

Artist Statement

My story is an investigation into a mysterious extraterrestrial phenomenon affecting the Alligator River Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina, and is presented in an epistolary format with a variety of media types that the reader is supposed to piece together to ultimately come to their own conclusions and judgements about the events that have occurred.

In August, I originally started out with a different idea for the conspiracy plot. The first idea was more like *Stranger Things* with multiple human experimentation subjects gone rogue and escaping, but I wasn't really inspired by that and couldn't think of anywhere to take the story; I had no idea how I was going to set up the mystery. In November, I revamped the entire conspiracy plot, inspired by the film *Annihilation* (2018) in the sense that a UFO was modifying and mutating the environment around it, and these changes were spreading across an expanding geographical area. I was immediately coming up with so many more ideas and places to steer the story—this change opened up my mind to the possibilities I could explore within my story.

I got a lot of feedback early on in the writing process that reader interactivity was very important to keep in mind for my story, since it was mostly text-based content at that point. I thought about including a “crazy wall” in the form of a Prezi to visually represent the information in an interesting way for the reader, but as I got further into creating the different types of content and kept running into issues with formatting the Prezi and directly embedding it on the website, I decided to scrap that aspect of my story. I think including the mock Emergency Alert System video, the curated spotify playlist, and the interactive map of the environment with image hotspots, along with the different generic types of writing (screenshots of tweets, government reports, news articles), spread throughout the site in a way that mirrors a scavenger hunt and kind of places the reader in an investigator's shoes, with no shortcuts tying different pieces of evidence together, is more satisfying than a crazy wall would have been.

What I gained from this experience?

I am most proud of my mock EAS video and the interactive map of the environment – these were also the hardest parts of my project to create. To try to avoid video editing, I used two apps specifically for creating EAS mockups. They were only available through the Google Play Store, so I had to download an Android emulator onto my computer to be able to use them. This was really tricky since the apps kept crashing when I'd open them on my computer, and I couldn't add audio to the video inside of either app, so I ended up having to use video editing software anyway to stitch the audio and visual components together. The interactive map was slightly less hard, but finding the perfect plugin took quite some time.

This project supplemented the skills I developed this semester in the first web development class of my New Media Certificate. I've been able to use my knowledge of Wordpress from that class to make my site look the best that it can look, when I originally thought I might switch to a Canva or Wix based site at the beginning of the semester when we hadn't reached the Wordpress unit in my Web Development class and I was really struggling with my site.

As a storyteller, this project has taught me that I don't have to rely on text-based content and that I am able to write in more generic forms than I thought I could. It was also really interesting to mix two distinct areas (in my mind, at least) of skills, web development and creative writing, into one project. I knew that storytelling came in many different forms, but through this project, I think I've been able to internalize this and really, truly understand what that means.