

Game Design Document

The Hanged

by

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Overview

Tagline

You dreamed of this place once...

Unique Selling Point: First-person, interactive surreal exploration that feels VR-immersive, without the headset.

Genre and Theme

It's a surreal immersive experience that involves exploration and puzzle solving. It is a heavily atmospheric visual game with a bit of platforming.

Theme: Life is weird and unexplainable.

Competitive Landscape Research

Utility Room – Black, white, and grey and surreal, but the Hanged is more linear and not as open.

POOLS – Giant pool area with white tile and water. Huge exploration game with pool floaties and smiley balls that look at you. In the Hanged, some obstacle items to move in similar ways.

Visage – Muted colors and surreal. The Hanged is different because it is not horror-focused in aesthetic. It is cosmic and existential rather than jump-scare horror.

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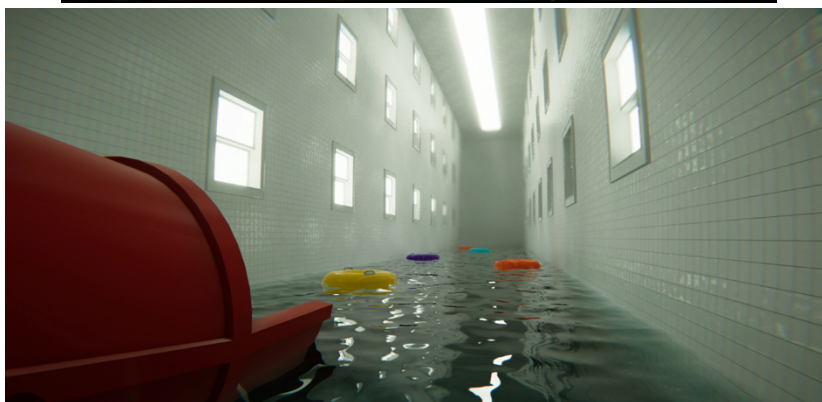
 CIRCUIT STREAM

The Hanged

From Utility Room:



From POOLS:



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From Visage:



Target Audience and Platform

This is for the Explorer type of player.

Gamers who enjoy surreal dream games like Utility Room, POOLS, and Visage. Gamers who enjoy games that are eerie but not focused on traditional horror like Conarium, Alien Cube, and Dredge. People who enjoy dreamcore and weirdcore on YouTube and TikTok. People who like The Backrooms. People who like ENA: Dream BBQ.

This will be a PC game.

Input:

- Arrow keys or WASD
- Trackpad or mouse to look around and click
- Space bar to jump

Gameplay

Core Structure

This is a solitaire (single-player) experience with mouse-click game play.

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Objective categories:

