Translating Folktales into Interactive Media through the Game Adaptation of "Fragrant Water"

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Format of work
Game Prototype

DESCRIPTION OF WORK
Fragrant Water (Hamijaya 2025) is an interactive story game inspired by the Javanese folktale *Asal Usul Banyuwangi*. The game reimagines the story through branching narrative paths, allowing players to step into the life of Sylo and make choices that test the tension between honor and loyalty. These decisions lead to one of three possible endings, highlighting the natural malleability of folklore. Developed in Unity using the Adventure Creator pack, *Fragrant Water* is designed for PC with a playtime of 10–15 minutes for the first playthrough. Its primary mechanic is an intuitive Point-and-Click system, ensuring accessibility while keeping the focus on story progression and narrative consequence. By combining simple interaction with layered narrative consequences, the game invites players to engage with cultural storytelling in an active and meaningful way.

Trailer: https://youtu.be/jLMXy5mgVK8

Demo: https://reilivia.itch.io/fragrant-water

RESEARCH STATEMENT
Background: The adaptation of folktales for contemporary audiences in Indonesia has been widely explored through moving image media such as film, drama, animation, and television dramas, with MD Entertainment (2023) alone producing 54 folktale-based dramas.[1] Consequently, the use of interactive media and games in folktale adaptation in Indonesia remains underexplored, highlighting a gap in engagement with complex media forms. Angelaki (2024) suggested that the approach to converting folktales into games is similar to literary and film narratives due to the authorial narrative nature of video games.[2] However, Koenitz (2010) challenges this assumption by claiming that the framework fails to consider the role of the interactive digital system that underpins the narrative's production.[3] This raises questions about how interactive storytelling utilizes the unique affordances of games to translate the authentic retelling of a Javanese folktale. This paper aims to approach folktale adaptation into interactive media through practice-based research to examine the authenticity in digital culture heritage through the natural malleability of folktale during

the production of *Fragrant Water* game. The work contributes to the ongoing discussion of folktale translation into interactive media to support cultural continuity and provide an exemplary framework for future design in adapting tradition-based narratives.

Contribution to field/industry: The development of *Fragrant Water* game is a part of practice-based research[4] on folktale translation through the lens of a game designer. Unlike the folktale-based games in the market, *Fragrant Water* took the adaptation further to explore the nature of folktales through the affordance of game as an interactive media. This exploration of narrative frameworks and the capability of interactive storytelling in creating a "what if" scenario is similar to the nature of folklore that evolves through word of mouth. The malleability of folktales can be reflected through the flexibility of branching mechanics in interactive narrative. Through its adaptation of *Asal Usul Banyuwangi* the *Fragrant Water* game exemplifies how to translate folktales into interactive media and provides a fresh framework. This framework emphasizes how digital game designers can effectively integrate culturally significant folktales into interactive narratives by maintaining cultural authenticity, providing meaningful player agency, and balancing mechanics with narrative progression. It proposes a model where games are not just tools for entertainment, but also for preserving and evolving traditional storytelling forms in a contemporary context, contributing to the growing practice of folktale game adaptation in Southeast Asia.

Significance: This work demonstrates how video games can serve as a form of digital cultural heritage that preserves and reimagines folktales through interactive design. By integrating the natural malleability of folklore into branching narrative structures, Fragrant Water proposes a framework for adaptation that emphasizes cultural authenticity while embracing the possibilities of player agency. Within an Australian context, these findings can be utilized as an exemplary approach, as Australia holds rich traditions of folklore, ranging from Indigenous storytelling to migrant cultural narratives. The use of video games as a medium, with branching narratives and player-driven play styles, highlights the importance of interactivity in reflecting how stories shift and evolve across generations.

EXHIBITION
The game will be displayed on a monitor with a mouse and headphones. The player will have to sit down and navigate through the game using mouse while listening to the sound for narrative immersion. The game will be a PC build and does not require internet connection to run.

BIO
Rebecca Livia Hamijaya is an Indonesian interactive designer based in Melbourne. With a background in digital media, her practice covers 3D environment design, web design, interactive design, and user experience. Her interest in user research informs her approach of connecting interactive experiences with narrative storytelling, emphasizing how design can shape meaning through player engagement. Fragrant Water, her adaptation of a Javanese folktale into an interactive story game, forms part of her major project as a Master of Animation, Games and Interactivity candidate at RMIT University. Her work explores the intersection of culture, narrative, and interactive media.

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ENDNOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Endnotes

[1] MD entertainment is a prime example of how Indonesian folktales are often adapted for screen, emphasizing the lack of engagement with complex media.

[2] The literature review written by Angelaki in 2010 shows a conflicting view with this research despite discussing the same topic, folktale adaptation in game.

[3] Koenitz's idea is introduced to challenge the linear narrative framework and brought up the affordance of interactive media.

[4] This research draws from Linda Candy's (2006) *Practice-Based Research* methodology, which positions creative practice as both the process and outcome of research

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