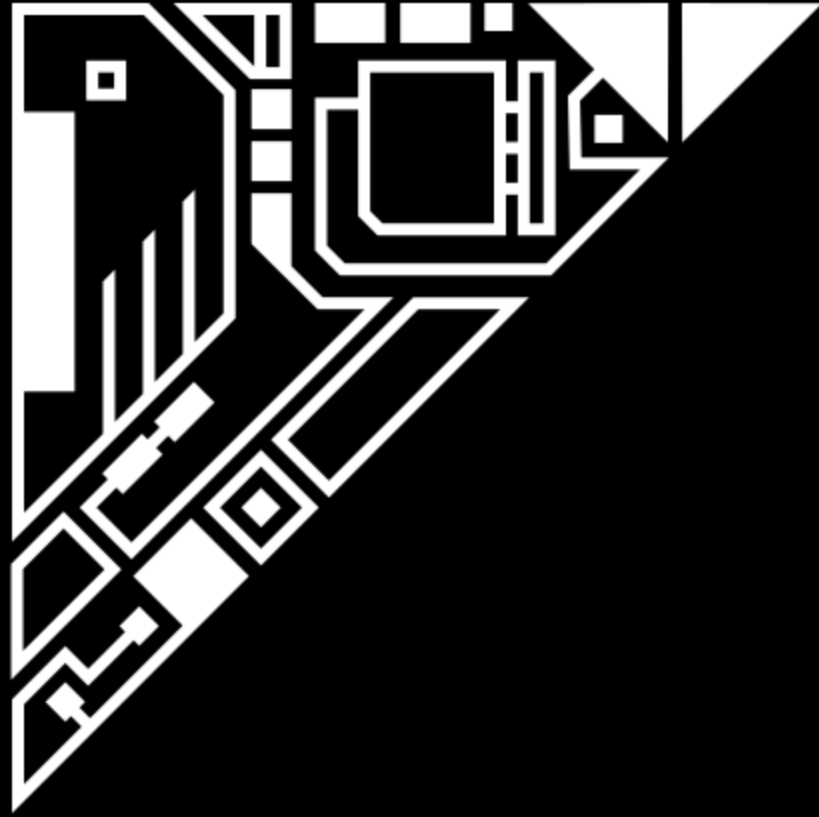




Polychromatic

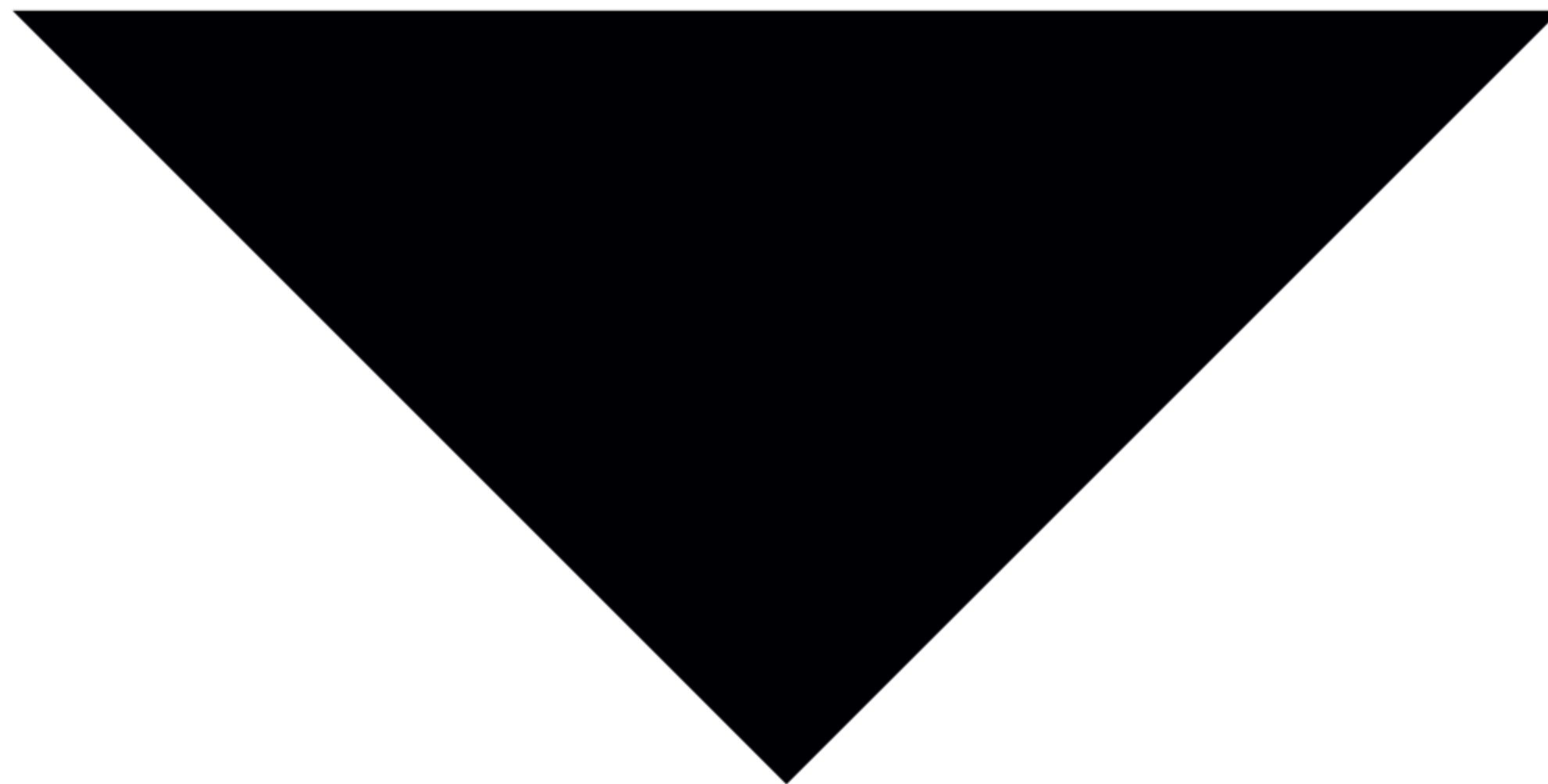
The Art of Resolution

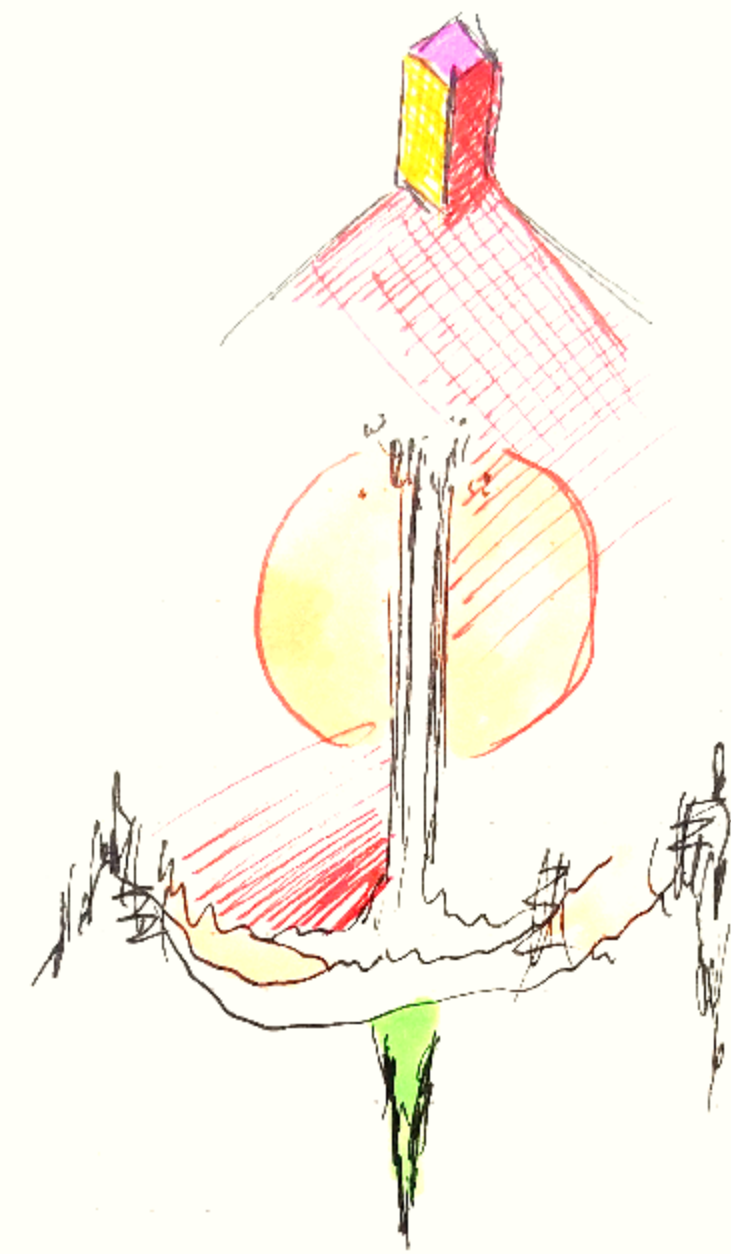


P o l y c h r o m a t i c

The Art of Resolutiion

T o R e s o l u t i o n





About this Book

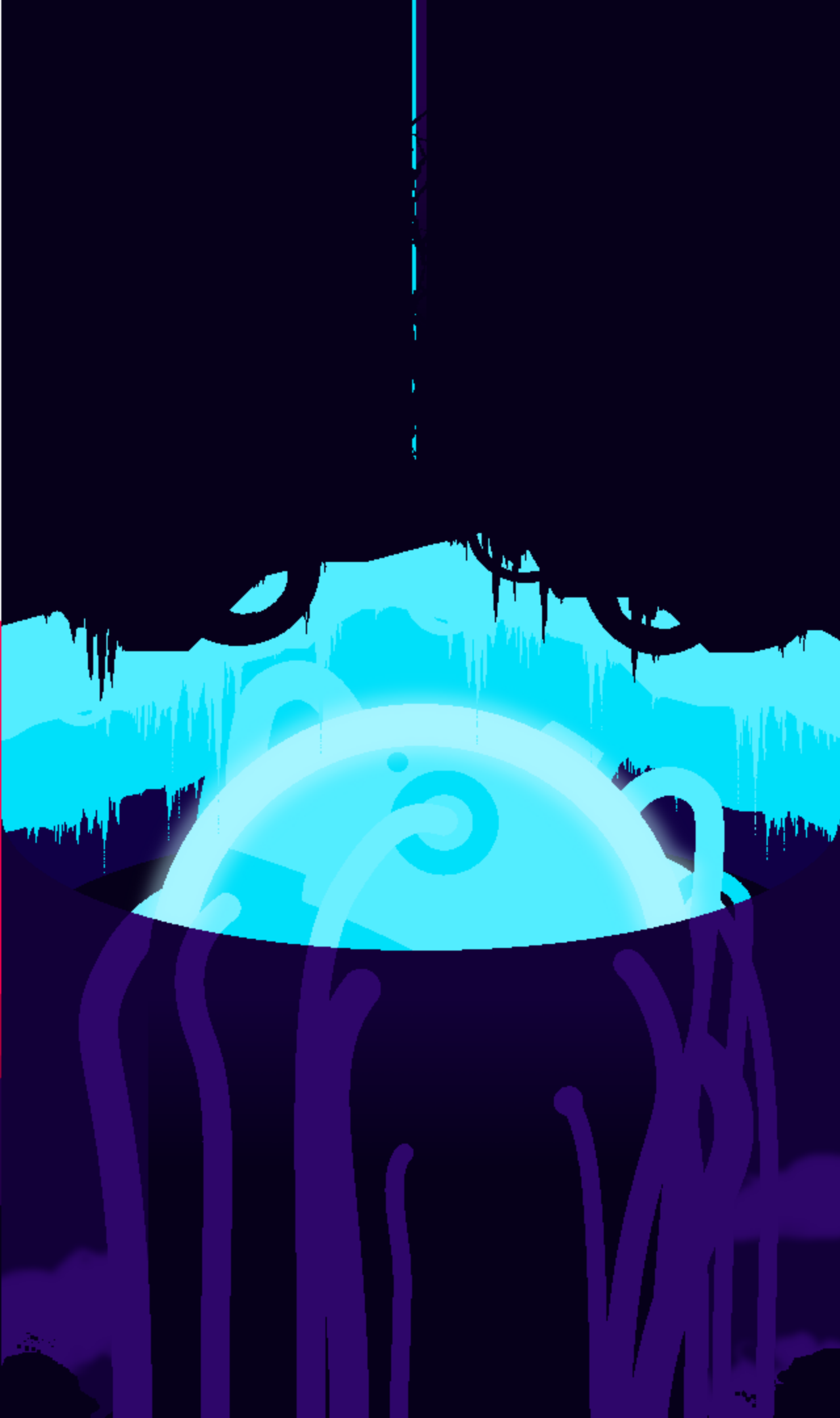
Hello fellow cat lovers, pixel junkies, 80s girls, and time-traveling cyborgs. You've arrived here because at some point in the past you developed an interest in a video game called Resolution. An interest that transcends a simple play-session or a peek at some screenshots. You wanted more.

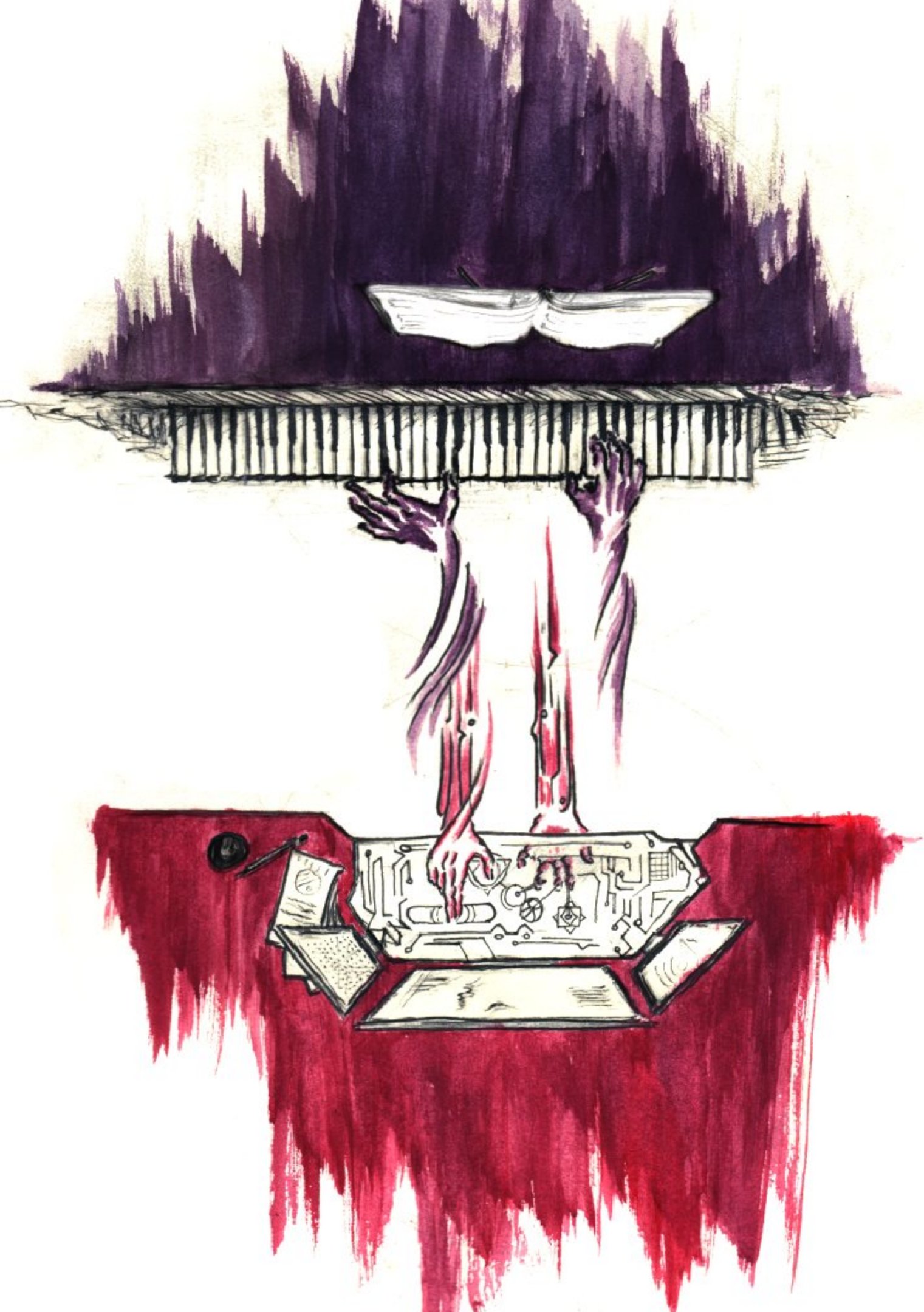
We, Richard and Günther Beyer, developed Resolution over five years, from 2015 to 2020. We started without any knowledge or experience in pixel art or game design, but with an eagerness to learn as many new skills as possible — after all, there was a story inside us we had to tell.

This book collects our ideas, sketches, prototypes, and final art. It's also a manifesto on human creation: if two angry German idiots like us can craft something as complex as a video game, so can everybody (as long as you're open, stoic, and ready to fight the fight).

Thank you, for your attention and support.
Enjoy.
—Monolith of Minds

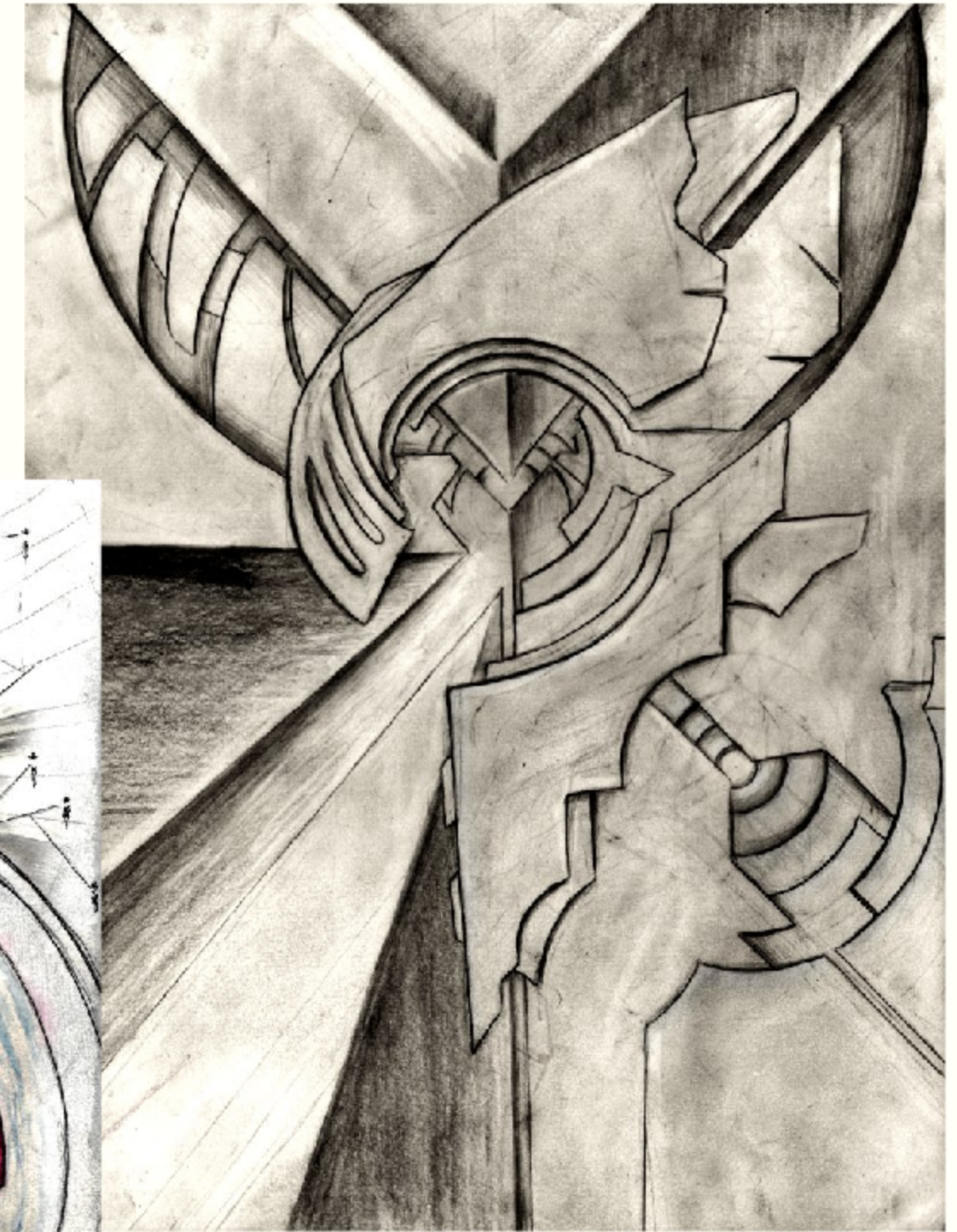
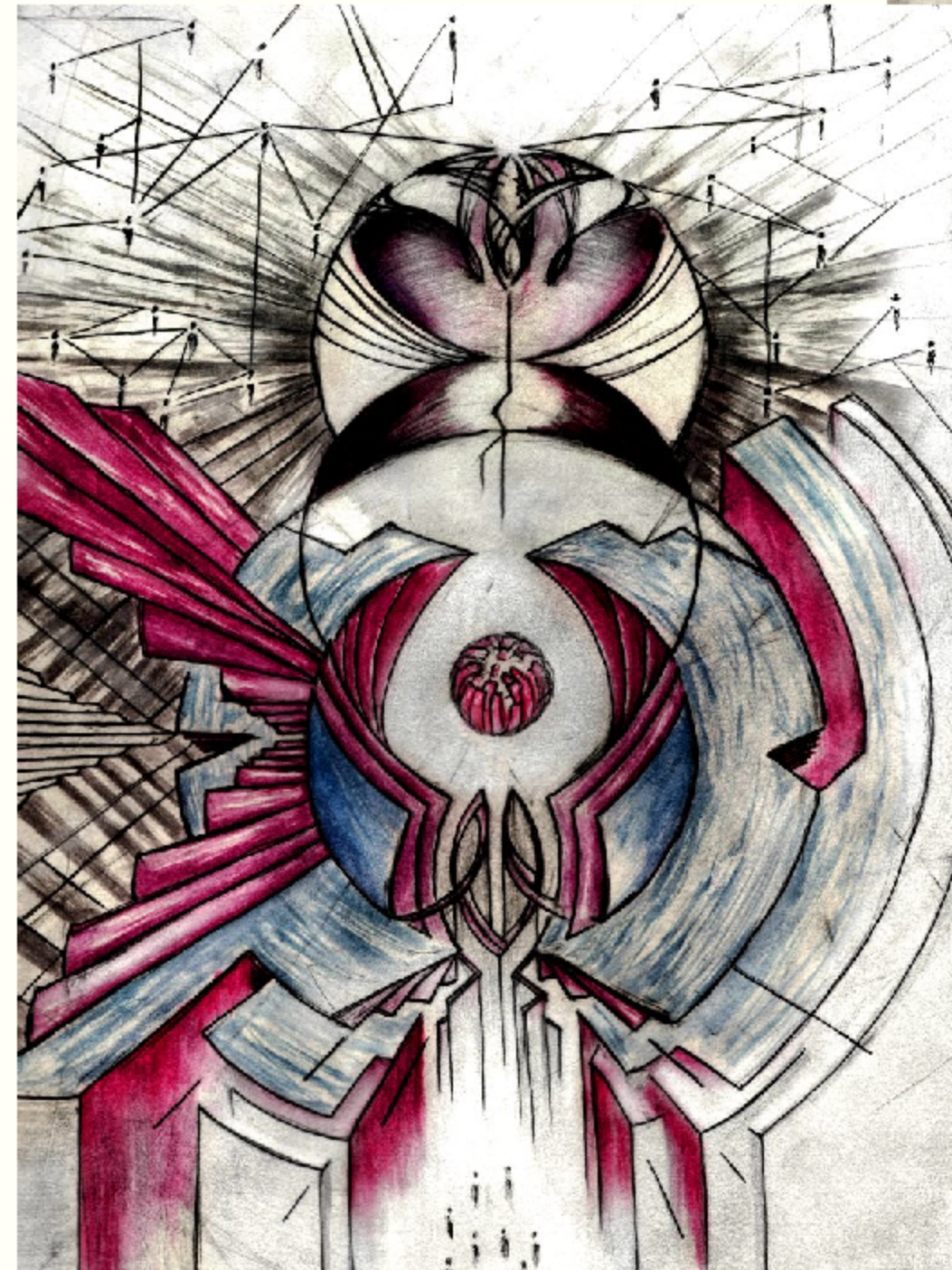
All art in this book by
Günther Beyer
Chris Rafferty
Jo Chapman
Ronja Friedmann





The Last Website

Before Resolutiion, there was The Last Website: a short multimedia experiment that we collaborated on with The Brothers Chapman in 2013. The story was cryptic, talking about a war between man and machine, and their struggle over information sovereignty. It also introduced the character of Alibi — Alibi-2's predecessor.



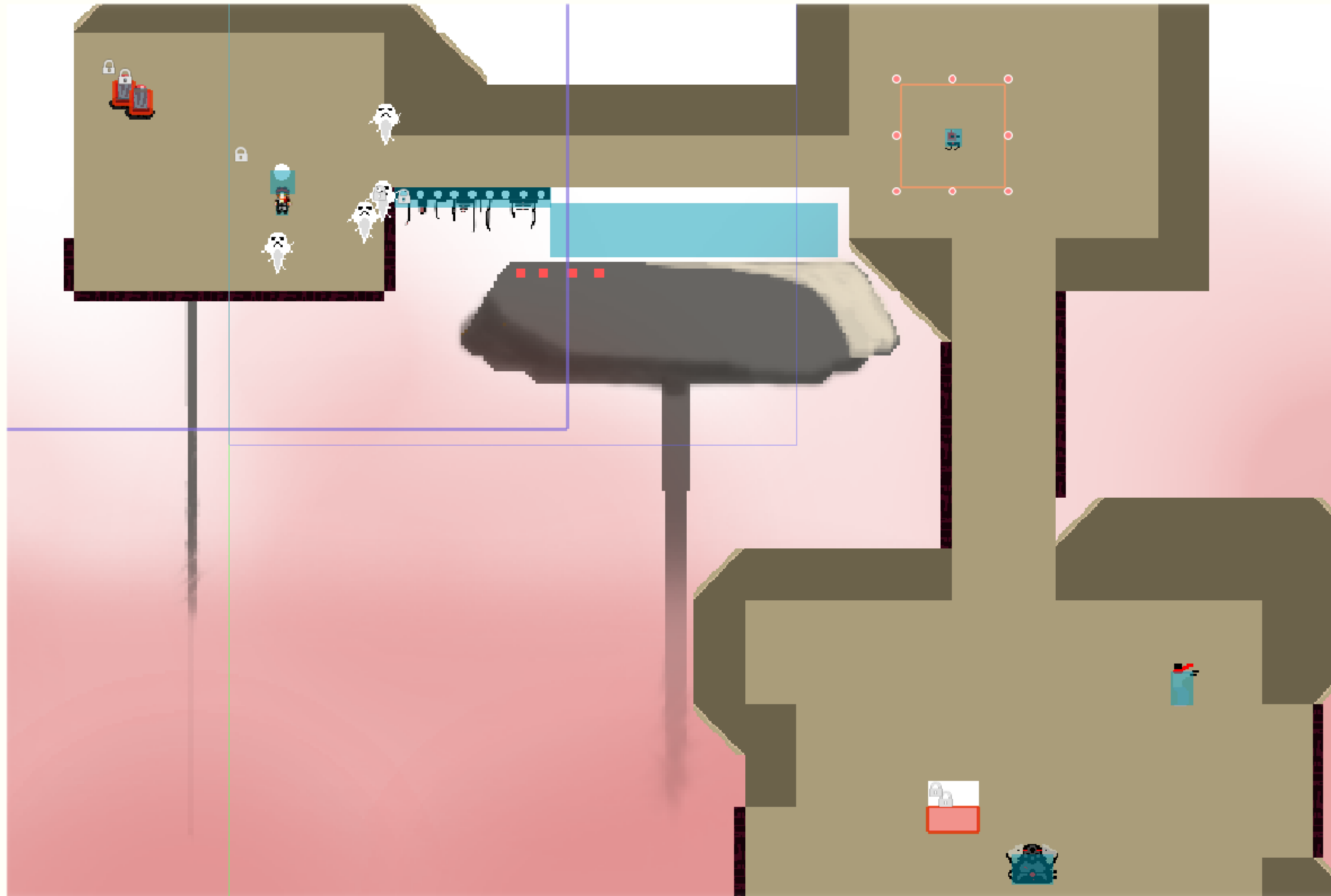
The Last Website sparked our interest in artificial intelligence and transhumanism and led to many discussions about how our world might be shaped in the foreseeable future. We craved more stories about humanity's inevitable symbiosis with technology ...



