



CONVERGENCE **CULTURE** CONSORTIUM  
COMPARATIVE MEDIA STUDIES AT MIT

# Deconstructing The Lost Experience

In-Depth Analysis of an ARG

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## Executive Summary

*This Is Not (Just) An Advertisement*, a white paper produced for the Convergence Culture Consortium earlier this year, examined the evolution and significance of an emerging form of large-scale interactive campaigns referred to as *alternate reality games*, or *ARGs*. As that discussion noted, the term “ARG” is somewhat problematic, and functions less as a clear definition than as a working title for projects that tend to share certain characteristics. Campaigns are likely to be considered ARGs if they bear several of the following traits:

- Interactive stories that unfold across media platforms and real-life spaces
- Offer an interactive, dispersed narrative experience
- Require participants to reconstruct elements of a fragmented narrative
- Refuse to acknowledge themselves as games
- Have no clear rules or guidelines for participants
- Require participants to solve difficult challenges or puzzles to progress
- Encourage or require the formation of collaborative player communities<sup>a</sup>

While *Not (Just) An Advertisement* was written to provide a systematic overview tracing the evolution and possible applications of alternate reality games, this paper is intended to supplement that discussion with a detailed case study of a recent, high-profile ARG campaign called *The Lost Experience*, and in the process, to consider current challenges facing both content producers and corporate sponsors moving into the ARG space.

Beginning with an in-depth discussion of the *The Lost Experience*'s framing, content, and public response, this paper assesses both the creative and strategic successes and failures of the campaign, considers the problems involved in integrating advertising content into an ARG's narrative, and illustrates several current problems that designers and sponsors face in implementing ARG campaigns.

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# I. Background & Context

Developed as a collaborative project between ABC's marketing department, the producers of the hit television show *Lost*, and four corporate sponsoring partners, The Lost Experience (TLE) was conceived as a grand-scale experiment in both television promotion and transmedia storytelling. The campaign, which ran from May 3 through September 24, 2006, represents the most significant (and visible) attempt to link an American broadcast television program with an interactive campaign since the failure of ABC's *Push, NV* in September 2002. Unlike *Push*, however, TLE was not designed to unfold in tandem with the show, but as a 'bridge' to sustain audience engagement and interest in *Lost* during the summer hiatus between the show's second and third seasons.

The narrative content of The Lost Experience was written by veteran *Lost* scribe Javier Grillo-Marxuach and newcomer Jordan Rosenberg, under the supervision of *Lost* co-Executive Producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse. According to Grillo-Marxuach, he and Rosenberg

turned the [story] into a series of documents describing the different phases of the game and establishing the creative framework for how things would be revealed, what the content would be, and how we wanted that to look. Our web design firm took that content and designed the mechanics of the hacks, taking our ideas and turning them into the... puzzles and animations/webpages.<sup>b</sup>

## Framing TLE: What's In A Name?

When The Lost Experience was first announced on April 24, 2006, the promotional rhetoric of ABC's press release sparked widespread excitement amongst both ARG and *Lost* devotees, describing the project as

a revolutionary marketing endeavor...designed to further enhance viewers' relationship with the program. The 'Lost Experience' incorporates over twenty broadcasters from five continents, making it the largest global interactive challenge based on a television series.<sup>c</sup>

With this press release, ABC made two significant decisions about the framing of TLE: first, to abandon the long-standing "This Is Not A Game" approach (by announcing the game existed, that it was a marketing initiative, and that it was designed to deepen audience engagement), and second, to avoid using the existing "ARG" description. These decisions suggest TLE was designed primarily to be accessible to *Lost* fans who were previously unfamiliar with ARGs.

In the extensive media coverage that followed this initial announcement, the show's producers went so far as to instruct viewers when the game would begin. In a *New York Times* article about the campaign, *Lost* Executive Producer Carlton Cuse insisted fans should "watch the May 3rd episode very carefully... You can TiVo it, but don't skip the commercials."<sup>d</sup>

These announcements prompted games scholar Ian Bogost to observe that,

For better or worse, the [ARG] genre has currently defined itself as advertising first. The Lost Experience takes this a step further than previous games, by literally announcing what it is and when it's beginning. No mysterious trailer URL (The Beast, ilovebees), no careful online leaks. This is mass-market stuff, and ABC doesn't want the mass-market not to know it's being marketed to.<sup>e</sup>

Based on media interviews with ABC's Vice President of Marketing, Michael Benson, Bogost's observation seems indisputable. Speaking with a popular video-game web site on the morning of May 3, Benson declared,

the first real, substantial clue will be placed in *Lost* on [tonight's] episode. It's important that, if you want to get engaged by this, there's more than one clue that will be in the show. You really need to watch the program from top to bottom.<sup>f</sup>

In the same interview, Benson revealed an awareness of the risks producers and marketers accept when initiating ARG campaigns, explaining "if we break a promise to the audience...all we're doing is hurting the show and that relationship between the show and the audience."

There is some irony, then, in the fact the exercise failed to deliver on Benson's claim viewers "need to watch the program from top to bottom" to catch the clue: the clue was designed to be obvious even to casual viewers. True to Bogost's assessment, it seems clear ABC is unwilling to risk the possibility the mass market will fail to recognize it is being marketed to.

## Presumed Goals of TLE

As detailed in *Not (Just) An Advertisement*, most professional ARGs thus far have been designed as promotional campaigns (e.g. Audi's Art of the Heist), extensions of existing narratives (e.g. ABC's *Push*, *NV*), or in many cases, both (e.g. *Artificial Intelligence's* The Beast). To evaluate the success of The Lost Experience, we must first determine what function – or functions – it was intended to serve. Drawing upon interviews published in the period surrounding the campaign's debut, as well as ABC's press releases, we can assume that The Lost Experience was designed to serve at least three functions:

- 1) **As a promotional campaign, designed to engage viewers and generate viral speculation during the five-month hiatus between seasons two and three of *Lost's* American broadcast.** As Benson explained, "this is a very non-traditional marketing venture for us... We're not trying to sell the show. What we're trying to do is find new ways to get people either more engaged or newly engaged in the program."<sup>g</sup>
- 2) **As a narrative extension, designed to provide *Lost* fans with additional content and plot points that deepen the immersive pleasure of the show.** Speaking to *The New York Times*, Cuse noted that the creators of *Lost* "wanted to tell stories in a nontraditional way, and there were certain stories that Damon and I were interested in telling that don't exactly fit into the television show."<sup>h</sup> Through the events of The Lost Experience, the show's writers were able to offer fans a level of additional information and detail that might otherwise weigh down the pace of the broadcast episodes.
- 3) **As an advertising space, for sponsoring partners to reach the engaged participants of the campaign with brand messages.** In an interview a month after TLE concluded, Benson clarified that the campaign was never conceived as a way of generating additional income from advertisers, but as a way for brands to "experiment with us and take some chances. Not only with how they would be exposed, or where they would be exposed, but how they would be integrated... in a way that would be organic... and that consumers would appreciate."<sup>i</sup>

## Initial Challenges

In developing *The Lost Experience*, the campaign's producers – and *Lost*'s writers in particular – were also conscious of two specific creative challenges that would need to be addressed: first, how to develop a narrative arc that would be interesting to *Lost* audiences around the world, who would be encountering the campaign from different points in the show's multiple-season progression, and second, how to make the narrative arc compelling and rewarding to participants, while at the same time ensuring that the campaign would not put viewers who chose not to participate at an unfair disadvantage. The latter should be of particular interest to content producers, since it is a challenge inherent in all transmedia narrative extension projects.

## II. Campaign Description

A press release from ABC declared that the narrative of The Lost Experience was designed to unfold in a five act structure.<sup>1</sup> While ABC never clarified where each act began or ended, the following summaries divide the narrative action of the campaign into five probable acts. For a more thorough sequence of events, please see the TLE Timeline, provided in Appendix I.

