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Collective world: interdisciplinary collaboration and communication in the visual arts

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Collective world: Interdisciplinary collaboration and communication in the visual arts

by

Stefanie Kim Yoshiko Dao

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major: Integrated Visual Arts

Program of Study Committee:
Chuck Richards, Major Professor
C. Arthur Croyle
Barbara Haas
James Lathrop

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2015

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I would like to first thank my committee chair, Chuck Richards, as well as my committee members, Arthur Croyle, Barbara Haas, and Jim Lathrop, for providing me with both guidance and encouragement, as well as indulging me in my tendency to wander, as I progressed through my graduate career at Iowa State.

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Third, I cannot adequately express my indebtedness to Taylor “Chuusa” Carlson, whose presence and friendship not only gave me a new outlook on my graduate studies, but also on life itself. I look forward to working with you for many years to come. You are indeed the angry bird god of the Badlands.

Finally, to Senpai: Thank you for your patience, your understanding, and your support. Thank you for always being there and for sticking by me, even through the roughest patches. Thank you for helping to bring out the best in me.
This document serves as accompaniment and commentary regarding the exhibition Collective World, which was shown from March 28th to April 3rd, 2015, at the Mayhem Comics and Collectibles store located in Ames, Iowa. The work exhibited was comprised of video game and comic book art, all of which resulted from collaborative processes. This document supplements the work exhibited by describing the background, influences, and workflow which were involved in the development of the final product.

As technology progresses and the world grows ever smaller, interdisciplinary collaboration continues to be of utmost importance. This document records the artist’s thoughts regarding collaborative work, particularly its presence and relevance in the visual arts, as well as details the processes used in order to achieve these results. The work displayed demonstrates the power and significance of collaborative efforts in the arts.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The body of work exhibited was based around the idea of collaboration; not only the creative collaboration between artists as they progress toward completing a joint work of art, but also the various interactions that naturally arise between artists, viewers, clients, and users. I commence my work by rejecting the notion that art is created for the artist. Rather, my work exists to serve the needs of my collaborators, audience, and society at large.

As the connections binding the world continue to expand, particularly through the advent of computing technology, both the potential and the need for interdisciplinary communication will drastically increase. My desire is to further draw the field of fine arts out from its traditional gallery setting and into a realm of higher accessibility, as well as to draw the fine artist out of her own training and worldview into those of the graphic designer, the writer, the programmer, and the myriad of others that she will certainly encounter as she progresses further in her professional career.

Furthermore, it is my hope that this body of work stands as justification toward the use of collaboration in the creative fields, as well as encouragement toward those who feel hesitation as they stand on the threshold of their own experiences. Such hesitation is a natural response to the conflict that could very well arise when one’s internal world collides with that of another’s; but if we allow fear of this conflict to take root, only anxiety and stagnation can result. In order for change and growth to occur, we must allow for the possibility of conflict, and hold to the belief that the experience we gain will be of use in the future.
Artist Statement

(Dreaming.)

I dreamed that I demanded control over reality, and when I was denied this, accepted instead that I was not a person capable of changing the world.

(Lucid.)

I have anxiety. I lack the ability to fully feel, process, and express my emotions. Unable to accomplish these things, I worry about the effect on my work.

When I awoke, I became someone who replaces reality with dreams, who uses story and illustration to tread into your internal world, in order to build a shared perception of the world around us.

Because I find reality too heavy to bear, I seek out the lightness of false realities, fictional worlds. Within the context of those worlds, I seek out my “heart,” which I see now is missing.
The concept of “us” is significant. My work demands your active participation: the manipulation of an on-screen avatar, the subtle complicity of traversing and deciphering the panels of a comic, the exploration of the emotional connection forged between yourself and the world that I put before you.

The concept of “us” is terrifying. I find social interaction painfully intimidating. If my ability to recognize emotion is compromised, then what of my ability to forge connections with other human beings? Behind the mask that fiction offers, I find the solitude and safety in which to begin exploring those connections.

The concept of “us” is entertaining. People are fascinatingly similar. I wonder what reactions I can evoke by playing at the heart of these similarities. I want to make you uneasy. I want you to feel joy and despair where before there was none, and wonder in panic why you do, as the rest of the world walks away wondering the same.
The concept of “us” is irresistible. I possess a sense of desperation, a desire to reach out to others like me, those trying to rediscover their ability to feel and connect, those who understand that they are missing what makes them human. For those people, too, I strive to build a world where we can learn to feel again, where we can regain our “heart.”

(Waking.)

In the end, I am not a person capable of changing the world.

But hand me your dreams. I will change the way you see it.
CHAPTER II
ON INTERNAL WORLDS

I believe that there is such a thing as an internal "world."
Each and every one of us has one.
These worlds are not imaginary.
In our minds, they are reality.
Just as a writer expresses his world in words
A dancer with movement
And a movie director, through moving images
I express mine through painting
Because I am an artist.
That is my role, that is my work. (Amano)

Internal vs. External

Before examining the idea of “collaboration,” it is first necessary to identify and
define what composes the “individual.” In 1949 at the 16th International Congress of
Psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan discussed in detail his concept of the mirror stage, a theory
then thirteen years in development. This stage, Lacan posited, is the point in a young child’s
life when he first becomes aware that the human image reflected in a mirror is, in fact, his
own image. As a result of this recognition, the child begins to develop his sense of “I”—his
own “self.” Yet, the child’s lack of physical coordination and control over his own body
stands in opposition to the full and clear image of the “self” pictured in the mirror. The idea of the “self,” Lacan argues, therefore is shaped by its opposition to the idea of the “other.”

Although Lacan’s theory becomes problematic in its later assertions, his initial argument of the development of the internal self in opposition to external factors is an idea which has persisted to the present day. Particularly in the treatment of mental disorders such as anxiety, people are encouraged to consider where the boundary of their own self lies in comparison to the rest of existence. This concept is perhaps best illustrated in the common question: “What are the things in life that you can control?”

Presupposing the existence of free will, this approach thus implies that the internal self is defined as the aspect of reality which one can personally manage. This is accomplished through one’s choice of thoughts, behaviors, actions, and emotional responses to external factors. Correspondingly, external factors lie outside the limit of one’s control, and include such forces as one’s environment, family situation, genetic predisposition, and in fact, the very same elements of thoughts, behaviors, actions, and emotional responses which comprise the internal self—that is, when they originate from other people.

Therefore, one’s internal self, one’s identity as an individual, becomes defined when it is compared against external factors, including the internal selves of others. Unfortunately, as we can observe from human history, these comparisons do not always end at peaceful acknowledgement. Sometimes, such comparisons lead to confusion and anger when internally-based beliefs and behaviors are at odds; sometimes, such reactions can lead to great conflict.

As a person whose internal self has been extensively shaped by my experience as a second-generation immigrant of Asian descent growing up in the Midwestern United States, I
have witnessed firsthand how miscommunication, fear of miscommunication, and the lack of desire to communicate can cause tension, self-consciousness, and social anxiety among individuals. This experience, I feel, has been a contributing factor to my own anxiety, reluctance to engage socially, and tendency toward introversion. This quote, delivered by the fictional character “Joshua” in the 2008 video game The World Ends With You, summed up my feelings quite accurately when I first played the game in the summer of 2012:

Everyone has their own little internal world—a secret garden only they can enter. Each world follows its own internal logic—individuality. And the logic of one world means nothing in another. Understanding other people isn't hard... It's impossible.

