REALİTY:
The Manual

a presentation of

the
REALITY
COMMITTEE

Los Angeles, California
MMXIII
First Edition

USCSchool
of Cinematic Arts

Microsoft®
Research

ADVİSORİES

THİS İS NOT "GAMİFİCATİON"

This is a game. There is a big difference. Gamification is the application of points and badges and other representations onto real-world behaviors under the assumption that such application will motivate or "incentivize" said behaviors. We believe that gamification is a crude behavioral control system masquerading as innocent marketing. That is not what games are, or have been, or ever will be. We define a game as a set of rules and procedures that generates problems and situations that demand inventive solutions. A game is about play and creativity and surprise. Real play isn't about motivating people to do things; it's about channeling and challenging motivations that are already there in order to create new meanings and possibilities. Gamification is about "checking in" and ticking off boxes. Never confuse the two. At the very least, you will piss off any game designers within earshot.

FİRST EDİTİON

This is a first-edition manual. As such, it is likely to contain: tyopgraphical erorrs, ambiguous or incomplete descriptions, repetitions, internal (in)consistencies, critical omissions, layout glitches, run-on sentences, repetitions, and other mistakes. Use with caution. Use your head.

FAİR USE

Elements of this project, such as the collectible sides of cards, use imagery found on the web. Much of this imagery is used without permission. We believe that this constitutes fair use. If you are upset because we used an image or font or graphic from your project or company to illustrate a point, ask yourself: why are these people using my material? Are they trying to pass it off as their own? Are they "stealing" it, or are they just in dialogue with it? If you really feel like we've used something of yours inappropriately, go ahead and get in touch with us, and we might remove it from future editions if you can give us a compelling argument (or threat) that would compel us to do so. But know that we consider imagery we find on the web to be no different than a bird spotted perching on a branch in the woods. The Web is a part of the forest we wander through, and we feel it is our right to use images of what we see there as we discuss how it might be made a better place. Chirp, chirp.

CONTENTS

THIS GAME BELONGS TO YOU.

...and by "you," we mean, you, the players, the people who pour their hearts into this experience, the ones who care enough to stay up late and get up early, playing and making and dreaming. You are who this game is for, and it is yours to change and grow and carry forward or let wither. It doesn't happen without you. You make it by playing it, whether you are playing as a player or playing as a game runner. This game belongs to you and becomes what you make it.

RULES FOR PLAYERS

Playing this game even very casually will get you noticed by the Reality Committee. The more you participate, the more the Committee will work to connect you with unique experiences that are relevant to you. Even engaging just a little will open up new opportunities and discoveries. Exactly what those are will become clear with time.

Media making is a habit. This game is the way to get a quick fix or nurse a long-term addiction. Play big or play small, serious or casual — it's up to you. The game is entirely optional. But then again, so is everything. Success, however you define it, is not mandatory. Your future is up to you.

RULES FOR PLAYERS

The quickest way to understand Reality is to look at it from the player's perspective. Players will learn the rules in a variety of ways. Some will learn directly from you; others will pick it up from friends. This section breaks down the basic rules of the game.

1. PICK UP A PACKET OF CARDS FROM THE GAME OFFICE

Inside your packet, you will find five kinds of cards:

- **2 green Maker Cards**
- **6 pink Property Cards**
- **1 orange People Card**
- **If you're lucky, a blue Special Card**
- **an Instruction Card**

2. COMBINE CARDS TO DESIGN A CREATIVE CHALLENGE.

By combining, sharing, and trading cards, you will create original media projects, earn points, and find international fame and fortune.

Here's how it works:

Green **Maker** Cards tell you what to make. For example, a 30 Second Short:
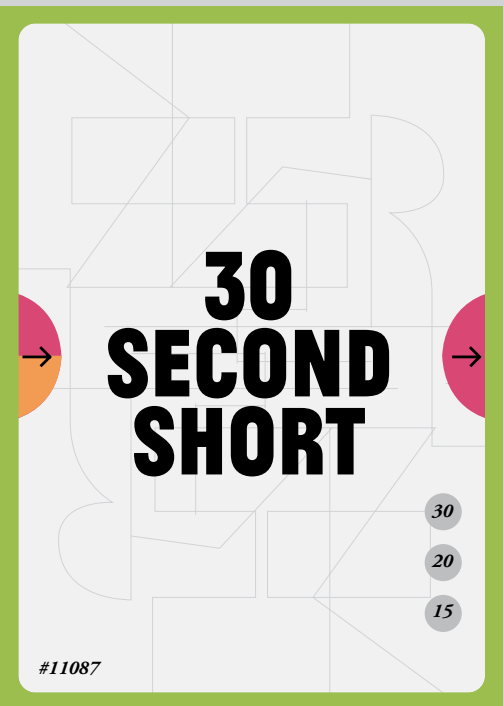
Pink **Property** Cards specify elements or ideas that you must include in your project. For example, a bicycle:
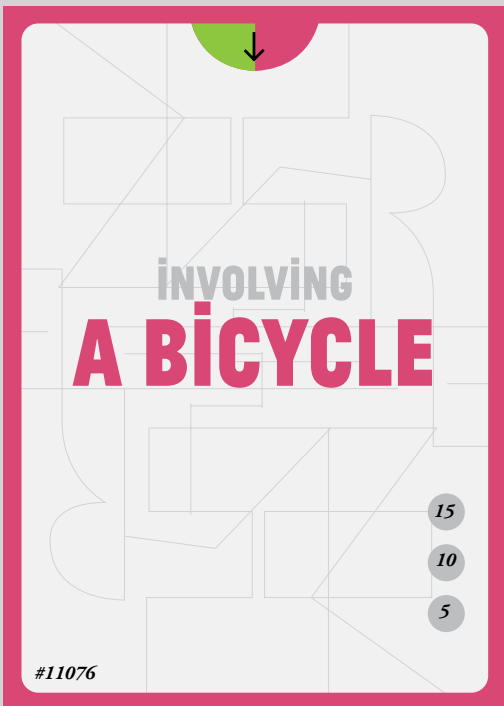
By combining two or more cards you make a "Deal." Any given Deal is worth the total of the highest point values printed on the cards used to create it.

All those who collaborate on a Deal earn the full point value of the Deal.

The most basic Deal consists of one Maker card and one Property card. For example:

This simple two-card Deal — "MAKE a 30 Second Short INVOLVING a Bicycle" — would be worth 45 points (30 points for "30 Second Short", and 15 points for "A Bicycle"). If you collaborate on a Deal with other players, everyone who collaborates will receive the full point value of the Deal.

Note how the cards connect together. You must match both arrow direction and at least one of the colors on the side of the cards to connect them.

Deals cannot contain more than one green Maker Card, but may contain an unlimited number of pink Property cards, blue Special cards, and orange People cards — so long as there are enough valid connections.

Depending on the number of available connections, you can make bigger and more complex deals. Making these kinds of Deals will often require you collaborating with others. You can also add in People cards (which award bonus points for working with specific other players), and Special cards (which add interesting new twists and are worth more points than normal cards).

3. CREATE AN ORİGİNAL MEDİA WORK THAT SATİSFİES THE CONSTRAİNTS OF YOUR CHALLENGE.

Once you've created a Deal that you want to make, make it. If it's a video, shoot it. If it asks for photo documentation, take pictures. You must use your own equipment - school resources are off limits. Phone cameras and other kinds of DIY solutions are encouraged. You're also going to have to prove that you fulfilled the conditions of your Deal, so remember to document appropriately.

4. SUBMİT YOUR PROJECT VİA THE WEBSİTE.

Log in and click on the "Submit" link. If you don't have an account, ask someone at the Game Office to create one for you.

5. TAKE YOUR CARDS TO THE GAME OFFİCE TO SEAL THE DEAL.

Once you're done, in order for your Deal to earn you points and appear on the website for the world to appreciate, you need to Seal the Deal by bringing all the cards you used in your Deal to the Game Office where they will be punched.

6. DİSCOVER AND BE DİSCOVERED.

As Deals are completed and processed by the Game Office, they will appear in the Deal Archive. You may rate and comment on anyone's Deals, including your own. Commenting will earn you a small amount of points, as will any participation in the Bullpen. Alumni, faculty, and other special visitors will view and comment on your work.

Points will be tracked on the Leaderboard in a variety of dimensions, from total points, to most points in particular categories or demographics. Weekly and overall points leaders will receive special interactions as the game proceeds. And by special, we mean special.

A NOTE ABOUT THE BACKS OF CARDS

On the back of every card is a collectible item that relates to the history of cinema, art, media, and communications. Each card is a member of a set, typically containing 5 or 6 different cards. If you manage to collect a full set of collectibles, you may bring them into the Game Office and have them "punched out" for the total unpunched point value of all the cards in the set.

DENNO COIL

Anime 1/5

An anime television series depicting a near future where semi-immersive augmented reality (AR) technology has just begun to enter the mainstream.

VALVE

Game Studios 4/5

A video game development and digital distribution company based in Bellevue, Washington. Valve became famous for its crically acclaimed Half-Life series and its distribution network, Steam.

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE

Drama II 3/4

花樣年華

A man and a woman in neighboring Hong Kong apartments form a bond when they both suspect their spouses of extra-marital activities.

RICKROLLING

Memes 5/6

Involves tricking people into clicking a link to a music video for the 1987 Rick Astley song "Never Gonna Give You Up". The URL is often masked for comedic effect.

BRAID

Influential Games II 5/5

This existential videogame ponders the relationship between free will, desire, and time.

BRENDA BRATHWAITE

Game Designers 1/7

Brenda Brathwaite is a 30 year veteran of the game industry, with credits including the classic role-playing game, Wizardry, and the art game, Train.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

Classic Games II 3/5

This seminal franchise follows the hero, Link, through a variety of fantasy quests involving solving puzzles and exploring dungeons.

SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE

Texts II 1/5

The Society of the Spectacle is a 1967 work of philosophy and critical theory by Guy Debord. The book traces the development of a modern society in which authentic social life has been replaced with its representation.

VIDEODROME

Science Fiction 5/5

Videodrome is a 1983 film written and directed by David Cronenberg. The film follows the CEO of a small cable station who stumbles upon a broadcast signal featuring extreme violence and torture.

BE PREPARED FOR SURPRİSES

INTRODUCTION

Reality is a collaborative media-making game for 10 or more players. It is not a single-sitting game, but rather a long-term experience. Depending on how you want to run it, a "season" of Reality can last anywhere from a few weeks to a few months or longer. It is not a game like Monopoly or Senet or Tag or Mario Kart. If anything, it's more like a miniature sporting league, where the sport involves media-making, socializing, strategy, and team-building, and where the teams are impermanent, forming and dissolving on a project-by-project basis.

INTRODUCTION

This game is about more than just making stuff. It's about collaboration, knowledge sharing, team-building, and growing local culture through creative play. Making this happen is a non-trivial challenge. This book will explain how to set up, run, and evolve your own version of Reality.
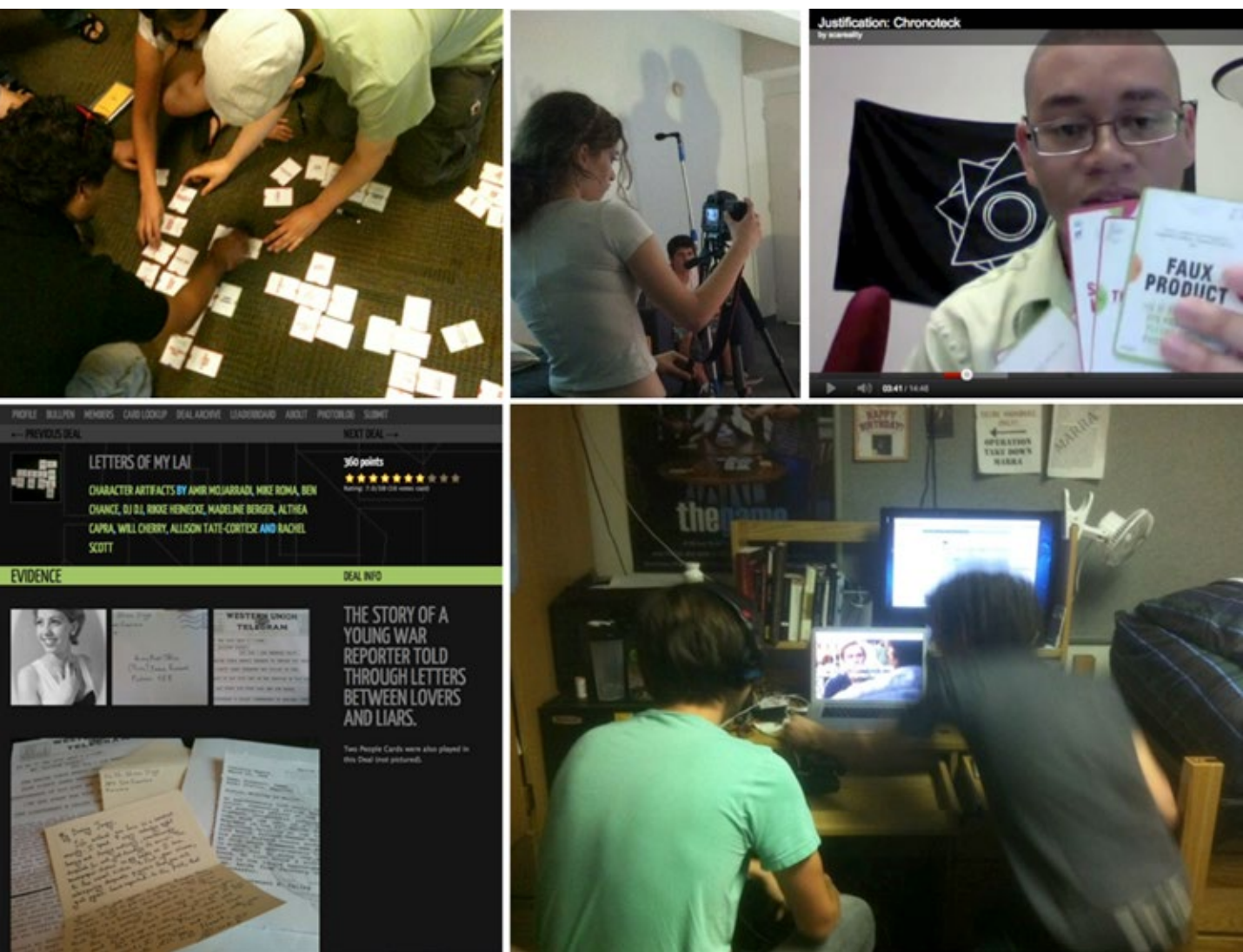
WHAT IT IS...AND WHY

Reality is a secret "underground" game designed to be played as an optional and unofficial activity at institutions such as universities and high schools. It is never openly advertised via official institutional communications. Players must find out about it organically through word of mouth or by piecing together clues left around the school or on the Web.

With persistence, players will eventually discover the hidden Game Office, where they will be inducted into the game, signed up for the website, asked to swear an Oath of creative fearlessness to the Reality Committee, and given a packet of 10 assorted game cards. These cards can be combined with each other or with other players' cards to create a "Deal" - a unique creative prompt (there are over 50 million potential combinations) that can be used to seed the production of some kind of media artifact such as a short film or a game or a "happening" or a website.

By producing and documenting these media artifacts and submitting them to the game's website (working alone or in self-assembled teams), players earn points on a weekly leaderboard.

As players cross various point thresholds, they unlock time-sensitive trailheads leading to special experiences and encounters, usually involving meeting interesting alumni and industry professionals in offbeat or otherwise unexpected locations.

All the projects created through the play of the game are shared with the world via the game's website, which also serves as a hub for player-to-player communications, player-

driven rating and ranking of projects, and interactions with Game Runners.

