The Complete Companion to Rocket's Anathema

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Cover art by Deviantart’s Flame Raven.

Clockwork spiders derived from “Antlion” by Clint Bellanger, additional portraits by Charles Gabriel, both from OpenGameArt.
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Acknowledgments

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Rocket 18

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Introduction

This book and the game it accompanies are the products of a project undertaken by the collaborators of various disciplines listed on the Acknowledgments page. As a “Complete Companion” it serves some of the same purposes of a traditional video game manual or quick start guide, such as providing the game’s controls as well as “flavour text,” including lore on the game’s characters, races, and setting. However, this booklet also aims to reflect on the creative process of interdisciplinary collaboration and, by extension, comment upon the relationship between form and content in video game narratives. While I am sure this sounds dauntingly academic and textbooky to many readers, I assure you that most of the material takes the form of a Production Diary, which has largely been written on-the-fly in my inevitably eccentric vernacular. However, that does not go to say that this material and the concepts that lie at its heart are to be disregarded or taken lightly, simply that they can be transmitted so.¹

When people read a book, listen to a song, watch a film, or play a video game, they seldom consider how the form² of a work can affect its content³ and vice versa. An image of a building can convey a very different message than a description of it; a viewer may not notice what the writer of the screenplay wanted them to, just as a reader may not be able to relate to a building that he or she cannot visualize based on the writer’s description.

The same applies to video games, but on an even deeper level because the form is one that the audience (the player) directly and actively interacts with to access its contents. The impact of interactivity will of course vary from game to game. In an open world game, such as Bethesda’s Skyrim, which contains dozens of narratives, the player’s choice of interactions greatly affects which

¹ Much like McCloud’s Understanding Comics, which is a book about comics and also in the form of one.
² The book itself and the way it is put together, the CD or device containing a song as well as its written form of sheet music, the film and code of a movie or game.
³ The story and meaning being transmitted through words, images, and/or sounds.
narratives they will experience and how they will experience them. In Anathema, there is only one central narrative to be experienced. However, the way that narrative is experienced by one or more player(s) may be affected by how many people are playing at once, which non-player characters they choose to interact with, how they choose to play through the game, as well as how they read the narrative they are experiencing and to what extent, if any, they investigate the game’s other components, such as art, related games, other media, and flavour text.

So, you are invited to think of this book as an expanded universe of Anathema. This is the deleted scenes, behind the scenes, director’s cut, and commentary for the game itself, but also for its making. This booklet’s purpose is to provide context, both for the game and for the critical consideration of form and content in video games.

On the Style of Prose

Because of the nature of this book and its contents, a variety of styles of prose are use. The “Introduction” and “Reflections” are written critically, contain research, and are therefore more formal and technical in their language. The “Lore” is flavour text and is therefore written as creative narration, much like a description in a short story or novel. Comparably, “Appendix D” is a short story and hopefully reads like one. “The Script” is written more like a teleplay: dialogue with intermittent stage directions. The “Production Diary” was written on-the-fly, like a normal journal, sometimes in the present tense on the same day as the events being described and other times in the past tense weeks or even months after their happening. I considered standardizing this section for the sake of legibility but I found it detracted from its authenticity and from the reader’s perspective of the reflections that emerged from this journal. Finally, the notes in “Appendix A” are copied directly from the project’s Google document and have been unaltered for the same reasons that the “Production Diary” was not standardized.

4 Accursed, consigned to perdition (OED Online).
SETUP

As an independently produced prototype game, Anathema is not a free-running application initiated with a .exe file like most contemporary home computer users are accustomed to. The game requires specific software and hardware in order to played.

You will require:

• Microfost Visual Studio C# 2010 Express

• Microsoft XNA Game Studios

• At least one (up to three) USB-wired XBox 360 controller(s)

To play Anathema:

1. Install MS Visual Studio

2. Install MS XNA Game Studios

3. Copy the game folder from the disc to a new folder on the computer’s primary hard drive

4. Open the .sln file “ClocksAndGears” in MS Visual Studio

5. Ensure that at least one controller is connected and that its drivers are installed

6. Click the green play button on the top toolbar

7. Enjoy!
GAMEPLAY & CONTROLS

“Anathema” is a collaborative action role-playing game set in a steampunk universe. It features fluid drop-in/out gameplay wherein a second and third player may join or leave the first at any point in the game, replacing or being replaced by A.I. Each player is capable of three abilities: a basic attack, a stronger attack that can be charged for additional damage at the risk of vulnerability, and a powerful combo ability. The combo abilities may only be used after the player fills their adrenaline bar by hitting enemies with basic and charged attacks and are unique to each player. Ana, the rogue protagonist, unleashes lightning from the tip of her épée; Felix, the gun-swinging mage, hurls a fireball; and Klug, the brawling technician, deploys a clockwork spider that seeks out and decimates enemies. Players may save their progress at runic circles found in key locations and are also equipped with items to protect, empower, and heal themselves and their companions. Thus, they must work together to overcome obstacles, defeat enemies, and solve the mysterious tragedy that recently befell the small town of Anville on the outskirts of a vast empire.
Gameplay Mode

Items (Hold)

Pause

Weak Attack

Charge Attack

Movement

Special Attack

Interact/Select
**Lore**

**History**

For millennia, the Denker and Erbauer have lived in animosity of one another. However, due to the vastness of the land, they were able to maintain a fragile peace. The Denker moved to the north-eastern highlands while the Erbauer made their homes in the valleys of the western mountains. During this time a third race emerged from the south, the Weltenwanderers. Nomads on horseback, they found themselves at home in the great fields that laid between the two nations, living off the land. Five hundred years ago, the Denker and the Erbauer each made a great discovery. The former reached enlightenment and were granted the heavenly powers of Arcane magic by the Avians. The latter discovered mechanics and the way steam could be used to power them.

This was the dawn of a new age of war between the two races. Each hoped to use their newly found power to their advantage and claim victory in the ancient conflict. Caught in the middle were the nomadic horsemen, whose prairies were desecrated by the new instruments and elements of war. Some fled south, encountering the descendants of their ancestors who were developing their own trade-based civilization on the arid coastline. Others fled east, hoping to establish themselves on more fertile land along the temperate coast. Their former home eventually became the wasteland known as the Land under Blood Red Skies because of the clay and red salts in the hills and fields, exposed by the destruction of war, and the way they catch the sun’s light as it rises and sets.

Those who went east encountered a new race of men, the Xente, who had crossed the vast sea from lands unknown. These newcomers established farming villages in the fertile lowlands and formed an alliance with the Denker, founding an empire with a capitol city in the Denkeran highlands. The Xente brought peace to the land, ending the strife between the Denker and the Erbauer.
by unifying Arcane magic and steam-powered technology to lead the way into a new era of power and civilization. While some Erbauer were swayed to lay down their beliefs and contribute to the Empire, many returned home to their valleys across the waste, simply content with the prospect of a peaceful existence, isolated from the Denker.

For years the Empire basked in peace and prosperity. However, the waste to the west and the tundra to the north meant that the Xente could only expand southward, and they soon encountered the Südländisch city-states and the Weltenwanderers roaming between them. Competition for trade routes and farmland soon erupted into armed conflict. To support the Empire’s expansion and ensure its success against any opposition, new laws were established, including conscription, prohibition, censorship, and the swift disposal of anyone fitting a broad definition of treason or conspiracy. And it is in these times of war and turmoil that men of power turned to dark purposes and the world saw the rise of iconoclasts.
**RACES**

The universe in which *Anathema* is set is populated by a diversity of sentient races. After creating the mortal plane and the immortal land of Himmelinsel, the gods created five lands and a race to govern each one. The Denker, first born and most closely linked to the gods, were given the central realm, which in time came to be known as Concora. The Erbauer were born to the mountainous lands to the west and the Helfer, a name they later adopted through their alliance with the Erbauer, were born to the temperate plains in the north. The Südländischers, as they came to be known by the other peoples, were born to the Mediterranean lands south of the great desert pass. The last mortal race, the Xente, were born to a mysterious land across the sea to the east. Finally, the gods created the Avians, angelic beings to look over the mortal world and guide creation.