Why, then, seek out the collaborative experience?

Internal - External

I am fluent in English. I have been speaking English all my life. Yet, sometime in high school, I became aware that as a person of Asian descent, I am not expected, at first glance, to have any grasp of English whatsoever. This was fine when I still lived in my hometown, where the circle of people with whom I interacted knew me as an individual, and with whom I rarely miscommunicated. Although I was still concerned with my ability to clearly express myself, my environment was sheltering enough that those worries never became too great.
However, the situation changed upon my arrival at college. In an environment where everyone was a stranger, I began to feel very self-conscious as a native English speaker who was not expected to be. Furthermore, as a half-Vietnamese, half-Japanese, natural-born American, my heritage-derived behaviors and thoughts did not fully mesh with any cultural or ethnic group I encountered. To international students, I was American; to Americans, I was Asian; and even to other second-generation immigrants, my cultural heritage was too mixed to find familiar ground.

This was not, in fact, a new experience; I had previously encountered such attitudes toward my cultural identity as a homestay student in Japan, during the summer of 2006. There, I had been viewed either as Vietnamese or American, but never as another Japanese person. For better or for worse, I left Japan with my perception of myself permanently altered, and from that time onward, would not view myself as “Japanese” as I had before my visit.

It is not that I encountered any direct conflict as a result of these experiences. Rather, I found that people were very accepting of me and my unfamiliar background, and often were curious to hear my input on various topics “as an outsider.” However, over time, these interactions wore down on the identity I thought I had so well constructed. I acknowledge that this is not at all unusual to the college experience, and in reality, the chance to change oneself is one of college’s most valuable aspects; but I found that the worries I had always nursed regarding my ability (or rather, what I saw as my lack of ability) to relate and communicate were now blooming from worry, to fear, to anxiety.

I began to develop an incredible resistance to what I viewed as intrusions on my self-perceived identity. I chose several phrases by which to call myself (Asian, female, digital...
and introduced myself by those phrases as belligerently as I could, so that nobody could question or approach me. Creatively, I tried to pursue projects through which I could explore and express the “self” I had decided to become, the “self” that I was trying to maintain in isolation. And I was desperately unhappy with that “self.”

At the time of this writing, I still have not arrived at what I would consider a satisfactory “self.” However, it was again the video game, The World Ends With You, that offered the suggestion as to what I was missing.

Internal + External

I was never good with people. I covered my ears and blocked them out. But you know what? If I don't clash, I don't change. The world ends at my borders, and the best moments slip away. Shibuya's full of people waiting for those moments, when we clash together and find something new. Here . . . , I clashed. I changed. (The World Ends With You)

In the spring of 2014, I was diagnosed with generalized anxiety. This anxiety makes it difficult for me to process my own emotional reactions, which in turn affects my thoughts and behavior. My anxiety causes me to feel reluctance toward social interaction, out of the fear that I will encounter misunderstanding and conflict. Anxiety is one of my external factors.

But if I accept that identities are formed and shaped by coming into contact with those of others, which I do, then I must put myself in a position to accept that contact. Even
though it puts me at the risk of misunderstanding or being misunderstood, if I want to expand my world, if I want to learn more about my “self,” I must leave these things open to others.

As a visual artist, I possess the training and ability to transmit messages immediately in the form of images. However, I know that my images will become more informed and more valuable as my ability to view and interpret the world grows. To this end, I am pursuing the social interaction and collaboration from which I previously shied away, in the hope that what I experience will better inform me, not only as an artist, but also as a human being.
CHAPTER III
ABOUT THE WORK: BATTLESHIP IOWA

At the 2002 Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles, California, the following quote was recorded from distinguished video game developer, Shigeru Miyamoto:

What if everything you see is more than what you see -- the person next to you is a warrior and the space that appears empty is secret door to another world? What if something appears that shouldn't? You either dismiss it, or you accept that there is much more to the world than you think. Perhaps it really is a doorway, and if you choose to go inside, you'll find many unexpected things.

This quote was highly influential in my decision to pursue video game design.

Background: Video Games

As far back as I can remember, computer and video games have been an essential part of my life. When I was a young child, my mother stayed home with me, allowing plenty of time for her to introduce me to the Nintendo Entertainment System and its collection of games, including Super Mario Bros. and Tetris (see fig. 1). As I got older, I was eventually allowed to obtain my own games for the Nintendo Game Boy, such as Pokémon, and even my own consoles, beginning with the Sony Playstation. This was in addition to the
numerous computer games that my sister and I had accumulated between the two of us, ranging from educational reading programs to arcade-style minigames.

I believed for many years that my career would eventually be in game design. Not only did I love playing video games, but I also found enjoyment in studying their structures and mechanics, discovering how they were put together and how they functioned. I amused myself by finding glitches in game programming and, with the help of the Internet, researching how such apparently small errors could have such drastic effects. Additionally, I admired the artwork and narratives that could be found in games such as The Legend of Zelda and Final Fantasy, and was intrigued by how such games married visual aesthetic and interactive experience to provide a form of entertainment unique to their format.

When I arrived at Iowa State University as an undergraduate in the fall of 2008, I dedicated my course of study to video games. Through the Integrated Studio Arts department in the College of Design, I focused on improving my abilities in illustration and 3D modeling, hoping to one day apply for a job in developing video game character concept art or models. In the spring of 2011, I had the opportunity to participate in the Iowa State University Game Design Competition, and with my team, took top ranking in the Serious Game category with an educational point-and-click adventure game meant to illustrate scientific concepts in physics and chemistry (see fig. 2). With the experience I gained, as a graduate student I was able to secure a position as a teaching assistant, aiding other students in their own studies of video game design and development.
Background: Battleship Iowa

In the spring of 2014, Iowa State University was contacted by Mr. Craig Johnson, one of the directors of the Pacific Battleship Center (PBC). The PBC is a non-profit organization which is responsible for the maintenance of the now-decommissioned battleship USS Iowa as it is converted into a platform for educational and historic purposes. From the PBC’s mission statement as published on their website:

The mission of the Pacific Battleship Center is to celebrate the American spirit through the preservation and interpretation of the Battleship IOWA, to educate the public on the accomplishments and sacrifices of American patriots, and to engage our guests in unique and exciting ways that bring the ship to life by connecting the past with the future.

Mr. Johnson’s purpose in contacting ISU was very much in line with this statement, as what he and the PBC sought were student efforts toward developing a mobile phone game based on the Iowa. The hope was that such a game could provide a novel and entertaining way for modern audiences to connect with and understand the historic battleship, while also raising interest and funds toward its ongoing maintenance. As a result, the opportunity to work with the PBC was opened to students then enrolled in Computer Science 437, Computer Game and Media Programming.

The students proposed a variety of games, which were pitched to members of the PBC’s board of directors. One of these games, initially designed by the team of James Boddie, Jesse Frush, and Karl Akert and given the working title, Project Powerhouse, was
among those selected for further development (see fig. 3). Following the conclusion of the 2013-2014 school year, Boddie and myself commenced work on a second, more polished version of this game, utilizing the same mechanics and similar objectives as the original prototype.

