REBOOK

EXPERIMENTS IN
EBOOK DESIGN
EBOOKS TODAY

Ebooks are reverse-engineered from print books.

Books are locked to specific platforms.

Platforms are reliant on the visual and navigational metaphors from physical books.
What would ebooks look like if we started from scratch?
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. **Web first**: the book is an API

2. Design for reader **exploration and choice**

3. Always **put readers and writers first**
INSPIRATION FROM GAME DESIGN

Content is fixed, but order need not be

Create a **mental model** of the story by using “physical” spaces

**Designed experiences** that include user testing
Authors working in a nondeterministic storytelling medium need to conceive of their stories not just as collections of words but as user experiences to be designed.
READING

How do you help readers form a mental model of an ebook?

Can we move away from the metaphors of physical books and create a digital-first reading experience?
OVERVIEW
GUIDING PRINCIPLES
READING
WRITING
MAIN IDEAS

Navigation

Progress and placekeeping

Immersive reading experience
Fan-created interactive map for Game of Thrones
PROGRESS AND PLACEKEEPING

A page from an illuminated Psalter from the mid-15th century (St Andrews copy at msBX2033.A00)

Article in The New Yorker magazine, with illustrations and cartoons breaking up the text
IMMERSIVE READING EXPERIENCES

My Struggle — Karl Ove Knausgaard

cigarettes from his breast pocket.

I nod and turn to go.

“Wait a minute,” he says.

He strikes a match and bends his head forward to light the cigarette. The flame cuts out a small grotto of light in the gray dusk.

“Right,” he says.

After taking a deep drag, he places one foot on the rock and stares in the direction of the forest on the other side of the road. Or perhaps he is staring at the sky above the trees.

“Was it Jesus you saw?” he asks, looking up at me. Had it not been for the friendly voice and the long pause before the question I would have thought he was poking fun at me. He finds it rather embarrassing that I am a Christian; all he wants of me is that I do not stand out from the other kids, and of all the teeming mass of kids on the estate no one other than his youngest son calls himself a Christian.

But he is really giving this some thought.

I feel a rush of happiness because he actually cares, while still feeling vaguely offended that he can underestimate me in this way.

I shake my head.

“It wasn’t Jesus,” I say.

“That’s nice to hear,” Dad says with a smile. Higher up on the hillside the faint whistle of bicycle tires on pavement can be heard.

Mercury in Sagittarius - 4 of 29

Luminaries, The

out goes the engine. He did not yet understand how the diggings could age a man in a matter of months, casting his gaze around the room, he reckoned himself the youngest man in attendance, when in fact several were his junior and his peers. The glow of youth was quite washed from them. They would be soaked forever, restless, watchful, grey in body, coughing dust into the bony lines of their faces. Moody thought they were coarse, even quaint; he thought them men of little influence; he did not wonder why they were so silent. He wanted a brandy, and to place some ice and close his eyes.

He stood in the doorway a moment after entering, waiting to be invited, but when nobody made any gesture of welcome or dismissal he took another step forward and pulled the door softly closed behind him. He made a vague bow in the direction of the window, and in the direction of the hearth, to suffer as a wholesome introduction of himself. From raised to the side table and engaged himself in raising a drink from the decanters set out for that purpose. He chose a cigar and cut it; placing it between his teeth, he turned back to the room, and scanned the faces once again. Nobody seemed remotely affected by his presence. He noticed him. He seated himself in the only available armchair. In his cigar, and settled back with the private sigh of a man who feels his daily concerns are, for once, very much subdued.

His comment was short-lived. No sooner had he stretched out his legs and crossed his ankles (the salt on his treasured hands had dried, most providentially) in toads of white than the man on his immediate right leaned forward in his chair, propped the air with the string of his very cigar, and said, “I can see you’re a business man, sir?”

This was rather simply phrased, but Moody’s expression did not register as much. He bowed his head politely and explained that he had indeed secured a room upstairs, having arrived in town that very evening.

“Just off the boat, you mean?”

Moody bowed again and affirmed that this was precisely his meaning. So that the man would not think him short, he added that he was come from Port Chalmers, with the intention of trying his hand at digging for gold.

“That’s good,” the man said. “That’s good. Now, shine up the beach—he’s up with it. Black smoke—that’s the cry you’ll be hearing; brush shoes up Charleston way; that’s half of it, of course—Charleston. Though you’ll still make pay in the gorge. You get a state, or come over slate?”

“Just me alone,” Moody said.

“No afflications?” the man said.

“Well,” Moody said, surprised again at his planning, “I intend to make my own fortune, that’s all.”

“No afflications,” the man repeated. “And no business; you’re no business, here at the Crown?”

