Arcane Ascent

Level Design Document

Level Design Blockout Project

1. General Project Info

1.1. One Pager

Personal Solo Project - Level Blockout
Single player
Genre: 3D isometric platformer, Metroidvania, single player
Themes: Dark Fantasy, grimdark, Medieval fantasy, Arcane mysteries

Elevator Pitch
In this 3D isometric Metroidvania the player visits a giant magical castle to learn arcane spells and mysteries and defeat a strange affliction that troubles their realm.

Description
In this Metroidvania like fantasy adventure our protagonist - a little fellow of extraordinary innate magical abilities - visits a long abandoned Castle, that was once a center point of magical studies and long forgotten knowledge. The purpose of this visit is to find a cure for its troubling curse and to find the answers about its magical origin. The Castle baffles with its enormous size and countless halls seeping with ancient secrets and arcane mysteries. Its infinite chambers hide a vast array of enemies, magical items and traps that will challenge any visitor.
Now our little protagonist - armed only with its infinite determination and will, sets on an adventure to visit the castle.

Inspirations
- Tunic
- Deaths Door
- Soulsborne games

1.2. Game Design

Core Game Pillars
Exploration - Platforming - Combat - RPG, Crafting

Experience goals
- exciting platforming and 3D traversal
- mysterious and gritty grimdark atmosphere

Core Loop
Platforming > exploration > combat > loot collecting > character customization > crafting >

1.3. Game Features

Player Mechanics
- Walk
- Jump
- Sprint
- Basic Attack

NPCs - Enemies
- Ghost, Slime - basic enemy type, melee
- Skeleton - basic enemy type, melee
- Rat - swarm enemy type

Items
- collectible Mana Essences
- Keys for opening parts of the level

Environment Mechanics
- Locked doors - key items
- Moving Platforms
- Fall Death

2. Level Overview

2.1. General

Level Concept
- intro tutorial level
- 10-20 min
- 2-3 level areas
- teach the player basic mechanics and skills
Player arrives at the gates of the Castle in which the whole game takes place and has to navigate its ruined outer walls to find the way inside.

Objective-Challenge-Reward
O - get inside the Castle
C - environmental hazards, enemy NPCs
R - entering the castle starts the game

Tech
- Unreal Engine 5 - Cubegrid Tool
- Top Down game template

2.2. Setting

Level Narrative
The player arrives at the end of the Dark Forest, threading their first steps upon the Great Bridge. The Bridge is the only connection and entrance to the castle which stands atop a giant cliff, a cliff so large and high that it could almost be called a mountain on its own. Going over the Bridge we notice how ruined and dilapidated the whole place is. Even the Castles Portcullis at the end of the bridge is lowered and covered in debris. The player character has to navigate around the wall ramparts and find another way inside.

Mood & Atmosphere
- gritty, dark fantasy
- crumbling, abandoned medieval castle with ancient alchemical and primitive technological contraptions, vegetation and foliage reclaiming parts of the castle

Scale & Architectural Style
- medium sized level
- architectural style - mostly early medieval and fortification architecture with gothic details
- as the player progresses more deeply inside the castle, the architecture and the ornamentation of the structure becomes more and more rich a complicated

2.3. Moodboard

2.4. Structure

Landmarks
- the great entry bridge
- the gates
- inner courtyard statue
- grand staircase

Puzzles
- open the castle gates which lead to the staircase and the rest of the game
- have to activate floor pressure plates around the entry courtyard - exploration

Sequences
- intro text, context and lore
- Castle Door opening
- staircase exit ending

Level Description
This is the beginning of the game and the first level in the game.

The player starts at the beginning of a long stone bridge, which extends over a large chasm. Behind the player, a barricade of bushes and forest overgrowth blocks the return, the only way is forward. The bridge is littered with stone rubble and statue debris. This section of the level is used to introduce the player to the movement mechanics and the read notes mechanic.

At the end of the bridge the player reaches the castle gates. The gates are closed, either with the dropped portcullis or a fully wooden blocked doors (but still looking shabby and abandoned) so the player has to find a way around it. This section teaches the player the jump mechanic and the player is off to locate a way in by jumping around the rubble and debris that is stacked from the crumbling walls.