**Avians**

Avians are immortal, semi-divine, six-winged beings who tend to the Garden of Avalon in Himmelinsel, the island of the gods. Within the Garden, the soul of every mortal is contained within their own plant. By attending to these plants, the Avians guide the fates of mortals and maintain the balance of life. However, they do not have the power to control choices made by individuals and are forbidden from granting or taking life. In past situations of dire imbalance, Avians have descended from Himmelinsel against the wishes of the gods to intervene in the affairs of mortals, such as when they granted knowledge of the Arcane to the Denker so as to prevent their extinction at the hands of the Erbauer.

**Denker**

The Denker are an ancient race of humanoids native to Concora. While still mortal, the Denker have extremely long life spans, some

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5 Name borrowed from a similar race from the online fantasy strategy game Utopia.
6 From the German for “thinker”, adj. form “Denkeran”.
surviving over half a millennium. As a result, they repopulate very slowly and only reach maturity around the age of fifty. They used to make their homes in the eastern highlands and now reside primarily in the Xenten Empire Capital. They are tall, fair, divinely intelligent, but also arrogant, self-righteous, and conservative. They are primarily scholars, healers, and blessed warriors, though they have found ways to incorporate their magic into nearly every aspect of life.

Their education and religion are both centered around the Avians, the divine creatures that granted them sacred knowledge of the Arcane. Prior to this enlightenment, the Denker had beliefs based on mysticism and had been delving into simple magical arts and the search for divine power for millennia, but they have always believed in the Stringer. He is the lord of the underworld and plays the strings of death on a harp carved into an ash tree, possessing those condemned by the Garden to do his bidding in the mortal plane. While not outright aggressive, their self-righteousness leads them to defend their ideologies to the point of purging those that they see as contrary. This attribute, in combination with their lengthy life cycle, has resulted in the race’s endangerment and subsequent dependence on the Xenten Empire over the course of centuries of war.

**ERBAUER**

The Erbauer are the only other humanoid race native to Concora. Their legends tell that thousands of years ago they inhabited a realm to the west that was consumed by the earth itself, but in all recorded history they have begrudingly shared their homeland, vast as it may be, with the Denker. The Erbauer often live well over a century, though do not reach maturity until their early thirties. They are strong-armed, stout, stubborn, and above all wise and innovative. Their beliefs reflect these qualities, rejecting anything that has not been recorded in their histories as legend at best. As opposed to a traditional theistic religion, they look to the writings

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7 See “Appendix D.”
8 From the German for “builder”, adj. form “Erbaueran”.

of their ancestors and pray to the spirits of ancient heroes for guidance.

Their culture is one of physical creativity and ingenuity, constantly building upon the works and ideas of the previous generations, particularly in the fields of mining, crafting, and smithing. The Erbauer’s greatest achievement in these crafts is the discovery of coal and the invention of steam-powered machines. These began as simple creations such as hydraulic pickaxes for mining. However, in the last century the Erbauer’s works have been developed into semi-autonomous clockwork machines powered by Arcane energy and controlled by Denkeran Arcanists.

The Erbauer live primarily in the valleys between the western mountains. While their home provides natural defenses from invasions, they will never back down from a fight, especially if the Denker are involved. The Erbauer reluctantly joined the Xenten Empire only after realizing through crushing defeats that they could not compete with the combined force of the Xenten soldiers led by Denkeran Arcanists. To this day there remain many Erbaueran separatists who long for their race’s independence from the Empire and from the unification of magic and technology that they see as blasphemy.

Helfer\(^9\)

The Helfer are a race of small humanoid beings who lived in a symbiotic relationship with the Erbauer for over a millennium after moving south from their homeland, which had frozen over the course of the previous age. Barely half the height of

\(^9\) From German for “helper”, adj. form “Helferan”.

the Erbauer, the Helfer had great difficulties defending their homes from bandits or even their farms from the comparatively large wild animals of Concora. However, their small stature and natural dexterity made them excellent craftsmen and later allowed them to perform maintenance on the smallest and most complex clockwork machines. Thus an alliance and a cultural bond formed between the two races, mutually dependent upon one another for their success and survival.

Upon the unification of the Xenten Empire, the ambitious men saw in the Helfer cheap and exploitable labour and denied them citizenship as they were perceived as lesser beings in the Hierarchy of Life. The Erbauers’ outrage at the Xenten disregard for their alliance with the Helfer nearly led to a civil war and resulted in several referendums that slightly ameliorated the Helferan standards of living but did not grant them full citizenship. Tensions regarding this issue remain high in many communities, particularly mining towns in which all three races reside.

**Südländischers (Il Popolo)**

The Südländischers are ‘The People’ of the southern realm. They are tall, dark, guarded, and very direct. Their beliefs are founded on ancient mysticism and prophecy. They underwent a great divide when two prophets gave contradicting predictions, one urging the people to leave the land and preserve their nomadic way of life, the other urging them to establish cities so as to defend themselves from an impending conquest. Those who stayed behind became urban but also became more divided as sects of their beliefs emerged and diversified. Out of these divisions rose

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10 From the German for “southerners” or “Mediterranean”, adj. form “Südländisch”; and from the Italian for “the people”
conflict, and the Südländischers’ realm eventually became a series of city-states that were constantly hostile with one another.

As centuries past, the only conquests to come were internal; however, the great desert to the north crept ever further southward across the land, claiming farms, hamlets, and entire cities. In an act of desperation, the Südländischers re-unified and attempted the crossing to Concora. Upon their arrival, the old feuds of blood and creed returned and the independent city-states were re-established.

After several years they encountered the descendants of their lost brothers, now calling themselves the Weltenwanderers, who had lost much of their land to the war between the Denker and Erbauer, races scarcely known to the Südländischers. They formed a loose alliance, granting one another trade, land, and security, trying to find their place in a now crowded world until the day the Xenten Empire came south, looking to expand their borders. And thus began the war that saw the mortal plane once again divided.

**Weltenwanderers**

The Weltenwanderers are a large tribe of Südländischers that chose to remain nomadic when the rest of their brethren began establishing cities. They are the masters of horses and of the hunt, relying on their expertise in these matters and their deep understanding of nature rather than on technology or Arcane arts. They are a shamanic and egalitarian society in which all members perform the roles to which they are best suited for the sake of the greater collective. Through their rituals they foresaw nature’s gradual reclaiming of their southern realm and so they ventured across the great desert pass to Concora.

They made a new home out of the endless plains that separated the Erbaueran mountains and the Denkeran highlands until it too was lost, not reclaimed by nature but ravaged by the unnatural engine of war. Now they are spread thin across the last remaining

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11 From the German for “plainswalkers”, inspired by the Dalrei from Kay’s The Fionavar Tapestry and Plainswalkers from MTG, adj. form “Weltenan”.
realm. Some gave up their ways and took up lives as farmers and townspeople. Those who retain their traditions are scattered amongst several small tribes, living in a loose alliance with the descendants of their southern brothers or off of what small unclaimed land they can find, passively resisting the inevitable era of smoke and metal.

Xente\textsuperscript{12}

The Xente are a powerful, industrious, and charismatic race of humans who fled across the great sea to Concora when their homeland was consumed by an inhuman darkness. They are versatile warriors and natural born leaders, capable of stirring the most cowardly hearts and unifying the most hostile factions. Through careful diplomacy and brilliant intuition they successfully unified the Denker and the Erbauer under their banners to form Concora’s first empire.

Despite their victories and perseverance, the Xente are a fragile race compared to the land’s native inhabitants and the wanderers from the south. While reaching maturity by the young age of sixteen, they seldom live beyond sixty, assuming they are not slain in the battles that they are often all too keen to join. As newcomers to the land they are far more susceptible to Concora’s unfamiliar dangers and often treacherous landscape.

They are firm believers in being self-made and value determination and the achievement of a set goal above all else. They rejected their former beliefs upon the decimation of their homeland for they felt they were forsaken by their gods. They gradually adopted a variation of the Denkeran religion after learning of the power of Arcane magic, resulting in the cultural differences that led to the ostracization of the Weltenwanderers and the war with the Südländischers.

