

Design Document

Project Goal:

I aim to transport viewers into the dream-scape which I once inhabited in one of my own dreams. I not only want to transmit the feasible environment I saw during my dream, but also the sensations that my dream evoked, with special focus on how surreal it felt.

The experience won't be mechanically challenging to players, instead focusing on the traversing of the environment and admiring its intricacies, be that in mise en' scene, mood, sound, colour and more. I would also desire for players to draw their own meanings from the experience I device, even if it doesn't fully align with the deeper significance I personally envisioned for the project while creating it.

I especially aspire to display a harsh contrast between two main sections of the environment, with a design which deliberately explores the shock players will experience when transitioning from one to the other, inciting players to think on the meaning behind such contrast.

In sum, the experience is designed to draw players in by displaying the beauty of the areas I lived in my dreams, deliberately refraining from implementing complicated puzzle mechanics or major overarching hidden plots. It is simply supposed to make players contemplate the surroundings and through analysis of what they feel in doing so, give it meaning.

Setting and its purpose:

The scene is mainly divided, as previously mentioned, into two completely juxtaposing explorable sections, present in both physical differences, but also how the section plays out, and how it feels to do so. It starts with "the Canyon", which eventually bridges onto "the Surface", through a transition "sub-section", which is a seemingly misplaced elevator.

Overarchingly however, both share a handful of similar features; In terms of time and location setting, the player will be blatantly given no indication of where they are located. Landmarks won't often indicate any traits of one particular country, culture, time period, etc. purposely leaving it open for players to imagine.

The main reason for this is because it is supposed to feel like the dream I had, which didn't have any of such specifics nor contexts revealed to me. Not knowing such information only further empowers the feeling of disconnection, which makes the experience all the more dream-like, which is my goal.

The main notable "exception" to this rule is the transition that transports the player from "the Canyon" to the "the Surface", an elevator. I am aware that such modern technology could possibly show traces of a more modern time period, however here, its purpose isn't to indicate time. It leans far more on delivering a stark contrast from the overall nature dominated, non-man-made aesthetic presented from both sections of play. This ensures that the player finds the transition from the first to the second section remarkable, grasping a feeling of surreal (further empowered by how the elevator's wire is connected to the sky and ascends by unknown means) while also subconsciously feeding the idea that some degree of human presence exists, or at least used to.

Human presence overall is far subtler and less frequent than signs of nature dominance over the land. Some vague traces of man-made structures used to facilitate transport are visible,

mostly in low maintenance or straight out broken, such as ladders, platforms, elevators, ropes, etc. The deliberate exility of such features is of course to give special focus to the natural, but it also subconsciously installs the idea that the landscape at least used to be inhabited, or at least explored by seemingly large groups of people, but that no longer seems to be the case.

I see explaining some elaborate plot to justify the lack of people condescending to players, limiting their imagination during the experience. It'd in fact harm the credibility of the adventure as a dream, because dreams are more often than not, unexplainable and mysterious. Hence, I deliberately leave the reason as to why people no longer exist there open to interpretation.

The contrast between sections:

“Canyon”:



The canyon consists of the space in between two tightly spread opposing, highly vertical walls of salt. Players can clearly observe how they find themselves bellow the surface level, making the ground they stand on darker and duller in tone as opposed to the bright sky above. Such over-head daylight also hints towards the existence of something above which can't yet be seen.

Due to how tightly limited the space is, the path seems to be fairly linear, and not much ambiguity is left for the player to ponder on where to go before moving.

Lots of hinting that there is something in the end of the path laid, which may lead to above the surface is purposely presented in order to give players a sense of purpose, that their journey through the unknown isn't devoid of reason, creating hope that maybe this oppressive environment could change to an open one.