Once inside the player finds themself in the castles entry courtyard. The courtyard is in ruins, with stone debris all over the place. On the opposite side of the courtyard gates is the Main Entrance Door to the castle interior, which is locked. The player has to explore around the courtyard to find a way to open the Main Entrance Door. The pressure plate door opening mechanic is introduced when a player unknowingly steps on a jutted out stone plate - visual and audio cue, and opens a side door in the courtyard - a nod to the other 3 plates which have to be stepped on to open the main gates - maybe add a note in front of the Main Door. Whilst exploring around the courtyard, the player finds a rusty sword and is introduced to the basic attack mechanic. In this section of the level, the player encounters basic melee enemies - rats and slimes. This part teaches the player basics of combat and combines it with platforming to reinforce previous lessons. Two routes are presented, which connect in a circular fashion and can loop on each other, avoiding a dead end and giving the player the chance to explore in either way. After activating all 3 switches the Main Entrance Door is open and the player can progress.

Once inside the player finds themselves in the Grand Staircase room which extends vertically on many floors. The Grand Staircase consists of many flights of stairs which go in all 4 direction, some doors are already open, some seem closed and locked. The player gets a glimpse of the staircase and the level/demo ends.

Level area
Mechanics
Puzzles
Enemies
Items

Level Intro Text

In a far away land, a magical Castle stood atop a giant mountain cliff. It was built long, long ago by the first people who came into contact with Magic. They built this place to study the magical arts and accumulate knowledge from all over the world. As time progressed countless beings attended this exalted place of mysteries, and so too did the castle grow, expanding its vast halls to immeasurable proportions. For thousands of years it was a beacon of the arcane and a focal point for wizards from all the known world.

But then the Egress happened, and the Magic in the world dwindled...

Nobody was seen visiting or leaving the castle since. For the last few centuries it has stood silent. Now the castle rots as a ruin, waiting for someone to unravel its mysteries...

You now stand in front of its crumbling gates, desperate to get an audience with its mysteries.
But what will you find, once you get inside,
will it satiate your forlorn inquiries,
will it give you the answers you came looking for,
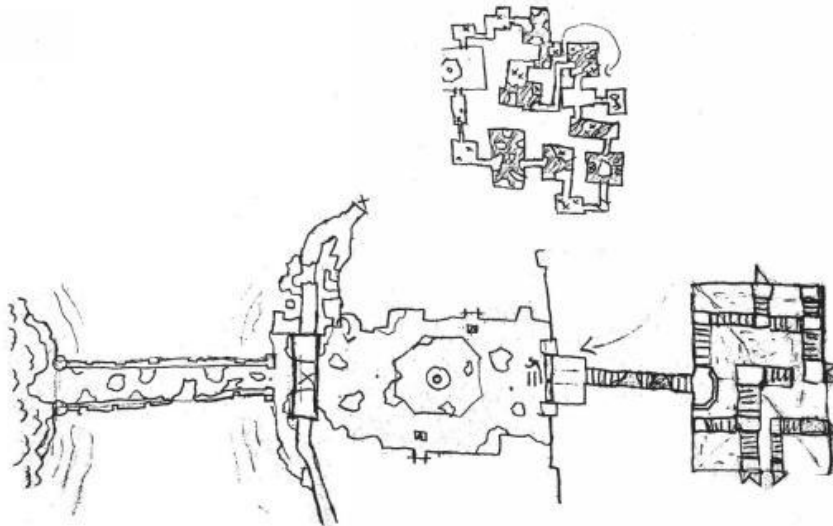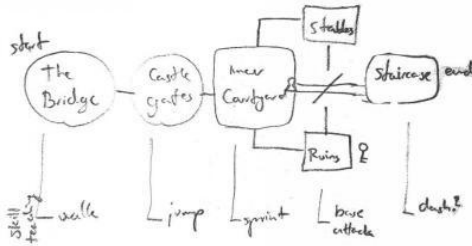answers that sear as the time seeps ever quicker?
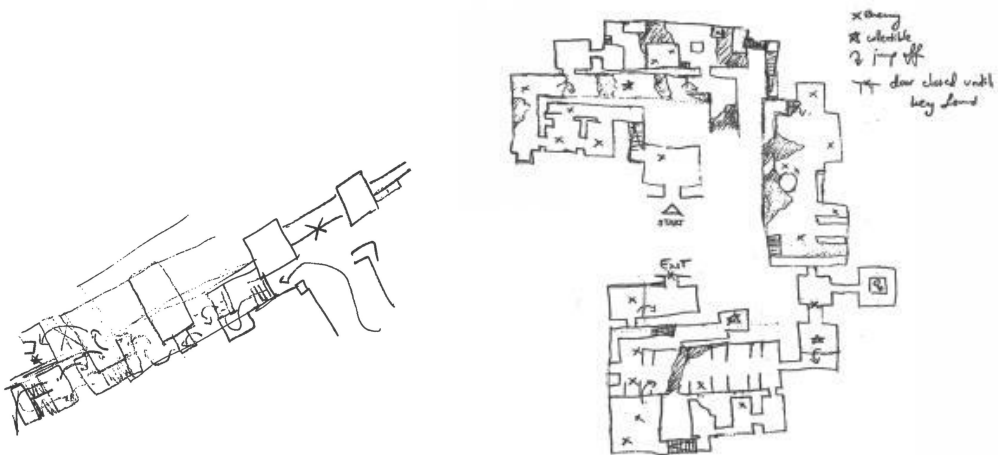...

