Reflection Postmortem for Enter The Dungeon

I believe it is safe to say that when this class began, not everyone was up to the challenge of completing a semester-long multimedia project. Being a game design major, it all felt like the same routine. However, over the past three years I have worked as a game developer, I often found myself beginning to loathe my work—I was not having fun anymore. I attribute this primarily to my workshop project that I work on with ten other students in the game design program. While initially I may have felt happy and excited to make something with a bunch of friends, it gradually and efficiently turned into a nightmare of arguments, technical fiascos, and poor planning. Somehow still, we managed to launch the game and it felt great to be able to do so, but I began to think about whether this was really the right thing for me. Unfortunately, I had been shanghaied into a fairly focused and reserved programming role, which I was not incredibly interested in doing since the project’s inception, so I was not as able to explore different avenues of focus like art, sound, or even design (even though the whole team took part in shaping the final vision of the game). The needs of the team come before the needs of the individual on a large group project like that, but I knew we did not have the resources to finish without another programmer otherwise.

I think this is why I decided to make my multimedia project what it is. I wanted to try something different, but not too extravagantly out of my comfort zone that I had no clue what I was doing. I wanted to have the opportunity to make a game that I myself could develop, manage, and create from start to finish. I wanted to be able to create a game involved and focused on something I personally have a lot of passion for (that being text adventures), and I wanted to be able to challenge myself ideologically. That is, I wanted to try and use this project as a means for me to ask myself the question, ‘is this something I *still* really like doing’? Every project I have worked on so far has been a team project of some sort, and while I have loved working with the people I have come to meet, I saw this project as an opportunity to challenge myself to make a completed demo for a game where I could only depend on my skills and determination alone—something I cannot test with my other projects. I decided to focus mainly on the Unity platform because it is what I was most familiar with, and also because it is the same platform I use in all my other projects, thus it will allow for a good comparison of experiences.

That being said, I initially found this project to primarily have a deeper meaning for myself rather than a specific outside audience. This would be a bit of a soul-searching project where I would be making something not necessarily for others but for my own assurance of whether or not I had confidence in my own abilities. I would be lying if I said I still was not completely one-hundred percent on that, even at the end of this semester, but I can definitely say I do feel like I have done something good and productive for myself over the last sixteen weeks. Yet, as I thought about my initial goals some more, I feel like my project inevitably had multiple target audiences and meanings. In the context of a consumer, as I wrote in my proposal, my game would specifically target casual players, particularly those who enjoy indie games, quirky visuals, and classic text adventures. In the context of a student or enthusiast, I can see my project providing some sort of guide for aspiring creators wanting to make their first game, but either not knowing how or not thinking they can. Regardless of which group has the focus, I feel most sincerely that this game was created with my self-confidence as its target audience, and I believe the project has somewhat hit its mark.

Focusing on the process itself, my project had plenty of pitfalls and blockades where I was frequently confused and fed up. On the positive side, I was able to overcome many of these problems (usually pertaining to debugging scripts, adding additional functionality, setting up objects in the inspector, designing puzzles, etc.) a lot faster and better than I had initially given myself credit for. One such example is debugging the room mapping for puzzle 2, which took an impressively long ten hours to fix, but provided a lot of insight on how to organize my file directories. On the negative side, however, there were still plenty of problems I was not able to figure out, and inevitably had to give up on which often caused a bit of personal disappointment (typewriting effects, time management, etc). An important con of this project is the sole fact that I did not make it completely from scratch, but rather followed an official Unity tutorial for the bulk of the framework. While I have no problem with referencing tutorials, there is something to be said for someone who has the skill and willpower to make something completely from scratch. It serves as a reminder that I do indeed have limitations to what I am capable of doing on my own, but then again, everyone does, and I think my project did a very good job of helping me see the extent of those limitations at my current state.

Regarding the final product, I can safely say I am quite happy with it. While I did not finish my initially planned three puzzle sections (cut down to 2), the two that I did make received relatively good feedback and created an interest in players to want to see more. It also proved to myself that I can develop a game on my own without completely despising it. As with all game projects, however, there are always going to be things you wish you had done differently or things that you hate (such as making the sprites larger or not having enough time to re-write parts of the dialogue that are not as strong). Regardless of my qualms, I think I am most proud of how my documentation turned out. Of all the projects I have worked on, between workshop, internships and the lot, I feel that this is the best document organization I have done so far, enough to where I reformatted my workshop project documentation in a similar way. I feel like I actually had fun writing down all the steps and the development process and organizing everything neatly in markdown (which I had not known how to use before starting this project).

Overall, considering the final deliverable, the reason for starting, the Covid-19 disaster and the fact that it is my final semester at Indiana University, I feel like I was able to go out with somewhat of a bang. Lots of personal baggage was loaded into this project and judging by the outcome, I can safely say that, to me, it was a success. Questioning your values or your career path is a difficult thing to do, but I believe it is something that had to be done. It is easy to loathe your work if you are not able to turn it into something fun or something that proves ‘yes, you *can* do it’. Over the two other project options I had considered for myself, I am satisfied that I chose the one that I did.