

Project Submission: The Sanctuary of Whispering Sands

1. Overall Design Philosophy & Intent

My primary goal for this project was to transform the default Stylized Egypt level from a purely architectural showcase into a living, purposeful template, ready for the diverse gameplay scenarios of Course 8. My theme is "**Sanctuary of Whispering Sands**"—a once-abandoned temple complex that has been reclaimed and turned into a bustling, self-sufficient desert outpost.

The core design philosophy was to create a clear dichotomy between two main zones:

- **The Inner Sanctuary (The Town):** A safe, communal hub built within the temple's main courtyard. This area is focused on story, crafting, and player rest.
- **The Outer Reaches (The Wilds):** The surrounding desert and canyons, designed to be a space for adventure, combat, and resource gathering.

This two-zone approach ensures the template is versatile enough to serve as a foundation for all six upcoming game modes.

2. Level Layout & Player Flow

Significant changes were made to the level's layout to guide the player and create distinct gameplay areas:

- **New Main Entrance:** I blocked one of the original, large entrances with a convincing rockslide (using assets from the Lowpoly Handpainted Environment pack), creating a more defensible feel. The main player entrance is now a smaller, more deliberate gate fortified with wooden structures from the FANTASTIC Village Pack.
- **The Central Hub - The Bakery:** My main focus was creating "**The Sandstone Hearth Bakery**" as the town's centerpiece. It is positioned directly across from the new main entrance, acting as an immediate, welcoming point of interest.
- **Verticality for Platforming:** In the desert area, I used large rock meshes to create a series of spires and ledges that lead up to the higher temple areas, creating a clear path for a future platforming game mode.
- **Defined Zones:** The town area is clearly delineated by walls and gates. A specific "back gate" leads out into the desert, signaling to the player that they are entering a more dangerous or untamed zone.

The intended player flow is to start in the relative safety of the town, centered around the bakery, and then venture out into the Outer Reaches to complete quests or gather resources before returning.

3. Implementation of Key Features

- **3D Models:** The level is populated with a rich variety of assets. The town's market stalls, benches, and decorations are primarily from the **FANTASTIC Village Pack**. The bakery interior uses tables, chairs, and sacks from the **Advanced Village Pack**. The surrounding desert landscape and the oasis area are built with assets from the **Lowpoly Handpainted Environment** and **Cropout** sample packs. Placeholder NPCs from the course files are placed in key locations: a baker at the counter, a blacksmith near a forge, and a quest giver near a newly created central fountain.
- **VFX (Visual Effects):** To bring the world to life, I've implemented several Niagara systems.
 - The bakery's oven emits a NS_Fire effect with subtle, heat-haze particles.
 - The central fountain uses a combination of NE_Fountain and NE_BlowingParticles (re-colored to look like water spray).
 - In the desert oasis, NE_HangingParticulates are used to simulate pollen or magical energy, making the area feel special.
- **SFX & Audio Design:** The level features a dynamic audio landscape.
 - **Music:** The dynamic music system from the course is implemented. The town area plays a calm, ambient track (Starter_Background_Cue), while entering the desert zone triggers a more mysterious and tense track.

- **SFX:** Diegetic sound is crucial. I've placed the Fire_Cue sound at the bakery oven and the blacksmith's forge. The fountain has a looping water sound cue. My character's footsteps use the randomized sound system, which adds a layer of polish while moving through the different areas.

4. Future Game Mode Considerations

This template was designed with the six game modes in mind:

- **Story & Crafting:** The bakery and surrounding town serve as the main hub for quests, NPC interaction, and crafting stations. The desert oasis is a primary resource node.
- **Action Combat:** The area just outside the back gate is designed as a small combat arena, leading to a larger, more open "boss" area near the main temple.
- **Stealth Survival:** The canyons I created in the Outer Reaches are filled with large rocks and deep shadows, providing perfect cover for a stealth-based game loop.
- **Platformer:** The rock spires and ledges provide a clear and challenging path for a platforming experience.
- **Capture the Flag:** The main town gate and the far-end temple entrance can serve as the two flag bases, with the central courtyard and desert paths acting as the contested territory.

By creating this versatile template, I have established a strong and flexible foundation that can be easily duplicated and adapted for the specific needs of each game mode in the final capstone project.