaws and if I had more to time to dedicate to the project, I would have addressed each one. Time and money had a great influence on the final product, but building *Grimm Trippin'* by myself allowed me to make decisions quickly and efficiently. If I had more time and possibly a team to work with, I could have:

- Designed more puzzles and created a hierarchy of difficulties.

- Added a more complex digital component than the WordPress page.

- Created figurines and or unique pieces for *Grimm Trippin'* during The Game Crafter production.

- Designed a website that details the contents of *Grimm Trippin'* and how to navigate the world of Jason Guile and The 12 Steppers.

- Established a relationship with a publisher that could print this kind of work for mass-production.

Though the last bullet point is a goal that could possibly require a year or more of planning and engagement with a publisher, I believe that the relationship would lead to a greater understanding of how a work like *Grimm Trippin'* could be pipelined through a more common

book or novel's publishing process. More so, I would be able to see how *Grimm Trippin'* could be adapted to make the self-printing process easier as well.

The list of action items or missing pieces does not well present other more serious issues at hand, as *Grimm Trippin'* was written while studying the current age of digitalization. However, the moves made during the creation of the work has had a direct impact on stability of different physical and digital forms of media. Recall that Ong proposed the technology of writing is scrutinized by other, robust technologies. *Grimm Trippin'* has been created and formatted for production on The Game Crafter, but these types of work could be designed in a way that utilizes new forms of media that elicits new reactions from its reader-players.

4.1 Publishing and *Grimm Trippin'*

Thinking about possible changes and additions to *Grimm Trippin'* proves that new and experimental literature shifts based on the accessible technology of the time. In the future, I believe that writing similar to what was completed for this project is going to drive the publishing market if the print book loses its battle with the e-book. Because the budget could not be stretched so far to mass-produce a printed copy of the work, I was unable to create another exact copy of the one-off. In the future, I believe it would be best to establish some connection with a company that could handle all of the printing. Even better, the company could sponsor a similar project that promotes this kind of new writing and reading. If projects are sponsored, there may be a need for a production company dedicated to creating this kind of work.

Publishing companies are careful to not take great risks with projects unless the project would be hugely successful. *S.* was mass-produced in full color along with many pieces within what looked (and smelled) like an old library book. The intense creation process led to a beautiful piece of work. As stated previously, the introduction of these physical pieces requires a

project to printed instead of only handled in a digital context. I believe that these creations could be tailored to specific markets, with the supplemental pieces developed for a narrow audience. For example, these ARG-like works could be designed for an educational market, targeting young adults. The book-in-a-box concept that I deployed could be used as model for new reading for younger audiences. With an emphasis on hands-on learning in the past decade, works could be created for instructors/teachers to build into their curriculum. Students may find the reading more interesting or want to take part in building a similar creation. Right now, some ARG novels have targeted younger audiences, but I have not found any that resemble an educational resource or guide to help students build one of these.

The resource to produce ARG novels and works of literature could be have online storefront along with multiple locations that are similar to makerspaces. Creators could work directly with their publisher, while also working with the physical pieces throughout the design process. Online interactions should be familiar for people who have pipelined work through a freelance workflow, but to have a physical engagement with developer/publisher emphasizes the importance of the work that is being built. So, if a store is built like this, there could be three major areas of the business: one dedicated to building these products, another to teach the creation process, and the last for influencing reading and building work like this.

4.2 Archiving *Grimm Trippin'*
The project is based on works similar to ARGs and other literary experiments. If in the future, there is another project like this, I recommend that there be a constant conversation with a group of players or readers that could offer their critical analysis of the work. Having a community, albeit a small one of reader-players, could influence the writer to create differently and help the editing process run more smoothly. This community driven editing process could

also promote readers who interact with the work to later continue their conversation with a large audience. Then the project could grow to similar sizes as some commercial ARGs. For now, works like *Grimm Trippin'* are shelved with books and games alike. Readers and players are not fully aware of these types of works and how it fits as a piece of literature or a game.

