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Mid-Mortem Paper  
11/15/17

Capstone Mid-Mortem

My capstone project, *Of a feather,* I’m producing with the rest of my team, the Squisheebees. The project pursues a story of one girl and focuses on her friendship with her best friend as mental illness attacks them both and they grow up. It is a coming of age story twined with bipolar disorder and borderline personality disorder. The game alternates between three-dimensional basement scenes where the player can walk around and explore the girls’ items where they are having their sleepovers. These scenes progress over time throughout the game and the items shift after mini-game. Each of the four, two-dimensional mini-games are on notebook paper to symbolize the writing the friends do to keep themselves in their own little universe and the mechanics are rhythm based, with some games forcing a win state that looks like a fail state in order to push the story.

In this first quarter, I found that a lot of things went right. This story is based on a true story. My story. Do to this, I had no issue figuring out the game’s layout. This is due to the game being based on my life. Once I knew exactly which story I was trying to get across, the rest flowed quite easily to me.

I was proud of how I was able to communicate to my team the emotional importance behind how this close of a relationship can pull at your heart. To me, losing my best friend for the short time I had hurt more than any break up has so far. So, either I haven’t properly had my heart ripped out yet or the universe tried when circumstances tried to pull my friend away. That can be hard to convey properly in a group that you have to get to aid you in putting those feelings into an artistic expression. Luckily, no one in my group is dismissive. Everyone listens and if they are apprehensive about something I am saying, it is immediately debated.

I am very excited that we are actually using versioning software! Github I’ve used before with unity projects and it’s great and…. Sorry I just have a small bit of loathing for perforce. Being able to merge files when you are away from your group is wonderful and being able (in theory) to have more than one person in file at once is amazing.

I want to carry the quick speed of iterations we had on the design into the pushes for alpha, beta and final builds. I think each person on this was working on it to the point that by the time we actually met sometimes we were burnt out. Half of our meetings, we discussed the game and the other half was whatever off ramp we got off on. The burn out probably isn’t the best. However, the fact that everyone was constantly working to the point of waiting for more direction might be. It is the energy and inspiration that we will need to get through the next quarter.

What went wrong? Well, I left for a week for a family reunion not long into the quarter. This reunion was out of state and my internet was not reliable. I ended up not communicating and leaving my group without a main vision holder for a whole week not long after we started. Now, this didn’t turn out poorly. In this time, some of the technical challenges, such as being able to switch between rooms were figured out well. However, when a group is trying to make major design decisions, a vision holder must be present.

I also feel as if for those first few weeks I was having a hard time allowing the project to progress in any way that wasn’t a hundred percent true to my memory. It is an issue I have with myself where I love for things to be as precise as possible in particular instances, stories being one of them. I love researching and being able to incorporate that research into whatever world I am building. This made it difficult to give up a degree of creative control with this project just due to the fact that I was talking about a personal life experience. The friendship in this game is my best friend, my roommate, my landlord. She’s been my friend for so long we forget to count and at last check it was twelve years. We’re both twenty-four.

How much of my experience could I even communicate to my team to get them to understand? That was another pitfall I fell into. In hindsight, I should have given all of them research on bipolar disorder II and borderline personality disorder before my family reunion so while I was gone, they could read up on it. However, I didn’t do that. There is constantly a part of my own anxiety (thank you bipolar) that is asking ‘are they getting it?’ and ‘do they think you are faking?’. Really it is something more for my therapist than this paper.

Another thing that is probably more for my therapist than this paper is that I need a better work – school – life – sleep balance. I messed all of this up in the past 6 months, which was when I had originally wanted to finish working on my last game and start working on *Of a Feather*. I ended up moving out of my mother’s home, moving in with my friend, fighting with said mother and suddenly having to pay rent and new bills like my phone and medical insurance. School starts and the financial strain gets worse with the commuter expenses and the family reunion trip. However it’s not like those were optional; I have to get to school and I would have regretting not going to that reunion for the rest of my life. All of this leads to more importance in my life being placed on working, not on my school work. There are days where I get home from class, switch outfits and bags & go to work. I dread the days when I have to come back from that and do homework. That will probably start next quarter; I don’t know how I’ve avoided it so far. With all of this, I still have to have a life and sleep. Those are both super important to self-care and sleep is mandatory just from a medical standpoint for me due to it being a side effect of the medication I take at night for my bipolar. This entire balance is something that needs to be improved on for not just my own sanity but for me to be effective at development. Currently I’m burning the candle at both ends and there is no end to the wick in sight.

Finally, the game needs more playtesting in quicker iterations. This game having four mini-games can be done in an assembly line fashion. I wouldn’t suggest having the entire development team split up and having everyone work on one. I would suggest though that we get all four prototyping then we can test and iterate all of them independently of each other so that a mini-game that needs more iterations isn’t held back by one that needs less.

So, all and all, this first quarter myself and the other Squisheebee’s got a lot done. We have half of the mini-games prototyped. We have the entire design of the game finalized. The three-dimensional basement spaces are laid out and the main furniture is built. I’m actually excited that over break I will be meeting with Stephanie to pretty much play Sims and finalize the level designs of those areas. Most of the second quarter for me should be spent on dialogue, level design and playtesting if I am to be effective on this team. I would like to help out with code slightly as it pertains to any changes I need to make during testing, but I really don’t want to mess with Garrah’s system. It should work between all four mini-games and that should save us all a ton of time.

I hope I didn’t just jinx us.

The paper is over now, Doris. This is just so the file says it is 6 pages long.