As work progressed on the updated Project Powerhouse, Boddie produced another prototype mobile game, which he titled Copta Moo Moo, as the game featured a helicopter-riding cow as its main character. The potential for this game to be developed into another Iowa-related project became clear right away, and we added it to our list of objectives. After some consideration, the game was redesigned to feature a seagull navigating the interior halls of the USS Iowa, and was renamed USS Iowa: The Seagull Escape.

Project: Battleship Iowa Mobile Games

Due to the nature of our client (the Pacific Battleship Center), certain guidelines were placed on the design of these games from the outset. Among these guidelines was the requirement that the games had to be suitable for all ages; excessive violence, among other factors, was not permissible. Additionally, the games had to be optimized for mobile performance, and their mechanics adapted to touchscreen input. Finally, as the games would be released as an educational component of the USS Iowa museum experience, they had to be reasonably accurate in their depictions of the ship and its history.

In preparation for work on these projects, I was given the chance to travel to Los Angeles, California, where I was permitted to create extensive photographic documentation of the battleship in person. This allowed for the collection of approximately 1,690 photographs; possibly too many, as sorting through that number in search of a specific
reference is somewhat of an endeavor! However, these photographs would be extremely useful in developing the visual experience of the games, as both reference images and sources from which in-game textures could be adapted (see fig. 4-7).

In addition to visual changes, the two projects also received some adjustments in their gameplay. In the case of Project Powerhouse, the main objective of the game, to keep the Iowa functional until she reaches her destination, remained the same; but while the first iteration of the game involved shooting at hijackers attempting to board and invade the Iowa, the redesign instead focused on maintaining a number of mechanical processes, such as the engine and communications systems, which would be necessary for the ship to proceed. This added an element of strategy and timing to the previously action-oriented gameplay. In both versions, the ship is attacked by enemy ships at certain points during its journey, causing damage to its functions and hindering its progress. Making use of the Iowa’s turrets, the player must fend off the enemy ships in order to complete his or her objective.

For The Seagull Escape, changes were made to reflect the new setting and character. The barnyard setting of the original Copta Moo Moo became the interior hallways of the USS Iowa, and obstacles were altered accordingly. Although the “flapping” motion of the original game remained intact, adjustments had to be made for the seagull character’s wider wingspan. Additionally, an idea regarding the seagull’s potential ability to defecate on unfortunate passersby gained support early in the concept stage, and made it to development.

Project: Workflow

Like most projects of this type, a basic prototype was implemented prior to beginning work on the final version, giving us a clearer idea of what type of assets and further
mechanical adjustments would need to be made. The project was assembled using the game engine Unity (see fig. 8), which allowed for the easy importation of models and other necessary assets.

The project was hosted as a repository to which both Boddie and I had access. Working on a project via repository involves making sure that your own local copy is consistently up to date with the master, as well as regularly committing local changes in order to make sure all involved are working on as close to a current copy as possible. With only two people actively working on development, this tends to not be an issue, but can quickly lead to conflicts if many people are working on the same repository but do not regularly pull or push updates.

Additionally, a major element in this project was the weekly meeting which we held between Boddie, myself, Mr. Craig Johnson, instructor James Lathrop, and eventually artist Peter Carlson, in order to determine deadlines and ensure that the project was advancing according to the PBC’s needs. This project differed from others on which I had been involved due to the presence of an outside client, on which we needed to rely for feedback and guidelines.

Project: Influences

Influences for these games included other popular mobile apps such as Angry Birds and Candy Crush Saga (see fig. 9). Although dissimilar in style and gameplay, we primarily sought to emulate those games’ successful payment structure, as an important aspect of our task was to find a way to return funds to the PBC. We also wished to examine the audiences
of those games, as we were aiming for an all-ages appeal and did not wish to create an overly violent or otherwise objectionable game which would not be suitable for children.

Mechanically, *Project Powerhouse* borrows from other first-person games such as *Wolfenstein ET* and *Team Fortress 2*; in particular, the “Engineer” class of both games, which exists as a support role and includes tasks such as building and repairing necessary items. *The Seagull Escape*, on the other hand, was highly influenced by *Temple Run* and other “infinite runner” games, as well as the phenomenally successful *Flappy Bird*. For *The Seagull Escape*, we sought to emulate the addictive quality of those games, the “one more time!” feeling. The constant presence of a visible scoreboard helps to supplement that quality.

Visually, both games were deliberately made cartoonish and exaggerated in style, with a strong emphasis on silhouette. This borrows from other cel-shaded games such as *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, and was done in order to maximize visibility within the bounds of the limited screen size offered by a mobile phone or tablet.
Background: Graphic Novels

Although I possessed an interest in comics and sequential narrative from a very young age, my involvement in graphic novel illustration itself has been long in coming. I suppose that I was introduced to comics in the same manner as most other Americans—through the black-and-white strips published daily in the newspaper, such as Charles Schulz’s *Peanuts* and Rick Kirkman and Jerry Scott’s *Baby Blues* (see fig. 10). Particularly outstanding in my memory is a 1994 newspaper insert featuring characters from Disney’s *The Lion King* in an original holiday-themed story, all told in comic strip format (see fig. 11).

In elementary school, I began to gain interest in Japanese comics, or *manga*, as well as American ones. The first manga I recall reading was Toshihiro Ono’s *The Electric Tale of Pikachu*, the plot of which was adapted from the *Pokémon* animated television series. The book was originally serialized in the monthly Japanese manga anthology *Coro Coro Comic* and subsequently translated and released in English by Viz Media (see fig. 12). Following *The Electric Tale of Pikachu*, I also picked up *Pokémon Adventure* as well as *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon*, a series I quickly abandoned due to its unexpectedly grim nature (see fig. 13).

However, I truly began to understand the appeal of manga with the stateside release of Akira Toriyama’s classic, *Dragon Ball*. *Dragon Ball*, which ran for 519 chapters over the course of 42 volumes, was originally published in the Japanese anthology *Weekly Shonen Jump* from the years 1984 to 1995. Beginning in 2000, the series was translated and published in English, again by Viz Media (see fig. 14). I remember visiting the local comic
store whenever I had caught wind that new volumes of *Dragon Ball* were available for purchase. With every new book I obtained, I looked forward with excitement to discovering the further adventures of protagonist Son Goku and company.

Yet, while I had proved myself to be an avid reader of comics, I was never inclined to the pursuit of creating them. I had certainly dabbled in writing comic strips in my free time, but the idea of developing and sustaining a continuous, serialized comic was, I believed, beyond my own ability.

I was not wrong in this regard. However, three important sources changed my mind concerning my eventual involvement in graphic novels. These were:

1. Takeshi Obata and Tsugumi Ohba’s popular manga, Bakuman.
2. The tabletop role-playing game, Dungeons & Dragons.
3. My eventual collaborators, Taylor Carlson and Emily Artz.

