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Research in Visual Storytelling

Narratives must be adapted to fit the type of interaction for each medium. Books have insight, the ability to tell the reader what people are thinking and felling. The writer acts as a filter to show the reader only exactly what is necessary and to make sure the reader doesn't miss anything that is important to the story. Movies have even less control then books and must keep the viewer's visual attention. Books turned into movies must scrap mundane events, which usually are important to the narrative, and replace them with events that are more stimulating for movie goers. This tends to have the effect of changing the narrative's well crafted events and in so doing change the narrative as a whole. Games have even less control of the viewing experience. For example the player may trigger a significant event to happen, but be looking in the wrong direction. Many attempts have been made to control what the player sees, but generally take the player out of the experience by taking away player control. My challenge is to create a compelling narrative within a purely visual storytelling scene that never pulls the player out of the experience and conveys the story in full with no missing parts.

Point of View

First person perspective has a great many advantages. Third person perspective creates a degree of separation automatically with the player. Players still associate with their avatar until the avatar becomes a surrogate, but this process of adopting tends to take time and different experience to completely bond. This is also my character customization is such a big deal in the gaming industry. By making an avatar that can be unique amongst a community and appeal directly to an individual, the avatar can become a surrogate quicker. Since this scene is so short and my hopes of achieving a high emotional response a first person perspective instantly places the player in the environment. From a development standpoint, making it first person also cut out the need for creation of an avatar and the animation process which I haven't delved into.

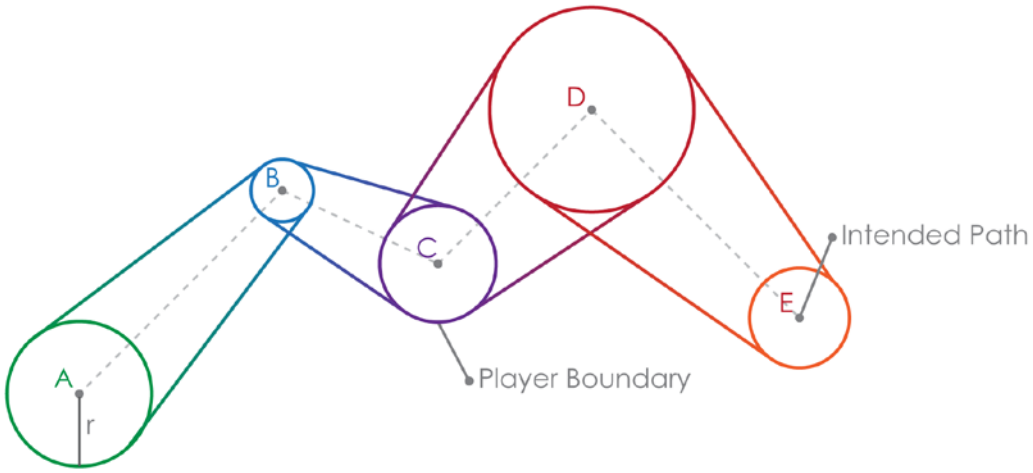
Linear, But Open

One of the biggest problems in games that try to tell a strong story is the corridor effect. To make sure a player gets from point A to point B the level designers have to keep the player not only contained, but moving forward on the correct path. I've seen three type of method for containment. The first is the main corridor type, in which the designers construct the level in a hallway fashion. To help hide that fact the use clever scenery like a New York war zone with wreck vehicles blocking every street, but the one the player is meant to travel down and sometimes not so clever tactics like a small fence or rail that can't be jumped over. These makeshift barriers are unrealistic and result in player trying to jump over them for several minutes until they realize there

is an invisible wall denying them access. Once this is attempted the illusion is broken and the player sees the hallways of the level, successfully pulling them out of the game. The second method, which is in response to the first method's problem, creates a larger more open area that has one entrance and one exit. Note that this method still has barriers that can bring the player out of the experience, but happens in a lesser degree (like the deference between prison and house arrest). With one exit the player then has to search a big area, which usually results in finding the barrier and following it around. So to stop that from happening the designers must create environments, signage, or events that lead the player through the larger area to the exit without the player finding the wall. The third method is to make staying on the correct path a game. Platformers are probably the first example of these; the player is trying to stay on the path to avoid punishment and at the same time to be rewarded. While being a fun main mechanic, if it is apply as a secondary mechanic the punishment aspect needs to be significantly reduced. One clear cut example is the game Zelda: Ocarina of Time in the area of the Gerudo Desert. This magical desert is in a constant state of sand storm and to travel it without a strategy condemns the player to wandering aimlessly before being expunged out the same way the player entered. This creates an illusion of infinite space that can never be shattered, while constraining the player to a set path. This is the method I will be using to tell my linear story in a magical fantasy bamboo forest, but with alterations.