Working on this project alone has led me to understanding how resourceful a team of other creatives would have been. Though having a team does cause some limitations on design choices, it also opens up new opportunities for creating on a grander scale. I recommend that students trying to create something like this should work in an even number, while half of the team writes the work and the other half brings it to life through different forms of media. The production time could be then cut in half and the work could be advertised and then tested with a large audience of readers. The project could identify how to create a new online home for communities interested in creating this kind of work, as well as utilizing the form as a way to educate, as previously discussed. Most importantly, the more interactions made with these kinds of work, the more likely a new category of entertainment will begin to emerge. A new label will be added on the shelves of bookstores and gaming shops.

Grimm Trippin' was created for new reading and testing new writing. In the future, regardless of similar projects being completed, *Grimm Trippin'* will continue to be shelved under Interactive Media and Game Development within WPI's MQP archives. All of the content available in the one-off print of the text will be digitally accessible. If a reader-player wants to explore the work in the way it was intended, then they must purchase the product from The Game Crafter. With access to all of the .pdf files, they may then print the digital pieces using the other services I have utilized. In a perfect scenario, all of the pieces could be printed under one roof. I hope that work like this continues to be produced and that it pulls in a larger audience.

Grimm Trippin' is one of many works that makes strides towards solidifying a new genre of media and should be archived as such.

4.3 Virtual Reality and *Grimm Trippin'*

The technology of the word changed because of disruptions in the design of new media. Just over a century ago, there were very limited channels through which to disseminate the spoken word. With the introduction of technologies like the telephone, the interactions people made began to change. After the telephone, the spoken word would soon be funneled through the radio and recorded for playback on vinyl records. The spoken word instantly turned into something that was static, similar to the written word's effect. Something so dynamic as the spoken word could be delivered through new audial and visual technologies. Jump ahead to the 21st century, and an even greater number of channels have opened up, including YouTube. The growth in the technology of the word allows for more people to access the technology. *Grimm Trippin'* was created in consideration of several forms of media, but as works like this are created, it may be easier to define the most accessible technologies to ingest the work's content.

Despite the few hiccups in the process, the completed product *Grimm Trippin'* allows readers and gamers alike to experience exploration similar to that of ARGs and traditional games. The layered narrative opens up many pathways for reader-players to go down as to possibly experience Jason Guile's world in a different way than anyone else. The evolution of the technology of writing allows for many opportunities for translating writing onto new platforms.

One of the most significant of these platforms is virtual reality headsets. Virtual reality (VR) exposes some of the pitfalls with the current age of digitalization, but also glorifies the best aspects of digitizing media. I believe that the current state of VR allows for experimental

literature to find its way in to the VR experience. Because VR is an emerging market, it is causing disruption in many of the current markets like the gaming and film industry. It is the best time to explore how literature can be introduced to this platform.

VR headsets transport the user into a new reality and the immersion can be so deep as to convince the user the memories in the virtual world occurred in the real. Media is created to allow for unique interactions with the real world. However, not all media is designed to allow access to as deep levels of immersion as something so complex as VR. *Grimm Trippin'* and other ARG-like works are designed to allow for interactions with different medias. The interactions lead to reader-players being immersed within a fictional world that is carefully blended with the real. VR technology allows for a complete immersion into a virtual world. The longer a person remains in this alternate reality, the more apt I believe they would be to not being able to identify the real and virtual apart.

VR allows people to experience entire adventures without leaving the comfort of their living room. The perception of reality changes as a people continue to live in both the virtual and real. Creating an immersive text like *Grimm Trippin'* could involve VR as component that harnesses the exploration of all the supplementary pieces. If each technology is usurped by another, or the next variation of said technology, then VR may lead to the destruction of all physical engagement. All physical objects could be digitized into this virtual realm. Thus, a metaphysical space will emerge as a dedicated home for all media. There may a point where a person requires the assistance of VR to engage with the physical world appropriately. If works like *Grimm Trippin'*, *S.*, *Pale Fire*, and *House of Leaves* promote the creation of print text and experimental literature, then VR may become the argument for a digital-only environment.

Human beings' reliance on the virtual world will cause extreme transformations in technology and the destruction of past mediums.

