

Mentor Assessment #1

Mentor: Skyler Jermyn

Profession: Lead Game Designer/Level Designer

Location: Gearbox Software Headquarters

Date: February 3, 2017

Time: 1:00 pm - 1:50 pm

Assessment:

My first visit with my mentor Mr. Jermyn was in my opinion a huge success. We got all of the logistical items out of the way quickly, so we therefore had more time to focus on my ideas for the final product. I had the opportunity to completely revise my product idea into something that is more tangible and able to be created in such a short amount of time that I have until the ISM Final Presentation. Mr. Jermyn loved my enthusiasm and willingness to undertake such a massive and complicated process, but he warned me that game and level design takes far longer than I think. Nonetheless, he can see that I have a plan of how to produce a successful level design.

One of the many good things about having Mr. Jermyn as my mentor is that he started off in the industry as a level designer and still to this day is quite involved in the process of creating levels. He can therefore offer me valuable advice as well as make sure that I do not make any dire mistakes. It is inevitable, however, that I will make many mistakes, but that is all part of the learning process. I have also learned that I should design my level in Unreal Game Engine, as it requires little to no programming knowledge, which is good for someone like me who hasn't taken a computer science class in their life. Mr. Jermyn demonstrated how to build a simple interior of a building, which gave me hope in that I can complete this product.

I also gained valuable level design advice from him. First, one needs to have a basic concept in their minds of how they want the level to be laid out as. They also must be aware that the level needs to have a central theme or idea that is trying to convey to the player, otherwise, it is just randomness and therefore not as entertaining to the player. I need to plan out and settle on how the projected villain's lair will look like and what the appearance will suggest about that specific villain. This will involve possibly compiling all of my ideas onto one sheet, as well as drawing out my ideas. Mr. Jermyn suggested I take real life photographs of places and receive inspiration from those. That way I can compare my results from what I have actually made to what I am trying to represent. How I can represent the layout of my game is by a block out, which is a way of laying out visually how one wants their level to be. I had the privilege to see some examples of block outs while I was at Gearbox Software, and I will say that while they were somewhat rough, I could see quite clearly what the designers had in mind.

I will therefore get started on reflecting how I want my level to be designed, and tell my results and potential ideas to Mr. Jermyn to get a professional opinion on the matter. I am very excited to see how our next mentor visit is going to be like, so I am preparing myself now for the long journey ahead.

Mentor Assessment #2

Mentor: Skyler Jermyn

Profession: Lead Game Designer/Level Designer

Location: Gearbox Software Headquarters

Date: February 10, 2017

Time: 1:00 pm - 1:50 pm

Assessment:

This meeting went fairly well as I asked him about the industry as well as the specifics of how he goes about designing a game. I also attempted to clear up what specifically I am looking forward to regarding my product and what I intend it to include within my actual product. I have discovered I can go two ways with my product, which is to either focus more on gameplay in the level or actual level design to make it look professional and clean. Mr. Jermyn states it is very fun and a great experience to create the gameplay for a game, especially in a somewhat simplified game engine such as Unreal Game Engine 4, which he commonly uses. He also cleared up some misconceptions I had in my head about designing a game, so that was also quite valuable information he offered.

The first things I wanted to know were some things he wished he would've known early on in the game design process. The first thing he said was to get the scale right of his game in respect to the player. He states the best way to achieve this is to place a humanoid object next to all objects to see if they are properly scaled. The reason as to why I asked these questions was because I want to know earlier on the most important and valuable advice so that I can avoid making too costly of mistakes in my final product. I shall take into great consideration the scale, as it is important to make things not appear too large or small to the player who is navigating the level and trying to have a fun and engaging experience. Another thing he said was to always be receptive of feedback from anyone even if it is

mostly negative. I know this very well, as I have been taught one of the only ways you truly can become great at your craft is if you receive critique and advice to improve upon the thing you are working. It is therefore very beneficial for me for my progress to be monitored by Mr. Jermyn, as he has expressed interest in seeing how well I am doing and how all is going. The last thing he offered was of course to not overscope your project and make it so that it is impossible to complete within the time frame allowed to finish my project in. This makes me fairly glad that Mr. Jermyn advised early on to adjust my plans to cut back on the amount of things I am producing.

I am excited to see how well scripting and testing out the gameplay capabilities will go. After all, games are about having fun, not a museum. If I get real world experience on something like this, it will benefit me tremendously. Even if it is only on the side and not part of my final product, I still want to give it a shot while I still have such a valuable contact as Mr. Jermyn.