### Act I: The Hanso Foundation, Persephone & Bad Twin



#### The Hanso Foundation

The Lost Experience began during the American broadcast of *Lost* on May 3. The final commercial block included a fifteen-second advertisement that purported to be a promotional spot for the Hanso Foundation (HF), a mysterious (and fictional) NPO featured in the narrative of the show's second season. At the end of the ad, viewers were encouraged to call 877-HANSORG to learn more. Similar advertisements aired in the UK on May 2, and Australia on May 4.

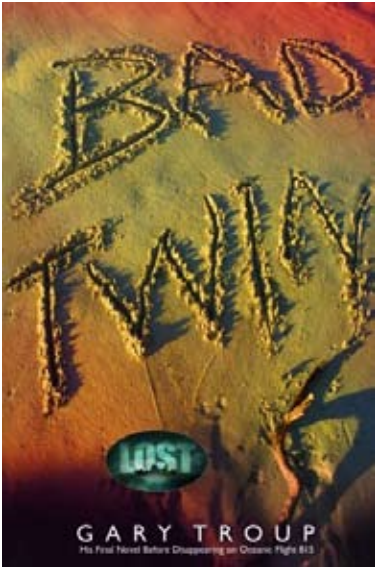
Around the same time, an official Hanso Foundation web site appeared at [www.thehansofoundation.org](http://www.thehansofoundation.org).

To help ensure audiences located the web site, 'official' Hanso press releases were issued, and several fan sites reported receiving e-mails from the Hanso Foundation announcing both the web site and the on-air advertising campaign. Visitors to the site were presented with basic information about the Foundation's charitable work and research endeavors, and encouraged to sign up for an e-mail newsletter.

#### Persephone

Viewers calling the telephone number in the television advertisement were greeted with a voice mail menu. Navigating through the available options, callers could access a few cryptic voice mail messages; during one of these messages, callers heard a 'hacker' identifying herself as Persephone 'break into the call.' Persephone then provided a password which could be entered at the Foundation's web site to access 'confidential material.' This material hinted at the group's involvement in a wide range of covert, nefarious and subversive activities.

For the remainder of May, the television advertisement aired during each broadcast of *Lost*, each time with a new URL at the end. Aside from the Hanso site itself, each of these subsequent sites was a co-branding effort with one of the show's partnering sponsors: Sprite (May 10), Jeep (May 17) and Monster.com (May 24). An additional ad tied to Verizon aired during *Boston Legal* (June 6). Exploring each of these sites, visitors would uncover a new password from Persephone, which would, in turn, unlock additional content areas on the main Hanso web site. During this period, TLE also introduced another character named DJ Dan, whose weekly conspiracy-focused podcasts introduced a series of allegations about the HF's criminal activities.



### **Bad Twin**

Just as The Lost Experience was structured to incorporate content for its sponsoring partners, it was also designed to cross-promote a number of affiliated ABC endeavors. The most visible object of this cross-promotion was another meta-fictional *Lost* project: a detective novel entitled *Bad Twin*. While *Bad Twin* did not provide concrete clues to advance the action of the game, ABC was able to integrate the book's unorthodox promotional campaign into the narrative of the Lost Experience. The conceit of *Bad Twin*'s promotional campaign was consistent with the reality-blurring technique of ARGs: rather than promoting the book as a product tied to a hit television show, the book's publicists made the book the focus of a public attack by the Hanso Foundation.

On May 9, several national newspapers ran paid letters purporting to be from Hugh McIntyre, the Hanso Foundation's Communications Director. In these letters, McIntyre accused the novel (and its deceased fictional author) of slandering the good name and charitable work of the Foundation. Encouraging readers to decide for themselves, it directed them to the Foundation's site, creating another avenue for bringing new players into the larger Lost Experience campaign.

A similar effort unfolded in collaboration with ABC's *Jimmy Kimmel* show on the night of May 24, a few hours after the *Lost* season finale, when Kimmel conducted a brief interview with an actor portraying McIntyre. In the interview, McIntyre attempted to present the Foundation as an actual, legitimate organization, which *Lost*'s producers had incorporated (and misrepresented) in the fictional narrative of the show; to discuss the 'malicious actions' of the hacker Persephone; to 'attack' *Bad Twin* as slanderous; and, of course, to encourage viewers to read the book and visit the Foundation's site.



The promotional campaign for *Bad Twin* also involved the development of a short interview sequence "from a few years ago," in which an actor, playing the role of fictional author Gary Troup, answered questions about his new book and accused the Hanso Foundation of concealing a mathematical formula – "the Valenzetti Equation" – which had been developed to predict the exact date and time of Armageddon. This interview was broken into several shorter clips, which were made available as 'exclusive content' on such sites as Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, Powells.com, and the author's own promotional web site, GaryTroup.net.



### **Act II: The Adventures of Rachel Blake**

TLE's second act began on June 16, several days ahead of schedule, when a number of players discovered the location of a new online video the game's producers had not yet intended for viewing.<sup>k</sup> At around the same time, viewers who discovered and submitted the correct sequence of codes on the site gained access to a different video sequence and were then banned (using browser cookies) from accessing the Hanso Foundation site again.

A few days later, the next phase of the campaign began with the discovery of a blog at rachelblake.com. While the site appeared to be a basic travelogue from a European vacation, players who enter a password from Persephone



were taken to a 'secret blog,' where Rachel Blake posted periodic updates and clues indicating the location of short video blog posts. The comments section of the blog allowed participants a limited degree of direct interaction with the character. As in the first act of the game, players were required to sift through content on the various sponsor sites to access Blake's transmissions, which recorded new developments in her ongoing quest to expose the Hanso Foundation's secrets.



### Act III: HansoExposed.com & The Glyph Hunt

The third act of the game began on July 22, with a live event: during the *Lost* discussion panel at the San Diego ComicCon, an actress portraying Rachel Blake grabbed a microphone and accused *Lost*'s producers of collusion with the Hanso Foundation. Before being escorted out by event security, Blake implored the crowd to discover the truth for themselves by visiting [hansoexposed.com](http://hansoexposed.com).

After setting up an account at this site, players learn Blake has recorded incriminating video of a secret Hanso Foundation meeting in Sri Lanka. To prevent the Hanso Foundation from intercepting and destroying the video, Blake explained, she divided it into dozens of fragments and scattered them across the internet. Players were asked to track down these clips and reassemble them into the complete video. In order to 'retrieve' (or unlock) the clips, players had to track down "glyphs," short alphanumerical sequences, concealed both online and in physical locations around the world. Glyphs were uncovered on sponsor web sites, as well as in television and print advertisements, posted in public locations, written on armbands worn by the producers and cast in public, printed in *Lost*'s official magazine, found through live scavenger hunts, and more.<sup>1</sup>

Completing the glyph hunt yielded one of TLE's most significant narrative rewards: the meaning of a mysterious sequence of numbers that have been central to *Lost*'s narrative mysteries. Blake's Sri Lanka video began with an orientation video (similar to those featured in the second season of *Lost*), in which Alvar Hanso himself explains that the mysterious number sequence on the show – 4 8 15 16 23 42 – represents a series of variables in an equation commissioned by the UN to predict the date and time when humanity will become extinct. Hanso explains that the purpose of the Dharma Initiative (another central mystery from the show) is to alter one of those variables, and in turn, to save the world. The video then shows the Foundation's ambitious second-in-command, Dr. Thomas Mittlewerk, informing a large group of scientists that the Foundation's newest plans involve an engineered virus which will target and kill approximately 30% of the world's population – thus changing one of the equation's variables, and preventing human extinction. The video ends suddenly, when Mittlewerk realizes Blake is present, and she is forced to flee from the scene.



#### ARGs As Cross-Promotional Initiatives

While many components of The Lost Experience did little to advance the game's narrative events, they were effective both in publicizing the game and the book, and used newspaper ads, existing non-game websites, and a network television event to help deepen the immersive 'realism' of the campaign as a whole.



## Act IV: Apollo Chocolate Bar & WhereIsAlvar.com

Unlike the previous acts, the fourth phase of TLE began well before the third had concluded: on August 8, 2006, a new web site went live at ApolloCandy.com. This site presented itself as promotional material for the Apollo Chocolate Bar, a product that has been seen in several broadcast episodes of *Lost*, and named the Apollo Candy Company as “the private purveyor of chocolates for Alvar Hanso and his many companies.”<sup>m</sup> The site then provided a list of dates, times and locations where players in the United States and the United Kingdom could go to receive their own sample candy bars.