**Background: Bakuman**

*Bakuman* is a 20-volume manga series, published in *Weekly Shonen Jump* from 2008 to 2012. The series was the second collaborative venture between artist Takeshi Obata and writer Tsugumi Ohba, the first being the notorious best seller *Death Note*. The plot of *Bakuman* follows two school-aged boys, artist Moritaka Mashiro and writer Akito Takagi, as they attempt to produce a successful manga series.

At first, I was purely entertained by the intricate artistic and narrative style I had come to expect from the team of Obata and Ohba, as well as the humorously self-referential nature of the series; but as the story progressed, I discovered *Bakuman* to be the most honest reflection on the collaborative process I had yet encountered. The acknowledgement that a collaborative project must be doubly profitable in order to financially support two people is
brought up from the beginning; the difficulties involved in merging personalities, aesthetic preferences, and deadlines are well-discussed (see fig. 15). Of course, the fictional team eventually accomplishes their goal; but the expected climax particularly resonates when one recalls the success of their real-world counterparts.

Supposedly, fiction possesses a unique capability to change one’s perceptions of the world. *Bakuman* certainly played a formative role in my own development as an artist and how I would go on to approach the idea of collaborative projects.

**Background: Dungeons & Dragons**

Quite familiar in today’s popular culture, *Dungeons & Dragons* (commonly abbreviated to *D&D* or *DnD*) is a traditional pen-and-paper role-playing game, created in 1971 by the team of Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. First released in 1974 by Tactical Studies Rules under the name *The Fantasy Game*, *D&D* continues to be published to this day, now by Wizards of the Coast (“The History of TSR”). Estimates place the number of *D&D* players at a cumulative 20 million worldwide over the course of the game’s forty years and five editions (Waters), and *D&D* is notably credited as both the first modern role-playing game and a formative element in the establishment of today’s fantasy/sci-fi and geek culture (Frum).

Although campaigns of *Dungeons & Dragons* can be put together as one-shot affairs, possible to complete in a single sitting, they can also be designed to last for multiple sessions over the course of weeks or months. This allows for greater character development and a more extensive story to take place. The rules of *D&D* are extremely flexible, allowing any given campaign’s objectives and scope to be determined totally by the players. There is
some method to this madness; the Dungeon Master, or “DM” for short, is a player chosen to design the overall campaign and create the obstacles that the other players will face as they progress through the game’s story. Therefore, D&D could be viewed as a game in which players face off against the DM; but perhaps more accurately, D&D is a game governed by the social interactions which occur across the tabletop.

It was in this context that the characters and setting of what would later become *Knocking on the Sky* were first brought together.

**Project: Knocking on the Sky**

*Knocking on the Sky*, as it would eventually come to be called, in fact began life as a prose novel, written by Emily Artz under the working title, *Crystal Sky*. It was from this novel that Artz would adapt several characters and locations, including the city of Nicodemia and its king, Philip Alphonse Ranietel, into the game system of *Dungeons & Dragons*, allowing myself and five other of our friends to play in and with the world she presented to us. (The character I put forward was a gender-ambiguous swordmage named “Ismat”; I did not know yet what consequences were going to result from this decision.)

Over time, we indulged in developing further art, poetry, and prose revolving around these characters and this world, exploring more aspects than could be afforded during our once-a-week tabletop sessions. We wrote extensive backstories for each character, as well as details about locations we would never actually visit over the course of our *D&D* campaign. Looking back, it is clear how a graphic novel was the natural progression and product of these visual and narrative forays into our world.
How Taylor Carlson got into comics is a story for her to tell; but my part begins in the spring of 2013, when she first approached me asking if I would join her in her attempt to turn the story we had been building for so many months into a professionally published, monthly serial comic book. In truth, I would not have considered this type of project if Carlson had not initially approached me; and in addition, likely would not have signed on if I had not recently gone through a four-month long bout of depression, which lasted from November of 2012 through February of 2013.

The period from November to February was an extreme low point in my life, but I did leave it with one useful conclusion; that is, a new and acute awareness of how far I could potentially fall, and precisely what I stood to lose, which stated plainly was “everything.” In the miasma of strange logic which accompanies depressive mania, I began to feel that if I did not drastically, recklessly change something about what I was doing, I could not consider my life fully explored. I came to believe that anything I might lose by accepting the opportunity that Carlson was offering me was worth far less than what I would surely regret by continuing on my current path. As a result, knowing nothing about the tasks which Carlson was asking me to do, in the spring of 2014 I became a collaborator on the first of the KOTS stories, “The Bloody Man.”

The content of “The Bloody Man” was adapted from a short story of Carlson’s, which had in turn been adapted from events explored in our game of D&D. The content was then edited by Artz, who altered the introduction and conclusion to be suitable for graphic novel content. From the beginning, Carlson and I had a clear division of labor, with her handling the figures and me developing the background scenery as well as the inked outlines. However, we knew from this time that task division would be fluid in nature, allowing for...
exchanges of responsibility over the various aspects of illustration. Spring of 2014 also marked the beginning of our workflow development, during which we explored a variety of methods toward the most efficient method of attaining our desired final product.

Work on “The Bloody Man” concluded at the end of the 2014 school year, at which point the completed manuscript with supporting material was pitched to Image Comics. Not anticipating an immediate acceptance at this point, we subsequently initiated work on the second round of stories, titled after their respective main characters: “Alexei,” “Red,” and “Siobhan.” In the meantime, we continued development on the overarching story, working to fit it to a 60-issue structure suitable for long-term publication.

As we worked through this overall plot, the theme of the story began to emerge as “family”; the definition, the creation, and the exploration of the types of bonds that exist within that structure. The related ideas of “friends” and “home” also began to appear as prominent concepts. We find these to be timely and relevant themes in contemporary society. Further themes that we began to explore included the ideas of “myth” and “legend,” what circumstances lead to the formation of such, and the consequences that result when myths and legends are deconstructed.

For the exhibition, I will be showing three stories completed up to this point, “Alexei,” “Red,” and “The Bloody Man,” as well as “Siobhan” in its pencilled state. These are the stories intended to serve as prologue to the larger narrative, Knocking on the Sky.

Project: Workflow

Our workflow begins with a written page-by-page script, provided by Artz. As Artz is currently attending school in Oklahoma, this aspect of our workflow is delivered to
Carlson and me via Google Drive, a filesharing service offered by Google which is accessible from any web browser. This technological advancement has allowed for more efficient long-distance collaboration than could otherwise be offered by traditional or electronic mail, as direct access to Artz’s document on Google Drive allows for immediate review and editing.

From Artz’s script, Carlson is responsible for creating the initial thumbnails of what the pages will roughly look like, at a scale of about two by three inches. When we first began collaborating, the thumbnails were solely Carlson’s domain; however, as I have advanced in developing landscape scenery, I increasingly take responsibility for individual panels wherein the setting is the primary focal point. Once completed, the thumbnails are scanned and converted into Adobe Photoshop files and uploaded onto Dropbox, another filesharing application. From there, I begin painting background imagery while Carlson simultaneously begins the pencilling work on comic board.

When we first began work, the inking of the pages was my responsibility. I chose to use a combination of Maru- and G-pen and black India ink in order to accomplish this task. However, we have since changed direction, and Carlson will now be responsible for the inking as well as the pencilling. This is an example of the fluidity of our workflow, and how we continue to discover new and more efficient methods toward achieving our desired aesthetic product.