- Explore
- Solve
- Survive

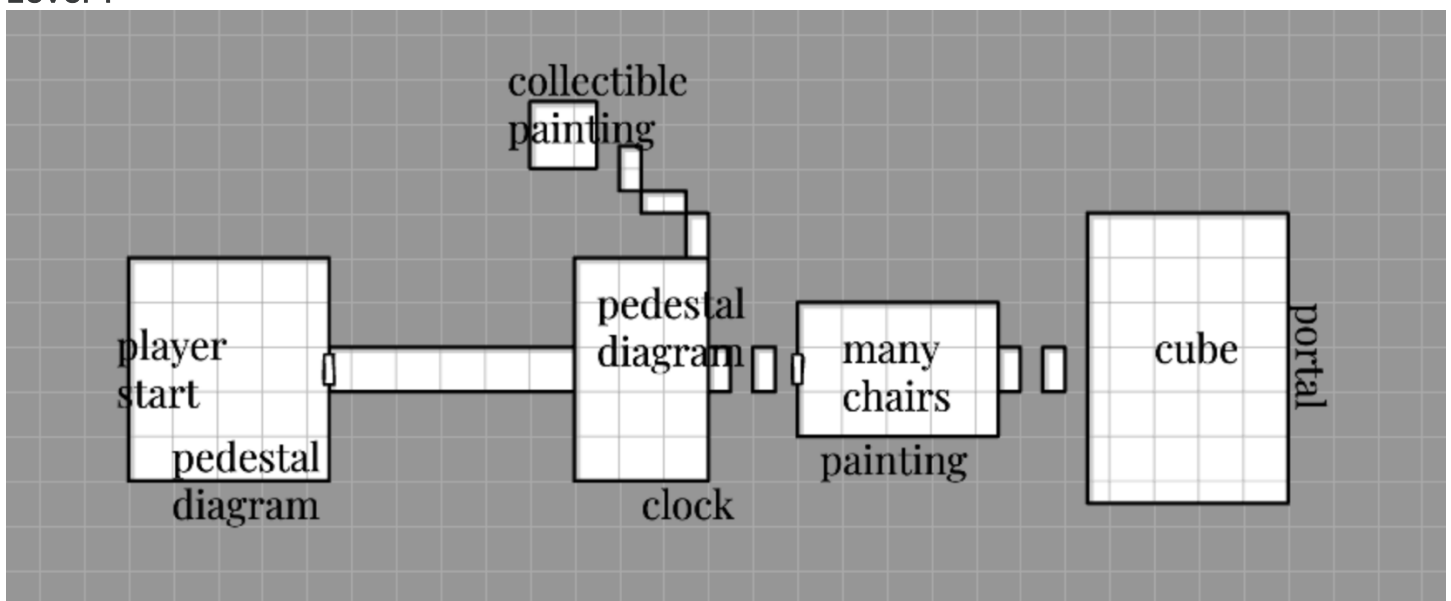
Primary gameplay is navigation and exploration, finding paths through surreal, empty, and sometimes claustrophobic spaces.

Core Loop

Explore, observe, interpret, interact, solve, survive, progress.

10 Minute Slice of Gameplay

Level 1

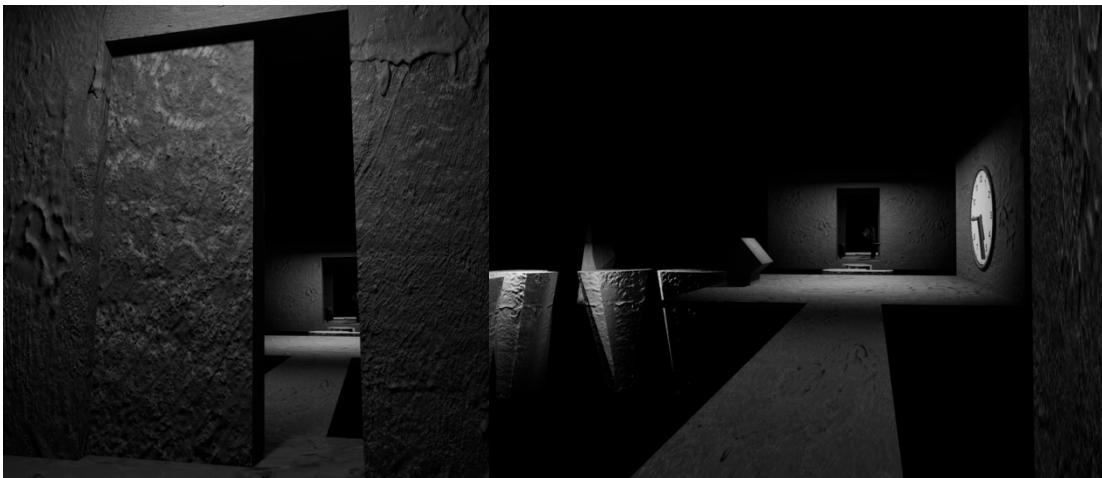


The slice begins with a full-screen message informing the player that they have been promoted to the role of Seer. The message is vaguely threatening: "Do not make us regret this decision." The player then awakens in a black void and glides toward a floating stone platform. The world is black and white, with cinematic lighting, heavy shadows, and rough stone textures giving the space an ancient feel.

The player lands in front of a massive stone door. Beside it is a pedestal marked with a diagram of the door and instructions written in an alien language. The player cannot read the text, but the drawing makes the meaning clear this world communicates through

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pictures as well as the unreadable words. When the player approaches, the door slides open slowly with the sound of stone grinding against stone, as if it has not been opened in centuries.



