

Mini-Portfolio – A Visit to Black Marsh



A screenshot from A Visit to Black Marsh, from outside the Outer Sanctum.

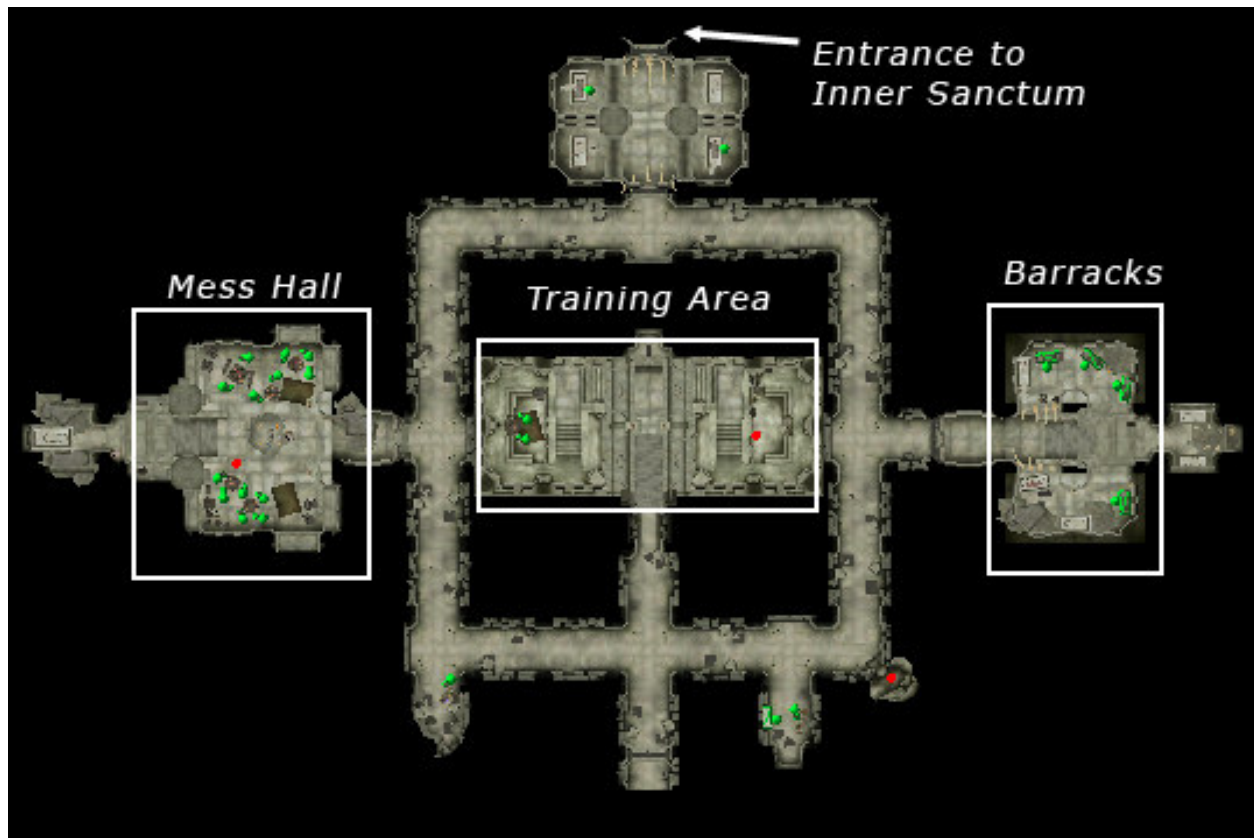
The purpose of this document is to illustrate some of the methods I use as a level designer, and to share some of the design decisions and thought processes that influenced creation of A Visit to Black Marsh, a plugin I created for *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (*Oblivion*). I hope this will provide some insight into how I work and how I design a level.

This level was created while attending The Guildhall at SMU and was completed in just under five weeks. During this time, I was also producing work for other classes and for other game projects.

Thank you for taking the time to review my work.

