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Three-Headed Monkey

Single Player Level for Gears of War

Figure 1 Server room for imulsion facility

Introduction

In this level deconstruction, I give a brief overview of a level that displays my abilities and focus while at the SMU Guildhall. In this document, I review the goals I wanted to achieve and the process I used designing the level to achieve those goals.

This level is a single player independent study, created during module 4 at the SMU Guildhall. Before this class, I had experience using Unreal Tournament 3 but not in Gears of War. The timeframe given was eight weeks and I was able to accomplish that while keeping up with work in other classes and developing a UT3 mod as a team project. My inspiration for the level came from Act 3: Belly of the Beast in the Gears of War campaign. I enjoyed the style of the Imulsion facility and wanted to create the same feel. The name I gave to the map is a reference to an ongoing joke found in the graphic adventure games named Monkey Island by LucasArts. Anytime the protagonist, Guybrush Threepwood, needs to create a diversion, he points behind his opponent and says, “Look behind you, a Three-Headed Monkey!”

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Figure 2 Imulsion loading area

Goals

I wanted to create a unique experience for the player but keep my level within the Gears of War timeline. To achieve this I allow the player to play as a generic COG soldier, in this case the player model is Carmine. I changed a few of the settings within kismet to give Carmine the same feel as Marcus or Dom.

I also felt the imulsion facility theme in Gears of War was interesting and visually impressive. I wanted to deconstruct their methods of using static meshes and assigning different skins to create a similar feel. I used that same method to create an interesting environment with a true to life feel as well as giving the illusion of a place larger than it actually is.

Secondary goals consisted of

- Balancing combat
- Creating an interesting level with a rollercoaster feel

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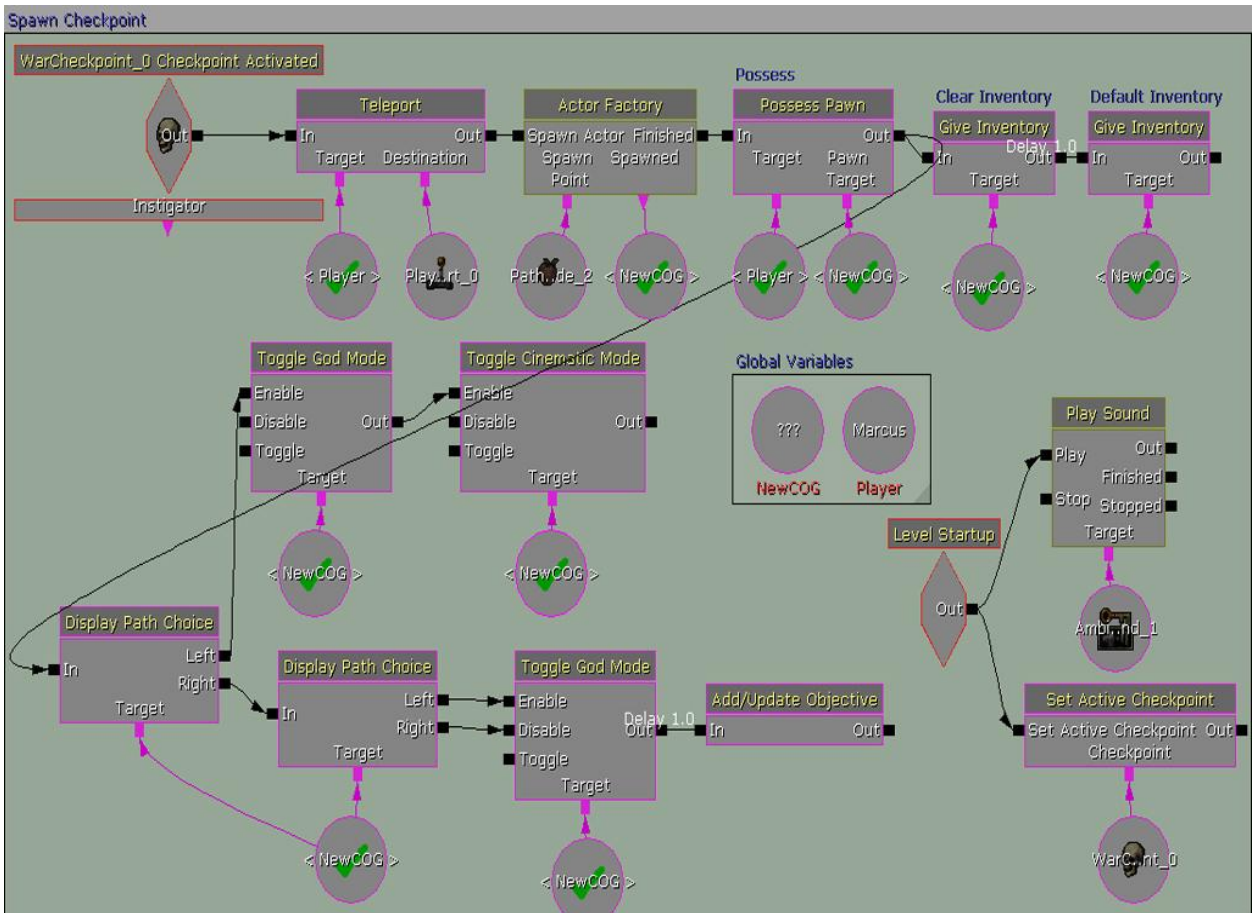

Figure 3 Kismet Example

Design Process – Scripting

In order to create the unique feel of playing a generic COG soldier I was able to put my scripting talents to good use. Within kismet, I created a sequence that placed a checkpoint while the player is still Marcus, and then swaps out the Marcus mesh for Carmine. As stated before I needed to change some of the settings for the Carmine model to allow it to play similar to Marcus or Dom. In addition, when the model switches to Carmine, the player is given the default weapon load out but with infinite ammo. To overcome this problem I stripped the player of all weapons and then reset the inventory with a predefined setup. Finally, to allow somebody a quick run through of my level I present the player with a choice to enable or disable "God Mode". This choice is made by either clicking the left or right mouse button, exactly like how you pick a path in the Gears of War game.

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Figure 4 Locust getting blasted

Design Process - Gameplay

When designing this level on paper, I placed six different combat areas. After the whitebox design of basic BSP geometry, I realized this could be toned down to four. Then during the gameplay testing phase, I removed another encounter. After these combat sequences were removed, the level had more of a rollercoaster feel. The player begins the level and has time to soak in the environment and get a feel for the area before being attacked for the first time. After the initial combat, the player receives a cooldown area and then thrust into a puzzle sequence with no combat involved. I feel with this flow that I achieve the rollercoaster feel found in good levels.

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Figure 5 Environment examples

Design Process – Visuals and Environment

In order to create similar structures used in the imulsion facility level I found a series of pipes, structures, objects, and materials that all had the same feel. I found what Epic used as doorway meshes and the sizes used. I created unique combinations using these meshes making a skywalk, imulsion storage and loading area, as well as an imulsion tanker.

Conclusion

Three-Headed Monkey became an impressive success given the timeframe and amount of work outside of this project. This map shows my level of skill and scripting ability while I was only half way through the SMU Guildhall curriculum. I have used this experience of balancing gameplay and flow and applied it to other levels I have created and really focused those skills. This map set my focus for the remainder of my education and became part of the solid foundation that defines me as a level designer.