Beyond the door is a narrow path suspended over the void. To the right is a strange clock with moving hands set to the player's real-world local time. To the left is another pedestal showing the clock in the same unreadable language. The clock introduces one of the game's core ideas: the player must observe the environment carefully and interpret visual clues without direct explanation.

A side path leads to a series of tall rock pillars that vanish down into the darkness. The player can jump across them to reach an optional collectible: a bright, easy-to-spot

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painting of a distorted figure, possibly the creator of this world. When clicked, the painting disappears into the player's collection and is marked 1 of 8, teaching the player that hidden collectibles are scattered throughout the game.

Returning to the main path, the player crosses another sequence of stone pillars and reaches a faster sliding door. This door opens into a room filled with rows of chairs, all facing the same distorted painting. The repeated image creates the feeling that someone, or something, is lingering. There are no enemies here, only stillness and the sense that the player is being watched.



The path continues to a medium-sized platform holding a spinning metallic cube. There is nothing beyond it except the black void. When the player clicks the cube, it shatters and falls to the ground. For a few seconds, nothing happens. The player is left standing at the edge of the world, wondering what they are supposed to do. Then three enormous stone heads rise from the void and stare silently at the player. A portal rises at the end of the platform. This is the player's first judgment as Seer.

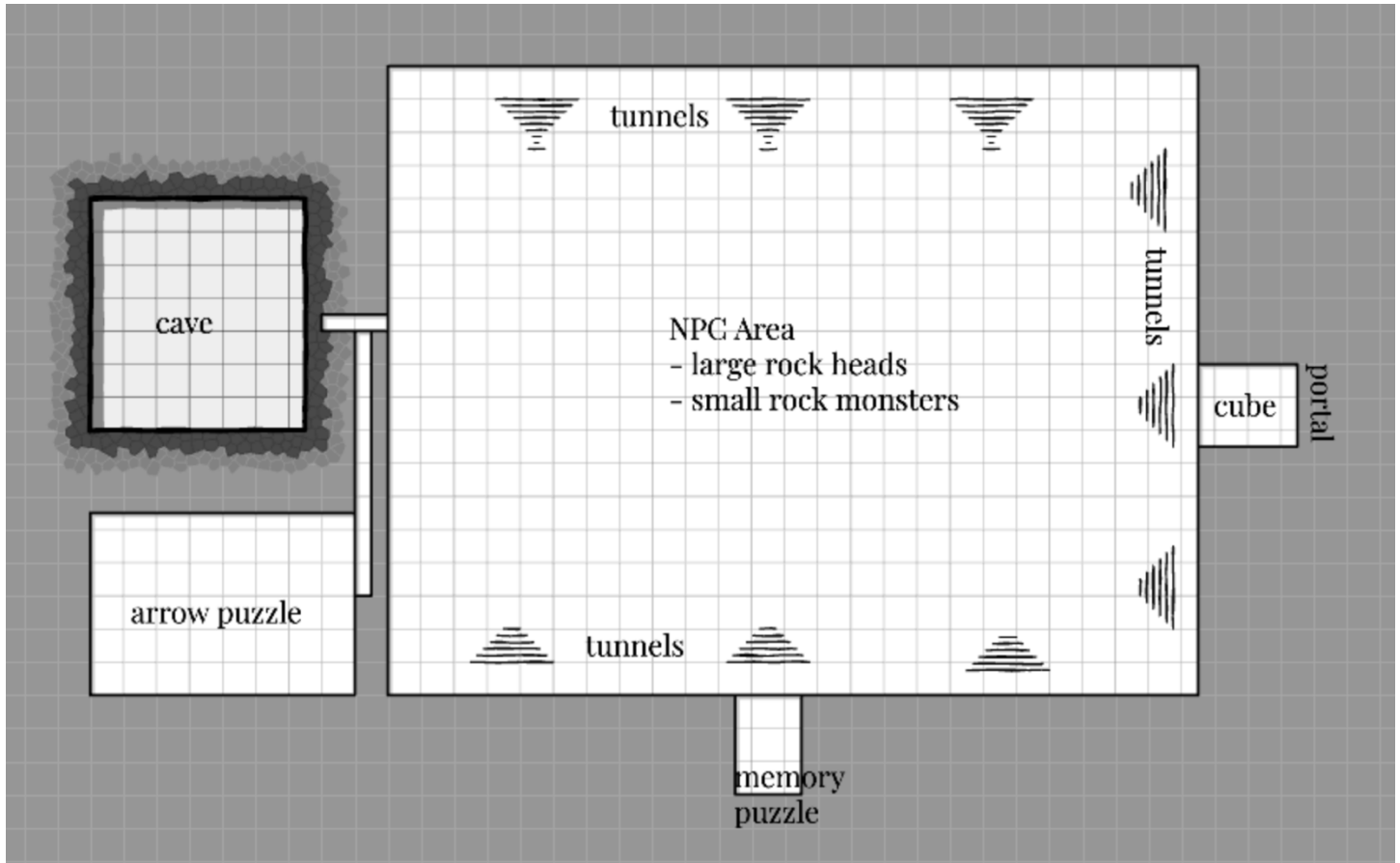
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Entering the portal brings the player to the main encounter area: a cave that opens into a rocky landscape surrounded by dark mountains and tunnel entrances. The cave acts as the checkpoint. If the player is hit by an enemy, they respawn here.