4.4 Concluding *Grimm Trippin'*

This project led me to engage with experimental literature that inspired the way that I create. Having not previously studied *Pale Fire*, *House of Leaves*, and *S.*, works that caused major shifts in the literary world, the interactions I made with the texts directly correlate with *Grimm Trippin''*s final form. Further, these interactions and the creating process greatly impacted how I want to move forward in my professional career. I have developed writing, design, and game development skills during the preparation and execution of this project, each of which will be vital in my future work. If I want to continue to create work like this, then *Grimm Trippin'* can stand as a first attempt, where time constrained some earlier visions of the work. My future creations will stand as opportunities for me to explore beyond the boundaries of the academic setting in which *Grimm* Trippin' was produced. I hope to continue to make connections between literature and the gaming world and make design choices that reflect these connections in all coming work.

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APPENDIX A: Original *Grimm Trippin'* Synopsis

(Note: The synopsis and final manuscript are still under development for submission on January 31st. All changes are not final.)

Standard Synopsis Formatting:
- Written in third person, present tense, regardless of what POV or tense the book is written in.
- The first mention of each character's name is put in all-caps (so that they can be easily spotted).

Short Synopsis:

Take a look into the life of JASON GUILE, a Chicago journalist who was, until recently, addicted to acid. As if he were comatose for the past year, Jason wakes, plagued by vague, hazy memories of a world where animals stand on their hind legs and order milk and cookies at bars. Jason is clean now, no need for a trip, but he doesn't know how or why. Jason's paranoia intensifies when he receives a package from his past drug-induced self with the warning "Beware the 12 Steppers" slapped on top. Inside are short stories, sketches of strange creatures, and a ridiculous amount of candy.

Now he's handing everything over to us, asking for our help.

Full Synopsis:

Grimm Trippin' is written with the intention to be introduced to the public in a package that emulates the creative technique and quality design within print novels like *S* by Doug Dorst & J.J. Abrams. In similar fashion, the novel intertwines the literature, puzzles, and community-building narrative as an alternate reality game (ARG). Due to the nature of Angry Robot Book's submission restrictions, the package has been altered and edited as a novel in parts. More so, the requirements for submission have created a unique opportunity for myself and the publisher.

In an ARG, some parts of the story, if not all of the parts, are influenced by the reader or players interaction with the literature, puzzles, and characters. New information is accessed when readers/players (these terms will be interchangeable for all following) solve and move through each "puzzle gate", moving the narrative forward. Sometimes, a player will have access to information that offers multiple choices. Based on the player's decision, the narrative may move in a new direction. This choice is similar to that of a choose-your-own-adventure or a role-playing-game like *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Grimm Trippin' will be deployed as an ARG in 2016 and players will choose the ending of the story, whether or not Jason discovers that he has been experimented on by THE 12 STEPPERS for the past year. Jason hands the package over to us when he is drained by the pursuit of the mystery's solution. Finally home after years of work in Chicago, Jason finds comfort in his home, sending the package away with all of his notes. He claims he would like to know what happened to him, but when the readers find out, it may not be worth the chance of

forever disrupting his life. If Jason finds the details of the experiments on him, he may not ever live the same way.

As the author, I believe the best way to publish this novel would be as if it were from the future, published sometime between 2018 and 2020, as if THE EDITORS were able to compile all of the documentation from the 2016 deployment of the ARG. The novel will thus become "The Big Book" of information for players to refer to when making any decisions and solving any puzzles. This work will be part cheat-sheet and part unfiltered narrative with comments from The Editors. There notes may influence 2016 player's choices, as The Big Book will also disclose what happened to Jason when the "other" players chose not to tell Jason what happened.

The copy of *Grimm Trippin'* from the future (The Big Book) holds the following:
- Jason Guile Tripping's (JGT) fantasy stories, footnotes, and sketches.
- Jason Guile Clean's (JGC) footnotes, sketches, and social media interactions.
- The 12 Steppers members' experiment notes and journal entries.
- RICHARD GASTON's (head of The 12 Steppers) letters and journal entries, along with some historical context Gaston's failed attempts at becoming a doctor.
- LINCOLN SANDERS' (second in command, behind Gaston) journal logs and ciphers. Solutions to these ciphers will also be available.