The Story of Red

Later that year, Günther experimented with another short tale, "The Story of the Red-Haired Girl". This turned out to become a very personal project about love and loss. From here sprung Cradles, Red (who we will learn about much later in this book), and Günther's first experiments in pixel art.





Coffee & Star Wars

Silence. Two years later, in 2015, Richard was playing around with a young game engine (Godot), just to waste some time. He made a black dot move in four directions, then eight, and eventually added borders, doors, enemies, and magic! A few weeks later, delirious on plenty of coffee, we decided to make a video game.

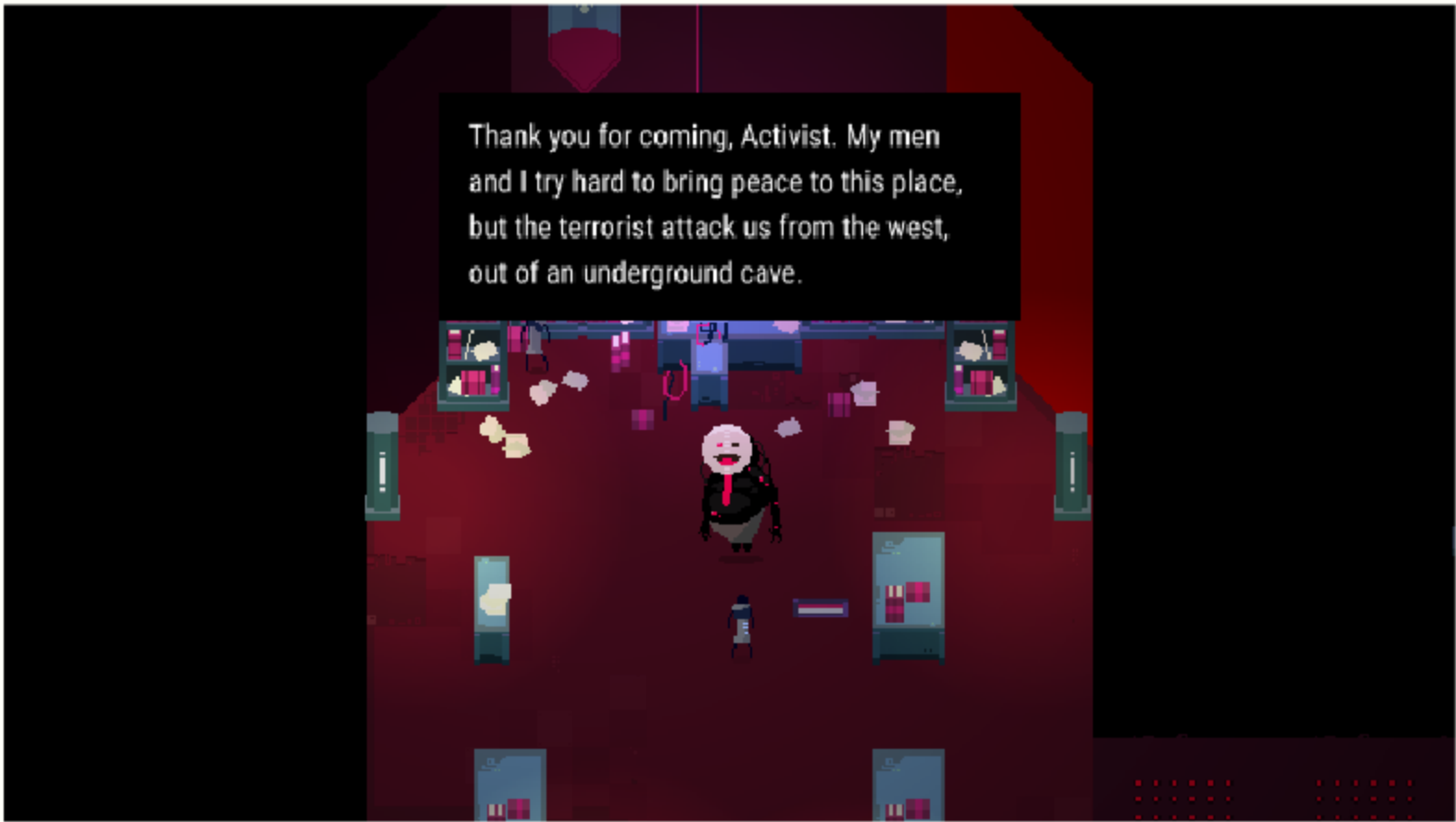
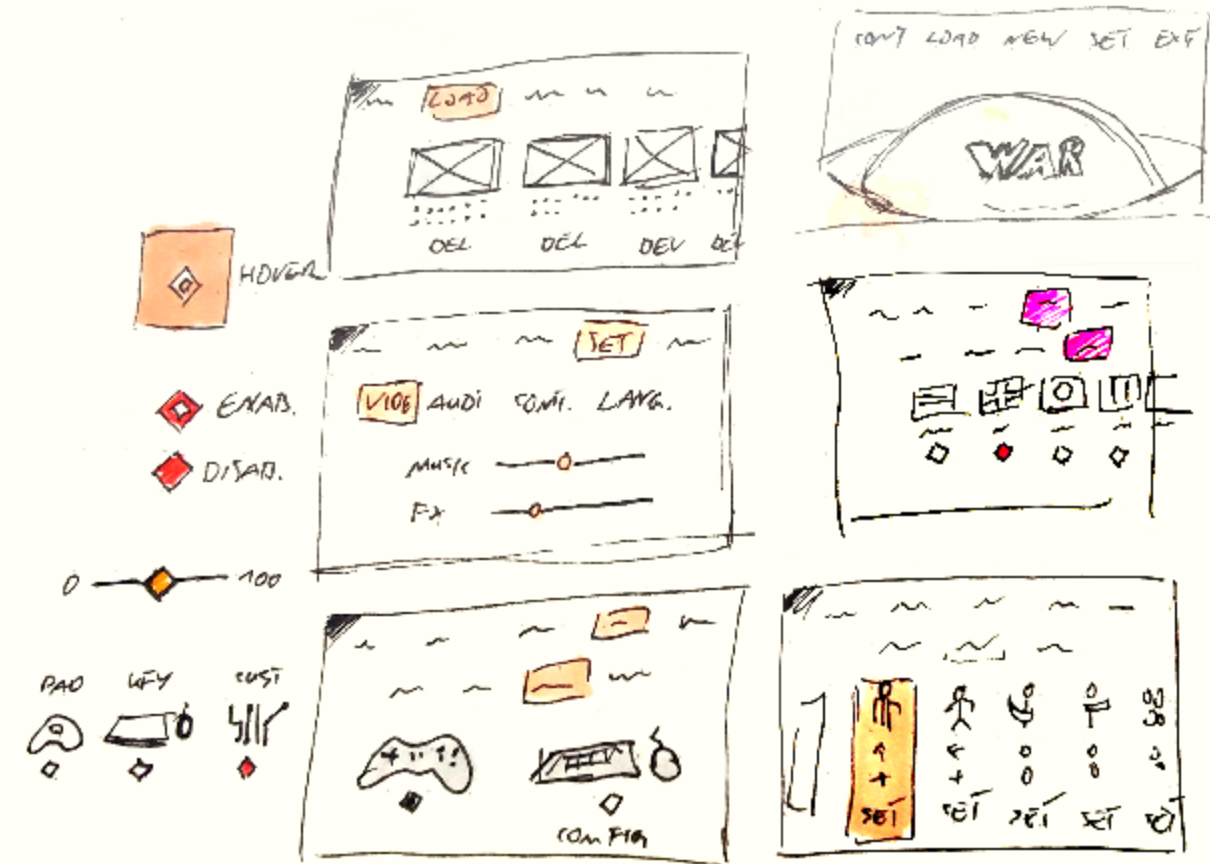
Star Wars was our primary inspiration, but we quickly incorporated The Last Website and The Story of Red into our wild potpourri of wishfulness and madness. Equipped with an arsenal of ideas, we were ready to get to work.



First Steps

Creating a video game is a crazy-complex endeavor. It fuses art, gameplay, mechanics, world design, music, soundscapes, writing, character development, menus, guidance, and just about every other human art form we can think of. And we embarked without luggage or a map.

The first few months were mostly spent poking at new software, sketching ideas, or reading articles about game development. At the same time, our perspective shifted when playing our favorite games: it became less emotional and more analytical.

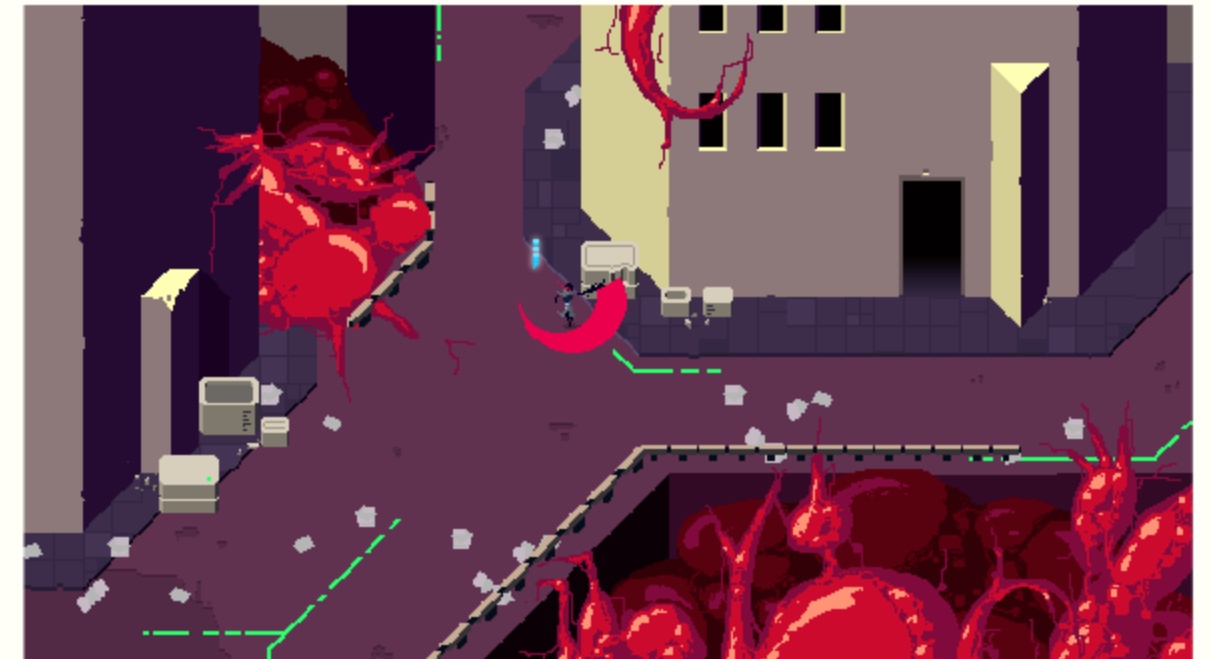
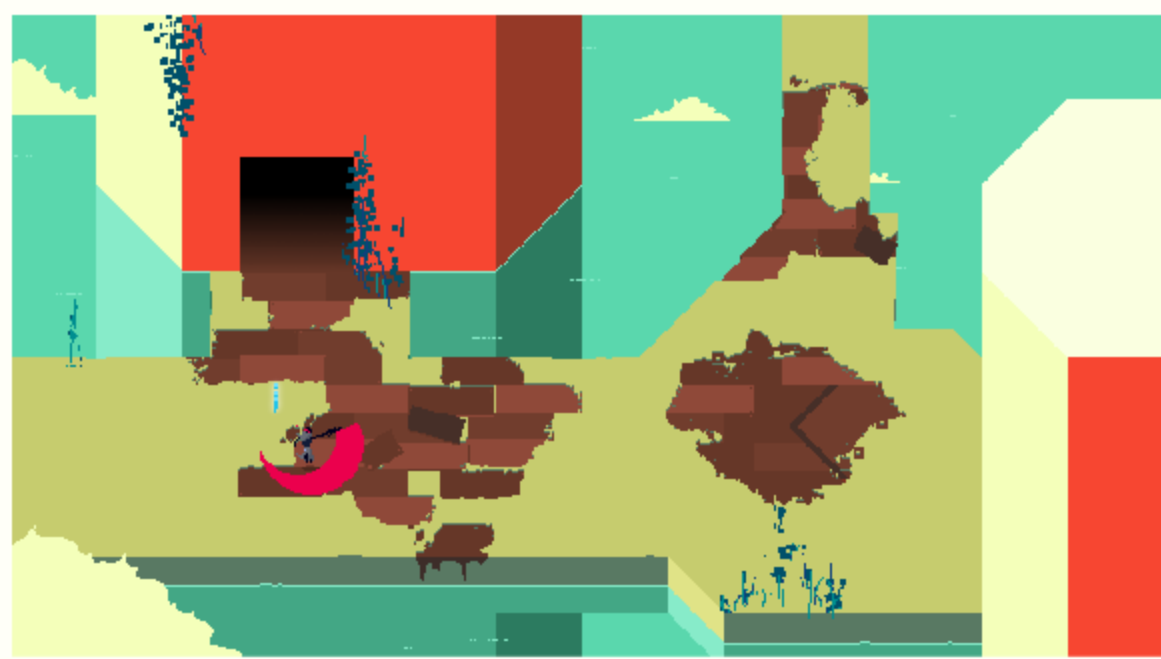
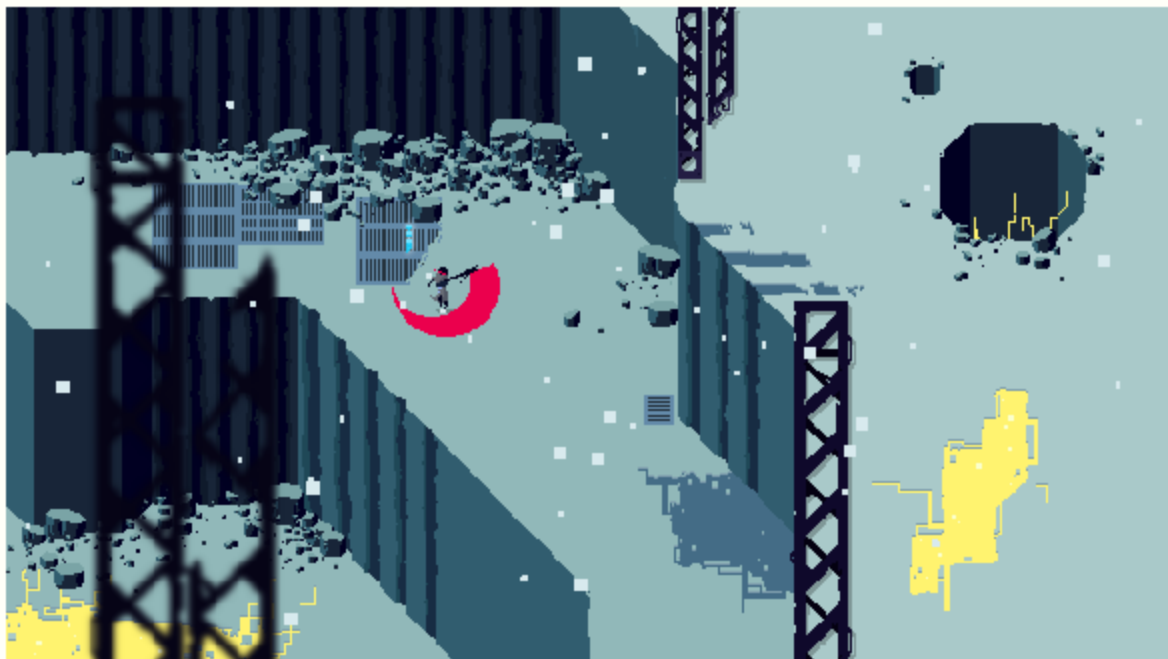
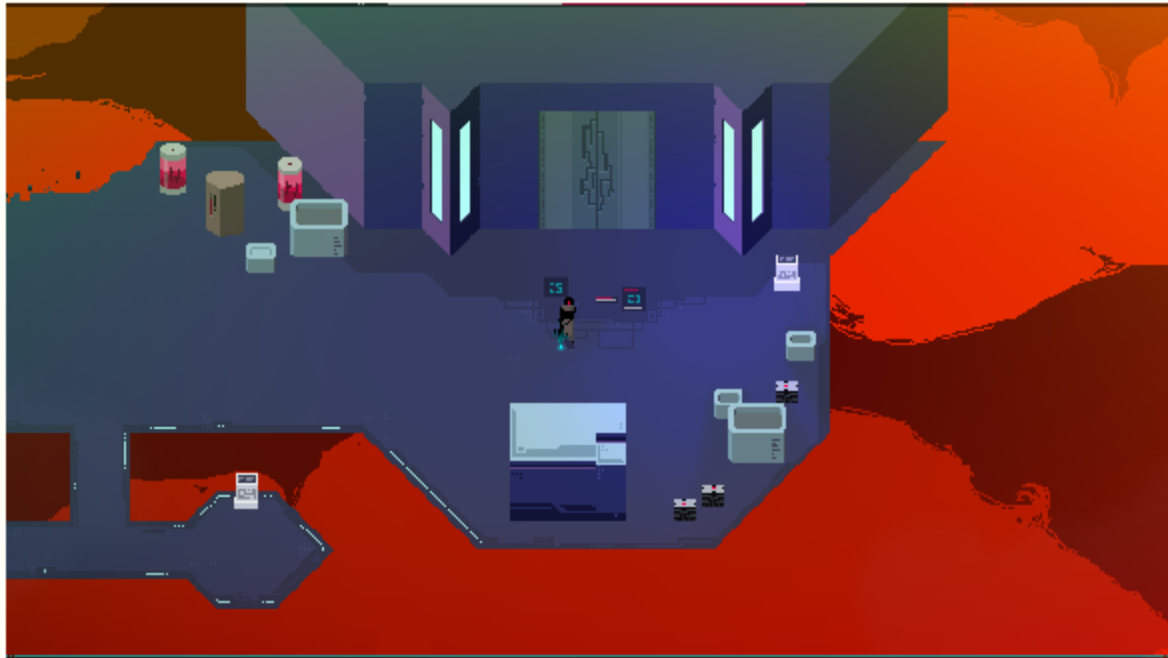


Themes

It wasn't until we were four months into production that the first themes and patterns emerged. Through plenty of prototypes, we had explored geometry, speed, layers, and objects, developing a rough sense of how we would structure our space and world.

From there, we carved out six themes we wanted to represent in our game: a city in the clouds; a desert; a mystical forest; a barren graveyard-like place; something above water; and finally, a disgusting, gore-infested area. Each should come with a unique look and feel, local enemies, objects, and plenty of characters to interact with.

We had no idea how to get there or what would unfold along the way — but you'll discover much of our journey in the following pages and chapters.

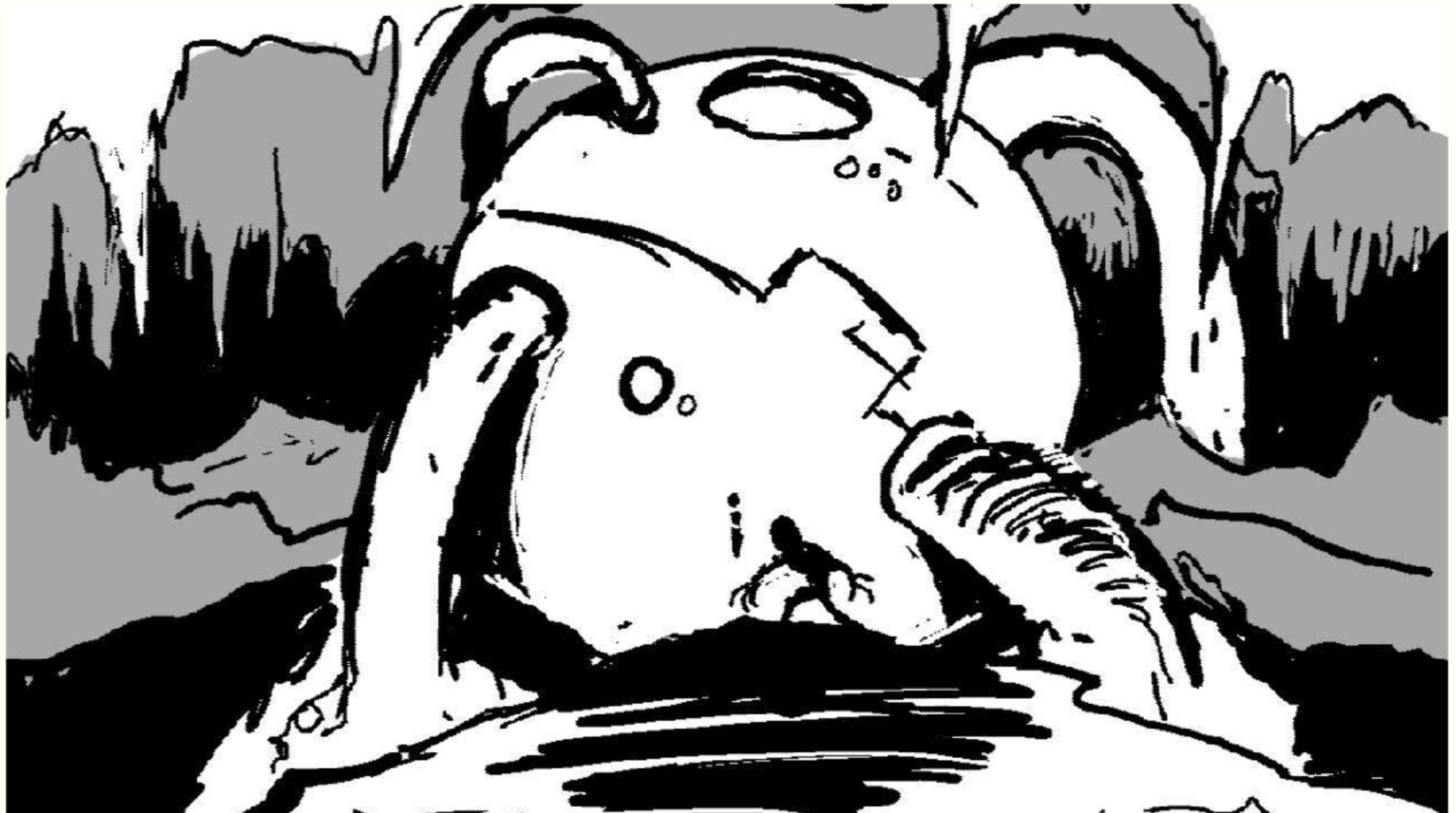




Spoilers Ahead

This book is primarily about Resolution's art and how we put all these pieces together, nevertheless, you'll be reading about plenty of lore, secrets, and scenes that are meant to be explored and figured out while playing the game ...

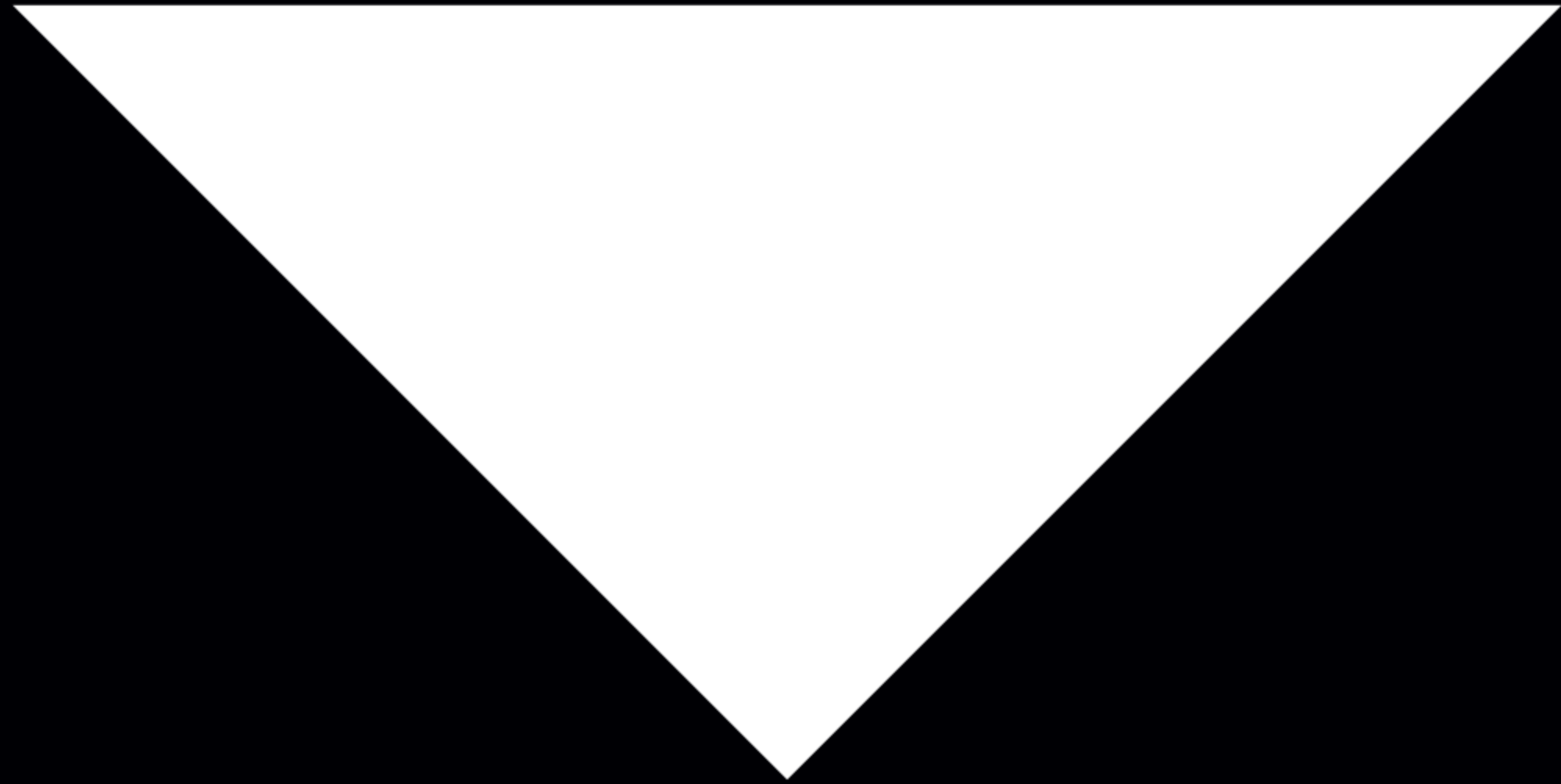
Be warned.