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Level 2



The objective of this area is to complete the Seer's first trial by solving three surreal tasks hidden across the landscape. Each task teaches a different part of the game's core loop: explore, observe, interpret, interact, and survive.

The area is patrolled by two types of stone guardians. Large statue-like figures move in and out of the tunnels carved into the mountains, creating crossing paths the player must time. Their movement is accompanied by a wind sound, giving the player an audio warning before they appear. Smaller rock monsters patrol the open space, with footsteps as their audio warning. If one sees the player within a close radius, it chases them. These smaller enemies pause occasionally, so escape is not too difficult if the player uses the terrain and tunnels well. These are not high-speed encounters, but more a bit of fun in a level that continues to feel more exploration-based versus action-based.

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The first task is found near the edge of the cave. The player discovers a wall with alien symbols. On the ground are arrows facing in four directions. The player must click the arrows in the right sequence based on the clues. When solved, an eye appears, watching the player and following the player's movements.



The second task is hidden inside one of the side tunnels. The player must avoid guardians to get there. The player finds the objects from the first level. The player must click them in the order they saw them in the first level: clock, painting, cube. Then another eye appears.



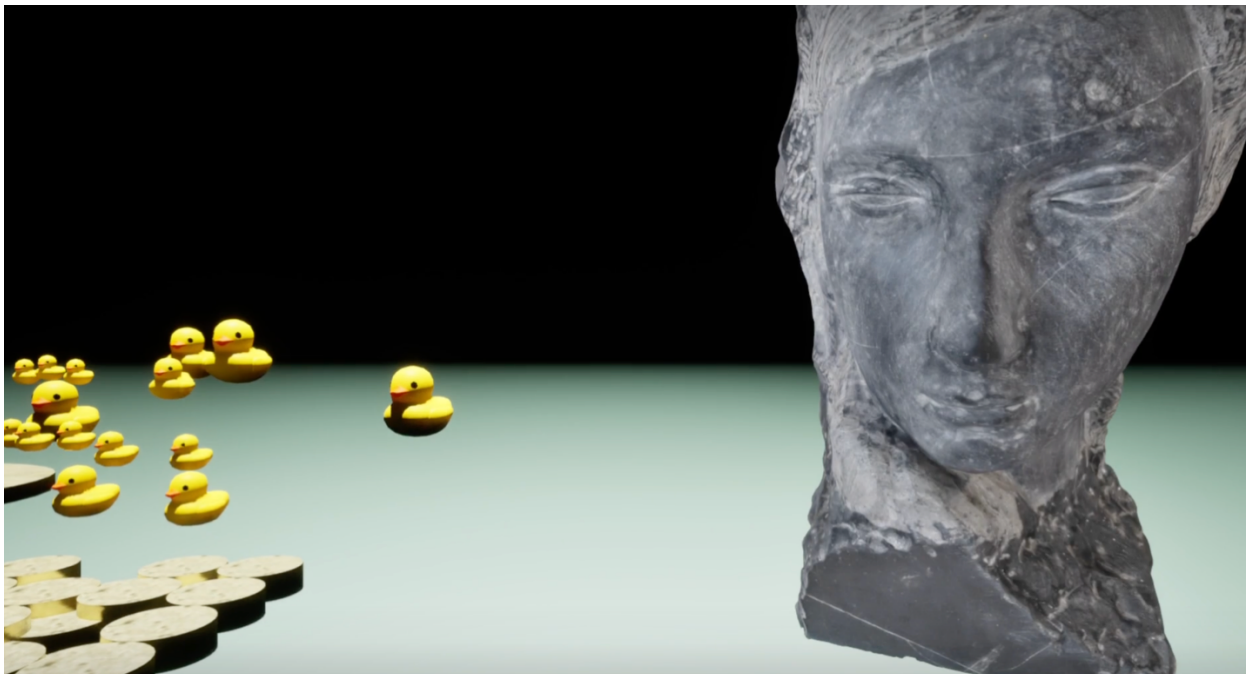
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The third task takes place in another tunnel at the end of the play area. A spinning metallic cube hovers in the center. The player must avoid the guardians, and click the cube. It shatters, revealing the third eye.