Players who attended one of the listed giveaway events found yet another web site address, WhereIsAlvar.com, printed on the inside of the candy wrapper. At this site, players who had obtained a candy bar were encouraged to submit photos of themselves – with the candy wrapper – for display on the web site. In a Willy Wonka-esque move, 78 of the 1064 bars distributed during the game contained special “golden oracle” wrappers, each bearing an exclusive code that had to be entered on the web site. A message from Rachel Blake promised that when all of the codes from the golden wrappers were entered (indicating that “enough of the world [wa]s watching”) she would provide further instructions.

On September 18, WhereIsAlvar.com was updated with Blake’s instructions, which advised players to tune in for her appearance during a final, live podcast with DJ Dan.

## Act V: Comeuppance & Conclusion

This final podcast, held live on the evening of September 24, 2006, is considered to be the fifth and final act of The Lost Experience. While much of the broadcast time was dedicated to questions and theories from players who called to talk to DJ Dan, the evening also incorporated two important narrative developments.

The first major event of the podcast came during a call from Rachel Blake, who reported that she had been hiding from the Hanso foundation for 12 days, and played an extended version of the Sri Lanka recording that players pieced together during the game’s third act. The recording ended with a new segment, during which Rachel Blake infiltrated a house in Norway, and encountered Alvar Hanso, who explained that he was being kept under house arrest by the corrupt Dr. Mittlewerk. Hanso then revealed himself as Rachel Blake’s father, and asked his daughter to help him expose Mittlewerk in a public statement.

The second important development came from an anonymous caller who claimed that he had hacked a government radio channel, and proceeded to play a ‘live feed’ indicating that government authorities were moving to apprehend Mittlewerk. Upon entering Mittlewerk’s compound, however, the authorities found themselves caught in a trap: after a recording of Mittlewerk’s voice explained that he could not allow his research to be compromised, the building exploded – presumably with the authorities still inside of it.

The next day, Blake’s extended Sri Lanka video was posted on ABC’s web site, and the Hanso Foundation web site was updated a final time, with an apologetic statement from the now-freed Alvar Hanso, and a promise that the Foundation would renew its efforts toward creating a better world. In a sinister final note, however, players clicking on the word “humanity” in the third paragraph of Hanso’s statement could unlock a short, ominous video clip from Mittlewerk, vowing to continue his work “at any cost.” Enthusiastic participants have speculated that this narrative thread is being left open for resolution in a new campaign, to take place during a future *Lost* broadcast hiatus.

## **MEDIA ASSETS USED TO CREATE IMMERSION IN THE LOST EXPERIENCE**

### **Original web sites**

More than a dozen original web sites, including pages for The Hanso Foundation, DJ Dan, and Apollo Candy, as well as sites maintained by each of the campaign's sponsors.

### **Commercial web sites**

Made use of free pre-existing services such as Amazon, Blogger, Flickr, MySpace and YouTube to deliver narrative content.

### **Physical products**

A commercial novel was released in bookstores; candy bars were distributed with clues placed in them at random.

### **Media appearances**

Fictional characters interviewed on the Jimmy Kimmel show, in *Entertainment Weekly*.

### **Advertisements**

Television spots directed players to web sites; print ads promoted the novel and web sites. Additional clues were embedded in print advertising for sponsoring partners.

### **Podcasts**

DJ Dan released regular prerecorded podcasts, and hosted at least two live events where players could call in.

### **Live events**

Rachel Blake appeared at ComicCon; Apollo Candy Bars were given away in several public locations; several glyphs were located through real-world group events.

### **Also...**

Telephone and voice mail boxes, online and real-world scavenger hunts, billboards, instant messenger conversations, discussion forums, e-mail newsletters, press releases.

### III. Public Response to TLE

#### Formation of Communities

Just hours after the release of the first clues on May 2, several community web sites appeared online to help organize leads, compile clues, and provide public spaces for collaboration and discussion. Some of these were organized at existing *Lost*-centric message boards (thefuselage.com), others as extensions of major *Lost* fan sites (TheTailSection.com launched thelostexperience.com; Lostpedia.org added a comprehensive section dedicated to TLE), and a few were entirely new (thelostexperienceclues.com). Communities dedicated to the campaign also formed at Yahoo! Groups (where 1000+ participants refer to themselves as “the Namastae”), LiveJournal, and existing ARG community sites (unforums.com). Over the course of the campaign, these communities drew upon a range of free tools and services, wikis,<sup>n</sup> Frappr maps, YouTube accounts and dedicated chat rooms to collaborate and share information.

ABC also commissioned an active fan of the show to maintain an ‘official’ blog at insidetheexperience.com. The blog featured “Weekly Round-Ups” recounting the major narrative developments during each week of the game, as well as a “Reader Mail” feature where “Speaker,” the blog’s moderator, responded to fan questions and comments. The same technique was also used in the United Kingdom, where Channel 4 hosted a blogger named “The Other Girl,” and in Australia, with Channel 7 hosting a blog for “The Lost Ninja.”

While ABC’s decision to commission its own blog is understandable, it is somewhat ironic that “Inside the Experience” (ITE) was often less informative, and less collaborative, than the independent fan-launched sites. Speaker often posted entries rambling on topics unrelated to TLE, and often assumes the “I’m-connected-and-you’re-not” tone of a fan who has been granted insider status – a tone which may be alienating to less dedicated players. On the other hand, many players who participated in ABC’s sponsored community cited Speaker’s personality and sense of humor as one of the most enjoyable aspects of the campaign. As one player declared in a post-game discussion thread, “Speaker (Andy) was a GOD SEND. I guarantee a lot of us would have jumped ship without his presence as well as [that of] The LOST Ninja.”<sup>o</sup>

#### Media & Press Coverage

Like *The Beast* and other major promotional ARGs before it, *The Lost Experience* has proven extremely effective at generating media coverage and off-season attention for the show itself: among other high-profile mentions, the *Lost Experience* was featured on the cover of the June 23 issue of *Entertainment Weekly*, with a tag reading: “LOST: The Conspiracy Lives On! Where To Find New Secrets!”<sup>p</sup> and an article detailing the campaign’s first month of revelations.

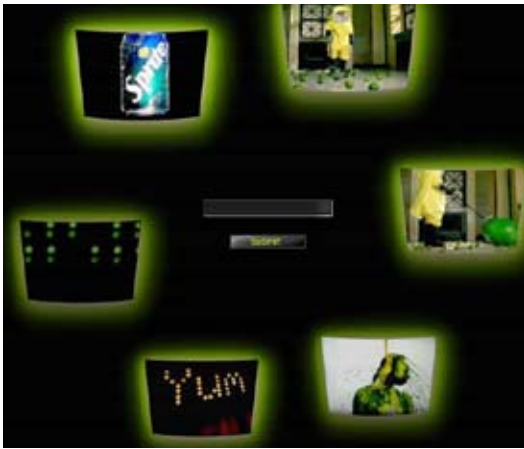
However, while the show’s use of an innovative promotional campaign helped TLE secure press coverage throughout the summer, it is worth noting that much of this coverage focused on the novel and notable aspects of ARGs as a form of interactive, multiplatform storytelling; whether this coverage was effective in promoting the show itself is difficult to determine.

## IV. The Challenges of Sponsor Integration

While the cost of designing and executing an ARG campaign makes sponsors and integrated advertising an attractive (and seemingly logical) option, the integration of advertising messages and content into an ARG's narrative can antagonize and offend players if the integration is not organic, or fails to enhance the overall experience.<sup>9</sup>

### How Sponsors Were Integrated Into TLE

The Lost Experience featured at least four distinct sponsoring partners: Sprite, Jeep, Monster.com and Verizon. Rather than simply presenting these companies as supporting sponsors, however, ABC attempted to integrate their sponsors' products and services into the narrative and content of the game itself. This section considers the specific role that each sponsor assumed within The Lost Experience, and within the narrative, before turning to a broader discussion of the challenges involved in sponsor integration.