The whole experience is framed by the fictional Reality Committee - which is, in fact, a real committee. By running the game, you will become a member of this committee, and will be entitled to attend meetings in its inner sanctum.

The purpose of the game is to increase peer discovery, deepen students' understanding of and experience with a wide range of media-making practices, and open new channels for experimentation and interdisciplinary collaboration.

In Reality, the core media-making game serves as a means of bringing about personally-relevant social interactions. While the many wonderful creative projects produced by the students constitute an impressive outcome on their own, the most important objective and most lasting outcome of Reality can be described in terms of the way that the game provides a channel through which players can connect with one another and generate social arrangements centered on the discussion and practice of media-making.

Because the game is played in the lived environment of its players, and because its procedures involve taking real actions that necessarily have impacts on the social environment independent of the game, these arrangements emerge not as second-order "side-effects" of game play, but rather as fundamental components of the activity.

You can find out more about the mandates and design thinking underlying the game in the Interviews section at the end of this manual.

THE DİRECTOR

To run the game, you'll need at least one player to take on the role of the Director. Unlike the rest of the players, this player works behind the scenes to frame the experience, adjudicate disputes, and coordinate events. From one perspective, this player is like the commissioner of a sporting league; from another, they are like the Wizard of Oz; from a third, they are the dungeon master.

You cannot play Reality without a Director.

This book assumes that you are that person.

You are creative and more than a little subversive. You are playful. You enjoy a good practical joke. You are good with social media. You are a dabbler, a tinkerer, and perhaps even a dilettante. You're good with people. You can improvise as well as you can plan. You are optimistic about humanity's chances, but know that it's always going to be a nail-biter. You are an agent of change.

This game succeeds or fails in large part because of you. **You are the alpha player.** You set the tone and adjust it when it needs adjusting. If it works, the game becomes an improvised dance among those who are playing. But never forget: you are not a choreographer. Rather, you are a muse.

GAME RUNNERS

As Director, you are responsible for running the game. But you do not need to bear this burden alone. You will want to assemble a small team of Game Runners to act as your agents and assist you with the day-to-day operations of the game. Game Runners should be smart, friendly, and as embedded as possible in your player community. We recommend having at least one primary (or "Lead") Game Runner, supported by two or three Assistant Game Runners.

We have had varying sizes of Game Runner teams over the years. In Season Two of the game at the USC School of Cinematic arts, five sophomore volunteers who had played the game in Season One rotated as Game Office Runners, keeping the office open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10am to 4pm.

TİME REQUİREMENTS FOR DİRECTORS AND GAME RUNNERS

As Director, expect to be very busy during the preparation and launch of the game, and moderately busy during its actual run. In our experience, being the Director averages out to around 20 hours of work per week, depending on the abilities of your Lead Game Runner.

Lead Game Runners can expect to work for approximately 10-20 hours per week. Assistant Game Runners can have extremely variable hours, working anywhere from 2 to 20 hours per week, depending on availability.

CORE RESPONSİBİLİTİES

Together, you and your team will:

ADMİNİSTRATE CARDS, WEBSİTE, AND GAME OFFİCE

This is a hybrid digital-analog game. As such, it has both physical and virtual components that need to be set up and maintained. To be able to run the game, you will need to print game cards, install the game website, and learn how to conduct day-to-day administrative tasks both on the website and in the Game Office.

As Director, you will likely want to delegate many of these responsibilities to your Game Runners and/or other collaborators at your institution. However, make sure to always keep a close eye on everything that is going on in the game. Elements such as game cards, the website, and the Game Office are primary contact points. Don't risk breaking the experience by overlooking sloppy copy writing on a card, a technical glitch on the website, or a rude game runnner in the Game Office. As with any work of experience design, the moment your players cease to feel like they're in capable hands is the moment they will walk away.

FRAME THE EXPERİENCE

As Director, one of your chief responsibilities is impression management. You will need to carefully frame the way that players discover, enter into, and inhabit the game. Every direct or indirect communication you have with players influences the way they think about and engage with the game, you, and each other. In some ways, simply being true to the core of the game will be your best guide in this framing process. At its heart, this game is a community-building game that provides a playful structure for people to experiment with creativity, build friendships and partnerships, perform and evolve personal identity, and develop media-making skills. Odds are if you are considering running this game, your players already want to do many or all of those things. This game provides them with a context within which to do so.

But be wary of being too literal. Simply saying, "Hey everyone, come be creative and playful and make friends and learn stuff!" will come off as clumsy and pedantic and will alienate your players. The best way to invite people to play is to do so playfully. Don't spell it all out—in fact, do the opposite. Inject poetry and play into every aspect of your role as Director, and your players will respond in kind.

PLAN EVENTS

At various times in the game, you will need to orchestrate special events such as encounters with mentors, puzzle quests, and exhibitions of work created during gameplay. These events can vary in complexity depending on the time and resources you have at your disposal. Your team should expect to plan at least one or two events per week on average.

Events serve multiple purposes. Some events, especially during the launch phase of the game, will function as "rabbit holes," providing ways for new players to discover and enter into the experience. Other events will reward attentive players with opportunities to collect rare and bonus game cards that provide an edge in the game. A third kind of event creates the occasion for encounters with mentors from both within and beyond your institution. In many cases, you will want to make events serve multiple purposes. For example, you might create a mysterious puzzle that both draws in new players and leads existing players to an offbeat encounter with a visiting mentor.

REFEREE THE GAME RULES

You are the representative of the Reality Committee. You have been vested with the power to interpret, make, and break the rules of the game. With this power comes responsibility. The players will look to you to arbitrate disputes and deliver the final word on ambiguous situations. Do not let

them down. Make sure every voice is heard. Be prepared to explain your rulings.

The majority of the rules of this game are encoded in the mechanics of the card game and the procedures of submitting and Justifying Deals. These mechanics and procedures are relatively straightforward. However, it is inevitable that your players will discover gray (or, if you're in the Commonwealth, grey) areas. Once the game gets underway, there will be various unpredictable attempts to exploit the rules. This is a natural (and often rather exciting) part of any game. Do not worry if

and when this happens. If your players are trying to find loopholes that allow them to get ahead, you're doing it right — this means they've invested in the experience and are playing hard.

If in doubt, you may consult the Reality Committee on a decision, via the forums at realitycommittee. org.

HOW TO READ THIS MANUAL

As Director, you will have to do a fair amount of preparation before the game launches in order to gather together game materials (such as cards, the Game Office, and the website) and personnel (such as your team of Game Runners, and alumni and faculty mentors). This process is critical, but ultimately, it is a means to an end.

Since your objective is to create an amazing experience for your players, we have organized this manual in a way that reflects the flow of the player experience, beginning with a description of the Launch process. By reading this book straight through, you will get a sense of the arc of the game. You can then set about making it happen by reading the Preparation section at the end.

(Of course, you may read this book in any order you like.)
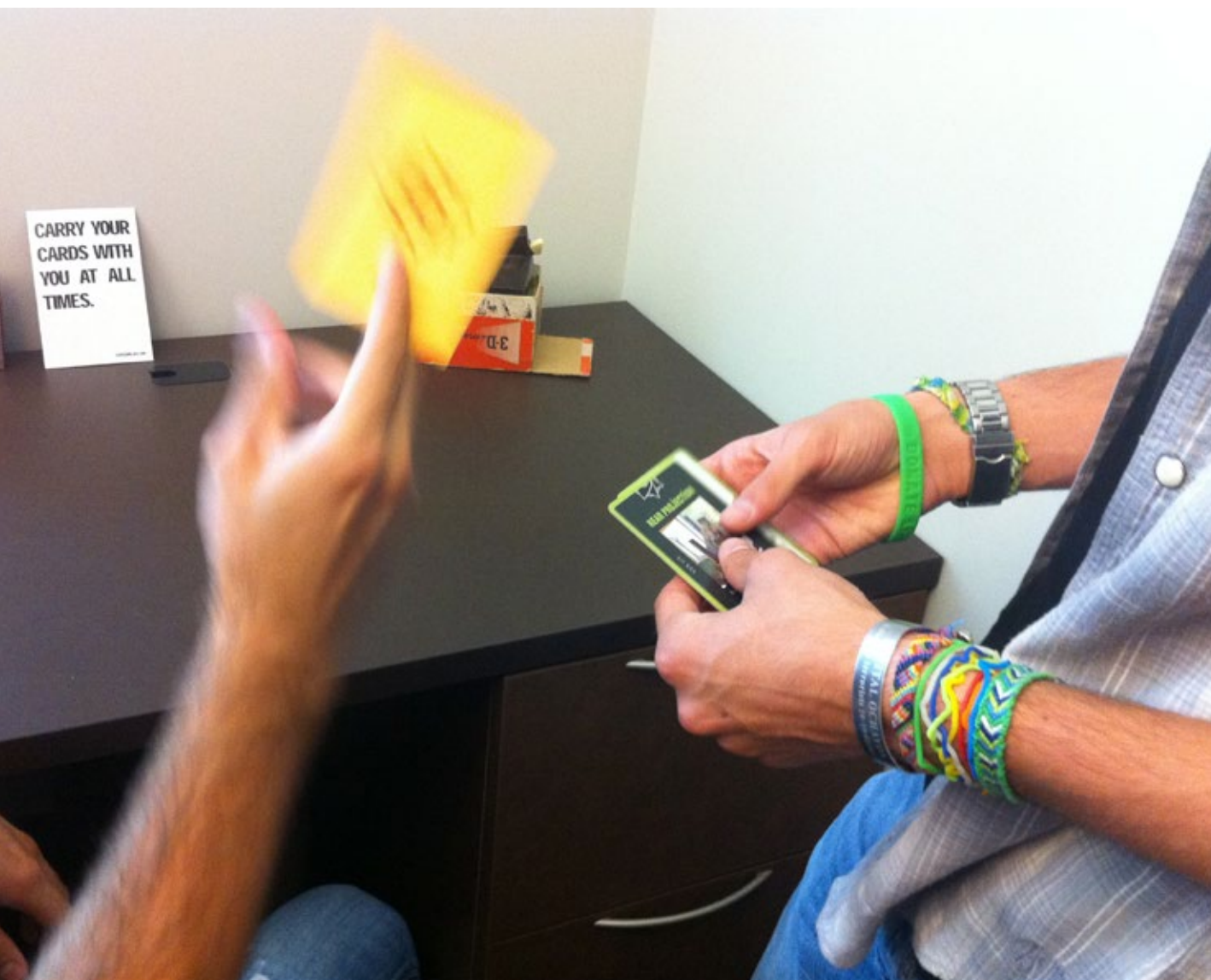
LAUNCHİNG THE GAME

Wherein you summon your players using mystery, stealth, and other dark arts...

For this game to work, you'll need to keep its existence a secret. For players, the price of entry is being attentive enough to their surroundings to notice that something is going on just beneath the surface. This is a game that takes energy to play, and players need to come to it on their own terms. It isn't for everyone, but those who it is for will find it. If you are working out of an educational institution, you may be tempted to make the game compulsory, either in part or in full. You must resist that temptation.

Opposite: A clue hangs from a magnet clipped to a glowing LED.

LAUNCHİNG THE GAME

Once website, personnel, cards, and Game Office are in place (see "Preparation"), you are ready to launch the game. The easiest way to do this would be to simply send a friendly email to all your potential players that contains information about how, where, and when to join up, along with an description of the kinds of experiences they are likely to have while playing. **DO NOT LAUNCH THE GAME THIS WAY.**

You must think of the launch as a *part* of the game, rather than just a promotion for it. The more excitement and buzz you can create up front, the more successful the game will be. Telling everyone exactly what's going on is a surefire way to deflate interest. Once a thing is known, why bother investigating further?

THE LAUNCH CAMPAİGN

Think of your launch as a stealth marketing campaign. By creating something that is indirect, information-limited, and opaque in origin, you create an object of interest — something that is out of the ordinary and worthy of exploration.

Launching the game is one of the most interesting challenges you will face as Director. How you get your players to want to know more about Reality is going to be something you will largely have to figure out on your own. Every institution and environment will present its own problems and opportunities related to launching the game. Be creative.

If you have already run Reality, chances are a lot of your potential players are going to know what it is. This is good news, because it means that a lot of the buzz you'll need to get things going has already been generated.

That said, a big part of the allure of this game, even for players who already know something about it, is that it implies the existence of a secret layer. There is always more to know. Just because one knows about the Bavarian Illuminati does not mean that one knows all there is to know about the Bavarian Illuminati.

This is what we might call "The Wizard of Oz Effect". By putting up a curtain behind which you and your co-conspirators can hide, you activate the imaginations of your potential players. So long as there is always a question about what is behind the proverbial curtain, your players will be inspired to explore.

Of course, there's the curtain you establish, and then there's the curtain that will always be there. We reserve the right to keep our own secrets, even from you.

RC%15 :: 19A9EE

A SAMPLE LAUNCH CAMPAİGN

If you're having trouble imagining what your launch campaign will look like, you can use the following sample campaign as a starting point. One way to understand how this campaign works is to think of it as a kind of jigsaw puzzle. In the early stages of the campaign, you will distribute unconnected pieces of the puzzle, which potential players may find but will not be able to fit together. By the end of the campaign, your potential players should be able to put together enough of the puzzle to find the Game Office.

But remember: never give them the whole picture. At every stage of the game, from the launch campaign to the wrap party, you want to imply that there is more to discover — because there always is.

PRE-CAMPAİGN

Brief your Co-Conspirators

Reach out to staff, faculty, and anyone else who will know about the game before it is launched. Enlist them as co-conspirators. Give them a simple and easy-to-remember way to respond if a potential player asks them about the game. The gist of this response should be something like: "I don't know what you're talking about. All I can say is, 'carry your cards with you at all times'." Explain to your co-conspirators that the purpose of this enigmatic response is to establish an ambience of mystery surrounding the game. Even for those potential players who already know about the game, little touches like this can set their imaginations spinning.

Set up "sockpuppets" and other confederates

We recommend having several "plants" in your potential player population. If your potential players are using social media, you can quickly set up some fake accounts. Make these accounts as believable as possible, such that they appear to belong to other typical potential players. As you go through the launch campaign, you will be able to use these "sockpuppets" to gently guide new players toward discovering the game. Keep it subtle.

TWO WEEKS BEFORE LAUNCH DAY

Enigmatic Communiques

If you have access to the physical or email addresses of your potential players, send them at least one enigmatic communique approximately two weeks prior to launch.

This communique should not be branded in any way whatsoever, and should not come from a recognizable source (i.e., it should not be immediately traceable back to any official element of your institution).

Included in this communique should be some kind of oblique reference to the game and/or the Reality Committee (which you may abbreviate to R.C. for added ambiguity). The purpose of this communique is to activate the curiosity of your potential players, and to get them asking questions.

For the communique, we recommend mailing your potential players a postcard with no return address. On one side of the postcard, print an unsual image from the history of your institution — preferably something that has sinister or bizarre overtones. On the other side of the postcard, simply print, "CARRY YOUR CARDS

WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES" in block letters.

If you want to really amp up the curiosity here, you may also make a website that contains a countdown timer that ends on your launch day — and no further information. Put the link to that website in tiny letters in one corner of the postcard.

ONE WEEK BEFORE LAUNCH DAY

Mystery Artifacts

Identify physical and virtual spaces where your players are likely to be in the week before your launch, then leave mysterious artifacts in those spaces that obliquely reference the game. The goal of this phase of the launch campaign should be to raise awareness that something unusual is going on while not completely spelling out what exactly that is. This is the perfect time to begin to employ some of the game's iconography, such as the logo. By raising awareness of the logo, you create a visual cue for potential players that will come in handy later.

We have found that there are benefits to be had from making both public and personal artifacts.