\textsuperscript{12} From the Galician for “the people”.
Primary Characters

Anathema Haovitch

Age: 27
Height: 170 cm

Anathema, often called Ana, but only by those daring enough to consider themselves her friend, is a gifted Xenten épéist who was outlawed from the Capital for infiltrating the military. She enlisted in the guise of a man under the name Arith and was revealed after being caught sketching maps of the military base at which she was stationed. That was five years ago; had she been caught under the new regime, she would have been tried and executed for treason. She was believed to have been affiliated with revolutionary or at least separatist organizations, but any leads on these ties disappeared when she was banished from the Capital. Since then she has wandered the countless towns on the outskirts of the badlands taking any work she can find... most of it is honest but very little of it is legal. In that time she has had numerous apprentices, usually thugs or bandits that possess a certain skill set required for her current job.

She is well seasoned, both in combat and in life. She takes advantage of her gender, playing off people’s presumptions of her helplessness to gain the upper hand in a confrontation. She also regularly reprises her role as Arith so as to infiltrate men’s conversations and restricted areas of towns and military posts. She is cold and apathetic, but a survivor. She lives day by day and lives for herself yet has softness for the helpless, seeing in them remnants of her lost sister. She will take any line of work so long
as the profit, often little more than getting by, outweighs the task. She lives by no law or code other than her own. While she often finds herself working with others, she’ll drop a partner the day he no longer proves to be useful. For now, she is willing to tolerate Klug and Felix, despite their youth and naiveté, because of their unique capabilities.
Klug Beilschmidt

Age: 34

Height: 155 cm

Klug is an Erbauer technician who was exiled from his homeland in the mountains for conspiracy and warmongering. He is a passionate youth, very outspoken and strong-minded. His political antics were tolerated for three years after he took a position in the mines for he was found to be a naturally talented technician with a particular affinity for traditional clockwork mechanics, which is technology that has not been altered by Denkeran magic. However, once his drunken rants developed into sober activism, pleading to the Council to fight for Erbaueran independence from the Xenten Empire, the Elders had no choice but to exile him.

Klug lived in the badlands near the edge of the Empire’s outskirt towns with a group of Erbauer that were exiled from their district for similar reasons. From them he learned many survival skills, and through his discourses with them his hatred of the Empire grew. But one day the leader of that group decided they should put their hate to action and ambush a caravan passing between towns. Of the reckless assault, only Klug escaped with his life and his freedom. It was shortly after this that he became acquainted with Anathema, to whom his diverse skill set, particularly his ability to salvage and repair clockwork contraptions, was appealing. Since then they have weathered the badlands of the outskirts, making their living by the end of a wrench or, more often than not, the tip of a sword.
Felix Akoluth

Age: 52
Height: 185 cm

Felix Akoluth is a former student of the Arcane Academy in the Xenten Capital. He has a keen mind and excelled at absorbing his elders’ and ancestors’ wisdom, but was at times too free-thinking for the liking of his teachers. His desires to experiment and push boundaries resulted in the Academy taking particular interest him, both as a potential prodigy and a potential danger. He is trusting to the point of naiveté and often only sees the world through the idealized lens of his privileged upbringing. He is friendly and jovial though other Denker would see him as unbecoming of his age and position.

Akoluth is in fact not Felix’s name but the title that he was given upon his admittance to the Academy. He was expelled from the Academy for questioning the elders about a tome he found pertaining to experimental and unethical Arcane arts. As a dropout, he was to become a trouxa, one who has been stripped of their connection with Arcane energy. Upon learning this, he fled the Capital and gradually made his way to the outskirt mining towns as the cities became more and more dangerous for him. In one of these towns he met Klug and Anathema and convinced them that his limited abilities in the Arcane arts as well as his knowledge of Denkeran culture and society could be of use to them. This proved to be true when he saved the group from bandits by infusing Ana’s épée with elemental energy. The unlikely trio has traveled together since that day.
* indicate general suggestions for action between conversations.

[] indicate dialogue that was added after the final script had been drafted.

<> indicate dialogue that was excluded from the final project. Most cuts were made due to constraints of space, time, or the target audience. In the case of the latter, the programmers said many of the cut or reduced conversations would make great optional dialogue for lore-oriented players similar to that of the Tales of… series if the game were to support it. For now, lore-oriented players can access these additional conversations through this complete original script.

*Trio sitting around the fire, Klug pulls out a bottle.*

Klug: Nothin’ like a fine mead to settle the spirit...

Felix: Is prohibition not in effect in your country, Klug?

Ana: Heh, what country?

Felix: Oh right!

Klug: Ha! An exile joke! Never heard one o’ those before, not from an Academy dropout leastwise...

Felix: I didn’t dropout, they just tried to kill me! And need I remind you I got away? I could boil that mead in your belly if you’ve forgotten.

Ana: Let him be, he can’t help himself, not once the drink hits him.

Klug: Oh, and now a drunk joke? You’re full of originality, Ana! And so respectable... why, were you anymore so they’d a had to give you an honourable discharge! Ha ha!
Ana: You had best put a stopper in it...

Klug: In the mead or my mouth? Ha ha!

Felix: Both! It’ll do you twice the good!

Ana: It’s time we turn in. We must rise early, we need to find work tomorrow.

Klug: We always “need to find work tomorrow.”

Ana: Would you rather roll over and die?

Klug: If we have to spend many more nights eatin’ hard bread and drinkin’ stale mead I might just!

Felix: An Erbauer that turns down eating, that’d be a sight to see!

Klug: Oi!

Ana: Good night boys.

*They go to bed, it is clearly late at night, enter clockwork spiders, they ambush the trio; general confusion.*

Felix: What devilry is this?

Ana: Clockwork spiders!

*Fighting, after winning:*

Felix: Where did those come from? And what were they doing attacking us like that!?

Klug: I don’t understand... they ought to be calibrated only for their work, and even then need windin’ and directions... unless they’ve been tamper’d with by that witchcraft of your so called ‘teachers.’
Felix: My people were granted knowledge of the Arcane by divine providence!

Klug: Oh yes, ‘divine providence,’ and look how well that worked for ev’ryone...

Felix: We use those powers for the people’s benefits!

Klug: Oh yeah? And who benefits from you usin’ your powers to do mercenary work and th’ odd thievin’?

Ana: Ahem... while I’d love to relive a millennium of cultural strife, perhaps we should proceed to the village and see if we cannot resolve this without dividing the Empire.

Klug: Never thought I’d hear an outlaw defend the Empire...

Felix: Never thought I’d see an exiled separatist follow one who did.

Klug: Aye.

[*Near the entrance to the mine:*
Guard: This way leads to the mine. You’ll need permission from the Captain for us to let you through.]¹³

*The trio proceeds to the village; two guards stand at the gate.*¹⁴

Guard 1: Who goes there?

Ana: We are travelers and are just looking for a place to rest.

Guard 2: We can’t let you in, the city is under quarantine!

Felix: Please, we were attacked in the night.

Guard 1: And you’re still alive, you’ll be fine.

Klug: You can’t just leave honest folk out to fend for ‘em selves!

Guard 2: Who says you’re honest?

Ana: Please, we might be able to help with the situation, we have... shall we say... a certain set of skills that could be useful.

¹³ Added by Jason to prevent players from skipping plot points.
¹⁴ Because we only had one portrait for the guards this conversation is somewhat difficult to follow in-game.
Guard 1: Skills, eh? I’ll bet! A bonny lass and her... ‘diverse’ companions... don’t wanna know what she’s into, eh?

*Ana draws épée on Guard 1.*

Guard 1: What are you doing? I am a soldier of the Xenten Empire!

Guard 2: By the Garden! What is that?!

*<A clockwork man enters with> clockwork spiders [enter]¹⁵; fight!*

Guard 1: Blimey! You saved our necks there you did! I think it ought to be safe to let ‘em pass.

Guard 2: Hold on! Who’s to say you won’t use them skills against us? Or the townsfolk?

Ana: The town seems heavily guarded. I’m sure your captain and his guard could have us thrown out if we stir anything up. Besides, it is obvious you couldn’t stop us if you wanted to...

Guard 2: You watch your tongue when you address a man, Missy! ‘Spetially a member o’ the guard.

Ana: And you watch your tongue when addressing a Lady, peasant! Or I shall cut it out!

<Guard 2: *sweat drop>*

Guard 1: Welcome to Anville my Lady! *Opens the gate, the trio walks through.*

Klug: Heh! Lady! Good one Ana! Lady indeed... you’ve got more stones than Felix ‘ere! Hahaha!