Movement Constraining Mechanic

Once the player moves far enough from the intended path, the screen fades gradually to black. Once the screen is fully black the player is rotated to look towards the closest point on the intended path. If the player keeps moving forward, they come back to the intended path. Once the screen goes black, some player may choose to stand still. This emulates the way they would react in real life, paralyzed by the unknown and the darkness. The player can only emerge from the darkness by continuing to move forward. The radius of each area of interest can be different. The corridor boundaries in between will gradually change from one radius to another, funneling the player towards the areas of interest. These boundaries however, are not the main way finding mechanic. That will be achieved by lighting and the player's own personal spirit guide. But if the player grows curious of the darkness, the boundaries will nudge them in the right direction.

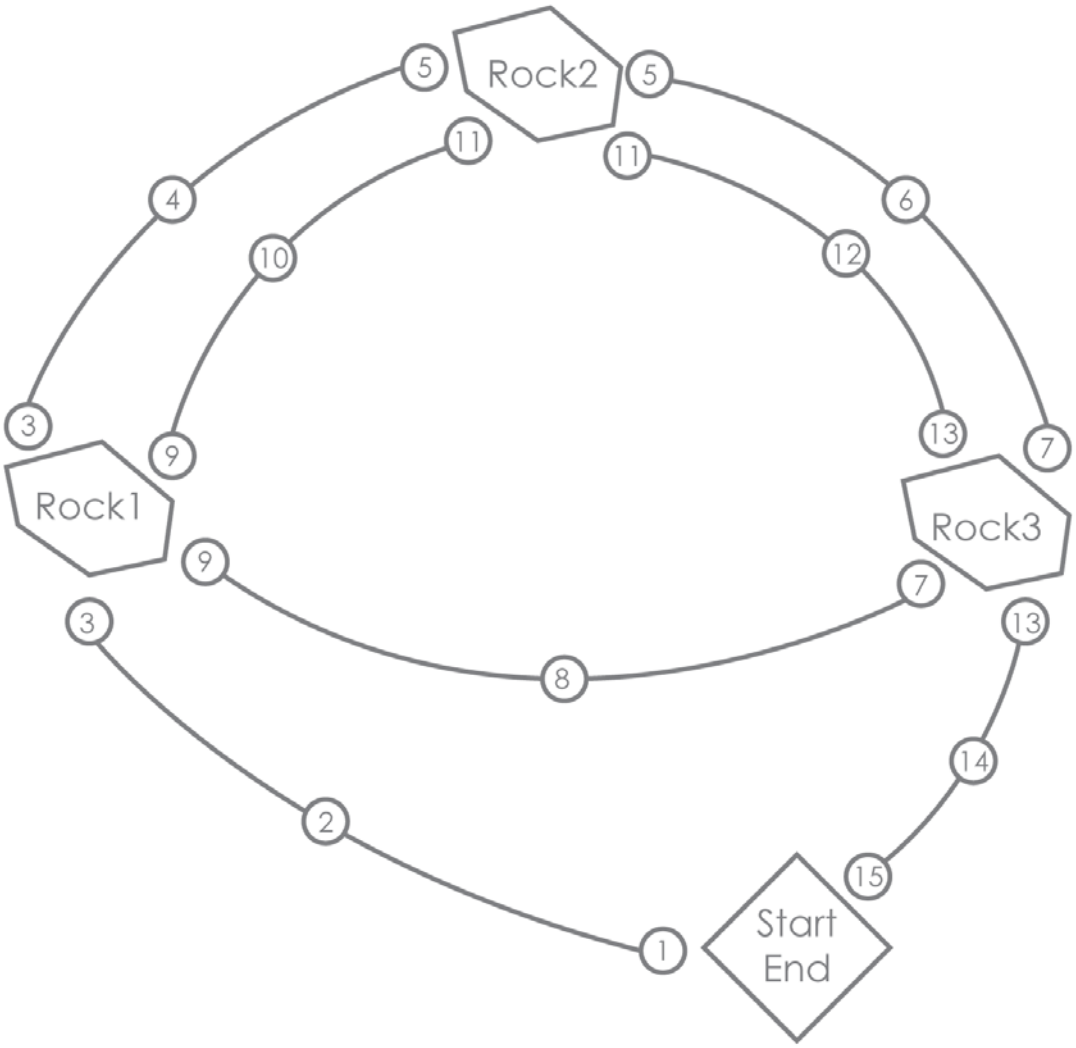


Proximity Triggered Events

Stream lining mechanics is always a goal, but the more player initiated mechanics there are, the more controls a player has to memorize. The target audience in this case is the variety of people who will be visiting the exhibition. I want every person to try out the scene and not to be scared away by a complicated control scheme. To people who have never played a game before, just controlling movement and looking around at the same time can be over whelming. With that in mind, I decided to cut down the controls. So the player will need to only get close enough to shrines, doors, and lanterns to activate each corresponding mechanic. This type of interaction is tailored extremely well with regards to story telling. There is nothing to distract the player from what is visually happening around them. Players will also be able to change the looking controls between verted and inverted without having to access a menu.