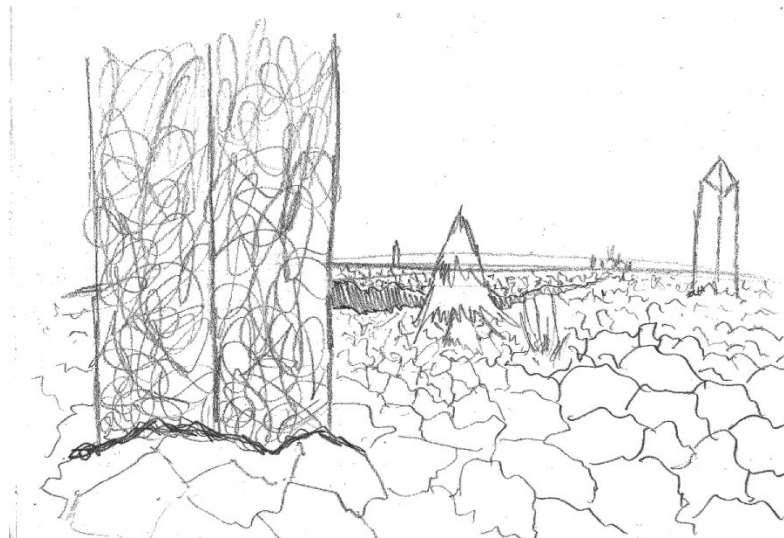
While still being an open environment, the atmosphere is quite oppressive, mainly due to the monotone dull palette, coupled with the claustrophobic lack of movement room, making players feel shut in.

Large salt pillar structures often pierce through the walls of the canyon, but aren't fully visible from within the first section alone, further building up curiosity for what's to come.

The environment feels quite natural, not at all hand-made, especially visible from the how the walls seem to have been separated by natural soil erosion. The presence of salt crystalized vegetation further empowers that notion.

Towards the end of the linear path laid by the canyon walls, completely shattering the "nature-made" aesthetic, an elevator will be found, which will transition the player onto the second section by rising them from the ground all the way above surface.

"Surface":



The surface involves an expanse of salt, mostly horizontally flat, with a ground full of salt plates, so white and clear that the floor mirrors the image of the blue sky, vividly enlightened by the bright midday sun.

It is clearly not man made, presenting geographical flaws like craters, canyons and cracks, and some isolated signs of vegetation, also crystalized in salt.

The landscape is littered with repetitive, vertically enormous salt pillars, often far apart from one another, some of which present structures and indications of having been climbed, presumably by humans, but who appear to have been long gone.

Overall, no linear path is obviously laid and the space feels quite empty, as it takes quite some time and distance to get from landmark to landmark, and there aren't many geographical limits on how to do so, since it's all mostly flat.

Further even, the horizon line is covered in a thick gust of salt, forming a dense cloud that obscures the player from ever reaching the end (which makes it feel very dream-like).

The canyon section will still be visible (and accessible via the elevator) once the player is on surface, and may be looked down upon. This is blatant, as to make players realise the freedom they have gained from that previously oppressive environment, while still understanding that their newly found freedom may come at the cost of feeling purposeless, having nowhere to go.

The meaning/purpose behind the experience:

