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Integrative Project
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Introduction

I have always found the act of discovery to be both intriguing and addictive. Now that information is readily available to anyone who wants it, finding something new and unique has become an especially difficult accomplishment. I desperately do not want the wonder of discovery to be eliminated from the world. For my thesis project, I attempted to instill genuine curiosity in strangers through acts of hiding, finding, and trusting.

To accomplish this goal, I chose to work with books. I found that the library was an ideal place for an anonymous gift, as libraries already promote discovery within their shelves. This is something I realized as a child while finding new and unexpected books to read. I wanted to push what they were already able to achieve. In the beginning of the Integrative Project course, I had a general sense of what I wanted to do, but not exactly how each element should look. It was not until I began making my third book that my project that was less about the form of the objects, and more about the trust imbedded in the interaction between me and my audience.

Inspiration

While trying to figure out the impact that these books might have on the finder, I was reminded of *The Secret Garden*. This novel deals with an unhappy girl, Mary, and what happens when she encounters a mysterious garden. While reading the book, I found myself caught by the moment when Mary finds the key to the secret garden. The narrator describes her reaction: “She looked at the key quite a long time. She turned it over and over, and thought about it” (Burnett 85). It is her hesitation in this moment that struck me initially - she seems unable to understand the key’s value.

As Mary shows, it takes a moment for the finder of an object to accept the found object as a good thing. The act of finding is not immediately joyous. I believe that there is always a moment of distrust with a newly found object. In that moment of trust, the finder must believe that the object will not bring them harm, or else the object will be left where it was found. This momentary distrust only made my interest in the project more intense. Not only would I be giving a stranger an unexpected present, but they would also have to overcome their own instinctual distrust in order to keep it.

I found that my project, which focused on this interaction of trust, was hard to categorize within the art world. I wanted my project to interact with people in a very intimate way, but I didn’t need to be present in the interaction. I wanted to create art that had to be “acted out” in a way, but I am not at all a performance artist. Since books were the primary form that I was working with, I spent some time investigating book arts; what I found was not as inviting as I had hoped. Because

bookmaking as an art form is a relatively new concept, most writers in the topic are primarily concerned with defining the new art form by limiting what should be considered “Book Arts”, rather than allowing the genre to emerge in new forms on its own. However, one commentator struck a chord of reason within me. Amidst short and often contradictory comments on the importance of the book, Ulises Carrión wrote in *The New Art of Making Books* that “the space is the music of the unsung poetry.” (Carrión 35). I took his article to be about the necessity of space for poetic expression. Carrion is saying that margins allow us to infer more meaning from the words than with the text alone, and that the poet uses this intentionally. The comment from Carrión brought my attention to margins in books and their ability to affect the legibility and pace of the text on the page. This showed me that books have a value in them even without content. It was this inherent value that I wanted to utilize for my project.

Books

I decided to make the spine of each book look traditional in that each had a title and publishing company printed on it. I chose to emphasize their cohesive identity on the spine because it is the first and most often viewed portion of the book. To keep the various books cohesive, I made the books’ spines look almost identical even though the titles and sizes of each varied greatly. Because I personally (not an actual publishing company) was making the books, I was able to insert my own identity onto the cover of the books by creating my own publishing company called Vermin. An anagram of my name, Vermin represents the hidden nature of the five books in my project.



Figure 1
Appendix F
Publishing Identity.

A Survivor's Guide

A Survivor's Guide is a twist on an herbal remedy guide. I have always enjoyed collections of plants dried or preserved for practical reasons. For *A Survivor's Guide*, I wanted to emphasize my personal belief that herbal collections have a precious quality. In the book, I force the finder to open, untie, pour, and uncork objects to get to individual items (see Appendix A: 1-15). The items are small enough and the



Figure 1
Appendix A
A content overview of
A Survivor's Guide.

closures tight enough, that they force the finder trying to retrieve them to treat the objects with the time and care usually afforded only to very valuable objects, even though the plant materials have little to no actual value. In *Figure 10* the container (a necklace) for a seed that was hidden within the structure of the book.



Figure 10
Appendix A
The necklace that
contains the seed of life.

The idea is to force value upon the seed to make it a symbolic life instead of just a potential plant. I made six objects that included plants such a Witch's Torch, Lamb's Ear, Burning Bush, Snowball Bush, and Money Plant. I created uses for the plants that played on their common names, or physical appearances. For instance, the Burning Bush could be used for warmth, while the Lamb's Ear could be used for comfort due to its soft touch. Each item was accompanied by a limerick that was intended to be hint at what the plant or item was, instead of explaining why it was there or what it should be used for.



Figure 11
Appendix A
Open container
near the seed of life.

Everything You Need to Know About the Cosmos and More

When I began my second book, I decided that to dwell on one subject it would be a disservice to the project, especially since these books belong in a library where themes and subjects change constantly. Instead of trying to build a theme literally connecting to the first book, I drew upon the humor present in *A Survivor's Guide* to inform the creation of the second book of the series. *Everything You Need to Know about the Cosmos and More* plays with the idea of constellations - what they are, and what they could be (See Appendix B: 1-12). The book itself is an object to be played with, as it contains a light box that can be used to view plates showing made-up constellations. In the constellation "The Lonely Spam," seven stars create a perfect tin of Spam while the rest of the plate remains bare of stars. In "The Simple Flower," a single star makes up a lush flower. Looking at the slides is the only possible use for *Everything You Need to Know About the Cosmos and More*, as it lacks plants' practical utility. The value is in the complex structure created for an apparently simple act.

Figure 4
Appendix B
Open view of
light box with
constellation plate.