*Inside the town: people are out of their homes in the streets, there

¹⁵ See note 21.
is general dismay*

<Villager: It’s such a tragedy! Someone has to do something!

Felix: What’s going on?

Villager: Just awful! I can’t bear to think of it! *runs off* >

Ana: What has happened here?

Villager: Oh! Don’t be fussing yerself m’Lady, I’m sure the guards will handle it... Uh... G’day!

Blacksmith: Welcome to Anville! Can ye believe they took my suggestion for the name? Hahaha!

[Random Villager: My son was taken from me! Please help!] >

[*Inside the shop:*]

Shopkeeper: Buy anything you need for your travels on the left. Red will treat your wounds, blue will pump you up, yellow will toughen your skin, and green can even bring you back from the edge of death! >

Random Villager: I can’t believe them guards ain’t done a thing about what’s going on!

Klug: That’s the milit’ry for you... Never ‘round when you need ‘em or workin’ for the wrong man when they’re around!

Villager: Wings o’ grace! These guards may not be fit to do all that ought be done but that don’t right yeh to be ill-speakin’ th’ Empire! What are yeh? Bunch o’ separatists!? Not the capt’n nor the mayor gonna tolerate none o’ that so you’d best put a stopper

16 Cut because programming villagers to enter, say their lines, and then leave was more complicated a task than the programmers’ time frame could allow for.

17 Woman’s dialogue before the player has permission to enter the mine, by Jason.

18 Added by Branson when he introduced items into the game.
in it! <*walks off*>  

<Felix: Imperialist automatons!  

Klug: Aye!  

Ana: Mind boys, we worked hard to get in, I suggest we not get thrown out just yet.  

Felix: Yes but, we got in for what, exactly?  

Ana: Well for one there is now a wall between us and those contraptions. And judging by the state of things, we might also find some work here...  

Klug: I’m workin’ for no imperial dogs!  

Felix: And it’s important no one recognizes me as a magic user!  

Ana: Work is work, Klug. I thought you would be more inclined to lighten the pockets of those... ‘Imperial dogs’. And subtle work is the only work I do Felix, so it’s the only work you will do as well. Therefore, so long as you follow lead, you need not fear exposure here. Now come, let us find someone with actual information. Step one to any job, legitimate or not, is getting it.>¹⁹  

<RANDOM VILLAGER: I can’t believe the guards still hav’nt dealt with this!  

Ana: What exactly is “this”?  

VILLAGER: Newcomers, eh?  

Felix: Yes, travelers as it were.  

VILLAGER: Travelers, hmmm? What be ye travelin’ to here for?

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¹⁹ Cut for space and fluidity.
Ana: We are looking for work.

Villager: Work? My Lady, I don’t know what kind o’ work ye be lookin’ for here, but I doubt you’ll find much to suit your stature here in Anville or in any of th’ outskirt towns without already “having establishment” as they say. What did ye say was yer industry again?

Ana: We uh...

Klug: Minin’.

Villager: Beggin’ your pardon?

Klug: M’Lady is from a mining family near the waste, lost it all when she lost her father with no brothers to carry th’ line. Myself and her steward ‘ere remain her only faithful servants out of courtesy to the kindness she show’d and our own desperation for work, with no rival families willing to take on a rival’s supporter.

Villager: So now...?

Klug: So now we go town to town, looking for any work, work for all three of us mind you, the Lady works too now, tryin’ to find a place to settle, maybe get back into minin’ in some small sort o’ way...

Villager: Well I hate to break it to ye, but ye won’t be findin’ work at the mine, not the kind you’re talkin’ at least.

Ana: Why is that?

Villager: The mine’s the problem, see? Few days back folk came runnin’ to town from the mine, screamin’ that all the clockwork spiders had gone wild, didn’t crank, didn’t take orders, just jumped at anything in front of them.

Ana: That would explain last night...
Villager: Aye, the problem’s spread out o’ the mine. I’m sorry m’Lady, but you’re outta luck in this town.

Ana: Perhaps... We are willing to settle for other lines of work, if there is any to be had.

Villager: All folk be talkin’ ‘bout is solvin’ this here problem, and, no disrespectin’, I don’t think a Lady and a couple boys’ll be much help there.

Ana: I have had many requirements of these boys in the past, and we have spent much time on the road, we dealt with the spiders last night and outside the gate this morning, we may be of more use than your people are willing to credit.

Villager: Well if ye be keen on an early grave, ye’ll get all ye need from the capt’n o’ the guard at the fort. Good luck to ye tho’. Swift wings!

Ana: And to you, good sir.

*Exit villager.*

Ana: Nice play Klug, the whole “Lady from a dead mining family on the run with a guard and a steward” idea was surprisingly brilliant.

Klug: Surprisingly! I’ll have you to know my people are known across the Empire for their brilliance, and not occasional at that!

Felix: Perhaps with a wrench, but not with the tongue.

Klug: Oi!>20

Ana: Come boys. We have a captain to find, and imperial dogs’ gold to pocket.

---

20 Cut for the sake of space. Players will simply stumble upon the guards’ fort rather than being directed to it.
*They make their way to the fort; inside they are stopped by a guard and the Captain.*

<Guard: Oi! Where do yeh think yer headin’ there, lassy?

Ana: I must speak with the captain of the guard.

Guard: Oh yeh must, eh? Yeh and yer... bodyguards here?

Klug: Aye.

Guard: Hehe, fat chance o’ th’t. Ye be strangers to the town, and no lass, nay e’en a Lady, be settin’ foot on grounds held by the Empire’s milit’ry.

Ana: Is that so? Well I would hate to tarnish your noble decree, but I really must insist...

Guard: !

*from off screen*: Now what’s all this about?

*Captain of the guard approaches>*

Guard: Captain! These ‘ere outsiders, these ruffians! They’re ‘bout to start sum’fin mighty foul, insistin’ they be shown to yeh, sir.

Captain: Is that so? I shan’t have trouble makers in my town! Not with all that has happened of late...

Ana: My apologies, Captain. We merely desired an audience with you.

Captain: I’m sure my man explained to that the fort is closed to civilians.

Felix: Is that what he was tryin’ to say? Can’t understand a word out of these westerners...
Ana: Felix, hold your tongue or Klug’s wrench will! Again, my apologies Captain, but our affair is one of military matters.

Captain: Go on...

Ana: We are mercenaries, in search of work and lodging. We fought off several of those spiders in the woods last night, and more outside the gate this morning. We believe we can help this town, and are willing to do so for compensation.

Captain: Forgive my skepticism m’Lady, but I don’t see how you and your oddly matched friends could possibly do what my men cannot.

Ana: Your men are spent guarding the gates, protecting the people, all while dealing with crime within the town and area. We would be focused, single minded in a single task.

Klug: We’ve got a bit more bite to us than you might be thinkin’ there Capt’n. You can ask your boys at the gate who saved who when the clockwork [spiders] <men> came for ‘em.

Captain: Thank you master Erbauer, but it is not your skills in brawling that concern me, more so your Lady and your gardener’s lack thereof.
Felix: Gardener!? Now wait just a minute!

Captain: If you think your arm can match your heart, then spar three of my best men. If you win, I’ll have you serve as mercenaries to clear the mine.

Ana: So be it.

Klug: Lemme at ‘em!

Felix: Aye!

Captain: Colt! Goyer! Klaus!

*Three guards enter; fight! After winning:*

Captain: Impressive and surprising. Be thankful that given our need I do not ask where you got your training m’Lady. And you, young Denker, you have a gift that you had best not draw unwanted attention to.

Felix: We have your leave then, Capt’n?

Captain: You do. Clear out the mine, and you shall receive pay in silver, perhaps more if you can uncover the cause of this catastrophe.

Ana: We shall do our duty for you, Captain. Thank you for your patronage.

Captain: The Stringer damn me, this town may have some hope yet...

*The trio heads towards the gate. On the way out of town, a woman approaches frantically.*

Woman: Wait! Wait! In the name of the Garden please wait!

Ana: What is it, woman?
Woman: Please! I heard in the streets... you’re to go into the mine...

Ana: What concern is it of yours?

Woman: Please... my... my son... he’s missing... three days now... went to work the mines when his father fell ill... was no talking him out of it... he’s just a boy, please...