The completed inks are then scanned as well and added as another layer to the working digital files. From here, Carlson completes the character and foreground coloring as I finish work on the background imagery. Because we host our files on a shared Dropbox, this allows Carlson and I to work in tandem, rapidly swapping files back and forth and
allowing us to keep up to date on our shared progress. We are also able to leave notes for each other directly in the working files as additional Photoshop layers. This method also allows us to quickly adjust for changes that occur in at either the layout or pencil stage.

Project: Influences

Much of our workflow and visual basis stems from the examples set by *Saga* by Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples (see fig. 16), as well as the previously-mentioned team of Takeshi Obata and Tsugumi Ohba (*Death Note*, *Bakuman*).

Visually, we drew influence from both Eastern and Western artists, including Staples and Obata as well as Masashi Kishimoto (*Naruto*), Frank Miller (*300*), Jeff Smith (*Bone*), Hiromu Arakawa (*Fullmetal Alchemist*) and animator Hayao Miyazaki (*Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, *Spirited Away*, *My Neighbor Totoro*). My background painting was also influenced by Modernist and proto-Modernist painters, particularly Cézanne (see fig. 17-18).

The choice of proto-Modernist influence was both practical and thematic in nature. From a practical standpoint, the tendency and ability of Impressionism to capture the feeling of a scene seemed like a natural method to utilize in order to achieve the immediacy a comic requires for the sake of readability. Furthermore, the story itself is an examination of “mythos,” and the deconstruction of mythos in the face of reality. In this regard, Modernist painting, with its images stripped of mythos, seemed like an appropriate aesthetic toward the theme of our narrative.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Summary
The world ends with you. If you want to enjoy life, expand your world.
You gotta push your horizons out as far as they'll go. *(The World Ends With You)*

Every person possesses a unique set of skills, beliefs, and experiences, which are shaped during our lifetimes by innumerable factors: the places where we grew up, the families among whom we were raised, the educations we received, and whatever innate tendencies and talents we have encoded into our physical selves. However, it is only when our beliefs and experiences are brought into contrast with those of others’, when we leave the comfortable bubbles of our personal worldviews to journey into unfamiliar territory, and when we open our own territory to be encroached upon by other people; only then, do we really begin to grow.

Through my writing and my work, I hope to have sufficiently demonstrated my belief in the importance of this type of growth, which I find to be necessary, not only for the visual arts or for individual persons, but for the progress of human culture as a whole. The interdisciplinary encounters that I was fortunate enough to have during my time as a graduate student were formative and practical experiences toward my development and future as an artist. As I continue in my career, I will not exist in a vacuum; my work will continuously be informed by the people around me, whether
they are my clients, my audience, my advisors, or my collaborators. Without the influence of other people and their own needs, opinions, and determination, the work which I have helped to create during this time could not have come into existence.

As a result of pursuing this type of work, I have also grown on a personal level and come to a better understanding of myself, and how I best function in a working environment. I have obtained a more thorough knowledge of my skills, limits, and motivations, and it is now clearer to me than ever that I will perform my best in a setting where I work closely with others whom I can trust to encourage and challenge my ability. This is not to say that I am not self-driven. Rather, my motivation comes from the desire to contribute to projects larger than what I could accomplish on my own, for the advancement of others as well as myself. The belief that I am helping to achieve a bigger goal, not only for me, but also for those around me, helps me stabilize my view of myself, which has become a vitally important part of how I confront and deal with my anxiety. In the future, I hope to often stand back and be able to take pride in the parts of a work that I contributed, while marveling at the fact that the work could not have come to be without similar efforts on the all the parts of those involved.

I would like for my work to stand as testament to the value of collaborative efforts, and encourage others who find themselves in similar situations to consider the significance of the collaborative artist.
Future Plans

**Battleship *Iowa* Mobile Games**

Beginning in the summer of 2015, I hope to begin deploying the games that James Boddie, Peter Carlson, and myself have so far developed for the Pacific Battleship Center’s use. These games will be distributed initially as downloadable apps from Google Play (formerly known as the Android Market), and eventually from the Apple App Store as well. Despite the slight cost associated with publishing to the App Store, this move ought to be done in order to reach as much of the mobile phone market as possible.

The games will be promoted via the PBC’s website and Facebook page, and will generate revenue via in-game advertisements and direct donation links, as well as potentially through the purchase of an advertisement-free “full” version. While it would be possible to continue generating purchasable in-game content, I believe that the games stand well on their own and that future efforts should instead be directed toward the development of entirely new games and concepts.

To that end, I hope that the work I have done so far helps to support the growing partnership between the PBC and Iowa State University. I believe that this partnership will allow for students at ISU to not only further their technical and creative skills in game and application design and development, but also to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of national history and monuments such as the battleship. The game concepts that I am overseeing this semester as an instructor show a great deal of promise toward both the support of the PBC and the students’ own personal growth.
Working with the Pacific Battleship Center has been an incredibly rewarding experience, and while I would gladly welcome further opportunities to do so, I believe that the best impact I could have made in my role was to give future College of Design students this same chance to professionally collaborate with outside clients as well as their fellow Iowa Staters, both inside and out of their own college. Too often, I feel that university students are unnecessarily divided by college and department, while the greatest strength of the university structure, its interdisciplinary nature, goes unutilized. Particularly at Iowa State, with its emphasis on science and technology, students of the visual arts should be encouraged to seek out students of other disciplines in order to better inform themselves and their collaborators of the creative potential they possess between them.

I sincerely hope that future students continue to be offered this excellent opportunity.

Graphic Novel *Knocking on the Sky*

In 2014, I made a formal agreement with Taylor Carlson to dedicate five years to the development of *Knocking on the Sky*. As of the beginning of 2015, our team (including writer Emily Artz) has four years left of this agreement, during which time we intend to achieve a publishing contract for the series. We acknowledge that publishing and maintaining an ongoing comic book series will not be a simple or easy task, but we feel that it is better for us to take on this type of challenge now in our professional careers rather than delay our decision and regret not pursuing it earlier. We remain cautiously optimistic regarding the timeline in which we expect to achieve publication.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, my primary role has become increasingly focused on illustrating the landscape and background scenery necessary for our graphic novel. To
this end, I will be working foremost on improving my ability to collect and utilize reference images, as the scope of our novel will take us through a wide variety of settings, including mountains, jungles, deserts, and underground, as well as numerous urban locations. In order to best represent these settings as they exist in my mind, I will be working intensively and in the long-term to build an internal visual repertoire of specific content, particularly color. Color in particular has the ability to influence a viewer’s mood and thought, and by utilizing this element, I will be better able to convey the mood of our story with the immediacy required of the comic book format.

Additionally, I will continue to work on exploring the digital format, and the possibilities it has to offer. Considering that artists today still find novel ways to treat paint, I firmly view digital media as relatively in its absolute infancy. This, I think, is particularly true in the realm of digitally-illustrated comic books. Just as paint on canvas cannot be fully experienced when it is digitized, I believe that there must be some nature of digital media, including digital media in its printed form, which is unique to itself and which cannot be adequately achieved by other means. As time goes on, I intend to be included as part of the movement which will find some solutions to this question.