Public Artifacts

For public artifacts, we recommend printing a full-size black pirate flag with the game logo in place of the skull and crossbones. Simply

CARRY YOUR CARDS WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES.

hanging this flag in a prominent place with no further explanation will have the effect of intriguing potential players, and will pay off later when they recognize the logo on the game cards and website.

Personal Artifacts

For personal artifacts, we recommend finding ways to cleverly deliver a clue about the existence of the game via a tangible artifact that potential players can keep (or eat).

One (rather specific) way to do this is to print custom fortune cookies and surruptitiously plant the cookies in places where your potential players are likely to eat (such as, for example, inside lunch boxes served at a student orientation event). Print two or three different kinds of messages in the cookies, such that potential players can

assemble a website URL or email address if they combine the messages. This kind of puzzle can really increase the buzz among potential players, and can lead to...

Direct Communications With Interested Potential Players

If you use your mystery artifacts to lead potential players to a website or email address, you may be able to find out who exactly is responding to your clues. For example, you may create a simple web page that, without further explanation, asks visitors to enter their email address into a form. Depending on how you reached out to your players, they may or may not trust the website enough to leave their email address. But if they do, and you capture their address, you can now communicate with them directly.

Direct communications can be a very powerful way of seeding the buzz at the outset of the game. Any potential player

who has jumped through the hoops you've set up so far is likely what we could call a "lead player". These gregarious players will not only aggressively engage with your communications: they will also spread the word about the game and engage the interest of others. By identifying and reaching out to lead players early, you can speed up the spread of knowledge about the game.

THE WEEKEND BEFORE LAUNCH DAY

Calls to action involving spreadable media

The weekend before you launch the game is crucial. You want your potential players to show up on Launch Day wanting to know more about what's going on. You don't want to spoil the mystery just yet, but you need to hammer home that there is, indeed, a mystery afoot. By now, you've already done a fair bit of "top down" promotions of this mystery. The next step is to engage your potential players in spreading news of the mystery themselves.

The way you structure this call to action will be determined by the circumstances of your environment. One approach that worked for us was to send our potential players an email saying that they would be "rewarded" should they post an image containing our logo (which we attached to the email) to the Facebook group for the incoming freshmen class (as these were our potential players). This email was itself a bit of a puzzle: rather than directly making this offer, we sent out a very enigmatic message saying something to the effect of "we look forward to working with you;" however, in the footer of the email, we added a string of text encoded using a Caesar Cypher (a simple rotating letter cypher). By decoding this text, potential players

discovered the (entirely nonspecific) offer of reward. Within a few hours, image mashups containing the game logo began to appear in the Facebook group. For those students who did not already know something was going on, such knowledge was now increasingly difficult to escape. Most importantly, it was no longer only us responsible for spreading the meme of the game: the players themselves

were now doing a significant share of that work.

Calls to action in physical space

In addition to deploying a spreadable media call to action, you will want to give your potential players an objective to pursue in physical space during the first week of the

game. This objective should ultimately lead them to the Game Office. For this purpose, we installed a physical flag bearing the game logo in the courtyard of our institution. The flag would appear at semi-random intervals over the course of the first week or so of the game. On the weekend before Launch Day, we posted a cryptic message about the flag (the "What to do when you see the flag" advisory) using one of our Facebook sockpuppets, who claimed that she had been sent it the night before. The message instructed players to inspect the area around the flag should they see it flying. This message spread through the potential player population, setting up expectations and goals which carried over into Launch Day.

LAUNCH DAY

Bring it all together

Everything prior to Launch Day is setup: now you start to pay things off and lead players into the game proper. For example, players who followed the instructions on the Flag Advisory described above eventually found an old Super-8 camera we left near the flag. Inside the camera was a puzzle which, when solved, provided directions to the Game Office (and a password to say to get in). Once these players knew of the Game Office location, it was only a matter of time before this knowledge spread.

Maintain the mystery

Remember to never give it all away. Even if you don't have more mystery to deliver, imply that you do.

FIRST WEEK OF PLAY

Make a splash

Run a tight ship for your first week of play. Make your Serendipitous Encounters and Reward Experiences (see "Running the Game") extra special to ramp up the buzz. The experiences your initial players have, and the kinds of things they make while playing, are going to shape the reputation of the game. If things get off to a bad start, the wrong kind of rumors will spread.

Never panic

Especially if it is your first season, it is entirely possible that only two or three players will join the game during the first few days. If this happens, don't worry. Always act as if things are going completely according to plan. Exude confidence and your players will feel like they're in good hands.

LAUNCH CHECKLIST

- ¤ Adopt a Wizard of Oz mindset: *you are the Wizard*
- ¤ Brief your co-conspirators
- ¤ Set up "sockpuppets"
- ¤ Create enigmatic communique
- ¤ Deliver enigmatic communique
- ¤ Create mystery artifacts
- ¤ Embed or deliver mystery artifacts
- ¤ Directly communicate with interested potential players
- ¤ Create spreadable media call to action
- ¤ Deploy spreadable media call to action
- ¤ Set up physical call to action
- ¤ Pay off physical call to action
- ¤ Make the first week rock
- ¤ Maintain a Sphinx-like aura

RUNNİNG THE GAME

Once the game is rolling, your players will determine where it goes. You and your team are there to make sure it doesn't spin out of control. You are the commissioner of this league, and your Game Runners are its referees. Your role is to facilitate the play of the game. Wherever possible, you will want to step out of the way of your players and let them shape the experience. But make no mistake: you set the tone. You and your team must carefully monitor the game as it unfolds and intervene in targeted ways to help it along. This is how *you* play the game.

RUNNİNG THE GAME

Once Reality is launched, it proceeds in weekly cycles. In this regard, it is again useful to think of the game as a kind of sport. Each week is a like a single game in a season. Weekly winners are declared at the end of each week based on points and your judgement, after which the Leaderboard resets, setting the stage for a new week. This structure ensures that players who join the game as a whole early on in the season don't have an unfair advantage on a week-to-week basis.

A Note About the Reality Engine (Website)

Up to date instructions on how to manage the website are included with the Reality Engine software package.

CORE PROCEDURES

Because this game is a mixture of what designers call *asynchronous* and *synchronous multiplay*, the order in which you do some things will change from week to week, while other procedures will occur at fixed times. This section describes all the main procedures you and your team are responsible for.

SİGN UP NEW PLAYERS

As players hear about the game, they will come to the Game Office during the operating hours you specify on the About page of your website. When they come in, you will need to give them a starter pack of cards and sign them up for the website.

Each card packet received by a new player should contain a random selection of:

- 1 orange People Card (with label)
- 1 Instruction Card
- 2 green Maker Cards
- 3 0-out pink Property Cards
- 1 1-out pink Property Card
- 1 2-out pink Property Card
- 1 3-out pink Property Card OR 1 blue Special Card
- **TOTAL: 10 cards/packet**

Please see "Card Packets" in the "Preparation" section for more about starter packs.

The signup ceremony

We recommend making something of a ceremony out of giving your players their

starter packs. One way to do this is to prepare starter packs that do not have green Maker cards, and to let players have some degree of choice in which Maker cards they begin the game with. When a player comes in to sign up, lay out 10 random Maker cards, 5 face-down, and 5 face-up. Tell the player that they may choose one of the face-down cards, and one of the face-up cards. Once they have made their choice, put the cards they chose into their packet.

Website accounts

After you have given your new player their starter pack, ask them for their name and email address. Write this information down somewhere where you won't be lost. Inform the new player that they will receive a login for the website in an email later that day.

Once things have calmed down in the Game Office and you have a few spare moments, create a new Player user account on the website and check the "send email notification to this user" checkbox. This will create an account for the player, enabling them to login to the website, submit Deals, and post status updates/comments. Further information on how to do this is included with the documentation for the Reality Engine software.

Note: Always maintain a posture of mystery when dealing with new players.

ACCEPT DEAL SUBMİSSİONS

As they complete Deals, players will submit them through the website. They may do this at any time of day or night. Once a Deal is submitted, admins will receive notifications on the website dashboard and via email.

These notifications are just to let you know that a Deal has come in, so don't worry: you don't need to do anything at the time of submission.

In addition to the creative project itself, a complete Deal submission includes information about the cards used, the collaborators involved, and the time of submission.

The submission process is completely automated. As Director, you get to experience the sublime pleasure of seeing new and unpredictable creative projects before anyone else.

PROCESS DEALS

Once a player or group of players has submitted a Deal, they must come into the Game Office to have their cards photographed and punched, and to conduct a Justification, before the Deal will be published to the site. Only then will the point value of the project be added to the players' profiles.

Overview

With luck, you and your team will be processing a lot of Deals over the next few months. In our experience, you can expect to process anywhere from 5 to 30 (or more) Deals per week, depending on how many players you have and where you are in your game's season.

Processing a Deal is a multi-step process that begins when a player/player group comes into the Game Office to Justify a Deal. The steps are:

- **Take a picture of the card layout used**
- **Enter point values for the Deal on the website**
- **Add any modifiers or powerups**
- **Punch each card used in the Deal**
- **Record the Justification on YouTube**
- **Add card layout image and Justification link to the Deal**
- **Publish the Deal**

While this may seem like a lot, in practice, processing a Deal takes only a few minutes, depending on how long your players take to Justify it.

Take a picture of the cards used

When a player or group of players comes into the Game Office to process a Deal, the first thing you should do is ask them to lay out all the cards they used in their Deal on the floor or a table. Dark surfaces are best.

Once the cards are laid out, take a photo of them with your smartphone/tablet or a digital camera. If necessary, transfer the saved image onto the device you are using to administrate the website.

Enter point values

On the admin interface of the website, navigate to the pending Deal that is being processed. Scroll down to the "Cards" section of the Deal's admin page and select the appropriate point value for each card used. This value is the highest remaining point value on the card. For example, if a card has one hole punch and the remaining point circles are "25" and "10", select the "25" radio button.

Add modifiers and powerups

You may also apply any powerups or bonuses associated with the card through the website interface. Some cards have additional powerups/modifiers; these will be selectable alongside the standard point values. You may also manually add powerup/modifier point bonuses using the "Total Points and Bonuses" fields.

The system will automatically tabulate the total points value of the Deal based on your input. When you are done entering points information and powerups/modifiers, make sure to save (not publish) your changes to the Deal.

Punch cards

Every time a card is used in a Deal, use a single hole-punch to punch out the highest remaining point value on the card. If the card is fully "punched out," you do not have to punch it further. Punched-out cards can be used in Deals, but do not count for any points (unless there is an applicable powerup or bonus).

The best workflow for punching cards is to do it while you are entering their point values into the website.

Record the Justification

Once you have punched the cards, give them back to the player(s) and ask them to sit down in front of your Justification webcam. Our setup for this consists of a coffee table, a laptop, and several chairs. The player(s) must now record their Justification, explaining how each card is used in the project they have just submitted.

We recommend recording directly to YouTube for the Justification. This saves you the step of uploading the recording later. At the time of this writing, you can easily do this by logging into your YouTube account and navigating to http://youtube.com/my_webcam.

It is not your role to judge the merits of the Justification: you are simply there to record it. If your players want to stretch the meaning of cards in order to fit more of them into their Deal, so be it. They will pay a social price if they come off as exploitative, and this is how the game "enforces" Justifications. That said, on occassion you will encounter a Justification that is patently absurd. You must use your own judgment to determine what to do in such situations. If you feel that a Justification is so sketchy that it will make other players angry or will otherwise undermine the spirit of the game, you should intervene. For edge cases, accept the Justification and see how the community reacts. If there is an outcry, you can intervene after the fact on behalf of the Reality Committee.

In the two years the game has run at the USC School of Cinematic Arts, over 300 Deals have been Justified. Only one has been rejected by the Reality Committee.

Upload Card Image and Paste Justification YouTube Link

Either immediately after accepting the Justification or later in the day, upload the picture you took of the card layout for the Deal to the Deal post on the website. Paste the YouTube link to the Justification, and you are officially done!

Publish the Deal

This is the final step of processing a Deal. Click the big blue "Publish" button and the Deal will now appear on the website. This action will also add the full point value of the Deal to each player involved in the Deal.

Additional information about publishing and managing Deals can be found in the documentation that accompanies the Reality Engine software.

SELECT WEEKLY WİNNERS AND SET UP REWARD EXPERİENCES

Reward experiences are up close and personal encounters with alumni and other mentors. Players receive reward experiences for being one of the weekly winners of the game. These experiences can take place anywhere the mentor wants them to: in their home, at a museum, at their workplace, at a restaurant, in a park, by the side of the road, in a sewer tunnel (not recommended), or anywhere else.

The best way to set up these kinds of player-mentor meetups is to let the mentors themselves decide on what kind of experiences they want to have with your players. Your role must be to simply facilitate the meeting.

Reward experiences, like everything in this game, should belong to the players. **Do not chaperone them or otherwise undermine the degree to which the experience feels like something from "real life".** If you're running the game at an educational institution, you can be sure that your players have already had it up to here with being chaperoned and supervised. This is for them: let them own it.

Identify the winners

At the end of each week (typically Sunday at midnight, although you may change this time through the website to suit your environment), you need to identify several players who will be declared the winners of that week. You will then send these players on reward experiences, where they will do something special, preferably with an alumni mentor, that other players will not get to do.

We recommend sending no more than 5 players on each reward experience. That means selecting 5 winners. To do this, you will want to make sure to strike the right balance between "winning by points" and "winning on the merits".

Winners by points, winners by merit

Our default practice is to declare the top 3 points-earners in a given week (listed on the Weekly Leaderboard on the website) as winners, along with 2 additional players who produced outstanding work that week (these are the "winners-by-merit" for the week, in the judgement of you and your team). Assigning winners this way creates two pathways to winning, and opens up opportunities for you and your team to "feature" interesting work.

Selecting the winners-by-merit each week is an entirely subjective process. As Director, you and/or someone on your team will be aware of all the projects submitted on a given week. The good ones will stand out. Trust your instincts. You may also create a "Weekly Digest" of outstanding Deals to share with colleagues outside of your team in order to gather their input.

Often, the best projects in a given week will be the result of large collaborations. However, to recognize an outstanding project made by a group with a weekly winner slot, you must select only one of its creators as you should never send more than 5 total players on a reward experience. The best way to decide which player in a given group should receive a winner-by-merit slot is to simply send a message to all the players in that group, and ask them to decide among themselves who should go on the reward experience.

Inform the winners

Once the week is over and you know who your winners are, you will need to direct them to the time and location of their reward experience.

To do this, send your 5 winners a message using the messaging system on the website. In the message, state the time and location that the players need to meet at. Make sure to send the message not as you, whatever your name is, but as the Reality Committee.

Always lean on the fiction of the Reality Committee. It will serve you well.

Do not tell the winners who they will be meeting. Keep the information as sketchy as possible. You want your winners to be guessing as to where they are going, what they will be doing, and who they will be meeting, right up until the moment that they arrive. The excitement this generates will feed back into the game as a whole, kicking up the buzz.

Keep it regular

We recommend having a more or less fixed time in the week when reward experiences take place. Friday evenings and weekends often work best for both players and mentors.

A sample reward experience

The first group of winners selected in the initial run of the game were messaged instructions from the Reality Committee. These instructions directed them to appear at a certain street corner at 5pm on a Friday. Once there, the 5 winners had no idea what to do. This was our intention. We wanted them to feel a thrill at the adventure of it all.

A few minutes after the winners arrived at the street corner, an oud player in traditional garb appeared and led them to a waiting car. The Reality Committee logo in the car window signaled that the vehicle was part of the experience. The winners entered the car (along with the oud player) and rode across town. The driver provided no indication of where they were going.