Down the rabbit hole we go.
This is probably gonna hurt.
-Alibii

Valor & Alibii



The Hero

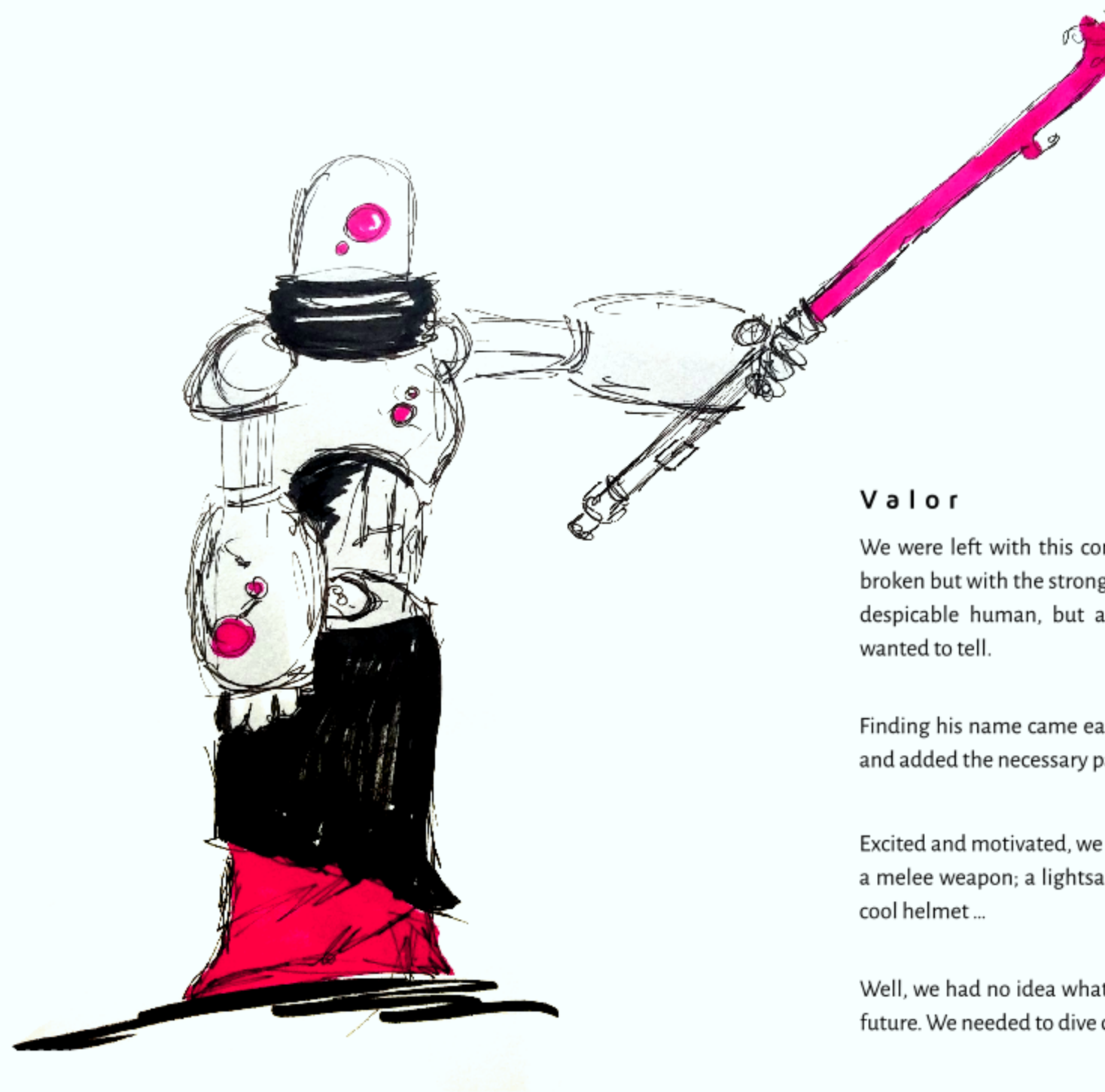
With a few chaotic ideas and a primitive game engine, we sat down and asked the most valuable question: where to start our journey?

One thing that bothered us with many other games was the tale of the “accidentally chosen”: a naive guy suddenly becomes the hero, saves the princess, then the whole world, because it turns out that he has been picked by the Gods. Random karma. Nothing ever mattered.

We preferred the idea of an anti-hero with a clear motivation and a reasonable set of circumstances that make him the pivotal character — he who can walk the hero’s journey amongst all others. But this approach takes a little more effort ... how do we make him special, without a cheap, superstitious explanation?

Diving into the little bit of lore we had at that time, we came up with three characteristics:

1. He’s a killing specialist, old and experienced enough to take on hordes of enemies.
2. He’s very loyal to his empire, and therefore has never questioned their decisions or virtues.
3. He’s old enough to be highly augmented, but not so much that he can skip sleeping — which gives him the unique ability to dream in a world that is only about efficiency.



Valor

We were left with this combat-hardened old man, emotionally broken but with the strong resolve to serve without question — a despicable human, but a perfect vehicle to tell the story we wanted to tell.

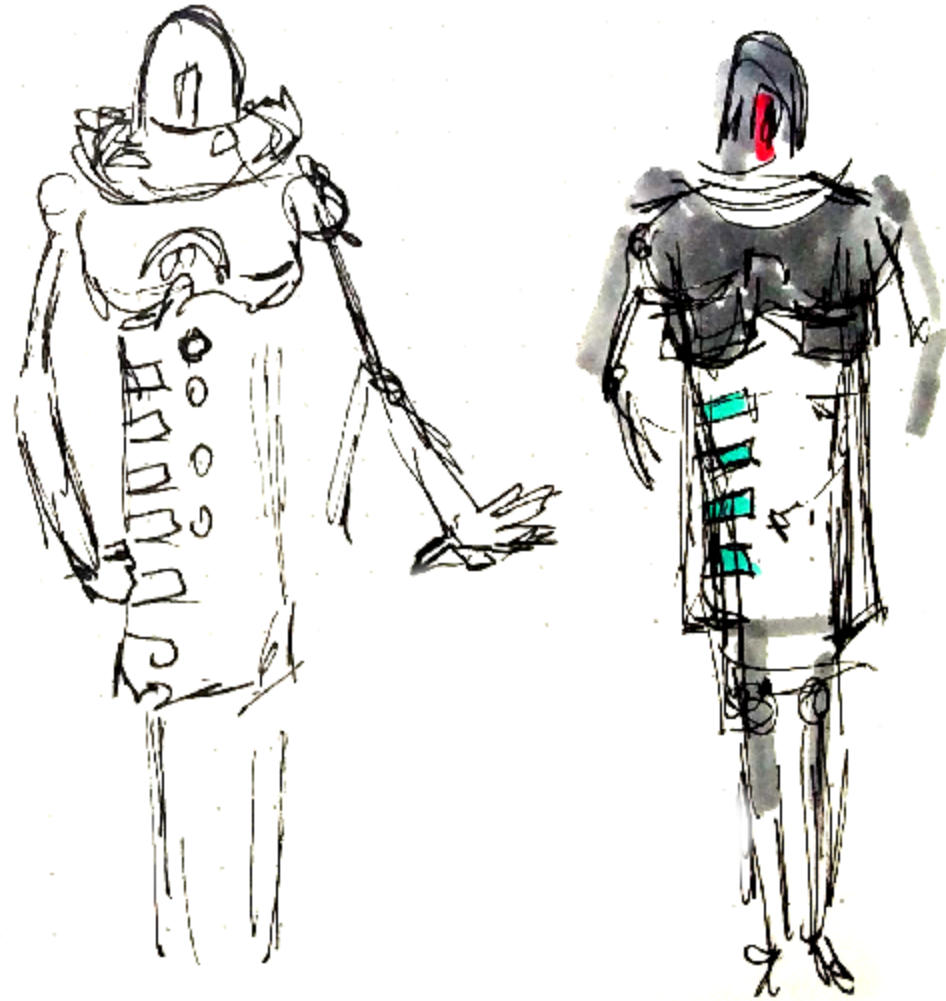
Finding his name came easy: we separated “Darth” from “Vader”, and added the necessary pathos. Our soldier’s name was “Valor”.

Excited and motivated, we jumped right into sketching: let’s have a melee weapon; a lightsaber. Some armor would help. Maybe a cool helmet ...

Well, we had no idea what a super-soldier would look like in the future. We needed to dive deeper.

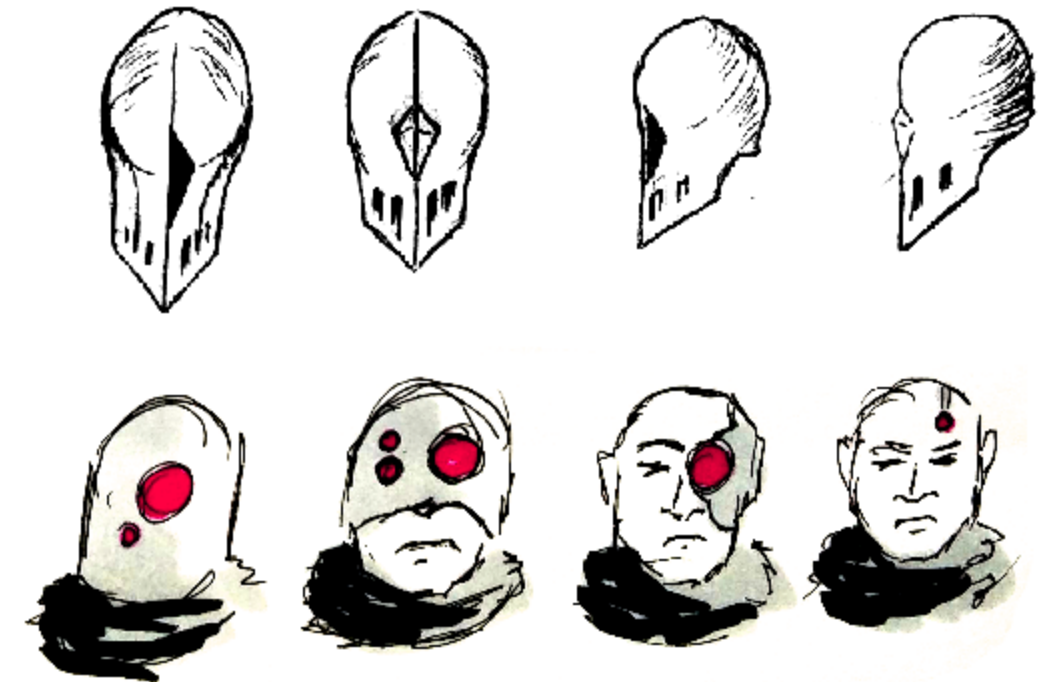
Soldier 2110

A hundred years from now, almost everything will be different — even with a totalitarian world-government like the Infinite Empire trying to slow and control any kind of change or progress. What will people wear? How will elite-soldiers fight and what will they be equipped with? Transhumanism, cybernetics, and bio-engineering will also be part of the mix.



- hair?
- metal?
- weapon?

*less masculine
androgynous*



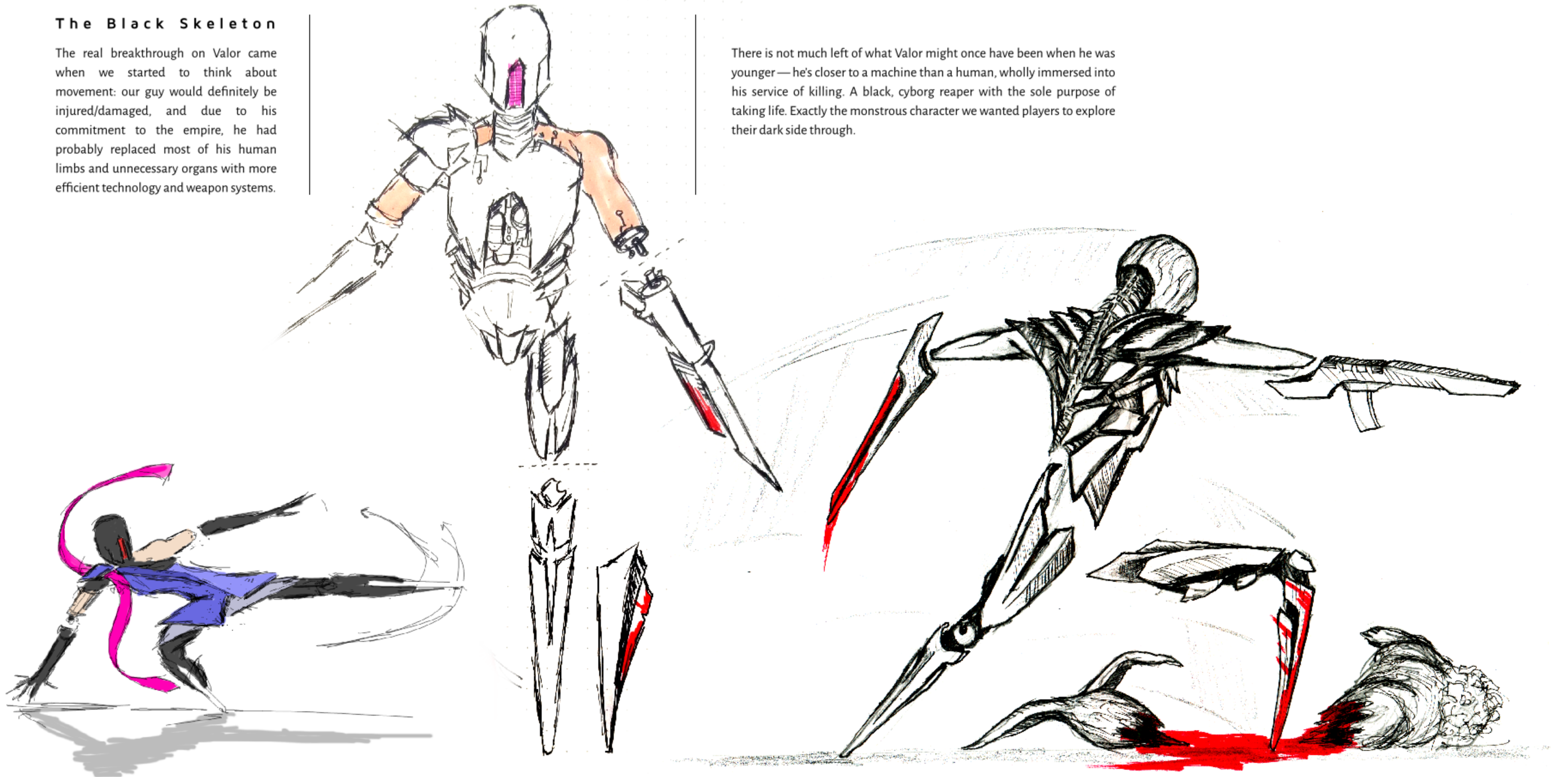
We fooled around with various ideas, from bio-armour to fancy head-dresses, Indian military coats, and blade-legs. Some of those concepts carried on, while others were naturally left behind.



The Black Skeleton

The real breakthrough on Valor came when we started to think about movement: our guy would definitely be injured/damaged, and due to his commitment to the empire, he had probably replaced most of his human limbs and unnecessary organs with more efficient technology and weapon systems.

There is not much left of what Valor might once have been when he was younger — he's closer to a machine than a human, wholly immersed into his service of killing. A black, cyborg reaper with the sole purpose of taking life. Exactly the monstrous character we wanted players to explore their dark side through.



VALOR



Mark I

Our first attempts at the pixel character were close to the initial sketch, with the heavy dress and bulky arms.



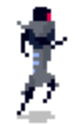
Mark II

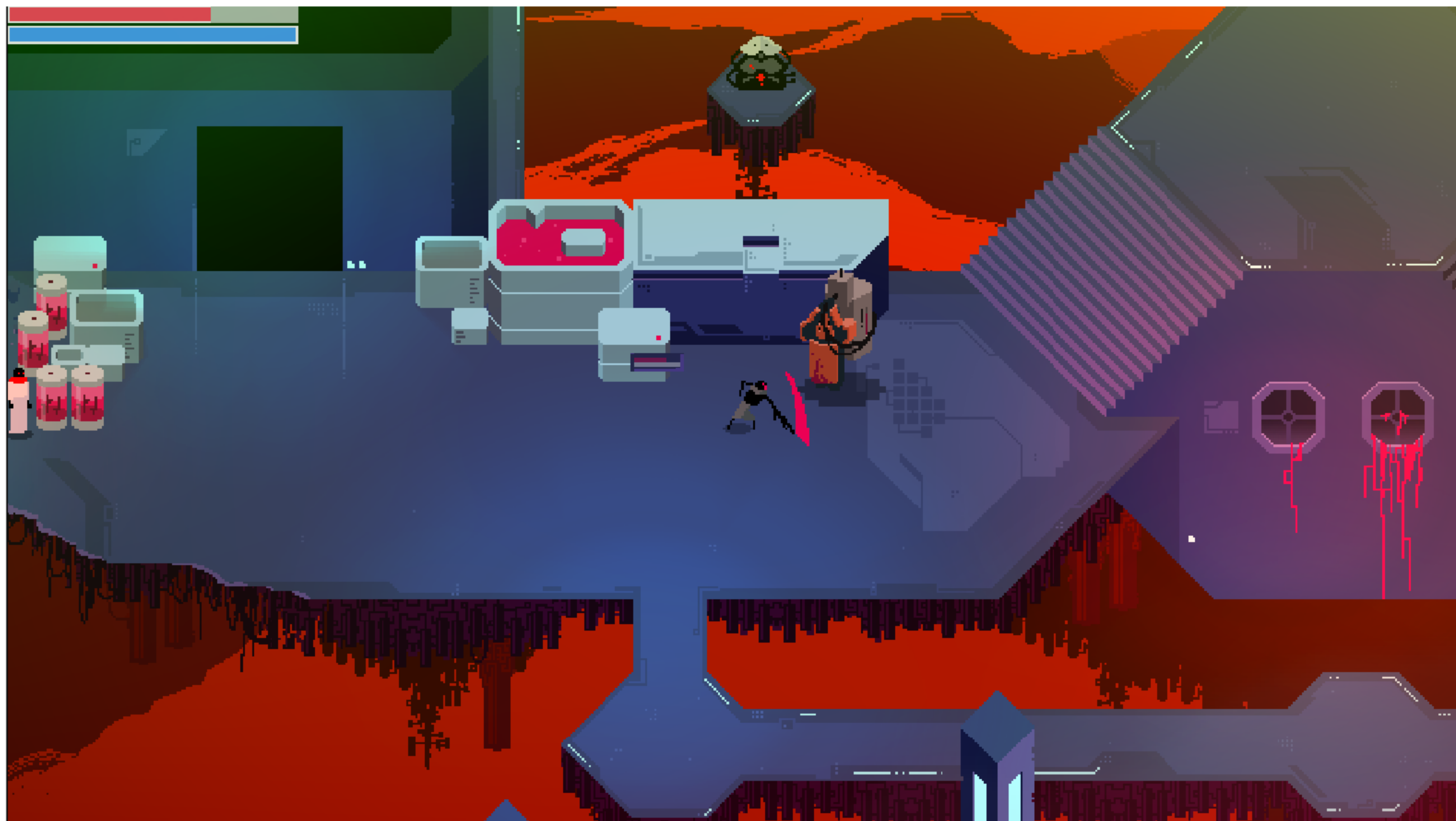
Take two brought some emphasis to the legs for a more dynamic walking cycle. We were still learning how to animate those pixels



Mark III

At version three of our hero, we had a more defined vision of who he was and how to utilize all his body parts to emphasize movement.

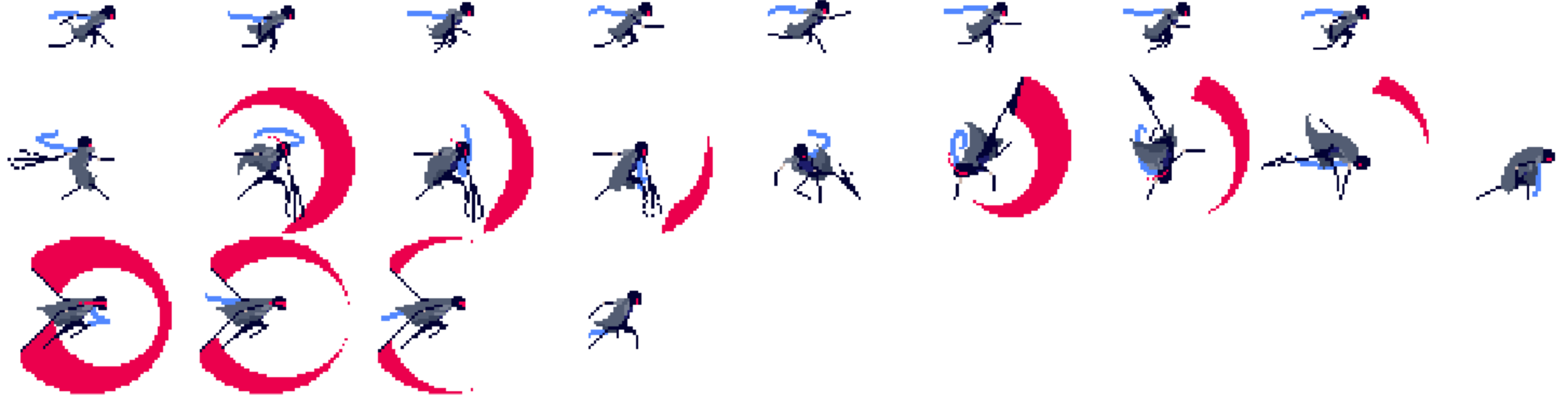






Mark IV

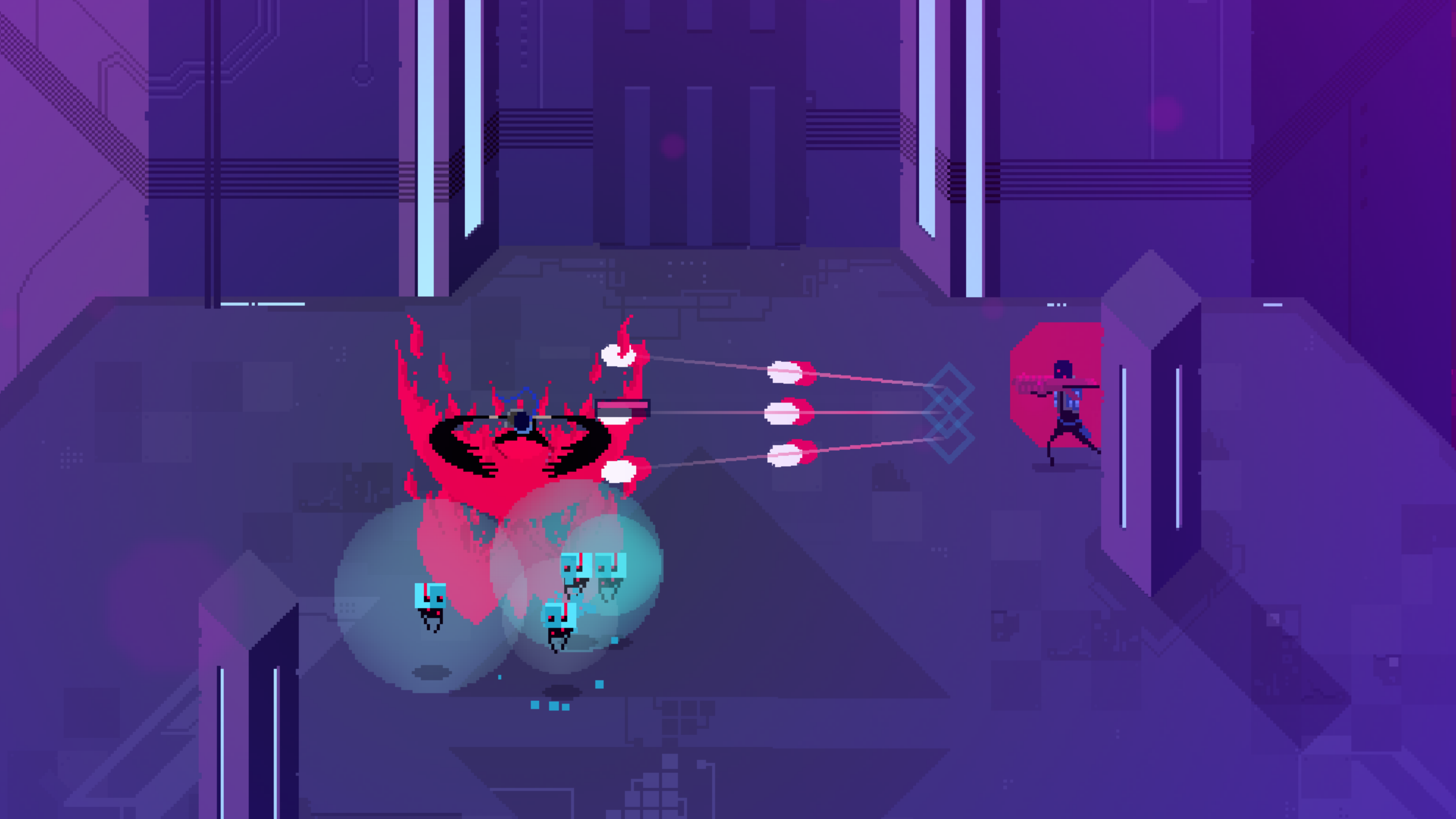
The scarf, crooked posture and eccentric move-sets came together in the fourth version of our leading man's sprite sheet. Yet he still felt closer to a cool enemy than the character we wanted our players to explore.

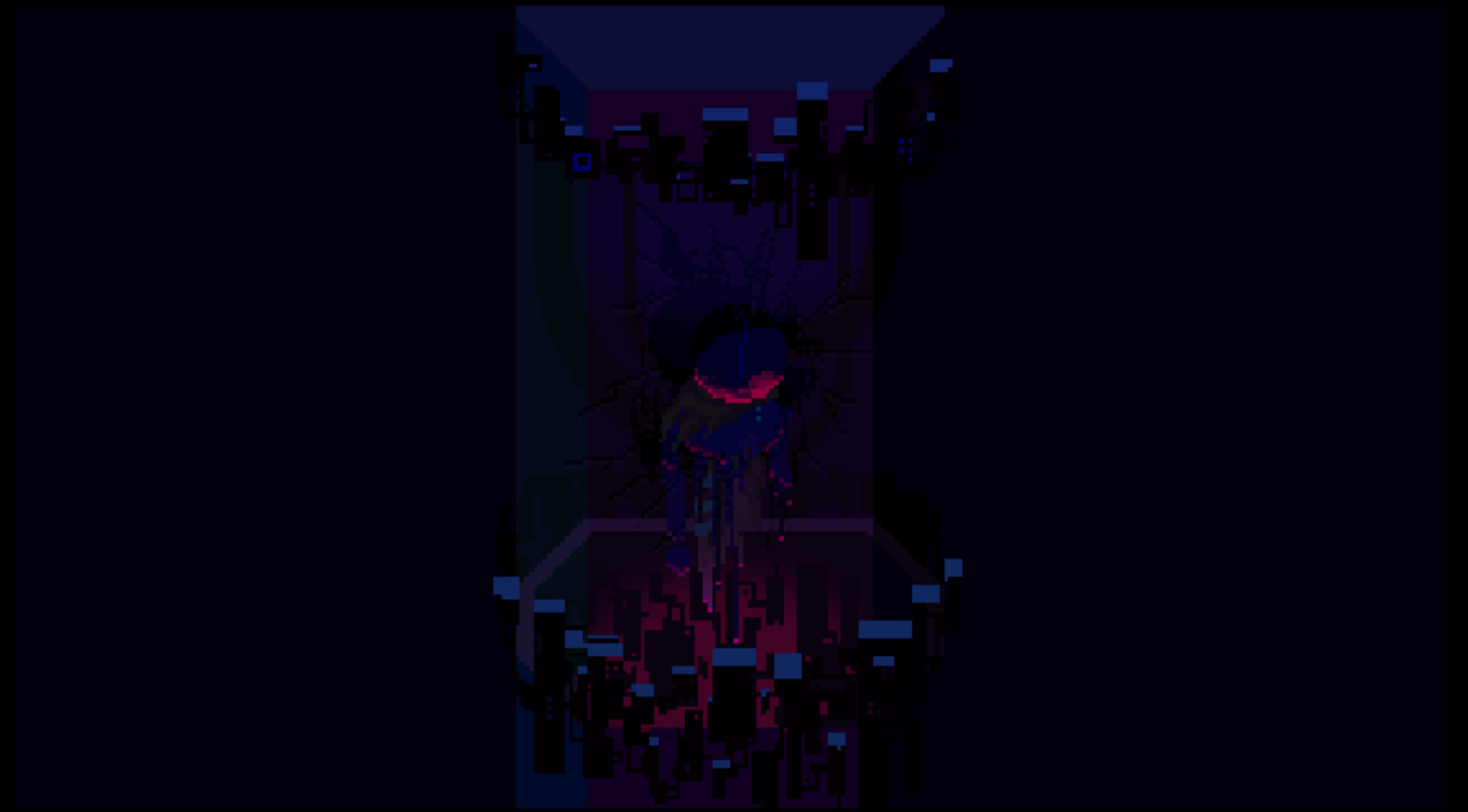


Mark V

The fifth attempt brought together everything we had learned over the first three years. We granted a few more pixels, added a couple more frames to the animations, and made him limp noticeably. The monster, Valor, came to life.