Due to the segmented narrative approach used to develop the story's plot, I have decidedly broken each section of the synopsis into parts based on the four main characters/groups. In one model, as a way to describe the novel, I have separate each group based on their (un)reliability and knowledge of their (un)reliability. Below is said model:
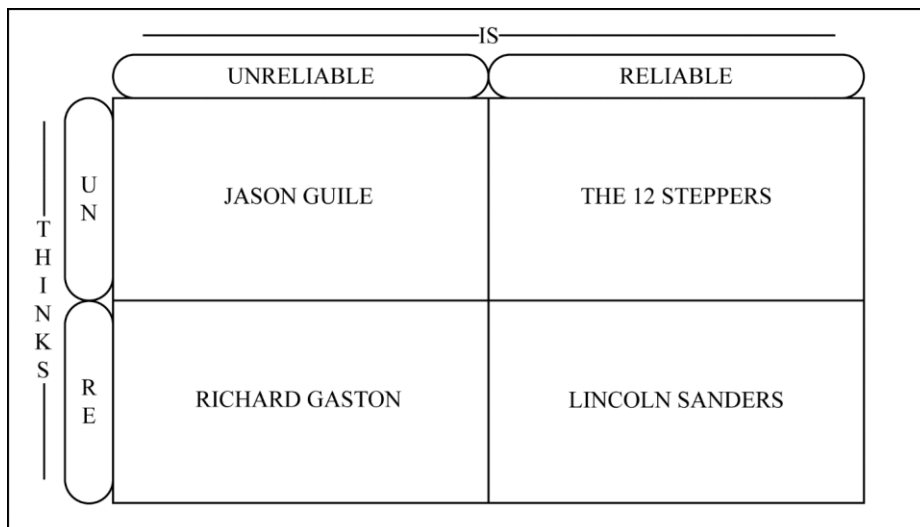
Jason Guile's unreliability is key to the nature of the story, along with the presentation of the stories within the fantasyland. JGT writes from the third-person perspective of seven animal characters, while four of them make direct contact with the darkest entity and thus, the enemy of the stories, the CARAMEL APPLE. Although, the apple never has autonomy, nor does it have a true spirit, it is willed to the present of four characters' lives by the evil in the Woods. The apple

represents defeat and loss, though it never takes complete control of a character's life, its presence implies darkness is looming and the characters have yet to stop their loss from plaguing their lives.

Larson Fox – Mr. Thompson – **Willis** – Ray **– Jackson (Jax)** – **Carla** – Kaiser
Fox – Giant – **Bear** – Raccoon – **Raccoon** – **Raccoon** – Pig

Bolded character "Meets the Apple"

LARSON FOX loses his wife and daughter years before he meets MR. THOMPSON, aka Ten Foot Tommy, his rival and nemesis during the majority of his career as a detective. It is not until Mr. Thompson is dead, that he meets the apple in the Woods, though the scene revolves around his dead family. Fox's daily pursuit of Mr. Thompson kept Fox's life invigorating and exciting. Once Thompson is, there is no more reason to live. Fox's father soon replaces him at the Bar Tower, where WILLIS serves him milk and cookies on the house.

Mr. Thompson lives a deranged life as a happy and hungry giant who will seemingly put anything into his mouth, like the green blood of small goblins. It is not until he feeds on a man that is made of chocolate that Thompson turns into a more deviant, evil giant, in search of the bet tasting foods of the fantasyland. In this world, it is cookies. That hunger turns against himself and in the end, he feeds on the blue, sugary blood of the famous cookie baking elves, knowing the poison inside will surely kill him.

Willis watches his brother get eaten by goblins in the Wood when he is a young cub and his loss haunts him for the rest of his life. Almost devoured by the control of the apple, Willis is driven to insanity after his trip into the Wood finally takes hold of him while he is watching soaps on his television. An advertisement for the caramel apple mesmerizes the bear, while images of his dead brother flash on screen, leaving him rocking on the floor. There is no close to Willis' tale, the apple seeming to have a grip on him for the rest of his life, like many of the other characters.

RAY exists as a medium for which the reader may see the other characters from a different point of view. Though he never meets Larson Fox directly, Ray sees his father, and makes contact in all of his stories with Willis. Further, he is JACKSON's father and CARLA's ex-husband. Never meeting the apple in the stories, he is reminded by Willis not to go into the Woods. Ray claims that he has lost too much and he has no other choice. Little does he know, this attempt to go through the Woods is how the apple will soon make it into his life.

