

The Button

A choose your own adventure game created by Zach Zohar

The Button is my rendition of a dystopian choose-your-own-adventure game, where all paths lead toward destruction. My concept began with the thought of what constitutes a choice and how I can make that choice feel both impactful and meaningless. I theorized that the most minor choice I could make was a single option present from the very beginning that the player could only delay and would eventually have to stumble upon. The story's formatting is open-ended, each separate location dreary and depressing, making the player understand the hardship the main character, The Boy, is going through. The player watches through the eyes of The Boy as he explores his world, looking upon familiar sights that he has grown numb to, but with a twist. The Boy has been given what can be assumed to be a kill switch, a button that can instantly reduce the world that he is living into ashes. A way to escape from the capitalist society ruled by the conglomerate Mega-Corp which has begun to replace the government as the new source of the ruling power.

The narrative of the game is a commentary on the direction technology and society is heading in a sort of unconscious distancing from everyday atrocities, normalizing the corruption and heinous acts prevalent in the world. It is made into a style of showmanship that allows journalism and media to present the soul-crushing terror in a way that obtains views and money. Everything is in the race to obtain more money. The point of the Button is to show the foreseeable extreme future where the Mega-Corp, which has attained the ideal of capitalist society, acquires a monopoly over the entirety of society and has begun attempting to craft society to fit into their infinite cycle of working and living underneath the rule of the corporation. With the Button, I hope that players who take the trip through the short but meaningful game will have a new perspective on everyday issues and look at them with a more nuanced eye so that they can examine their own biases, step past them and really understand issues that others around the world are going through.

The essential part of creating the Button was to make it short but powerful, so the message wouldn't be diluted by repeating that the world is corrupt — while still making it feel like a complete story that could be resolved at any point by deciding that the world needed destruction.

The boy started with a button. Written on the button were only two words, "The End." No matter where the boy went, the button followed; inside a pocket, atop a windowsill, and always placed in a position visible to the boy.

One day a man showed up and said to the boy, "You have been chosen to determine the worth of this world, learn all that you can and decide if it is worth continuing to exist." He disappeared.

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The boy goes to the nearby library, where he spends much of his free time. Here the boy retreats to the computer section to browse social media as he has no devices of his own. He logs in to his account to see that his previous post depicting his history of abuse and self-harm has garnered much attention. He sees that the video he posted has been reposted, making fun of him, saying, "A man can't be abused." or "You're a man. You deserve everything that is coming." He looks on as those that comment or share his post ridicule him. The more the boy scrolled, the more hateful comments became, some calling for additional self-harm and even others proclaiming he was better off killing himself to rid the world of his filth.

The button waited patiently, placed next to the mouse, one wrist movement away.

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The boy reads the newspaper daily to learn more about the world outside his isolated circumstances. Lately, all the headlines in the news have been talking about the Mega-Corporation and its drive for "perfect workers." Mega-Corp has discovered a way to neuro link to workers and reduce their pay if their thoughts drift from their job. Mega-Corp claims that this technology is so effective that workers will dream of solutions to work problems and come in to work with fresh ideas, having no time to participate in any other activities, fully engrossed in their jobs. The boy reads that this technology is said to begin widespread production in those that are still in any form of education so they can acclimate to the devices before entering the workforce. The newspaper frames it as a beautiful invention able to increase productivity across the board. Still, the boy understands that what the technology will really do is restrict all free will, essentially enslaving those who are equipped with it to Mega-Corp.

The button lies on the pages of the newspaper, always within reach.

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The boy decides to walk through the city he has grown up in his entire life. On his walk, he tries to look at the city in a new light, looking through a stranger's eyes. What he sees disturbs him, the once unnoticed homeless population begging, crying for any scrap of food or money. Men and women sprawled in alleyways, either dead or dying, massive billboards displayed on the side of buildings reading, "Welcome to Haven, the city of purity and progress! For those looking for a new start in the technology industry, look no further, Mega-Corp is here to support you." The white light of the billboard illuminated the decrepit old man, crawling away from the street-tough holding onto what looked like a loaf of bread. The light flickers, and the sound of flesh being torn and blood spraying reaches the boy's ears. The tough was gone as the lights flickered back on the street, and the old man lay dead on the sidewalk.

The boy felt the button in his pocket, a weight making each step heavier.

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The boy makes his way home to where the pain originates. What the boy called home was a two-roomed apartment he shared with his father. It was an unkempt place, littered with empty beer bottles and wrappers from take-out meals. "Is that you boy! Who gave you permission to come back inside? I swore I told you not to return unless you brought me more beer or you returned with your mother, and it seems you didn't bring any beer. And lest we forget, IT ISN'T POSSIBLE FOR YOUR MOTHER TO BE HERE, AS SHE DIED GIVING BIRTH TO YOU. My life would have been much better if you died that day instead!" His father stood up from the couch he was currently drinking himself to death on and pulled off his belt, and began beating the boy, making sure to hit him with the metal end.

The boy could see the button waiting for him, resting next to his father's opened bottle, ready to be pressed.

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The boy decided to go to school for the first time in what felt like a long time. The brown brick walls covered in tattered posters marked the entrance to the school ground. There was a presentation going on in the assembly room. The boy entered silently just in time to hear the beginning of the speech. "Hello, bright futures!" Said the female presenter. "I would like to thank your school for inviting us here today. At Mega-Corp we strive to support the youth that will shape the future. We aim to give you purpose after education, a way to give back to this wonderful city you have all had the privilege to grow up in. But this privilege does have a price, and that is progress! Each of you must help Mega-Corp in our drive to create the perfect worker. With that in mind, we have added additional mandatory courses for each student on the benefits of working and living under Mega-Corp. Thank you."

The button sat patiently on the armrest of the auditorium chair, ready to be pressed.

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With the button pressed, the ground begins shaking. You watch as the world around you begin to crumble, the sky turning a vibrant red as black clouds start to cover the sun. The screams of people nearby reach your ears as you struggle to stay alive with the apocalypse fast approaching. The Man appears next to you, "So I see that you decided that the world needed to be destroyed. Hopefully, you won't regret your decision." The toxic fumes of burning flesh sear your nose and your eyes water. It was never said that you wouldn't die as well when the button was pressed.