Eventually, the car arrived at an esoteric independent museum. The driver informed the winners that they were to go inside and investigate an exhibit about bees. The winners went inside and found the exhibit. Two alumni mentors wearing masquerade ball masks (Jenova Chen and Kellee Santiago, of *Journey* fame) were there, waiting for them. Conversation ensued...

Not every reward experience needs to be this elaborate, but you should work with your mentors to make each as special as possible. The more intriguing these experiences are, the more buzz they will create, and the more players you will have.

INJECT NEW CARDS INTO THE SYSTEM

Because starter packs only contain 10 cards, and because cards diminish in value through hole-punching each time they are used, your players are going to have to find ways to collect new cards if they want to keep pace in the game. The first way they will try to do this is to trade and share cards with other players.

But depending exclusively on trading and sharing will not ensure that the game continues. After all, cards are a finite resource in this system. As Director, you must replenish this resource by providing ways for players to get new cards.

There are two ways to do this:

Points Thresholds

Using the website, you can set player awards and ranks to be automatically triggered whenever a player crosses a certain points threshold. Once a player receives one of these awards (which will appear on their website profile), they may come into the Game Office to collect one or more "bonus cards".

As Director, you will set what the points thresholds are for the receipt of bonus cards. We recommend starting with an easily-met threshold (say, 500 points), and working up from there. At each threshold, increase the number of cards that a player will receive for crossing the threshold. For example:

- **500 points - 1 card**
- **1000 points - 3 cards**
- **2500 points - 5 cards**
- **5000 points - 10 cards**

We recommend never exceeding a 10 card bonus. Depending on how engaged your players are, you may need to set thresholds up to 100,000 points or more.

We have found that it can be enjoyable for all concerned to make the awarding of cards into something of a game in and of itself. For example, for a 3 card award, we lay out 3 random Property cards, with the collectible sides facing up. We then instruct the player who has earned the award that they can have all three if they can guess what is on the other side of two of the cards. The twist is that if they guess wrong, they will not receive any cards at all. We also offer them the option to hedge their bets by just taking one card of their choice. This little game adds nuance

to the awarding of bonus cards for crossing a points threshold. Feel free to make up your own bonus card award games.

Quests

Quests (or "puzzle hunts") are part of what we at the Reality Committee call the "ARG sauce" on top of the "meal" that is the game proper. Reality is not technically an ARG (for it is not really about exploring an *alternate* reality so much as it is about *altering* this reality; it is also much more truly game-like than most things that get called ARGs, which usually don't have rules and fixed mechanics), but it does use some classic ARG techniques to generate buzz and alternative modes of

player engagement. These techniques, which we term Quests, serve the triple purpose of deepening player engagement with the game (or introducing new players to it), extending the narrative scope of the experience, and providing players with a means for acquiring new cards.

We recommend having at least one Quest event per week (preferably taking place in the middle of the week) for the first half of your season. After that, you may scale things back somewhat as the action taking place in the game proper will be creating most of the excitement. However, it is important to keep running Quests because they provide ways to inject new cards into the system, and to alert players to serendipitous encounters (described below).

A Quest is a kind of mission you invite your players to undertake. At the end of the mission is some kind of reward, typically a combination of bonus cards and a serendipitous encounter of some sort. A Quest should reward players for being attentive to their environment and dogged in their determination.

A good Quest has a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning consists of a clue that only the keenly observant will detect, along with some obscure hint as to the promise of reward. The middle part of a Quest is the part where the player have to figure something out. The end is the reward, which can be a cache of cards, an encounter with a visiting mentor, both of those things, or something else that you think is awesome.

You will have to use your imagination to invent Quests relevant to your environment and players. Have fun with it.

We have run Quests at a wide range of complexity levels. A simple Quest we ran early in the second season at USC went like this: one Wednesday morning, we tweeted out a series of images depicting a run-down basement hallway. Since most of our players were Freshmen, it was unlikely that they knew where this hallway was; however, those who noticed the tweets began asking around. Eventually, someone pointed them in the right direction. Once they got to the location depicted in the final image, they found a cache of about 20 game cards, some of which were "rare" blue Special cards.

A slightly more complex Quest example involved a clue we embedded on the game website. We began (again on a Wednesday)

by placing a tiny image of a paper crane in the footer of the website. If players noticed the crane and clicked on it, they went to a special webpage that said, "Oscar-nominated director seeks paper cranes in exchange for conversation," followed by a date, a time, and a picture of a location on campus. If players managed to figure out where the location was, they were treated to a serendipitous encounter with USC alum John Singleton.

The most elaborate Quest we have run recently involved the popular multiplayer adventure video game, Minecraft. To prepare this Quest, our Game Runners spent several days developing an elaborate adventure inside a password-protected Minecraft server. This adventure involved literal questing through a series of tunnels, dungeons, and expansive landscapes populated with monsters. At various stages

in the adventure, players would discover giant Reality cards built into the Minecraft landscape. Instructions stored in chests nearby informed players that they could take screenshots of these cards, print them out, and use them as cards in a Deal. One of the cards was especially rare, as it was wired to explode at the press of a special button. This card was eventually "accidentally" blown up by Professor William Huber, who was lurking in the game, watching the players who were participating in the Quest.

One final note: while Quests are a great way to enhance the experience of lead players (who are the ones who are most likely to be paying close attention to things like your Twitter feed), you may also use them as a way of giving a leg up to players who seem invested in the game but who are having trouble keeping up with the lead players. These players may be shy or geographically dislocated from the core of your player population. To lend them a helping hand, you can give them advance warning of, or an important clue about, a given Quest via direct messages. Use your Quest-giving power wisely.

ARRANGE SERENDİPİTOUS ENCOUNTERS

Serendipitous encounters are impromptu meetups between players and alumni or other mentors at or around your institution. Unlike Reward Experiences, these encounters are open to anyone, and can be scheduled on-the-fly as

mentorship opportunities appear (for example, you might learn that a visitor of interest is coming to your institution to deliver a talk; you could then reach out to that visitor and ask them if they would like to participate in the game). When and where serendipitous encoutnters will occur should change from week to week, and finding out about these events should be something that demands attentiveness from your players.

A typical serendipitous encounter involves an alumnus, faculty member, or other mentor agreeing to simply hang out at a certain location for about an hour. Once you have secured the mentor and set a location, you must then distribute one or more clues to your players, using the website, social media, word of mouth, or other means. Do not make these communications completely straight-forward: rather, make your players have to think and problem solve in order to figure out what is going on. This is as much a part of the fun of these encounters as it is a practical consideration: you don't want 100 people showing up to one of these things, as it will diminish the experience for everyone.

When you brief a serendipitous encounter mentor, tell them that they don't need to

do anything beyond simply chat with any players who show up. Of course, if your mentor is up for doing more, make use of their enthusiasm and let them come up with something inventive. You can also provide mentors with game cards to give to the players who manage to find them.

You should plan on having an average of at least 1 serendipitous encounter every two weeks; the more, the better.

A NOTE ON İMPROVİSATİON

Making this game work requires a lot of on-the-fly decision-making. What we have outlined here is the framework for what you and your team will need to do to keep Reality moving along smoothly. You will inevitably encounter unique circumstances that require some degree of invention. This, to us, is the fun part of running this game. Be bold.

ENDİNG THE GAME

This is where Reality ends. All things come to an end sooner or later. Such is the nature of our strange existence. There is no exception to this rule. The good news, of course, is that every ending is another beginning...

ENDİNG THE GAME

CALL İT A SEASON

You should give your players a clear indication by at least the halfway point of your season as to when the season will end. Once that day is reached, no more Deals will be accepted, and the points on the Leaderboard will be frozen.

Expect a frenzy of activity in the final week or so of play as players rush to get projects submitted.

HOLD A WRAP PARTY

Mark the end of the season with a Wrap Party. Find an interesting location, get together some kind of food and drink, and make sure everyone who played the game in any way feels welcome. You will still want to maintain an air of mystery, of course. One way to do this is to keep the actual location a secret until only a couple of days before the party.

ANNOUNCE OVERALL WİNNERS

At the party, announce the overall winners of the season. Consult the Overall Leaderboard to identify the top points earners. The top 3 players will be going on the final reward experience.

In addition to winners-by-points, you will want to select 2 more players to go on the final reward experience. These winners will be chosen by you and your team, based on your own judgement.

AWARD MEDALS OF HONOR

Alongside the overall winners, you will want to recognize the best projects created throughout the season. The best way to

do this is to narrow down the projects to a list of about 20 which you can pass by other co-conspirators (such as faculty and alumni). Cut the list down to 10 or so, then make up categories that correspond to each

winning project. To make the categories seem pre-planned, you can reverse engineer "nominees" for each category. When you announce the winners, have the entire

group responsible for the project come up to accept a medal, trophy, or other object commemorating their achievement.

If you wish to use official Reality Committee medals for this purpose, please contact us via realitycommittee.org and we will connect you with our medal designer.

EAT, DRİNK, AND BE MERRY

Have a blast. You've earned it, and so have your players.

FİNAL REWARD EXPERİENCE

The final reward experience (also known as the "Mega Award Experience") is an amped-up version of the standard reward experience. This is the one where you pull out all the stops. Identify the single most interesting, famous, influential, or inspiring alumnus of your institution and ask them to participate. Send your overall winners to spend some time with that person, and send them in style (within your budgetary limitations, of course). Make the experience last several hours or even a whole day. Make it unforgettable.

The final reward experience does not have to take place immediately after the end of the season. Depending on your star alum's availability, it could take place as long as two months after the end of Reality.

PREPARATİON

The first step in preparing this game is to simply announce with total conviction that you are going to do it. Look in the mirror and make this announcement to yourself. Schedule your Launch Day and Wrap Party and do not waver from that schedule under any circumstances. Do not wait until you have everything listed below lined up in a tidy row before you commit to this project. Your commitment is the most important asset in making Reality happen. Once that is in place, everything else will follow.

PREPARATION

GETTING STARTED

CHOOSE YOUR LAUNCH DAY

Pick a day in the future that will be your Launch Day. We recommend a day that coincides with some kind of natural beginning for your players — the first day of the school year, for example, or the first day back from the winter holidays.

If this is your initial run of Reality, you should start your preparations at least two months prior to your Launch Day. If you have run Reality before, your preparation requirements will likely be less intensive. Either way, the more lead time you give yourself, the more you will be able to customize the experience for your players, and the easier the game will be to manage once it's running.

SET YOUR END POINT

Now is also a good time to choose the day on which your season of Reality will end. On this day, you will hold a "Wrap Party". While it is entirely up to you, we recommend that your season lasts at least 6 weeks. Whatever length you settle on, your season should align with other natural start- and end-points in the lives of your players.

In the university context, we recommend structuring the season to span a single semester (or term). A season of Reality at a semester-based US school will last somewhere in the neighborhood of 120 days.

GET TOGETHER MATERIALS AND PERSONNEL

Reality is designed to place as few demands as possible on the existing operations of your institution. The game does not require extra class time, changes in curriculum, or the procurement of media-making equipment. Players are expected to play the game on their own time, independent of their existing responsibilities, and with only DIY equipment such as smart phones and other kinds of commonly-available media-making gear.

That said, the game simply cannot exist without a set of crucial materials, resources, and personnel. As Director, you are responsible for getting these things together.

GAME OFFICE

You will need a medium-sized office to serve as the Game Office. This needs to be a dedicated space. It will be busy at various times throughout the week as players drop by to sign up for the game, ask questions, Justify Deals, or just hang out. At certain times, the Game Office can be a noisy and hectic environment. Make sure that the surrounding area can tolerate the unruliness you are about to unleash.

The Game Office should be as nondescript as possible. It does not need to be easy to find (indeed, making it a little bit hidden can make it more intriguing to discover), but it should be in a central location relative to where your players work or take classes. It should not be marked with a placard reading "Game Office". If signage is required, substitute the Reality logo or any other mysterious icon in place of text.

The Game Office will need:

- **a stable high-speed internet connection**
- **a computer or tablet with a webcam**
- **storage space for cards and other materials**
- **seating for game runners and players**

- **a desk**
- **basic office supplies, including access to a printer**
- **a standard single hole-puncher**

Optionally, you may wish to get together:

- **decorations reflecting the secret history of your institution**
- **costume components (wigs, hats, masks, etc) for players to wear during Justifications**
- **a black flag bearing the game logo**
- **a small fridge stocked with root beer**

The Game Office needs to be open and staffed by at least one Game Runner and/or the Director for a fixed amount of regular hours each week for the duration of the season.

SCI-FI SU

BULLPEN BELONGS TO YOU

What's new, Samantha?

Posting as: Samantha Lafontaine

All   Updates   New Deals   Comments   Photoblog

(x)

Samantha Lafontaine posted an update right now

Totally postmodern.

Reply   0

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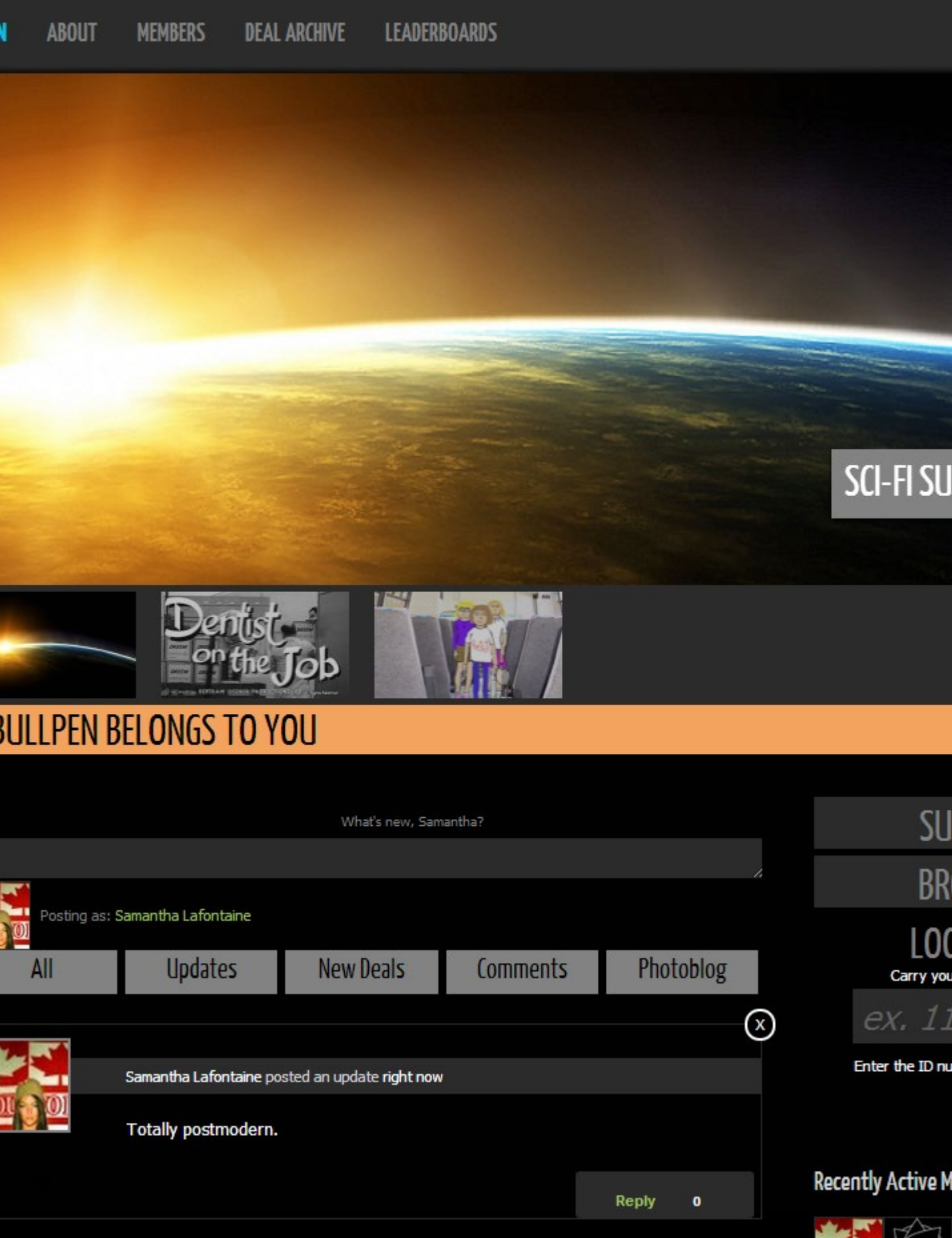
The Reality Committee recommends three six-hour days per week (10:00 - 16:00). Of course, you will have to work within the constraints of the personnel you are able to muster. You can keep the Game Office open 24 hours a day, every day, or just for a couple of hours on Wednesday afternoons. That said, know that your results may vary depending on the schedule you are able to maintain.