Once all three tasks are complete, three stone heads rise from the ground, matching the heads from the opening void. The next portal opens.

The player enters the portal to the third level. The player has learned how the game works without a traditional tutorial: symbols replace language, objects act as both collectibles and clues, surreal objects can hide important information, enemies create pressure during exploration, and the Seer's job is to interpret a hostile world that refuses to explain itself.

The third level is in muted color like waking up from a dream. The descend on a moving platform with one of the statue heads from the previous level attached to it, but the head is just looking and not active. There are bobbing rubber ducks in the background, making it feel more dreamlike. There is a bit of platforming and then the player must navigate a laser maze to reach the boss. There is a bit of extra platforming that seems to lead nowhere, but if the player makes it to the end they are transported to a small surreal town they can enjoy for a bit, although the houses are all locked, before returning to the third level. When the player reaches the boss, he tells them they are fired and must return to Earth. The slice ends when they are teleported to the next level.



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The Next Levels

When the player is sent back to "Earth" they enter a boring office building that looks like any regular Earth office building. They learn that they can now sprint. As the hallway is long, this seems like a good idea. However, If the player sprints for more than a few seconds, the door at the end of the hallway will change, teleporting them to an endless loop of office hallway. When they stop sprinting for 8 seconds, the doorway in this endless loop will unlock and take them back to the original hallway. Upon exiting this hallway, the player will move into another office room that starts to look a little less ordinary, just in small details. There is a noise localized behind them. If they look back twice, they will be rewarded by a door appearing in the side of the room. This door teleports them to an immersive experience room that is fun to explore. After 10 seconds, a doorway will open, and take them back to the original room. Once they leave this room, they will enter an office room that is even less ordinary with interesting paintings on the wall. These paintings will encourage the player to touch them using animation. If the player touches the wall, the room will flip upside-down, and they can now see things from a new perspective. They will then enter a right-side-up very immersive room for a surreal experience. When they exit this room, they will be back with the Boss. The Boss will explain he would never actually send them back to Earth, but they needed to learn to slow down and "See" things instead of rushing through them. The player then will restart the first level but with interesting things to explore, including The Hanged, people how came before but didn't slow down to do the Seer job correctly.

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Movement and Survival

Players can:

- Walk
- Run
- Jump
- Sprint (starting at level 4)
- Interact with objects

If you get hit or fall out of the world:

- You blackout and respawn at the beginning of that level

Environmental Interaction

Environmental interactions include puzzles that use mouse click and found items, and hallways and rooms that react to the player's actions.

Challenge Systems

Challenges are reusable mechanics in different combinations. It is interpreting and placing things correctly to continue.