HAND

Valor in the M

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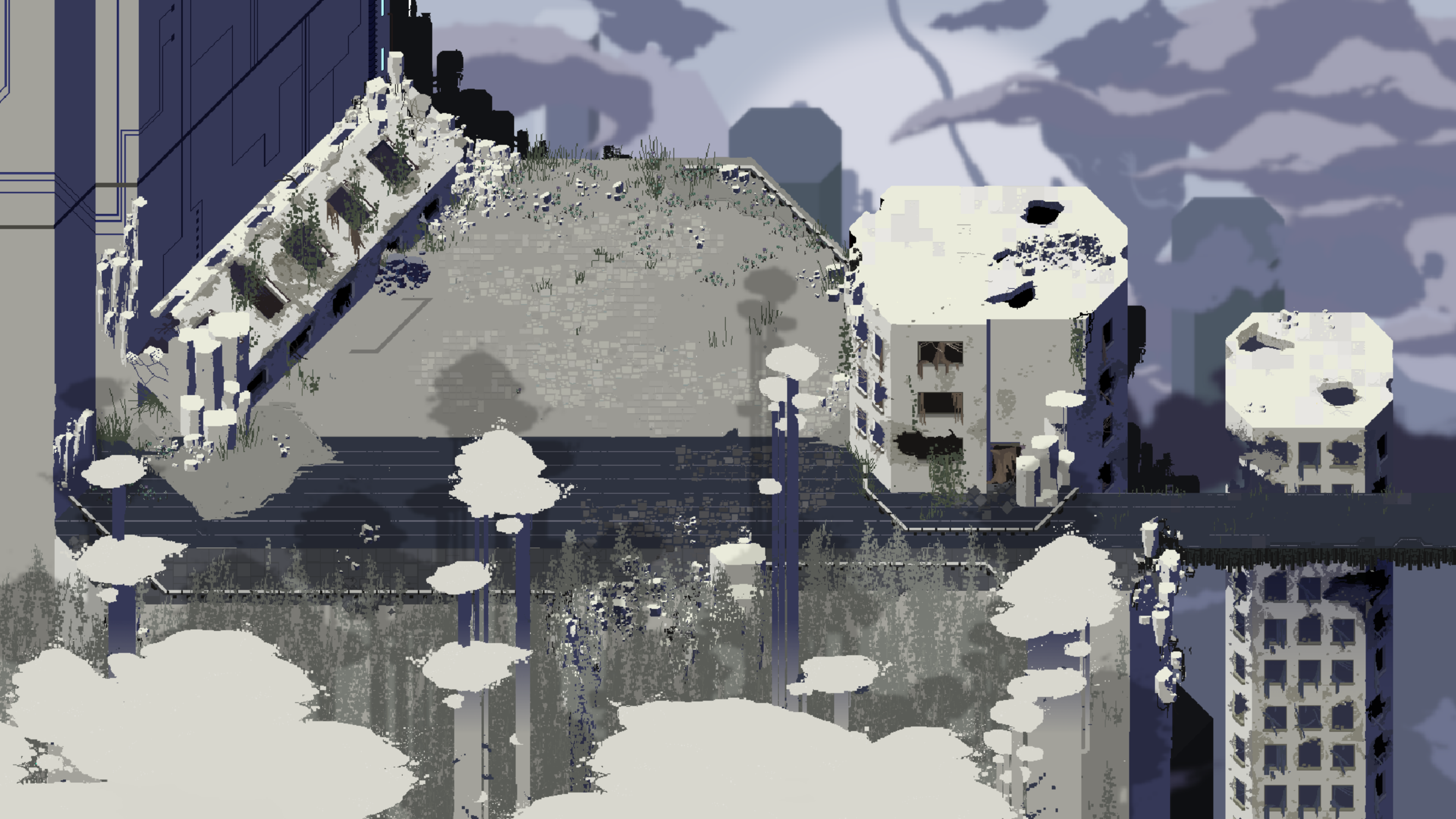
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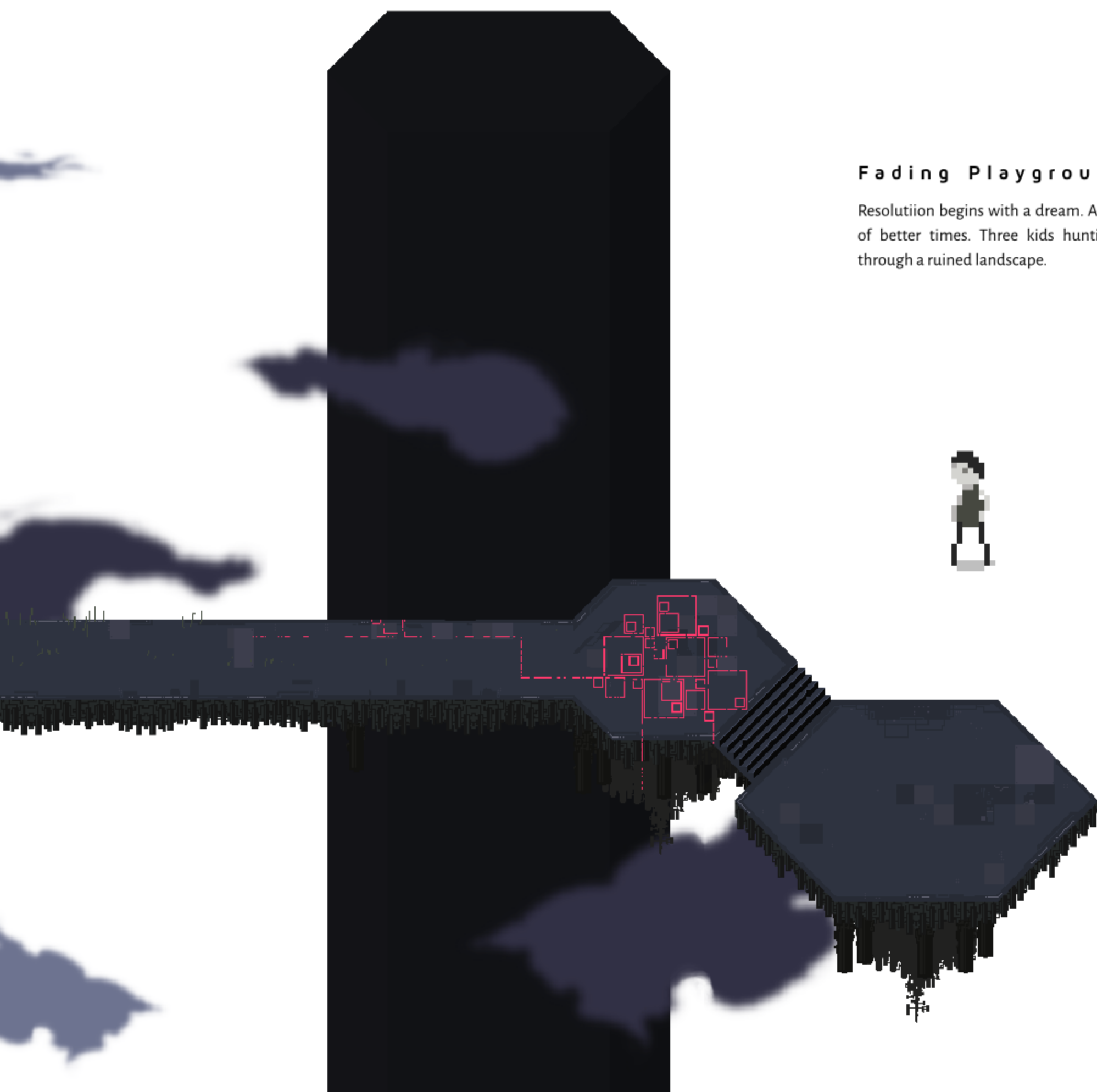
Redownload Polychromatic on July 10th, 2020











Fading Playground

Resolutiion begins with a dream. A flashback of better times. Three kids hunting a ball through a ruined landscape.

The Fading Playground is intentionally opaque, but it serves an important storytelling function. We wanted to start with something unexpected — no enemies, no clear goal, no tutorial, and no interface. Things should feel strange and mesmerizing, ready to be experienced.

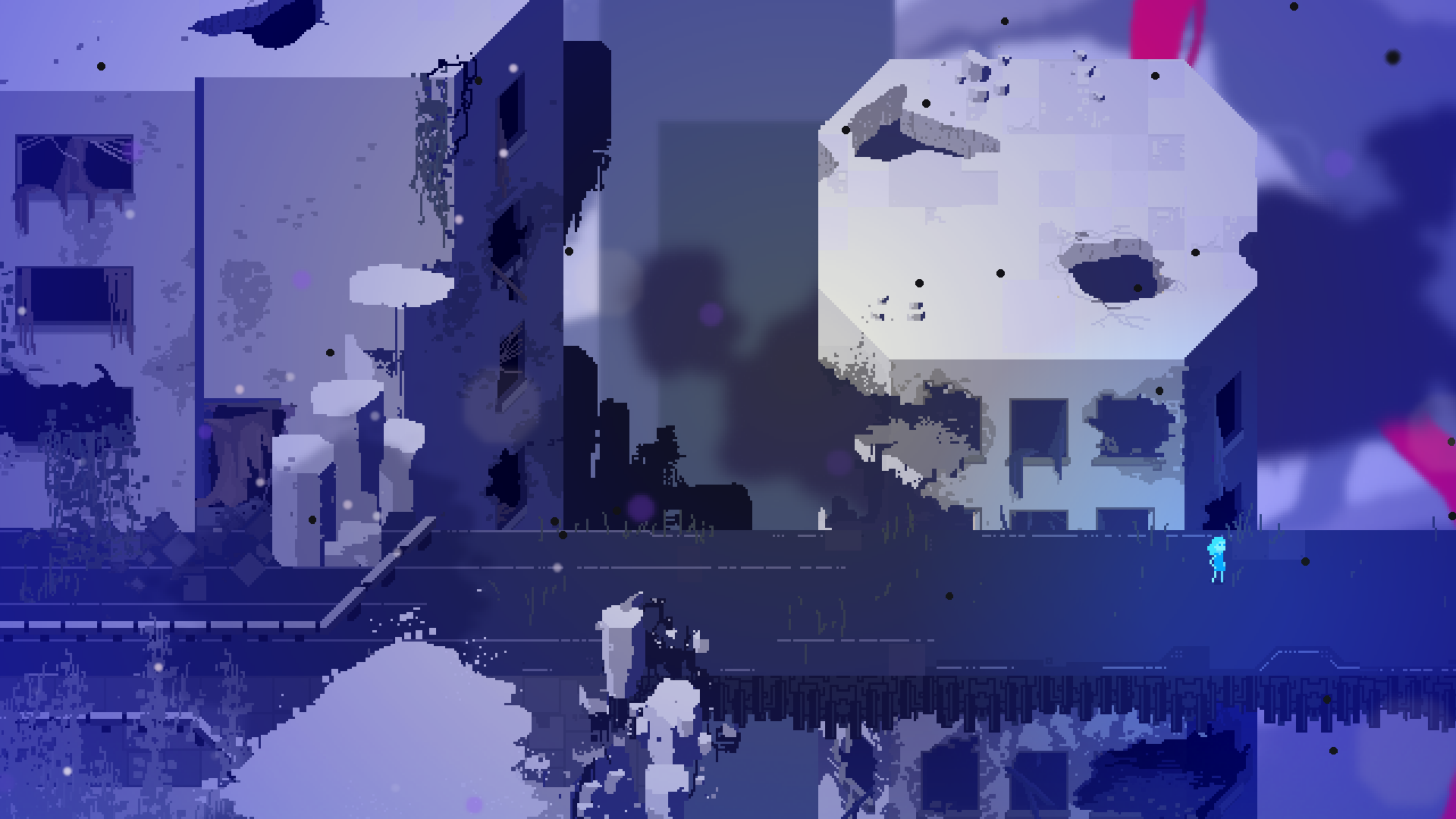
But then there are these three kids: who are they? Will they be relevant later in the game? Introducing Marty and Varty in the opening scene helped us show players that there's more to Resolutiion than bloody combat and big bosses, if they dare to look deeper.

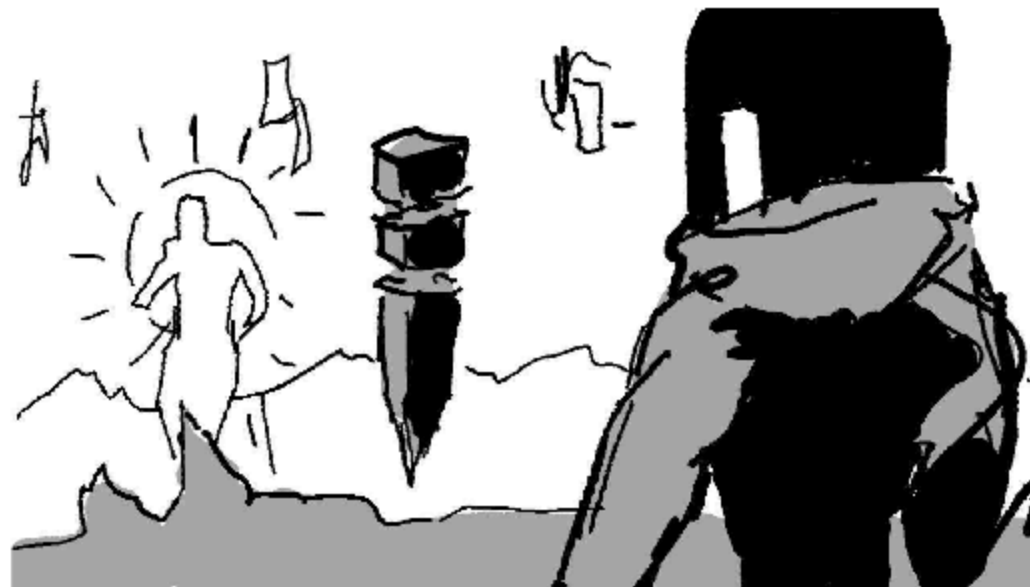


The Blue Girl

On the right-hand side of the playground, we meet a little blue girl. She runs away. We follow. The scene fades. Alibii is activated.



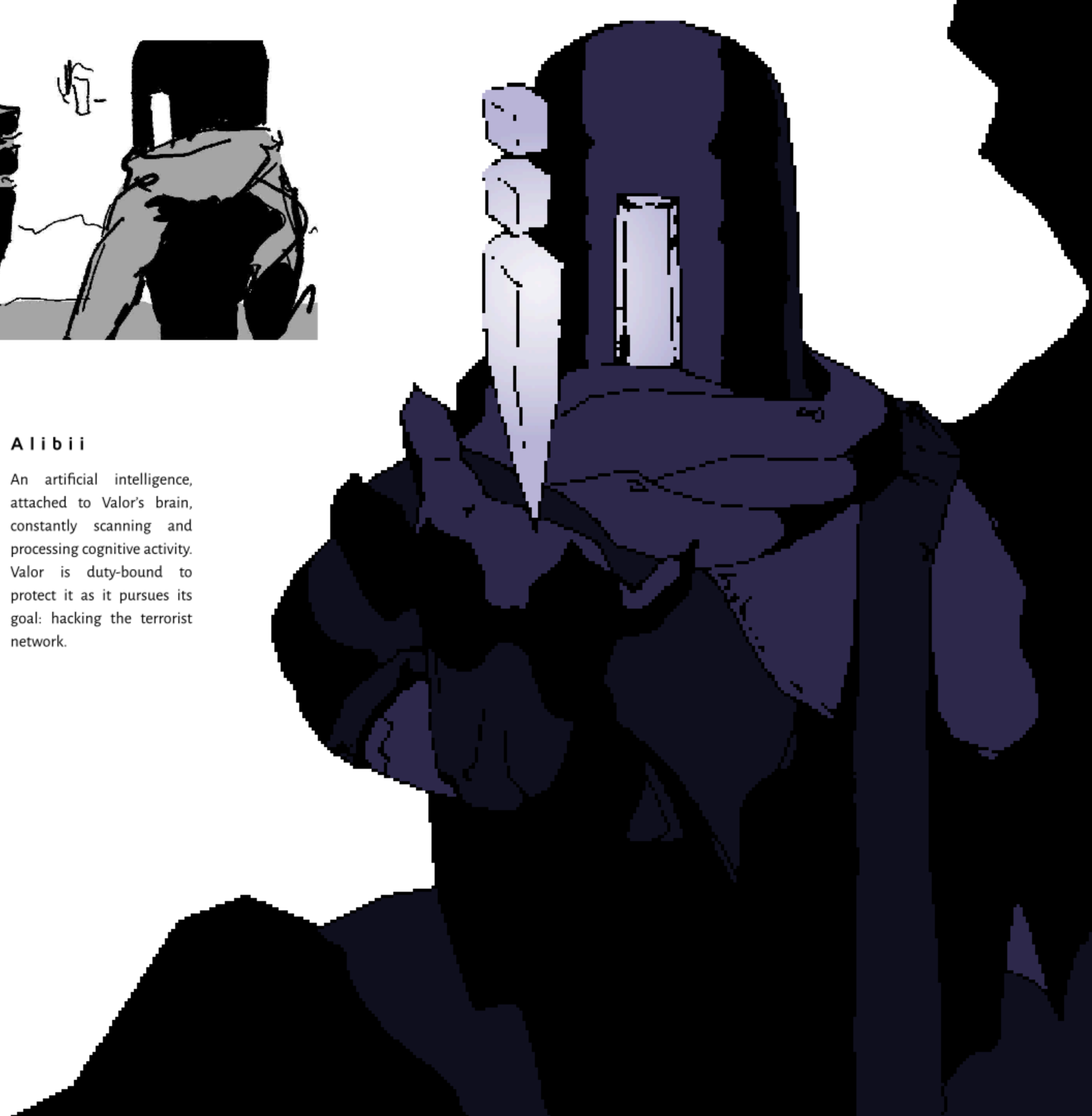




Alibii

An artificial intelligence, attached to Valor's brain, constantly scanning and processing cognitive activity. Valor is duty-bound to protect it as it pursues its goal: hacking the terrorist network.

"This is Alibii.
An exceptional access
specialist. Outlearning
and outperforming the
leading AI in encryption
and hacking."

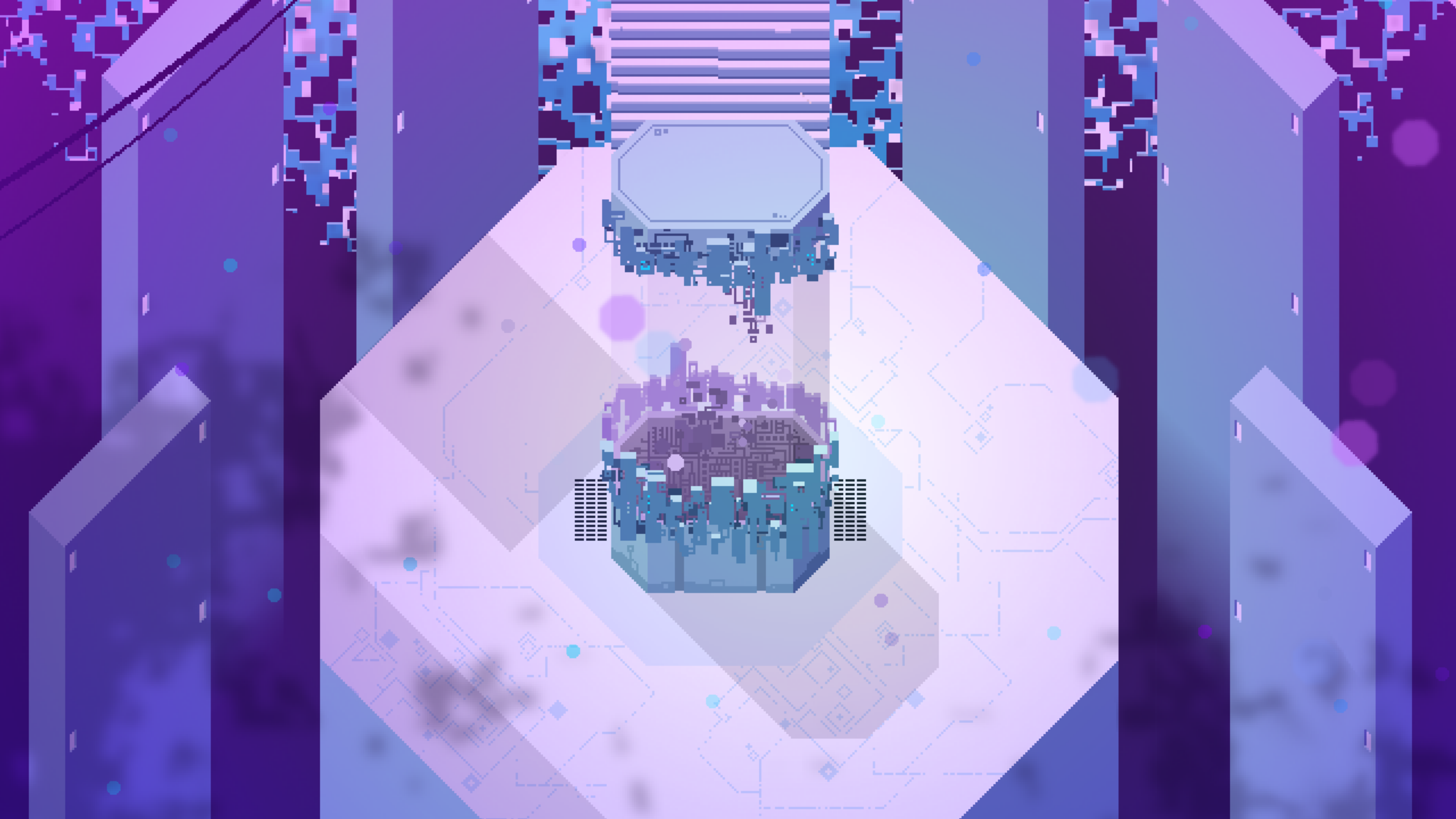


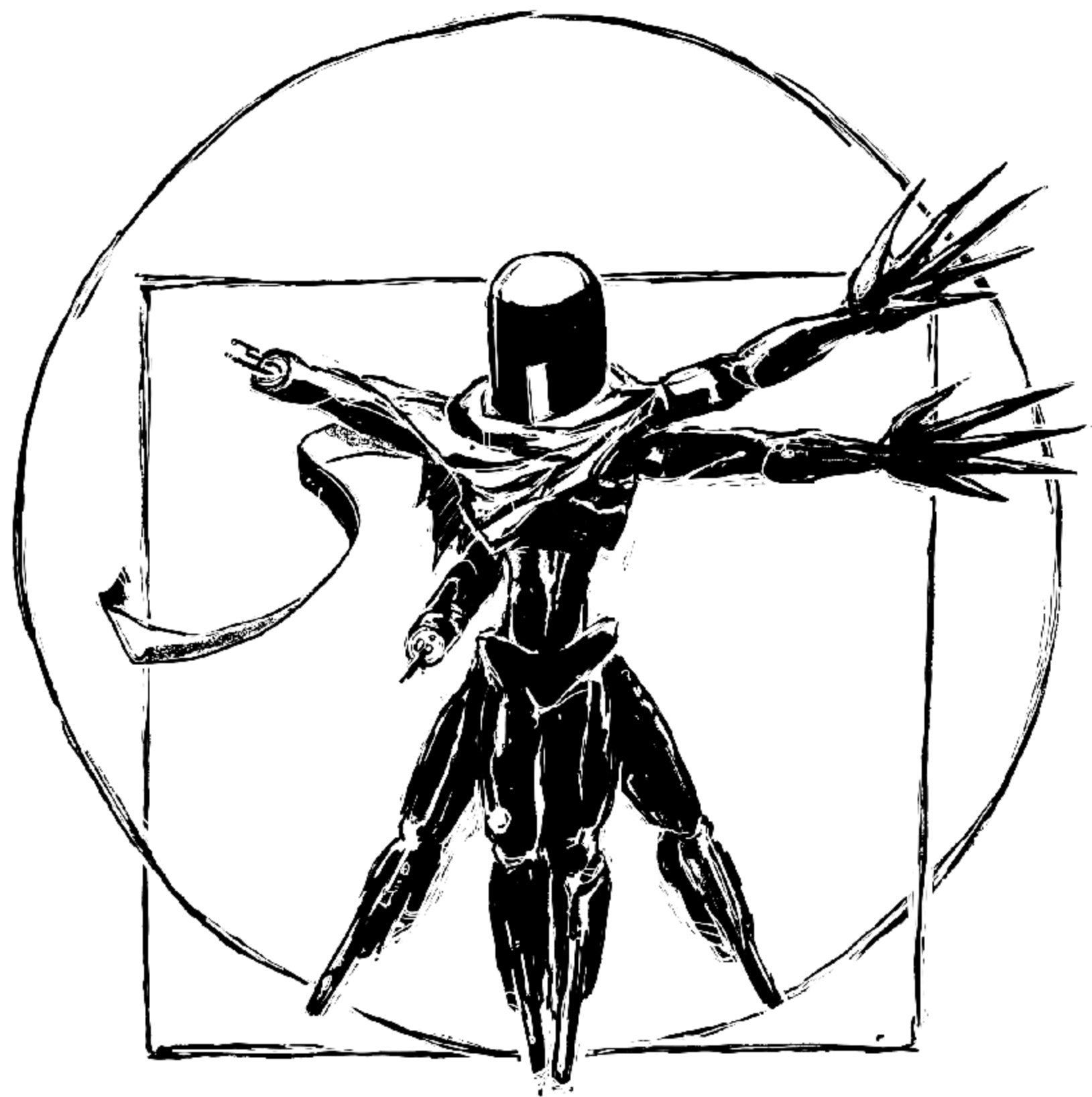


It's a Girls

Eventually, Alibii changes from a floating bit into the shape of a woman. She will guide us into Valor's final journey through the Red Code.