#### Sprite: Sublymonal.com

The first sign of corporate sponsorship surfaced on May 10, when the televised commercial for the Hanso Foundation ended with a new URL, sending viewers to a Sprite-sponsored site at sublymonal.com. Upon arrival, players encountered a series of static television screens decked out in Sprite's promotional colors, an image that was faintly suggestive of a plot development late in *Lost's* second season, involving a mysterious room full of surveillance monitors. To proceed, players were expected to click the screens in the correct sequence, using the number sequence featured prominently on the show. Once entered, the site would provide a password that could be used at the main Hanso Foundation site.

While the content of the Sublymonal site might have made sense in the larger context of Sprite's new "sublymonal" promotional campaign – which matches provocative images with overt 'subliminal' suggestions compelling viewers to consume Sprite – it made almost no sense in the context of The Lost Experience. There was no narrative explanation to justify the monotonous television-clicking required of participants; instead, the unspoken assertion seemed to be that such illogical tasks were the price of corporate sponsorship.

#### The Jeep Compass: LetYourCompassGuideYou.com

Jeep's participation began on May 17, when the televised advertisement was updated with a new URL, directing viewers to a Jeep-branded web site at LetYourCompassGuideYou.com, which featured a large, animated image of a compass. Clicking on the correct degree mark of the compass – in the case, the mathematical sum of all of the numbers in *Lost's* ubiquitous numerical sequence – would unlock a new screen, which asked visitors whether they were "one of the good ones." Answering in the affirmative would take players to a site designed to look like a corporate intranet for Jeep, with a list of directories and mailboxes tied to individual login accounts.

```

The Hanso Foundation (64.207.133.244)
Sun Microsystems Inc. SunOS 5.8 Generic February 2000
going into pemsguar.sh
exiting pemsguar.sh
Going into oracle envu init
going into pems_init_umb.sh
bash-2.03#

****Connected to OPENERS HEP
Are you one of the good ones [Y,N]? █

```

Searching through (and in some cases, decoding) these files led to a number of ‘secret documents’ that players could uncover, as well as online chat transcripts between the hacker, Persephone, and a Jeep representative named William T. Kirkpatrick. Among these secret documents, players found an old Jeep advertisement, hinting that the Hanso Foundation has been purchasing Jeeps for decades, as well as a series of contracts between Jeep and the Hanso Foundation revealing that Jeep had recently (after some harassment from Rachel Blake) opted to cancel a contract to provide the Hanso Foundation with a large order of vehicles.

Unlike Sprite, Jeep’s representatives found a plausible role for their product in the larger narrative of *The Lost Experience*, making their presence both logical and acceptable to participants. Even better, Jeep’s site invited participants to ‘hack’ a private network, a challenge that helped deepen player immersion in the campaign’s narrative.



### Monster.com: HansoCareers.com

The third round of sponsorship began on May 24, when the televised Hanso Foundation advertisement updated its URL once again, this time sending players to HansoCareers.com, a sparse site providing listings for Hanso Foundation career opportunities. This concept gave Monster a logical context for presenting and showcasing its service – accessible, well-organized job openings – but also managed to provide an intriguing and indirect way for the campaign’s writers to provide new material for speculation, along with suggestive details introducing larger narrative elements.

While the featured career titles themselves were provocative – ranging from Organ Courier and Art Therapist to Simian Veterinarian and Anger Management Director – the job descriptions and qualifications introduced a wide range of new questions for communal discussion: why would an organ courier need to be fluent in five languages? Could the listing for an Anger Management Director in Seoul be the first hint of some connection between the campaign’s narrative and a Korean character featured in *Lost*’s broadcast episodes?

By finding a logical way to integrate its service into the narrative structure of the campaign, Monster positioned itself as an asset to enthusiastic TLE participants, rather than a necessary inconvenience. In fact, the integration of Monster’s job listing service was logical enough that many players began scouring the official Monster.com site in hope of finding additional clues, in the form of conspicuous and unusual job openings in cities featured in the campaign. Would-be ARG sponsors should note that while Monster.com chose to participate in the game by using a dedicated “Hanso Careers” site, players would likely have been even more satisfied – and immersed – if the clues had been concealed on Monster’s main site, amidst ‘real’ content.

## Verizon Broadband: RetrieversOfTruth.com

Verizon's presence in The Lost Experience unfolded across two sites: a campaign-specific sponsored site at RetrieversOfTruth.com, with no obvious or immediate link to the company or their services, and at a video showcase site, RicherBroaderDeeper.com, designed to illustrate the rich-media benefits of having a high speed internet connection. At the latter site, persistent visitors could uncover video clips and footage related to the game's narrative; like the problematic Sprite integration described earlier, there was no well-established logic for the presence of this content on the Verizon-branded site, requiring some good will from participants to make sense in the context of the campaign's narrative.



The Retrievers Of Truth (ROT) site, created specifically for TLE, offered a more interesting integration, with the main site presenting itself as an organization founded by Dr. Vincent “Wally” Bole, a researched dedicated to proving that yellow labrador retrievers possess clairvoyant powers – a claim that (if true) might shed light on the significance of another ongoing plot element on the broadcast show. A small banner ad at the top of the site indicated that Bole's work was “supported by the Hanso Foundation.”

supported by the HANSO

retrievers of TRUTH

HOW IT STARTED  
We've discovered that our beloved company, Verizon, is being used by the Hanso Foundation to further their plans for global domination - here, order is chaos vs. evil empire. We couldn't just sit on the fence and not get involved. So we got involved.

THE ROT  
We don't want this job. We need to ignore what was happening, but we saw something no one else seems to have noticed... yet. The devil is not in disguise, he walks among us. He is the Hanso Foundation and he wants nothing less than our very souls. So we picked up our spades and started the nearest electronic rooftop and started. And this is our voice. Open up your eyes, throw off your blindfold of disbelief and see it... the TRUTH

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Topic	created by	posted on
The gospel according to The DSL	DSLerator	05/07/06
The media is their weapon of choice	lob/seeingYou	05/11/06
Hanso in da house!!!!	DSLerator	05/24/06
Man smart, monkey smarter.	DSLerator	05/17/06
You'd be amazed at what you can find if you look.	Fiberoptician	05/10/06
Pay no attention to that elephant in the room	DSLerator	05/3/06
The dog ate my board work.	DSLerator	04/29/06
What are they trying to hide right under our noses	DSLerator	04/29/06
I have a very bad feeling about this	BroadBandBeatnik	04/19/06
The revolution starts not with a bang but a whimper	DSLerator	04/12/06

While participants could access some of the game's original content by signing up for the ROT e-mail newsletter, the most significant material on the site was hidden on a secret message board, which visitors could view by entering the correct password into the newsletter subscription form. This forum presented itself as the project of a small group of like-minded Verizon employees who believed that their “beloved company, Verizon, [was] being used by the Hanso Foundation to further their plans for global domination.”<sup>r</sup> With a noir-styled banner headline declaring “Man's Best Friend Is The Truth,” the forum hosted a series of discussion threads from users with Verizon-related names (DSLerator, Fiberoptician, BroadBandBeatnik).

Participants in several TLE communities also reported that these names were active as accounts on AOL Instant Messenger, sending in short transcripts of real-time conversations held with the characters. Assuming that these conversations were conducted by real, campaign-authorized ‘actors,’ this is a particularly strong contribution from Verizon, since real-time interaction with fictional characters is one of the most immersive experiences that ARGs can offer.

## Public Response to Sponsor Presence

Given the relative prominence of the sponsoring partners in the narrative of The Lost Experience, it was inevitable that debates over ‘appropriate’ advertising would arise in some of the dedicated player communities around the game. While it is hard to make a sweeping, conclusive statement about player response to the advertising – since only a fraction of TLE’s players participated in forums, and only a fraction of those entered into the discussions about the impact of commercial sponsorship – certain themes and opinions seemed to recur in the discussion across disparate communities, suggesting that these discussions can be interpreted as indicative of the general sentiment among active, vocal players.