Combat and Threat

There are rock statues that move at a moderate pace on set paths. If they hit you, you will respawn. There are smaller rock monsters that move slower. They target the character within a narrow radius. If they hit you, you will also respawn.

Narrative

You are in a place so far from any universe everything has become simplified even yourself and the spacecraft you came here on.

It takes 1800 years to get from earth to this location. Thankfully at 30 years into travel, time becomes meaningless.

You are the first human employee to work here. You have worked here for 2 billion years now and are finally getting that promotion you wanted. Being a Seer is no easy job after all...

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The player fantasy is that you are a lost entity. The main character believes they must serve a greater purpose but it is not revealed. What you have to do is not explicitly explained, but there is a clear path forward.

On these paths, you can:

- Solve challenges.
- Collect items.
- Encounter NPCs.

The narrative arc is curiosity → revelation → surrender.
Or control → realizing lack of control.

There is a late-game realization that you are just here. This is an existential experience.

Allies/Non-combatant NPCs – There is the Boss, who sends you back to “Earth” when you reach him.

Enemies – Moderate-speed rock statues and smaller slower rock monsters who will make you respawn.

Mechanics

Enemy Types & Threat Systems

There are some monsters that can't kill you, like stone statues. If you enter a challenge solving area, the statues will block your exit and you can't leave that area until you solve the challenge. They are non-lethal gatekeepers.

The rock statues and smaller rock monsters will respawn you on impact.

There is also something called The Hanged. But you don't need to fear The Hanged, it doesn't attack. They are creepy because you know these bodies didn't hang themselves. They are people who came before you and failed.

Interface

First-person perspective with full immersion. You never see yourself. You are the camera.

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Moment-to-moment awareness:

- NPCs approaching from the distance.

The player should feel awe and unease. The feeling of being watched.

Audio

Echo-like soundscape. Faint, surreal music. Dreamcore.

When alone:

- Dreamlike ambience.
- The world making echoes and rock sounds.

When under attack:

- Monsters moving like wind or footsteps

Sound heightens unease by shifting from surrealism to unsettling during combat.

Production

The environment is vital. Immersion is everything.

Aesthetic:

- Surreal
- Rocky, barren world

Art Notes:

- The first two levels should be entirely black and white, created through post-processing using saturation and EV100 settings.
- Materials and textures for the first two levels should mostly be stone, giving the environment an ancient, carved, ritualistic feeling.
- Lighting in dark spaces should rely mostly on Rect Lights to create a cinematic look and guide the player toward important areas.
- The rock pillars can be shaped so they are wide at the top and narrow at the bottom, making them appear to extend down forever into the void.
- The tunnels should be embedded into the rocky landscape so they look like part of the environment rather than separate objects.
- The tunnel openings should blend naturally into the terrain.

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Technical Notes:

- The moving clock hands can be created using vector manipulation, including location and rotation, and should reflect the player's local time, or perhaps switch the hour and minute hand to make it more surreal...
- Rock pillars can be created in Modeling Mode using boxes or cubes, then shaped with lattice points.
- Tunnels can be created in Modeling Mode by using the Dsculpt tool on a large box or rock form with enough height.
- For tunnel carving, use a large brush size and the Fixed Plane option to change the brush axis horizontally.
- After carving the tunnel, use the Plane Cut tool vertically to make a side cut and shape the tunnel entrance.
- Collision should be added or checked on the rock pillars and tunnels so the player can jump on them without falling through.
- Use the Landscape Visibility tool to cut holes in the landscape where the tunnels connect. The hole material must be the same as the landscape material.
- The landscape material must support holes/visibility masking for the Landscape Visibility tool to work.
- Enemy movement can be set up with a NavMesh and Nav Modifiers.
- Large statue NPCs should move on set paths in and out of the tunnels using something like a trigger as their targets.
- Smaller rock monster NPCs should use AI sight detection to chase the player.
- If either enemy hits the player, the player should respawn at the beginning of the level.

Reliability factor:

Design consistency across mechanics, aesthetic, and tone.

Project Scope

The project will be done by September 2026 and I will use Unreal Engine. Within these constraints, I will deliver a prototype.