Overview

This project was the first singleplayer level that I was assigned while attending the Guildhall. The majority of the projects before this one were multiplayer maps for games like *Unreal Tournament 2004* and *Quake III: Arena*. This project on the other hand was an exercise in story-telling and in RPG world/area creation. The only limitations/requirements imposed on the creation of this plugin was that we had to use standard *Oblivion* assets, and that it had to have at least one hour of gameplay.

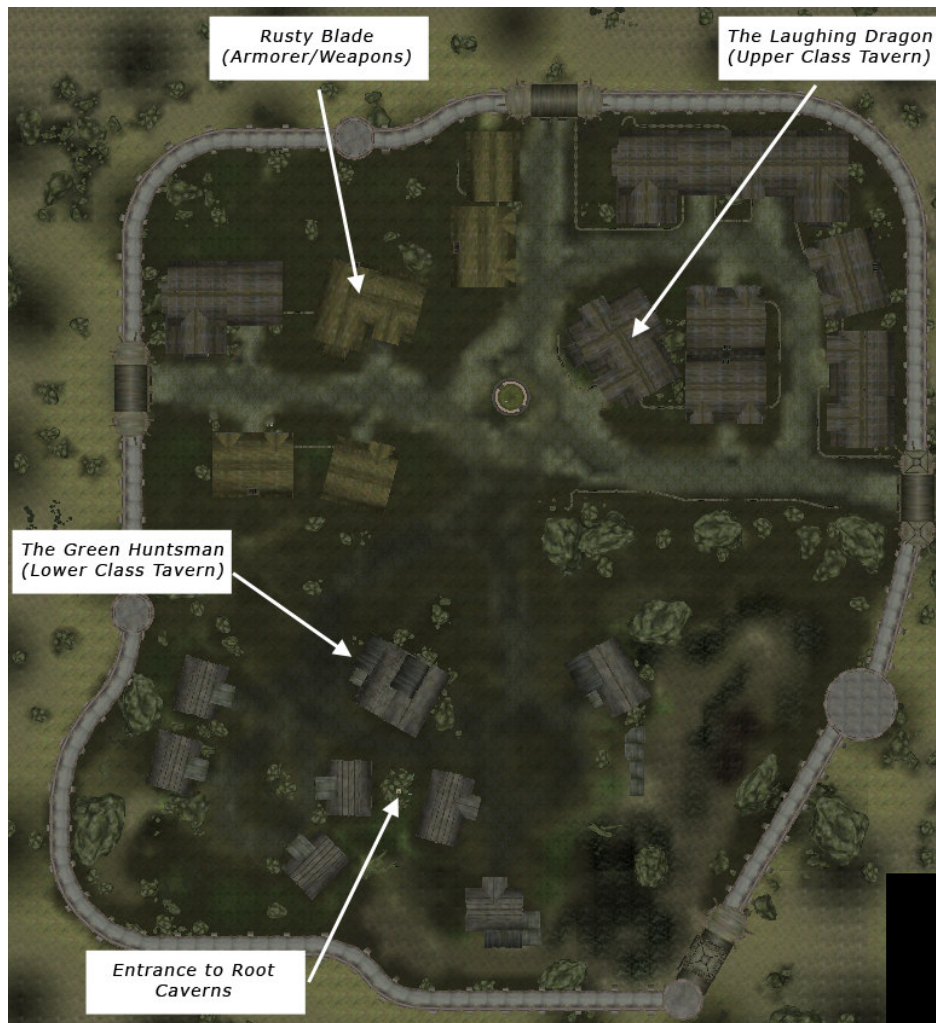


A map/top-down view of the Outer Sanctum, the main base of the Followers of Seth. I wanted to portray the Outer Sanctum as an above-ground fortress that had sunk into the swampy marshes of Argonia; the fortress interior has a practical feel to it, since it acts as the home to a large group of people.