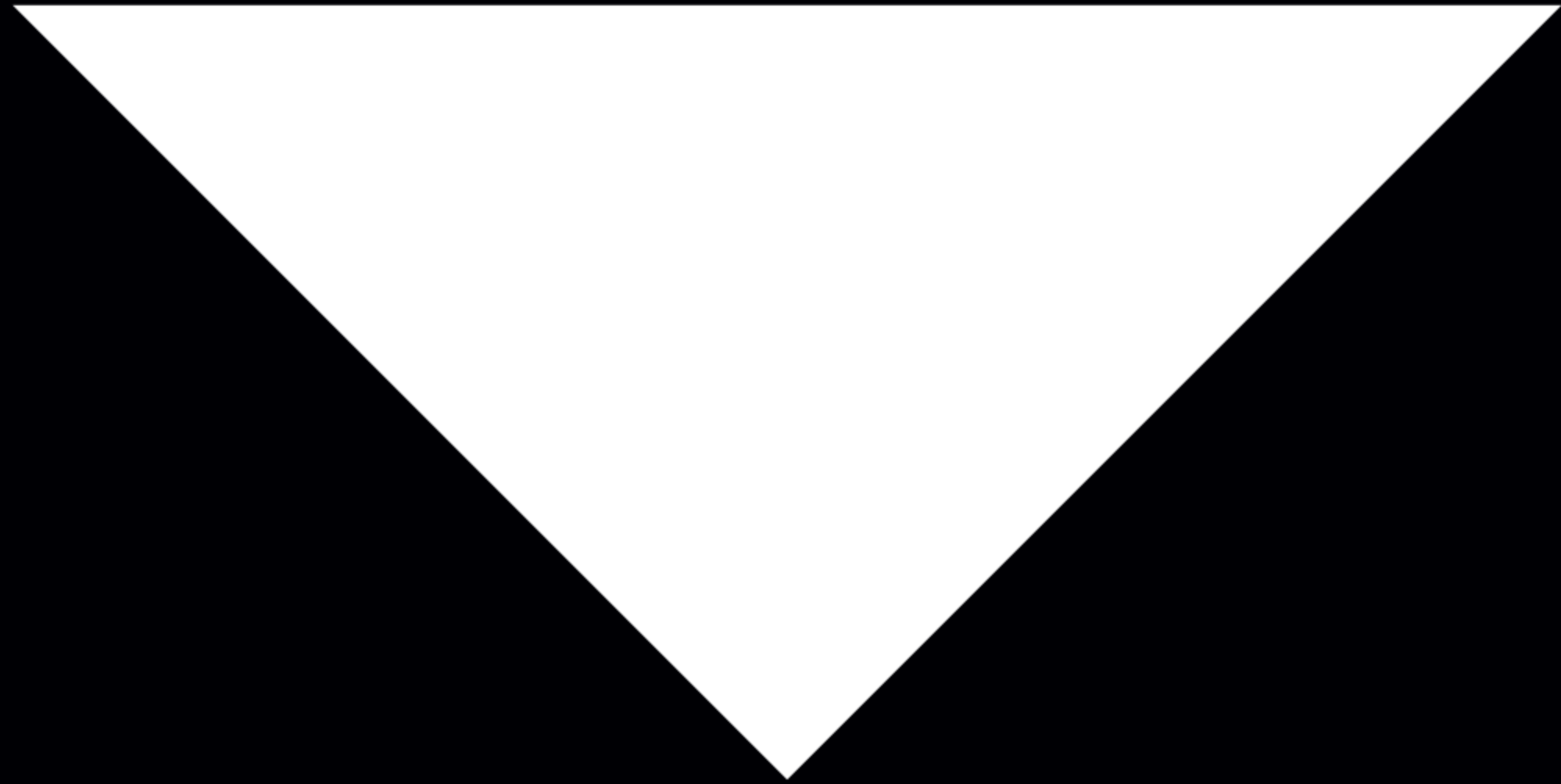


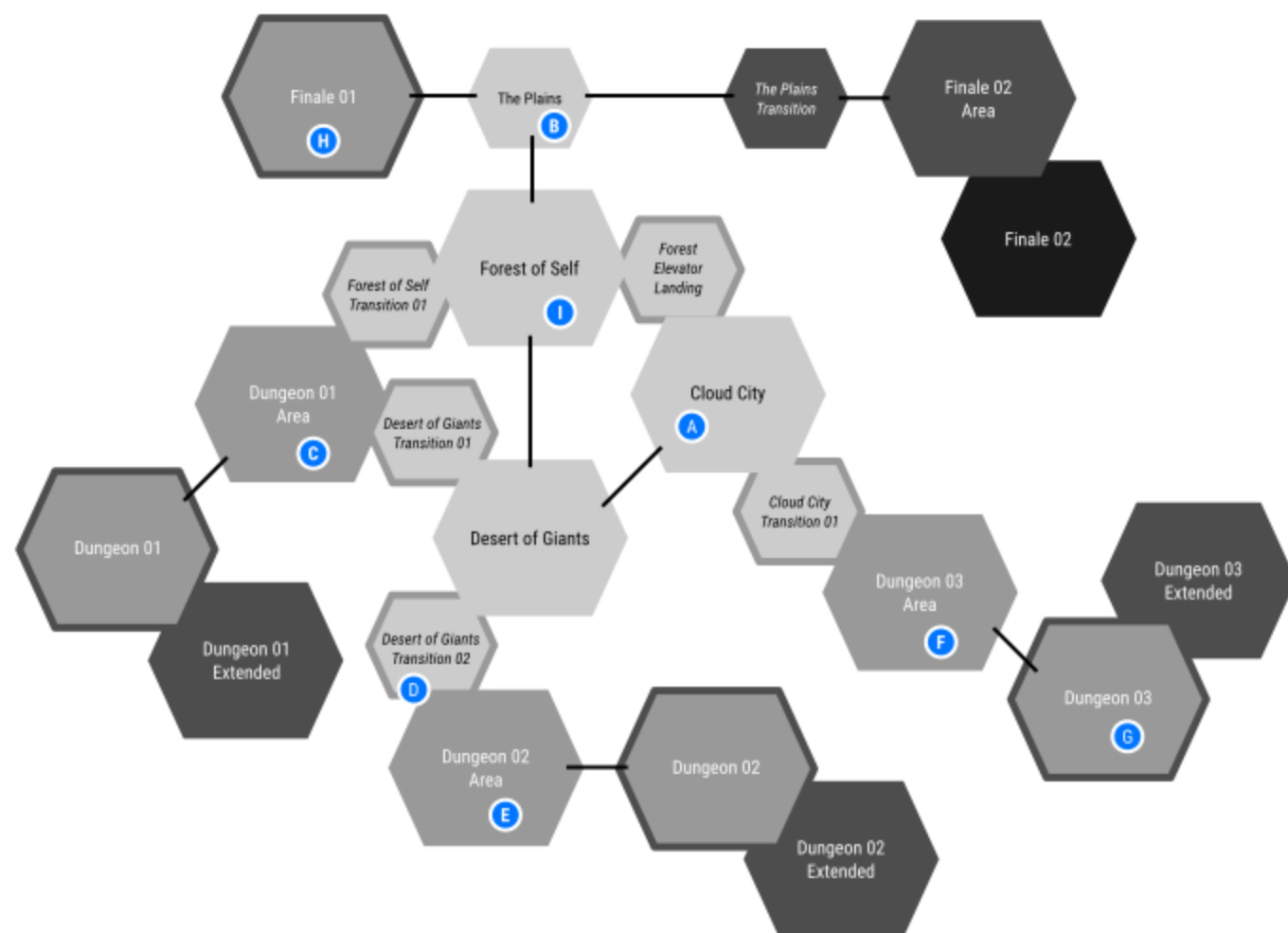




I remember ...

The World



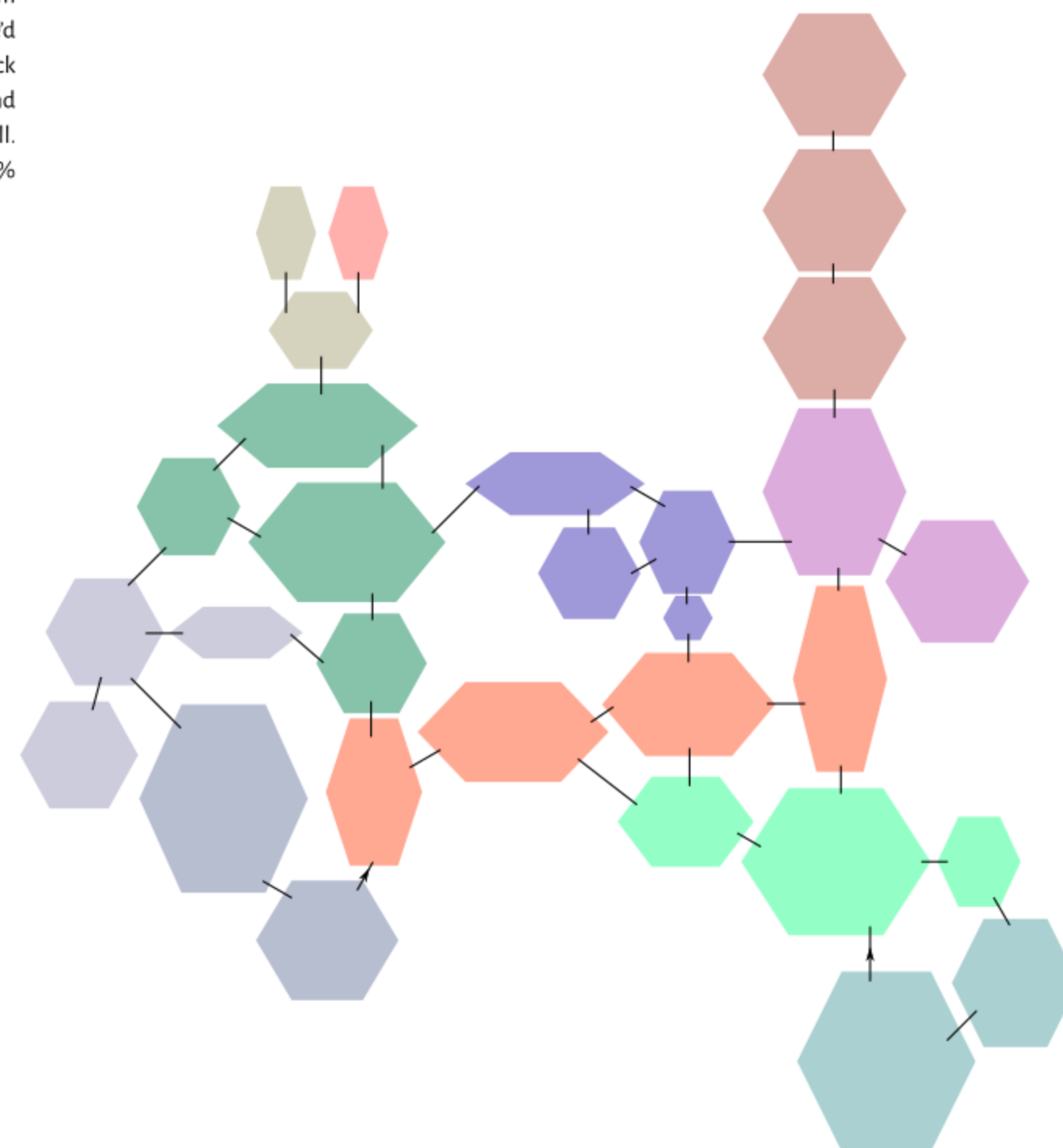


Originally, we planned for Resoluiion to play out as sequential levels, one leading into the next without loops or backtracking. But as we continued, we began to ask questions that would challenge this idea... How could we distribute items and upgrades in a way that allowed them to manipulate the world in increasingly interesting ways? How would we control the pacing? Were there more unique ways to create doors and locking mechanisms that determined the player's progress?

All of these musings finally collated into the real question, the one we had been purposely avoiding due to our lack of experience: how would the game play if levels seamlessly connected to the others? Put another way, what if Resoluiion was an open-world game, and on a much larger scale? This would provide us far richer options for exploration and navigation, but a much, much, harder job in terms of game design and writing

One Path

So Valor and Alibii would set out from Cloud City into a wild world. We'd follow them along a linear story, pick up fun items one after the other, and visit new areas until the credits roll. Everything was going to be 100% straightforward, right?



What the hell — we loved Metroidvania games way too much to let this opportunity slip! In early 2017 we began the process of tearing apart our established series of levels and rewiring them into a fully interconnected, open world. That meant flipping, twisting and rearranging most existing areas, adding plenty of new bridges and tunnels, redesigning items, and rewriting dialogue. But it was time well spent.

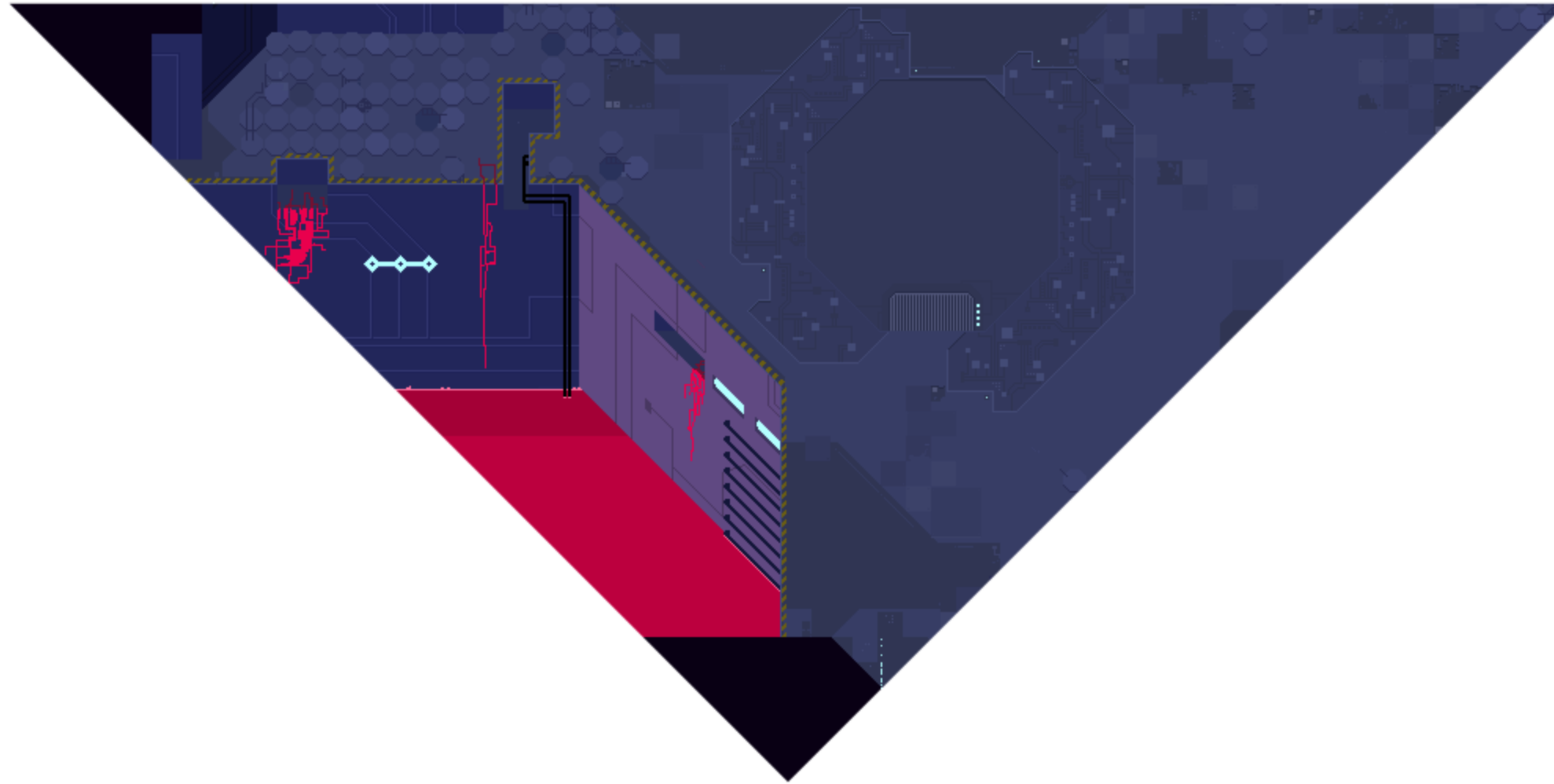


Hey.

Can you hear me?

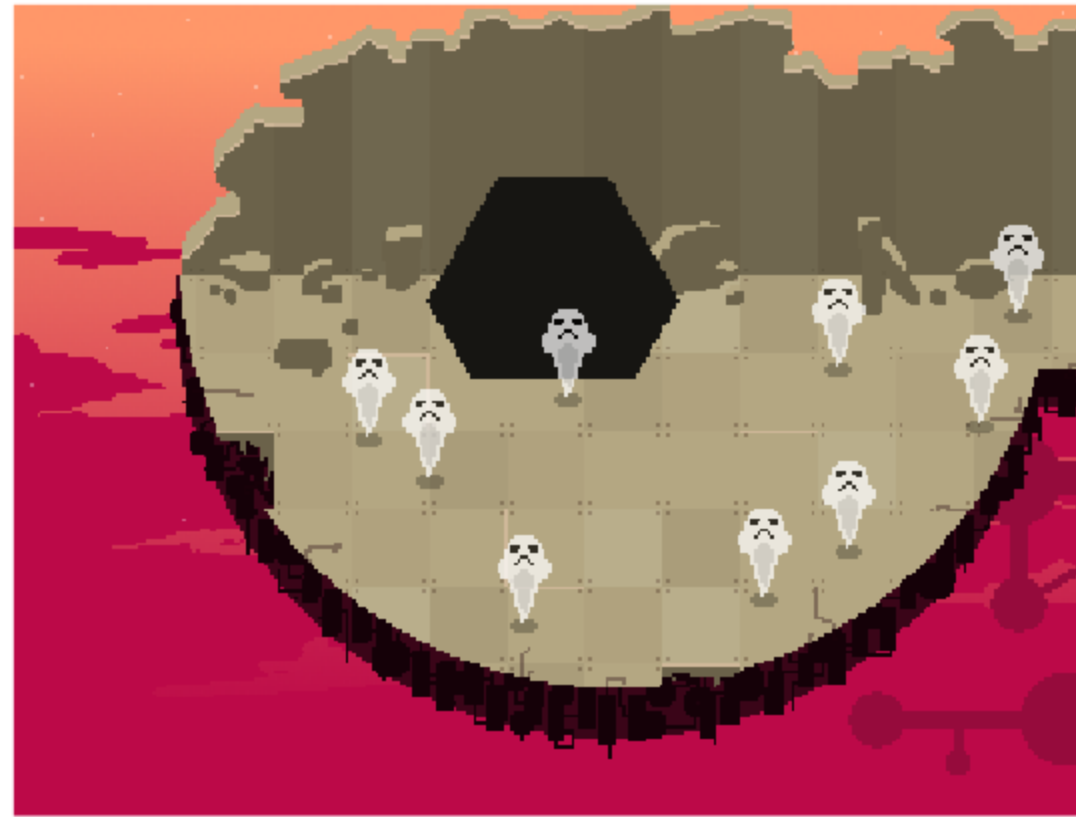
-Alibii

Cloud City



Not a Star Wars Story

The first visual test for “Red Wars” clearly revealed our Star Wars influences: from color schemes siphoned off the gas planet Bespin to Storm Trooper ghosts as placeholder character references. Not one of these pixels remains, but it set us on the path towards Resolution.



What Does a Video Game Look Like?

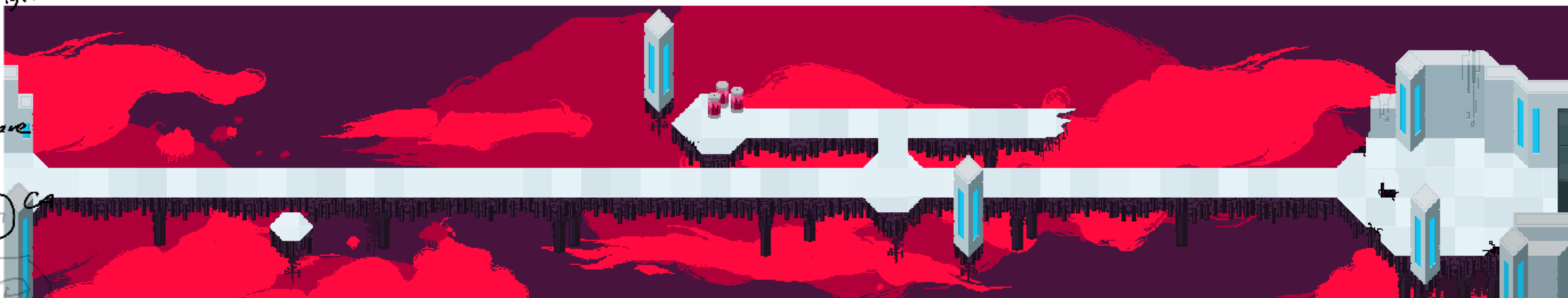
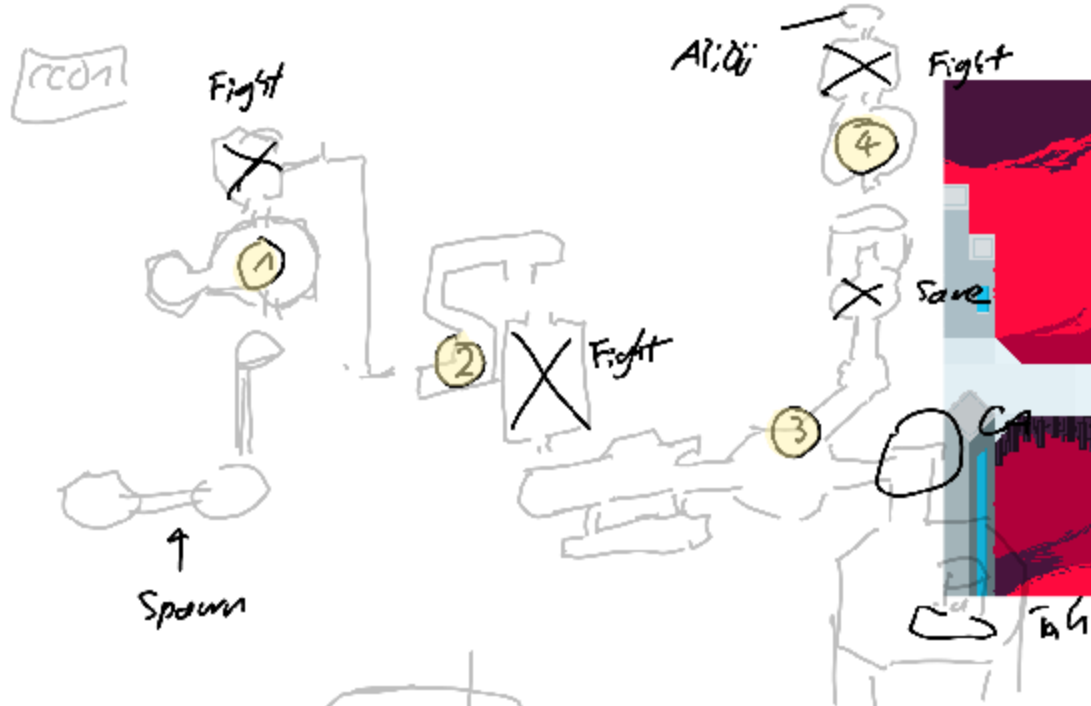
What colors should we use? Will there be multiple backgrounds? How fast does our hero walk? Can he run, teleport, jump or roll? Are we using tiles or hand-painted maps? How wide should a path be?

All these technical questions piled in at the same time as we struggled to creatively define the game's world. We had a hero and a rough outline of the story we wanted to tell, but no idea how to set boundaries. In theory, everything was possible, but without any experience, we didn't even know where to start. So we just dabbled with shapes and colors and our gut feelings for a while.

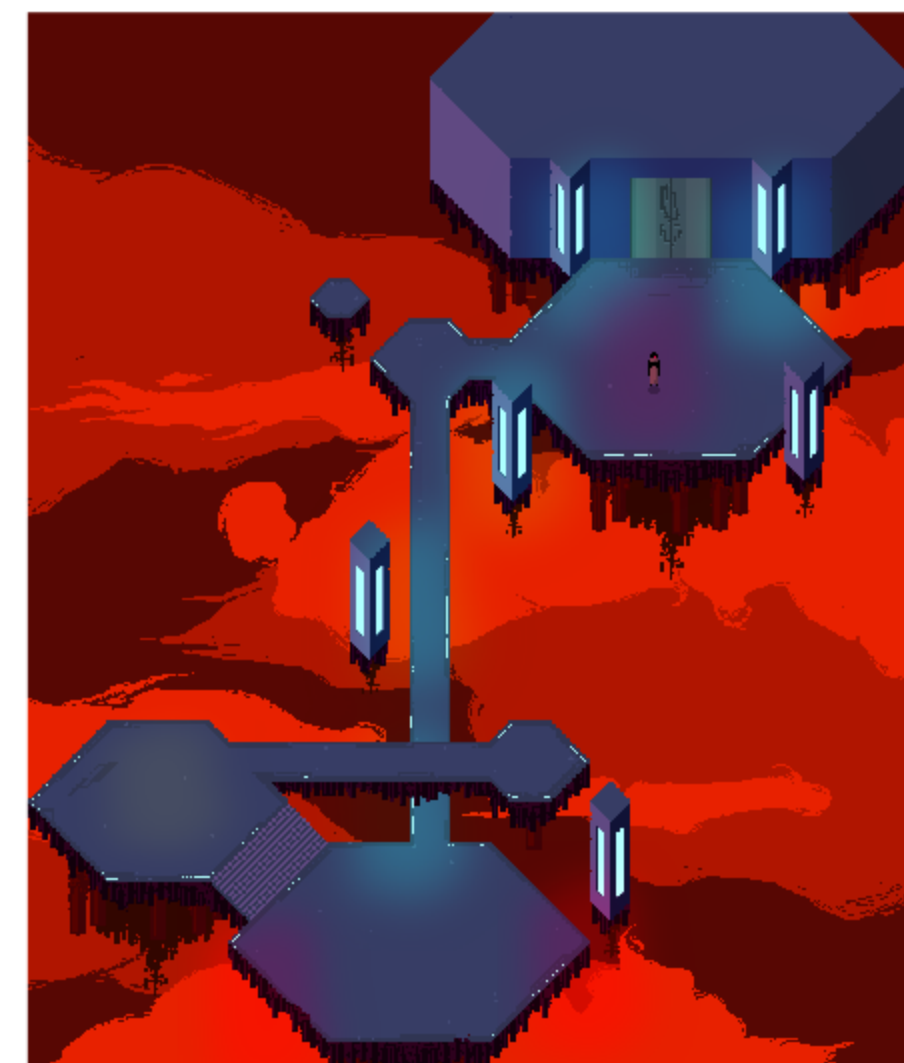
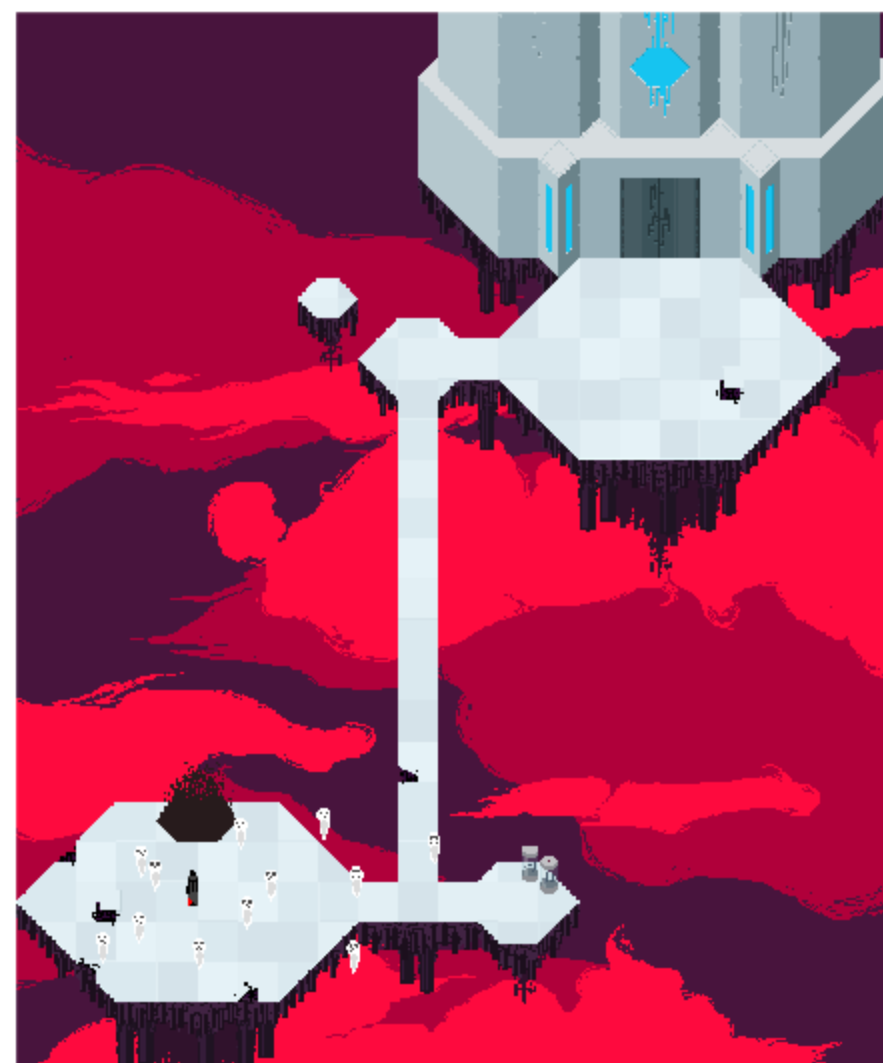
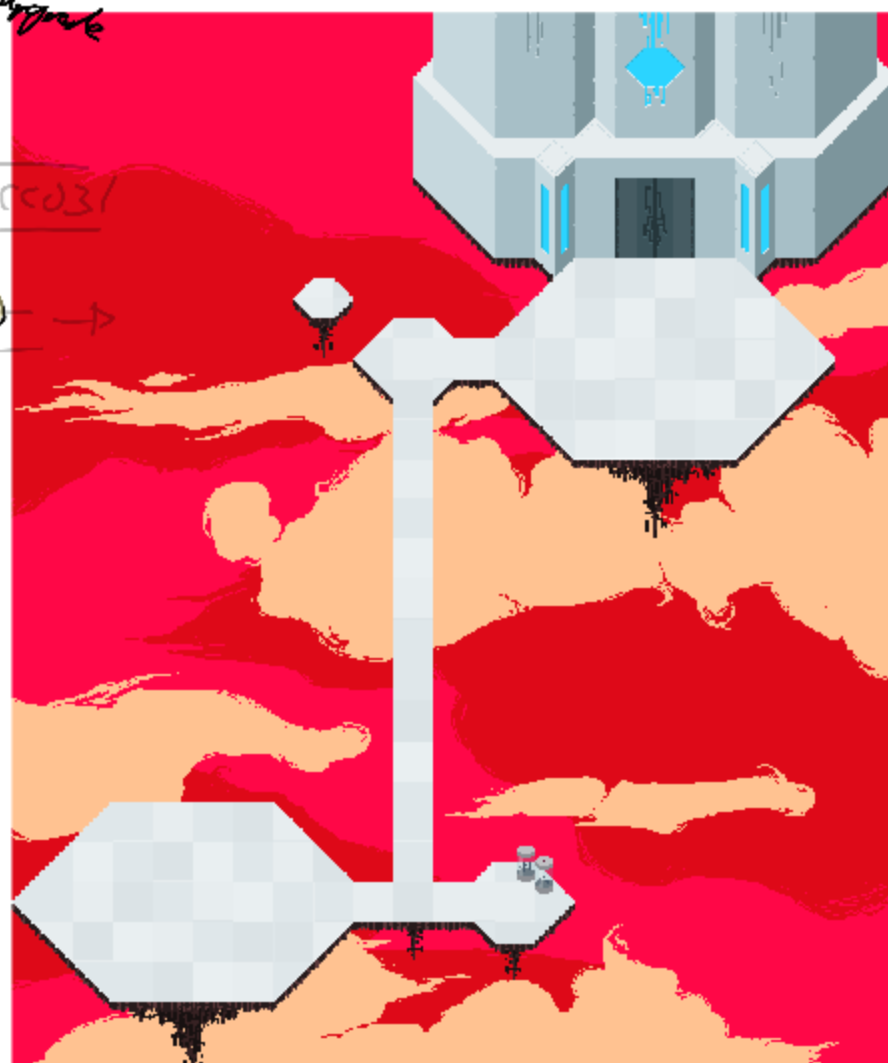
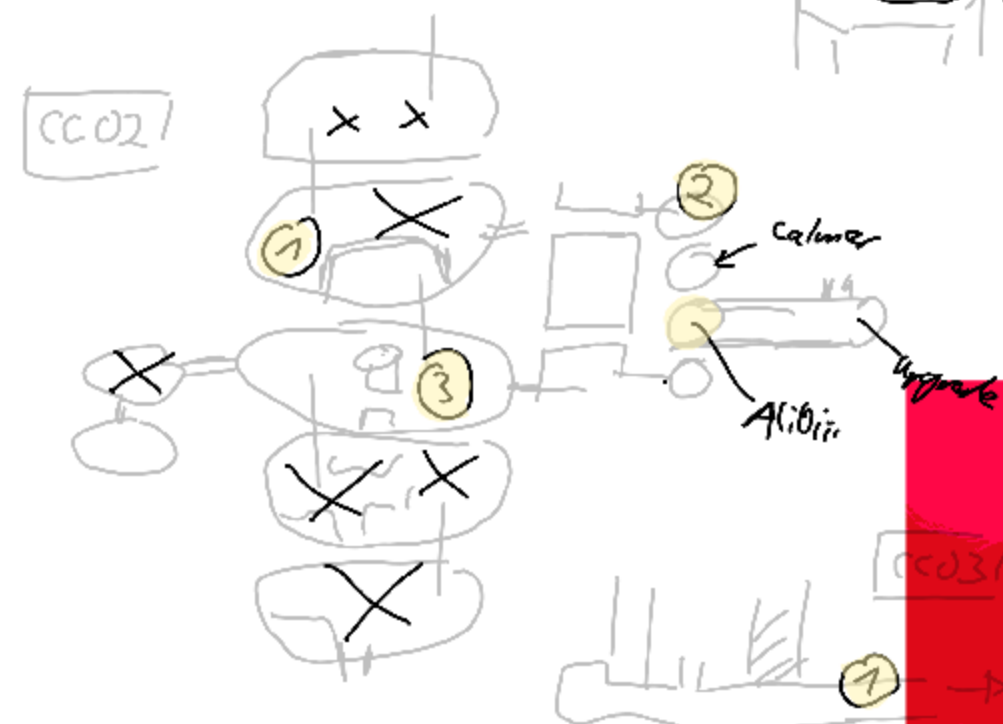
Corners, not Curves

