Level Up with a Post-Mortem
(Reflections on Development with an Indie Budget)

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Takeaways

- Discover the **method** of making a post mortem
- Go beyond a productive event and bring the team **together**
- Generate **outcomes** that can be delivered by leadership

Disclaimer

- I am not a producer or product manager
- This is the first post-mortem I've run...
- … and described to peers!

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Who Am I

- Mike James
- Game Designer
- The Creative Assembly 2009-2018
- Brightrock Games 2018-present

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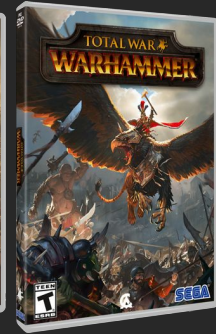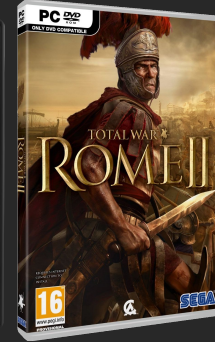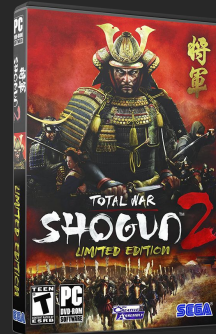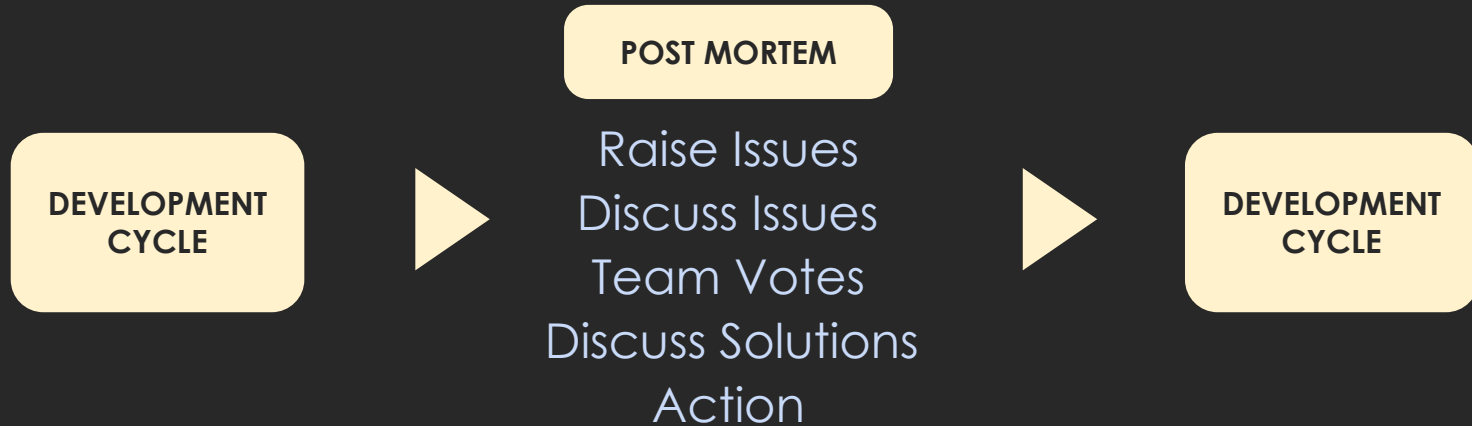
What is a Post-mortem

- 'The examination of a body to determine its death'
- This is unfair, but common vernacular for the games industry
- Other terms you might hear:
  - Retrospective
  - Start-stop-continue
  - Project review
  - Debriefing
  - Also a classic game review...

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What is a Post-mortem

- A reflection on a project and the processes therein
- By the people who worked on it
- With the intention to improve development for future projects

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What is a Post-mortem
How it Works

POST MORTEM

DEVELOPMENT CYCLE ▶ Raise Issues
Discuss Issues
Team Votes
Discuss Solutions
Action ▶ DEVELOPMENT CYCLE

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What is a Post-mortem

What Does This Mean to Me?