That said, I am extremely optimistic about working in a format which is as consumable and disposable as comic books. *Action Comics* #1 aside, comic books themselves are not particularly valuable items; but in that lack of value is a tremendous utility, which is the ability to be distributed in mass amounts to a wide audience. I reiterate that my work is not made for myself, but rather for other people, and I deeply hope that some of the people who come across my work will find something within it to which they can connect.
I am greatly looking forward to many years of working on this project.

Conclusion

The thought of my work being received and responded to terrifies me, but I believe that my role as an artist requires me to face that fear. Expression is a one-way street, but if I am to achieve my full creative potential, I must allow myself to be open to the input and influence of the people around me.

I realize that I, on my own, am only a limited human being. I have only my own thoughts, my own skills, and my own experiences. If I wish to attain something greater, then I need to push the boundaries of “myself” beyond where they exist now. What I can accomplish by reaching “outside” will always be more than what I can accomplish in isolation. What we can do in tandem with others will always be more than what we can do alone.
APPENDIX A

FIGURES

Fig. 1. Title screen for the 1985 Nintendo Entertainment System game, *Super Mario Bros.*

Fig. 2. Screenshot from *That 1 Science Game*, an educational Flash game created for the 2011 Iowa State University Game Development Competition. Screenshot by author. 9 Mar. 2015.
Fig. 3. Concept art illustrating the original version of *Project Powerhouse*. James Boddie, et al. 11 Sept. 2014.

Fig. 4. Exterior of the USS *Iowa*. Personal photograph by author. 9 Nov. 2014.
Fig. 5. Porthole on the USS Iowa. Personal photograph by author. 9 Nov. 2014.

Fig. 6. Exterior door on the USS Iowa. Personal photograph by author. 9 Nov. 2014.
Fig. 7. Looking down at a 5-inch gun mount on the USS Iowa. Personal photograph by author. 9 Nov. 2014.

Fig. 8. Layout of the game development software, Unity (Version 4.6.2f1). Screenshot by author. 9 Mar. 2015.

Fig. 10. *Peanuts* by Charles Schulz, an example of a comic I would have encountered in my childhood. GoComics. 4 Mar. 2015. Web. 10 Mar. 2015.
Fig. 11. Scan from the December 7, 1994 issue of the Hawaii Tribune-Herald, containing an original comic strip story featuring characters from Disney’s *The Lion King*. From the author’s collection. 7 Dec. 1994. Print. 10 Mar. 2015.


Fig. 15. Pages from *Bakuman* by Takeshi Obata and Tsugumi Ohba discussing collaboration in comic creation. From the author’s collection. Aug. 2010. Print. 11 Mar. 2015.
Fig. 16. Cover of *Saga* #1, written by Brian K. Vaughn and illustrated by Fiona Staples. Published by Image Comics. ComicVine. N.d. Web. 10 Mar. 2015.

Fig. 17. *Basket of Apples* by Paul Cézanne. Oil on canvas, 1895. WikiArt. N.d. Web. 10 Mar. 2015.
Fig. 18. *Mont Sainte-Victoire* by Paul Cézanne; this and the previous painting were influential in the aesthetic development of *Knocking on the Sky*. Oil on canvas, 1895. WikiArt. N.d. Web. 10 Mar. 2015.
Renders of the 3D model of the USS Iowa created for Project Powerhouse.
Renders of 5- and 16-inch gun models created for *Project Powerhouse*. 
Screenshots of *Project Powerhouse* as rendered in Unity.
Render of the seagull model used for *USS Iowa: The Seagull Escape*.

Screenshots of *The Seagull Escape* as rendered in Unity.
Concept art (left) of *The Seagull Escape* as compared to a screenshot of actual gameplay (right).

The following are pages from the four short comic stories: “The Bloody Man,” “Alexei,” “Red,” and “Siobhan.” (While “Siobhan” is still in the pencilling stage, it is being included here for the sake of completion.)
RIGHT ON TIME, OLIVER.

FUCKIN' THIEVES!

YOU STEAL MY FOOD AGAIN AND I'LL DO WORSE THAN THROW YOU OUT!

YOU DON'T NEED IT, YA FAT BASTARD---

GIVE IT A REST, DEIRDRÉ.

AWWW, HELL'S---

SEE, THAT WAS A TERRIBLE IDEA.

IT'S TRUE.

I SWEAR TO GODS ROWAN---

GUYS--

C'MON, GUYS, QUIT ARGUING.

GUYS--

OH, SHIT.
TCH. WHAT A DISGRACE--
SO'S STARVIN', BLONDIE.

--EVERYONE KNOWS HE FORGETS TO LOCK THE CART DOORS MOST NIGHTS.

HERE.
MONEY? WHY?

WOW.
BECAUSE YOU THREE ARE TERRIBLE THIEVES.

AN' WHO WOULD'VE TAUGHT A RICHBOY LIKE YOU ABOUT THIEVING?

MY DAUGHTER.
THE BLOODY MAN

PRIMARY ARTIST: TAYLOR BUCKLEY
SECONDARY ARTIST: STEFANIE DAO
WRITER: EMILY ARTZ & TAYLOR BUCKLEY

BACK TO BUSINESS.
OLIVER:

GOT YOUR NOTE— THERE ARE MORE SUBLIME WAYS THAN ATTACHING THEM TO ARROWS, YOU KNOW.

I’LL BE BACK IN THE CITY EARLY THIS WEEK; I SHOULD HAVE A BIT OF TIME OPEN ON THE EVE OF THE 15TH.

I’M STAYING ON THE UPPER FLOOR OF THE BLACKBIRD & BELL PUB.

KEEP YOURSELF AND YOUR AFFAIRS QUIET; I’M CURRENTLY WORKING ON A DELICATE PROJECT.

TAKE CARE NOT TO BRING YOUR DEMON FRIEND WITH YOU. --RED
SUSTLE, RED.

...UNLOCKED?
Nearly eight hundred years ago, Emperor Marlon inherited one of the richest lands in the middle plane.

Artificery, the study of mechanics and magic, was the backbone of the realm. For years, there was peace and progress.

But history books such as this do not record peacetime, but war.

Soon, Marlon’s desire for wealth began to destroy him, and his kindness decayed as he demanded more and more of his artificers.
Even Korbán, Emperor Marlon’s head artificer, was not spared Marlon’s rage. Soon, Marlon’s paranoia and rage resulted in Korbán’s exile.

Korbán’s students were hunted like animals. The sciences withered. Many dreamed that Korbán would return...

...however, as the years passed, most gave up hope.

However, his true disciples always knew he would return—sweep in like a hurricane and right the injustice.

Their faith was not in vain. Korbán returned, but only for a day—when night fell, Korbán was gone, along with half of the population. All that was left of Korbán’s followers was a crater.

But some believe that Korbán left more than a crater... that he left a prize for any artificer brave enough to find it. The key lies in his last will and testament, a book lost to the ages. The book is believed to be the key to an unknown artifact, Korbán’s last gift to his fellow artificers.
TOO BUSY FOR ‘HELLO,’ OLIVER?

JUST LIKE YOU’RE TOO OLD FOR FAIRYTALES, RED.