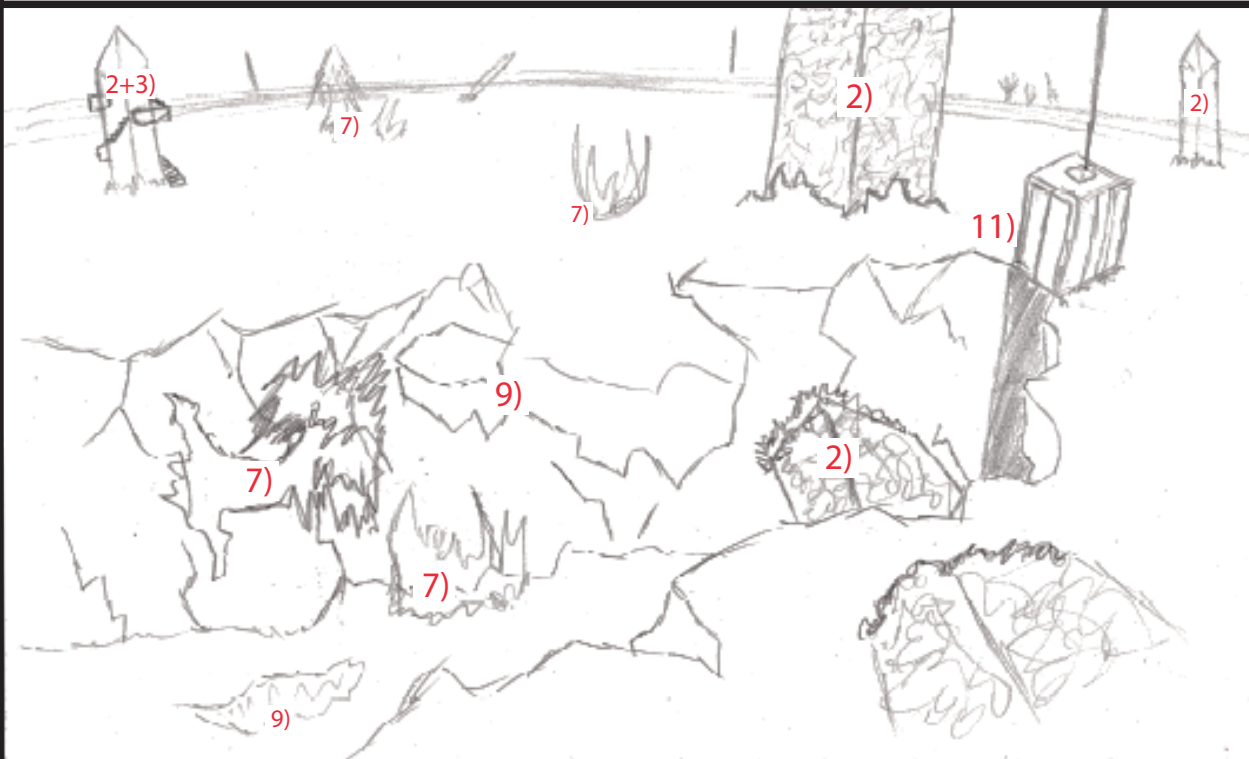
Although I don't want to set it on stone completely as to allow lots of room for interpretation from the players, I do have an overarching theme that I constructed my idea from, and would like audiences to either experience on their own accord, or be informed of so that their experience is given new meaning.

I want to focus specifically on the contrast between the two playable sections of the game in terms of dynamics, sensation, visual and auditory stimulus because each of them express the two sides of the same concept in all of its pros and cons: freedom.

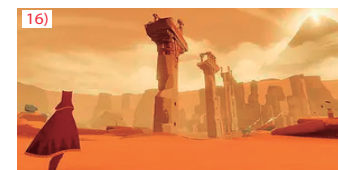
The canyon is designed to emulate the sensations of a lack of freedom, from anything in general. Its environment is oppressive and claustrophobic. Colours are dull greys, very monotone. There's barely any room for movement, and the bare minimum space that there is can only be navigated in one direction without ambiguity. Light is scarce, coming from above, a constant reminder that freedom lies ahead and should be sought after. The path to obtaining such freedom is littered with naturally occurring incidents, such as vegetation, craters and salt pillars obstructing progress. All of the stimuli presented in the first section are metaphors to represent the journey to obtain freedom. It is arduous, full of adversities, but the payoff is enormous, and the journey is constantly full of meaning, without much pausing room.