When you haven't a clue about how to build a video game, the most mundane things become existential questions: should we go with round edges, squares, or various angles? How can we map rooms and frame spaces? These kinds of challenges defined the first few months of getting into the video game world.





A breakthrough emerged as we simulated our first enemy encounters. At the time we had bright floors, and we discovered our white attack-effects couldn't be seen — the art needed more contrast. We revamped the floors with a new, darker shade and it worked beautifully. Soon we began to apply this concept to environmental design too, and Cloud City quickly emerged from the vibrant clash between blue platforms and red skies.



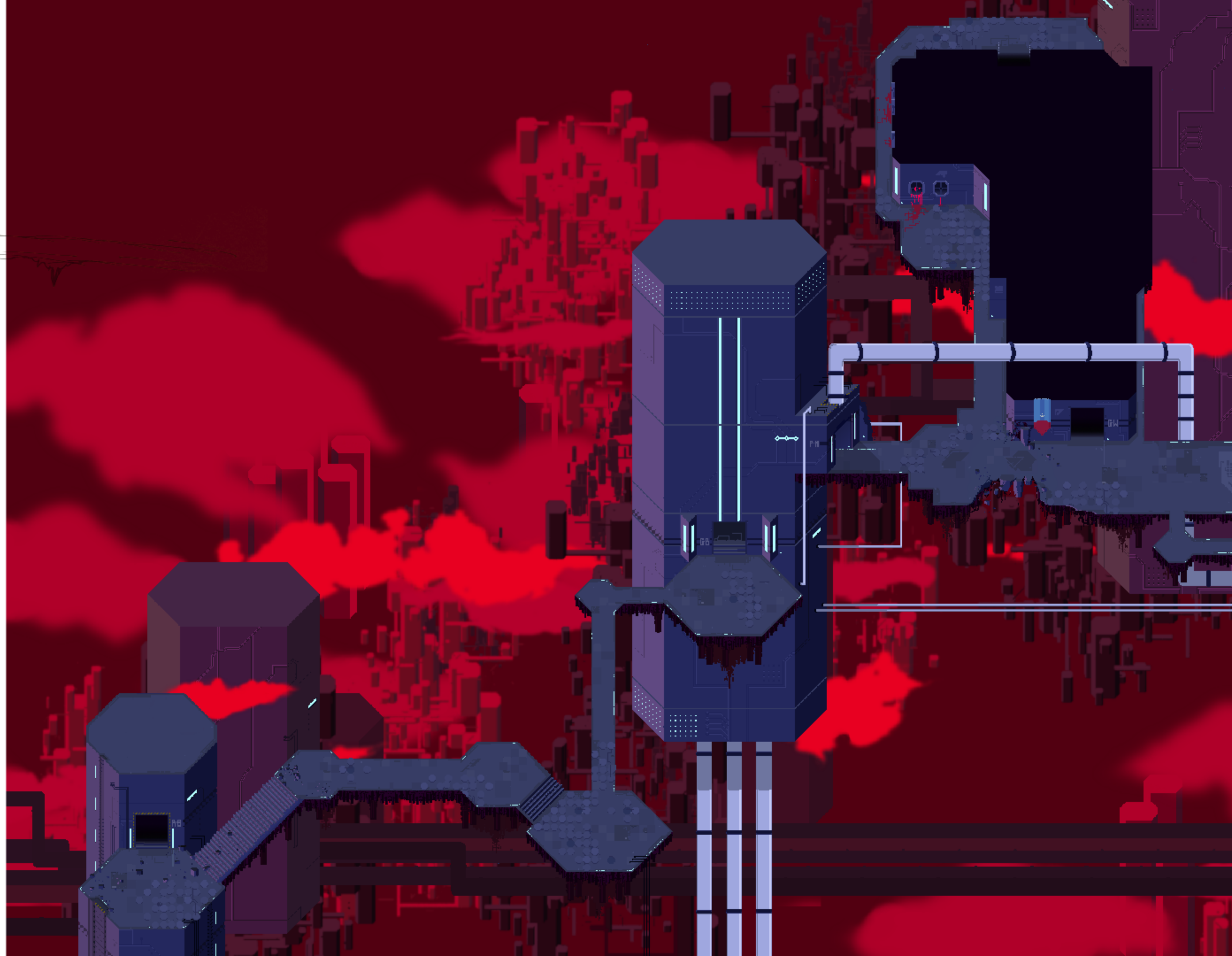
Finding Resolution's Style

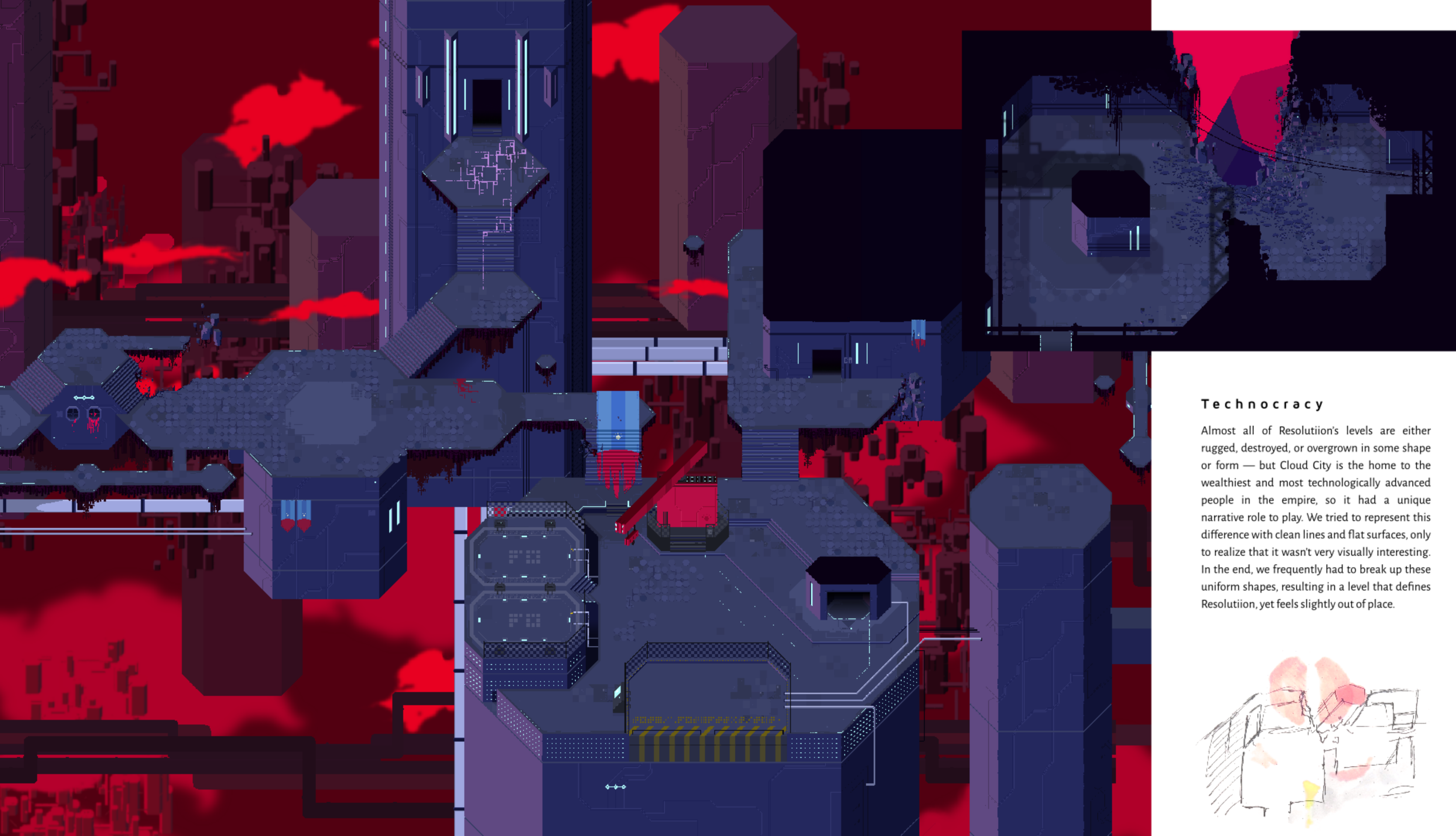
The concept of a futuristic city in the clouds stuck with us beyond our early mockups — how might that work, practically? There would probably be floating skyscrapers, so they'd require plenty of connecting paths in between. If massive engines held the structures in place, then lights and signposts would be needed to help people and ships navigate them through the mist.



Cloud City

Cloud City wasn't intended to be Resolution's opening level, but as this was where we learned how to build a game, all our lessons gradually made their way into its architecture and design language. Eventually, we decided to stick with it and structure it as a tutorial area.

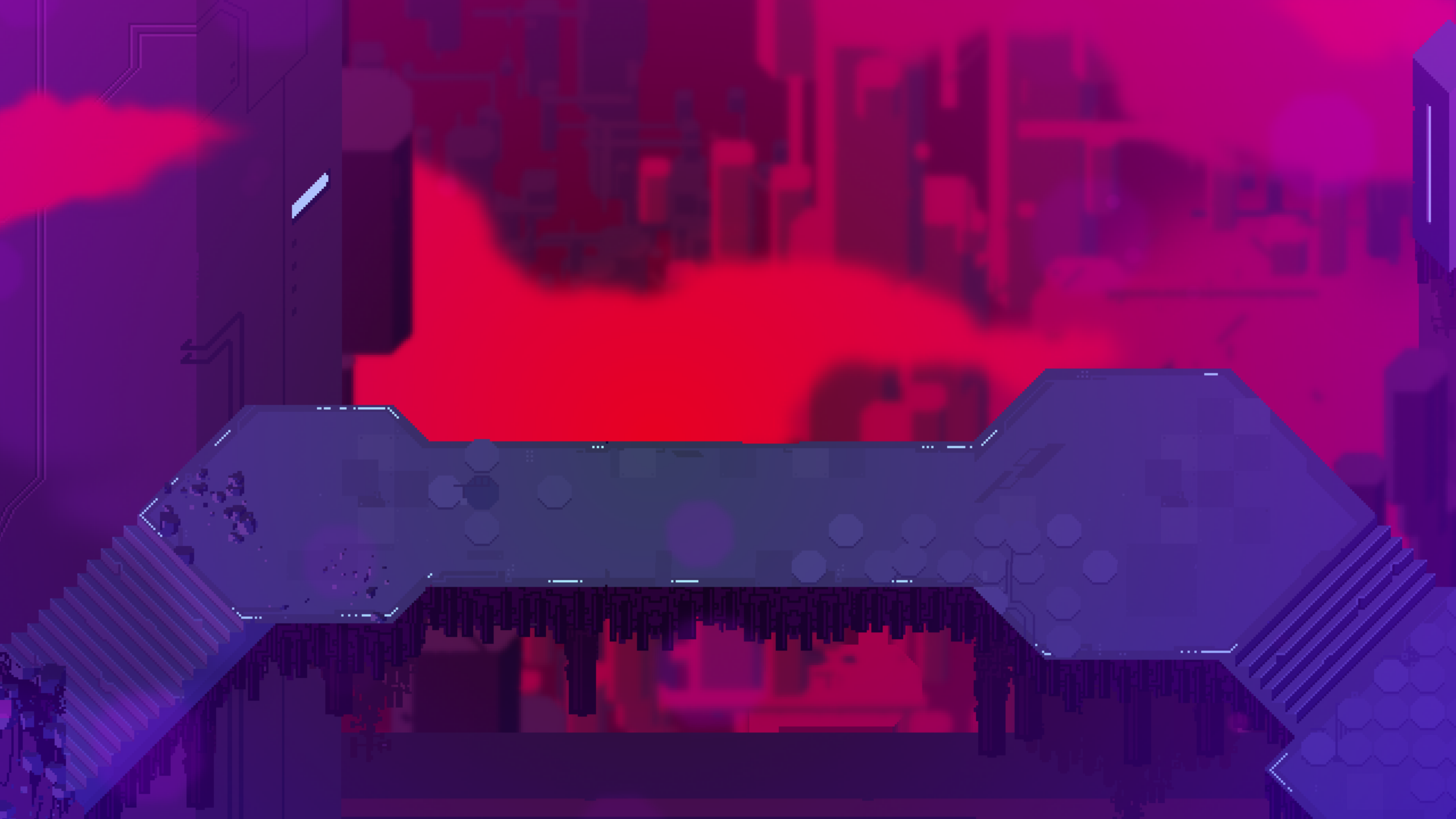


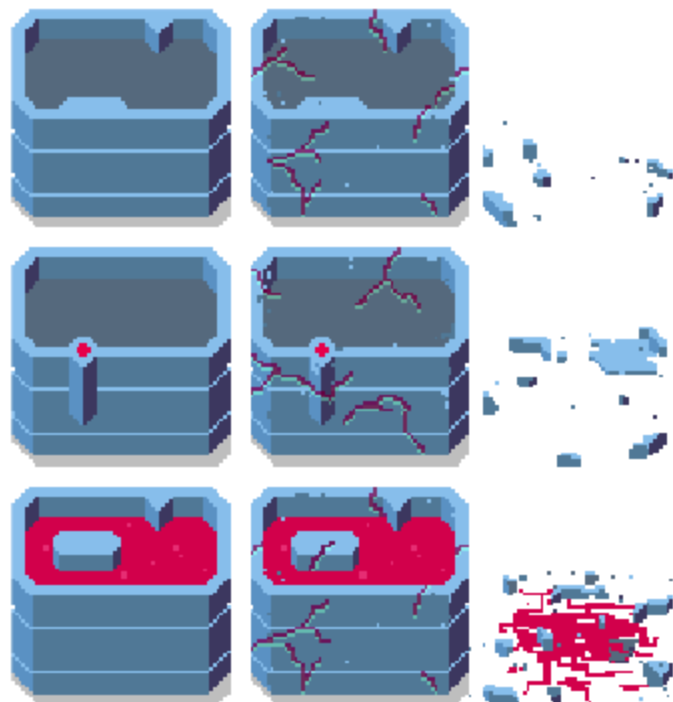
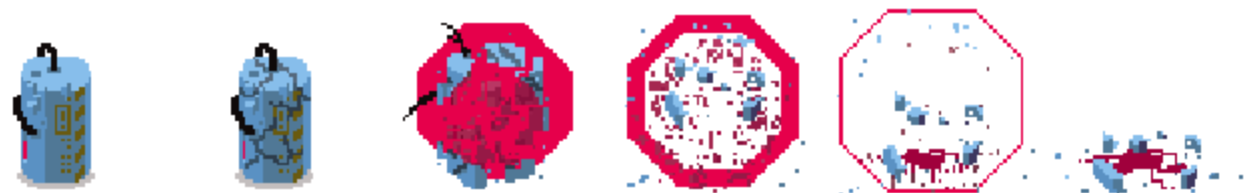


Technocracy

Almost all of Resolitiion's levels are either rugged, destroyed, or overgrown in some shape or form — but Cloud City is the home to the wealthiest and most technologically advanced people in the empire, so it had a unique narrative role to play. We tried to represent this difference with clean lines and flat surfaces, only to realize that it wasn't very visually interesting. In the end, we frequently had to break up these uniform shapes, resulting in a level that defines Resolitiion, yet feels slightly out of place.



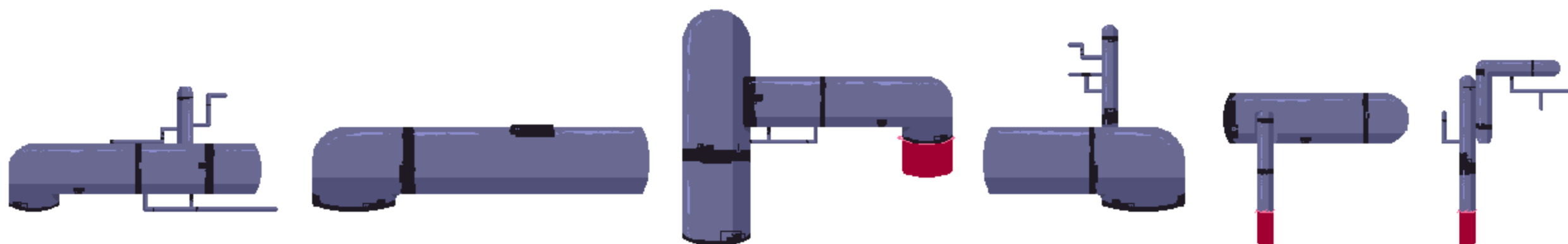
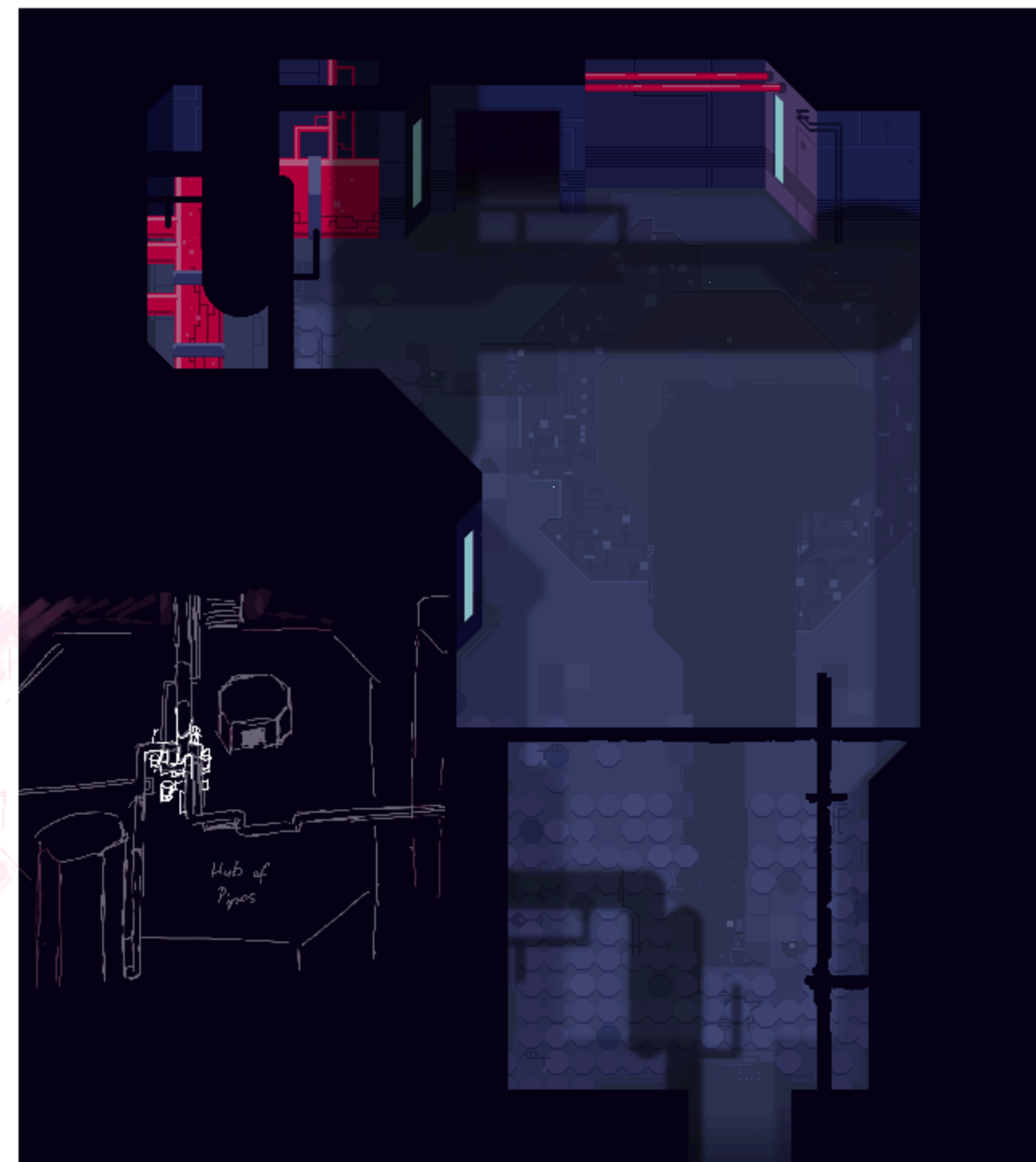


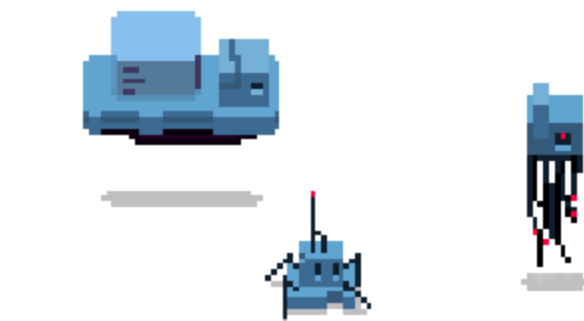


Pipes & Barrels

Cloud Cities are massive constructions that house all human needs, from food-processing to luxurious entertainment. In Resolution we don't get to witness much of that. What we do get to see are the outermost regions — barren docks, where ships deliver goods to be processed and distributed to the higher levels.

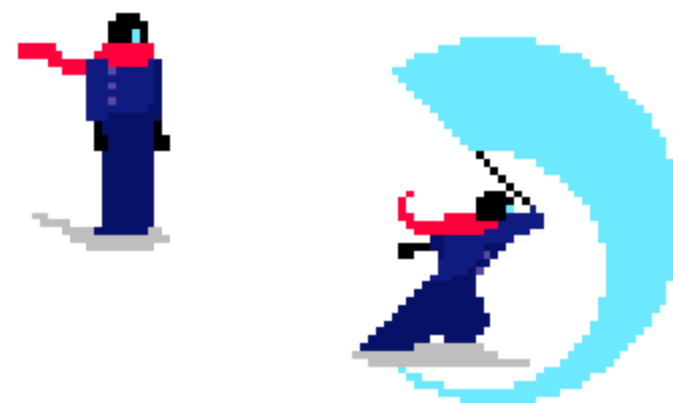
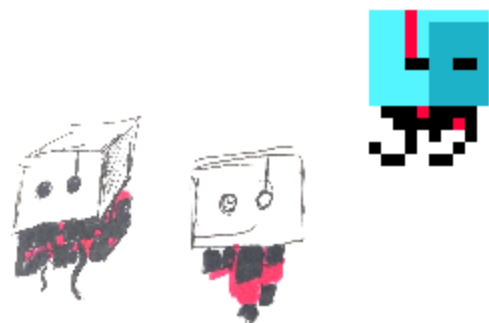
There are barrels and crates everywhere, filled with a red liquid that gets transported through huge pipes into nearby refineries and manufacturing areas. This substance is the enriched version of the Link Fluid, which we'll learn about a bit later in the journey.