Jackson's attempt to cope with his parents' divorce leads to a life of the dealing candy-equivalent to drugs in the fantasyland, pop rocks candy. His internal conflict with the divorce causes him to truly believe he has lost his parents. Meetings the apple, Jackson is the only character to accept it into his life, embrace it, and hand it off, though he is now stirs in darkness, working for the witch of the Woods. When the HAG has had enough of Jackson, she kills him by overdose. Fox will later pursue this case when Ray finds Jackson's dead body.

Carla loses her son before her Jackson ever dies, believing him dead in the Woods after he ran away years before. On the first day back to her bookshop for work, a new book has just been released by one of Carla's favorite authors. Carla's two employees hand her the book to enjoy reading and forget working for the day. Unknown to her, though never explained directly in the story, her favorite author, a woman never known to be seen before, is actually the witch in the Woods, the Hag. The book is about a boy, like Jackon, who falls into darkness and is killed. Carla meets in the apple during the final pages and fears all to come.

Shutting herself out for some time again, Carla returns to the world, only to ascend to a dreamland where an owl named FRANCIS. Although he is not the creator of the fantasyland, his position and knowledge suggest he is a being of omnipotence. Francis is the last of the Wise Owls, and guides Carla to meet her true self. During a haunting scene, Carla is presented with the opportunity to ask her past self anything she pleases. Though the story ends here, it is assumed that the Caramel Apple is actually the dark form of loss of self, not the loss of others.

Kaiser has one story, but it is completely fictional, as to reinforce JGT's unreliability as a narrator. The question of Jason's honesty arises, though the readers must understand that he is incapable of pulling enough truth out of any of his stories or footnotes while under the spell of his LSD trips.

Post-Trip

JGT becomes JGC overnight and Jason is completely unaware of what has happened during the past year. And so, he finds the package with a letter from himself and the warning of the mysterious 12 Steppers. Over the next several months, JGC reads the stories within the fantasyland, all about the caramel apple, along with the JGT's footnotes. The footnotes tell a story of dark tales and people following JGT all over the city. The footnotes also mention JGT's losing his job at the Ripple as a journalist and the return of TAYLOR, a middle school crush, back into his life. JGC follows these footnotes and stories and creates another set of notes to follow.

JGC's footnotes talk of how easily Jason returns to everyday life, though he is restless from the unique and dark explorations his past self has made. He is unsure why he is clean, but decides it is for the best, and no longer wants anything to do with LSD. JGC obtains a job as a barista and his realization of self pushes him to contact his family after disconnecting from them five years prior. His family welcomes him with open arms, but Jason decides it best to send the package out and see if someone can figure out what truly happened during the past year.

The 12 Steppers

Richard Gaston founds the 12 Steppers, claiming the movement is in name of his friend GABRIEL, a victim to overdose. It is an underground organization built to transform the way the 12 Step program works. He claims in his letters to have developed a machine to end an addiction, while Jason Guile was their first client. In actuality, Jason is abducted by Gaston and

the 12 Steppers and experiment on him trying to formulate "the drug to end all drugs". Readers discover this through Lincoln Sander's writing.

Sanders writes of Gaston's narcissistic view of life, never sure if Gabriel existed in the first place. Sanders is under the impression that Gaston is close to mass-producing the *pink stuff* as it is so called in all of his notes. This is the same *stuff* that Jason is injected with over the course of a year, inducing heavy trips, which Jason believed to be caused by his own LSD.

Members of the 12 Steppers write about their experiences and the experiments they did on Jason. Many of them are sickened by what they have done, suggesting they may end their lives for "what we put him through." Sander and the Steppers' narratives set the frame for what was going on while JGT was hallucinating and writing stories of the animals.

Sanders must rise up against Gaston, but is unaware if he can rely on the 12 Steppers. So, he intercepts JGC's package to the readers, encrypts the writing with ciphers and other puzzles, in hopes that the reader learn the *real* truth of Gaston, the Steppers, and Jason Guile.

APPENDIX B: Original ARG Designs

Rabbit Hole / Point of Entry: Maybe some trailer (similar to how "S" worked). There is going to be a Deluxe Edition that has everything, while the content can then also be seen in digital form.

