

Assignment 2 // Twine game

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For creating this story, I had already started fleshing out a world. Having played Dungeons and Dragons [2] as a Dungeon Master in my own campaign I have tried creating my own world before, though not in a cyberpunk setting. First I started sketching and writing about different concepts that could be interesting to explore. The idea that caught my attention the most was a slice-of-life story in this setting, as I haven't seen that before. I wanted the narrative to be told to the player, a ripper doctor (a person providing illegal cybernetic enhancements), through his clients. As he helped some clients and pushed others away (the choices the player would make) the narrative could unfold in different ways: some clients failing their mission and exacting revenge, or succeeding and rewarding the player. Though this idea was still my intention it slowly faded as I started fleshing out the narrative more. I wanted to do a classic Aristotelian 3-act structure. The game was supposed to cover all three acts, but as I started writing the story unfolded itself and became too big for the amount of time I had to make the Twine game. I therefore decided to keep it to covering most (if not all) of the first act. I wrote out points that could introduce the character and his world, and then choices that would lead to the inciting incident. As I was writing this the idea of having the narrative being told by the clientele disappeared. Though I still want to explore the idea, the scope of it seemed to grand, if I was to keep the reader engaged through it all, and doing so without any major plot-holes. I wanted to start by giving some exposition about the world and the character of the player. Giving them two jobs should indicate financial issues, and illegal activities at a big company could indicate some shadiness and defiance as aspects of the character (the punk aspect of cyberpunk). To allow the player to identify with the character no gender is specified nor name of the city, or country for that matter, the game takes place in. Though the game is in the future (or alternate universe) there is no mention of millennium or century. All years are referred to by the last two digits of the year. I did not want the player to spend too much time thinking relating how far into the future the game takes place. Another way of taking time into consideration was with transport. If the player loses his bike and walks the rest of the way home (taking too much time) then the person outside of the apartment will be dead. This was done to give the world a more realistic feel — the world does not stop just because you want it to.

For choices I placed some small and some big ones. Almost all change the direction you're going in but only a few have an actual effect on how the story ends. I also chose to add some places where chance had an effect. By doing this the player may experience different narratives even if they make the exact same choices. I did not, however, want the "true" ending to be based on luck,

so though luck might mean the difference between life and death, the "true" ending is still possible without having luck involved. The luck is mainly used to determine whether you live or die after a choice in a dangerous situation. There are also choices that will lead to death without any luck playing a role. The luck variables are placed in the first passage to ensure that the variable is not re-rolled if they re-enter a passage. Upon death the player is met with the same screen every time, with a "reboot" command (just for fun, fitting the style of the game) which restarts the game. An immediate restart allows the player to dive right back in at once, encouraging to keep playing.

What ended up taking more time that I expected (and wanted) was the visual style of the game. Though I did not change the standard look of the paragraphs (white text on a black background with the default font), I changed the style to convey different things. As the cyberpunk genre has a heavy use of computers and monitors I made the tag "computer" which would change the font to "Courier" and the text to be all uppercase. This is sort of an homage to Blade Runner [1], but more generally to the science fiction movies of the 80s and 90s. As the story unfolded I started adding the personal notes of the main character to be accessed. These followed the same style, indicating that what the player sees is the same as what the character sees. The notes were also linked together when appropriate creating a small network of indeces.

For the "true" ending I took inspiration from Spelunky [3]. In Spelunky, to reach the "true" ending, you have to pick up an item in the first act, which allows you get the second item in the second act and so forth. In the same manner I wanted the player to choose "correctly" early in the game (exporting the script result) which then allowed them to meet Gun, where they then had to show cooperation, etc. I wanted the player to make choices where they could both have the same progress (whether to turn around (and be lucky) or walk backwards) but one led to the "true" ending and the other did not.

Though this project has been a lot of fun, more preparation would have been beneficial. I thought my vague idea of the story would be enough to guide me through the actual writing in Twine. This was not the case. I kept going back and forth between different branches tying the different paths together. I got new ideas (like the log) that had to be tied in with the existing branches. I thought the log was very fitting to the theme and worth spending some time on working it out. Another way of mitigating the time loss caused by this, would be to spend more time understanding Twine [4] better. I started using Twine as I started writing my story. Discovering and experimenting with new ways of using Twine caused me to make changes that took time. Taking a day just for playing around would have made the writing a lot faster, better, and would potentially have given me new ideas of how to make the narrative more interactive/interesting. I also think I should have spent more time on the "true" ending branch, as it didn't end up feeling as satisfying as I wanted it to.

If I had more time, adding some RPG mechanics into the game would be interesting. As one of my inspirations for this was Cyberpunk 2020 [5], adding stats could have been a good way of adding customisation to the narrative. First

I would probably add three stats, i.e. Strength, Charisma, and Tech. Then the player would receive new choices (or different outcomes of existing choices) based on how high the different stats were. This could also replace some of the luck based events, already existing in the narrative.

References

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