WEBSITE

The Reality website provides players with the means to:

- **submit, view, and discuss Deals**
- **socialize**
- **share knowledge**
- **post blog entries**
- **keep track of their progress**

Like any good secret revolutionary network, Reality is a decentralized system. There is no single website to which all players everywhere must sign on. Rather, every instance of Reality is its own customizable website which runs on the Reality Engine, a free open source theme and plugin package for Wordpress, downloadable from realitycommittee.org.

You will need your own installation of the Reality Engine in order to run the game. Any standard (LAMP) server should run the software without a problem. Install Wordpress, then add the Reality Engine theme to your "themes" folder and the Reality Engine plugins to your "plugins" folder. Activate the theme and plugins and your website is ready for configuration.

Basic configuration of the website is a guided process that occurs when you first login as Administrator to a new install. The system is designed to be easily operated by users familiar with Wordpress. Admins savvy with PHP, HTML5, and CSS can more deeply customize the look, feel, and functionality of the system, and can even change the core mechanics of the game if they wish.

In addition to installing the Reality Engine on a server, you will also need to acquire a URL for your version of the game. Your URL should be something evocative and mysterious, or simply "reality-dot-whatever". The URL for the USC version of the game is "reality.usc.edu". Once you have reserved your URL, remember to point it at your Reality Engine installation.

Full instructions for installing and configuring the website are included with Reality Engine software.

CARDS

Cards are the basic unit of play in Reality. You will need to print enough cards such that every player can start the game with a packet of 10 (and can acquire an average of 20 more over the course of the season). You will also need to make sure that every physical card in your deck has a digital version on the website with the same ID number. This process is largely automated, but requires your attention at various stages, as outlined below.

You may customize the cards completely or use our standard deck. All files for printing our standard deck are included with the Reality Engine software.

To get started as quickly as possible:

1. **Import the standard deck spreadsheets and images (included in the download or on the Reality USB key) into your website installation;**

2. **Send the print-ready standard deck card files (also included in the download or on the Reality USB key) to a printing company that produces playing cards, or print them yourself on card stock. Make sure to print enough cards to cover all your potential players (see, "The Deck", below); and,**

3. **Put together enough packets to cover your expected player population.**

Once you have completed these steps, you will be ready to launch the game.

THE DECK

A "deck" for a single season of Reality consists of at least 300 cards of varying types. You may choose to use our standard deck, create a custom deck of your own, or do a combination of the two. Over time, your deck may grow in size should you choose to add new custom cards or expansion packs.

If it is your first season of Reality, we recommend that you begin either by using our standard deck "as is", or by using it as a starting point for your own customizations. This 300-card deck will give you enough cards for 10 players, and covers all facets of media-making.

For every 10 players you expect to participate, you will need to print another copy of the deck. For example, if you are running the game for 200 potential players, you should print the equivalent of at least 20 standard 300-card decks. Always round up. Even if you are running the game for 11 players, you should print 2 decks. This will ensure that there are enough instructions and People cards for your players. It is always better to have extra cards in stock than to run out.

The standard deck includes the following kinds of cards:

INSTRUCTIONS CARDS

HOW TO PLAY

MAKE A DEAL

The object of the game is to make Deals by connecting cards. Cards connect together by matching the colors and arrows on their edges:

A Deal must contain only 1 green card and at least 1 pink. Additional colors/cards can be connected if the connectors allow for it.

Each card is worth the largest point value shown on its face, and the Deal is worth the sum of these values. Each collaborator receives the full point value of the Deal.

Collect more cards and work with other players for better Deals.

Basic quick-start rules for player reference. Each player must receive an instruction card in their initial card packet. There are 10 Instructions cards in the standard deck.

BLANK PEOPLE CARDS

25

EARN 25 POINTS IF THE PERSON NAMED ON THIS CARD COLLABORATES IN THE DEAL.

Every potential player has an orange card bearing their name which a random other player will receive in their initial card packet. You will need to write or print your potential players' names onto labels, then affix these labels to your blank orange cards prior to assembling card packets. There are 10 blank People cards in the standard deck.

MAKER CARDS

Tell a story with a how-to manual. Write what you know or make it up from scratch.

A MANUAL

+10 FOR EVERY 3 DIAGRAMS YOUR MANUAL INCLUDES

35
25
20

#11198
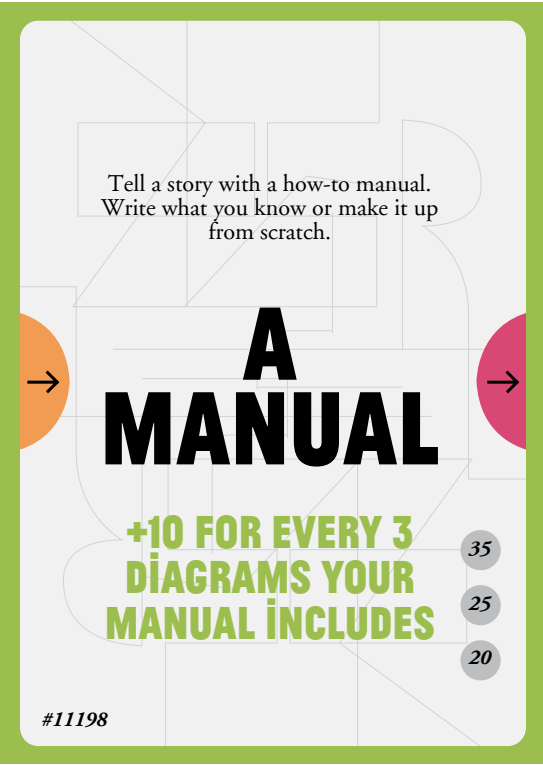
Maker cards specify the kind of media artifact players will create in a given Deal. In the standard deck, these cards span a wide range of media-making practices, from filmmaking and game design to web publishing, music recording, event planning, and more. There are 50 Maker cards in the standard deck.

PROPERTY (PİNK) CARDS

ABOUT
OBSESSİON

35
25
20

#11068

These cards describe themes, archetypes, situations, issues, characters, places, things, and other elements (or "properties") that players can incorporate into their projects. There are four broad categories of pink cards in the game system. These categories are differentiated by the number of outbound connectors present on the cards. Generally speaking, the more concrete the property specified on a card, the fewer outbound connectors will be present. For example, "Including a Horse" has 0 outbound connectors, as it is a very specific property, whereas a more abstract thematic property such as "Greed" has 3 outbound connectors. All permutations of Property cards are listed below in "Card Layouts and Templates". There are 210 Property cards in the standard deck.

SPECİAL (BLUE) CARDS

Connect your project to another project created by another player or team. Use common characters, themes, settings, etc.

SHARED UNIVERSE

+5 FOR EACH ADDİTİONAL STORY YOU CONNECT

30
20
15

#11179

Special cards apply global constraints to a Deal in order to twist players' creativity in unusual directions. There are 20 Special cards in the standard deck. Some of the most sought-after cards will be Special cards. Distribute them sparsely.

PERSONALİTY CARDS

100

ERİC WALKER

Eric was an enigmatic player of the game. Following his own motto, "Dream Big, Never Settle", he earned his team 3,000 points in a week with The Chronoteck Saga, but made few projects afterward.
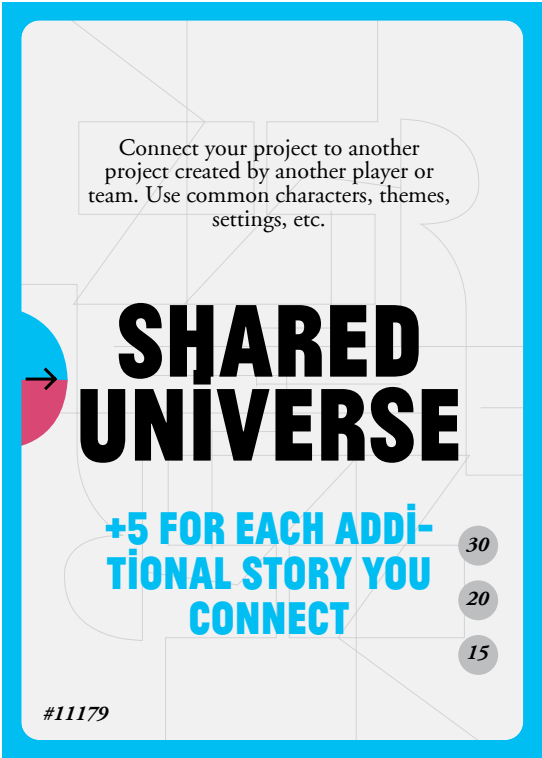
#12111

If you have already run Reality for at least one season, you may wish to incorporate custom orange People Cards containing images of players from previous seasons.

Optional/Expansion cards

These cards are not included in the standard deck, but templates for making them are included with the Reality Engine software package.

- **Wild Cards**
  Wild Cards are very special Special (blue) cards. Instead of containing a fixed prompt, Wild Cards contain a scannable glyph which leads to a special page on your website that randomly shuffles prompts. When players come into the Game Office to Justify a Deal made using a Wild Card, you or your Game Runners will scan the card. This will load a special page on the website that will randomly assign the card with a new meaning and point value, leading to unexpected bonuses (and the occasional bump in the road). You can configure Wild Card web pages through the website interface.
- **Utility Cards**
  These blank cards have nothing on the playable side and only the game logo on the collectible side. You may use these cards for whatever purpose seems sensible to you.
- **"Vintage" Cards**
  These are cards from decades gone by. Use them as you see fit.

IMPORTING THE DECK

To set up the standard deck on the website, begin by logging in to the Wordpress admin area. Navigate to the Reality Settings section and use the Reality Card Importer to import the files in the "Cards" folder included with the Reality Engine software. Once imported, each card in the deck will now have its own page on the website, ID number, and preview image.

MODIFYING AND CREATING CARDS

If you are using the standard deck "as is," you can skip ahead to "Printing the Deck", below.

If you want to customize the content or look of your cards, the following section covers everything you need to know in order to get started.

The easiest way to create a new card or edit an existing one is to do so directly through the website. Admins can use the New Card and Edit Card tools to create or edit cards.

If you modify the cards on the website, you'll have to make sure those edits are reflected in the cards you print. At the time of this writing, we are developing tools that will allow you to download printable card files directly from the website. If this functionality is not yet available (check the documentation that comes with the software), you will have to manually make these changes and generate your cards using a spreadsheet program and Adobe InDesign, as outlined below.

ADVANCED CARD CREATION

The standard deck of Reality cards is ideal for launching your first season. However, you may find yourself wanting to create your own new cards, change what's on the standard deck cards, or even alter the look of the whole game. If so, you're going to have to roll up your sleeves and do a little somewhat technical work. You or someone on your team is going to have to learn how to work with spreadsheets and do a Data Merge in Adobe InDesign. This is not rocket science, but it's not ridiculously easy, either.

That said, make sure to check the documentation included with the Reality Engine software to see what kinds of card exporting features we've managed to implement in the time since this manual was printed. Who knows — we might have even automated the whole thing by now.

Warning: This section is meant to provide you with starting points for getting into advanced card creation and editing. It is NOT a complete guide, and you are going to have to figure a lot of this out on your own. If you get stuck, and the documentation included with the Reality Engine software doesn't help, feel free to get in touch with us via realitycommittee.org.

EXCEL AND INDESIGN

The most powerful method for creating and/or modifying cards is to do so by working directly with the spreadsheets and templates included with the download or on your USB key.

Every element of the deck is customizable, from content to appearance. The appearance of the cards is controlled by a set of Adobe InDesign templates, and the content is controlled by a set of Excel spreadsheets. Print-ready .pdfs are created by using the InDesign Data Merge function to import the spreadsheets into InDesign. If you need help, feel free to get in touch with us and we can talk you off the ledge.

SPREADSHEETS AND IMAGES

The current version of Reality includes a folder containing a set of spreadsheets (compatible with Microsoft Excel, Google Drive, Apple Numbers, OpenOffice Calc, and numerous other programs) and image files. These spreadsheets contain all the data for every card in the standard deck. You can customize the deck simply by editing these spreadsheets to reflect the changes you desire.

When you're done your customizing, you can then import the spreadsheets and images into the website (if the cards you've created aren't already set up) and InDesign (for printing the physical cards).

Each spreadsheet provided has an associated InDesign template. By using the "Data Merge" function in InDesign, you can import the data from the spreadsheets to generate print-ready .pdf files for your cards.

You can start from scratch using the blank spreadsheets included in the software package. If you modify the standard deck, we recommend changing the ID numbers for the cards so that they are distinct from the originals.

If you wish to customize the look of your cards, you don't have to do it on a card-by-card basis. Rather, by customizing the main InDesign template for each kind of card, you can transform the look of your entire deck.

CARD LAYOUTS AND TEMPLATES

The current system has 17 different card templates. Once you have familiarized yourself with the way the spreadsheets and card templates work, you can even invent your own kinds of cards.

Maker (Green) Card Templates

There is only one template for the Maker (green) cards. This template has one orange "in" arrow on the left side, and one pink "out" arrow on the right. There is also space above and below the main title to allow for description and powerup text.

Property (Pink) Card Templates

There are 12 different kinds of Property (pink) cards possible, allowing for all possible placements of 0, 1, 2, and 3 "out" arrows and Special (blue) connectors. Generally speaking, the "bigger" or more abstract an idea contained by a Property card, the more connectors it will have. For example, the Property card, "Involving a Horse," specifies something extremely specific and concrete (a horse). As such, this card has 0 outbound connectors. Conversely, the Property card, "About Greed," specifies a very abstract thematic concept (greed), and has a full complement of 3 outbound connectors.

Please consult the chart on the next page to learn more about Property card templates.

PROPERTY CARD CHART

You may use the following chart as a guide for creating new Property cards:

	0-out	1-out	2-out	3-out
Content types	Concrete elements: things, locations, names, and actions	Archetypes and simple situations	Traits, dynamics, and complex situations	Themes, concepts, and ideals
Examples	A car, A treasure, A theory, A chase	An anti-hero, A seeker, A Sysyphean task, A misunderstanding	The cycle of revenge, split personalities, betrayal, doomed Love	Hubris, time, community, justice
Max. Points AAA	25	30	35	40
Max. Points AA	15	20	25	30
Max. Points A	10	15	20	25
Percentage of Property cards in Standard Deck (actual number)	40% (84)	30% (63)	20% (42)	10% (21)

Note: There is something of a fuzzy boundary separating the content types of 1-out and 2-out cards. The categories specified here are meant to help you to create a balanced deck in the brainstorming and development process. If you are having trouble deciding which template to use for a given card, think of it this way: the more connectors a card has, the more "powerful" it becomes for players. If you want to "incentivize" the use of a particular card, one way to do so is to give it more connectors. When in doubt, fall back to roughly maintaining the balance of card types specified here and in the Card Ratios section.

