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This paper considers a new form of graphic novel that combines the potentials of print and Virtual Reality [VR] storytelling. The novel 'Upgraded Gods', now in its final year of development, uses an autobiographical narrative to consider the nature and impact of malignant and collective narcissism in contemporary Russian society. The thesis asks, 'How might one employ physical and virtual modes of storytelling to enhance empathetic experience in a narrative that considers the nature and impact of malignant narcissism?' Goldner-Vukov & Moore (2010) identify malignant narcissism as a severe personality disorder that has "devastating consequences for the family and society" (p. 392), while traumatic childhood experiences are considered foundational to the development of malignant narcissism. Covington (2018) suggests that leaders can only enact a narcissistic abuse of power when they receive the support from a traumatised society that searches for "a charismatic leader who will promise to restore power and status to the group" (p. 255). Employing an autoethnographic methodology activated by heuristic inquiry, the study develops an immersive narrative that follows a protagonist through her childhood in the USSR, through the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, into her exile and subsequent analysis of contemporary Russian politics and society. The significance of the research lies in its employment of creative practice to contribute embodied experience to wider theoretical discourses that consider the dynamics of power abuse through social and political aggression. Specifically, the study also examines the manner in which traumatic experiences may affect individuals' wellbeing, and shape social institutions and economics, contributing to the rise of far-right, nationalist, and fundamentalist movements. In the realm of graphic novel design, such analyses may be identified in an emerging trajectory of autobiographical literary works such as "Persepolis" by Marjane Satrapi, "Gast" by Carol Swain, and "Commute" by Erin Williams.

#### Keywords

Virtual Reality; graphic novel; malignant narcissism; trauma; near-death experience

#### References

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