Post-Mortem: Portal 2.5

What is this?

> *post·mor·tem (pst-môrtm)*
>
> *noun. Definition 2: Informal analysis or review of a finished event.*

As part of my progress and development as an artist, I'm committed to completing my projects - part of that is creating post-mortems for games I make on my own. Post-mortems are very candid documents about game details, so if you don't want a game's experience spoiled, reading these before you play the game might not be in your best interest.

Game Summary

Portal 2.5 is a fangame/interactive fanfic for the Portal game series. The game takes place where Portal 2 ended, and explores story theories about the main characters' backstories. You play as Chell and explore areas, completing puzzles to progress.

What went right

Finishing: As most artists and writers know, there is a big difference between *thinking about* a project and *completing* a project. Throughout the making of this game, I worried whether or not I would have to finish making it. I'm glad I was able to complete it; I was able to prove to myself that I have enough determination to not give up on a long project.

Writing Personalities: Writing the dialogue was one of the most fun things to do in production.

Fans:

What could have been better

1. Lack of interactivity: As you can tell from my game summary, this project isn't sure whether to be a game or an interactive piece of fanfiction. It tries to be both, but really ends up being neither. People who want it to be a game will be disappointed by the lack of interactivity (for example: The player has the choice to forgive or refuse to forgive Wheatley. This does not change the ending in any way), and people who want a good story will need to go through obstacles and puzzles before being rewarded with the next plot point. I think players who go in expecting an interactive fanfic will be more entertained than players who go in expecting a game.

   I got one of the most useful and helpful criticisms from LuigiBlood:

*"I'm probably not the only one who didn't really like it. […] Though, I still played it to the end, and I was bored from start to end. I love Portal, but this felt really wrong to me. It's possible to make a 2D Portal game[…] Sorry to say, but the idea is poorly done here.[…] Even if it's meant to be taken as a piece of fan fiction, **the story is not what makes the game as a whole. You really need to put gameplay**."* [1] (Bolding is by me)

Next time I'll add more interactivity and gameplay for players.

2. <u>Time it took:</u> It took about a year to complete this project (albeit, I worked on it on and off in my free time, along with other projects as well). One year for a half-hour game seems like much too long a wait for players, so making my next game in less time will be a new goal (which I will, hopefully, be able to fulfill since I'm now more familiar with RPG Maker VX).

3. <u>Learning Curb:</u> The majority of the time was spend on writing and re-writing codes for cutscenes. Since it was my first time using RPG Maker VX, I tried a lot of experimenting on what would happen if I check marked a particular box in the editor panel, and figuring out the differences between autoruns, parallaxes, and action buttons, and so on. If it wasn't for a guidebook I was able to come across (See: What I Learned; below).

4. <u>Errors:</u> Despite play testing the game before publishing it, and few players noted bugs that I quickly had to fix. Some of these errors only occurred in some games. I will beta-test games more thoroughly next time I make a game.

5. <u>Directing people to the Game:</u> I posted links to the game on deviantART groups, my deviantART account, and my Tumblr blog. This did attract a burst of attention (on Tumblr particularly), but I still felt that I couldn't reach a lot of Portal fans. Traffic slowed down to virtually zero hits a day within about two weeks.

<u>What I Learned</u>

1. <u>How to Use RPG Maker:</u> I highly recommend reading *RPG Maker for Teens* by Michael Duggan for anyone learning to use RPG Maker VX (or even RPG Maker XP or Ace). It gave me so many useful tips and instructions on how to make a game using VX.

2. <u>Learning and developing a production pipeline:</u> There's the more obvious tips that prudence demands, such as "Start with writing the script and outline", and then there's more obscure tips like "Complete the pixel art before programing the sprite events. Otherwise you'll have to playtest every event a second time after adding the pixel art,"

and "Don't add the music until you are near finishing the game. Otherwise, you're going to get sick of the music from play testing events over and over".