Drones

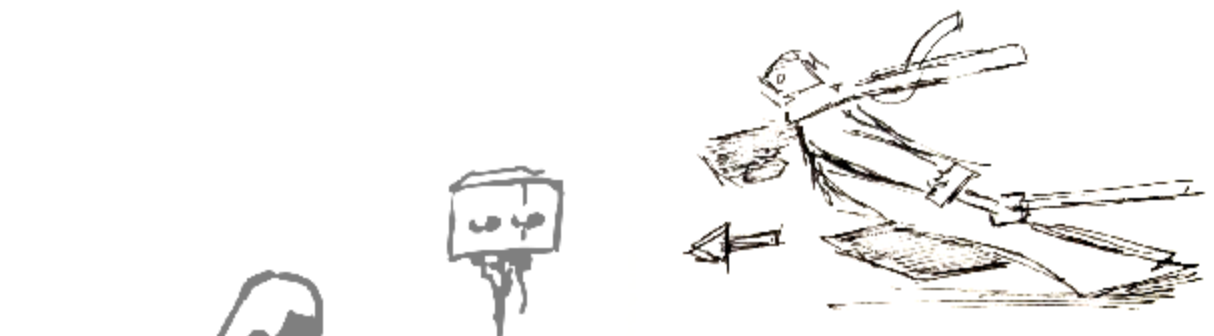
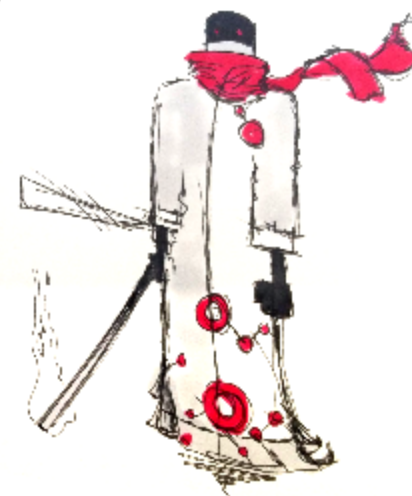
Mechanical worker-bees roam all areas of Cloud City. Some repair the floating structures, some carry heavy parts, others spot intruders and scream for attention. We wanted to introduce combat and enemies slowly, easing in from the innocent to the not-yet-dangerous creatures of this world: the alarm-drones just drain Valor's stamina.

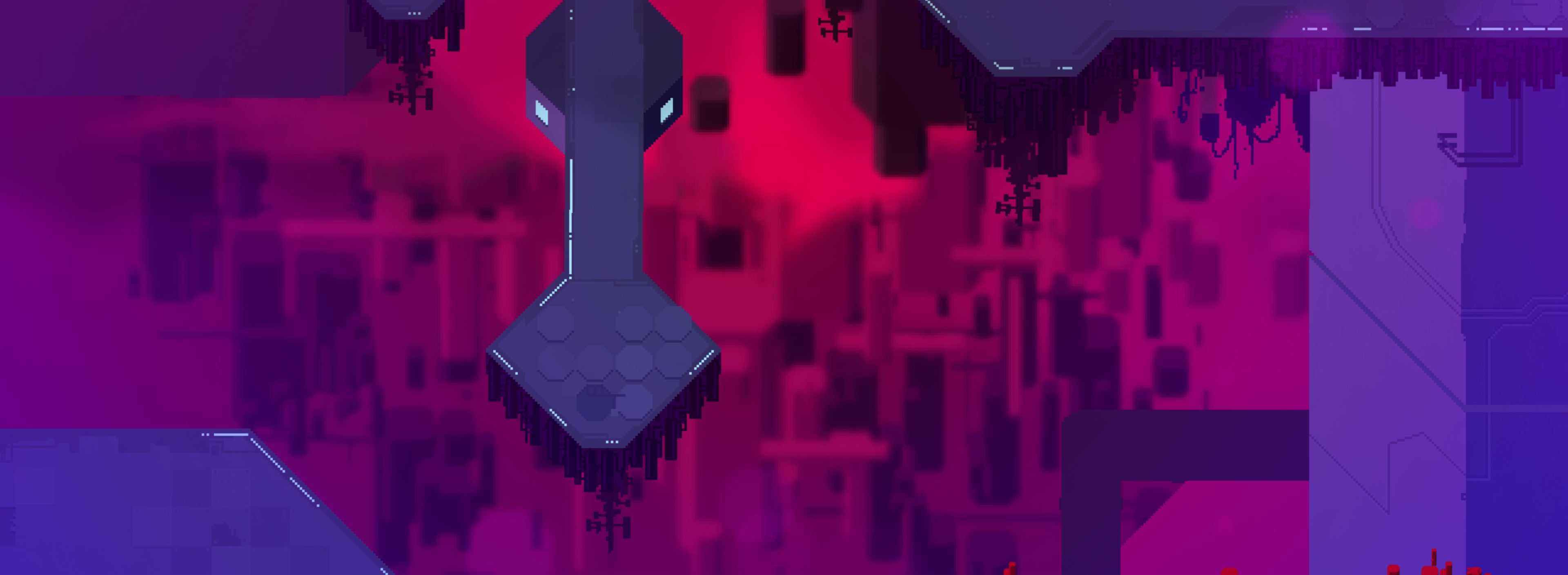


Lut

Believe it or not, this guy was our initial concept for the main character. We downgraded him to a general security unit with shock-baton and stun-grenades, but kept the scarf and helmet to identify the affiliation.

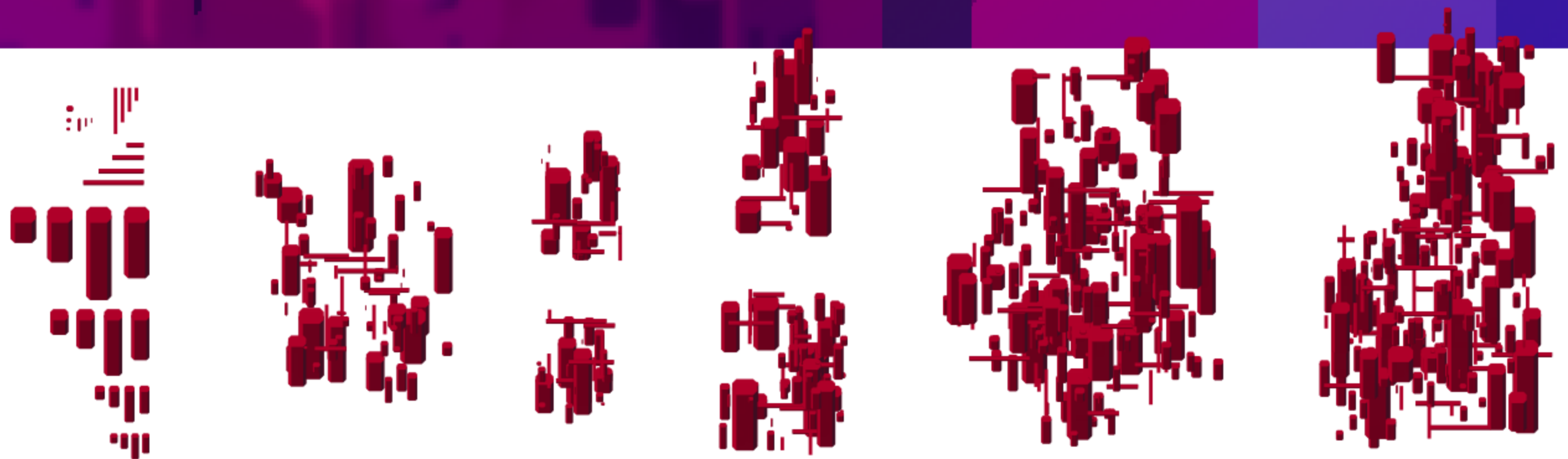
Lut was also the first enemy we prototyped, testing attack patterns, artificial intelligence and the "dance of death". While his sprite sheet and animations were reworked countless times, his general design remains mostly unchanged.

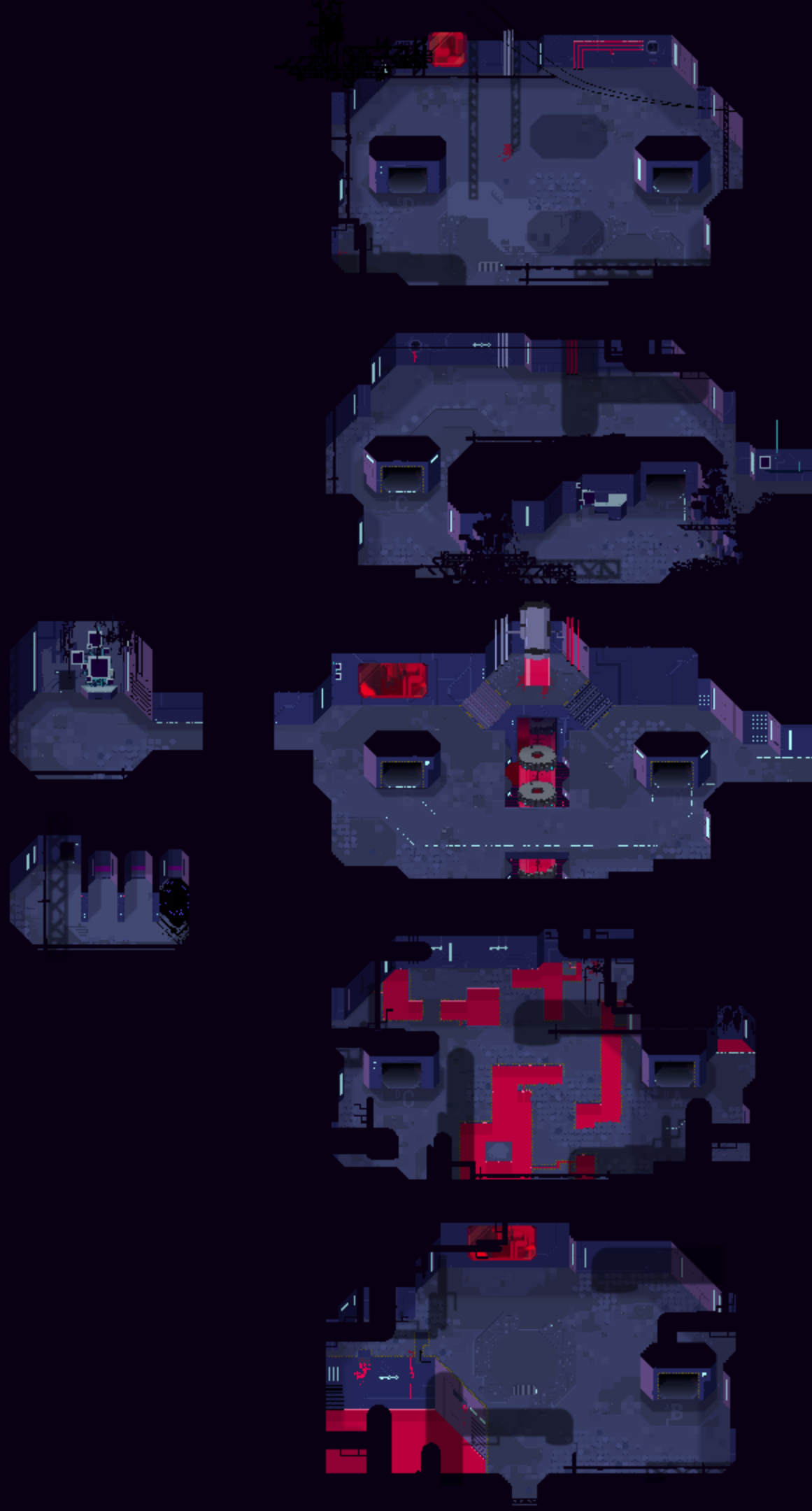




Cloud City Generator

We quickly realized that the Cloud Cities were probably massive, delicately layered, and networked. To reflect this, we had to show lots of towers, paths, and flying ships in the background. To speed up the creation of these background-cities, we built the Cloud City Generator: a simple set of vector shapes, that could be infinitely copied and randomized. This primitive tool let us create dozens of building-constellations in no time, which were then rescaled, recolored, and distributed on various layers to simulate Cloud City's complex depth.





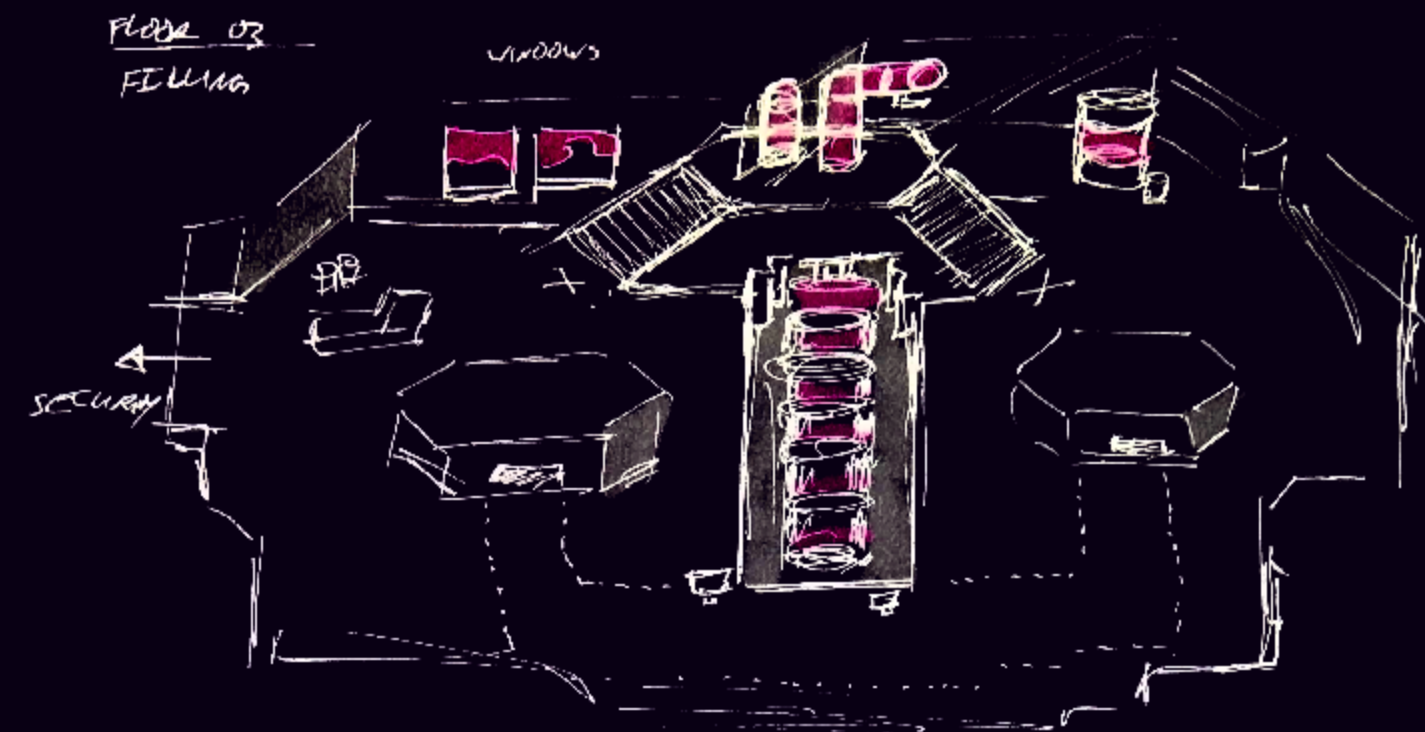
The Tower

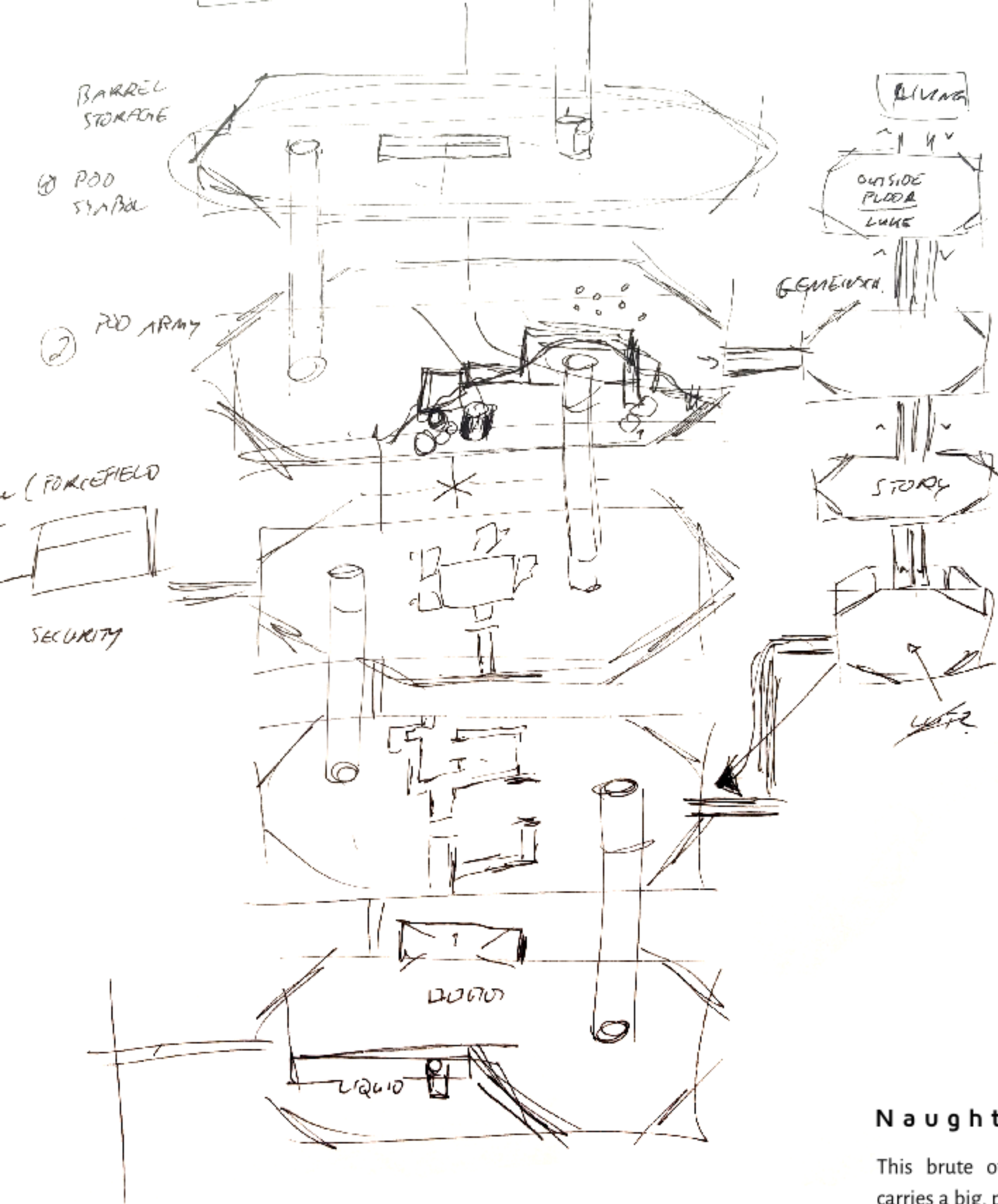
The second chapter of Cloud City is all about learning how to fight. There are five floors encapsulating an immense barrel-filling plant, each introducing new enemy combinations that force players to explore movement and evasion.



Quarters

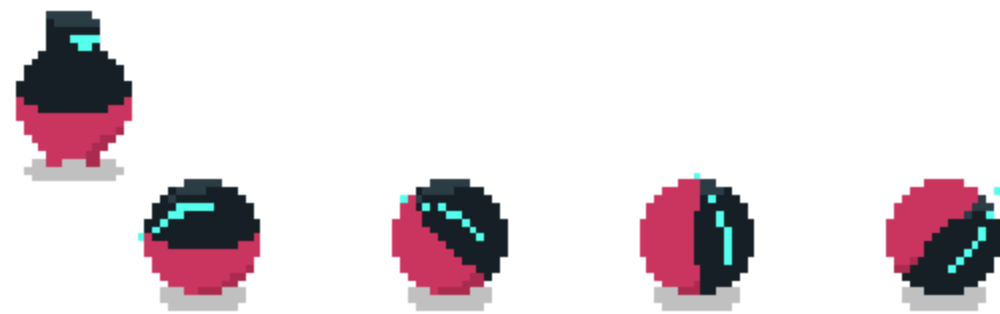
Alongside the main floors are smaller structures, like the prison, and quarters for the workforce. Though the factories and loading bays are rather empty, we tried to tell a little bit of story on each floor through changes in architecture. Switching between large and small spaces to differentiate sleeping alcoves, processing zones, and landing sites, we wanted to show not only the journey of the red fluid but of the laborers carrying out this dirty work.





Naught

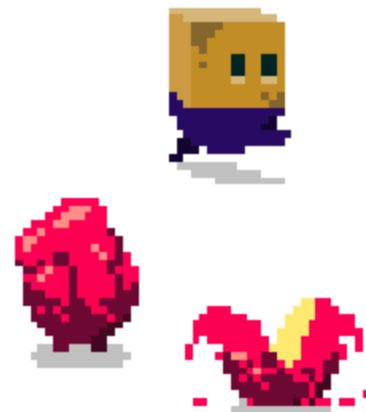
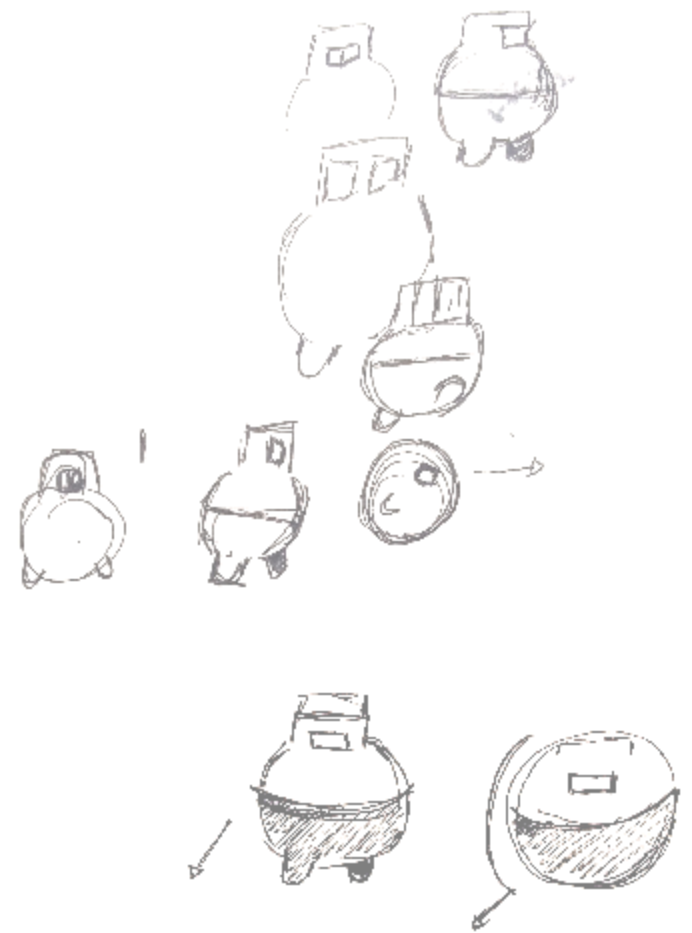
This brute of a dock-worker carries a big, pressurized barrel on his back. What seems like a hammer in his hand is actually a sample picker for the red liquid, but it hits just as well.



Pods

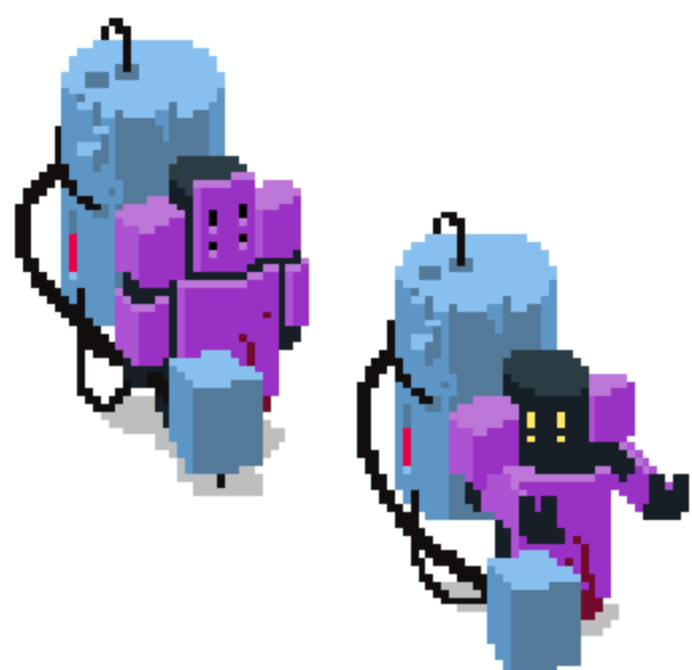
These little critters keep the pipes clear for the processing liquid. To do that, they roll into a ball, which doubles as a great attack move to harass intruders.

Pods were further reused as the King's loyal minions and the suicidal Flesh-Pods which appear much later, in the Fallen City.



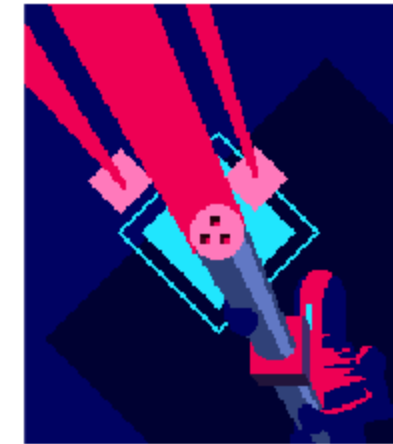
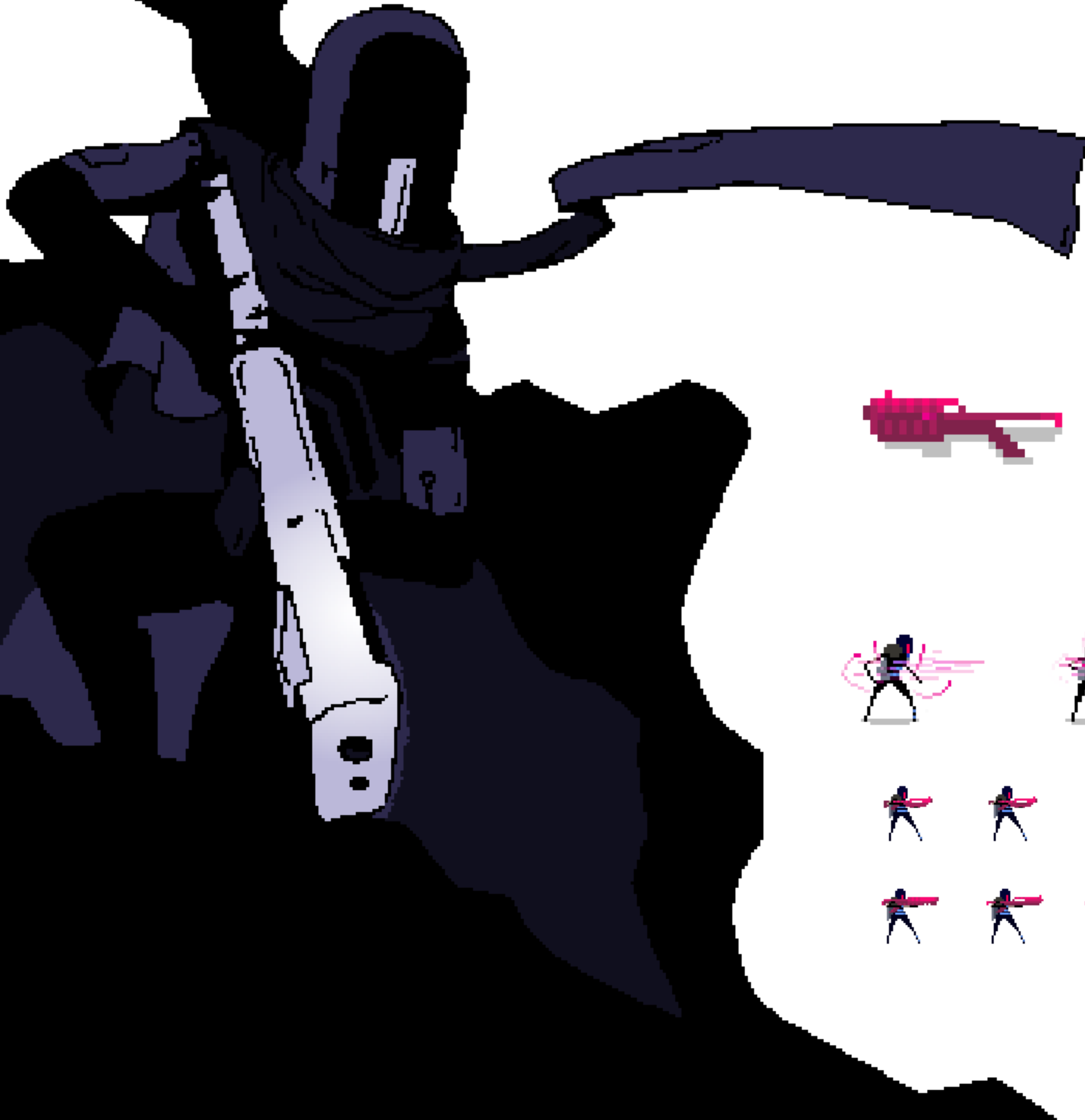
Sullu

These static and strange enemies split their faces to reveal a laser-cannon. We still like the concept, but ultimately removed them from the game: fighting them was no fun and they found no place in the lore.