Contents of the DelEd:
- **Autobiography / Biography / Completely different book written by the same author**, but devoid of the supernatural - what if it was post-addiction and he is clean now? If there is clarity in his voice, maybe he is truly ready to send a message to everyone else. But what exactly does he know!? -- *This needs to be defined by the next meeting.*
- **The author's vignettes** (He needs a name soon. Reading too many books with S's in them - trying to not be influenced, but isn't that how this game works?) - Written during his life as an addict (but were all of them?) What if they were edited after he got clean?
- **A jar/package of candy (and wrappers)** - Within the wrappers, why not have messages? -- *"What begins at the sweets shall end at the sweets."*
- **A letter to the readers** - suggesting that there is so much more, but only his drugged mind of the past could be of any interpretation -- a call for help?

Is this something that will only happen once, or will the solution be left up to interpretation -- Kind of like how *Her Story* worked.

Simple chart of how a reader will interact with the physical copy:

MAIN BOOK → EAT CANDY (READ MESSAGE) → MAIN BOOK → VIGNETTE (REFERENCED IN MAIN) → VIGNETTE (NOT YET MENTIONED) → CANDY (PUZZLE SOLVE - DID IT BY EATING) → ONLINE COMPONENT DISCOVERED → FIND PIECES OF OLDER VIGNETTES → MAIN BOOK → VIGNETTES SET IN SAME LOCATION GO TOGETHER (PUZZLE SOLVE) → WHO IS THIS MAN?

Online component(s):
- Blog written by author, pictures of his old apartment, old figurines, models of strange toys, remnants of rough night… etc.
- What if this place is real? -- Pictures of animals on hind legs (something of that sort) discovered. Recollection of strange phone calls.
  - Memory loss and or accidental memory relocation (Total Recall)
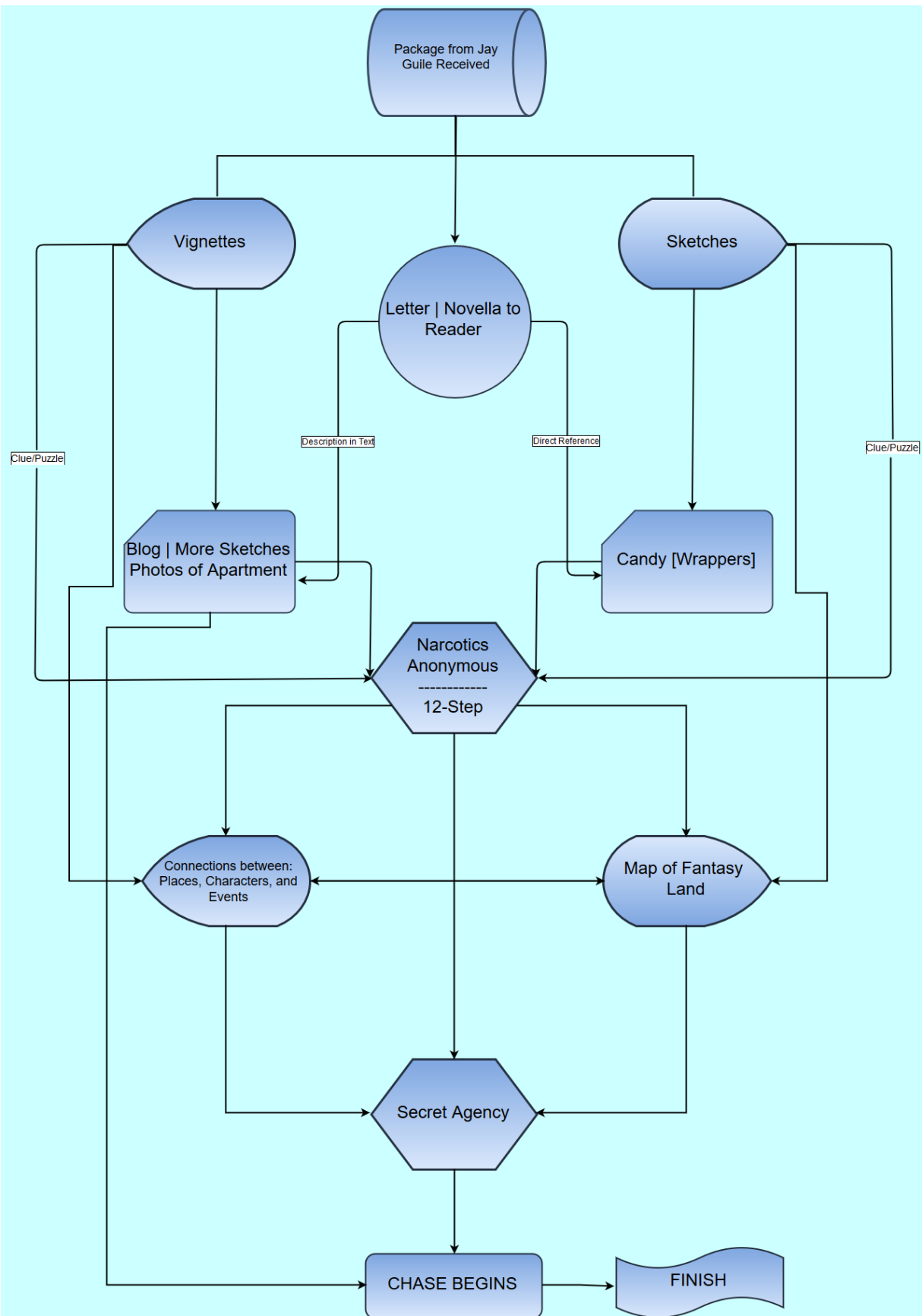
APPENDIX C – Initial MQP Plan