Klug: We’ve got orders to clear the mine out, ‘n that’s all.

Ana: Klug!

Felix: Think about it Ana... if the guards couldn’t get through that mess...

Woman: Oh Ian! *weeps*

*Ana turns to the boys.*

Ana: We will be going through that place top to bottom regardless, it will not delay us to keep an open eye for the child.

Klug: There’s no sense gettin’ her hopes up Ana...

Ana: Sometimes the world needs hope more than it needs miracles.
*She turns to the woman.*

Ana: We will look for Ian, and return with him if we can.

Woman: Bless you child!

Klug: So... other than for the sake o’ your touchin’ “hope”... Why’re we takin’ this job when we’re already gonna pocket gold from the mine?

Felix: Aye! Why risk are neck for this runt whose mum can’t even pay us for doin’ so?

Ana: The military job is for the money. If everything has to have a price to mean something to you, then this job is for the reputation, and reputation has its own value.

Klug: Does it now? So tell me, what is your reputation as an outlawed military infiltrator who pretends to be a ruined Lady so she can surprise people with her fancy fencin’ skills valued at?

Felix: Jobs rescuing children in dirt poor towns apparently, hehe!

*They make their way to the mine.*

Ana: Here it is boys, think you can handle it?

Klug: Ha! I was born underground, near a mine just like this; I was born able to handle it!

Ana: It is fairly dark in there Felix, are you certain you will be alright?

Felix: Who are you my mother? Besides, I have the eyes of a hawk and the ears of... uh... well something that hears well...

Klug: Smooth lad...

*They enter the mine, fight clockwork spiders, slimes, and at some
point encounter a Helfer miner who attacks them. After the fight:

Klug: That was a Helfer miner... I’ve not heard of a single time one’s attacked a man, least of all an Erbauer... there be darkness brewin’ here.

Felix: If y’ask me it was just a matter of time before the little wretches fought back against us.

Klug: Fiend! If e’er they had reason to fight you, t’was your own doin’! Treatin’ ‘em the way you did, like they weren’t even men!

Felix: Men! Not half the stature, not half the man!

Ana: Enough! Klug is right, the fact that the Helfer attacked is most troubling. We must find answers, not fight over a past that cannot be changed.

*They proceed through the mine, fighting clockwork spiders, Helfer miners, and guards<, and eventually several clockwork men (some are haywire while others have an ominous blue glow to them).*

*After encountering some of said clockwork men:*  
Klug: Did you see that?

Ana: Some of those clockwork men were not just running haywire...

Felix: I recognize that aura. I think... I think it might have something to do with... why I left the Academy...

Klug: What do we do?

Ana: We push on. We have a job to do.>  
<*>deeper in the mine: scream*

---

21 Due to Nicole’s hard drive being corrupted and time constraints we ended up replacing the clockwork men with more difficult spiders and had to omit the aura.
Felix: What was that!?

Ana: It might be the child, Ian! Come on!

*They fight their way to the bottom of the mine and arrive at a door.*

Ana: He must be here, hurry!>22

<Felix: Ana, wait! Listen...

*Camera pans to the next room*

Man 1: We must hurry, sir.

Man 2: Patience, this is not an art to be rushed...

Man 1: But sir, the intruders have not been stopped. We need to get you to safety!

Man 2: Security is your concern, general, grafting these souls is mine. Ensure that I am not interrupted again, at your own expense if need be.

*General comes through the door*>23

General: These are the intruders? Well, we can’t have you interrupting the Clockworkmancer... may your souls be tended in the Garden!

*Fight! After winning:*

Klug: What the hell did he mean by... Clockworkmancer?

Felix: It can’t be! May the light guide us and the Garden keep us...

---

22 Omitted because we did not have the means program a scream that was triggered by an event and subsequently triggered other events.

23 Players will walk-in on the General and Clockworkmancer rather than listen in on them.
Ana: What is it, Felix?

Felix: This is why I was exiled, why they tried to strip me of my power. During my second year at the Academy I came across tomes describing how the Arcane arts could be used to strip a soul of its mind, its body, everything, and graft it onto something else, to animate it, like creating a living weapon. Horrified, I confronted my elders. The following week I was warned by a friend that I was to be tried for treason for challenging the will of the Arcane and become a trouxa, that’s when I fled to the outskirts. I never thought they would actually be capable of succeeding... I was sure the gods would smite them or the Avians would deny them their power, yet here the darkness rises...

Klug: So... those queer lookin’ clockwork [spiders] <men>...?

Felix: Experiments gone wrong I’m guessing... partial grafts, or souls that clung on to their identity and were driven mad by their fate.

Ana: We have to stop them.

Felix: Yes, but how?

Klug: The same way we stopp’d those poor derang’d Helfer ‘n
haywir’d clockwork [spiders] <men>, arms swingin’ and guns blazin’!

Felix: Heh, what would we do without your insight? But I meant how do we stop them, the Xenten Empire. You saw that man, he was a general.

Ana: We shall deal with the greater concerns later Felix, right now we need to find that boy and stop this madness! Are you boys still with me?

Klug: Aye!

Felix: I am with the light in the Garden.

Ana: Alright then, let’s go!

*They enter the room.*

Clockworkmancer: You’re too late for the boy, his blood and flesh are as cold as the dark steel to which his mind is now a slave.

Ana: DEMON!!!

<*She charges him, but is thrown back by a magical barrier.*>24

Clockworkmancer: [Minions] <Soldiers>! Dispose of the intruders!

*Enter several <blue-glowing> clockwork [spiders] <men>.*

Felix: No! Don’t listen! You were once like us, you can fight him!

Clockworkmancer: They can’t hear you, they can’t think, all they know is my command!

Ana: Felix, we must...

*Fight the clockwork [spiders] <men> and defeat the

24 The programmers opted for teleportation over a barrier.
Clockworkmancer.*

Clockworkmancer: Please! The Empire would pay handsomely for my safe return, name your price!

Ana: The souls of the men grafted to those clockwork [spiders] <men>, that is my price.

Clockworkmancer: Have mercy!

Ana: We’ll show you the same mercy you showed that boy! *She stabs him and runs to the boy’s body.*

Ana: We were too late...

Voice: ...hello?

Ana, Klug & Felix: ?!

Voice: Hello?

Felix: Who’s there?

*The seemingly lifeless clockwork [spider] <man> in the corner gets up and walks over to the trio.*

Clockwork [spider] <man>: My name is Ian.

*fade*
Production Diary

Summer 2011

The core ideas for Anathema first came to me in the summer of 2011 while I was brainstorming ideas for a series of short stories with the working title The Land under Blood Red Skies. I had come up with the idea that it would be interesting to digitally publish a collection of interrelated stories in serial as they were written, a sort of reinvention of Victorian novel composition. While musing on this new potential project, I began to see that my recently discovered interest in steampunk culture might fit into it. I began brainstorming ideas for characters, settings, and plots, deciding that I would tell the stories of several outlaws who eventually wound up forming a caravan of ‘chaotic good’ nomads, traveling from town to town doing odd jobs. Over time I outlined a grand narrative that would span numerous ‘seasons’ or volumes, each comprising of a dozen or so ‘episodes’ or stories. I had planned to begin writing in September of 2011, but the files containing all of my notes were lost.

Summer 2012

In the summer of 2012 I randomly remembered that I had e-mailed the files containing my notes to my PAWS account but had never found them because shortly thereafter I switched over to Gmail. With the notes once again in my possession I began to further develop my concepts and outline a back-story that facilitated an eventful plot. By this point I was unsure of how pragmatic my original medium would be as I was about to begin graduate studies at the U of S. None-the-less, I made sure to hold onto the files and save multiple backups this time, and whenever I thought of an interesting feature to include in my world or its story I took note of it.

Of this original concept, little has been incorporated into Anathema with the only major exceptions being the steampunk
genre and the world itself. The original storyline was planned as a relatively realistic alternate history in which a new energy source was used to power clockwork machines as opposed to a fantasy world in which magic and technology are fused. The concept of an institution fusing a boy with a clockwork man also comes from these original story outlines.