Speaking after the conclusion of TLE, ABC’s SVP of Marketing, Mike Benson, offered a suggestive statement:

I won’t use names, but I think the thing that was most interesting for me, personally, when I sat down with some of our partners in The Lost Experience, is the ones that I thought were going to be the least innovative were the most innovative, and the ones that I thought would be the most were the least.

I really found it interesting that some of the older companies that have been around for a while, that you really feel like, “You know what, are they gonna get it?” They seem to really grasp what is going on in our culture today. And some of the newer companies that are fresh, and out there, and they’ve done some innovative work... but then when we sat down and said, “You know, this is really what we need to get done here,” they were just very inflexible, they did not want to bend at all.<sup>s</sup>

While Benson wasn’t willing to use names, participants in The Lost Experience were more than willing to do so, and the most aggressive player complaints named Sprite. The “sublymonal” campaign certainly fits Benson’s description: Sprite’s advertising is consistently recognized as fresh and innovative, and the wholesale incorporation of the brand’s existing imagery and style into the game experience indicate that Sprite had no desire to adjust their own message to the contours of TLE. As one player wrote,

Intrusive advertising, breaking TINAG, and in-your-face product placement is annoying. There’s no logical way they can associate Sprite with Hanso without making it seem forced.”<sup>t</sup>

Another player went so far as to write an “Open Letter to the Puppeteers,” declaring it “uncool... to plant clues that are blatant marketing rips. You can’t even be troubled to make them subtle.”<sup>u</sup> While the Puppeteers<sup>v</sup> never responded, the letter did spark a heated debate between players about acceptable forms of sponsor integration. Even if some players were willing to accept such blatant branding attempts as a necessary evil, however, Sprite’s presence in the game was ultimately an uncomfortable one – a result quite different than Sprite had intended.

By contrast, relatively few players singled out Jeep, Monster, or Verizon for criticism. As one player pointed out,

Notice that nobody’s complaining about Monster.com...the advertising has so far been very non-intrusive and has done it’s job so far. How many people are constantly scouring Monster.com now for resumes with some link to THF. Monster.com is getting tons of new visitors, and ARGers aren’t bothered.”<sup>w</sup>



## The Importance of Narrative Justification

The player backlash against Sprite suggests that the success of sponsor integration within ARGs will depend, in large part, on selecting sponsors and product lines that match the content of each game's narrative. The rule here for prospective ARG designers is simple: if a sponsor is integrated into your campaign, there needs to be a plausible and organic reason for their presence.

It is essential to understand that Sprite's mistake was not their decision to embed advertising in an ARG, but their refusal to integrate themselves in a way that enhanced the realism of the players' experience. As another fan explained,

We're investigating the disappearance of one of the worlds most powerful corporations leader (among other things), we shouldn't have characters referencing us to things like Sprite ads. It would be like getting a phonecall from Alvar Hanso himself that goes all in-character the way through when as the phonecall ends he says "Don't forget to watch *Lost* on ABC while enjoying a cold glass of Sprite!" It's not IN CHARACTER. It's not immersive. It takes away that epic feeling.

How could the whole thing have been done [better]? Simple: an ad on the Hanso page for Sprite with some sort of disclaimer [like] 'Sprite, proud sponsor of the Hanso Foundation' or the like. THAT would be much more immersive. However, being directed by a character to a website that is a blatant (or even half-assed like subLYMONal) advertisement for something that somehow contains a clue you need to use to get more information... that makes no sense. Unless, of course, Persephone is an investigator that also works for Sprite."<sup>x</sup>

In a best-case scenario, however, sponsor brands will do more than fit into a narrative: like the sponsored sites from Monster.com and Jeep, they will position the events of the narrative in the fabric of the real (commercial) world, and in doing so, will enhance the player's immersion into the alternate reality of the game.

## V. Evaluating The Lost Experience...

Earlier in this paper, we speculated that TLE was designed to serve at least three critical functions: as a promotional campaign for *Lost*, as a narrative extension of *Lost*, and as an innovative advertising space for sponsoring partners. Having detailed the content of The Lost Experience, as well as the public response to the campaign, we can now attempt to evaluate the success of The Lost Experience on each of these counts.

### As A Promotional Campaign For *Lost*

In evaluating TLE as a promotional campaign, we face the same problem that plagues all ARGs: even if the campaign attracted participation, was it effective as a promotion for the core product that it was supporting? Since there are no confirmed participation figures available, it is difficult to determine what percentage of the existing *Lost* audience chose to engage with The Lost Experience. As such, our evaluation can only be speculative at best.

That said, it seems unlikely that The Lost Experience would have been effective in drawing first-time viewers to the show, since the narrative rewards that compelled audience members to participate would only be valuable to viewers who were engaged with the mysteries of *Lost* before the campaign began.

However, based on the high volume of discussion and visitor statistics at such fan-launched community sites as “The Lost Experience Clues,” it appears that The Lost Experience was successful in creating – and supporting – the conditions that lead to the development of strong communities. While *Lost* was already known for having an active, vocal fan audience, post-game comments from many players indicated that their participation in TLE had compelled them to participate in fan communities for the first time, and that their participation in these communities would continue into the show’s third season.

### As A Transmedia Narrative Extension

While there is no simple benchmark for evaluating the creative worth of The Lost Experience, the easiest question to ask is: did participants feel that TLE offered a satisfying narrative experience? There is no single answer to this question, of course: some participants declared that TLE was a valuable and exciting addition to the overall experience of *Lost*, others viewed the entire initiative as an exploitative marketing ploy designed to benefit the sponsors.

In evaluating the success of TLE as a narrative extension, however, we can also return to the initial challenge mentioned earlier in this discussion: was TLE successful at offering a compelling narrative experience to participants, without creating an unfair disadvantage for *Lost* viewers who chose not to play? Echoing a concern that surfaced in most of the dedicated TLE communities, one fan posed the following question to the *lost\_tv* community on LiveJournal.com:

I opened my Live Journal today and was inundated with posts regarding the Hanso web site, and the phone number and the advertisement and the book. The whole thing got me to thinking ... What of us who have dial-up and can't readily access all the wierd and wonderful official web sites, or have no desire to pick up the book(s), or can't call the numbers (because it's only free in the US)?

Will those of us in these situations end up missing out? Or do you think that the show's creators will be able to keep the show fresh for those of us who don't, or can't, go for the “gimmicks.”<sup>y</sup>

According to *Lost*'s producers, the most significant narrative rewards offered in TLE – revelations about the origin, significance, and agenda of the mysterious Dharma Initiative, and insights about the origin of the show's mysterious numerical sequence – were intended to reward the curiosity of invested fans by allowing more complete immersion in the show's plot, without revealing essential plot details that would put non-players at a significant disadvantage.

## **As A Promotion For Sponsor Brands**

As the previous section has explained, The Lost Experience seems to have been a more successful experiment for some sponsors than others. As ABC's SVP of Marketing, Michael Benson, recently reflected, the success of advertiser integration in narrative campaigns ultimately hinges on the advertiser "being the right fit. If it's not the right fit, I believe that you'll not only damage the television show, but the [sponsor's] brand can be damaged as well."

<sup>z</sup>

As TLE has demonstrated, however, it remains easier to tell when a brand has failed (in this case, Sprite) than to determine when a brand has succeeded. All the same, it is important to recognize – just as Benson speculated – that unsuccessful brand integration can damage the brand more than it helps. As one frustrated participant observed,

The sponsors' / PMs' method of integrating advertising is actually creating a negative reaction; in that they're transforming what was previously an indifference towards the Sprutkuk® brand lemon-lime soda, into an actual negative feeling towards the product where I will now choose a Sierra Mist when given the choice between the two.<sup>aa</sup>

## VI. Challenges Illustrated & Addressed By TLE

### Optimizing The Difficulty

One of the greatest challenges facing developers as ARGs move into the mainstream is determining how difficult a campaign's challenges should be. Most often, this will depend on the target audience for participation; in the case of *The Lost Experience*, which was conceived as a marketing campaign to engage mainstream television viewers (rather than experienced ARG players), it was important to make the game accessible, and enticing, to the largest possible audience. The challenge, of course, is how to create a campaign that appeals to both amateur *and* expert gamers. As Michael Benson, ABC's VP of Marketing explained,

[The Lost Experience] has been designed on more of an easy, medium, advanced and expert levels so you can kind of get into this thing at different points and dive deeper depending on how deep you want to dive.<sup>ab</sup>

The inherent challenge is how to design a game that satisfies players on each of these levels, since – as seen in the earlier overview of *Push, NV* – making a game accessible to new players often means the game's challenges will be too easy for more experienced players.