NOT FAIRYTALES, KINGSPORT, HISTORY!

I’M ON THE VERGE OF A BREAKTHROUGH.

AREN’T YOU ALWAYS.

KORBAN’S CRYSTALS WERE MEANT TO BE POWERED BY A SOUL, NOT BY MAGIC.

THEY’RE SOULS, AND MANIPULATING THEM ISN’T—

NOW, SIT.

I’M NOT GOING TO TOUCH UP YOUR SPELLWORK WITH YOU PACING.

PLEASE, DON’T FEEL THE NEED TO SERVE AS MY MORAL COMPASS.
There’s few people that can make a deal with the devil and remain as functional as you, Oliver.

You’re such a whiner.

Well, your bedside manner is shit.

If you call constant heat flashes and the slow drain of humanity functional, then I’m perfectly fine.

To be frank, I’m surprised it hasn’t caught her scent yet...

Has it caught up recently?

Hunter demons aren’t known for their sloth.

Siobhan has a habit of forgetting to bathe.

Not for a few months.

I’m not sure if that’s a good sign or a bad sign.

That’s my daughter you’re talking about, Red.

Touchy, touchy.

Now, do you want to tell me what you’re really here about?
This book is a map to what is likely the largest, most intricate alchemic creation of our age, Oliver.

Your "concern" is touching, but I assure you I know exactly what I'm doing.

I... I'm concerned about the direction your research is going.

"Souls were created and trapped in crystalline cubes for the benefit of all artificers."

If one of Korbán's trapped souls could be controlled, it could lead us to his ultimate creation!

"If it could be controlled?"

You sound like you're speaking from experience.

How astute of you, Ollie.

I'm flattered that you've been following my research so carefully.

I know what you're up to.
"Up to?" you wound me, Ollie.

Korbán’s “artifact” is nothing but a myth. A dangerous one.

Come now... how dangerous can a stick be?

You-- what is this?

I found one of Korbán’s original cubes, and replicated his experiment.

Can’t you feel the magic? It’s different. It’s alive!

I haven’t discovered it’s sensory abilities as of yet, but--

This is wrong, Phileas, and you know it.

Such a wet blanket.

You have to stop.

... Are you going to make me?

Don’t bore me with your outdated ethics. This is bigger than all of us. And don’t call me Phileas.
SO SERIOUS, OLLIE.
I’m surprised you’re so confrontational. Are you certain you want to aggravate that brand?

If you’ve got any sense left at all, back down.

Phleas, don’t make me threaten you. I swear to gods—

Red, if you even think about—

I made that spell. That’s shielding her, and I can take it away.

Swear to whom, exactly?

That brand marks you beholden to the devil, Ollie. That rules out most deities you’d care to name.
THE LADY DEATH, PERHAPS?

I AM BURNING THIS PLACE AND I WILL BURN YOU WITH IT!

YOU’RE SO... SO MUCH FUN.

GODS LOVE YOU, OLLIE.

I NEVER KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT.
PLEASE, EXCUSE MY GIRL.

GIRL?

IT’S A LITTLE PROTECTIVE OF ITS MASTER.

YOU’RE WRONG, PHILEAS.
YOU ASSUME YOU’RE THE MASTER.
WELL, OLLIE--

LET'S HOPE I DON'T MAKE A HABIT OF IT.

...lest your little girl end up on the wrong side of a demon!
AFTER ALL YOU’VE DONE FOR THAT GUTTERSNIPE GIRL...

DOES SHE STILL THINK YOU’RE DEAD?

AAUGH--!!

YOU NEVER DID LEARN HOW TO TAKE A BEATING.

BUT I CAN GIVE ONE.
AS I'M SURE IS NOW PAINFULLY OBVIOUS--

YOU HAVE MISCALCULATED, MY OLD FRIEND.

I DID WANT TO WALK OUT OF HERE AS FRIENDS, OLLIE, TRULY.

BROTHERS IN ARMS.

......

NOW I'M NOT SURE IF I WANT YOU WALKING OUT OF HERE AT ALL.
I learned a little curse, designed to hobble people with your... condition.

Fortunately for you, I can’t kill you now. That brand connected you with me, somehow.

A loophole I’ll have to sew shut soon.

I built in a failsafe, like any logical sorcerer would, just to make sure I could keep you in line when the time came.

I take any component of the spell, and it breaks down, like a cog out of a machine.

Such as... the pendant.

Now listen close, Ollie, because I want you to remember this.

I’m going plant this pendant on your little boat of a daughter, so that you think twice about following me.

Unless you want to leave your little spell broken.
IN WHICH CASE YOU CAN KEEP PURSUING ME AND LEAVE YOUR DAUGHTER.

YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO PICK HER REMAINS OUT OF THE DEMON’S TEETH.

NOW, GET OUT OF MY HAIR. I HAVE WORK TO DO.

GOODNIGHT, OLD FRIEND.

WAKE UP, KINGSPORT!
Olive Kingsport has two
sets of memories. One is
his. The other is on loan.

There was a time before
queens and kings, when
the biggest trouble was
deciding what color of
ribbon to put in her hair.

Before death had come pecking at
the window, and before he knew
that the whispered myths of an
empty helmet enthroned in flame
were a terrible reality.
His memory twisted and warped, straining to remember what it felt like to hold his daughter, and trying to forget what it felt like to be eaten from the inside out.

He couldn’t remember which of them had died.
......

...SHIT.

RED, D’ANAM DON DIABHAL--
THE PENDANT!

'SO TALK TO HIM, OLLIE, IT'LL BE FINE, OLLIE!"

JACKASS.

HOXKK--!!
OH, GODS.

I HOPE THIS IS A FIRST EDITION, YOU BASTARD.

MR. SELLE?

SIR... SIR, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

YOUR CHECKOUT TIME WAS TWO HOURS AGO.

MASTER SE-- WAIT, WHO ARE YOU?

IS THAT BLOOD?

I APOLOGIZE IN ADVANCE FOR THIS, MA'AM.

YOU'RE GOING TO WANT TO LET THIS BURN FOR AWHILE.
YOU DON’T THINK IT WAS—!!

LOOK!

HOLY HELL!

THE SHIPS ARE FLYIN’!

COOL.

...WE’RE LEAVING.

BUT--

NO BUTS. NOW.

IT’S A BAD SIGN, WHEN THE SHIPS START FLYING.

THE WAR’S COMING.
KNOCKING ON THE SKY
Alexei, we're way up. This path is going to ice over if we go much higher.

Who cares?

Where are we, anyway?

We aren't home.

That's what matters.

Whatever you say, Lex...
IT'S PERFECT!

SMELL THAT? THE CRISP NEW SNOW. THE WOODY SCENT OF PINE—

YOU'RE ALLERGIC TO PINE SAP?

I KNOW.

COME ON, MATTIE, I KNOW WHERE I'M—-

GOING...

ALIEN DETECTED. PLEASE STATE YOUR IDENTITY.

A-A-ALEXEI AND ISMAT.

UNDE. COS. NIZE. ALEN. IDENTIFY.

I'M THE CROWN PRICE OF RODAN!

ALEXEI, GET BEHIND ME.

IT'S JUST A MACHINE!