In complete juxtaposition, the surface section represents a state of being and feeling free. The huge expanse is open as far as the eye can see, and it is all explorable with barely any limitations. No single linearly traced path must be followed in order to effectively navigate and find new landmarks. Colours are a vivid combination of blue and white, reflecting the image of the sky on the salty clear floor. The entire environment is well lit by the sun, leaving darkness only to shadows of large landmarks, creating the sensation that no mystery is too hidden to solve. Players may even look back at the canyon they ascended from, gazing upon the achievement they've made, further appreciating the struggle they went through to get to the surface. The second section's metaphors evoke the feeling of accomplishment and appreciation for freedom after ascending through harsh conditions. However the reward does come with the price of an overlaid sensation of emptiness. Too much freedom takes away a sense of purpose, which is why I'll ensure to design the second section devoid of as much density of stimulus as opposed to the first. There will be lots of more empty space that needs to be traversed prior to getting anywhere interesting, which will ensure that such hollow feeling is always on the back of the player's mind, which they most likely will not have had in the first section, when they weren't yet this free, inciting intrusive thoughts of how freedom might not be that desirable.

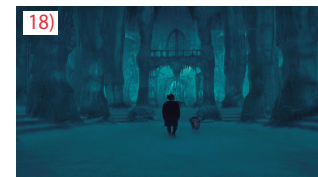
Rough Sketch of the Map's Landscape



Inspirations from Diverse Medium



Journey and Shadow of the Colossus (10 and 11 respectively) have iconic atmospheres during gameplay. The environments are vast, making the player feel alone and very small. Those are all sensations I too wish to encapsulate in my project.



The Castle of the White Witch is fully encrusted in ice crystal. That aesthetic first inspired me to incorporate elements of other environments that aren't naturally revolved by salt, such as trees, but in an alkaline version, to match the overarching mood.

Eternity map's colour scheme and textures have a similar sensation to what I expect to be creating. The presence of monotones, smooth surfaces in sharp contrast with each other are blatant, and I would desire to achieve a similar result in those terms.



Salvador Dali's surrealist style evokes sensations of a dream like experience in every single one of his paintings. Such overarching sensation is what I strive to make players feel while exploring the space I will create, since I first came up with it in a dream I had, so in order to make the experience feel authentic, it should also play out like a dream.

Landscape Breakdown (numbers indicated on map above)



Above canyon, at surface, the landscape will draw inspiration from image 1, very horizontally flat in contrast with the canyon's verticality. I hope to imitate the mirror effect the floor has with the sky. I would also like to make a similar texture for the floor's salt plates. I also hope to encapsulate a similar cold yet bright colour scheme.



The salt plane will be filled with vertical salt pillars, emerging from the floor, and reaching far deep into the earth, as visible within the canyon. Like picture 2, they assimilate to the Washington Monument. Some will have primitive climbable structures, like picture 3.



I intend to create colour contrast between inside the canyon and the salt flats above. This cold colour scheme displays a perfectly obvious juxtaposition between the man and his surroundings in picture 4. Hence, to oppose the vivid blue of the above, I'll use this far more dull palette for the canyon.



In the canyon, light will be similar to picture 5. Natural light from the sun, coming from above, leaving the lower level floor dark and colder. With that, I aim to hint to players that there is more above the canyon from section 1.



The light I'll aspire to assimilate for the surface level, above the canyon, will be much like picture 6. A fairly high key natural light coming from the sun, leaving most areas very well lit. Vertically inclined objects will cast very solid shadows.



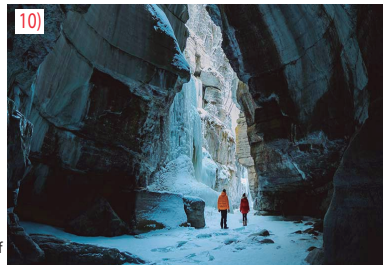
I'll include dense vegetation within the canyon, and above surface, only vague traces. All will be engulfed in salt, similar to frozen, ice crystalized trees during winter.



Glasiers and desert canyons both can display a very tight, claustrophobic sensation, as seen in pictures 5 and 8. I intend on encapsulating such sensation during the first part of the experience within the canyon section.



