Postmortem

This is an Adventure game where the character is an assassin and uses parkour-like climbing to traverse the terrain. It has scenic views with loot hidden throughout. While in a third person perspective you play as this assassin uncovering secret locations and finding the underlying story. This project was done with a small team of four who strive to bring beauty to our levels. While these four people are across the world, with a budget of little to none, they still managed to make a great series of levels that can really show our individual character. I was one of the four.

What went right:

- Contribution – As stated previously, this small team of four were able to come together and work hard against the odds of time, distance, and all-around values. We all played our part and made contributions to the main goal of creating a coherent level design with an interlocking theme. The team was able to hold up to their responsibilities and as a designer within that team, I am highly grateful. I learned that though there may be distance, we can still come together and make something great.

- Landscaping – As a designer on this level, I learned a lot about myself and the tools I work with. I have made progress with simple things like the Landscape and Foliage tool within Unreal Engine 5. The abilities and ideas became more apparent to me as I used those tools and found myself impressed with what I could create. Since the ability to utilize more tools for my repertoire, I have become a stronger level designer and smarter Game Designer all around. In the future I will be able to create more beautiful landscapes with much more impressive plant-life in the games/levels I create.

- Asset sourcing – I had used over 2,300 assets across the entire level. Within those assets I had sourced most of them from Epic Games itself. With no funding at all I was able to create proper replacements for my blockmesh and throughout the level. If no assets were available, I made my own using textures and materials still from the Epic Games store. To further explain that even if those materials and textures were not available, I would have to make my own using the already provided material instances. This gave me insight into what can be done with little to no funding.

- Environment – One of the most important things to me as a designer that went completely right for me was the environment that was created. While working with the team and new tools, we created a coherent level and story with all the same assets. This was detrimental as we needed to make sure the level had a coherent design. I was highly impressed with the way my level turned out as it is now flourishing with life all due to simple paint tools and team cohesion. The tropical theme is now one throughout the level and makes for a unified design.

- Golden Route – While transitioning from blockmesh I was concerned for the golden route. I wanted to keep the level route as close to the same as possible when converting assets from blockmesh. Due to the tools used there were some changes that had to be made to the route. The changes were subtle and inadvertently made the level more appealing. This "new" route had made some parts more fun for the player and allowed for more options of exploration. This also allowed for more chest locations giving the player more loot to obtain.

What went wrong:

- Decisions – Yes, as a team we did a wonderful job coming together to make this level a reality. However, that does not mean we did not bump heads a few times. As we worked on our level's individual parts, there were a few instances where some of us had reached just a little too far out of their zones, me included. This created subtle tension within the group but that is to be expected within a small team like ours. With that, some of the connections between the levels may have an asset out of place, but that won't be noticed by the player. A team is not perfect as we are all individuals with a shared vision but can still act as our own self.

- Asset migration – I came into this project with excited eyes as I was ready to give my blockmesh some flare and make it something I have seen in my head since its conception. To do this I had downloaded assets from reputable sources and started putting my level together. Once the migration of assets to my level completed and I started dragging in assets I noticed that some assets didn't have textures that came with them, or so I thought. Once realizing those same textures were not actually available to use on other meshes, I knew something wasn't right. I reached out to my team to find out who brought those assets into the Source Control. Turns out the assets were brought over but were not fully selected to bring in, thus giving us the mesh with no texture.

- Restricted Assets – Due too little to no funding for the level creation, we as a team found it quite difficult to collect assets that would work together and not break the bank. The total costs of creating the level were $0 and that hindered our creativity. Though we were able to persevere, we still needed specific assets to make the main portions of the buildings work. Due to this lack of options within our sources like Epic Games, we found that creating Meshes and texturing them with previously downloaded textures should give us what we envisioned. Some level assets and design elements are noticeably different in quality, which can pull the player from their immersion.

- Learning curve – While learning new tools, I found that my time for other parts of the level was running fast. I needed to do specific parts of the level before others but required the new tools to complete. This process of learning whilst under pressure of a time crunch made for a lack of time on other parts of the level that followed. After the process ended and I had a workflow, I was then able to speed up through the project and almost did not catch up to where I should have been by the deadlines. This has taught me to research prior to and learn before I take on a project this large in such a short time.
- Availability – In the weeks of creating this level, I learned about my team's personal life, and my own abilities. This made a difference as we all worked full-time jobs and some even had families to tend to. The Team could only show up for meetings so often and I was only available at night due to my Full-time job. This created gaps in workflow amongst the members and myself as we could not always have something done on another person's part as they may be full-on busy. This added stress to our time crunch and had all of us up at very late times in the night. This was manageable as the team was good company and we all had the same thing happening to us.

This whole process of creating a blockmesh from reference, utilizing assets with no funding, to create a cohesive level, with a team of four people who are scattered across the United States with their own lives was a major change of pace from my daily life. I was impressed with myself for becoming a better designer and teammate. As I was also impressed with my team for being able to work alongside me to create this vision and make it a reality. With new sources of assets and new learnings to dive into I can say I'm ready for the next one and this one's just finished! If I had to do this again, I would indeed change some steps in my process and the way I handle specific situations, but most of my issues were things to be expected in the design process. You are always learning in the Gaming industry, and I am learning fast that this is true, luckily for me I love to learn new things, especially about the things I love.