3. <u>How to make pixel art:</u> As most of my watchers may know, I like to draw lineart using a pencil/pen on paper, and then scanning it into a computer to colour/shade it (the general alternative would be to draw the lineart directly onto a computer using a tablet). So making the game's pixel art (which needed to be drawn on the computer) was a challenge. I found a useful trick to help speed up the process: Take a piece of lined paper, draw vertical lines across it to create a grid, and then draw sketches of the sprites/tiles you need into each square. The result is a reference you can look at as you are drawing on the computer.
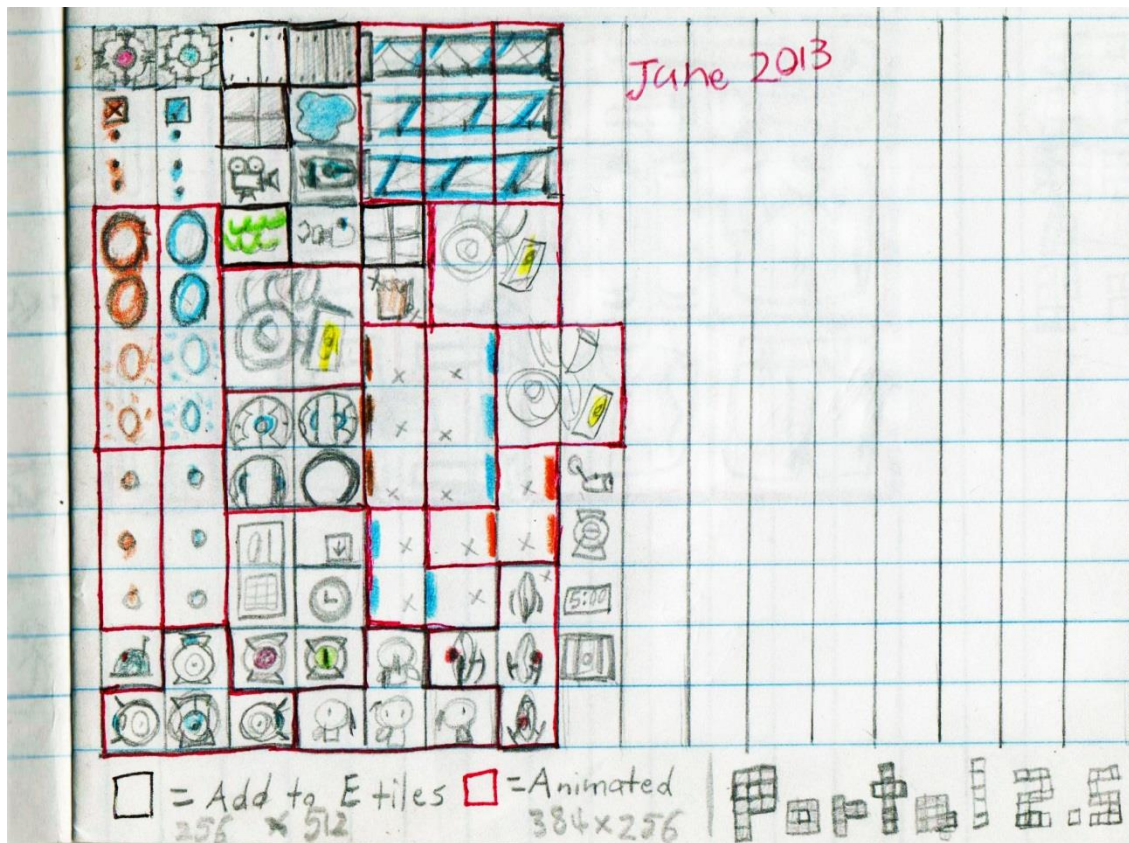
(Above: My concept/reference sketches for the game's pixel sprites and tiles)

4. <u>Writing a dialogue script for a game:</u> The game is very linear, so writing alternative dialogue (for the player's different choices) was a lot easier to organize than, let's say, the dialogue choices for a visual novel with multiple endings. I also found that writing in the coding (for RPG Maker VX) was easier to organize if I just wrote it all in the script,

