Caleb Dee-Rakower Culmination Project Reflection Paper

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Culmination Project: Big Shadow Over Little Innsmouth

CST 4499

My culmination project is a choose-your-own-adventure horror fishing game called Big Shadow Over Little Innsmouth. I like games with multiple endings so that the play can guide the direction the story goes. I chose a Horror-Fishing game because there were very few out there. I decided to use the software, Twine as I thought it would be the best software for the job and I already had experience with it and knew how to use it. Twine was first made in 2009 by Chris Klimas. It is a software where you can easily create choose-your-own-adventure games or digital books. I found Twine to be easy-to-use software with some code easily accessible, such as being able to set timers for certain events to pop up or being able to make branching paths for the players to go down. The pros of using Twine in this game were for its aforementioned ease of use. The software is completely free and you can even open it directly from your internet browser. In addition, the built-in codes allowed me to time certain events, make branching paths, and change the font size, type, color, and background color. The cons of Twine were the fact that I needed to use a 3rd party website (Yola) in order to put in detailed pictures. Neither Yola or Twine allowed me to directly input sound files into the game so instead, I needed yet another 3rd party system in order to implement sound design.

For all the art in the game, I chose artificial intelligence (AI) art (specifically a watercolor painting template from OpenAI). There are a few reasons I chose this. The first and primary reason I did was because I have something called dysgraphia. Dysgraphia is a neurological disorder that affects a person’s writing ability, sometimes only having a small impact, other times making it almost impossible to read the person’s handwriting, and unfortunately, I am the latter. Not only is handwriting a problem for me, no matter what tool I use, whether physical or digital, I still cannot draw well enough for it to be usable in any sort of project (except for maybe abstract art). The other reason I chose AI art is that I had neither the time (as it could take months for every single page to get a drawing done for it) nor the money to commission someone to draw for me.

 I would not sell this game as is. One of the reasons is because I used AI art for this project, I would feel a little bit disingenuous and greedy for selling this game to the public, as I never really drew anything, I just used a computer program to substitute for my lack of artistic ability. Also the quality of most Twine games does not justify them costing money.

The main thing I enjoyed about making my game was developing the storyline; writing what would happen in the story. I could really let my creativity flow into the game. It’s not very often I get to flex my creative muscles when writing things, as I rarely get to write about anything that I find interesting. The game, Big Trouble in Innsmouth takes place in Innsmouth, Massachusetts. I worked hard to ensure that the fish used in the game were actually accurate to where the game takes place. I loved writing all the branching paths of the game, as I was able to write both casually and seriously in the same project. Another thing I enjoyed is the feeling of satisfaction I got when I got the coding to work. When first writing the code, I had many glitches that needed fixing, and sometimes it took a while to fix them. When I was able to fix the bugs, it was incredibly satisfying to see the code work properly. When I got a good image from the AI art generator, I could really feel how well the pictures fit in with the pages of the game.

What was particularly frustrating for me when working on the game was how difficult it was to implement the sound. I spent so much time fruitlessly attempting to find a way to incorporate sound files into the game, as Twine doesn't directly allow you to do so. It took me a very long time and many tries and many hours in order to find an image that worked from the AI art generator, as often, AI art is inaccurate on how it generates things. If you're not specific enough with your words, you could end up generating something entirely different than you intended. For example, on day 4 of my game, you reel in a pumpkinseed, which is a type of fish. Unfortunately, the AI system did not understand this at first, and it depicted a man reeling in a giant pumpkin SEED! I ended up looking up the scientific name for the fish, and finally it worked.

 After working on this game for the past ~5 ish months, I can say that I am satisfied with my work, as I have tested everything that needed to be tested, have fixed any bugs that I have found, and feel good about the final story. I am proud of all the work I put in the game as I feel like it has really paid off into a game that is enjoyable. I ask myself if my 21 year-old friends would enjoy playing this game. Maybe, this kind of game is better suited to younger kids. But because of the dark themes, violence, and blood, it is not.

My advisor for this project was Professor Hosni. The reason I thought to ask Professor Hosni was that he was my professor for a class in my previous semester, where I came up with the idea for this project and started its production. Hosni, from the beginning, was very helpful for my project. We met by zoom every other week and this consistent communication game me focus and kept me on task. His advice and guidance were pivotal in helping me make a game I am now proud of. He was particularly helpful in pointing out areas where changes made the pages more pleasing and viewable. He helped with color choices for the text so they could be seen better. He helped me understand how timing in text popups are key, making sure that players don’t wait too long for something to happen or something happening too quickly. When I first started this project, I had trouble adding the sound into the game. He looked up options on how to incorporate sound when I could not find any. And his help in this area was extremely helpful and moved me forward. Once I had reviewed the tutorial he had found on Slack, I was able to move forward independently. All the suggestions he gave me were very good and made the game much better than it already was. His contributions were very important and appreciated.

After experiencing what it is like to make a game from start to finish, I can say that game design is a career that I really want to go for. Game design was an enjoyable experience, and I can tell it would be even more enjoyable if I was able to work together with a team of people. I feel like I have what it takes to become a great game designer as I am patient enough to work through all the bugs, I have good ideas, I am a creative person with a sense of humor, and I really enjoy playing games (and therefore know what players want). The main parts of game design that I am capable of doing and enjoy, are the writing for the story, coming up with ideas, and the coding for the game. The one thing that could be a challenge in this career path, is the fact that I have dysgraphia, making it impossible for me to make my own art. Yet working with a team, this could be solvable.