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GAME696

Final Post-Mortem

Sea of Glass Redux Review

The approach to Sea of Glass Version 2 (SOGv2) was completely different than the midterm approach. I took a more conservative view of the story opting to write for more readability and understanding vs aesthetic style. The timeline of work was different as well, the author started off with a full playtest review by my friends. This play test was conducted via Discord where users shared their screen as they went through the game. I took notes on what users were saying as they commented or read passages a loud. One of my friends read every single passage aloud as he went though the game, this provided invaluable feedback about the flow of the story.

After the play tests were conducted, I decided to change the tutorial pages, originally there were around 8 pages before one got to the meat of the story. After cutting these chapters it was easier to get into the story and thus a better understanding of the setting. The other piece of critical feedback was the ability to jump around passages from the first page to better give the feel as though users are jumping around pages and chapters of a book. In this moment the aesthetic of the story is kept intact while also increasing readability. After these play tests and quality of life changes, I added a subsection that increased interactivity. The major downside of the original version was there was no end nor goal for users to work for. Upon rereading the book, *Interactive Digital Narrative: history, theory and practice* Nick Montfort gave a piece of advice that changed my view of the project: “A work of IF(interactive fiction) is not itself a narrative; it is an interactive computer program” (111). This what prompted the “fragments” section of the game. Users are able to look at specific points in the narrative at this fragmented journal. On the first page, the page that users are brought back to when they cycle back though they are informed of how many fragments they have found. This gives the reader an active goal vs the passive reader that the original version prompted. Koenitz section of the IDN book also grants us insight to the fact that “terminology loses its specific meaning and becomes fuzzy when it is continuously redefined. (p 112)” This prompted me to look deeper into the narrative structure as a whole and the fragments filled in the missing gap. I would now classify this as a mystery poetic narrative where the user now has a purpose of finding out who they are and how to navigate life. This leads into making the map for the game. With the core loop being discovery that loop become monotonous with no goal; thus the implementation of fragments and map lead to hopefully breaking the loop and using different terms and themes to convey the same ideals.

The major part of the story that was added was the map of locations that could take users to specific passages. This was given as feedback in class and while it was not normally something I would have added, that only motivated me to try it out and push myself out of my comfort zone. With the help of the professor I was able to get the map working and was pleasantly surprised on how well it fit into the story. It felt rewarding for users to discover locations and then have a visual that informed users of where they were. It also helped with sense of progression though the story. While this also sacrificed the feeling and atmosphere of being lost I felt that it was more important to understand what was occurring than being completely blind in the story.

I plan to add more than four fragments in the future, I chose the time period of my undergrad due to that being when my agoraphobia was at its strongest, these writings are taken from journals I kept when I was younger. I plan to find the diaries from when I was very young and transpose them into fragments to give a more holistic approach to the feelings and emotions I am trying to convey.

Now we come to things I wish I knew before starting this process. I wish I had spent more time finding my physical journals instead of trying to remember via photo albums, I wrote the majority of the fragments before stumbling across them when cleaning. This would have saved a lot time due to rewrites to get things exactly perfect. I also wish I had more time to work on visuals, I wanted to do water color paintings for key passages but that was the last thing on my list of tasks for stretch goals.

I also plan to add more text effects after working on better understanding TWINE. I feel as though there are a lot of opportunities to explore more how space is used and what it can be made to do. For example, I found when editing the last few sections that there was documentation in twine on replacing text when clicked on. This opens the door for a lot of neat interactions that I am planning on working on. I have also become more accustomed to using variables in twine to display alternate text due to working on Kitty Cat Detective Taz and am already planning updates and interactions that can use what I have learned from developing that game.

Moving forward I wish to continue this for capstone. With the addition of fragments, the ideals and narrative of growing up with agoraphobia and the impact of COVID-19 can be explored more. I see this narrative as a conduit to show a first-hand experience of this mental illness and how it can affect an individual, especially since I have had in since middle school. The path forward is a complicated one in regards to healing and progression. When the quarantine went into effect it no longer (and still does not) required us to go outside and do things from our homes aka safe places. I feel like exploring this though a digital medium enhances this the experience and commentary of digital spaces.