



The Arcane Gallery of Gadgetry: A Design Case Study of an Alternate Reality Game

www.arcanegalleryofgadgetry.org

Mythology & Game Mechanics

Set in civil war and post-war reconstruction United States, the game's mythology is grounded in the history of the U. S. Patent Office. AGOG incorporates player-created/-curated artifacts, scavenger-hunt like missions; information search and retrieval exercises; STEM concepts & activities (including soft circuits & basic electronics); and cryptographic challenges.

This is Not a Game

"Hi april i have a question are You really in trouble or is this all juss a game?"

- Traditional educational setting = unusual issues:
- Explanations of the game's fictionality were lost to short student attention span
 - Younger students trained to follow directions rather than evaluate all information for credibility
 - Lessons on gauging web credibility falter when fictional content is delivered through a believable-looking site

"i m beginning to think that this whole thing is all fake"

- Two solutions:
- Coding real/fictional in online site as "public" and "private" knowledge
 - A trustworthy player character to answer questions about what was real

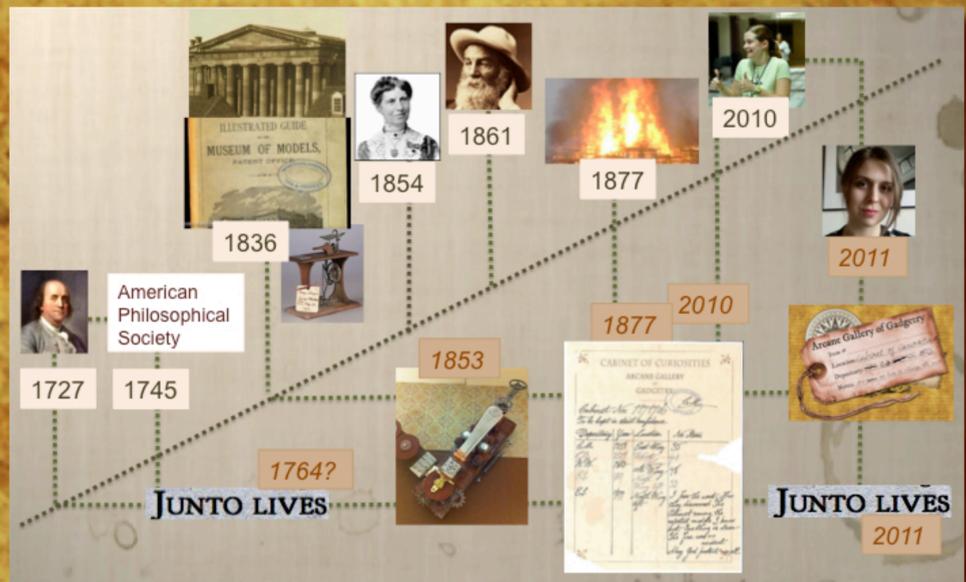


Counterfactual Design

"Reality shimmers with glimpses of counterfactual alternatives."

~ Ruth Byrne

The challenge of counterfactual design is to decide how to purposefully, meaningfully, and responsibly depart from the historical record when developing ARGs within the context of libraries, schools, museums, and archives--cultural institutions that place a high value on trustworthiness and accuracy of information, including digital information.



Designer Quotes

- "We take history for granted because we encounter it in a narrative format that makes it seem inevitable. We forget that it could have gone any way at any moment." - Ann Fraistat, AGOG
- "You make it real, but not so real that it does the uncanny valley stuff." - Mal Jones, illustrator for *Save the Pygmy Dragon Panda*
- "I'm going to go out on a limb and say that when they can actually put an fMRI machine on a game player, they're going to find out that there are essentially game mirror neurons in the brain, where when you're in a situation some of the same neurons are firing as they would be in real life." - Ken Eklund, *World Without Oil*

Player Artifacts



Data Collection

- Interviews with experienced ARG designers
- Design sessions with Human-Computer Interaction Lab (HCIL) Kidsteam (Intergenerational Cooperative Design Group)
- Surveys & design documents from MLS students who created learning modules for AGOG
- Design Process/Launch of AGOG & a "mini-ARG"
 - Library Research Seminar V (LRS-V)
 - AGOG "Season 1" (middle schoolers, Spring 2011)
 - Included surveys
 - AGOG "Season 2" (undergraduates, Fall 2011)
 - Run Red's Road (designed by teens & librarians for a County public library system, Summer 2011)



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