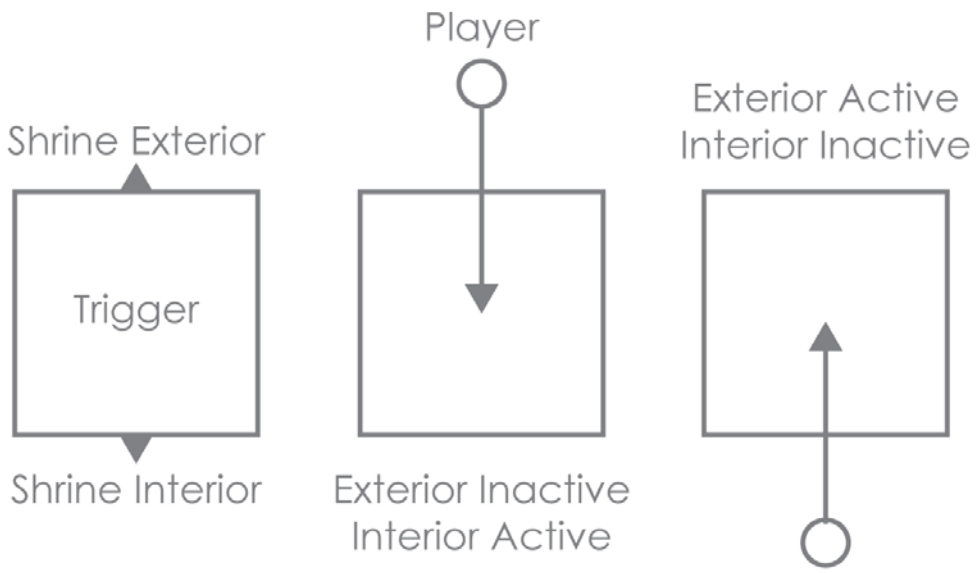
Rock Shrines

These shrines are sacred boulders that guard the path to the main shrine further along the path. Carved symbols mark the unique stones while rope tethered wooden seals give them their magical power. During the journey the guiding spirit will lure the player to them. When the player approaches, the spirit will show a sequence that must be replicated to progress further. Once the correct pattern is performed by the player, the magical barrier fades away and the shrine rocks crumble.



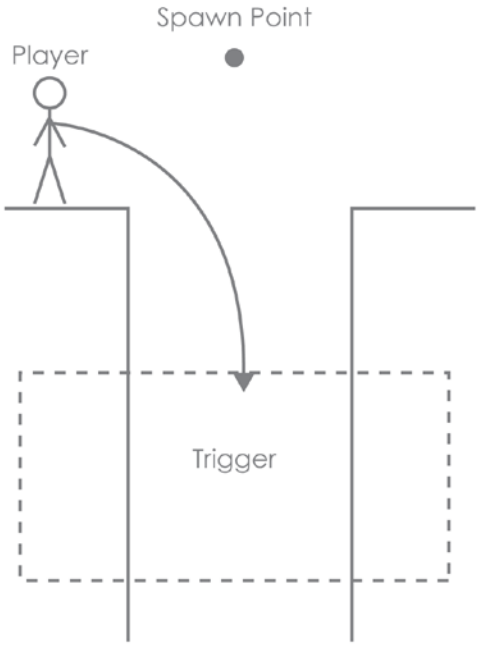
Shrine Mechanic

Forest shrines can range in size from as small as a closet to the size of a barn; this shrine will be about in the middle. Steps will lead up to a porch and a pair of doors that open with the player. When the doors open the back side of the shrine will turn off and the much larger interior will turn on. With this effect I can achieve impossible architecture. The shrine interior will be notable bigger then the shrine exterior. When the player leaves the shrine to investigate the doors close, the interior turns off and the back exterior turn back on, making this the second dimensional time and space phenomena.



Falling Paradox Mechanic

During the journey, the player will come across a bridge spanning a vast ravine. Knowing curiosity will persuade players to jump in; I've deciding to implement a falling paradox as a player reward. No matter where the player jumps from, once the fall 20 meters or so the screen will fade to black and the player will be teleported to the bridge.



Evil Mask Mechanic

As the player reaches the end of the impossible interior the mask hanging on the wall is the last major mechanic of the scene. The closer the player gets to the mask the more visible danger effects will get, depth of field, lights dimming, black shadow hands reaching up from the ground, glowing eyes, etc. When the player reaches the climax range the ending script activates.

Scene

The player starts out in the middle of the bamboo forest with mist surrounding him. The path to the shrine transitions from a grass, to dirt with a wider birth and lanterns, to gravel and old wooden *torii* gates, to stone stairs and the main shrines ground. If along the way there are steep inclines stone stairs might be added. I've also considered making a bridge and stream to help add variety to the landscape. The main shrine will be a mixture of Gothic and Japanese architecture, possibly accompanied by gargoyle guardian lion hybrids. The shrine interior will be an elongated room and wall lined with masks from different cultures. Though the masks have completely different styles they will all be made from porcelain to tie them together, hinting at a single craftsmen.