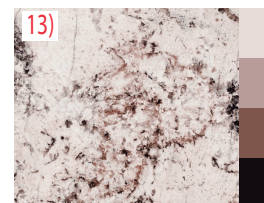
In order to further reinforce the natural aspect of the environment, both within the canyon and on the surface, lots of environmental faults like holes, craters and loose ground, similar to that of glaciers as shown in picture 9, will be apparent. They also reveal the consistency and texture of the soil being stood on, especially on the canyon's walls.



I want the experience to start not in the canyon right away, rather, in a smaller cavernous area with a large hole for a door, which then leads to the canyon. I will do so mainly because I want the player not to know what to expect right away as the start to navigate, and being surprised the size of the expanse that follows the cave's opening.



I want to clearly establish the contrast in mood from the canyon to the surface as the player transitions between sections. To do so, the player will go through a golden elevator. It indicates sharp visual contrast from the rest of the homogeneously coloured, dull environment surrounding it. I desire to allude a sensation of being in a dream, like I was when I came up with the concept. This will be further emphasised by the elevator's string, which reaches to the sky, connecting to apparently nothing, and its light, the only non natural source of the whole experience.



Images 12 to 15 are respectively, the textures of Salt, Marble, Ivory and Ash. They all share a somewhat similar colour palette, but with harshly different textures. I aim to use more than a single texture across the entirety of the environment, and these 4 are a good inspiration to introduce variety to the project. I don't intend on perfectly realistically imitating them, rather, stylising them, while maintaining believability.

Image Creditation

1 - Salar de Uyuni

<https://birdinflight.com/news/industry/video-day-sky-meets-earth.html>

2 - Washignton Monument

<https://www.washingtondc.com.br/monumento-de-washington/>

3 - Tree House Platform

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Non_invasive_method_of_fixing_a_tree_platform.JPG

4 - Volcano Taal, Philipines

https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2020/01/14/album/1579014440_381308.html

5 - Bluejohn Canyon

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bluejohn_Canyon

6 - Sussosvlei, Namibia

https://www.flickr.com/photos/peter_warne-epping_forest/38693603932

7 - Frozen Forrest

<https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/293085888233401717/>

8 + 9 - Franz Josef Glacier, New Zealand

<https://scribol.com/environment/lakes-and-rivers/the-incredible-ice-slot-canyon-of-new-zealands-franz-josef-glacier/6/>

10 - Maligne Canyon, Canada

<https://www.banffjaspercollection.com/canadian-rockies/jasper/maligne-canyon-icewalks/>

11 - Golden Elevator

<https://szmayford.en.made-in-china.com/product/YXPnMuBKWhE/China-Luxury-Passenger-Elevator-with-Golden-Cabin.html>

12 - Salt Texture

<https://nohat.cc/f/closeup-of-salt-texture-free-stock-photo-377752/comrawpixel377752-201907180423.html>

13 - Marble Texture

<https://nohat.cc/f/marble-pattern-of-texture-background-free-photo/bf528681d45c406daa95-201909231535.html>

14 - Ivory Texture

<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/polished-ivory-marble-real-natural-stone-622703075>

15 - Ash Texture

<https://in.pinterest.com/pin/332914597434368525/>

16 - Journey (2012)

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/gamesblog/2012/mar/13/journey-ps3-review>

17 - Shadow of the Colossus (2005)

<https://www.wired.com/story/shadow-of-the-colossus-remastered-review/>

18- Jadis Castle, Chronicles of Narnia Series

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/102537907@N03/10719360264>

19 - Enternity, Destiny 2 (2017)

<https://www.destinypedia.com/Eternity>

20 - The Dream of Venus, Salvador Dali

<https://www.salvador-dali.org/en/artwork/catalogue-raisonne-paintings/obra/484/the-dream-of-venus>