**Autumn 2012**

During the fall of 2012 I came up with a new medium through which to express my world and the story of the caravan. Over the past couple years I had started playing Dungeons & Dragons and was becoming an avid fan of role-playing games. However, I felt that no matter which system I encountered (3.5, 4th Ed., 'Next') there were always elements that I found to be less than satisfactory. Then I thought to myself, why don’t I create my own role-playing mechanics and then I could set my campaign in the world that I had been drafting for the stories. This idea was further encouraged by the prospect of Dr. Jon Bath’s Interdisciplinary Centre for Cultural Creativity course on the book as object to be offered in the winter. Around this time an old friend of mine, Jason Dahl, also asked me if I might be interested in being outsourced as a writer for future projects in video game development that he and other friends were undertaking as part of a computer science degree.

**January 2013**

As I began to plug away at the core mechanics for my table top RPG, particularly class-specific combat abilities, stats balancing, and skill tree development, I began to realize how ambitious a project I had started and how unrealistic it was for me to hope to complete it by April. Around the same time, Jason and his computer science group (heroically named (Team) Rocket!) approached me and asked me if I was still up for being their writer. I had been keeping Jason up to date on my RPG endeavours and he suggested that the game be set in the same universe so as to not multiply my workload. After consulting with Dr. Bath, for who’s class the project was already intended, it was decided that, while
brimming with potential, the RPG was indeed too ambitious in its scope and that the narrative of the video game (in combination with the document that you have been reading for some time now) would constitute my project for the interdisciplinary seminar on cultural creation.

Thus, Rocket grew to ten members—five programmers from the Computer Science department’s Game Mechanics course: Branson, Chris, Jason, Julian, and Zach; four visual artists, out-sourced to create sprites, the map, tiles, and concept art: Nicole, Paige, Robbie, and Sarah, respectively; and myself—and held its first full meeting in mid-January. I was asked to give a short presentation on the lore of my world. Much of this was done on the spot as I had been thinking about such things for months or even years but had very little written down or mentally set in stone.

What resulted was a verbal version of the “History” section of this booklet, which remains surprisingly slightly altered, and the following figure:
Yes, with work like this I can’t believe I wasn’t outsourced to do the art for the game!

This meeting was also the first occasion at which I was formally filled in on the style and genre of the game. It was to be an over-head view, co-operative, beat-'em-up RPG comparable to Secret of Mana for the SNES. We also discussed plot and the length restrictions that would inevitably have to be placed on the narrative due to the short production period for the game. It was at this time that I pitched to the Team a (very) rough outline of my storyline. The programmers decided to begin working on basic mechanics not requiring art or story-based direction (such as movement and collision detection) while Nicole and I respectively began developing sprites for characters and creatures and the characters and creatures themselves.

Over the course of the month I wrote a full draft of the (still unnamed) world’s history as well as jot note outlines of the Denker, Erbauer, Xente, Helfer, Südländisch, and Weltenwanderer races, the four principle characters (including a female alternative to Arith who later became the protagonist), and the plot, which had to included a starting point, one town, one dungeon, and one boss, as per the requirements of the game’s style and genre. Many of the races, characters, plot ideas, and concepts (such as clockwork spiders and men) were previously conceived for either my stories or my RPG. One exception was the Helfer race, this was added upon the request that there be a larger variety of possible enemies in the mine, and I was willing to go along with it as the race’s position in society tied into the commentary I was to make on imperialism.

This finally brings us to today (January 28, 2013), where I have finally caught up with my journaling. From this point forward, meetings and developments will likely be documented on-the-fly, and will therefore be even less sensible or coherent, and even more quirky and (hopefully at least somewhat) entertaining.
In early February I began rough drafting several different parts of the booklet at once: the script, the intro, and the backgrounds on the characters and races. I guess I just work better a bit pêle-mêle as they say en Français (honhonhon). I had asked the guys (the programmers) what they wanted me to focus on at the time, and their reply was “just storyboarding while the artists are working on sprites and concept art” (this is far more paraphrase than quote). I interpreted the term “storyboarding” very loosely as I feel that all of the flavour text in this book contributes to my characters and plot. As it turns out, they meant “more detailed plot outline and scripting (Englishy scripting, not computer scripting)” (again, a very loose quote). And so I returned to plugging away at a rough script, which inevitably bled into the characters’ lore section as I began to shape our heroes.

It is now mid-February and I have thoroughly neglected my script! The storyline did however receive a face-lift and the back stories on the protagonists, races, and general political history of the world are now complete. The other day we made use of the combined high-end technology of Skype and Google docs to have a long-distance meeting about what the town and surrounding environment should look like. I suggested Grasslands National Park and, of course, dismal industrial England as primary inspirations. We also played with names. I had never liked “Zaub” for the mage character, and decided to change it to “Klaus” after my girlfriend’s suggestion, but the guys felt it was too similar to “Klug”. After some bartering involving my insistence on the importance of etymology we settled on “Felix”, and there was much rejoicing *yay...*. 
March 2013

At the beginning of the month the entire group got together for a massive collaborative work meeting. During this time I worked mostly with the artists, describing the characters and setting so that concept art and sprites could be developed. The programmers and I also settled on the final details of the plot, specifically the ending, and discussed the characters’ combat style, how it would affect mechanics, and how it would have to be animated. One of the highlights of the sessions was Jason spending nearly the entire day trying to resolve a problem he encountered in the code, and then dreaming about it that night and fixing it in under thirty minutes when he awoke from the dream. In the first week of March I also completed the first draft of the script and began editing.

In mid-March, the programmers had their proof of concept, in which they showed their work in progress to their professor and received feedback. This feedback was primarily on the game’s mechanics, but also on production -- what about this game makes it stand out in comparison to other within the same genre? What elements of game play are going to draw gamers in and keep them coming back? -- these are questions he encouraged the group to ask itself in order to produce a top rate game. On the same day, Jason taught me how to do some basic XML scripting for dialogue so as to display sequential dialogue and trigger the correct portraits during conversations between characters. I got a kick out of this as it was my first experience directly interacting with the code that would make up a part of the game and from the pun that I was scripting the script, as it were.

With two weeks left before the game must be presented, the programmers’ professor gave them their spec change. This part of the assignment was designed to simulate the challenges of game design in the industry. The professor played the role of the creative producer and gave each team a feature that he would like to see

25 Which was almost foiled by a Heisenbug, a bug whose point of origin is uncertain, punning on the Heisenberg uncertainty principle.
incorporated into the game. He told Rocket that *Anathema* needed summoning. He wanted the player to be able to summon a pet/minion/companion that fought alongside them. This twist, its implications for all people involved in the project, and the fact that Nicole’s hard drive has been corrupted, has caused some chaos and panic to ensue. We are hoping to have the project completed to the producer’s liking, though this may require a compromise in the amount of content created, since the foundations of art and mechanics must now be revisited.

**April 2013**

It is early April, the programmers are presenting their prototype to their professor, and I am completing the final sections of this booklet and am knee-deep in the tedium of formatting and production. Over the next week, the programmers will pump out the remainder of the game’s content: the remaining levels and their respective dialogue as well as the boss fight. We plan to have a completed, fully playable demo by the middle of the month.

It is now mid-April and our demo is complete! The Game Mechanics course held a demo day where other students could play test and evaluate each project. Most players enjoyed the game’s combat system as well as the steampunk aesthetic, but did comment that they felt it had too much dialogue for its length. The game was deemed successful enough to be featured at the first StartupUofS event for young entrepreneurs. This event was great for seeing other projects, showing off our own, and making connections.

I now look forward to having this book printed and bundling the entire game together. As for the future of Rocket and *Anathema*, there has been some talk of members taking game design to the next level and I genuinely hope that I can be a part of any future projects and perhaps even have another one of them set in the world of Concora.