When creating this plugin, I had two main goals: stay true to the existing *Elder Scrolls* lore, both visually and contextually, and create an engrossing quest line that expanded upon the existing Dark Brotherhood quest line.

Goals

When I started this project, I made the conscious decision weave my plugin into the existing lore of the Elder Scrolls world. The province of Argonia, or Black Marsh, provided a backdrop that had enough in the way of basic details for me to form a story arc that would fit into the lore, but had yet to be fully explored in any of the *Elder Scrolls* games.



A top down view of the city of Gideon. The city is distinctly class segregated, with the upper class homes being located on the higher, northern half of the city, and the lower class homes in the swampy lowlands to the south.

The existing lore gave me a city name, Gideon, and a small amount of information about the city: it was Imperialized (meaning somewhat like the cities from *Oblivion*), its citizens' skin color tended to have a grey tint, and they were rumored to be involved with a dark character known as Seth, who seemed to be involved with necromancy. These few bits of information gave me enough to develop a story arc that was entirely new that still fit within the *Elder Scrolls* universe.

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My second goal was to create a quest line that extended upon the existing Dark Brotherhood quest line but remained faithful to the overall spirit of the original quests. The Dark Brotherhood quests from *Oblivion* were, in my opinion, the most entertaining and engrossing quests in the game. I tried to reproduce that with feeling within the level.



A screenshot from Soulwretch Caverns, the main dungeon in *A Visit to Black Marsh*. I kept the dungeon dark and used colored light and shadow to create a creepy vibe throughout the dungeon.



A view from inside the Root Caverns, the natural “sewer” system underneath Gideon. Large, semi-sentient trees known as the Hist are a large part of Argonian lore, and are native only to Black Marsh, so to make a unique subsystem, I based them off of the hollowed out roots of one of these trees.

Plot Summary

The main quest line in A Visit to Black Marsh revolves around the Followers of Seth, a cult of necromancers that has begun to grow in popularity in the city of Gideon, located just inside the province known as Argonia. This cult is luring away members of the Dark Brotherhood due to the similarities in their beliefs. After the player has become the Listener of the Dark Brotherhood, a messenger from the Black Hand of Argonia appears in the Cheydinhal Sanctuary, requesting the player's assistance in dealing with the Followers of Seth. The player is smuggled into Gideon, and once there, they need to investigate the cult and find a way to assassinate its mysterious leader, Nakuma. In order to get close to Nakuma, the player has to join the Followers of Seth and gain the trust of one of its higher ups, named Tul-Neel. After the player has completed the initial rite of passage to join the Followers of Seth, they can either choose to attempt and find Nakuma on their own, or aid Tul-Neel in his quest for power, by assassinating his immediate superiors, which in turn allows the player to get progressively closer to Nakuma.



A screenshot from the Laughing Dragon, the upper class tavern in Gideon. The bartender, J'Kvirra, acts as the players Dark Brotherhood contact.

Additional Screenshots



The Upper class area of Gideon. The small, non-Argonian population of Gideon resides mostly in this area.



Entrance to the Inner Sanctum. This is where the player confronts their final target, Nakuma.

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The Training Area in the Outer Sanctum. I wanted to give the Followers' compound a practical but dark feel to it.



Nakuma's Lair / The Inner Sanctum. Acts as place of worship for the Followers and the location for the "final battle" of the plugin. Once the player has assassinated Nakuma, the rest of the cult turns on them, attacking on sight, and the player has to fight their way out of the Followers compound.