ABOUT **OBSESSION** 35 25 20 #11068

ABOUT **A LOCAL ISSUE** — Choose a real-world issue in a community you're familiar with and address it. — 40 30 20 #11080

INCLUDING **A PATHO-LOGICAL LIAR** — "I wish, for just one day, Dad couldn't tell a lie." - Max Reede, Liar Liar — 25 20 15 #11081

INVOLVING **A QUEST** 25 15 10 #11116

REGARDING **AN EXPLORER** 25 15 10 #12107

INVOLVING **RISE AND FALL** — "Together, my lord Sauron, we shall rule this Middle-Earth. The old world will burn in the fires of industry. Forests will fall. A new order will rise." - Saruman, LOTR: The Two Towers — 30 20 15 #11178

INCLUDING **A LIVING TOY** — "YOU! ARE! A! TOYYYY! You aren't the real Buzz Lightyear! You're - you're an action figure!" - Woody, Toy Story — 20 15 10 #11095

INVOLVING **BREAKING A RULE** — "I have one rule." "Then that's the rule you'll have to break to know the truth." - Batman and The Joker, The Dark Knight — 30 20 15 #11222

ABOUT, REGARDING, OR INVOLVING — This is a Property Wildcard. Use a Sharpie to fill in the space below. Once modified, this card can be used by any player in any Deal. — 35 25 20 #12083

Special (Blue) Card Template

There is only one kind of Special (blue) card template. All Special cards have a single pink inbound connector.

People (Orange) Card Template

There is only one kind of blank People (orange) card template. All blank People cards have one inbound and two outbound orange connectors.

Personality (double-sided) Card Template

This is a special kind of orange card. This template uses both sides of the card as playable (or "face") sides. Side A, usually used as the collectible side, now becomes a playable orange card, with one "in" orange connector at the top of the card, and two "out" connectors at the bottom and on the right. Side B of the Personality card can be any other kind of card, such as a Special card, a 0-, 1-, 2-, or 3-out Property card, or a Maker card.

Instructions Card Template

This card contains basic "How To Play" information for players. Every player must receive one of these cards in their starter pack. While you are welcome to customize the look of this card, we encourage you to retain the text and illustrative images included on the present version of the card, as they effectively capture the core mechanic of the game.

Utility (Black) Card Template

This is a black card. You don't need to worry about this one. Move along, nothing to see here.

CARD RATİOS

The most common kind of card in the standard deck is the 0-out Property card, while Special cards (and Property cards with Special connectors) are the rarest. Here are the numbers for the cards in the standard deck:

- **Property Cards - 210 cards (75% of total)**
- **Maker Cards - 50 cards (18% of total playable cards)**
- **Special Cards - 20 cards (7% of total playable cards)**

Property cards are further broken down by the number of connectors they have. Two guiding principles operate here. First, Property cards with more connectors should be rarer than Property cards with fewer connectors. Second, you should aim to have an equal number of "Left", "Right", and "Bottom" outbound connectors for each type of card. Here are the numbers for the Property cards in the standard deck:

- **84 0-out**
- **19 1-out L**
- **19 1-out R**
- **19 1-out B**
- **6 1-out B/S**
- **12 2-out L**
- **12 2-out R**
- **12 2-out L/S**
- **6 2-out R/S**
- **14 3-out**
- **6 3-out S**
- **1 Property Wildcard**

Roughly maintaining these ratios is important because it ensures the game is balanced. Too many cards of a certain type will bias players toward certain strategies and project types.

If you end up having more than 300 total cards in your deck - for example, if you use our standard deck and augment it with an expansion pack or with cards of your own creation - make sure that you loosely maintain the ratios of card types described here.

Remember: your physical cards must EXACTLY MATCH their counterparts on the website. For example, a card with ID number 11001 must be findable on the website by looking up that ID number, and once found, should have the exact same text and image as is on the printed card. If you create or edit cards on the website, you will have to make sure that your changes are also reflected on your spreadsheets and that the images used are the same.

COLLECTİBLES

On the back of every card is a collectible item that relates to the kinds of media-making practices that take place in Reality. You can customize these collectibles completely, or use the default ones included in the standard deck.

Collectibles aren't part of the game proper (i.e., they don't "do" anything in the actual play of the game), but they are often an object of player interest nonetheless.

Collectibles come in sets of 5 or 6. Examples of collectible sets in the standard deck include: TV Comedies, Media Theorists, Game Designers, Directors, and Memes.

When creating new cards, we recommend finding ways to conceptually link the content on the collectible side with the content on the playable side. For example, in the standard deck, Charlie Chaplin appears on the collectible side of the property card, "A Tramp".

Collectibles are created using the same spreadsheets that create the playable sides of cards. Simply find images and write text for your cards, include the text and image filenames in the spreadsheet, drop all the images into the same folder as the spreadsheet, and you're ready to import the data to your website and InDesign.

MİNECRAFT

Influential Games II 2/5

Minecraft is a survival and creativity game in which players build constructions out of textured cubes in a 3D world.
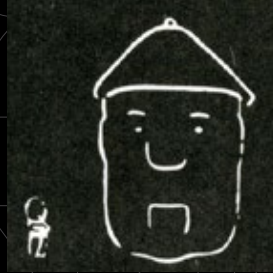
NEON GENESİS EVANGELION

Anime 2/5

An apocalyptic action series revolving around the efforts by the paramilitary organization NERV to fight hostile beings called Angels.

ÉMİLE COHL

Animators 5/5

Émile Cohl was a French cartoonist, animator, and caricaturist of the largely forgotten Incoherent Movement. He has been called both "The Father of the Animated Cartoon" and "The Oldest Parisian".

THELMA SCHOONMAKER

Editors 1/5

Thelma Schoonmaker is an American film editor who has worked with director Martin Scorsese for over thirty-five years. She has been nominated for six Academy Awards, and has won three times.

THE NİGHT JOURNEY

Experimental 4/5

The Night Journey is a video game/art project based on the universal story of an individual mystic's journey toward enlightenment. The game is a collaboration between artist Bill Viola and the USC Game Innovation Lab.
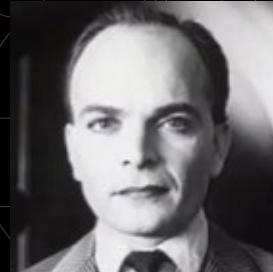
CARY GRANT

Leading Men 2/5

With his distinctive yet not quite placeable Mid-Atlantic accent, Cary Grant was noted as perhaps the foremost exemplar of the debonair leading man: handsome, charismatic, and charming.

KULESHOV EFFECT

Concepts 1/5

A film editing effect demonstrated by Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov in which emotions seem to be seen in an expressionless face when cross-cut with images that evoke such emotions.

JEAN-LUC GODARD

Directors III 5/6

Jean-Luc Godard is a Franco-Swiss film director, screenwriter and critic. Often expressing existential and Marxist philosophies, his films are arguably the most radical of the French New Wave.

THE DECALOGUE

TV Drama II 4/5

This ten-part dramatic series explores the often ambiguous meanings of the 10 Commandments through stories set in modern Poland.
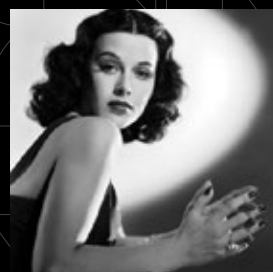
AGNÈS VARDA

Directors IV 6/6

A French film director whose films focus on social commentary, with a distinct experimental style.

HEDY LAMARR

Inventors II 2/5

An early 20th Century actress and co-inventor of an original technique for spread spectrum communications and frequency hopping, necessary to wireless communication.

KRZYSZTOF KİESLOWSKI

Directors IV 1/6

The great Polish film director Kieslowski examined the ethics of existence with the sensibility of a poet and a painter.

PRINTING THE DECK

To play Reality, you will need to print cards. As mentioned above, the number of cards you will need to print will vary depending on the number of players you expect. We recommend printing one standard deck of 300 cards for every 10 players, as this ensures an average of 30 cards per player. If your deck has more than 300 cards, try to maintain this 30:1 card-to-player ratio.

To print the standard deck yourself, look for the "standard-deck-front.pdf" file included in the Cards folder of the Reality Engine software package, and print one copy for every 10 players you have. Collate the printed out pages, flip them over, and put them back in your printer. Then open "standard-deck-back.pdf" and print the backs of the cards onto the reverse of the pages you printed the fronts on. For best results, print on medium-heavy card stock.

We are currently developing technology that will allow you to directly print cards from the website. Please check the documentation accompanying your version of the Reality Engine to see if this functionality has been implemented.

If you want to have the cards professionally printed, or if you want to do some substantial customizations to the graphic design, you will need to create your cards using the provided spreadsheets and InDesign templates, as outlined above.

For the actual printing, the Reality Committee recommends using the fabulous folks at PDI in Quebec for this workflow, but you are free to use whatever printer you like.

PRE-MADE DECKS

Because of the open-source, post-copyright nature of this project, we cannot directly sell you decks of cards without incurring the wrath of the film, television, music, games, and publishing industries, among others. However, if you require assistance in getting your decks printed, we have plenty of expertise to offer. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need support in this regard or any other. We can be reached online at realitycommittee.org or in person at our headquarters.

PEOPLE CARD LABELS

Assuming you know the names of your potential players, you will need to print their names out onto small mailing labels no wider than 2.5 inches and no higher than 1.5 inches. Standard Avery labels will work perfectly for this purpose.

After you have printed your cards, affix these labels to the blank People (orange) cards. In a pinch, you can write the names of your potential players directly onto your blank People cards using a Sharpie.

If you do not know who your potential players are, you will have to prepare your People cards on the fly, or not use them at all.

CARD PACKETS

Once you have your cards printed and People card labels affixed, you will need to prepare card packets to distribute to your players when they sign up for the game.

Once again, each card packet received by a new player should contain a random selection of:

- **1 orange People Card (with label)**
- **1 Instruction Card**
- **2 green Maker Cards**
- **3 0-out pink Property Cards**
- **1 1-out pink Property Card**
- **1 2-out pink Property Card**
- **1 3-out pink Property Card OR 1 blue Special Card**
- **TOTAL: 10 cards/packet**

To inject blue special cards into the system, replace the 3-out pink property card with a blue special card in every fourth or fifth packet you create. This guarantees that special cards remain "special".

We do not recommend distributing packets as loose cards or as cards wrapped in elastic bands. Players will lose cards this way, and it also detracts from the mystique of the game. Instead, we suggest #4 Coin Envelopes on 24lb. brown Kraft paper. These envelopes are available online at envelopes.com, and can be found at office supply stores everywhere.

To further enhance your packets, you should stamp the game logo on the front side in red, and the URL for your website on the back of the packet in black. You can print rubber stamps for less than $20. Use our Adobe Illustrator logo file, included with the Reality Engine software package, to create your logo stamp.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEB SERVICES

You will need a Twitter account for your game. This account will synchronize with the website, and will automatically tweet important updates and newly-Justified projects. You will also need this account to communicate with your players in various ways. Your Twitter handle should be as enigmatic as possible. Do not use something like, "MySchoolGame" or "Play2Learn". If in doubt, use the name of an ancient Egyptian god, or a lesser-known branch of the House of Hohenzollern.

You will also need a YouTube account to host Justification videos. Setting this up should take all of five minutes.

Finally, you will want to have a Google Voice (or equivalent) account. This will allow you to create a "help" SMS number that players can send texts to regarding things like Game Office hours and questions about the rules. Google Voice will create a phone number that can be patched through to your phone or the phones of your game runners. Additionally, Google Voice will store all the messages you receive from players, yielding an archive of documentation and contact numbers.
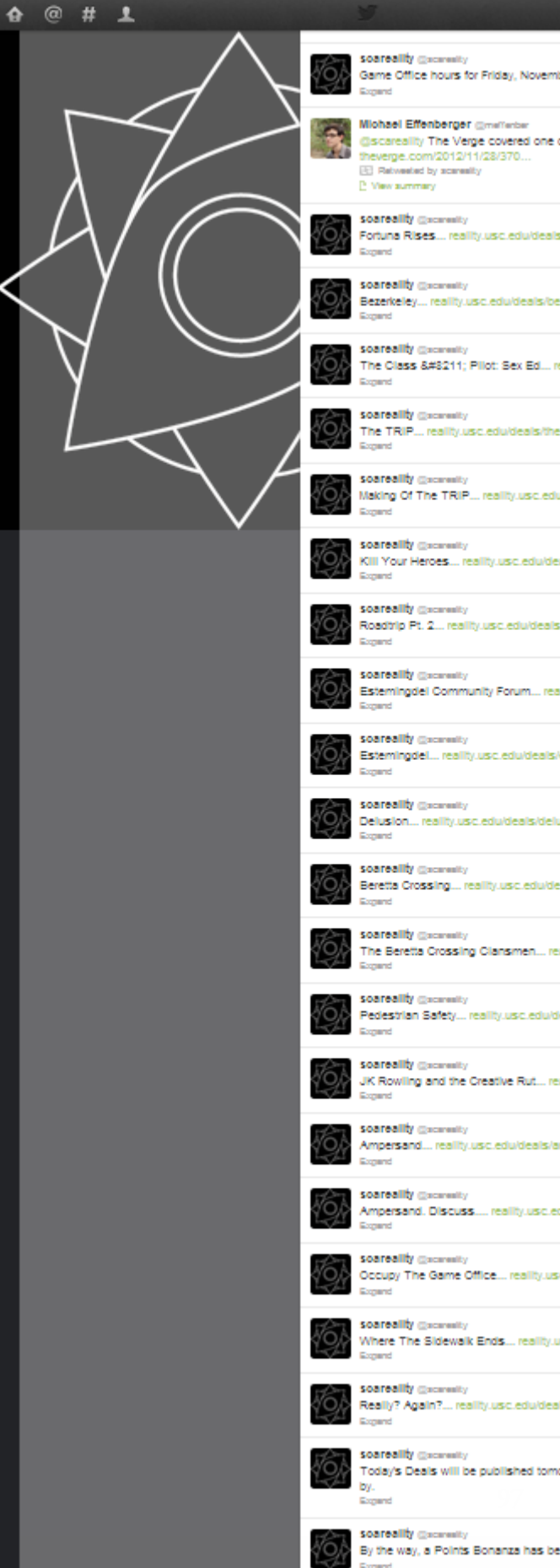
PERSONNEL

GAME RUNNERS

A team of Game Runners is essential to the day-to-day operations of Reality. As Director, you will lead this team. Assemble your team based on the kinds of things you feel you're going to need the most support doing. Game Runners come in handy assisting with preparation, running the Game Office, coordinating reward experiences, and planning and implementing events.

We recommend having at least one Lead Game Runner, who will serve as your right-hand person, and two to four Assistant Game Runners to round out your team. The best Game Runners come from the same population as your players. In an educational setting, upper-year students make for the perfect Game Runners, as they are familiar with the institution and its existing culture (which you are about to radically transform).

If you have a Lead Game Runner, you may want to pay them in order to ensure they stay on top of mission-critical work. Assistant Game Runners can be volunteers. After you have run the game for its initial season, former players will likely be interested in being Game Runners, and will require little training, as they will already know the ins and outs of the game.

FACULTY MENTORS

For those running Reality at an educational institution, it is essential that you involve the faculty in the game in various ways. However, be warned: this game belongs to its players. There is no room for moderators or censors here. Nor is there room for people who teach by saying "no". Faculty should participate by constructively commenting on Deals, participating in "serendipitous encounters" (detailed below), and making themselves available to students working on projects relevant to their expertise.