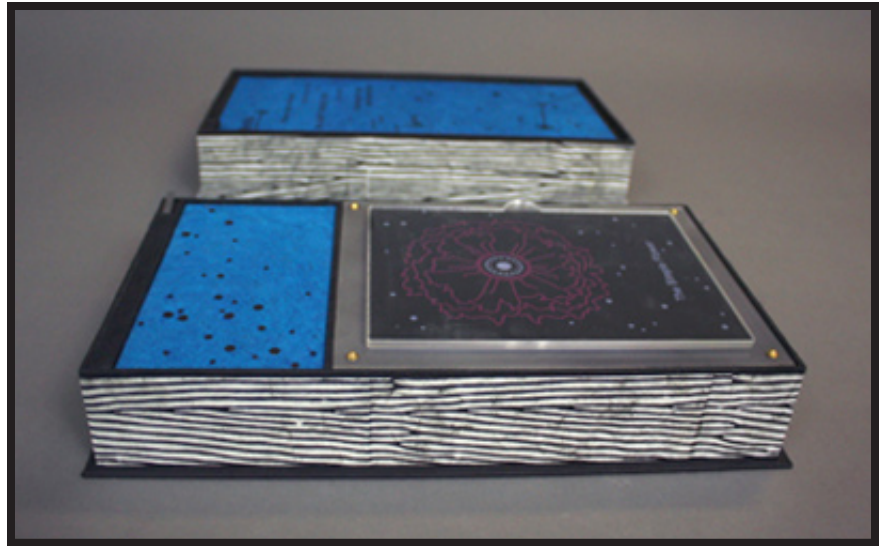
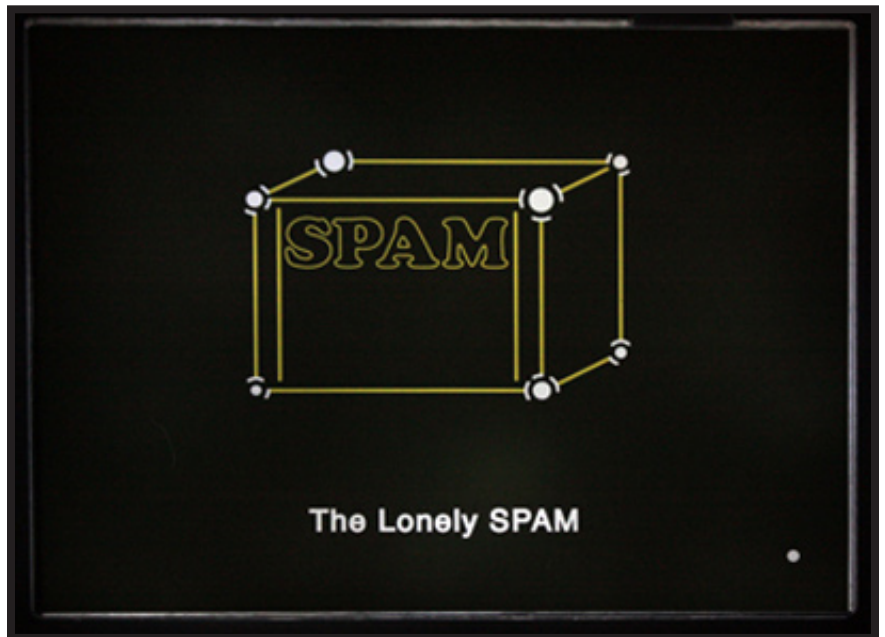


Figure 5
Appendix B
Constellation plate:
“The Lonely Spam”



Bits and Things

Following the simplicity of *Everything You Need to Know About the Cosmos and More*, I wanted to focus on the book’s relationship with its surroundings. It was the very contradiction that the book’s presence created that I wanted to focus on for the third book, entitled *Bits and Things* (See Appendix C: 1-8). All of the books near *Bits and Things* on the shelf were thoroughly academic. They had orderly text situated on sterile pages and bound inside of commercially printed bindings. To me, they were the epitome of academia, and I wanted to contrast with that. *Bits and Things* is a small book covered in luxurious paper and warm colors. Masses of paper and string fall out of the book when the covers are opened. Papers are attached to the ends of the strings and dangle just outside the book’s boundaries. On the papers are fragments of thought. Perhaps they are memories of people and places, or perhaps they are just figments of someone’s imagination. Opposite of the thoughts are seventeen vials of dirt. Each thought corresponds to a bottle, but the book does not give a clear indica-

tion as to which vial goes with each thought. I meant for this book to be, in essence, a complete contradiction of the ordinary academic book.



Figure 3
Appendix C
Overview of opened
Bits and Things.



Figure 4
Appendix C
Close up of papers.

pμ 5]v2

Inspired by the contradiction contained within *Bits and Things*, I continued to explore the meaning of the book form in my fourth installment. What exactly makes a book a book, and what determines its value? I wanted to dissect the interaction of content and the form. Would the finder feel the content was more important than the physical book, or the other way around? To explore this, I encoded a small booklet of short stories, memories, words, and musings (See Appendix D: 1-11). I wanted the text to appear as if it were completely impenetrable, even though it can be decoded back into its original message. The booklet of text is at the front of the book proper, giving it the most important position. A small box comes after the booklet. It is approximately the same size as the booklet and secured to the back cover of *pμ 5]v2*. Within the box, just visible through a small window, is another

booklet. It is much smaller than the first and contains the key to the larger booklet's text. The finder has three options: 1. Preserve the book and leave the booklet unread due to its encryption. 2. Rip the box open to utilize the key, and read the booklet. 3. Spend their own precious time discovering the key on their own, thereby preserving the book and uncovering the message of the text. I left it up to the finder to decide the future of the book and ultimately what was the most important part of it.



Figure 3
Appendix D
Open image of $\mu 5\}v2$.

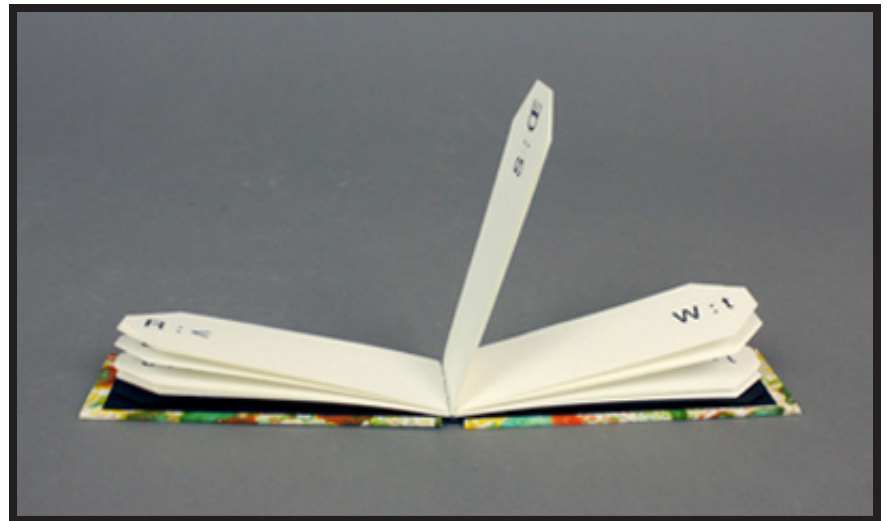


Figure 8
Appendix D
Image of the key
booklet.

Bad.