This was important—to demand the same information twice—but the man seemed concerned, even distinctly, and he was stooping with the fingers of his left hand. Perhaps, Moody thought, he had simply not been clear enough. He said, “My business at

I stare down at my shoes, watching as a fine layer of ash settles on the worn leather. This is where the bed I shared with my sister, Prim, stood. Over there was the kitchen table. The bricks of the chimney, which collapsed in a charred heap, provide a point of reference for the rest of the house. How else could I orient myself in this sea of grey?

Almost nothing remains of District 12. A month ago, the Capitol’s firebombs obliterated the poor coal miners’ houses in the Seam, the shops in the town, even the Justice Building. The only area that escaped incineration was the Victor’s Village, I don’t know why exactly. Perhaps so many forced to come here on Capitol business would have somewhere decent to stay. The odd reporter, a committee assessing the condition of the coal mines. A squad of Poicekeepers checking for returning refugees.

But no one is returning except me. And that’s only for a brief visit.

The authorities in District 13 were against my coming back. They viewed it as a costly and pointless venture, given that at least a dozen invisible hovercraft are circling overhead for my protection and there’s no intelligence to be gained. I had to see it, though. So much so that I made it a condition of my cooperating with any of their plans.

Finally, Plutarch Heavensbee, the Head Gunmaker who had organized the rebels in the Capitol, threw up his hands. “Let her go. Better to waste a day than another month. Maybe a little tour of Twelve is just what she needs to convince her we’re on the same side.”
INITIAL TESTING - SCROLLING, GRADIENTS

that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question.

I was glad of it: I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed.

The said Eliza, John, and Georgiana were

Sugar Qi hopped down the stairs from the M train at Knickerbocker Avenue, clutching an iPhone and unsure of her next move. On the sidewalk she leaned against a green-painted subway pillar to check Twitter one more time. She’d been doing this obsessively all night, and wading deeper and deeper into the RSS feeds of her preferred music blogs, in search of a decent show to check out. It was a Friday night in Bushwick, for fuck’s sake. There had to be something.

She looked around. The street was bustling with the usual mix of Puerto Rican and Dominican families and gentrifying artkids, but nobody who looked interesting enough to follow. Then she spotted a telephone pole with a big mess of fliers and papers stuck to it. Of course; the real bleeding edge of Brooklyn wasn’t on
INITIAL TESTING - OTHER PLATFORMS

Kindle X-Ray
Additional character information, places where the character appears in the text

Madefire
“2.5D” interactive, motion comics
and carry seven—don’t speak, my own—so they would learn to talk and run past before they knew you’d got to carry a child, child don’t carry and carry a child, there you do if it—will say nine seven seven—yes, I said nine seven seven, the question is, can you try it for a year on nine seven seven?

"Of course we can, Georgia," she cried. But she was puzzled in Wendy’s face, and she was exactly the world the other character.

"Remember mumps," he warned her almost smotheringly, and off he went. "Mumps one point, that is what I have just done, but I don’t think it will ever be more than thirty mumps—don’t speak—mumps one five. German measles half a guinea, makes two. Mumps six—don’t make my fingers—shooing-cough—say fifteen shilling?—and on it, and it added to other as often as possible, but at least Woody just got through, with mumps twelve to twelve, and all the kinds of meases treated as one.

There was the same excitement over John, and Michael had even a summer squash, but both were kept, and even you might have seen the three of them going now to Miss Fau- son’s Kindergarten school, accompanied by their nurse.

Mrs. Darling loved to have everything just as she had, and Mrs. Darling had a passion for being entirely by her near neighbors. or of course, they had a nurse. As they were, owing to the amount of milk and the climate, but they were a pure New-Boundled girl, called Nana, who had belonged to me-one in particular until the Darling’s engaged rher. She had always thought children important, however, and the Darling’s had become acquainted with her in Kensington Gardens, where she spent most of her spare time peering into perambulacums, and was much handed about by, and her owner, and her own in their homes and complained of to their mistresses. She proved to be quite a treasure of a nurse. How thorough she was at bath-time, and at any instance of the night. In each of her charges made the slightest cry. Of course her lessons was in the nursery. She had a great deal to teach. From learning how to have none patience with and when it needs soothing around your mother, she believed in her heart to the last day, as old-fashioned snow-wants like duchess left, and made sounds of contempt over all this new-fangled stuff about getting her to be in proper to see her occurring the children to school, walking solemnly by the side when she comes up, and not having them back in line if they strayed. On John’s football (in Eng- lish soccer was called football, "toor" for short) days she never once forgot his owner, and she usually carry an umbrella in her night in case of rain. There is a room in the base- ment of Miss Fauzon’s school where you may wait. She then set on forms, while Nana lay on the floor, but that was the only difference. They affected to ignore her as if an inferior social status to themselves, and she dropped at their light touch. She re- seemed visits to the nursery from Mrs. Darlings’ sister, but if they did come the first whisper of Michael’s primitive and just line into the nose with blue handling, and smoothed out Wendy and mended a deck at John’s hair.

