Alternate Reality Gaming
Engineering the Future through Play

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Slipstream as Alternate Reality

- Bruce Sterling, inventor of the term “slipstream” in 1989
Alternate Reality Fiction

“Alternate reality fiction is a subgenre and hybrid of Urban Fantasy and Alternate History; this often fun and extraordinarily small genre not only alters this world's history, but also its dynamics.”

- OED for Science Fiction
Alternate Reality Fiction

“Alternate reality, another—equally valid but not always attainable—way of experiencing existence.”

Alternate Reality Fiction

“We're not bound by the same limitations, and we can become aware of alternate realities.”

- L. TUTTLE Lost Futures 95, 1992
“When they returned, they discovered that the present was just as they'd left it, that their excursion in time had not changed the past, but rather created a new alternate reality.”

Playing in the Slipstream

The *players* invented the name alternate reality gaming.

Why do they want an alternate reality? What specifically do they want to alter about their everyday lives?
“The more the merrier.” (experience design)
Players want the pleasures of a collective identity. They want to be a part of something bigger.

“More is needed.” (supercomputing)
Players want to achieve unprecedented problem solving power. They want to make a difference.

“More is different.” (physics)
Players want to directly experience what’s next. They want to be the pioneers of the complexity of the future.
Recombination through Play

“Genetic recombination is the process through which new DNA combinations not present in earlier generations are made possible.”

Techno-social recombination is the process through which new social combinations not present in earlier generations are made possible... through play.
Recombination through Play

“We are more ready to try the untried when what we do is inconsequential. Hence the fact that many inventions had their birth as toys.”

-- social philosopher Eric Hoffer

Alternate reality games are the invention of new, near-future social organizations.
So: What is an alternate reality game?

Nine common design factors:

1. A viral mystery
2. Multi-platform interactive story
3. Real-world missions
4. Persistent gameplay
5. Everyday, intimate design
6. Real play, not role play
7. Massively collaborative
8. Community-driven (Web 2.0)
9. "Live" entertainment
Engineering the Future via Play

The players hack real-imagined social networks out of everyday technologies. They collectively experience and test the pleasures and powers of novel social-technological constructs. Players embody the future, now (so stay in their slipstream...).
Let’s look at three examples of near-future techno-social networks engineered through ARG play:

– bionic software collectives, or “wetware A.I.”
– the mobile hive mind, or “swarm networks”
– the folksonomy mob
The *A.I.* Web game ("The Beast") was designed as an immersive, real-world experience of the back story to Spielberg's film *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence.*
Real world timeline.

2001. Real people on real Earth.  
2142. Real future on real Earth.

A.I. timeline.

2142. Alternate future in pre-apocalyptic Earth.

Connecting fans directly to the A.I. world:

How can we help real players on this Earth feel responsible for a fictional future in an alternate reality?
The Sentient Beings Voting Rights Amendment

Amendment XLVII

Sentient Being Voting Rights has passed

YES: 58.33%
NO: 41.67%
A.I. Mission: Construct a Distributed Nightmare Database
*I Love Bees* was designed as an immersive, real-world experience of the backstory to Bungie’s *Halo 2.*
Connecting fans directly to the Halo world:
How can we help real players on this Earth feel responsible for a fictional future in an alternate reality?
HALT - MODULE CORE HEMORRHAGE

Control has been yielded to the SYSTEM PERIL DISTRIBUTED REFLEX.

This medium is classified, and has a STRONG INTRUSIVE INCLINATION.

PHASE 1 COMPLETE: Network throttling has eroded.

In 7 days this medium will metastasize.

COUNTDOWN TO WIDE AWAKE AND PHYSICAL:

20:15:12:42:265

Make your decisions accordingly.

FAQ
Q: What happened to this site?
A: No idea. Help me out here.
I Love Bees Mission: Build a Swarm Computing Network
Last Call Poker was designed as an immersive, real-world experience of Activison’s fictive *Gun* world.
Connecting fans directly to the GUN world: what kind of everyday, real-world gameplay would create an immersive, social experience of the GUN game world?
LET’S SEND VIDEOGAMERS TO HISTORIC CEMETERIES!

“You killed them... now go play your respects.”
**Last Call Poker**

**Mission:**
Create Folksonomy Mobs

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The key thing about the game is, there's only four shapes you get on top of a tombstone.

- pointy = spades
- round = hearts
- flat = diamonds
- statue on top = clubs

Take the last year in the date of death, that's your card value. 1945, that's a 5; 2001, the one is the Ace.

Two names on the stone? That's a Jack. Three is a Queen, four or more is Kings.

Lay out the flop -- 5 regular cards if you got 'em, a line of 5 tombstones if you don't. Now each pair has two minutes to find their two best hole cards. Trick is, you got to be able to touch both tombstones and each other at the same time -- so maybe I've got one hand on a ten of hearts, and the other on my buddy's toe while he's stretched out to touch another hear for the flush.

After 3 minutes, whoever's got the working watch yells our "LAST CALL" and everybody runs hell for leather back to the flop and says what they found. Only the best hand has to prove it, and in case of ties, first back to the flop is the winner.
ARGs for Marketing...

Why it has worked for marketing so far:

• ARG play makes people happy and powerfully engaged. (Positive feelings associated with the marketed brand.)

• ARG play is sticky—people want to keep being happy and powerfully engaged. (Long-term bonds developed with the marketed brand.)
ARGs for Marketing... and beyond!

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Engineering the future is a collaborative game

“To be sure, there have been earlier forms of collective intelligence... But, ARGs push it to the next level.”

–media theorist/ARG critic, Henry Jenkins
Engineering the future is a collaborative game

“We just accidentally re-invented Science as pop culture entertainment.”
- Sean Stewart, co-creator of ARGs
Want to engineer the future through play?

Follow the ARG slipstream here:

The Alternate Reality Gaming Network
www.argn.com

Unfiction Forums
www.forums.unfiction.com
Alternate Reality Gaming

“The game is now over... the game has just begun.”

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