It took me a long time to decide on the theme for the fifth book. My previous works involved playing with the expectations inherent in library books, and I wanted to continue this theme for the fifth book. However, I suffered from artists' block and could not figure out how to proceed. In hope of fixing this and finding inspiration, I started at the end of the process – the actual placing of the book on a library shelf. I chose a spot for the still-uncreated book on a library shelf based on my own preference for the library and the books that would be near mine. I decided that my book must be placed next one named *Bad Art*. I chose the spot almost as a punishment for my book's delayed creation. In doing so, I came across inspiration and a title for my new book *Bad*. I set out to create intentionally bad art without a real understanding of what bad art might be. In an attempt to figure out what bad art was, I polled friends, family, students, and faculty about what bad art was to them.

Unfortunately, I came to the conclusion that bad art was not something that I could create intentionally. The consensus seemed to be that bad art was usually made by people who had intended to create good art. Because I believed that the things I intended to be good were actually good I chose instead to create a book that stood on the line between beautiful and terrifying (See Appendix E: 1-19). The book has a somber palette of grays, creams, and black with just a touch of maroon. A porcelain baby doll face peeks through webs, spikes and mesh on the front cover. A small black envelope containing an ominous apology accompanies the porcelain face. A



Figure 2
Appendix E
Open view of *Bad*.

maroon bow tied over cream lace covers the box attached to the back cover of *Bad*. The lace covers a set of twelve necklaces. In each necklace there are objects ranging from fingernails to an ambiguous red residue.



Figure 5
Appendix E
View of twelve copper
and glass necklaces.



Figure 9
Appendix E
Necklace four of twelve.

Display

Initially, I did not want to display anything in the gallery show. I would have been happy just to put out an empty bookshelf. I was afraid that the books, if they were on display, would not be given the time that they needed to be appreciated. I doubted that anyone would stop long enough to open all the doors, books, and containers that I had created. Most importantly, I was afraid that the books' value would decrease if they were shared with many people instead of with just one person. I thought that the books should be reserved for the people who found them. The books, as displayed in the library, were exactly the way I had intended for them to be showcased. This meant that there was no reason to display them again in the gallery setting, where their meaning and value would change or even decrease. However, I

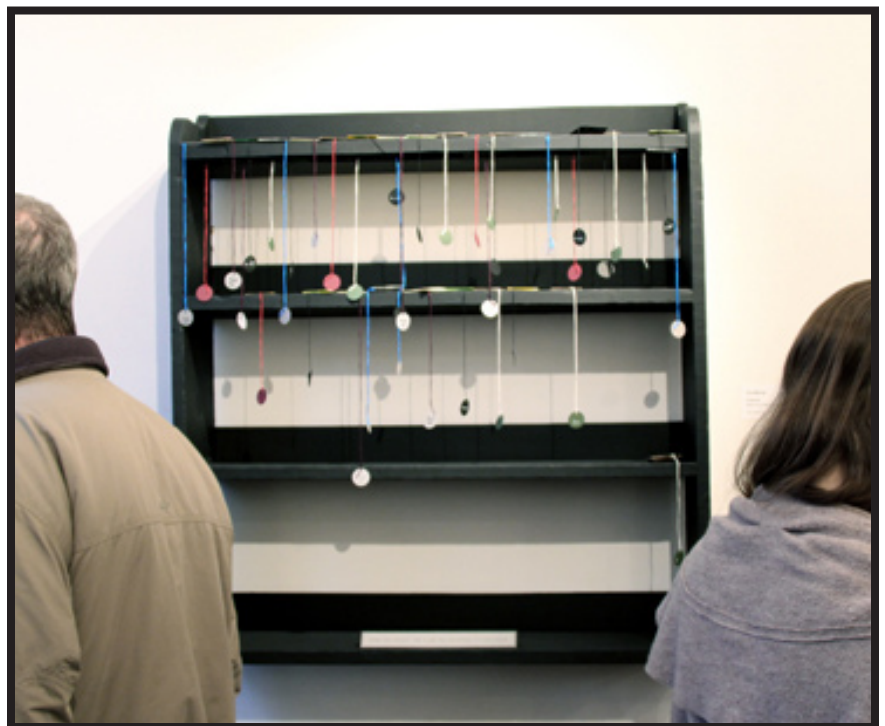


Figure 2
Appendix F
Image of bookshelf
in Work gallery.

felt some outside pressure to create a more informative gallery display instead of a seemingly worthless shelf. I decided to make a compromise. Instead of viewing my display as an informative representation of my project, I made it an extension of the project itself. In the voice of each book I wrote a hint for the book's location. These hints ranged from helpful guides to warnings. Each hint was tucked inside of an envelope and left upon the top shelves of the bookshelf. I created a test of sorts for the gallery audience. I gave the hints to anyone they trusted me enough to take a piece of my project. This is a test only because there seems to be a common understanding that nothing in a gallery can be touched. I believe that my compromise represents the idea of my project accurately without having to explain it.

Integrating my project into a library setting was surprisingly easy, thanks to the support of the university's library system. My goal for the books is that random people perusing the shelves will pick up and take the books home. That exact moment, when the finder decides to "trust" their discovery and take the book, is really what my whole project was about. In that moment, they have found something unexpected, decided to trust an unknown author, and gained a gift from me. Because that moment is the most important part of my project, it took a considerable amount of brainstorming between the librarians and myself to figure out how best to facilitate it. There were a few obstacles that we had to work around. To keep the student workers and librarians from taking my books off of the shelves, I attached a barcode to the cover of all the books to make them look like they belonged in the library. Time was both a problem and a positive quality of the project. Over time my



Figure 3
Appendix F
pu 51v2 on a bookshelf in
Hatcher Graduate Library.

books will change, and memory of my project will fade. There is a chance that the books will not be taken for years, and if they stick around that long the librarians might forget about them. If the librarians don't know about them then they could be taken off of the shelves and thrown away, or worse, placed into a special collection. Trust was another problem. What if it was the person who discovered my

piece that brought its existence to the attention of the future unknowing librarians? How would the librarians' reaction affect the moment of discovery for the person? I was able to notify the current staff of each library that my books inhabited, but the future is a problem with no true solution.

Next

Throughout the course of my work, I have been inspired by the reactions to my work. I believe that I will continue to create projects that stimulate people's sense of curiosity through secrets and surprises. Perhaps my next project will depend less upon the integrity of a secret and more on sheer surprise. I would like to continue working with the unexpected presentation of a gift that has a familiar form. I think I will not focus so much on keeping my projects a secret and work more on making sure they are always surprising. Initially, when I decided to work on this project, I had cared only about being an unexpectedly generous artist. It took me some time to realize what my project meant to me and how much I really felt connected to the principles of it. I likely will never know if I was truly successful with my project. All I will ever have is the knowledge that I created a valuable gift for someone who will never meet.

