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Year / Block: Year 2 Block D

Project: Akuma no mori



Overall Goal

I want to use some basic world beatification to better sell my intentions with the levels I create. This includes using the build in and placeholder assets as well as setting up lighting scenarios.

Why do this? Doing this will help me improve my efficiency with working in the Unreal editor (asset placement etc.), and help me develop a clear model of conveying my ideas and intents – “why did I place that there?”. It will also be beneficial to the project as a whole during early showcasing and playtesting, bringing the experience closer to the final experience.

Intro Level

In week 3 I did a basic designer level art pass for my whitebox of the introductory level. This included placing the tree roots using my procedural root generation tool, placing rocks using the build in rock asset, and doing a lighting and detail pass.



Intro Level

The player starts in a very dark cave, only seeing a very slight semblance of the rock structures the cave is made of. At this point the player will be taught the most basic mechanics: movement, and the guiding nature of the fireflies.



Intro Level

As the player reaches the first firefly the next one is revealed from behind the wall - clearly communicating the idea that the player is supposed to follow the fireflies. Additionally the firefly disappears as soon as it has been reached further reinforcing this idea. As the player progresses the lighting becomes more intense, showing the progression and slowly revealing the environment the player is in.



Not much further after having followed the fireflies and having confirmed that the player understands the basic movement mechanics they reach this small, more open, area. Here the player is taught how to jump. Lighting and the use of new assets (the roots) is used to convey to the player that this area is important. And also used to clearly signpost that there is a ledge they have to jump unto, and that the progression is to the right. The player can only see their next goal after having successfully performed the jumps.



When/if the player looks up in this small section, they will see a slightly discomforting sight. The roots are breaking into the room, and look somewhat hand- or tentacle- like. This is done to explain why there is spotlight lighting coming down into this room, as well as to reinforce the slightly uncomfortable mood we want the player to be in. It also give this area an unique element helping it convey it's importance to understanding how to play the game.



After having learned how to jump the player will set their eyes on the next area, this area is quite large and bright compared to the last area, and has a clearly defined exit point straight ahead. This point is shown by the use of unique assets, intense lighting, and signposts to the outside world. This is the place the player should want to go! OUTSIDE! Fireflies are once again used to guide the player to this exit.



Intro Level

As the player is moving forwards, into the open area, I repeatedly use the roots to block the sight of the red encircled area. This introduces element of motion, pulling the attention towards it. This area is completely optional, but gives narrative context (first sub-objective plant) to the experience. Additionally I use lighting with a new colour to further pull the player's attention.



Intro Level

Clearly showing the path the player has to take, but also fully revealing the optional area.



Intro Level

Clearly showing the path the player has to take, but also fully revealing the optional area.



Intro Level

When the player looks back they can clearly see that they cannot and should not go back.



Intro Level

This is what the player sees after having left the intro area.

