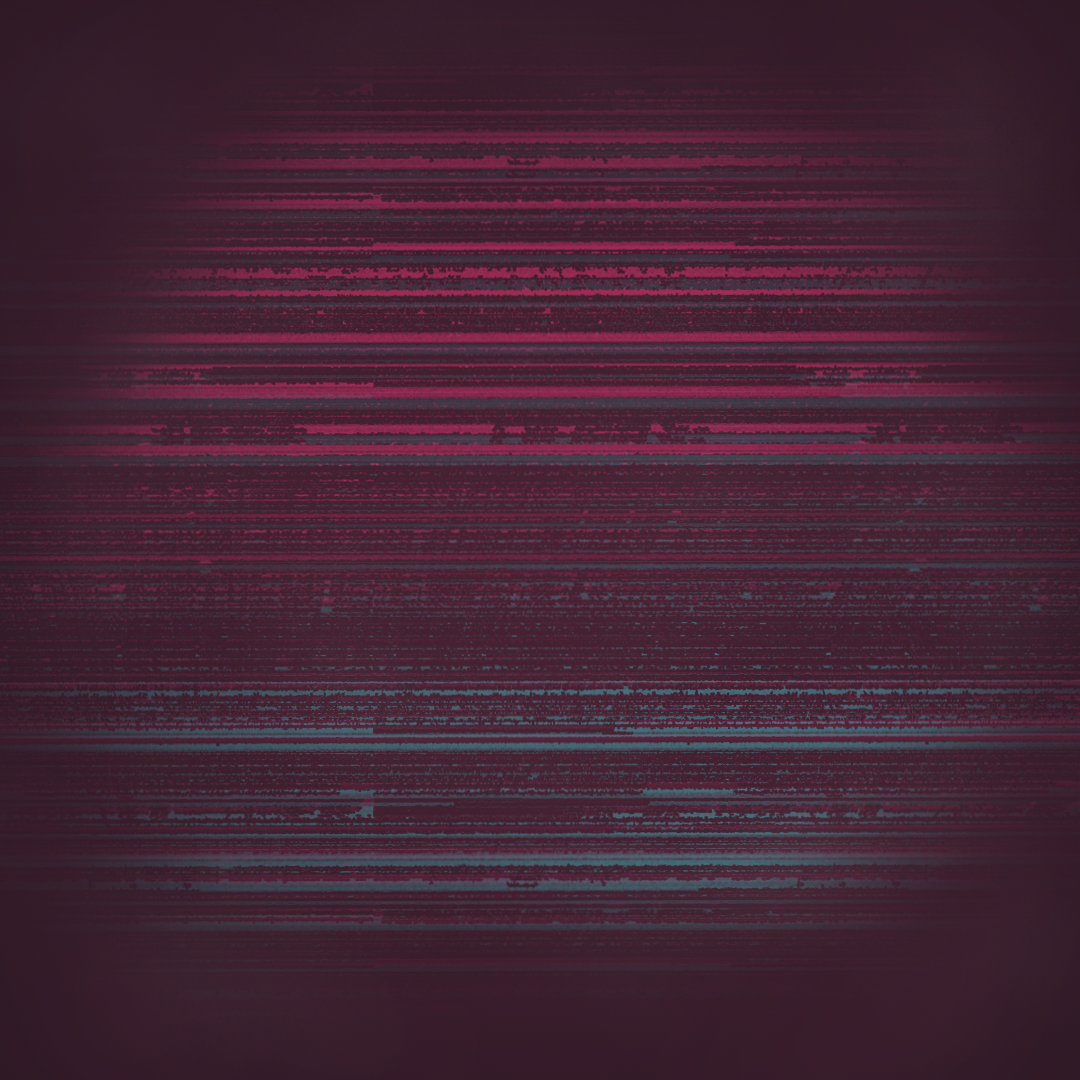




**Ars Amatoria**

***Game Design Document***

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# Base Summary

## High Concept

A young man is trapped in a loop, time-traveling back to the moment before speaking to his crush, armed with the knowledge of each failed attempt.

## Formal Information

**Genre:** Interactive Fiction

**Type:** Text-based Modified Parser

**Players:** Single Player

**Game Length:** Variable, determined by the player’s decisions—subject to final adjustments upon full story completion.

**Platform:** Browser-playable (keyboard [possibly digital included] input essential), hosted on itch.io

**Demographic:** Targeted towards late teenagers and young men shaped by the influences of social media’s dating advice culture.

## Overview

In *Ars Amatoria*, a seemingly simple conversation with a crush, spirals into a disturbing exploration of manipulation and toxic dating advice. This first-person, text-based interactive fiction thrusts players into the role of a young man who, after every failed attempt to win over his crush, is sent back in time to a "checkpoint" just before the encounter. The game’s innovative parser system, reminiscent of Hangman and Wordle, offers word recommendations that subtly guide players, making it accessible to those unfamiliar with traditional text-based games.

What starts as an innocent attempt to connect with a crush quickly becomes an unnerving experience as the game forces the player to enact behaviours typical of misguided "alpha male" advice found on social media. The narrative, full of short, punchy segments, keeps players constantly typing, searching for the right words to progress, only to find themselves trapped in a loop of increasingly uncomfortable and morally questionable actions.

The minimalistic, modern UI enhances the eerie atmosphere, with ambient sounds and effects deepening the sense of unease. As the story unfolds, players must grapple with the realization that they are not just playing a game but are being manipulated into behaviours that reflect the darker side of societal norms.

*Ars Amatoria* is not just a game; it's a commentary on the toxic advice prevalent in today's digital age, making players question their actions and the consequences of following the wrong path. With its roots in Ovid’s pickup advice and influences from the game Aisle, *Ars Amatoria* subverts the dating game genre, standing out as a disturbing and thought-provoking experience in the world of interactive fiction.

# Gameplay Summary

## Inspiration

*Ars Amatoria* draws inspiration from the unique narrative style of Aisle (1999), initially perceived (by me) as a dating fiction with a twist. However, upon realizing that Aisle was not about engaging with random women but rather unravelling the protagonist’s fragmented past, there was a small sense of disappointment. The overlapping and inconsistent backstories, while intriguing, left a desire for a more cohesive narrative. What if there was a game that fulfilled this initial expectation—a flirting game where the player must repeatedly engage with the same person, gradually learning what will earn her affection?

*Ars Amatoria* takes this concept and builds upon it, ensuring that with each restart, the narrative remains consistent. The player can use knowledge from previous attempts to improve future interactions. Unlike other games where the reset is merely a gimmick, *Ars Amatoria* weaves this mechanic into the storyline, with time travel serving as the canonical explanation.

However, the dating game genre is not without its flaws and controversies, and *Ars Amatoria* does not shy away from them. Instead, it amplifies these issues to such an extreme that the player is forced to confront the absurdity and toxicity of such behaviours. This game exaggerates the troubling aspects of dating advice—often propagated by social media “alpha male” influencers—into a dark satire.

The game finds its roots in Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*, an ancient precursor to modern-day pick-up artist tutorials. Just as Ovid provided men with strategies to seduce women, so too does this *Ars Amatoria*—but with a twist. The game’s seemingly innocent mechanics slowly reveal themselves to be tools of manipulation, forcing the player to partake in actions that, while presented as normal, quickly become unsettling.

By borrowing techniques popular in social media, books, and films, Ars Amatoria lures players in with familiar gameplay, only to subvert expectations and expose the underlying darkness of these behaviours. What begins as a light-hearted attempt to win over a crush evolves into a haunting commentary on the pervasive and often harmful dating advice targeted at young men today.

## Setting