Works Cited

Burnett, Frances H. *The Secret Garden*. 2nd ed. New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1911. Print.

Carrión, Ulises. "The New Art of Making Books" *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*. Ed. Lyons, Joan. Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop, 1987. 31-44. Print.

Appendix A
A Survivor's Guide

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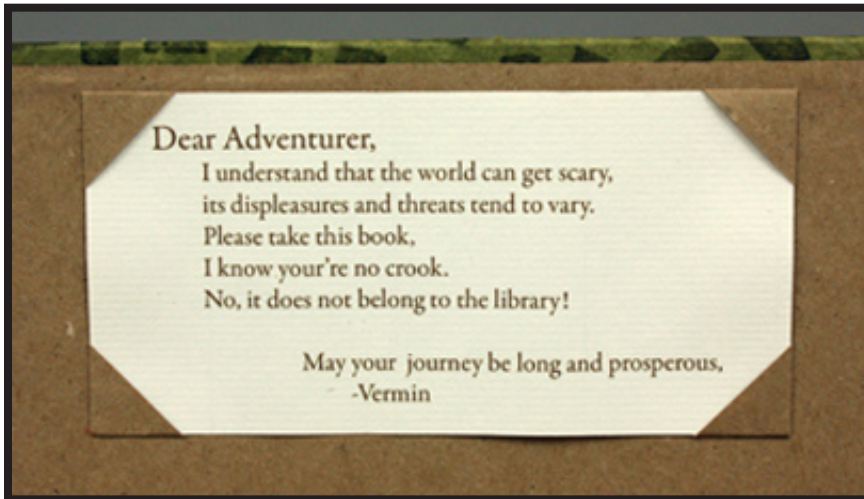
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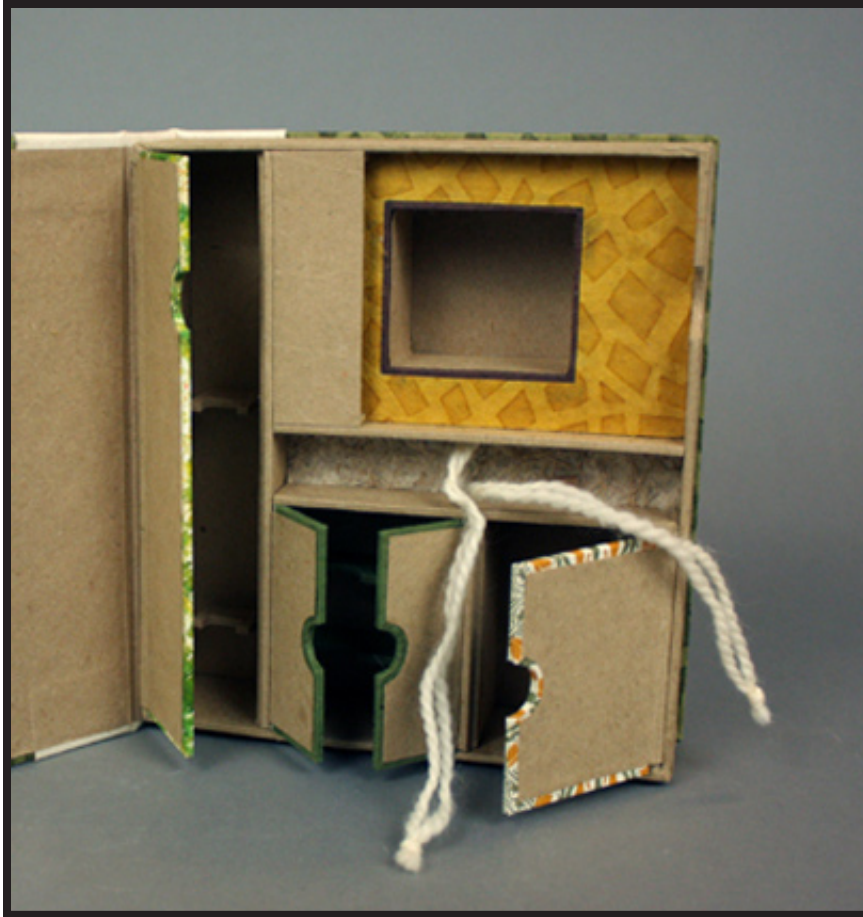
10



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12



13

Book Intro:

Dear Adventurer,

I understand that the world can get scary,
its displeasures and threats tend to vary.
Please take this book,
I know you're no crook.
No, it does not belong to the library!
-Vermin

14

Poem Booklet:

A
If you find yourself lacking a light,
while the sky becomes less than bright;
then take this witch's torch,
your fingers, I won't scorch.
Then we'll be free to wander the night.

B
If comfort is your current obsession,
I'll give you a simple suggestion.
Treat me well
or you'll repel,
the lamb that's in your possession.

C

If you find that your temperatures' shot,
and you feel just like soup in a pot,
then come let me out,
and I'll tell you about,
the bush that grows snow when it's hot.

D

If summer has already succumb,
to a cold that has made you numb;
then set me free,
and I'll let you see,
a fire that glows in autumn.

E

If suddenly your debt has become taller,
it's no use to scream or to holler,
so take one or two,
we've a bit of value,
for we are from the plant of the silver dollar.

F

If a new start is what you need,
then please take this last seed.
Just give it a home,
beneath dirt and loam,
and a life within will be freed.

Display secret:

15

Hello.

If you look through a book collection
You might discover a small confection.
In it you'll see
A botanical key
That contains a soul's resurrection.

However,

I have to dowse your curious fire,
The book, you can no longer acquire.
I'd like to apologize
You did not realize,
But it is ignorance that I now require.