The initial clue that launched the game provides an excellent illustration of this problem: despite Benson's insistence that viewers needed to watch the entire episode of *Lost* to catch "multiple clues," the only acknowledged clue from the May 3 broadcast appeared as an overt advertisement during the show's final commercial break. While this served ABC's immediate interests – introducing the game to as many viewers as possible – it also proved frustrating to the game's "advanced and expert" players, who were hoping for more subtle and demanding clues.

An alternate approach would have been for ABC to conceal the clue in a single video frame or conspicuous phrase of an otherwise unrelated product advertisement. Invested viewers would then be required to scan *every* advertisement in the show, one frame at a time, scrutinizing both the show and the intermittent advertisements in slow-motion and at regular speed, in order to be certain that no important details had been missed.

For ARG veterans, this is what the hint from *Lost's* EP, Carlton Cuse, seemed to imply: "you can TiVo it, but don't skip the commercials." By choosing to make the clue more overt, ABC may have eliminated the need for dedicated viewers to pay careful attention to *all* of the ads on the show – a result advertisers are bound to find enticing, and a challenge which committed players would inevitably find more rewarding.<sup>ac</sup>

The problem, of course, is that the mainstream media industries are not yet prepared to focus on the dedicated few at the exclusion of the casual mass audience: the value of the attentive, obsessive viewer might seem obvious, but it has not yet been proven or quantified. For the foreseeable future, it is likely mainstream ARGs will continue to struggle with this challenge.

### There Is Only One Internet

To their credit, *Lost's* producers understood the importance of launching *The Lost Experience* as a global event, and coordinated with broadcasters around the world to ensure the event was accessible to audiences wherever *Lost* is shown. Recognizing *Lost* fans around the world were going to follow TLE, the producers designed the narrative

events of the campaign to make the game accessible to both American viewers (who had just finished watching the second season) and viewers abroad (many of whom were just beginning the second season). This maximized the possible number of participants for the campaign, and allowed TLE to use the entire world as a stage for the game.

That said, public response to *The Lost Experience* provided a firm reminder the internet is a global network that doesn't allow for the staggered release of information in different regions. Once information is made available on the internet – particularly information of interest to the type of knowledge communities that develop around ARGs – all interested parties are going to see it. The most obvious example, in this case, resulted from the attempt to launch the game over a three day period, with the first television advertisement airing on May 2 in the United Kingdom, May 3 in the United States, and May 4 in Australia. As soon as the first ad aired, however, calls began pouring in from around the world, with a “huge portion” of calls originating in the United States. This is not to say that the subsequent broadcasts in America and Australia were unnecessary, but to emphasize that many dedicated *Lost* fans chose to make international calls to start participating, rather than wait an additional 24 hours for the producers to provide a domestic phone number – a testament to the excitement ARGs can produce.

ARG designers should anticipate the rapid spread of information, and utilize this global sharing principle in the design of future campaigns. *The Lost Experience* exploited this principle during the game's “glyph hunt” in Act 3, by hiding critical information in a wide range of virtual and physical locations, and allowing the game's participants to do the difficult – but satisfying – work of bringing all of the pieces together to determine their larger significance.

## The “Misinformation Threat”

Less than two weeks into *The Lost Experience*, an article in *The Washington Post* hinted at a problem that many ARGs face: how to establish the immersive “This Is Not A Game” illusion, without being accused of spreading false information in public spaces. A few days earlier, *The Washington Post* had been one of several papers to run advertisements for The Hanso Foundation.

The ad contained no ABC or Disney identification, but The Post's ad department knew it was from ABC. The ad caused some concern in the newsroom because its appearance meant that The Post had advertised a phony group.

“We expect advertisers to identify themselves correctly because we don't want readers to be confused,” said Eric Grant, a Post spokesman. “This advertisement did not raise a red flag.”<sup>ad</sup>

The BBC faced similar challenges in the design of their 2005 stand-alone ARG, *Jamie Kane*, which distributed game content throughout the BBC's website and used the network's assets to make the game as convincing as possible. This would have been confusing enough; when a Wikipedia entry appeared, describing *Jamie Kane* as an actual person, a debate erupted over the possibility that the BBC had contaminated the public resource in order to market their campaign.<sup>ac</sup>

## Tripping Over The Reality Line

A related but distinct problem *The Lost Experience* faced was that of establishing ‘how real’ the game was intended to be. As media scholar Jason Mittell has pointed out, *The Lost Experience* often has a muddled and self-contradicting relationship to both the show and our own world.<sup>af</sup>

Well before the game's launch, in an official *Lost* podcast on March 28, Executive Producers Cuse and Lindelof admitted "something will be happening online" in May, and warned once it began they would deny all knowledge of it. As promised, once The Lost Experience began the producers proceeded to 'play along,' insisting The Hanso Foundation was a real organization, but that they had chosen to include a fictionalized version of the organization in the plot of *Lost*.

After that, the waters got even muddier. During the staged interview with Hugh McIntyre on the Jimmy Kimmel show, the actor was asked for his opinions on *Lost* – since The Hanso Foundation has chosen to run advertising during the show's broadcasts – and replied that he doesn't watch it because he finds it "too confusing." He then went on to confirm that some of the details depicted on the show were true, but distorted, while others were false and altogether fictionalized. The show's producers claim the show is completely fictional, while a fictional company claims to be partially real, perpetuating a cycle of contradictions and ambiguities that make it impossible to determine how convincing The Lost Experience is even *trying* to be. While this degree of meta-convolution might be fun for some players, and for the show's creators, it runs the very real risk of confusing, then frustrating, and then alienating potential participants altogether.

However, the high rate of participation throughout the entire run of The Lost Experience indicates that ARGs may be able to successfully move away from the more traditional, hard-line "This Is Not A Game" stance that veteran ARG participants are drawn to, in favor of games that declare themselves to be immersive narrative campaigns prior to beginning. That said, ARG producers would be well advised to choose a position on the 'reality spectrum,' and design both the campaign and any promotional materials for the campaign, to remain consistent with that position. Even if an pre-game announcement limits players' ability to 'lose themselves' in the campaign, such an approach will still be more enjoyable for participants than a game that seems unclear on its own status.

## VII. Learning From The Lost Experience

### 1. The Experience Matters Most.

While good writing and plotting are important, ARG designers must remember that in an interactive narrative, the *experience* matters as much as the content. This means the situations and challenges you create are not simply a platform for delivering narrative content, but a critical part *of* the narrative content. In order to make an ARG immersive – and as such, believable and fun – it is essential the game’s mechanics make sense in the context of the story.

### 2. If Advertising Isn’t Making It Better, It’s Probably Making It Worse.

Don’t focus on your sponsor’s brand message, focus on what they’re bringing to the story. Remember that brands can *further* immersion by bringing your campaign into more aspects of the real world – as Jeep did by inserting TLE-related clues in their otherwise unrelated print and television advertisements, and as Monster.com could have done by embedding their fictitious career listings on their main web site, instead of segregating them to a branded mini-site.