- The **team** has a chance to express
  - Opportunity for feedback
  - Chance to learn
  - Bringing the team together
- **Management** has a great resource to effect change
  - Weighted list of team concerns
  - How the team thinks about the project
  - How the team thinks about each other
- **A foundation for the future**

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How do we level up?

Every development has three core components:

- The **Product**
  - How do we make our **product vision a reality**?
- The **Team**
  - How do we create a **development culture** to achieve the product?
- The **Individuals**
  - How do we satisfy the **needs and aspirations** of each team member?

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How do we level up?
Issues and Talking Points

THE PRODUCT

Feature Complete
Low Quality

Met Deadlines
Heavily Scoped

Great Reception
Few Players

Good Budget
Didn't Break Even

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How do we level up?
Issues and Talking Points

THE TEAM

Experienced
Junior

Hard working
Overworked

Broad Skills
Focused Experts

Communicative
Reserved

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How do we level up?
Issues and Talking Points
INDIVIDUALS

Right to Contribute

'I know I'm just a tester, but I never get a chance to give real feedback.'

Legacy Issues

'I've tried to fix this last project, and on this one, but is still an issue. I don't think it'll ever be fixed!'

Silent Suffering

'To be fair, I'm happy to just collect my paycheck - it's easier than fighting to fix my concerns.'

Confidence

'Whenever we have meetings, people always either argue or one person just talks for the whole time.'

Sharing

'I heard the other day that the other team was using a practice that would save us weeks, but they never thought to tell anyone.'

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Tools for Leveling Up

- Finding a Post-Mortem template must be simple?
- No.
  - Free resources?
  - Amount of theory?
  - Examples?
  - If so, was it any good?
- So what do I need?
  - A **method** of creating development insights
  - Bring the team **together** and talk through their thoughts
  - **Collaborate** on deciding the most important points
  - Create **outcomes** that can be easy to implement

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Tools for Leveling Up
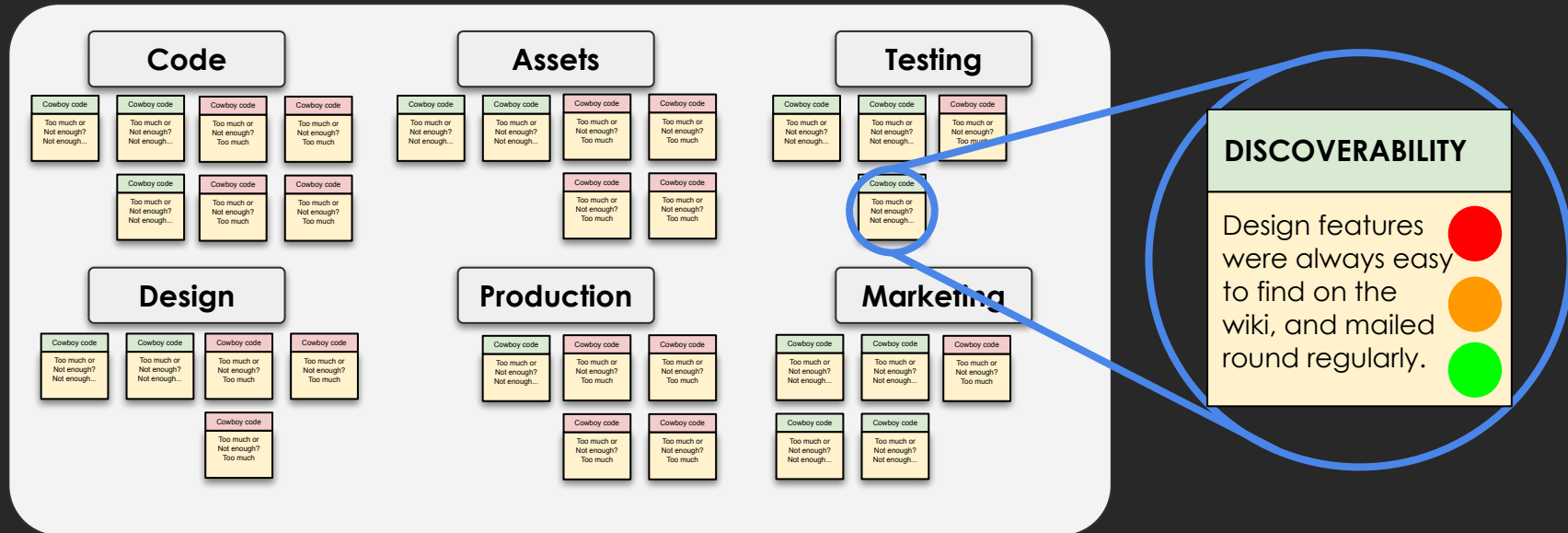
Things You'll Need