Appendix B

Everything You Need to Know About the Cosmos and More

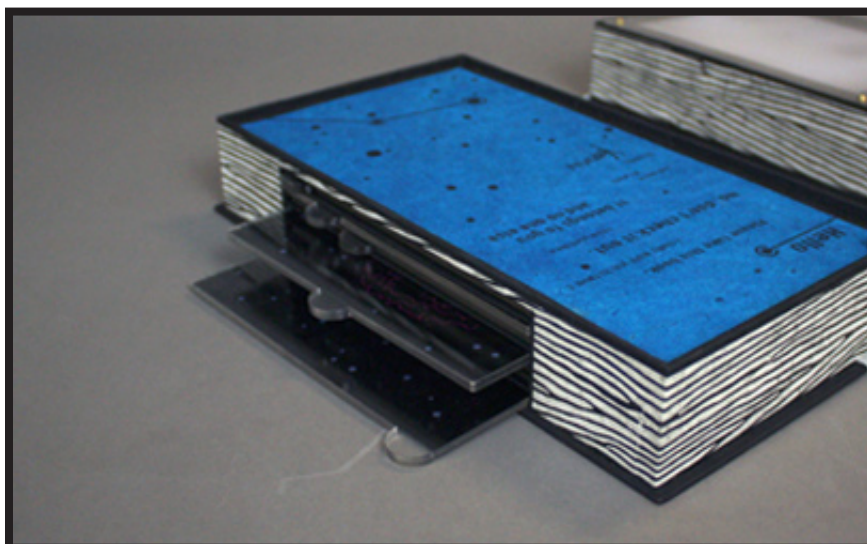
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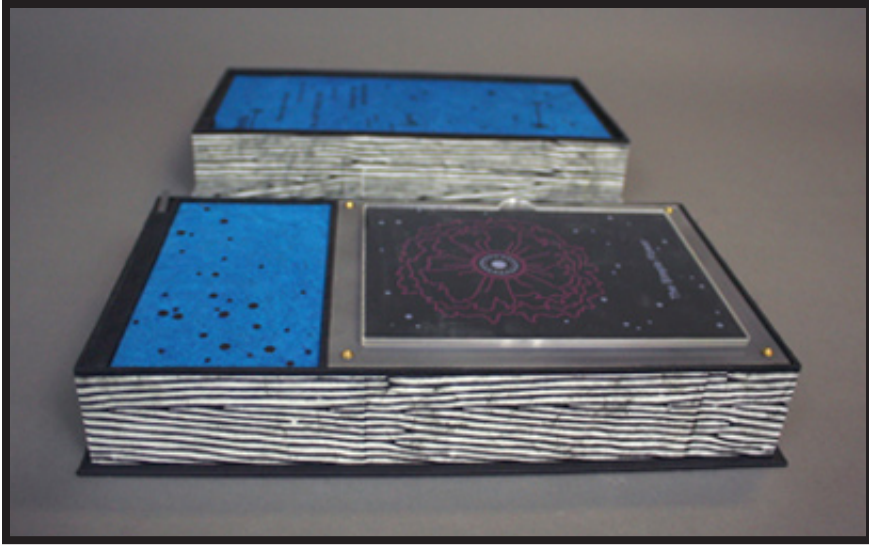
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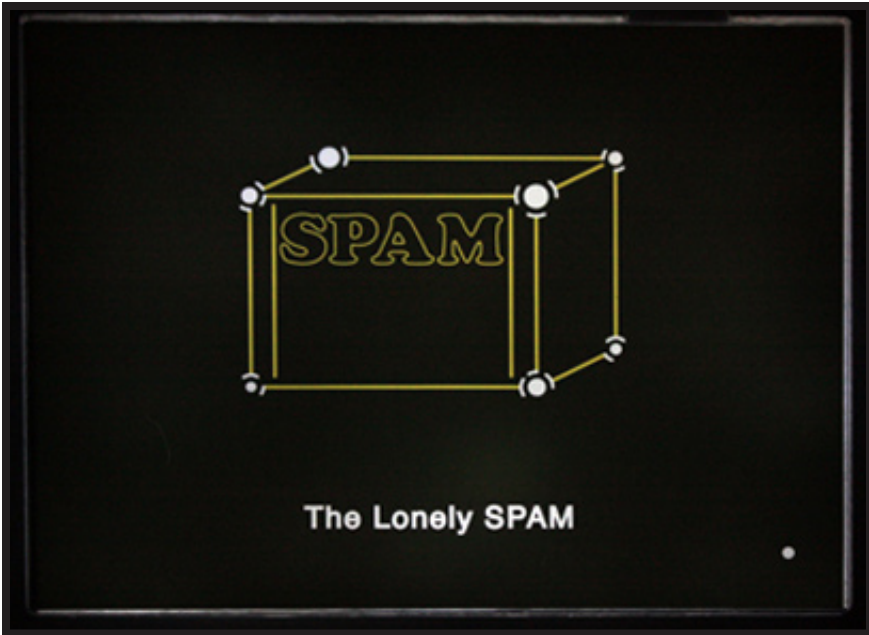
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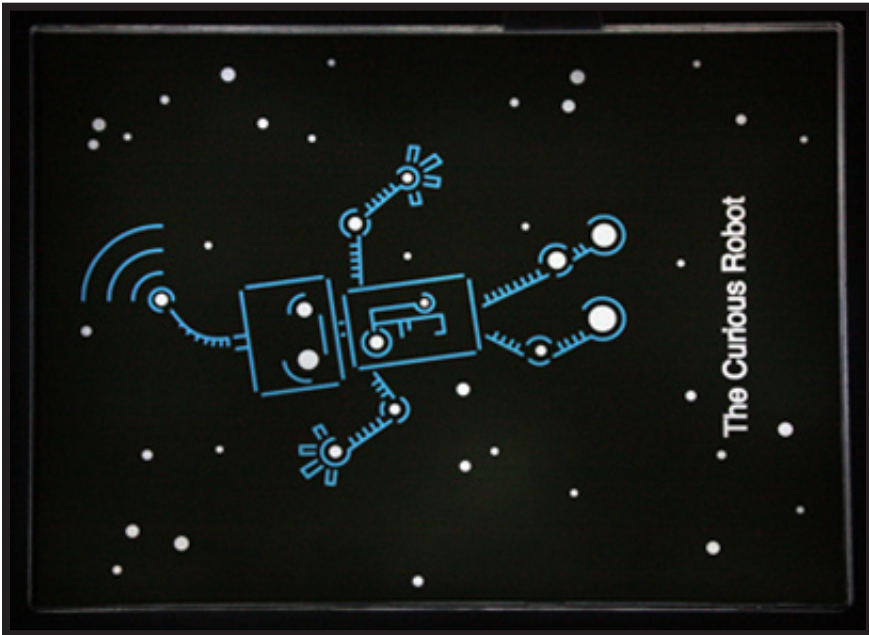
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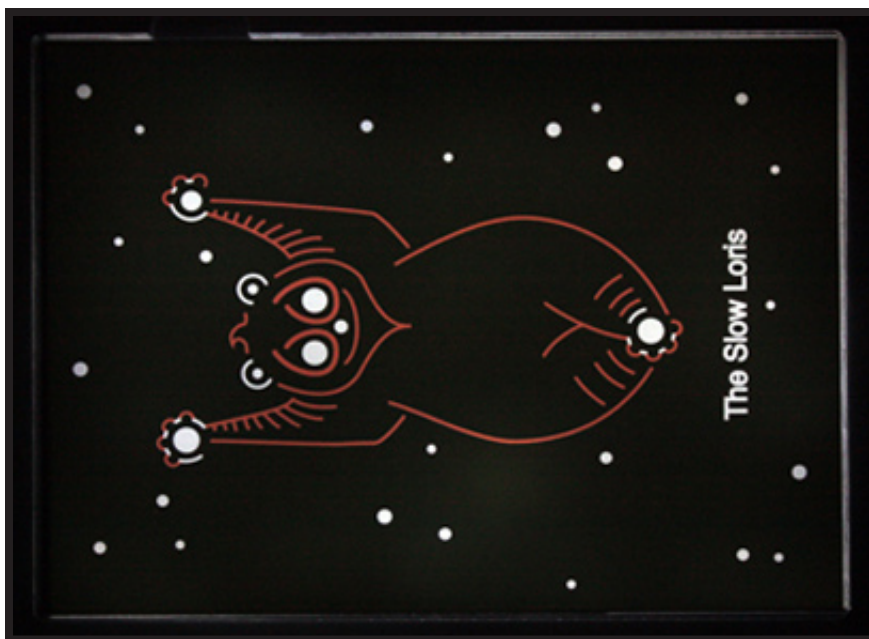
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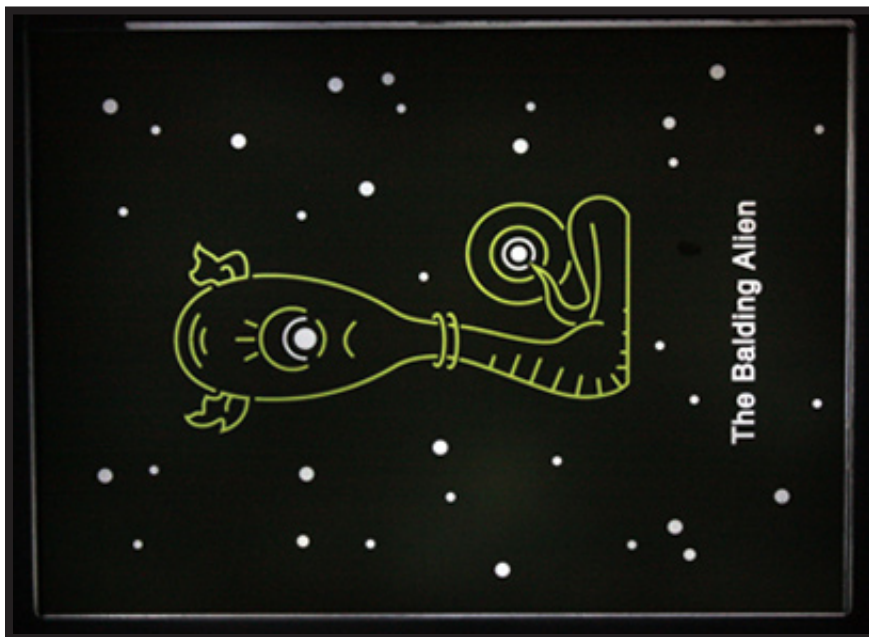
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8



