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ENGL 3500

May 4th, 2025

*Fame, Fortune, Felonies?* Reflection: The Why, What, and How

The Why

My game idea is titled *Fame, Fortune, Felonies?* It is a choose-your-own-adventure game where the player sees the world through the eyes of Ayla Bernard, a young girl from the Midwest whose dream is to become a famous actress. You move to Hollywood with no money and a dream, making choices that can either help you rise to stardom or lead to complete chaos. The goal of the game isn't to follow one specific path, but rather to have fun, explore, and replay multiple times to influence different outcomes through your choices. I was influenced by two major works. The first is *Meanwhile*, the game we played at the beginning of this course. It had a huge impact on me. The ability to play again and again, making different choices and ending up with different outcomes, was incredibly fun. I loved being able to play the choices I would in real life, then replay as chaotically as I wanted. What stuck with me was how *Meanwhile* was both a book and a game, arguably a game within a book, or a

book within a game. As an English major who loves reading (and enjoys gaming), the blend of the two inspired me. Which is why I created both in my project.

Creating this game also brought me back to my childhood. When I was younger, I had a choose-your-own-adventure book designed for young girls. I read it so much that it fell apart. I was obsessed with finding every possible outcome and replaying it from every angle. The joy of not just reading a story but being a part of it stuck with me, and that's something I've tried to bring to life in this project. I wanted this project to be more than something I submit for school, but something I can be passionate about and make my younger self proud by combining my love of reading and gaming.

This game represents humor, but also has a touch of realism. Going to Hollywood in my game is fun, and many of the choices and endings are silly; that's a core part of what I wanted to create to make the gaming experience enjoyable. But I also wanted to acknowledge some of the real hardships associated with chasing fame. Some choices may lead players down dark or unexpected paths, reflecting realities that some people genuinely face. Even though my game is fun, I hope players recognize and respect the more serious themes beneath the surface.

## The What

Critics have viewed choose-your-own-adventure games as an intersection of narrative and gameplay, recognizing them for their creative storytelling and interactive

structure. Janet Murray, in her chapter “From Additive to Expressive Forms” from *The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, explores the relationship between games and narrative. She argues that the narrative environment in these games plays a significant role in shaping the gameplay, as players' choices directly influence the direction of the story. According to Murray, “The digital narrative environment extends the fictional universe of television shows and films in a way that is consistent with the canonical version of the story but personalizes it for each of the players” (Murray 25). Critics often treat these games as a form of interactive media, similar to television or movies, rather than merely games with a plot. This is important because, while many games are traditionally understood through gameplay mechanics (such as controls), choose-your-own-adventure games emphasize plot and narrative, which often makes them more seen for their storytelling than their mechanics. According to Murray, the narrative-centric design of these games can either enhance or detract from the gaming experience. The branching structure of the narrative allows for a changeable experience, unlike traditional gameplay, allowing players to immerse themselves in the story. For some, this is liked, allowing them to experiment with different outcomes, while others may feel constrained by the lack of control over the character, as they are primarily controlling the text rather than a character's actions. From this, I've learned that the affordance of player choice, narrative, and participation is needed for the success of a choose-your-own-adventure game. In my own game, I've focused on

providing freedom to experiment and explore different outcomes, understanding that these games need replayability and player involvement. The ability to influence the narrative is needed, as players want to engage with a plot that feels personal and open to exploration.

Another key element discussed by critics, particularly Amanda Phillips in her article “Making a Face,” is the issue of race and representation in games. Phillips critiques how many digital games and stories highlight racism and sexism, often reinforcing harmful stereotypes. A quote that highlights this issue is: “The remainder of this chapter will interrogate this promise, situate it within a deeper history of facial calculations, and examine how numbers insulate digital techniques from political accountability, reinvigorating centuries-old practices of racism and sexism within our most contemporary technologies” (Phillips 74). This critique is significant because it highlights how games can either reinforce or challenge societal biases. In my own game, I’ve worked to avoid these issues, ensuring that it provides a fair and inclusive environment for all players. I recognize that representation and inclusivity are affordances of this type of game, and I make sure my game reflects that by presenting diverse characters. At the beginning of the book version, you see five different characters to play as. This has zero game impact, which to some seems redundant, but to me is important. It is simply a personal choice to feel connected to the game, which

seemingly small, has a large impact on the player, especially if diversity was something in previous games that was unseen to the player.