Since faculty are typically extremely busy, you will want to prepare a structure for their involvement in advance. One solution we've developed is to schedule one or two faculty members per week for the run of your game. During each week, the scheduled faculty members will view projects submitted by players, make comments on the website (you will need to create accounts for them to do this, which can easily be done through the Users section of the admin interface), and may also participate in "serendipitous encounters". By making the "ask" to faculty as constrained and minimal as possible, you can maintain a constant flow of faculty participation throughout the entire run of the game. For busy people, easily understood bite-sized commitments are much more likely to be followed through on than amorphous long-term responsibilities.

A certain degree of faculty involvement ensures that players feel as if their work is being viewed by an audience that goes beyond their peers. This can have the effect of improving the overall quality of projects. However, the last thing you want is for players and potential players to feel as if the game is purely a means to curry favor with the faculty. Your overarching goal must always be to create a playful space for experimentation. Faculty voices are important in the game, but only insofar as they can contribute to an atmosphere of fearless creativity and social engagement.

ALUMNİ AND EXTERNAL MENTORS

One of your main responsibilities as Director is to ensure that the top players each week get to experience unique and personal encounters with alumni and external mentors. These "Reward Experiences" are described in detail below. We recommend having one Reward Experience per week of the game, and a final "Mega Reward Experience" for the overall winners of the game.

You will want to schedule your mentors for Reward Experiences in advance in order to avoid scrambling at the last minute. If your game is running for 15 weeks, you will have to schedule 16 mentors: 15 to cover the weekly Reward Experiences, and 1 to serve as the Mega Reward Experience after the game has concluded. Generally speaking, you will want the first few mentors to be as interesting and diverse as possible. This will increase the buzz around the game as players report back to their friends about the crazy things that happened to them as a result of "winning a week."

Getting commitments to participate from alumni is easier than you think. Many alumni of educational institutions are keen on "giving back" to their alma mater. Unfortunately, their options for doing so are often limited to cash donations or formal public/in-class speaking events. You can offer them something different: a chance to connect as mentors with four or five extremely keen and energetic students. While Reward Experiences typically last only 2 or 3 hours, the impact they have on students and alumni alike can be profound. In our experience, alumni have jumped at this opportunity, and have almost always expressed interest in doing it again.

EVENT PLANNING

To a certain extent, you can improvise the serendipitous encounters, quests, and puzzle hunts that will occur on a weekly basis throughout the run of the game. However, as with everything, the more you prepare ahead of time, the easier it's going to be to manage the game during its actual run.

İNTANGİBLES

Pulling off Reality requires significant buy-in from the administration at your institution. Your team will need a high degree of autonomy to buffer itself against the demands of well-meaning individuals who will want to put their unique spin on this experience. You will need to listen to these people, but at the end of the day, you will need to have final authority over what happens. Design by committee will lead to disaster.

One method we have found useful in dealing with faculty and staff is to structure their enthusiasm around the content on the cards. Many faculty will be very happy to provide you with extensive notes on the kinds of materials to be included on the backs (collectible sides) of cards, as well as ideas for content on the fronts (playable sides) of cards. The more you can focus their energy on these elements of the game, the less interference you will experience when it comes to the overall implementation of the project.

PREPARATİON CHECKLİST

¤ Get coffee or tea
¤ Make the commitment
¤ Set Launch Day date
¤ Set Wrap Party date
¤ Set up Game Office
¤ Download Reality Engine software
¤ Acquire server space
¤ Set up URL for website
¤ Install website
¤ Configure website
¤ Customize website*
¤ Customize cards*
¤ Import card spreadsheets into Website
¤ Print cards
¤ Print People card labels
¤ Affix People card labels to blank people cards
¤ Prepare card packets
¤ Set up Twitter account
¤ Set up YouTube account
¤ Set up Google Voice (or equivalent) account
¤ Hire Lead Game Runner
¤ Engage Assistant Game Runners
¤ Engage faculty mentors
¤ Schedule weekly faculty mentors*
¤ Schedule alumni/external mentors
¤ Plan events*
¤ Maintain your authority as Director

Indicates an optional activity. In the case of customizing website and cards, you may want to simply use our standard deck and the default website theme. In the case of weekly mentors and events, you may choose to schedule these on the fly during the actual run of the game (which we don't recommend).

İNTERVİEWS

The following interviews were conducted with the design team in late 2011 and early 2012. In the first interview, USC professor Henry Jenkins interviews Jeff Watson, Simon Wiscombe, and Tracy Fullerton for his blog, *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*. In the second interview, *Wired* writer Nathan Maton speaks with creative director Jeff Watson.

Opposite: The designers of the game after receiving the Impact Award at IndieCade 2012. Left to right: Tracy Fullerton, Jeff Watson, Simon Wiscombe.

INTERVIEWS

HENRY JENKINS

In this interview, Professor Henry Jenkins interviews the design team (Jeff Watson, Simon Wiscombe, and Tracy Fullerton).

Henry Jenkins: The three of you have been co-conspirators in the development of an alternate reality game which has captured the passions and interests of the incoming students at the USC School of Cinematic Arts this fall. Can you give us some background on the project? What got it started?

Tracy Fullerton: The project actually came out of a committee established by the dean of the School of Cinematic Arts (SCA) in 2009 after a full faculty retreat. The charge for that committee was to envision the future of the SCA, and one of the key initiatives was to establish a "gateway experience" for incoming students that introduced them to the changing media landscape, the history and future of the school, the possibilities that can emerge from the SCA network of current and past students, and the importance of bridging the divisions of the school while they are here, both socially and academically.

The gateway course was envisioned as introducing a new kind of social networking for SCA students, both on and offline, that would become critical to their involvement in courses and with each other. As the class developed, it became clear that a game layer would be a perfect way to achieve all of the goals set out by the committee without falling victim to the general survey or lecture class tradition we wanted to move beyond. So, while the curriculum for the gateway class and the game aren't "officially" linked, they are intertwined in vision and purpose and serve to bring students from all divisions together in multiple ways that will purposefully drive the social dynamics and the cross-media collaboration.

From its inception, the gateway class was envisioned as having a companion social network, which linked to a digital library of information about media history and theory and SCA's past and future. The design of the card game, with its "high touch" in-person mechanics, is just the beginning of implementing that vision. On each card, history and theory are linked to practice with a piece of knowledge on one side and a prompt to creative practice on the other. This bridge between theory and practice, like the ones we hope to forge between divisions here, is a critical statement at the heart of the game.

What were the core learning goals for the design and deployment of this game?

Tracy Fullerton: The core learning goals for the game are all around fostering the kind of complex skills that are sometimes called 21st century skills. Of course, these skills, such as team-building, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and innovation, are not unique to the 21st century and they have been at the heart of the curriculum here at SCA for a very long time. The difference here is activating students right from the start of their SCA experience with the knowledge that these skills are critical building blocks to their success as media makers, and also that the development and improvement of these skills is something they need to take responsibility for themselves from day one.

The game wraps these learning goals into a kind of induction into the SCA culture of networking and support which is something students certainly leave USC with, but we wanted to use the game to start surfacing these ideas for them earlier in their development.

Jeff Watson: When we first met to brainstorm what we wanted students to be able to discover through this game, we filled up a 16 foot whiteboard and still felt like we hadn't scratched the surface. On top of the kinds of building block skills Tracy just mentioned, faculty members from each division of the SCA had very granular lists of the kinds of things that they felt Cinematic Arts students should be aware of as they commence their tenure as undergraduates. Writing professors wanted the game to encourage the exploration of character and story; production faculty wanted to make sure all students acquired basic knowledge about cameras, editing, and safety; critical studies pushed for more opportunities for analysis, historical contextualization, and reflection; animation wanted to make sure their students would have more ways to connect with students from other divisions; and interactive media pushed for a deeper integration of notions of iterative design and systems thinking. At the end of the meeting, I took a picture of the whiteboard with my iPhone. It was a crazy tangled bird's nest of inspiration.

To make sense of it all, we took the mass of ideas generated during that whiteboard session and started looking for connective tissue. We noticed that all the learning goals we had brainstormed fell into one of three broad categories, which we ended up calling Literacy, Craft, and Social. Literacy goals were those that pertained to knowledge of all

kinds: from highly local lore about the school and its resources, to basic understandings about the history and theory of media-making. Craft goals were those that had anything to do with the act of making -- from writing prose to shooting video to designing board games. Finally, Social goals were all those that related to the discovery of and connection with peers, alumni, faculty, and the broader community. Since the "content" of each of these categories of learning was agnostic with respect to the various divisions of the SCA, the first challenge of breaking down divisional/disciplinary boundaries had been met. The question became how to make a game that would motivate players to traverse the networks of Literacy, Craft, and Social goals that we had identified for inclusion. This became the starting point for our prototyping.

Can you describe some of the basic mechanics of the game?

Simon Wiscombe: The game is, at its core, a project creation game. When players elect to join, they're given a pack of cards containing green "maker" cards (e.g. "30 second short," "Board Game," etc.), pink "property" cards (e.g. "About love", "In the SCA Courtyard", etc.), and one orange "people" card (which contains the name of one first year undergrad in the USC film school). These cards can be combined together or with other players' cards to make a "Deal," the simplest of which is composed of one maker card and one property card -- although an almost unlimited number of property cards can be attached so long as there are enough connectors. After laying out a Deal, players go out and actually create it (i.e. "A 30 second short about love in the SCA courtyard"). They then submit it to the site, and justify

it in the game office -- at which point it's uploaded, they get points for the Deal, and everyone in the game can see it.

What relationship does this game have with other alternate reality games which have been used for entertainment or training purposes in the past?

Jeff Watson: The "meat" of this game is structured creative improvisation. As Simon has described, the core interaction here involves players trading, sharing, and combining collectible playing cards in order to generate creative prompts known as "Deals". Responding to these prompts by submitting completed artifacts results in advancement on the game's various leaderboards, unlocking special game content. This special content constitutes what might be called the "sauce" on the meat of the game.

This "sauce" is the closest we get to "traditional" alternate reality game content. For example, toward the end of the second week of gameplay, we sent clues to several players who were leading in key Deal-making categories. The clues provided the players with a time and a location and nothing else. Bravely enough, the students showed up. Once there, they were greeted by a formally-attired Oud player. Accompanied by the Oudist, the players were transported without explanation to the Museum of Jurassic Technology. Once in the museum, the players encountered two alums of the SCA, Jenova Chen and Kellee Santiago (designers of critically-acclaimed games such as Flow, Flower, and Journey), who were wandering around in the darkness wearing sequined masquerade masks. Upon discovering them, the players were presented with a special

game power which enabled them to score additional points on subsequent Deals, and were then treated to 90 minutes of informal discussion about game design, art, and media making.

In short, our approach uses a rule-based play system (the card game) to drive the bulk of the experience, and employs more traditional ARG techniques around the edges, as rewards and tonal elements. This approach is in many ways a practical implementation of the ideas and critiques I presented last year on your blog in my essay, "ARG 2.0". In most "traditional" ARGs, our "sauce" is the full meal. The player experience in such games unfolds around a kind of scavenger hunt activity wherein game runners moderate and manage player communities as they plow through a sequence of puzzles, curated action prompts, and side-quests.

While this logistically-complex structure is appropriate for certain team-building and talent sourcing applications, we wanted to make something that would have the capacity to perpetuate itself without relying on the constant generation of puzzle and narrative content by game runners. More importantly, we wanted our game to emphasize an active engagement with media-making: while scavenger hunts might help to build social bonds and search/analysis skills, we felt that they are inherently about solving puzzles or responding to prompts created by someone else -- and as such are a kind of consumption-oriented form of play. We wanted to make this game about the players' creativity, not ours.

A key concern of the Cinema School recently has been to encourage greater integration across the different tracks

(production, screenwriting, animation, critical studies, interactive). How has this game helped to support this goal?

Tracy Fullerton: This was part of the mandate given to the committee that initiated the project. The school is making an integrated effort, of which this game is only one part, to bridge divisional barriers and encourage thinking, working and team-building across the school. One way the game does this is simply by eliminating divisional identifiers on the site. We give students an area to talk about their skills so they can find each other to work with, but we don't identify them as coming from any particular part of the school. Also, more directly, we have cards in the deck that reward them for working interdivisionally, and even across other universities.

In the first few weeks of play, we had a writing student who had never done any programming pick up GameMaker on the advice of other students, teach himself some simple coding, and make a simple video game. We have a group that has created a transmedia ARG, and interactive students who have tried their hand at creating an animation flip book. The game rewards groups equally for either trying something new or adding a person with know how to the team, so it is up to players how to approach and solve a problem.

One thing that stands out to me about this project is that it isn't mandatory. Students don't get graded on their work, and they don't have to participate if they don't want to. How has this worked in practice, and what was the thinking behind making engagement optional?

Tracy Fullerton: Yes, this is a voluntary experience. We were very clear about this from the outset of the design. In fact, when we first showed the game concept to some of the staff, the reaction was "great, we can use this to make students do things we want them to do, like fill out these forms or go to this office, etc." But we very nicely pushed back on those ideas because we wanted the game to have an energy that could only come out of students' passion for making media together. It was important that it not feel in any way like an assignment or an extension of the orientation process. We felt that the tone and the sensibility had to recognize personal expression as being intrinsically motivated. Incoming SCA students have already self-selected as creative individuals, so for that kind of student, the idea of taking away that intrinsic motivation could actually be potentially harmful to their development as creative professionals.

Jeff Watson: We actually went to some pretty extreme lengths to keep the game a secret around the time that we were launching it. This was a bit nerve-wracking at first, because only a handful of students even noticed that the game existed at all. But in the end, this strategy paid off. It made the game a "pull" experience, drawing students in of their own accord. Players gradually began to appear at the Game Office, and they did so because they were curious and they wanted to be involved. As more and more students came in, the game acquired more and more evangelists, since each new player was personally invested. This approach is well-trod territory for marketers and ARG designers, but is something new in education, and we're excited to be breaking that ground.

How do you deal with students who aren't willing or able to get involved in creative production? Are there ways to engage that don't require large investments of time or social capital?

Simon Wiscombe: We figured that the level of engagement would vary from person to person, so this came up during our design sessions constantly, and we created four tiers of engagement. The top tier is for those who engage in all the ARG elements along with making creative projects--these are our "hardcore" players who seem to be able to solve all of our puzzles in a fifth the time we estimated they would. The second tier is for those who engage in the projects and enjoy creating, but aren't necessarily interested in scouring SCA or the website for the hidden ARG clues. To tackle the last two tiers, i.e. those who wouldn't engage as much as the others but still wanted to feel a part of the community, we drew from some inspiration we took from old photographs of the SCA in the 1960s and 70s. Jeff was particularly interested in one photograph of a space known as "the Bullpen."

Jeff Watson: The Bullpen was the central workspace of the Stables, the building which used to house the cinema school back in the day. It was a wild, unruly place, covered in graffiti, littered with junk, and full of creative energy. We felt like that kind of space was missing from the SCA of today, and so we decided to re-create it -- virtually, as a kind of social networking system on the game's website.

Simon Wiscombe: In the Bullpen, players are can comment on both deals and cards, participate in impromptu discussions, and upload pictures. Some of this is publicly visible through the site's "Photoblog" feature, but much of this discussion is kept in a walled garden, both to create a safe space for venting, and to extend the "exclusive" and "mysterious" narrative that envelops the game. Finally, there's a whole slew of other forms of engagement, much of which we can't track (but we know is going on), such as collecting sets of cards, lurking on the website, participating in deals without registering for the game, and so on.

Essentially we wanted to foster an awesome interconnected community of already amazingly talented people, and it seems to be working for players at a variety of engagement levels.

What roles do faculty and staff play in this process? How might the kinds of playful interaction the game is encouraging shift the relations between students and faculty? How have faculty integrated aspects of the game into their own curriculum?