Mentor Assessment #3

Mentor: Skyler Jermyn

Profession: Lead Game Designer/Level Designer

Location: Gearbox Software Headquarters

Date: February 28, 2017

Time: 3:00 pm - 3:50 pm

Assessment:

This meeting made me very excited to continue on my ongoing project of creating a level for a game. My focus as well as my ideas for the level have all shifted to producing an abandoned, small village in the middle of a forest that is close to a mountain range. The setting will be in Russia at night in order to allow more flexibility with mood and lighting changes. I discussed with Mr. Jermyn the differences with Unity game engine and Unreal game engine and I have decided that Unreal is going to be my best option due to a number of reasons. Firstly, it is easier to build a game in Unreal without using any coding language, which is one of the best options I can take since I am neither proficient nor confident with my coding skills. Another reason why I value Unreal over Unity for this project is because of the availability of resources such as meshes, decals, models, and tutorials for Unreal Game Engine.

My meetings have been more of a session where I learn about game development both on an individual scale as well as within a large company such as Gearbox and Epic Games. Mr. Jermyn states that it is a time where he can reminisce over all of his lessons from SMU at The Guildhall and describe them to me in less than an hour. Because of this, I have been able to gain quite important and valuable teachings and advice that I can look back on going forward. From Mr. Jermyn's words of wisdom, I have discovered that most of the learning process with video game development is actually taking part in the

industry and developing games and levels. It does not hurt, however, to become formally educated on the topic in this increasingly competitive world.

I have also learned from this meeting about the value of set up. In video games, this relates to where the player starts out at, why he is there, and what his objective or mission is. With Mr. Jermyn having extensive experience as a mission designer, he described to me how I could best convey to the audience what their main focus should be while keeping it relatively simple to develop since I am crunched for time and resources. Regardless of this, I will somehow effectively demonstrate to the audience that they need to go after the villain who has caused the village to be abandoned to put it to justice. Mr. Jermyn stated that it would be most effective if I used meshes such as letters, signage to describe to the player that the village is abandoned and that there is a monster out loose, and decals, such as blood, slash marks, or drag marks that indicate an obvious scuffle. My available tools to use are limited based on time and knowledge, so I need to make do with what I can.

My objective for the next meeting is to have a complete concept art diagram of the level completed as well as the story the player is going to perceive, not just my story in my head. I need to be both creative and at the same time realistic with this project, so balance is everything.

Mentor Assessment #4

Mentor: Skyler Jermyn

Profession: Lead Game Designer/Level Designer

Location: Gearbox Software Headquarters

Date: March 9, 2017

Time: 1:10 pm - 1:45 pm

Assessment:

This meeting went fairly well between Mr. Jermyn and I, as we mainly discussed our thoughts on the concept art I drew up on the game. I also wrote a story from the player's point of view, which greatly impressed him, so much so that he got a colleague of his to listen to my level pitch. This person's name is Brad Sierzgar and he is another level designer who works with Mr. Jermyn on certain projects. While explaining the level's design and story, both helpfully offered me advice on how to improve the level, but mostly warned me against over scoping, which is something every game designer is guilty of doing some point in their career and continuously over again. This led to a major shift of plans from what I originally intended, which is usually expected in this constantly shifting industry. This empowered me to rethink my original project and make changes to it before I get too deep into the game.

The two main issues I must consider as I design my game is the limited time frame and the resources needed to make the game. With next to no experience designing a game and a slightly tight budget of zero dollars, it seems as though I am limited with what I am able to create. However, that is what video game designers have to wrestle with when making a game, which provides for me a very real experience as I make this game from the ground up. Mr. Sierzgar said that I must consider what resources I have able to use at my disposal, which can be found on the community market on the Epic Games Launcher. I will take a look at what I have to use and if I can get any free assets and models.

The other main interest is actually building the level, which is something I desperately need to get started with. Designing a level in less than two months is a very demanding a heavy task to ask from even an experienced designer, so I am slightly perturbed at how much work seemingly lies ahead. However, despite the heavy workload, I enjoy every minute drawing and creating my game, as I believe I have possibly found my true interest. It allows me to think outside the box and create something that is typically not seen in any school projects.

While I do feel overwhelmed at such a task of learning level design and then building my own level, but I have full confidence that with the help of my mentor, I can successfully model and design this level. It is crunch time and I cannot afford to let the dreaded disease of "senioritis" take its toll on me and my potential level I am going to build. I will set small goals when building this level so that I can build it one step at a time. As the saying goes, you can eat an entire elephant as long as you take it bite by bite. I understand that the level design will take time, which is something I do not really have, so I will have to go overtime and quickly get this level off the ground.

While this meeting was mostly aimed at cutting back my level and may seem discouraging, it actually inspired me to hurriedly begin work on my game. I have already found a good looking tutorial series, so I will begin to learn off of those very soon.