GAME BASED LEARNING

What can Alternate Reality Games teach us about the future of e-learning?

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CONFESSION

I am not a gamer
(not even board games)
CONFESSION

I have read a few books on games and learning
(Enough to be dangerous)
CONFESSION
I don’t like the word "gamification"
(more like: lame-ification)
WARNING

I am not arguing for games and learning
(or against games and learning)
WARNING

I will not mention best practices
(or anything immediately applicable to your job)
WARNING

The ideas contained herein are speculative
(think about them but hold them loosely)
STORY ONE

How did I get here?
THE ORDINARY WORLD

Lectures, assignments, assessment, content…

(start the assembly line)
CALL TO ADVENTURE

e-Learning has to be better than this
(more engagement please)
REFUSAL OF THE CALL

I’m a librarian
(I’ll read about it)
MEET THE MENTORS

REALITY IS BROKEN
Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World
JANE McGONIGAL

PLAY AT WORK
How Games Inspire Breakthrough Thinking
ADAM L. PENENBERG
CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

Alright I’ll commit
(which conference will take me?)
NARRATIVE PATTERN

The Hero’s Journey
(yes, I just described myself as a hero)
STORY TWO

Alternate Reality Games, huh?
WHAT IS AN ARG?

Immersive game, networked narrative, chaotic fiction…
(so, no agreed upon definition)
2001
iPod, Survivor, Destiny's Child, Harry Potter, Wikipedia
(isn’t time travel fun?)
THE BEAST

Viral marketing campaign for A.I.
(stay with me here...)


“Evan Chan was murdered”
“Jeanine is the key.”

Who murdered Evan Chan?
Who is Jeanine?

Jeanine Salla
“Sentient machine therapist”
Found: Jeanine’s website and more clues

Formed: Cloudmakers discussion forum

Featured: emails, phone calls, websites, from the characters
Over 7,400 registered Cloudmakers

Estimated that 1 million people played the game

Solved in three months
WAIT A SECOND!

What is this all about?
(and other questions)
Who created The Beast?

Why?

A new kind of immersive experience

Built specifically for the internet
Fragmented narrative that players had to put together

Solving the mystery required collective intelligence

Game designers remained unknown

Information presented in a variety of formats
“If we put a clue in a Turkish newspaper at dawn, it would be under discussion in a high school kid’s basement in Iowa by dinner time.”

~Sean Stewart
A writer for “The Beast”
WHY “THE BEAST”? 
An early content inventory listed 666 items 
(see Revelation 13:18)
4 TERMS

You need to know
RABBIT HOLE

The initial clue or artifact that players stumble upon
(and then the game begins)
PUPPET MASTER
The people who design and run the ARG
(they stay hidden)
THE CURTAIN

Players do not interact with the puppet masters directly (they interact with the fictional characters)
This is not a game

Refusal to admit that there is a game at all
(see why ARGs are hard to define?)
WAIT A SECOND!

This was a marketing campaign for a blockbuster movie
(Shouldn’t we be suspicious?)
YES, WE SHOULD
The Beast launched more ARG marketing campaigns
(e.g. ‘The Art of the Heist’ sponsored by Audi)
NO, WE SHOULDN’T
ARGs did not convert players to customers
(so marketing departments moved on)
FATAL FLAW = OPPORTUNITY
8 OBSERVATIONS

Compare & Contrast
NON–LINEAR
Content is fragmented and strewn about
(players stitch it together)

LINEAR
Content is paced and builds progressively
(selected and built by instructor)
STORIES
Narrative is essential for engagement
(context and clues are situated in characters)

FACTS
Disciplinary knowledge is essential
(theory is situated in the textbooks)
NO BOUNDARIES
Lines between real life and ARG are blurred
(players self-organize and use diverse tools)

CONTAINED
Interaction happens within a defined system
(learners are organized and use provided tools)
COLLECTIVE EFFORT
Players are assessed and tested as a group
(progress requires working together)

INDIVIDUAL EFFORT
Learners are assessed and tested individually
(working together is discouraged)
ONE BIG GOAL
Players have one major objective
(i.e. solve the mystery)

MANY LITTLE GOALS
Learners have many small assignments
(i.e. get enough points)
**PUSH**

Information gets pushed to players at any time
(game interrupts real life)

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**PULL**

Learners are pulled into the system
(learners choose when to engage)
DYNAMIC
Puppet masters adjust the game in real time
(based on players’ progress)

STATIC
Instructors pre-determine the learning
(based on curriculum requirements)
REAL WORLD
Fictional elements are incorporated into the real world
(progress is messy)

LABORATORY
Learning experiences are planned
(progress is controlled)
WAIT A SECOND!

This is all well and good, but we need an example…

(Glad you asked)
HISTORY of BIOLOGY
“Where is Walden Shyre... and what happened to him on the eve of the Nobel Prize Ceremony?”

~History of Biology
Spongelab
THE HERO’S JOURNEY
THE LEARNER’S JOURNEY
The ordinary world
Call to adventure
Refusal of the call
Meet with the mentor
Crossing the threshold
Tests, allies and enemies
Approach
The ordeal
The reward
The road back
The resurrection
Return with the elixir
THANK YOU!

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REFERENCES