Critics understand choose-your-own-adventure games as interactive narratives that offer players the power to influence the story, with the affordances of narrative agency, replayability, and player participation being central to the genre. These games allow for personalized experiences and are more focused on plot than traditional gameplay mechanics.

### The How

For my game, I chose to work in two major mediums. The first is a traditional book-style format, modeled after classic Choose-Your-Own-Adventure novels, where players flip to different pages based on the choices they make. I've always found that format engaging and familiar, something I tend to fall back on and enjoy. Its book-like physical combined with game-like mechanics creates a creative and deeply narrative-driven experience. The second medium is a short interactive section built using Inky, a game-writing tool introduced to us in class. I was heavily inspired by *Meanwhile*, a game that blends book and game structures. It showed me how a story could exist in both a literary and playable format, and I wanted to experiment with that dynamic in my work.

What made this challenging was the code: I am comfortable with books and writing, which is why it was originally only going to be in book format, as the coding aspect of Inky was intimidating. Despite that, I pushed myself to include it anyway. I wanted to prove to myself that I could do both, and it ended up giving me a much clearer vision for my game. By blending mediums, I now see my project as something that can live in both the physical and digital worlds. That dual-format approach has made me more passionate and excited about the entire process. It's been difficult, but also incredibly rewarding, which I think is what makes the best kind of creative project. The hardest part of the design process was narrowing down my format. I had so many ideas, and at times I wanted to include everything, from multiple narrative paths to different medium styles. I started with Inky, shifted to a full book format, and then realized I didn't have to choose just one. By merging both my original and new ideas, I found a way to create something that feels true to me.

My game has six different endings. I felt it was important to include a range of outcomes: some are light and funny, others are more realistic or even "winning" conclusions. I wanted players to feel like their choices mattered and that there was more than one "right" way to play. Beyond the main endings, I've also included one hidden "easter egg" ending, which can only be reached through a very specific path. I designed this as a little surprise, something that's both fun and slightly frustrating to discover. Unlike the other endings, which can often be reached from various paths, this

one requires a one-way set of early-game decisions. I think it adds a layer of mystery and replayability that makes the game more engaging overall.

If this game were ever expanded on, I would add more endings to keep replayability. Designing this project on my own, adding more than 6 endings felt hard to keep track of and make within my plot map; however, if I were to work on it longer, I would love even more random, fun, and realistic endings to bring more to the experience. Also, I would make customizations (in the digital format), but I was unable to do that for this game. I would create a fully customizable avatar that would have fully customizable hair, race, body types, and features to bring a unique experience to the gameplay. This would help my desire to put diversity in the gameplay, allowing all to feel included in my gameworld.

### The Purpose

The systems in my game are designed to reflect and reinforce a deeper idea: the darker, more complex reality behind Hollywood's surface. While the game is playful and entertaining on the surface, its structure and outcomes explore serious themes such as manipulation, exploitation, and the dangers of trusting the wrong people. These elements aren't just hinted at, they are in the choices, consequences, and branching paths the player navigates. For example, players can start the game with good intentions, wanting to "make it big" in Hollywood, but depending on who they meet or

what situations they fall into, their journey can shift. One wrong interaction, a moment of naivety, or trusting someone too quickly can spiral out of control. These outcomes are intentionally structured into the decisions, not just as “bad endings,” but as commentary on how the entertainment industry can be. My endings, such as “Jail” or “OnlyFans,” are, yes, comical, but were intended to show how these can be someone’s reality. Hollywood is a large and scary place, and only a small portion makes it big; this mirrors how my game is structured. In the end, the systems in my game serve to display Hollywood itself, fun on the outside, but with real risks hidden underneath. It’s a way to tell a story about what fame costs, and how chasing it can lead to more than just disappointment.



Works Cited

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