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26 Clearly kids need to play less FPS games and more RPGs!
Reflections

On Anathema

As a critical making experiment developed by a team comparable in size to that of Big Hug Games’ Bastion, working on Anathema facilitated insight to and reflection upon the production of independently produced videogames, their booklets, and the narrative advantages of external textual objects. I will not pretend to think that Anathema is a revolutionary experimental work of ‘high seriousness’ and I will certainly not argue that it is a better game than Bastion or other innovative indie games. However, it is a work whose art, code, and narrative were closely considered in relation to form, and whose narrative and critical potential are amplified through the incorporation of an external booklet. It is at this point that my argument becomes a self-reflexive criticism, since this discussion is part of the booklet and therefore contributes to its own demonstration of booklets’ potential for artistic reflection and criticism, which is the ultimate purpose of a critical making (Ratto). When I first began the project and started thinking about form and content, I naively believed that they would have minimal impact on one another. I assumed writing the game’s dialogue would be similar to writing a teleplay, and that the form would just be a different, more interactive way of transmitting the same narrative as an episode of a cartoon. I also assumed that the “Lore” section of this booklet would simply be complementary material for gamers who wanted to know more about the game’s world, races, and characters. As the project developed, the programmers and I began to realize the inseparable nature of our game’s form and content, the way both had to compromise for one another, and the drastic, though often positive, impacts they had on one another. Connections between Anathema, its booklet, and the broader discussion of form and content in art may be drawn by examining several elements of the game-narrative and booklet and how the latter had an impact on the relationship between form and content as it was designed and written over the course of Anathema’s development.
Over the course of production, many changes were made to the game’s mechanics, game-play, art, story, and dialogue; some were simple while others changed one or more member’s entire conceptualization of the project. First and foremost was the script in general. Many of the ideas I had for the game’s story ended up not working with the game’s mechanics or simply slowed the pace too much for the target audience of action role-playing game fans. Most cuts made to the script were ‘flavour text’ that would ideally be incorporated into the game as optional dialogue, either through voice-overs or cut scenes. Currently, this additional dialogue is found only in the complete edition of the script in this booklet; thus, due to the mechanical limitations of production and the project’s consciousness of audience, multiple media are required for a player to experience the entirety of the core narrative. Aside from the script in general, there were several internal and external changes that stemmed from form-content interactions. One minor change that nonetheless affected the game’s content and my writing in particular came up when the programmers were designing the playable characters’ special attacks. They wanted to give Ana some ranged attacks and therefore decided to give her the ability to shoot lightning from the tip of her sword. My concern was a lack of continuity in the game since at no point is it implied that Ana is a magic user; in fact, according to “Primary Characters” and “Races” sections, magic is entirely alien to her as she is a Xente. In compensation of this concern, I made a brief addition to Felix’s back-story and justified his use of magical knowledge to empower Ana’s sword with elemental energy.

Two larger, more significant changes came up early in pre-production, while I was constructing the story’s outline. As noted in the “Production Diary,” my original medium of choice was a series of short stories. The original premise was to have a steam-punk setting that paid homage to Victorian culture and maintained a high level of realism with the exception of the historical path of industrialization being directed towards steam-powered mechanics fueled by a fictional source. But this approach was inspired by the Vinci civilization in Big Huge Games’ Rise of Legends. However, the programmers wanted a more fantasy-oriented steam-punk universe for the game as this
would promote a greater diversity of monsters and character abilities, facilitating more role diversity between player-characters and a more action-oriented game-play. Thus, I created several new races, including the Denker and Erbauer, easily comparable to Tolkien’s elves and dwarves, respectively; the Avians, winged humanoids; and the Helfer, who are more comparable to gnomes or J.K. Rowling’s house elves. While I was initially frustrated by this shift in genre, I soon realized its potential to facilitate the discussion of additional social issues within the text. There were now numerous historical and political relationships to explore that were not only economic, as the strife between the Xente and the Südländischers was, but also racial and religious. Having cultural diversity within the playable party also created more distinct character dynamics within the narrative’s dialogue. The races and some of their attributes are referred to throughout the in-game narrative, but as their mannerisms are common knowledge to the characters within the game-world the player is alienated from them. Detailed descriptions of the races and their nature is found in the game’s booklet, developing the narrative externally for more immersive play and a deeper understanding of the characters and their world.

The second major change concerned the ending. I had originally planned three different possible endings depending on the player’s performance in the game’s final conflict. When I came up with the idea I thought that I was contributing to the form directly through the content. Regrettably, the programmers did not have the time or resources to program such an ending and I was left having to choose which of the three endings I wanted to use in the game. Regardless of my choice, the narrative, the message it conveys to the player, and that player’s experience within the game would not only be changed, it would be substantially more fixed. If a player was dissatisfied with the narrative’s outcome, there was nothing formal that could be done to ameliorate the experience. This prospect caused me some anxiety as I was concerned that limiting the game to a happy ending would yield a predictable narrative whereas limiting it to a dark ending might convey pessimism, cynicism, or other negative

28 This plan was intended as an homage to early games that featured alternate-endings, such as Metroid and Chrono Trigger.
social criticisms more strongly than intended. Thus, I ultimately decided on a bitter-sweet ending, hoping to appease fans of the plot twist without compromising a social commentary that encourages the player to approach the game’s narrative with a hermeneutic of suspicion. The alternative endings are included in note form in the booklet’s “Appendix B: Original Plot Outline” and not as additions to the script because they were never fully developed and so as to not create a conflict with the ‘canonical’ narrative. Once again it is the form of the booklet that allows this distinction to be made and also allows, returning to the self-reflexive criticism, this reflection upon the artistic intention and outcome of such decisions to be made.

A critical reading of one last example in which the form and content of the game influenced one another demonstrates the potential social and cultural impact of these relationships within textual objects and the importance of external information in making these readings. When developing the villagers of Anathema’s game-world, there were two different ways of programming the conversations that players would have with them. They could either be programmed to go through a series of conversations in a pre-determined order regardless of which villager(s) the player interacted with, or the villagers could be individually programmed to have a specific set of lines associated with each of them. Within the game, which employs the latter technique, one masculine villager dismisses Ana’s concerns, calling her “m’Lady,” telling her not to “fuss,” and assuring her that “the guards will handle [the problem].” Having any villager dismiss her concern because of her gender is very different from having a single individual programmed to do so. The former set up generalizes sexism and applies it to all members of the game-world’s society over the course of numerous play-throughs whereas the latter restricts sexism to one individual who may then be criticized for his comment. By providing players with this information, the booklet fulfills the role of a ‘making of’ or ‘behind the scenes’ external narrative, such as the one on the bonus DVD of the collector’s edition of Skyrim. Without a source of field-specific knowledge, most who read the game narratologically would be unaware of the effects of specific mechanics on the narrative, and therefore booklets and other external textual objects facilitate a blending of theories for a more homogenous
interpretation of games, resulting in a more complete understanding of videogames' artistic and mechanical significance and their role in contemporary popular culture.

The schism between the studies of narrative and game mechanics perceived by certain scholars in game theory is also often evident in the medium itself. McCloud distinguishes between form-oriented and idea-oriented comics, which can be extrapolated to apply to mechanics/game-play-oriented and narrative-oriented booklets. The videogame equivalent of this concept would be the “Agency/Destiny Divide” as McDevitt puts it. The implication is that a work can either be formally experimental at the cost of narrative or can use its form as a tool to convey a narrative, like a traditional novel. However, many videogames and booklets have the potential to break down this binary. While Anathema may not be experimental in its use of game mechanics, its purpose is very form-oriented as it was originally an assignment for a course on game mechanics. At the same time it is also an idea-oriented game; I have a story to tell and the videogame and booklet are my means of telling it. When first approached to write the game’s story and dialogue, I considered taking the artists’ book maker’s approach and writing a meta-game wherein every aspect of the narrative relied on the characters’ self-reflexive awareness of the game’s form, its impact on their free will and abilities, and vice versa. In the end I conceded to a traditional narrative in fear that it might not otherwise see the light of day. The resulting compromise of this dual emphasis on mechanics and narrative was that of player agency. Due to production restrictions the player has little control over the narrative beyond delaying it indefinitely or choosing to succumb to enemies. However, Dan Pinchbeck’s experimental videogame narrative Dear Esther has shown players can have even less agency than that and still have a positive play experience of “something incredibly beautiful that could not exist without videogames” (Edge) due to the fact that they “allow for pacing and discovery that would be impossible to reproduce elsewhere” (McGee). Thus, this broad discussion of art, form, and content is reduced to two simply aspects: the artist’s purpose and the player’s experience.
From the programmers’ point of view, the purpose of *Anathema* is to demonstrate specific methods and applications of computer programming and is therefore purely mechanical. My purpose with the project was, originally, purely narrative. Thus, the game in isolation is a relatively pure combination of form-oriented and content-oriented intent. This fusion, as well as the linear and relatively passive experience of the player resulting from their lack of in-game agency, is then complicated by the self-reflexive considerations of this booklet. Ultimately, the purpose of this “Complete Companion” is to encourage people to think critically both about the popular culture with which they interact and that they produce, either organically or through an interactive experience with a pre-existing work, so as to deconstruct the boundaries between form and content and better understand the role that videogames play in our culture.
On the Writing & Collaboration

Over the course of this project I learned a lot about writing, production, and design within the fields of videogames and books. I was fortunate enough to have a huge amount of creative freedom with my story; the only times my concepts were challenged was when they were not feasible within the project’s medium or time constraints. At such points, compromises were made on both sides so that everyone involved could have a final product that most closely resembled their hopes and expectations. I realize that in the industry this would not be the case unless I were co-producing the work with a programmer for a very small studio. I am grateful to everyone involved for facilitating the opportunity for me to tell my story.