- A way of creating talking points
- Coloured stickers or markers
- Whiteboard
- Time put aside for the event
- The team!
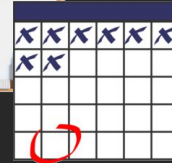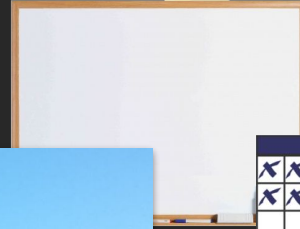
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Method for Leveling Up
Creating Structure

TALKING POINTS
Team Submissions
Anonymity
Hygiene
Examples

Pathfinding

Characters moving through the level worked well and there was little bumping into each other.

VFX

When animating in a level, the accompanying character VFX was good.

Animation

I really like the character animation for the main protagonist. The general character vfx was ok. Walking around, characters seemed to move past each other nicely.

Animation

Character animation went really well, especially the protagonist.

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Method for Leveling Up
Creating Structure

TALKING POINTS
Team Submissions
Anonymity
Hygiene
Examples

Design Process
_____

It would be great to have more workshops on design and to make decision making better documented and more transparent.

Design is Really Crap
_____

I didn't agree with a bunch of ideas Mike had, but we had to work on them anyway. I think the leads should change the design if there are better ideas out there.

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Method for Leveling Up
Creating Structure

TALKING POINTS
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Anonymity
Hygiene
Examples

Found it really hard to test some of the things the discord guys sent over.

So there were some bugs from the discord group that came through ok, kind of balance type bugs relating to low level mechanics and characters, but there were some really weird behaviour ones that they struggled to describe - i ended up having to chat with them over two days then reproducing it from scratch anyway. It would be way much better to have a repository on the discord page to submit files with it, like saves movies and pictures. In fact, it'd be much better if they could just drop files onto the page like in google mail or something. This would save me hours and days of mucking around.

Community Feedback

It would be great to include adding files to comments to make testing them easier.

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Method for Leveling Up
Creating Structure

TALKING POINTS	**VOTING**	**DISCUSSION**
Team Submissions	Encourage Prep	Idea Meritocracy
Anonymity	Tactile or Digital	Q & A
Hygiene	Pro / Con	Top 10 Issues
Examples	Limited Votes	Solution Oriented

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Day for Leveling Up
Bringing the Team Together

POSITIVE	FACILITATE	FUN
No Blame	Unbiased	Time Together
Share the Good	Equal Opportunities	Make an Event
Understand the Bad	Don't Rush	Keep it Light

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Day for Leveling Up
Bringing the Team Together

POSITIVE   **FACILITATE**   **FUN**

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In Sum...

- **Method**
  - Create a structure that offers equality to all team members
  - Give everyone the tools to express themselves
- **Together**
  - Promote an environment of learning and sharing
  - Make an event that encourages communication
- **Outcomes**
  - Give leadership the opportunity to effect change
  - Give everyone a greater insight into development

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Level Up with a Post-Mortem
With Mike James

**LINK TO PRESENTATION
(insert here)**

**LINK TO FREE POST MORTEM TEMPLATE
(insert here)**

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