A Term Benchmarks
- Each of the following meetings should be comprised of a short writing - a reaction to:
    - "S" by Doug Dorst & JJ Abrams [9.22]
    - Pale Fire by Vladimir Nabokov [9.29]
    - House of Leaves by Mark Z. Danielewski [10.6]
- Start working on puzzles for own narrative - try *not* to be too inspired by these works in hopes to not create an imitation.
- The term ends on the October 15th, so the last week and change will be dedicated to finishing development of an ARG design chart/Outline for the interactive novel

A/B Recess: October 16-25
- Any catch-up on design chart. Begin formal documentation of sources (using Google Drive) -- Right now everything is in my Mozilla favorites ARG folder. Those will be organized into its own works cited.
- I also want to read more Grimms' Tales and try to make my way through *a book on the Brothers Grimm*.
- I need to study more of the drug as production and its large-scale destruction, as well as how it affects the individual - Anthony pointed me to Beautiful Boy and Tweak (supplemental narratives on a father and son's lives through addiction).

B Term Benchmarks
- Oct. 26-31: Complete planning for the novel; Hitting 50,000 will be easy if I am writing a short story every day, but I need to be careful of delivering a short core novel (maybe then there's a question about have a core "biographical novella").
    - Questions to ask:
        - WHO AM I to be writing this biography / How do I know this story?
        - Should contents all be released at the same time / Or should there be online content?
- Oct. 27-31: ARG time!
- NaNoWriMo (Nov. 1-30) - Writing the novel(la) and the short stories that are delivered with the biography.
- Dec. 1st: I am going to take a break today.
- Dec. 2-5: Reflection on NaNoWriMo experience to later be used in formal MQP documentation.
- Dec. 5-17: Begin work on what physical objects will be included with release. What more will come with the biography and short stories?
    - Inspiration could include:
        - Disney Keepsakes + Disney Treasures
        - Personal Effects: Dark Arts
        - "S."
        - Cathy's Book

Winter Break: Dec. 18 - Jan. 13
- I am going to take a break through Christmas, unless I am behind. I think I would like to dedicate this time to personal reading (and life).

- Once January starts, it will be time to start revisions and edits.

C Term Benchmarks
- This term should be dedicated to developing and finalizing the puzzles that are going to work cohesively with the "Starter Kit".
  - This includes physical and digital content.
- As a reminder to myself, there should constantly be documentation of how these puzzles were designed.
- Nearer toward the end of the term, final edits will need to be made, so that the items can all be printed and created.

C/D Recess: Mar. 5 - 13
- Find the best place to get extra pieces printed.

D Term Benchmarks
- Documentation, final printing, and finishing formal paper.