I also learned a lot about my own writing style through this project. First and foremost, I realized that I like to write a lot! Ultimately, I think the scale of my ideas are better suited to a more extensive medium, such as those for which they were originally planned. However, Jason and Branson proved to be brilliant editors of my script and story, siphoning out the flavour dialogue whilst maintaining the plot as well as much of the game’s post-colonial, feminist, and liberalist subtext. Thus, between Anathema, Jason and Branson’s editing, and this booklet, into which I have poured two years worth of flavour text, I am able to present my complete narrative through the versatility and artistic diversity of two media.

I would like to end by simply saying that this has been a unique and incredible experience for me to collaborate with such a diversity of people in multiple media and on two interrelated projects that are so near to my heart.

29 Joke’s on you, there are still three Appendices and a Bibliography to go!
Appendix A: Original Storyboard

Diagrams on white-board by Jason Dahl.
Appendix B: Original Plot Outline

- an unlikely trio -- an outlawed Xenten épéist named Arithíma [now Anathema] (fighter), a Denkeran drop out of the Arcane Academy named Zaub [now Felix] (caster), and an exiled Erbaueran technician named Klug (skill monkey) -- are traveling together through the badlands and the outskirt mining towns looking for work

- while passing the night in a grove of trees near one such town they are attacked by clockwork spiders (first fight, learn the combat system)

- this is odd since they don’t normally leave the mine and would never attack someone unless commanded to

- they make their way to the nearby village (name pending) to inquire about the event

- they have a hard time getting in because of over protective guards but eventually prove that they could be helpful to the town

- turns out lots of clockwork devices have been going haywire and people have been going missing
  
  o people are out and about in the town because of the panic
  
  o opportunity for some flavour text about the captain, the role of the military in the town and the outskirt towns in general, and about the missing boy

- sheriff hires trio to wipe out dysfunctional clockwork machines and lady asks you to find her son, a young boy who just started working the mines to help support the family and has been missing for 2 days

- they accept (could have an alignment thing depending on whether they accept for money or for helping the lady)
• the go through the mine (aka ‘crawl the dungeon’) fighting off Helfer miners, clockwork spiders, Helfer guards, and clockwork men (in order of increasing difficulty; see Dwemmer centurions from TES games and clockwork men from Rise of Legends), noticing oddities about them as they go

  o *some of the clockwork spiders/men appear to be haywire while other have a strange blue aura that neither Klug nor Zaug have ever seen before (spoiler alert: these are clockwork men who have had a soul only semi-successfully grafted to them and were set free in order keep people out of the mine and “exterminate!” anyone who comes around asking questions and looking for answers)

• occasional dialogue could be used to add flavour and character development, like Frog’s b’dassery in Chrono Trigger

• At the bottom of the mine they find a secret door (opportunity for problem solving element?) and sneak in

• There they discover that someone from the military as well as a high ranking Arcanist from the Academy are trying to graft souls whose memories have been wiped onto clockwork machines so as to automate them without a resource-based power supply

  o the trio and the player(s) learn here that none of the grafts have been fully successful so far, either the memories are retained and the hybrid goes mad, or the graft is incomplete and the half-controlled haywire clockwork man is sent back up into the mine to prevent intruders from discovering the secret

• generally, a clockwork machine is either would up and steam powered, fueled by an orb of arcane energy and controlled by an engineer, or controlled by a clockworkmancer via the channeling of arcane energy

• horrified and disgusted, the trio burst in and fight the clockwork controlling caster
o Boss Battle! Boss is the clockworkmancer, he has several clockwork men fighting for him and casts various spells at the trio

o team work as a requirement to beat him? can only be killed by a c-c-c-combo?

Ending

• after defeating him, they search for the missing boy

• ***if they beat boss in under X amount of time:

  o they find that they were successful in interrupting the soul transfer and the boy is fine

  o they return him to the mom and the village celebrates but is also deeply disturbed by the revelation of what the Empire was attempting

• ***if they beat the boss in under Y amount of time:

  o they find his body in the next room, it is lifeless, but suddenly a young voice comes from a shadow in the corner

  o the boy’s soul was successfully transferred to a clockwork body but he retains his memories

  o the group returns him to his mother and informs the village of the bittersweet victory

• ***if they beat the game in longer than Y time:

  o they find his body in the next room, it is lifeless, but suddenly a hollow voice comes from a shadow in the corner

  o the boy’s soul was successfully transferred to a clockwork body; there are no remnants of the boy’s previous life
o the trio return the body to the mother and explain what has happened to the guard

***I don’t know ho doable this is, I just though of it from old Metroid games and RPGs like Chrono Trigger. Let me know what you guys think and to what extent this is plausible...
Appendix C: Sample of Dialogue Script

<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
  <Actor>
    <avatarIndex>1</avatarIndex>
    <message>Nothin’ like a fine mead to settle the spirit...</message>
  </Actor>
  <Actor>
    <avatarIndex>2</avatarIndex>
    <message>Is prohibition not in effect in your country, Klug?</message>
  </Actor>
  <Actor>
    <avatarIndex>0</avatarIndex>
    <message>Heh, what country?</message>
  </Actor>
  <Actor>
    <avatarIndex>2</avatarIndex>
    <message>Oh right!</message>
  </Actor>
  <Actor>
    <avatarIndex>1</avatarIndex>
    <message>Ha! An exile joke! Never heard one o’ those before, not from an Academy dropout leastwise...</message>
  </Actor>
  <Actor>
    <avatarIndex>2</avatarIndex>
    <message>I didn’t dropout, they just tried to kill me! And need I remind you I got away? I could boil that mead in your belly if you’ve forgotten.</message>
  </Actor>
  <Actor>
    <avatarIndex>0</avatarIndex>
  </Actor>
</ArrayOfActor>
<message>Let him be, he can’t help himself, not once the drink hits him.</message>
</Actor>

<Actor>
<avatarIndex>1</avatarIndex>
<message>Oh, and now a drunk joke? You’re full of originality Arith! And so respectable... why, were ye anymore so they’d a had to give you an honourable discharge! Ha ha!</message>
</Actor>

<Actor>
<avatarIndex>0</avatarIndex>
<message>You had best put a stopper in it...</message>
</Actor>

<Actor>
<avatarIndex>1</avatarIndex>
<message>In the mead or me mouth? Haha!</message>
</Actor>

<Actor>
<avatarIndex>2</avatarIndex>
<message>Both! It’ll do you twice the good!</message>
</Actor>

<Actor>
<avatarIndex>0</avatarIndex>
<message>It’s time we turn in. We must rise early, we need to find work tomorrow</message>
</Actor>

<Actor>
<avatarIndex>1</avatarIndex>
<message>We always “need to find work tomorrow.”</message>
</Actor>

<Actor>
<avatarIndex>0</avatarIndex>
<message>Would you rather roll over and die?</message>
</Actor>

<Actor>
<avatarIndex>1</avatarIndex>
<message>If we have to spend many more nights eatin’ hard
bread and drinkin’ stale mead I might just!</message>
</Actor>
<Actor>
<avatarIndex>2</avatarIndex>
<message>An Erbauer that turns down eating, that’d be a sight
to see!</message>
</Actor>
<Actor>
<avatarIndex>1</avatarIndex>
<message>Oi!</message>
</Actor>
<Actor>
<avatarIndex>0</avatarIndex>
<message>Good night boys.</message>
</Actor>
</ArrayOfActor>
Works Cited