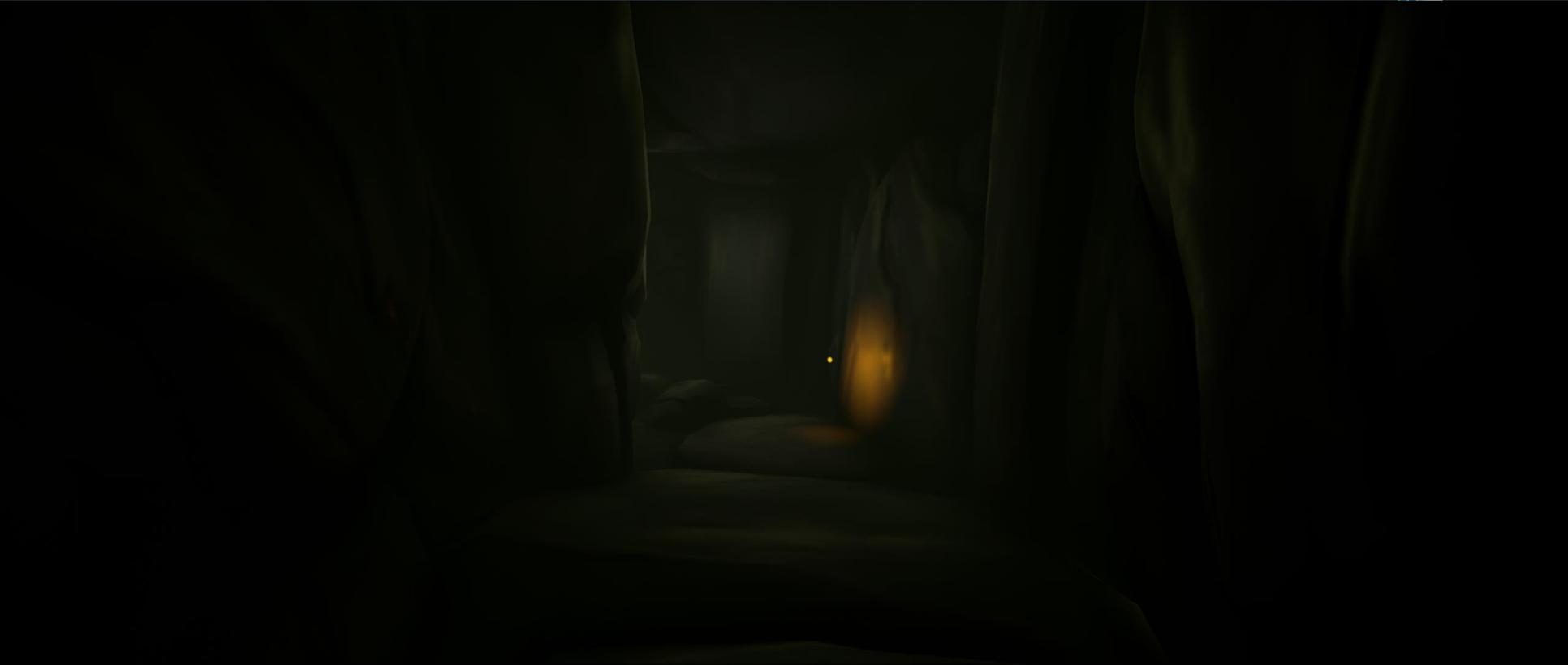


After having completed this art pass I started working on another designer art pass using the assets that were gradually becoming available. In the intro area I primarily focused on getting the lighting to guide the player in the right direction and teaching them the correct elements the correct way.