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11

Book Intro:

Hello

Please take this book.
I really want you to have it.
No, don't check it out.
I think you'll like it.
It belongs to you and no one else.
Just take it ...it's yours.
Sincerely
-Vermin

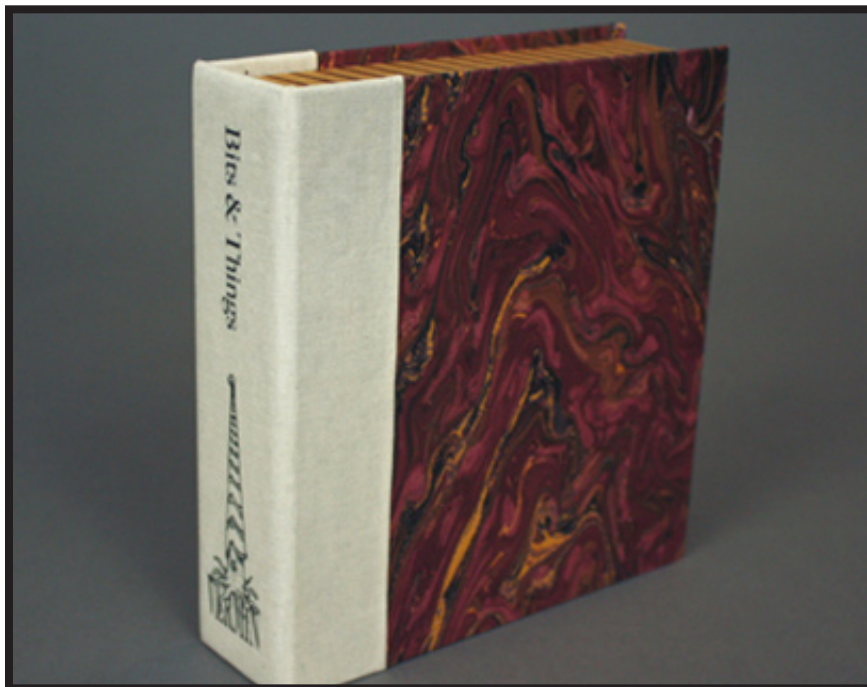
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Display Secret:

There is a book in the world that currently belongs to no one. Like a constellation it is more than what it seems. I'll let you keep it if you find it. It will tell you everything that you need to know about the cosmos and more.
Good luck,
-Vermin

Appendix C
Bits and Things

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②



3



4



5



6

Soil Commentary:

- 1: No more BINDO!
- 2: A totem. A Goldfinch.
- 3: There could have been more water, but there was not.
- 4: He watches as I sample. He is very, very slow.
- 5: I looked for a stick... I am stickless.
- 6: A romance that I will not get to.
- 6: This has happened before...
- 7: I could, but... I'd rather not.
- 8: There is more because there is more heat.
- 9: There is a boat. There is a lot of water. I am not there.
- 10: Many died, but this one lived.
- 11: I lived here. Now I do not.
- 12: Energy Energy Energy Energy Energy Energy Energy Energy Energy Energy
- 13: I would speak of love, but that would not be strong enough.
- 14: You were meant for better things.
- 15: Life was too short for this one.
- 16: The end of an era.