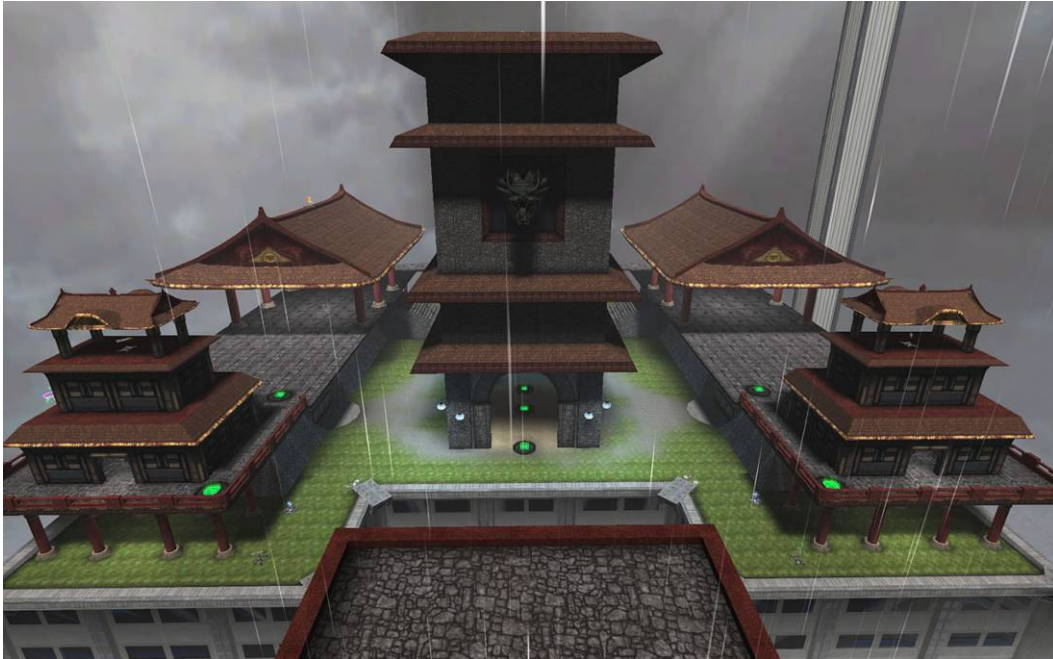
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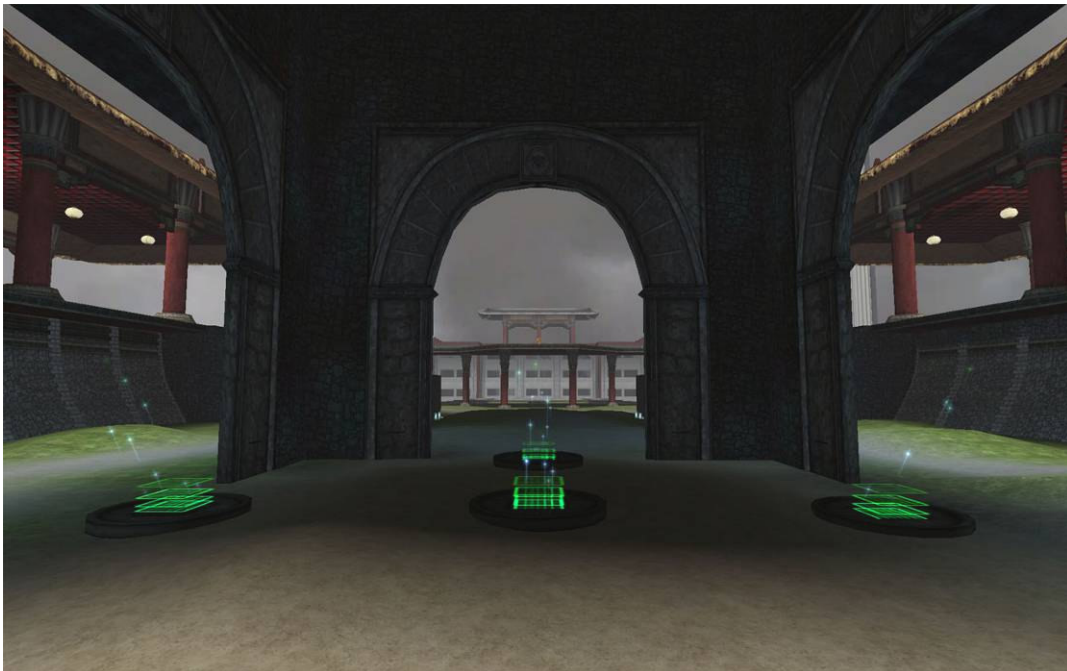
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Other Work



A screenshot from DM-Kyototech, a *Unreal Tournament 2004* level based off of the classic *Quake III* map, DM-17. The level takes place on a rooftop garden, located on the top of a skyscraper. (Dev Time: 3 Weeks)



Another screen from DM-Kyototech, near my version of the signature jump pad hub in the center of the level. The central jump pad launches the player up towards a Mega Health Pack floating inside of the pagoda.