Rather than seeing this as a restriction or an imposition, advertisers should view ARG participation as a chance for more innovative, demanding marketing. As one TLE player pointed out, participation puts advertisers in the rare position to place active demands on players:

I’m interested to see how far they can push it. Would you go to a car showroom to find a message about the game? Would you buy some chocolate to find a secret code? That’s an example of being more clever, and its probably going to happen, if not with this ARG, then with another.”<sup>ag</sup>

### 3. Know What You’re Getting Into.

Despite the recent comment from ABC’s SVP of Marketing, Mike Benson, that he had never heard of ARGs when ABC began developing the framework for The Lost Experience<sup>ah</sup>, one of the most critical lessons that future ARG designers and sponsors can glean from TLE is the value in researching previous ARGs and similar interactive/viral campaigns, and improving upon past successes and failures. If the designers of TLE had been familiar with previous ARG campaigns, for example, they would not have been surprised by the overwhelming volume of callers responding to their initial voicemail advertisement.

#### **4. Expect Players To Exceed Your Expectations.**

No matter how difficult or cryptic you believe your challenges are, the power of collective intelligence all but guarantees that players will solve your puzzles faster, sooner, and more aggressively than you expect. In an attempt to compensate for this, The Lost Experience incorporated several periods of prolonged waiting for the release of new information – a decision which frustrated and drove off many players who had been enthusiastic during the first weeks of the campaign. After the conclusion of the campaign, Benson acknowledged that the campaign went on for longer than it should have, and that a shorter, more demanding campaign might have had more impact.

#### **5. Build Communities, Not Audiences and Markets.**

While it is tempting to think of promotional ARGs in terms of such traditional economic terms as audiences and markets, it is essential to understand that ARGs are most effective at creating *communities of interest*. Participants will be far more responsive to campaigns that encourage them to work together, share knowledge, and form new friendships – and these bonds, forged around their shared experience of participating in a collaborative endeavor, will last far longer than the campaign itself. As one participant observed in the post-campaign discussions online, “After creating such a cohesive and varied community of people willing to cooperate...it seemed kind of wasted in the latter portions of the game.”<sup>ai</sup> To get the greatest possible value out of ARGs, design challenges and game mechanics that acknowledge these communities, and give them compelling reasons to work together.



# Appendix I: The Lost Experience Timeline

Act 1: Persephone, The Hanso Foundation & <i>Bad Twin</i>	
May 3	The game begins with <a href="http://www.thehansofoundation.org">www.thehansofoundation.org</a> (thf.org) website being updated and the airing of a fictional television ad. Visitors attempting to sign up for the e-mail newsletter receive a transmission from Persephone instead.
May 4	Parts 1, 2, and 3 of the Gary Troup interview are released on the Barnes & Noble, Borders and Amazon.com websites respectively.
May 5	A press release is issued by Hugh McIntyre, a fictional employee of the Hanso Foundation (HF). The release includes a hidden link to <a href="http://persephone.thehansofoundation.org">persephone.thehansofoundation.org</a> where the second clue was found.
May 7	The message on <a href="http://persephone.thehansofoundation.org">persephone.thehansofoundation.org</a> is updated.
May 8	A message from Persephone appears in the executive biography of Alvar Hanso, CEO and founder of the HF, revealing that Hanso has not been seen in public since 2002.
May 9	The HF places a newspaper advert in real world newspapers: "Don't Believe <i>Bad Twin</i> ." A hidden link on thf.org and a new television ad both direct viewers to Sprite's sponsored site, <a href="http://www.sublymonal.com">www.sublymonal.com</a> , where visitors can find a code. Entering the code at thf.org unlocks a message where Persephone questions the falsified education credentials of HF Director Dr. Thomas Mittlewerk. The message also includes concealed information about Gary Troup, the author of <i>Bad Twin</i> .
May 10	Persephone's Sublymonal clue is changed; the Gary Troup message is no longer available. A note from <i>Bad Twin</i> 's publisher is placed on <a href="http://hyperionbooks.com">hyperionbooks.com</a> and Gary Troup's website, rebutting the HF's attacks on the content of <i>Bad Twin</i> .
May 12	A new press release is issued on thf.org about <i>Bad Twin</i> , linking to the May 10 newspaper ad. A "hidden letter" from Hugh McIntyre to Robert Miller, real-life President of Hyperion Books, demands that Hyperion cease selling <i>Bad Twin</i> . Hugh McIntyre and Persephone both begin responding to selected player e-mails, briefly.



A MESSAGE FROM  
HUGH MCINTYRE, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AT THE HANSO FOUNDATION

**Don't Believe "Bad Twin"**

For over thirty years, The Hanso Foundation has stood for compassion and innovation, but today, our reputation has been attacked in the novel "Bad Twin," written by Gary Troup and published by Hyperion books.

Throughout the pages of "Bad Twin," readers have found numerous passages featuring misinformation about The Hanso Foundation and its partners. The Hanso Foundation strongly objects to the book "Bad Twin," and encourages readers to make up their own minds.

The truth about The Hanso Foundation is available at [www.TheHansoFoundation.org](http://www.TheHansoFoundation.org) and not on the pages of Gary Troup's "Bad Twin."

Experience it for yourself.

Thank you, and remaine.

Reading and is a better experience

<p><b>May 16</b></p>	<p>A link found in the source code of thf.org to <b>www.djdan.am</b> leads users to the first DJ Dan podcast, which claims that Hanso is in cryogenic freeze. <b>persephone.thehansofoundation.org</b> is updated with a new numerical code, which is decoded to the message “stand by”. Part 4 of the Gary Troup interview is posted on Amazon.com.</p>
<p><b>May 17</b></p>	<p>Hugh McIntyre’s picture is removed from the Executive Bio page on thf.org. A password entry field for press releases also appears on the same page. One of the active project pages directs viewers to a link to Jeep’s sponsored page, <b>www.letyourcompassguideyou.com</b>. Parts 5 and 6 of the Gary Troup interview are found at Powells.com and GaryTroup.net.</p>
<p><b>May 18</b></p>	<p><b>persephone.thehansofoundation.org</b> is changed to a new number set.</p>
<p><b>May 19</b></p>	<p>Flashing letters are superimposed on Peter Thompson’s Executive Bio, providing visitors with another password to unlock secret content.</p>
<p><b>May 23</b></p>	<p>During live coverage in the UK of Channel 4’s <i>Big Brother 7</i>, on its <i>E4</i> channel, the audio feed is occasionally replaced by a female voiceover which described events from the second season of <i>Lost</i>.</p>
<p><b>May 24</b></p>	<p>An advertisement for the Monster.com-sponsored <b>hansocareers.com</b> airs during <i>Lost</i>’s US season finale. Hugh McIntyre of the HF appears as a guest on ABC’s <i>Jimmy Kimmel Live</i> talk show, answering questions about the HF, and insisting that the writers of <i>Lost</i> have included fictitious details about the group in the show’s mythology.</p>
<p><b>May 25</b></p>	<p>Half-page ad for <i>Bad Twin</i> runs in <i>USA Today</i>. Minor updates to <b>Sublymonal.com</b> remove most of the game-related content. Entering “108” on the Sublymonal site unlocks DJ Dan’s second podcast, which talks about the development of “electromagnetic super weapons.”</p>
<p><b>May 30</b></p>	<p>Additional information is posted on thf.org about several HF projects, including the Mathematical Forecasting Initiative.</p>
<p><b>June 1</b></p>	<p>Clicking on the 108 degree mark at <b>letyourcompassguideyou.com</b> unlocks the third DJ Dan podcast. Persephone hacks thf.org to include news of the HF’s participation in illegal organ harvesting.</p>
<p><b>June 6</b></p>	<p>An advertisement is aired during Boston Legal directing viewers to the Verizon-sponsored <b>RetrieversofTruth.com</b>. Entering the password “Steinbeck” into a field provided for joining a newsletter changes the information provided on the site and unlocks a forum.</p>



June 8	DJ Dan's fourth podcast is discovered on <b>Monster.com</b> , and claims that the HF is involved in genetic engineering experiments.
June 12	Players who complete a memory game learn that "DHARMA" is an acronym standing for "Department of Heuristics And Research on Material Applications."
June 13	DJ Dan's fifth podcast is discovered in a thread on the <b>RetrieversOfTruth.com</b> forum, and discusses HF work in nanotechnology and mind control experiments.
June 16	DJ Dan's sixth podcast is discovered on <b>Sublymonal.com</b> , and discusses HF memory experiments run on autistic savants.
June 17	In a video posted on <b>monster.com</b> , a woman named Rachel Blake explains that she intends to uncover the true purpose of the HF.
June 19	A link to Rachel Blake's blog ( <b>www.rachelblake.com</b> ) is hidden in the source code of thf.org. The most recent post is dated 9/14/2006.
June 20	thf.org is shut down, with a new message explaining that, "The Hanso Foundation has been hacked by malicious infiltrators seeking to blemish the good work of many dedicated researchers. Until a legal investigation is completed, the site will no longer be accessible to the public. Namaste."
June 21	DJ Dan's seventh podcast is discovered on Jeep's sponsored site, and talks about the HF's involvement in life extension research. A new post on Rachel's blog accuses the HF's Hugh McIntyre of adultery.