7

Book Intro:

Hello.
Take this.
It's yours.
Take this.
It is not the library's.
Take it take it take it take it take it.
Please take it,
-Vermin

8

Display Secret:

It is there, hiding.
Alone, all by itself. Dirt.
It is dirty, I think.
Somewhere it is hidden. How long it has been there I do not know. So much is contained within it, but it gives nothing away. Perhaps it is near others like it, all numbered. Not one has been missed by the numbering. In all honesty the others are much smarter than it. Technical, sterile.
Yes I am sure that it is dirty.
Bits and Things all covered in soil.
-Vermin

Appendix D
pu 5jv2

①



②



③



4



5



Hello,
 I would like you to do me a favor. I know that we
 have never met, but I need you to trust me. Please
 take this book. I want you to have it. It belongs to
 you. No, this does not belong to the library. It
 belongs to you and no one else. Take it.
 -Vermin

Perhaps what you need now is right in front of you.

6



Hello,
 I would like you to do me a favor. I know that we
 have never met, but I need you to trust me. Please
 take this book. I want you to have it. It belongs to
 you. No, this does not belong to the library. It
 belongs to you and no one else. Take it.
 -Vermin

7



Perhaps what you need now is right in front of you.

8



9

Primary Booklet (excerpt):

In Code

L& Ø2L v<&p ‡&t L& Lw2‡

LΠΩ2 Π CEt2ΠL2<. + ·L ∫L &‡ Π‡1 Lw2‡ LΠΩ2 ∫L &vv. 5&&Ω 52vL,
‡&L <∫ØwL μ& · p ·CEL ‡2o2< 5&&Ω <∫ØwL, Lw2‡ tΠ5Ω AΠβΩtΠ<iCE.
∫1 μ& · CEΠo2 LwΠL CEΠ‡1t∫βw v<&p 2Π<5∫2<? Ø&&i. LΠΩ2 ∫L & ·L
&v μ& < +&βΩ2L Π‡1 2ΠL wΠ5v &v ∫L, ‡&L Π55 &v ∫L. ∫1 μ& · CEL&+
tΠ5Ω∫Ø? T255 Ω22+ Ø&∫‡Ø. μ& · wΠo2 ‡&L Π<<∫o2i ΠL Lw2‡ μ2L
Π‡1 μ& · ‡2o2< t∫55 ∫v μ& · CEL&+ p&o∫‡Ø. ∫v μ& · vΠ55 i&t‡ Lw2‡ <&55
L& 52vL. ‡&L Lw2 <∫ØwL, ‡2o2< Lw2 <∫ØwL. i& μ& · Lw∫‡Ω LwΠL
∫L ∫CE +&CE∫A52 v&< A5&βΩCE L& A5&βΩ A5&βΩCE? Tw2‡ μ& ·
Π‡CEt2< Lw∫CE ċ 2CEL∫&‡ Ø2L +. + ·L μ& < v∫‡Ø2< L& μ& < <∫ØwL
2μ25∫1 Π‡1 CEΠμ, “∫ t∫55 t‡Ωμ ∫‡Ωμ i&, ∫v Π t‡Ωμ ∫‡Ωμ i&’CE i·2.” ∫
w&+2 μ& · wΠo2 Ω2+L tΠ5Ω∫Ø AΠβΩtΠ<iCE, ∫v ‡&L Lw2‡ CE∫L
i&t‡. Lw∫‡Ω ΠA& ·L Lw2 p&o2p2‡L &v ‡&‡p&o2p2‡L. ∫v μ& · wΠo2‡’L
CEpΠβΩ2i μ& <CE25v &‡ Lw2 v&<2w2Π1 μ2L, i& CE& ‡&t. L ·<‡ 52vL
ΠCE μ& · tΠ5Ω AΠβΩtΠ<iCE. ΠCE μ& · tΠ5Ω +∫βΩ + Π L252CEβ&+2
Π‡1 CE&p2 Π5<2Πμ βw2t2i Ø p. ∫L pΠμ A2 wΠ<i L& v∫‡1 A ·L ΠvL2<
Πw∫52 μ& ’55 Ø2L Lw2 Ø p. Tw2‡ μ& · w∫L Lw2 tΠ55 L ·<‡ L& vΠβ2
∫L. +<2CECE μ& < A&iμ ΠØΠ∫‡CEL Lw2 tΠ55 Π‡1 LwΠ‡Ω Lw2 tΠ55
v&< A2∫Ø Lw2<2. ∫L ∫CE ∫p+&<LΠ‡L L& A2 +&5∫L2, ‡2o2< v&<Ø2L
LwΠL.

Regular Text

To get from now to then

Take a sweater. Put it on and then take it off. Look left, not right you must never look right, then walk backwards. Did you save that sandwich from earlier? Good. Take it out of your pocket and eat half of it, not all of it. Did you stop walking? Well keep going. You have not arrived at then yet and you never will if you stop moving. If you fall down then roll to left. Not

the right, never the right. Do you think that it is possible for blocks to block blocks? When you answer this question get up. Put your finger to your right eyelid and say, "I will winky dinky do, if a winky dinky do's due." I hope you have kept walking backwards, if not then sit down. Think about the movement of nonmovement. If you haven't smacked yourself on the forehead yet, do so now. Turn left as you walk backwards. As you walk pick up a telescope and some already chewed gum. It may be hard to find but after awhile you'll get the gum. When you hit the wall turn to face it. Press your body against the wall and thank the wall for being there. It is important to be polite, never forget that.