IDENTITY NOT RECOGNIZED. IDENTIFY— IDENTIFY—

ISMAT—
GET DOWN!!

Why doesn't it recognize me? They're programmed to recognize me!!

Keep your head down.

I'm the prince!

Alexei--

He doesn't believe you.
PLEASE STATE YOUR IDENTITY

IDENTITY NOT FOUND——

STAY BACK, ALEXEI!!

ISMATT??

IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO GO THIS WAY!!

MATTIE!! MATTIE, WHAT'S HAPPENING——
I'm okay!

Stay out of the water.

You just had to throw it in a lake?!

I thought those things were built for war.

Not yet.

Let's just get out of here.

I can't just leave him there!

He was hurt already.

What are you talking about?!
IT'S NOT A HIM, IT'S AN IT!
AN 'IT' THAT TRIED TO KILL US!
HE HAD FAULTY PROGRAMMING.
SOMEONE HAS TO PUT HIM OUT OF HIS MISERY.

ISMAI, IT'S JUST A BROKEN MACHINE--

IT'S DONE.

...ALEX!
I GET IT ALREADY--

IT'S JUST A MACHINE.

NO, THERE'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD SEE.

HIS INSIDES AREN'T SUPPOSED TO LOOK LIKE THAT.

THIS WASN'T FAULTY PROGRAMMING...
HE WAS DOING EXACTLY AS HE WAS TOLD.
At the library?

What did they take?

Was anyone hurt?

Hurt? Honey, give us more credit.

The library is the center of Nicodemus’s history and culture.

Guarded by the city’s finest.

Must’ve taken years to earn that badge—sorry, Patch—on your chest.

Boy, you’d think the city’s finest could afford a better seamstress.

Hey, it’s a very intense summer training camp?

Anyway this guy was just a smash’n grab, no violence.

No need for it, he was in and out so fast.

Just snatched some old book.
SO THAT'S ALL YOU KNOW--

ABOUT THE REAL TREASURES IN THE LIBRARY

AND HOUSEBREAKING, FOR THAT MATTER.

HMMMM.

IS THAT--!

JUST A SMASH 'N GRAB, HUH?

BURGLARY IS AN ART FORM.

IT TAKES GRACE.

DEXTERITY

PLANNING.
NOT BEING AFRAID OF HEIGHTS HELPS.

YOU MEAN BEIN' CRAZY?

SEE, THAT'S WHAT SOMEONE WHO'S AFRAID OF HEIGHTS WOULD SAY.

A GOOD THIEF IS NEVER EVEN SEEN.

WHAT WAS THAT??

I DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING!

NEVER SEEN... UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE.

HYPOTHETICALLY SPEAKING, OF COURSE.

THAT'S AMAZING!

ONLY A REAL LOWLIFE PATHETIC SCAVENGER WOULD STAND TO THEIVING——

ESPECIALLY FROM SUCH A FINELY TRAINED BARRACK AS THE NICODEMIA GUARD!

HEY, PSYCHO!
**Panel 1:**

"It should be my... My honor to..."

**Panel 2:**

"Sigh the next round..."

**Panel 3:**

"Next round's on... on me..."

**Panel 4:**

"Shit!!"

**Panel 5:**

"Keep those eyes open, psycho. Tell me more about the girl, okay?"

**Panel 6:**

"I know I said 'no questions asked' but you are pushing it, kid!"

**Panel 7:**

"She had stars in her eyes..."

**Panel 8:**

"That's it. Tell me more..."

**Panel 9:**

"A good thief... A good thief is never seen."
NEVER HAS TO DO MUCH AS DRAW BLOOD.

LEAVES BEHIND NO TRACE.

HE’S A SHADOW. A BREEZE.
HE BENDS TREES WITH HIS PASSING, BUT BREAKS NOTHING.

HE SEES THE GIRL... GIRL WITH EYES BRIGHT AS MIRRORS, HEHEHEHEHE...

THOUGHT YOU SAID ‘STARS.’

NAH, MIRRORS.
HAD TO PUT
THE MIRRORS
IN 'EM FIRST...

.............

Uh, tell you what—

How bout this
one's for free,
and I'll just be a
footnote in your
memories one day...

Really gotta
look for the
stars...

A shadow takes
only what it
came for,
folded away safe
under its wings, never
to be seen again.

A shadow speaks
nothing, leaves only
an empty plinth...

...and a few memories.
Good stories to tell
your grandchildren.
NORMAL'S A MATTER OF OPINION.

SO'S VIOLENCE.
JUSTICE, VENGEANCE,
ALL THAT SHIT.

IT ALL DEPENDS ON
WHERE YOU'RE STANDING.

AND WHAT YOU'RE
HOLDING IN YOUR HAND.
SUBJECT: RA-6 (VOLUNTEER, BRIDGE DISTRICT)

SUBJECT: SHOKEHAN [NO GUNNADE] 12 YO. (1478-1490)

DESIGNATED GUARDIAN: OLIVER KINGSPOOL 28 YO. (1464-1490?)

FAILED
CAUSE: SUBJECT DECEASED
IS IT MALFUNCTIONING? I CAN HELP YOU. I CAN FIX IT! LET ME--

WHERE ARE YOU DOING THIS? THERE'S NO--

THEY WERE VOLUNTEERS, THEY WERE ALL VOLUNTEERS!

YOU NEED ME, DON'T DO THIS!

Neural Integrated Prostheses

SYMPTOMS OBSERVED:
- Symptoms Indicate Blood Poisoning
  - Light-headedness, Difficulty Concentrating, Confusion, Vomiting, Vertigo, Lack of Motor Control, Seizures, Psychosis, Permanent Coma

Degradation of host shows little effect on prosthesis. Due to Designated Guardian restricting patient access, further observation is postponed.

PLEASE!!

OHH MY GOD!!
WHO'S RIGHT, WHO'S WRONG.

WHO'S A HERO, WHO'S A KILLER.

WHO LIVED, WHO GOT KILLED.

WHO DIDN'T REALLY DO EITHER.

LIKE I SAID... ALL A MATTER OF OPINION.

PLEASE, I SWEAR I--I DIDN'T...

I DIDN'T KNOW...

...ANYTHING.
YOU'RE HER -
THE ONE WHO DIED.

IN THE FLESH.
WELL, IN THE REANIMATED FLESH.

THE REST OF THEM ARE HOLED UP IN THE BASEMENT.
YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND QUICK, DON'T CHA?

I JUST-- I WAS SHOCKED.
IT'S, UH-- VIOLENT.
NO SHIT.

THAT MAN, IN THE PHOT. ANYWAY.
I DIDN'T REALIZE THAT THEY STILL HAD INFO ON ME.

THESE PEOPLE LIKE TO PRETEND THE OLD DAYS ARE ALL BEHIND THEM, BUT THEY DON'T WANT TO LET GO, NOT REALLY.
THEY RULED THE WORLD BEFORE THE CIVILIANS. THEY DON'T RULE EVERYONE.
Not anymore.

Nuitia likes to come in through back doors around here.

Siobhan? I’m sorry for what they did to you.

Go out the front if you don’t wanna get snatched.

If ya do get snatched, slipst int’tears, they hate that.

Yeah.

Me too.
REFERENCES


