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./Run Artist Statement

./Run is a four-player co-op board game/video game hybrid emphasizing transmedia connections and issues surrounding “big data” and personal privacy. Players play as vigilante hackers against the game system framed as a large corporation holding the personal information of countless individuals. The game’s title is a pun—“./” in a terminal is the command to “run” an executable, effectively making the game’s title “Run Run.” We draw inspiration from a myriad of existing games including (but not limited to) *Golem Arcana* for its integration of digital enhancement and *Netrunner* for its cyber/hacker themes. *./Run*’s aesthetic draws from stereotypical hacker/computer science tropes (i.e. green Unix terminals) as well as various contemporary events and organizations tied to social networking and personal information.

./Run features a circular game board composed of concentric circles, comprising three layers of rings that players are allowed to traverse with “running cards.” CS-related puns are also present in the different types of movement cards; for example, one card allowing players to “Climb Down” to a deeper level between levels is titled after the “CD” terminal command (short for “change directory”), which allows one to traverse in and out of various folders in a system. The “echo” and “touch” cards operate in a similarly punny manner—echo repeats the action of another run card just as it repeats whatever is typed in the terminal, while the touch card does nothing (it only updates the timestamp of a file when used in a terminal). Each ring has four color-coded computers which need to be hacked (through minigames) to open paths of

corresponding colors to the next floor. The purpose of designing the board as a circle is not only to allow for a greater freedom of movement than in a linear board, but also to emphasize that players are literally running in circles in an attempt to infiltrate and fight the corporation. The win condition of getting a player into the innermost circle also elucidates one of the central conceits of the game: while players have achieved their original goal of “defeating” the company, they find themselves trapped in the center, reflecting to an extent the ultimate futility of their struggle.

The primary digital aspect of the game lies in the minigames played to “hack” computers and open pathways. All minigames can only be accessed while in a board tile with a computer that has not been unsuccessfully hacked before, and are played during the stress phase, which lasts exactly thirty seconds. Minigames involve various data-related tasks, including searching through someone’s “Mugtome” (a play on “Facebook”) in attempt to uncover some of their passwords and listening to audio clips and reacting accordingly. Originally-composed fast-paced music plays in the background of the minigames to establish the high-speed environment and emphasize the “stress” of the stress phase.

Our choice to create a game with both physical and digital elements was inspired by Marshall McLuhan’s assertion that “The medium is the message” (both Jacques and Sam took Media Aesthetics for Hum). We seek to emphasize the effect of the digital on the physical, as demonstrated by real world systems already in place including China’s “Social Credit” systems where everyday activities are influenced by a government rating of an individual’s online activity. We attempt to achieve this effect through the use of the digital minigames to affect the player’s actions in the physical board game realm. The failure state of a minigame not only induces a failure screen to be shown on the computer, but also raises the threat level by two on

the board in an attempt to mimic the punishment received for poor online decisions in accordance with the Chinese example used for inspiration. On the contrary, we also believe that the physical can have an effect on the digital—the physical game space requiring physical interpersonal connection and teamwork is not reproducible in a purely online/virtual environment, and influences the strategies employed to win the game. The computer color on the game board also determines which minigame the player will play, reflecting the effect of the physical on the digital. Additionally, through the physical elements of the game we sought to evoke the feeling of sitting around a table and planning a heist.

Another theme we seek to address in *./Run* is that of privacy and big data in the modern “information age.” At the beginning of the game, players are prompted to enter some personal information and identify themselves, consequently placing their own data in the game system. We attempt to use this information against the players in the game, both for an emotional effect and as a game mechanic to make minigames more difficult—for example, in the “Mugtome” game previously mentioned, the player is increasingly bombarded with personally tailored attacks from the system as the difficulty rises, increasing the amount of time needed to find and sort through the relevant information for winning the minigame itself. Additionally, the reward for winning the game is access to a file containing a list of procedurally generated names and associated personal information, including medical statuses such as mental health, etc., that also contains the information that the players entered about themselves at the start of the game. This file not only illustrates the extent of the knowledge the corporation has, but also reveals that the player has been reduced to just another entry in the system.

We face a few concerns in our final product, some of which are inherent to our system design and others that we would perhaps be able to address with more time/resources/technical

expertise. Firstly, the relative lack of replayability due to the “surprise” end file being discovered seems to be an organic result of any creative process involving a twist/shock-factor. We think that this lack of replayability could potentially add to our message, acting as a parallel to our desensitization as a society to privacy breaches, both by and against corporations. Players may recognize the futility of their actions when they realize that hacking into this corporation has given them access to information that has little use without analytical technology and the context of how the information is used. This situation is similar to the real-world examples of Facebook and its associated privacy scandals, where public outcry occurs for a brief time until nearly all is forgotten or diluted and everyone carries on with using the service despite the newfound revelations. Another concern we had was the use of smartphones to play minigames, as raised by many commenters on the presentation. While we fully agree that the integration of smartphones as the digital component, reflecting the increasingly smartphone-based data collection present in modern society, would be an effective component to add to the game, we are not capable of creating a smartphone version given our current team coding expertise and time limit. The games are all browser based, however, and as such may work on a mobile browser as well (although not recommended). Assessing the state of the game in aggregate, however, we would have liked to have performed more play-testing and difficulty tuning given more time and/or better time management. We see this iteration of *./Run* as a prototype of a game that could feature longer and more complex gameplay with fine-tuned minigames.