10

Secondary Booklet:

Code Key

A: Π, B: A, C: β, D: ι, E: 2, F: v, G: Ø, H: ϖ, I: ∫, J: 9, K: Ω, L: 5, M: ρ, N: ‡, O: &, P: +, Q: ç, R: <, S: Ⓒ, T: L, U: ;, V: o, W: t, X: 8, Y: μ, Z: k, 1: 4, 2: †, 3: Σ, 4: °, 5: {, 6: %, 7: 1, 8: ±, 9: U, 0: %o

11

Display Secret:

In Code

Π255&!
 ∫'p Ø&∫‡Ø L& L255 μ& · Lϖ2 L< ·Lϖ <∫ØϖL ‡&t. ∫ ϖ∏o2 ϖ∫u2‡ v∫o2
 A&&ΩⒸE ∫‡ o∏<∫& ·ⒸE 5∫A<∏<∫2ⒸE ∏β<&ⒸEⒸE Lϖ2 ‡∫o2<ⒸE∫Lμ &v
 P∫βϖ∫Ø∏‡'ⒸE β∏p+ ·ⒸE. ∫ β∏‡ L255 μ& · ∏55 &v Lϖ∫ⒸE A2β∏ ·ⒸE2 ∫
 †∫55 A2 2‡β&ι∫‡Ø Lϖ∫ⒸE L28L ⒸE&&‡, ∏‡ι μ& · +<&A∏A5μ †∫55 ‡2o2<
 ∏βL ·∏55μ <2∏ι Lϖ∫ⒸE. ∫ ι&‡'L p2∏‡ L& ⒸE& ‡ι ‡2Ø∏L∫o2... ∫ <2∏55μ
 ι& ϖ&+2 μ& · v∫Ø <2 Lϖ∫ⒸE & ·L. ⒸE&, ∏ⒸE ∏ +<∫k2 v&< μ& · ∫∫55
 Ø∫o2 μ& · &‡2 o2<μ 5∏<Ø2 ϖ∫‡L ∏ⒸE L& tϖ2<2 μ& · β∏‡ v∫‡ι Lϖ2
 A&&Ω <25∏L2ι L& Lϖ∫ⒸE ‡&L2.

∏∫‡L: Lϖ2<2 ∏<2 ⒸE2o2<∏5 ∏‡β∫2‡L L28LⒸE Lϖ∏L ‡& &‡2 ϖ∏ⒸE
 2o2< A22‡ ∏A52 L& L<∏‡ⒸE5∏L2. V∫‡ι Lϖ&ⒸE2 ∏‡ι μ& · †∫55 v∫‡ι p2.

-O2<p∫‡

Regular Text

Hello!

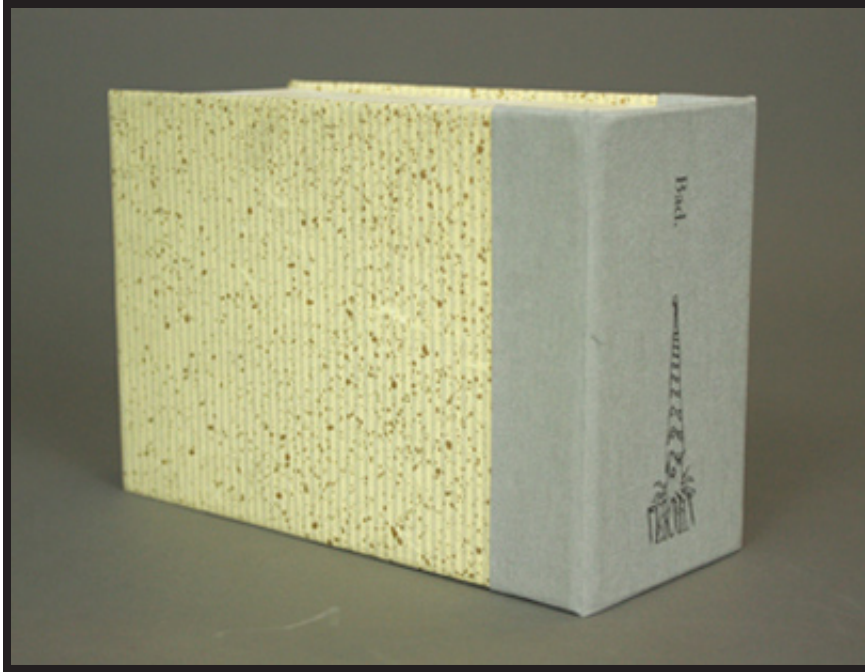
I'm going to tell you the truth right now. I have hidden five books in various libraries across the University of Michigan's campus. I can tell you all of this because I will be encoding this text soon, and you probably will never actually read this. I don't mean to sound negative... I really do hope you figure this out. So, as a prize for you I will give you one very large hint as to where you can find the book related to this note.

Hint: There are several ancient texts that no one has ever been able to translate. Find those and you will find me.

-Vermin

Appendix E
Bad.

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18

Book Intro:

I must apologize. You should never have found this book. It is yours now. Take it, it can belong by no one but you now. The moment you opened this mischievous thing it tied its fate to yours. I hope that the items within will help you, for what comes next will surely be a trying experience. With such regret,
-Vermin

19

Display Secret:

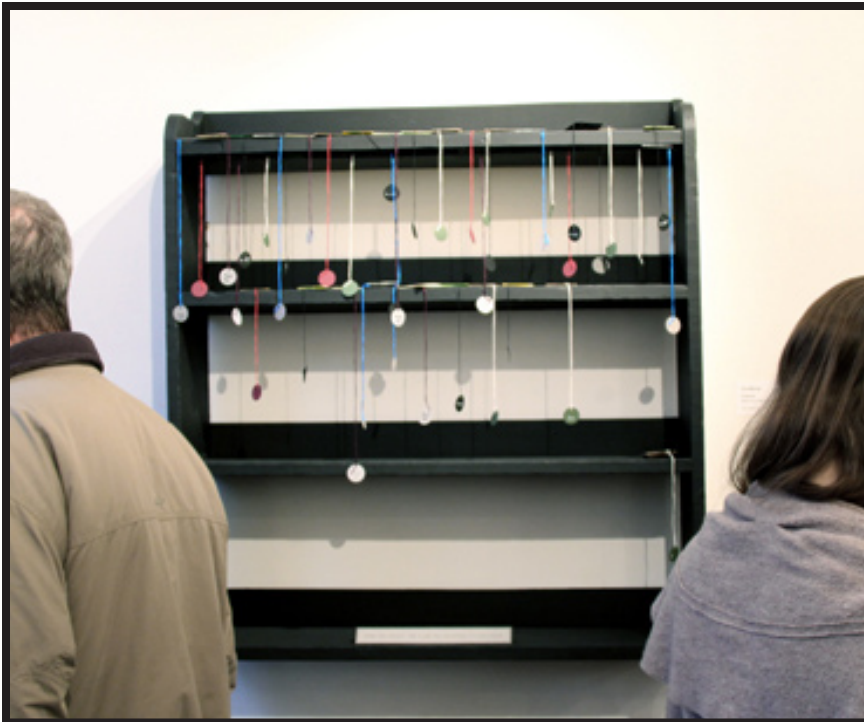
In the Hall of Tappan there is a treasure that should never be found. It contains gifts that should never be given, and sights that should never be seen. With equal measures of fear and guilt I ask you to not look for this most unwelcome Belladonna.
-Vermin

Appendix F
Other Relevant Images

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②



3