Tracy Fullerton: When we designed the cards for the game, we purposefully included some prominent faculty, past and present, in the deck -- as you know, since you've given your own card out to students as part of our "Hey, Henry convergence" meet-up. It's a nice opportunity for us to involve faculty from all over the school in the game. We've found that the faculty have a tremendous curiosity and interest in what's going on in the game. Some are participating on the site, commenting on deals or cards, joining in the general discussion. Some are coming to the class to hear speakers, and some have helped with deals. It's an interesting opportunity because in this situation there are no predefined power structures. The game is presented by the mysterious "Reality Committee" which may or may not be comprised of faculty, it is very unclear. So the faculty are free to participate at any level they feel comfortable.

What aspects of this game could be ported to other educational contexts, and how does a game like this scale?

Simon Wiscombe: This type of game can be modified, with very simple tweaks, for any creative endeavor. We've had discussions about how we could specify it to any of the film school's departments (interactive media, film, animation), or how we could port it to art, music, dance, or theater schools. At its core, it's a game that relies on fostering and promoting the creativity of its participants through prompts that eventually lead to projects. What form those projects take could be anything. And in regards to scale, while this game was designed specifically with 130 or so players in mind, it could easy be for smaller or larger groups, although one would likely have to rethink its purpose. For smaller groups, I've found it's great as a brainstorming or creative sprint tool, and larger groups might embrace the idea of maximizing collaborators. This game is fairly simple in its construct, so I'm sure there are methods of applicability we haven't even dreamed of yet.

I have to ask: Early on in the game, you asked me to meet some students at a "secret location" on campus and give them some "Shared Universe" game cards -- which also happened to have my picture on one side. What did they end up using those cards for?

Jeff Watson: Well, so far, your card has been used in 5 different Deals. Each of these Deals spins the notion of "Shared Universe" In a different way. For example, in the Justification for the stunningly-photographed music video,"Space Bound," the players explain that the characters and story elements in their music video cross over with characters and story elements from a "Character Artifacts" project they previously created in the game. Other projects, such as the 10-part transmedia extravaganza, "Chronoteck", use the "Shared Universe" card to link together multiple projects across many platforms, connecting artifacts such as the fake Facebook group,"Stop Chronoteck!" to other story-rich artifacts such as the fake promotional video for the"Chronoteck Tach C," a new brand of cell phone that "receives messages from the future." It's a daily thrill for us to see amazing transmedia projects like these emerge out of our game.

NATHAN MATON

In this interview, Wired journalist Nathan Maton interviews creative director Jeff Watson.

How did you choose on a deck of cards?

Our initial design didn't have cards at all. It was much more like something like SFZero -- a collaborative production game played through a web portal, full stop. This is one of those instances where the daunting task of executing this project -- we only had a few months to get everything designed, tested, and implemented -- made me just want to run with the initial idea and leave it at that. Thankfully, Tracy pushed me to work harder. She reminded me that we weren't making a game meant to be played by people distributed across a wide area like a city or the whole world. Our players would be coming into the same building pretty much every day. Most of them live on campus in the same dorms. We would be crazy not to make use of that. Physical artifacts would provide a social lubricant and mnemonic that would speed up the spread of the game while also producing all sorts of ancillary moments of discussion and interaction. And since the whole mandate of the game was to increase peer discovery and collaboration, the more we could get people interacting in real space, the better.

For years I'd been wanting to do a game based on an interlocking card system. I had these abstract prototypes lying around on my desk -- basically just index cards with "in" and "out" arrows on them. I started to think about how these cards could be used to drive a collaborative production game. I realized

that this could be how our game could generate the creative prompts that players would respond to. Rather than curating the prompts ourselves, we could generate them procedurally through card play. It was kind of like transmedia Tarot -- by combining the cards based on an interlocking connectivity schema, players could make a kind of physical "random log line generator" for media projects. Further, since the cards could be shared and traded, this meant that players could gain more control and granularity over their prompts by engaging in social activity. The idea had an elegance to it that we ran with immediately.

How did you come up with those individual cards?

This was a long and tedious process. Based on the capabilities of our printer and the limitations of our budget, we settled on a 300-card master deck. The tricky part was breaking down that deck into the right ratios of the different kinds of cards. We knew we needed to keep certain kinds of cards scarce in order to drive the players into trading and collaborating.

What kinds of cards?

There are four basic card types in the game: green Maker cards, which determine the kind of media artifact that a project is going to become; pink Property cards, which describe ideas, places, props, or other elements that need to be included in the project; blue Special cards, which provide various kinds of power-ups, bonuses, and extra-difficult prompt elements; and orange People cards, each of which contains the name of one of the players in the game.

In general terms, we knew the most plentiful type of card needed to be the pink Property cards. Any given Deal can only have one Maker card, but can have anywhere from 1 to more than 30 property cards. Special cards were conceived as being just that -- special -- so they needed to be the rarest of all. And there needed to be enough orange cards printed in total such that each player could have their own (which would be given to another player at random, encouraging another vector of peer discovery).

Other cards would have to be plentiful enough to guarantee that players could conceivably start playing right away as soon as they found the secret Game Office and received their starter pack of 10 (semi-) randomly selected cards. Figuring out the exact ratios took a lot of number-crunching and pie charts.

How did you approach that process?

One factor in all this was that we wanted our players to all be able to start the game with fairly different cards, such that they would be able to discover, trade, and share new cards by talking to other players. If everyone had the same 10 cards in their starter pack, players wouldn't be curious about what other players had in their packs. So we looked at the approximate size of what we expected would be our start-up player base -- we designed for around 200 players -- and then did the math from there.

A second factor was the range of media artifacts that we wanted players to be able to create. Obviously, since this is a cinema school, we would need Maker cards for things like "5 minute short" and "Long Take" and "Suspense Sequence" and "Documentary

Short" and so on. But this is a transmedia game, and today's SCA student does more than just think about and make movies. So we needed cards for games -- the Interactive Media Division is a hugely important part of the SCA -- like "Serious Game" and "Board Game" and "Live Action Video Game." We needed writing cards, like "Series Bible" and "Scene", and critical studies cards, like "Salon" and "Screen a Film," and animation cards, like "Flip Book" and "Animated Short", and on, and on, and on. We brainstormed an initial list of around 90 that our pie charts said we needed to cut down to 54. We feel like our final collection of Maker cards accurately reflects the spectrum of media making and theory that goes on in the undergraduate program at SCA.

In terms of the content of the Property cards, this was largely based on the connectivity mechanic. The more connections a given card has, the more powerful it is in the system. A card that can only link to one other card in a Deal constitutes a kind of "dead end", whereas a card with two or more connections enables the Deal to grow, increasing its point value and creative specificity. Since hyper-connected cards would be so powerful, we thought it made sense to make them the most conceptually-rich ideas -- big-picture stuff like "Memory" or "Obsession". Our general rule was that the fewer connections a card has, the more specific it should be: and so the cards with the least connectivity ended up being very concrete things like "A horse" or "The beach" or "The Statue of Douglas Fairbanks."

Finally, we designed the backs of each card to contain a piece of media-making history or theory or technique. This was part of the tiered design approach to the game:

even if you didn't engage in the actual card mechanic, you could still collect bits and pieces of media history. In this regard, each card was a part of a set such as "War Films" or "Game Consoles." Coming up with all this trivia was fun, but it took forever to make a list that covered all the different kinds of media making and analysis that goes on at SCA -- not to mention to gather all the images, write all the text, and lay everything out in InDesign for the full set of 300.

You mentioned not promoting the game at all and keeping it secretive, how did you get play testers to see what aspects of it worked?

As it happens we did very little play testing. The only thing we were really able to thoroughly test in advance was the card game mechanic. To conduct those tests, we got together a few members of PEG -- LA's pervasive gaming meet up group -- and gave them some prototypes of the cards. They grokked it immediately and we knew we had something that in its broad outline was going to work. But we really didn't have the time to test everything else. We were manufacturing the cards, making the website, and setting up the Game Office right up until the minute we launched. In the end, we told ourselves, "this is the play test. The whole game is a test." And that turned out to be a pretty liberating attitude.

How did you get to know your target audience? Was there a process you used? When did you know you knew enough to begin making the game?

There's a temptation in designing games for institutional interventions that says you

should make your game maximally scalable such that other institutions can easily port it into their programs. The general idea with that is that doing things that way is going to save you time and money, because scalable universal systems can be turned around and monetized more easily than bespoke systems. We felt like there was something really important missing in that argument. In my experience, designing for scale from the start depersonalizes and flattens games. Our mandate was to make something that would intrigue, galvanize, and mobilize our players, and we felt that the best way to do this was to create a genuinely tailor-made experience, something that couldn't happen anywhere else and that was precisely tuned to this particular player population. That was our priority. We left aside scale and designed everything around these students and this place. Ironically (and perhaps instructively for others looking into doing something like this), the outcome of that process was a number of things that turned out to be quite scalable and generalizable: the card mechanic and the way it links to a web-based collaborative production game, for example. But we got there by asking very specific questions about our players and their context.

Any examples of specific questions?

Here are just a few:

What are our players doing before they come here? What sorts of media are they interested in? How do they communicate with each other? What kinds of social behavior do the existing digital and physical infrastructures of the SCA promote? What gets hidden or suppressed? How do students traditionally get to know students outside their division

or cohort? What has been tried to break down the silos between divisions, and why hasn't that worked?

In terms of process, there were basically three stages. In the first stage, we held several meetings where faculty from each division of the school shared their thoughts on the students. Since many of these faculty have been teaching here for a long time, this gave us a good sense of the bigger trends. We also set up a wiki and some discussion boards around this time, so that faculty and other collaborators could share ideas as they came up. Next, we did a whole thwack of historical research, digging into the archives and talking with alumni to get a sense of what students here were like in the past. This was basically a process of scoping out the USC image/zeitgeist, and since that's a big part of why students end up choosing to go here, we ended up using this material -- particularly the rebellious, wild stuff from the 1960s and 1970s, when the school was an unruly den of creative energy -- extensively in developing the tone and design aesthetic of the game. Finally, we did some very direct observation of the students by creating sock puppet accounts and lurking/lightly participating on student- and school-run Facebook pages and discussion forums. This last piece confirmed the original instinct to make a collaborative production game, since we observed students both sharing creative works and informally issuing media-making challenges to one another -- exactly the behaviors that are at the center of our game design.

What other initial processes did you use to ensure its success? Were any of them particularly applicable for other

educational ARG designers that you'd like to share?

I never thought of this as an educational game. I think that's the best advice I can give. If educators want to truly leverage the power of games, they need to make good games. If it's not a good game, students won't play unless you force them to -- and if you force them to play, it's not really a game anymore: it's just a simulacrum of a game, a "trojan horse for learning" that students will see right through. A lot of educators have trouble getting their heads around that. The fact is, much of the transformative power of games comes from the fact that players invite them into their lives. This motivation and agency ("I am curious; I want to mess around with this; I want to see how this works") makes play personal and meaningful. And once an activity becomes personal and meaningful, players will learn and discover and collaborate and problem-solve in all sorts of amazing and self-directed ways. Put differently, ARGs are "pull" experiences. If you find yourself "pushing" at any point, you're doing it wrong.

Real play is a pull experience. It's about action, not consumption. If you have a serious aim in mind with your game, the optimal outcome is that you authenticate that aim through action, not exposition. Now, of course, I *am* being extreme in saying that you're "doing it wrong" any time you find yourself pushing in a game. But to me, that's the ideal to aim at. If you have a thesis to prove and you want to prove it with a game, prove it with a game. Don't set up a game that frames some moment where you prove the idea with prose.

Of course, I'm being intentionally provocative here. At the end of the day, it's always about what works. But here's an analogy that may or may not clear things up: Imagine you're making a movie about some serious subject. And you get to a point where you realize that through cinematic storytelling alone you haven't been able to prove your thesis. Do you include a five-minute stretch of text printed on the screen in order to clear things up? Probably not; instead, you go back to the drawing board and figure out a way to use the affordances of the cinema -- as opposed to the prose essay, say -- to get your idea across. Similarly, if you are making a game about some serious subject and you get to a point where you realize that the play of your game alone hasn't got the point across, don't just give up and send your players a link to some video they need to watch to really understand what you're saying. Or if you're doing it at a school, don't use your power as an educator to force your players to do something that they wouldn't do if they were "really" playing a game. Solve the problem with good game design instead.

What's the process through which you now determine what components of the game are working best?

We've been doing a lot of on-the-fly assessment, and are also compiling statistics and interviews for review once the game is over. We know from raw numbers that the core parts of the game are working.

The website through which the game is played tracks a lot of stuff on the back end: who's collaborating with who, how much and in what way each player is engaging, the kinds of cards and Deals that players are creating, and so on. There's been a wide

adoption of the game among students, and those who are involved generally participate a lot, both on the website (through comments, photoblog posts, and status updates) and in the creation of Deals. We've been seeing a lot of inter-divisional collaboration, and the effect on the general spirit of the students is something that faculty and students say is really positive.

In addition to the formal data tracking, we're also watching how players play the game and search for exploits. There have been a lot of interesting surprises. For example, players have tended to form into very large working groups so as to have as many cards as possible at their disposal for the creation of Deals. We didn't expect this -- we thought teams would be very ad hoc and in the 3-6 player range. As it happens, team size has been closer to 15 or 20, and in many cases teams have stuck together since shortly after the game launched. Some groups even keep "card banks" which all their players can use as a kind of credit union for making Deals. This isn't technically an exploit, but it gives us ideas about what to expect next year. It's also been encouraging to see the whole thing move from a very dog-eat-dog capitalist arrangement at the beginning (in the early weeks, some teams even drew up "exclusivity contracts" to prevent their members from working with other players) to something a lot more collective-minded by the mid- and late-game.

One of the most exciting design aspects to me was that this ARG was easily replayable, not heavily narrative driven and the core mechanic met the exact needs of your target population, media

creators. Can you tell me when you first realized this product/audience fit?

In a lot of ways, this project was a way for me to explore some of the things I was thinking about when I wrote a paper called "ARG 2.0" in 2010. Many people who come to the world of ARGs come from a storytelling background (myself included), and as such they bring with them a lot of tendencies that maybe aren't so appropriate for the kinds of interactions and experiences that are possible in pervasive gaming in specific and transmedia in general. The mantra, "it's all about the story" is one example of this mentality. I actually think this is a very counter-productive idea, even though there is now a super-cool conference that's dedicated to its propagation.

Here's my view on this in a nutshell: story-heavy ARGs are difficult for even the most well-financed operations to maintain (primarily because of the ballooning content requirements of nonlinear storytelling -- as anyone who has worked on a story-driven game of any sort or read a choose-your-own-adventure would surely understand), and even when they do pull it off, from a player perspective you run into a lot of problems with people losing the thread of the narrative, new players not being able to figure things out/catch up with the story, non-hardcore players not being admitted into the inner circles of players who are at the cutting edge of story material releases, declining engagement, the abandonment of player groups after the experience has concluded, and so on.

One solution is to design your ARG experiences so that they function procedurally -- that is, create an actual game

that drives participation and play among your audience such that the play itself generates the experience. In our case, we had a lot of eager young media-makers to work with, and so we were able to leverage their creative and performative motivations in order to generate the overall experience. This strategy was a particularly good fit for SCA because we wanted to place the emphasis on the players' creativity, not ours. Our job was to frame their engagement with the right narrative/design cues in order to bring out the real story -- the unique story of our players themselves, told in their own images, words, and works.

BELİEVER

by John Maus

Telephone lines all across the world
People fight all across the world
Angels sing all across the world
Baby, you and me all across the world

Jackie Chan flashing all across the world
Hulk Hogan flashing all across the world
Baby, let's go fly all across the world
Baby, let's go fly all across the world!

They call me the believer
They call me the believer