## Act 2: The Adventures of Rachel Blake

June 22	<b>persephone.thehansofoundation.org</b> updates with a film of an upside-down woman displayed on a constant loop with strange music and garbled voice over narration. When the voice is played backwards, it provides a series of numbers. Visitors browsing the "trash" folder on <b>letyourcompassguideyou.com</b> within the trash folder find a transcript of discussion between Persephone and "William", an employee at DaimlerChrysler. Persephone insists that Jeeps provided by Chrysler are being used for nefarious purposes. To prove the claim, she provides a zipped archive of files ( <b>missing_organ</b> ). The evidence in this archive convinces William to continue contact.
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<b>June 26</b>	DJ Dan's eighth podcast talks about Rachel Blake, and theorizes that she is the same person as Persephone.
<b>June 30</b>	Rachel Blake reveals she is the hacker "Persephone" on her blog. During DJ Dan's ninth podcast, Rachel calls in and identifies herself as Persephone.
<b>July 5</b>	Rachel's blog discusses Dr. Mittelwerk's visit to a medical clinic. She directs readers to the site of a web-based show called <i>thisisaknife</i> on the UK's <b>channel4.com</b> . Here, if you watch the July 5th episode, a brief message from Rachel appears during a break, encouraging viewers to "Navigate to the Truth" at <b>www.channel4.com/lost</b> flashes on the screen. A hidden link on the main navigation bar at this URL opens an audio file. DJ Dan's tenth podcast provides information that seems to shed light on a character mentioned on <i>Lost</i> named Karen DeGroot.
<b>July 10</b>	DJ Dan's eleventh podcast begins asking listeners to call in if they have leads on Alvar Hanso's current whereabouts.
<b>July 12</b>	An advertisement airs during a US <i>Lost</i> rerun features Dr. Mittlewerk, who asks viewers to "discuss [the HF's] achievements and continued progress." No URL is provided during the commercial, though a credit onscreen reads "Presented by ABC Corp."
<b>July 14</b>	Rachel's blog is updated with a picture of a path, a username, and a password. The name and password unlock a hidden video on <b>Sublymonal.com</b> .
<b>July 18</b>	Rachel's blog is updated with a blurry picture of a man's head, a username, and a password. The name and password unlock a hidden video which shows what happened immediately after the previous entry.
<b>July 21</b>	Rachel's blog reveals that she has fled to Sri Lanka, claiming that the situation is too dangerous for her and people who possess the evidence. She states that she must resort to desperate measures, which will become clear in the coming days.



<b>Act 3: HansoExposed.com &amp; The Glyph Hunt</b>	
<b>July 22</b>	At ComicCon in San Diego, Rachel Blake interrupts the <i>Lost</i> panel discussion to accuse <i>Lost</i> EPs Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof about the HF. When the producers insist that the HF is fictional, Blake claims that she of their existence and directs the crowd to <b>hansoexposed.com</b> . She is then escorted out of the auditorium.
<b>July 24</b>	Rachel's blog posts with a picture of a glyph and a code to enter at <b>hansoexposed.com</b> . From July 24 through September 8, a total of 70 codes, or "glyphs," are discovered on numerous websites and in physical locations around the world. Each clip corresponds to a fragment from a larger video clip that Blake recorded. thf.org is updated with the 7-10 advertisement featuring Mittlewerk.
<b>Aug 7</b>	A series of photos depicting a note, torn into several pieces, is uploaded to a the Flickr account of "lehcarekalb" (an anagram for Rachel Blake).
<b>Aug 11</b>	DJ Dan hosts a 2-hour live webcast of his show, with call-ins from actual viewers (unlike the podcasts, which feature staged callers).
<b>Sept 8</b>	The final glyph was uncovered, allowing visitors to <b>hansoexposed.com</b> to assemble Blake's complete video clip, which was quickly posted to YouTube.
<b>Sept 9-14</b>	During the period between September 9 and September 14, various hidden codes and images were released on the blogs of Speaker, Lost Ninja, The Other Girl, and Rachel Blake.
<b>Act 4: WhereIsAlvar.com &amp; Apollo Candy Bars</b>	
<b>Aug 8</b>	<b>ApolloCandy.com</b> launches, purporting to be the promotional site for the "private purveyor of chocolates for Alvar Hanso and his many companies." The site appears to be a cross-promotion with Jeep.
<b>Aug 24</b>	Starting on August 24, 1142 free "Apollo Chocolate Bars" were handed out in New York City, at special live events across the USA, and at Forbidden Planet stores in the UK. 78 of these bars are marked as "golden oracle" bars, with golden wrappers inside. Players who receive the special bars are instructed to send photos of themselves, holding the bar, to be posted on <b>whereisalvar.com</b> . On the site, Blake explained that when "enough of the world is watching," further instructions will be given.



<b>Sept 18</b>	Blake sent an email to everyone registered at <b>whereisalvar.com</b> instructing them to check out the site, where the 78 submitted photos were arranged to form the word UNITE. The site then instructed visitors to listen to DJ Dan's next live podcast. DJ Dan's site instructs visitors to visit <b>whereisalvar.com</b> for a hint about his "special guest" for the final podcast.
<b>Act 5: Comeuppance</b>	
<b>Sept 24</b>	DJ Dan hosts a final live podcast at 8 PM PST, ending the game. The two-hour broadcast concluded with an interview with Rachel Blake. Following this, Rachel directed the listeners to <b>abc.com</b> , where a final Rachel Blake video was shown. This video contained the Sri Lanka from the glyph hunt, followed by Rachel Blake's encounter with a gray-haired Alvar Hanso.
<b>Sept 26</b>	thf.org was updated with a letter from Alvar Hanso stating he would try to pick up the pieces of the Foundation and salvage its reputation. Clicking on the word "humanity" in the third paragraph reveals a hidden video transmission from Mittelwerk, who declares that he will continue his work.



## Appendix II: Endnotes

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- i. Mathieson, Rick. "'The Lost Experience:' Audio Interview with Mike Benson, SVP of Marketing for ABC Entertainment, Part 2." *Generation Wow!* September 27, 2006. Accessed at [http://mathieson.typepad.com/genwow/2006/09/the\\_lost\\_experi.html](http://mathieson.typepad.com/genwow/2006/09/the_lost_experi.html).
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- l. For a complete list of locations where glyphs were discovered, visit: <http://members.aol.com/matthepale/fragments.html>, a fan-maintained list.
- m. Apollo Candy Website. <http://www.apollocandy.com>. Accessed on August 18, 2006.
- n. The most active wiki for The Lost Experience has been *Lostpedia*, available at [http://lostpedia.com/wiki/The\\_Lost\\_Experience](http://lostpedia.com/wiki/The_Lost_Experience).
- o. Sassyrican. "Loved it and hated it." Comment in [hansofoundation.livejournal.com](http://hansofoundation.livejournal.com/1978.html?thread=5818#t5818). Sept 26, 2006. Accessed at <http://hansofoundation.livejournal.com/1978.html?thread=5818#t5818>.
- p. *Entertainment Weekly*. Issue 883. June 23, 2006.
- q. For more on the organic integration of advertising messages in entertainment content, see the C3 Whitepaper on Product Placement, by Alec Austin.
- r. RetrieversOfTruth.com Website Forum.
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