rather than adding in the coding later on in the game maker. Organizing the dialogue into the game's different maps was also helpful.
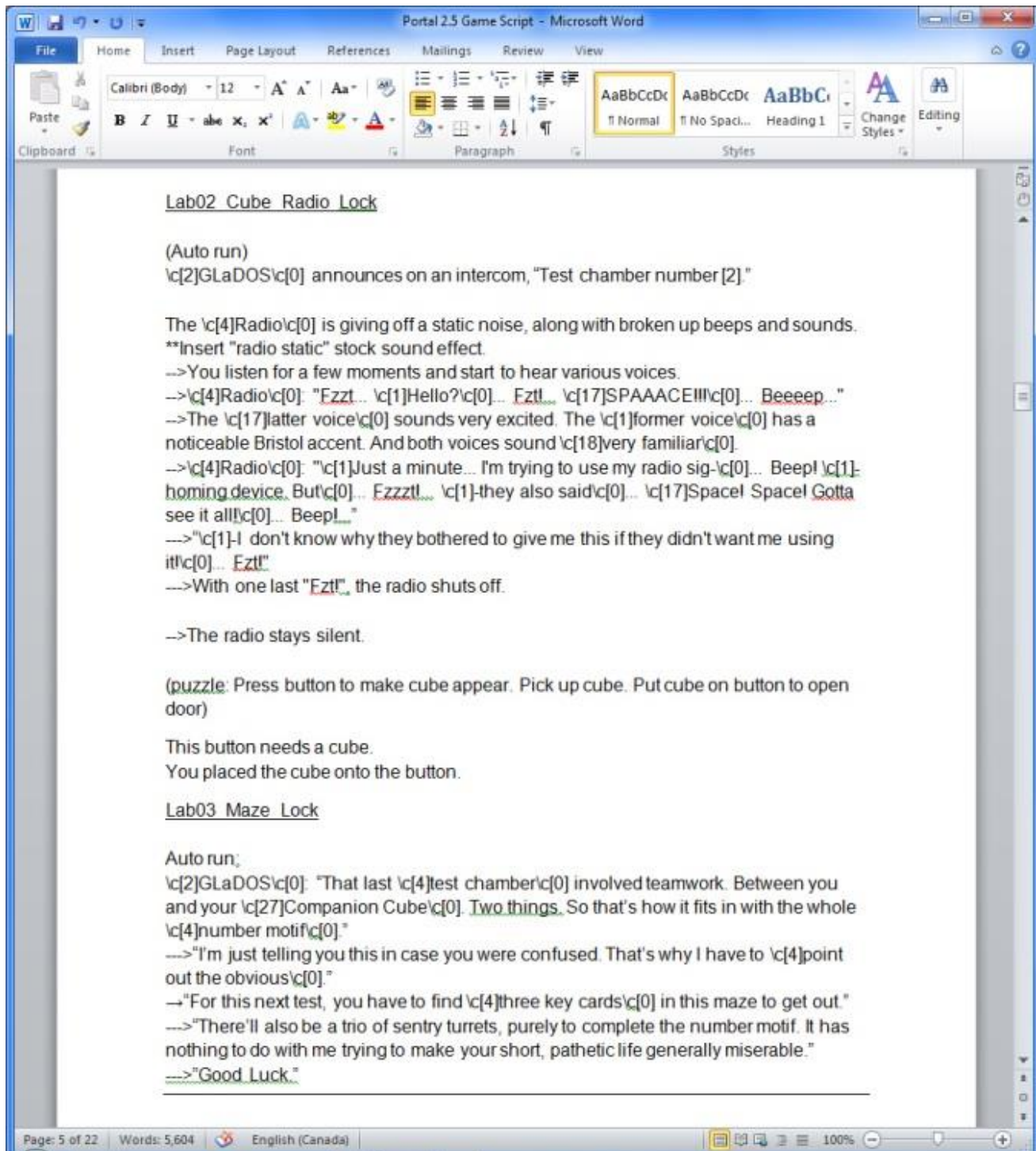
(Above: A page of the game's script. 22 pages in total.)

5. Add more interactivity next time I make a game: (See: What could have been better; above)

Conclusion

Portal 2.5 is my first solo game. It has its flaws, but I learned a lot from making it. This knowledge will be invaluable for future games.

Notes:

[1] LuigiBlood. Web. deviantART, Comments section. 26 July 2013. <http://katy133.deviantart.com/art/Fangame-Portal-2-5-From-the-Wheat-Field-386427957>.