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A screenshot from DM-LastCall, one of my *Unreal Tournament 2004* levels for the Team Deathmatch gametype. The level takes place in a post-apocalyptic city block. (Dev Time: 4 weeks)



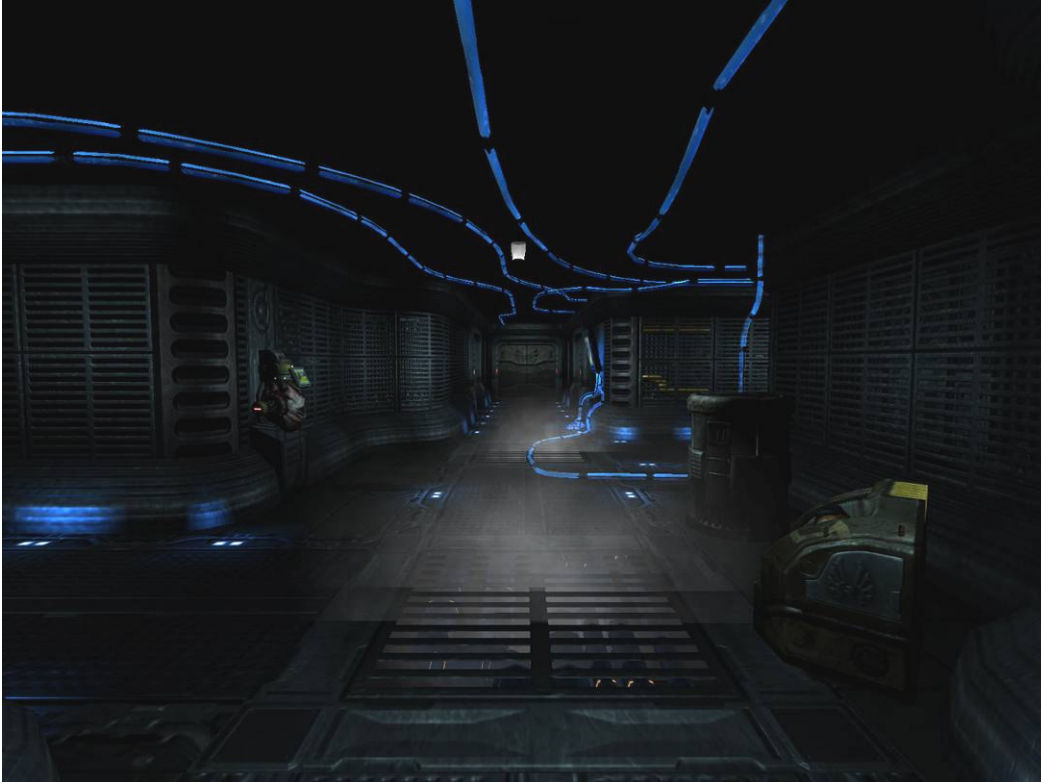
A view from above the bar in DM-LastCall. The overpass stretches across the level and acts as a sniper's roost for both teams.

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A screenshot from U.S.S. Heimdall, my singleplayer *Quake IV* level, which takes place on a UMC Battleship during an enemy attack. (Dev Time: 7 Weeks)



The Walker Bay from U.S.S. Heimdall. The so-called “Breach” scripted event, where the attackers blast through the outer hull wall, required extensive scripting and AI pathing to produce a believable sequence.