3. Layouts

Area list
START - Forests Edge - Entry Bridge - Castle Portcullis - Wall Ramparts - Entry Courtyard - Courtyard interior Dungeon - Castle Gates - Staircase - END
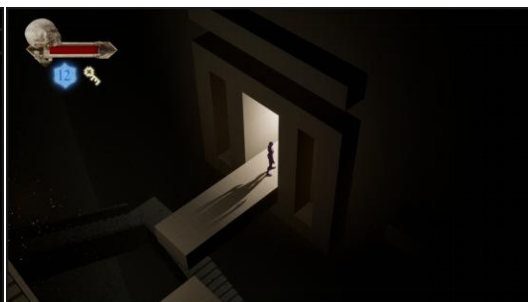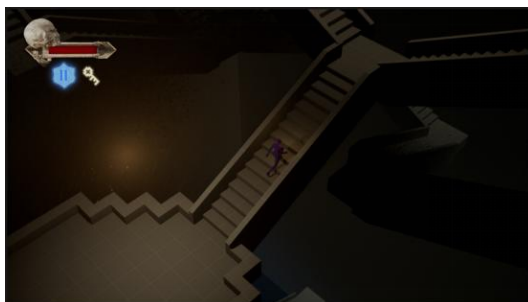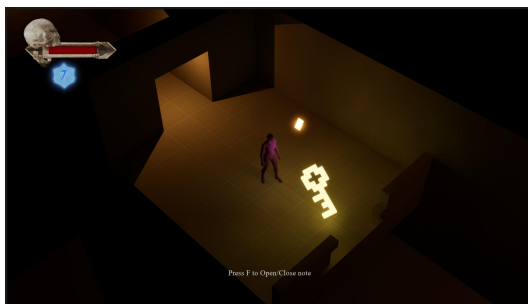
3.1. Initial sketches & Diagrams

Detailed Layout Sketches

- wall ramparts jumping section redesign   - courtyard interior "dungeon" detailed design

4. Blockout

4.1. Gameplay Screenshots

4.2. Level Diagram

06_Courtyard Dungeons

Player Start

**Movement Tutorial
Collecting Mana Essences**

**Portcullis dropped - player
has to find another way in**

Jumping Tutorial

04_Ramparts

01_Forest

05_Entry Courtyard

08_Great Staircase

02_Access Bridge

**03_Castle
Portcullis**

07_Castle Gates

— **Critical Path**
★ **Level Start**
⚑ **Level End**

**Doors shut - players have to
find the key from a note**

**Besides the enemies
dungeon houses the Door key**

**Final platforming segment
Level End**