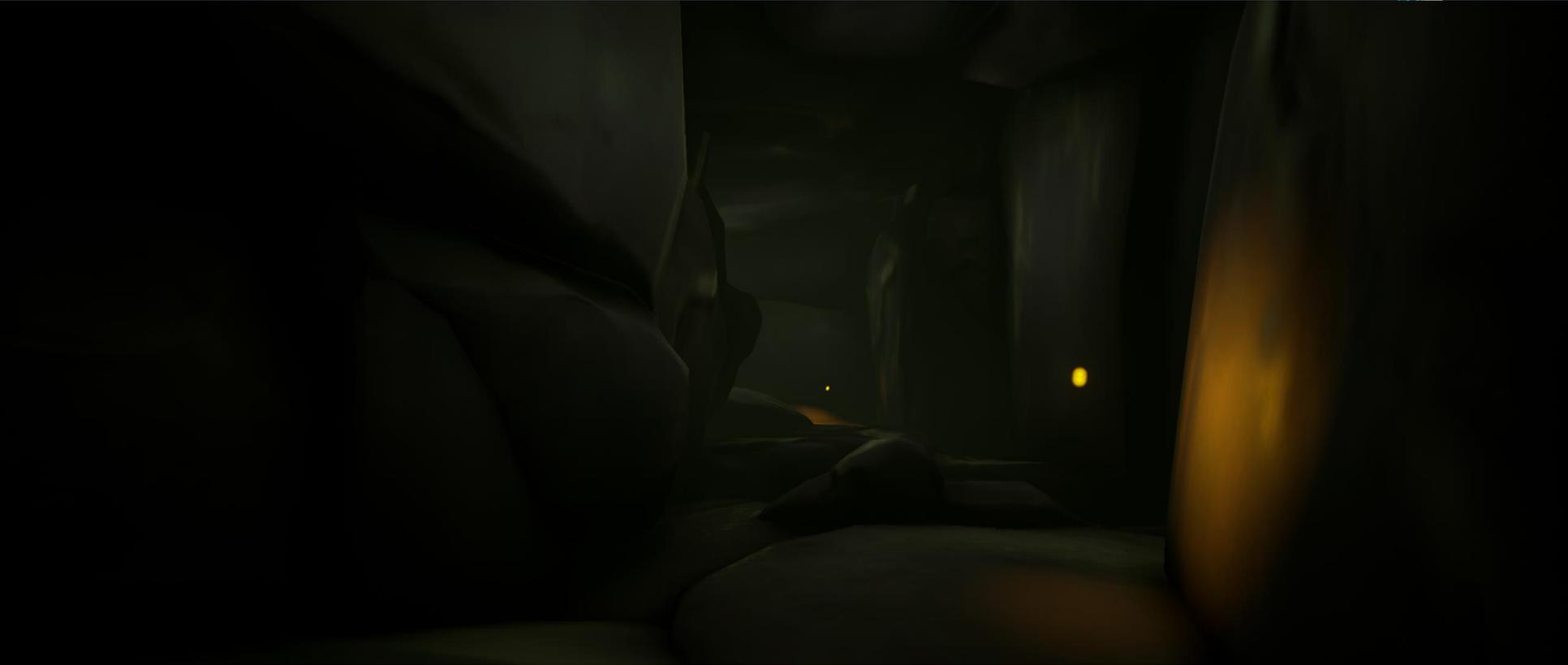
I also placed assets to guide the player's eyes to help enhance the effectiveness of this 'tutorial' zone.



Intro Level



Intro Level



Intro Level



Intro Level



Intro Level



Intro Level



Cemetery

With the cemetery I did a designer level art pass to:

- Better guide the player,
- Sell my level design to the team,
- Get playtesting data closer to the final result early.

Cemetery

First pass. Implemented roots, and rocks to help make the environment feel more real and lived in.



Cemetery



Cemetery



Cemetery



Cemetery



Cemetery



Cemetery



Cemetery



Cemetery



Cemetery



Cemetery



Cemetery



Cemetery

This pass made the level already work quite well, there were however still some issues with framing, and guiding the player into the correct direction. The level also felt quite empty and artificial or intentional.

I worked on fixing these issues in the next pass, here I focussed on moving the roots out of the way, and placing smaller assets such as small stones and plants, as well as tweaking the terrain.

I also worked on properly connecting the cemetery to the village and toxic forest.



Cemetery



Better connection to the village

Cemetery



More open and directed path

Cemetery



Tweaked window into the next area, more gradual reveal.

Cemetery



Foliage depicts important and un-important areas.

Cemetery





Path is very clearly blocked off.

Cemetery



More gradual slope to the next area, with detailing on the floor (ground material and rocks) to pull the attention.

Cemetery



The route is less obscured, impassable route more solid.

Cemetery



Next point to move to more clearly indicated and pointed to by the environment.



Climb indicated by smaller rocks.



Short tunnel making this area feel more transitional.

Cemetery



More detailing and a gradient in plant life making the intentions clearer.

Cemetery

After having performed this art pass the level played a lot better and intentions were conveyed more clearly. Having done this the artist was very aware of what I wanted out of the level, and did not have to change much for the final art pass.



Reflection

I think that doing a simple art pass as a designer can be quite useful, as it allows you to better convey your ideas and intentions to both your team and early players. It also give you a great opportunity to consider your level artistically and in terms of framing before the artists have to spend their valuable time on it.

In doing the art passes I have become better at framing, lighting, and faster at actually doing the pass.