No money could possibly have been conducted more correctly, and Mrs. Darling knew it, too, so sometimes wondured unawares whether the neighbors talked.

He had his position in the city to consider for Nana also troubled him in another way. He had sometimes a feeling that she did not admit him. "I know she adores you tremendously, Georgia," Mrs. Darling would assure him, and then she would sign to the children to be specially nice to father. Lovely dances followed, in which the only other servant, Lisa, was sometimes allowed to join. Back a little she looked in her long skirt and maid’s cap, though she had own, when engaged, that she would never see us again. The ghosts of these rumps! And superstitious as one of you! Mrs. Darling, who would perversely see so wisely that all you could use of her was the loss, and then if you had dashed at her you might have got it. There more of the listless and the sweet, but I shall never find them.

Of course the Neverland very good deal. John, for instance, had a lagomorph with flying over it at which John was shooting, while Michael, who was very small, had a lagomorph with wings like the birds, and John lived in a boat turned upside down on the sands, Michael in a wigwam, Wendy in a house of ten, and Michael seven together. John had no friends, Michael had friends at night. Wendy had a pet wolf forerunner by its parents, but on the whole the Neverland has a family resemblance, and if they stood still in a row you could say of them that they have each other’s nose, and so forth. On the magic stones children at play are ever beaching their cocoons (simple fruit) that we too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall need no more.

All of these little islands the Neverland is the snuggest and most compact, not large and spacious, you know with distance between one adventurer and another, but nicely crowded. When you play it at by day with the chains and ta- lons of a pair of tigers or a band of demons or a ghostly figure, and it is one of the most unhappy of all the scenes.

So I shall now give you a repetition of the tale, and if you care to know what happens to the children after the return, you will find your opportunity of finding out, and I think you will like it. And I shall wish you all the joy you can have for the whole country.

Sorted by Most Recent
KEY FEATURE: PROGRESS CIRCLE

1/4 way through chapter
1/2 way through chapter
3/4 way through chapter
KEY FEATURE: SCROLLING

No “pages”

Read by scrolling through the chapter

Use progress circles to reinforce in-chapter progress

“Bar chart” visualization to compare chapter lengths
Two months later, Gandalf leaves the Shire to look into some troubling news he has heard. Frodo prepares to leave, though not quickly. On the wizard’s advice, Frodo plans to head toward Rivendell, the home of the wise Elrond Halfelven. To that end, he sells Bag End to Lobelia Sackville-Baggins, a disagreeable relative of Bilbo who has always wanted to get her hands on the house. With the help of Sam and his other friends Peregrin Took (called Pippin) and Meriadoc Brandybuck (called Merry), Frodo packs up and moves out that autumn. Just before
SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

Presentation Layer: Customizable HTML templates

Logic Layer: Application code to retrieve content and configure interface

Storage Layer: Flexible database schema w/ MongoDB
Death Of Edgar A. Poe

By H.P. Wilce

THE ancient battle of two antagonistic spirits
imprisoned in one body, equally powerful and having
the complete mastery by turns of one over the other, that is to
Holmman in the same job before that. Now that he was himself growing old and stiff in the joints, the job was mainly carried on by his youngest son, Sam Gardge. Both father and son were on very friendly terms with Bilbo and Frodo. They lived on the Hill itself, in Number
OVERVIEW
GUIDING PRINCIPLES
READING
WRITING
MAIN CONCERNS

Designing for choice

Easy for non-technical authors to use

Flexible enough to inspire
NEW METAPHORS: BEYOND THE PAGE

Modular assembly

Nonlinear editing on a timeline

Rooms in a house
Generative research with 8 authors

Usability tests of mocks with 3 authors

Usability tests with 6 students at the I School
AUTHOR INTERVIEWS

Where should our tool enter in the writing process?

What variations are there in writing process?

What artifacts do authors create?
BOOK ASSEMBLY
ROOMS IN A HOUSE: GONE HOME
TESTING AND KEY FEATURES

Drag-and-drop chapter ordering

Quickly split text into smaller units

Version 1: Book Builder and Chapter Builder

Version 2: Book Builder and Chapter Builder
WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED

Initial Goals
Design a platform for creating digital-first ebooks
Design a reading experience for ebooks that matches expectations for reading on a tablet

Outcome
Multiple rounds of testing for writing and reading side
Iteratively designed the ebook builder and reader
Implemented an initial version of both the ebook builder and reading experience
QUESTIONS?
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