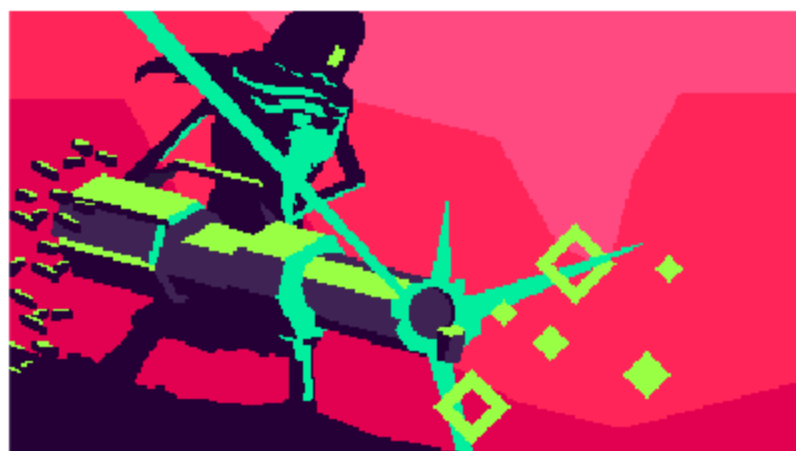


Calmer

Very early on, the player can collect a shotgun-style weapon called the Calmer — it's short-range but has great recoil. Its main purpose for the player is to learn to cherish the stamina bar, since all items share this single resource.

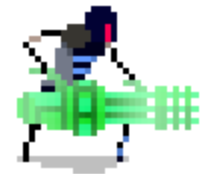
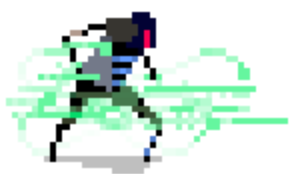
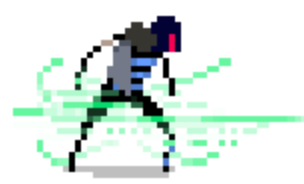
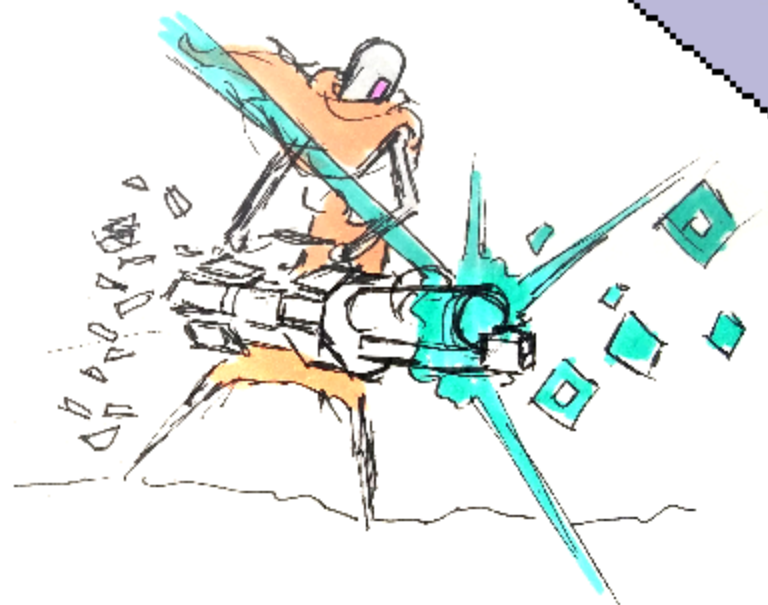


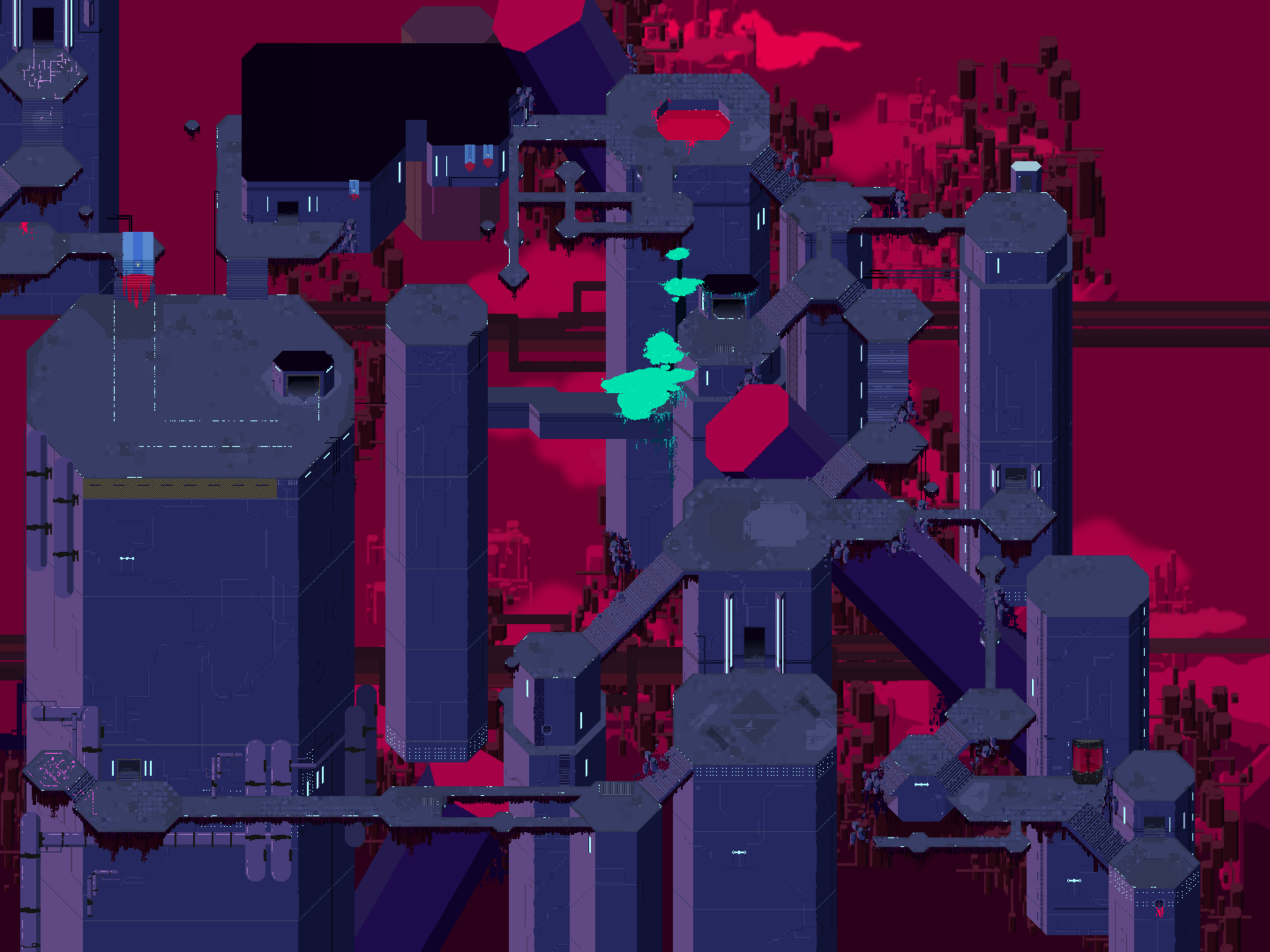
Instead of Valor carrying weapons on his back at all times, we decided that he would just summon them from light and nanobots whenever he wanted to kill something. That seemed totally reasonable in a dream-world.



Resolver

Everybody loves miniguns, so we needed one in Resolution. The Resolver only becomes available very late in the game, but makes quite a difference to subsequent combat, hailing down thousands of bullets on friends and foes alike.



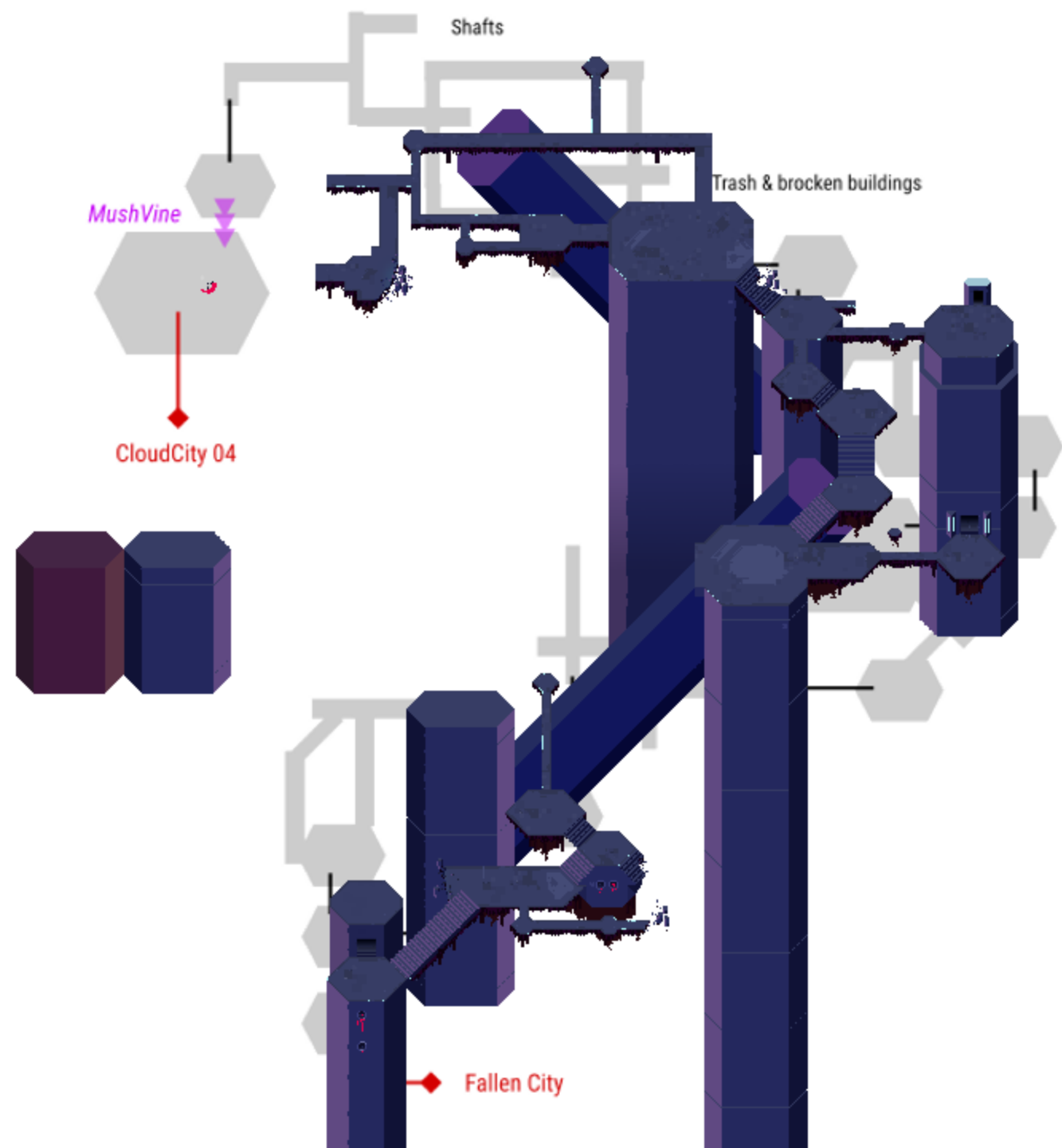


Junkyard

The outer perimeter of Cloud City is known as the "Junkyard". From here, everything the elites no longer need or want is tossed into the ruins of the old world below.

Arriving at the bottom of the Tower, most of this level can not be accessed, yet. But those who like to rummage will find plenty of combat, lore, and the mighty Resolver.



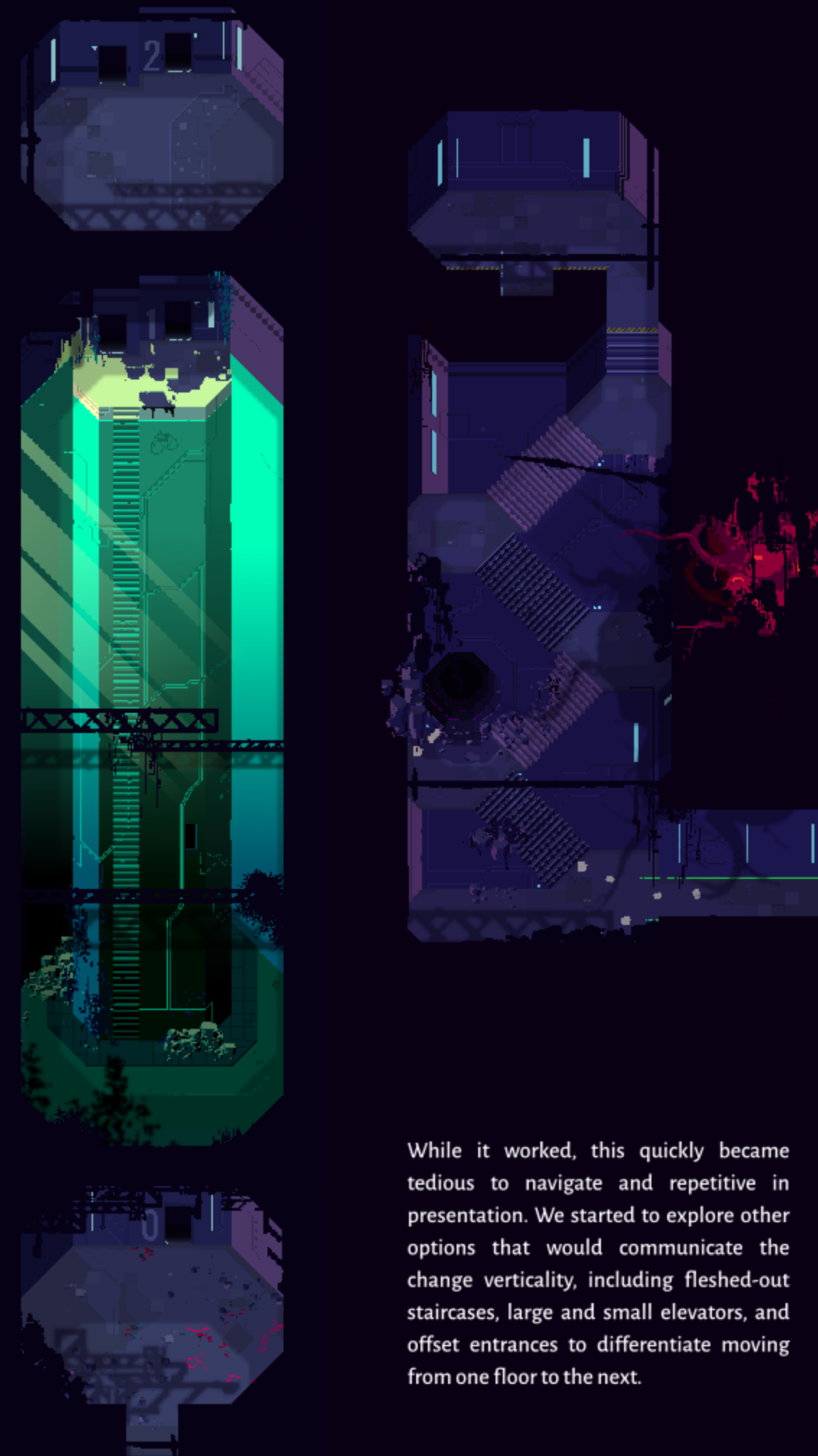


Remixing the City

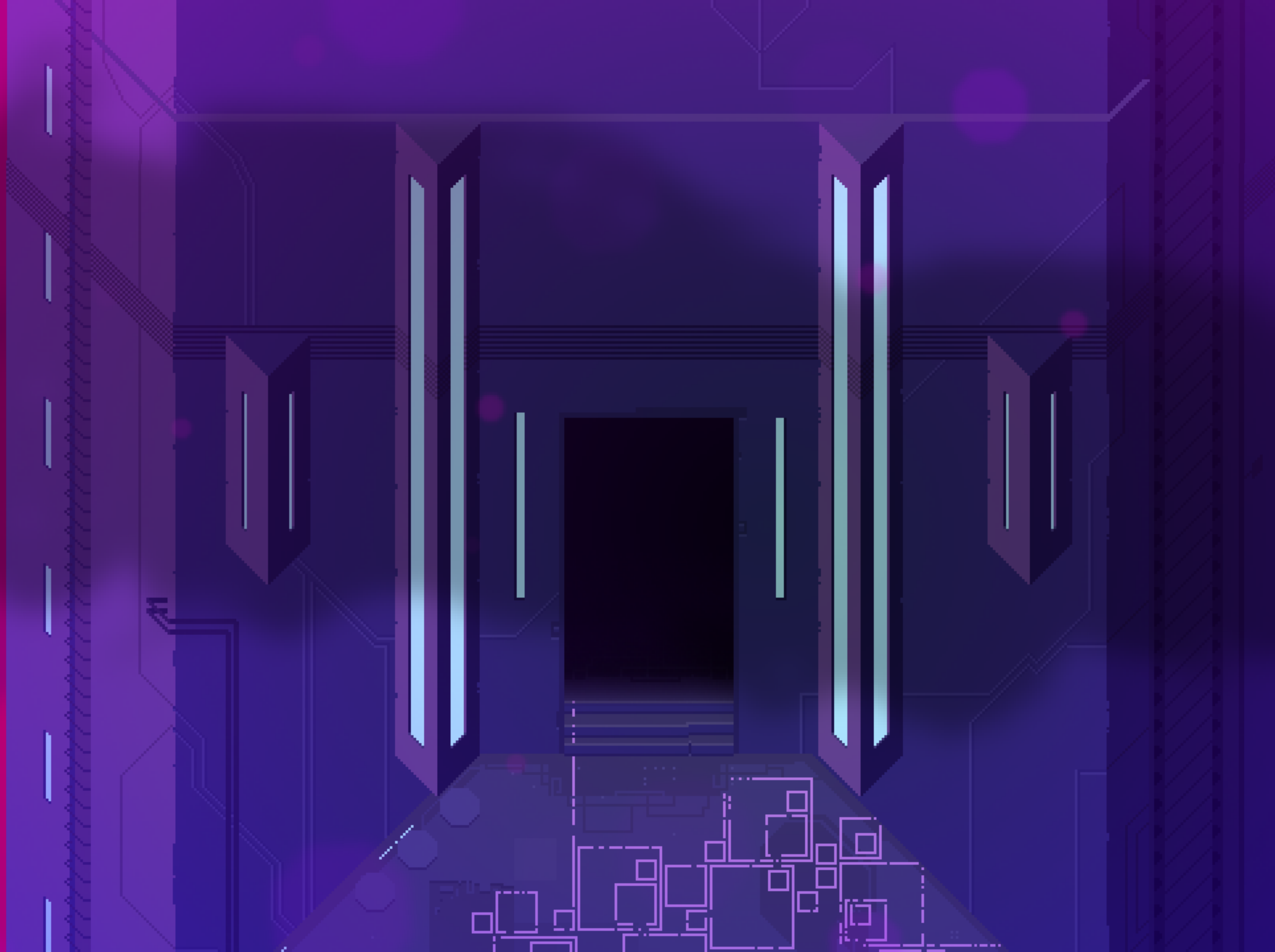
For the most part, the Junkyard is an optional area. Early on, it only appeared as a single ledge with a boss fight at the end, right before Valor's decent into the Desert of Giants. However, when we decided to make the world a consistent, interconnected map, we took what was then Cloud City 04 and married it with the Junkyard. Now, this twisted hub leads to all areas of Cloud City, as well as the desert and the Fallen City below.

Elevation

Cloud City is essentially a collection of floors on top of floors. How to move between those vertical floors on a flat 2D plane gave us some trouble in the beginning. Initially, we applied Zelda's stairs mechanic, where you enter a door at the top of one screen, and exit from the same door in another room, with a short break in between.



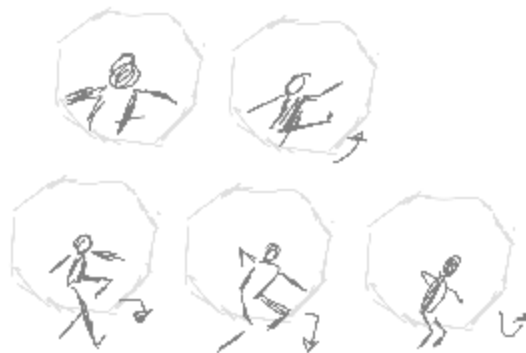
While it worked, this quickly became tedious to navigate and repetitive in presentation. We started to explore other options that would communicate the change vertically, including fleshed-out staircases, large and small elevators, and offset entrances to differentiate moving from one floor to the next.



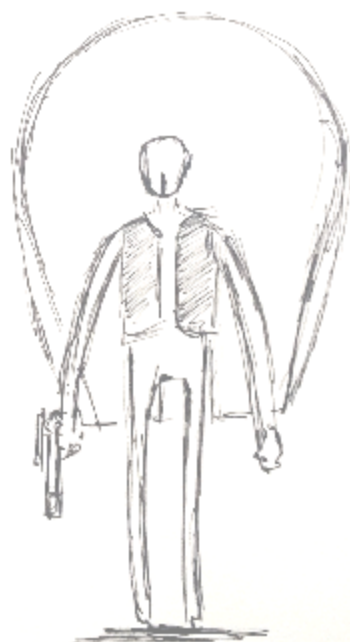


Halo

By the closing stages of Cloud City, the player has learned to move, attack, and fire the Calmer — here we put these new skills to the test. Meet Halo, Resoluition's first mini-boss.



This guy is a soldier, similar to Valor, but less sophisticated and therefore equipped with an energy-shield and plenty of explosives. Just watching him dance around the arena, launching one attack after the other, should give players a good idea of how to approach combat later on.



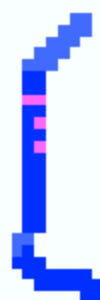
Halo still bears plenty of our early Star Wars homages, as this early version of his design shows: look closely and you'll see Han Solo's famous vest and laser-pistol. And the shield's shape is not too far from that of the Millennium Falcon ...



"But hey, I got new augs as well. Let me show you some sweet revenge."

—Halo

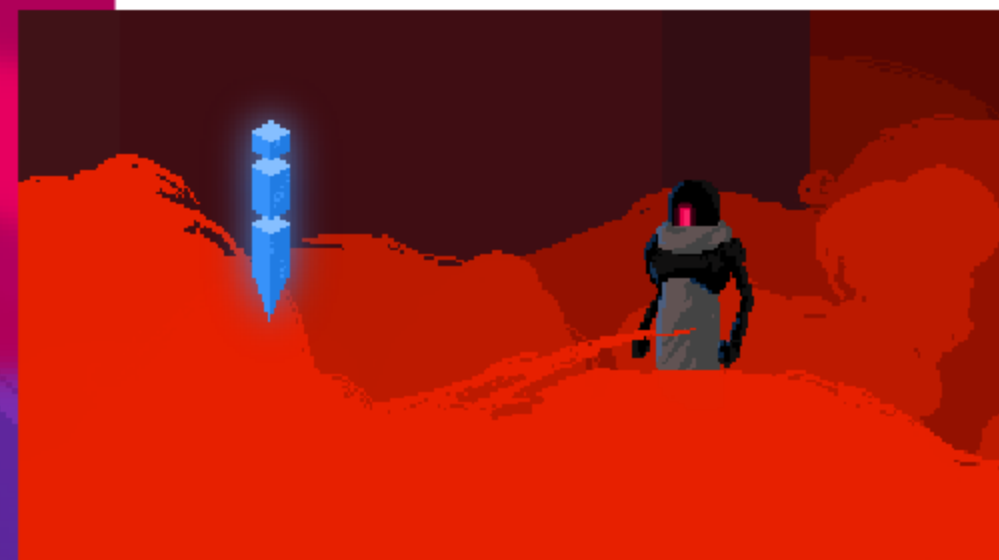




Screen-Tearing

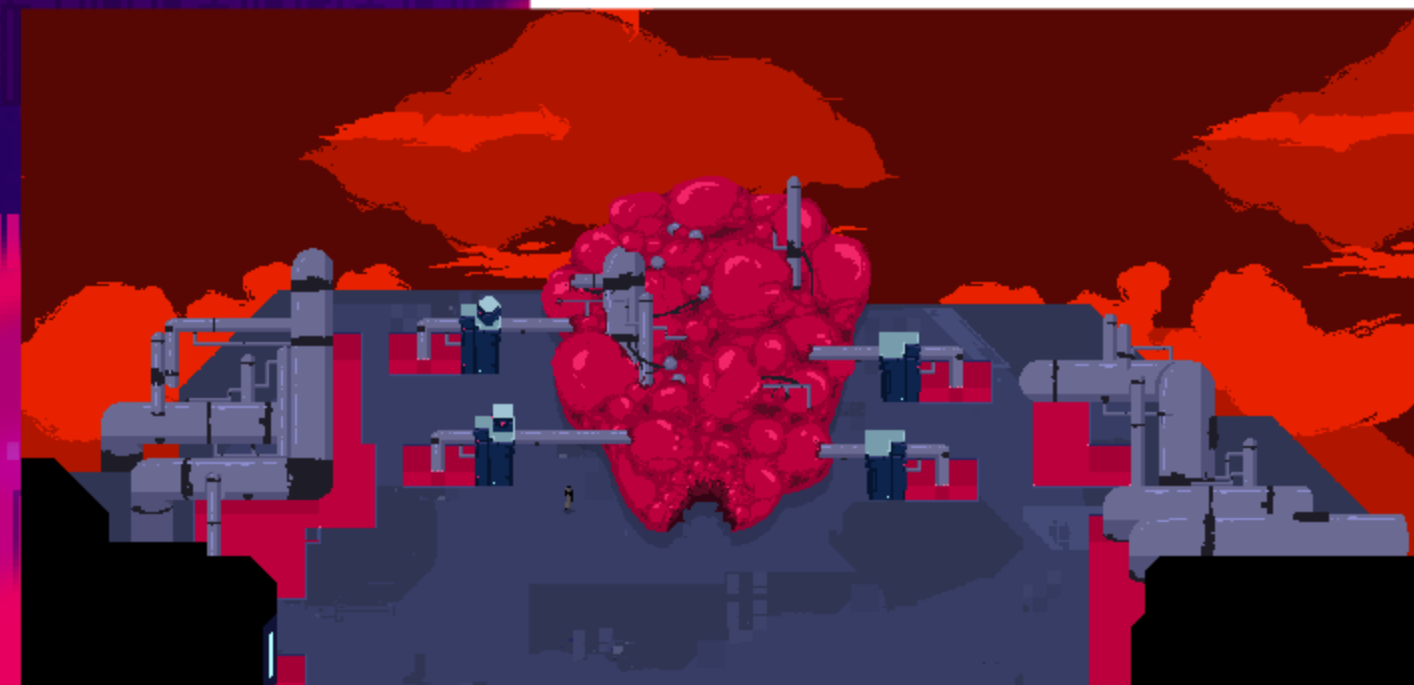
The main movement-modifier in Resoluiion is the speed-boost, or “Screen-Tearing”. For a long time, this ability was present right at the start of the game, but while testing we realized that players got quickly overwhelmed and zoomed towards hazards instead of evading them. Instead, withholding such a powerful ability until after the first boss worked out great, and from here on out, speed is of the essence—Resoluiion is a big game.





After the Fight

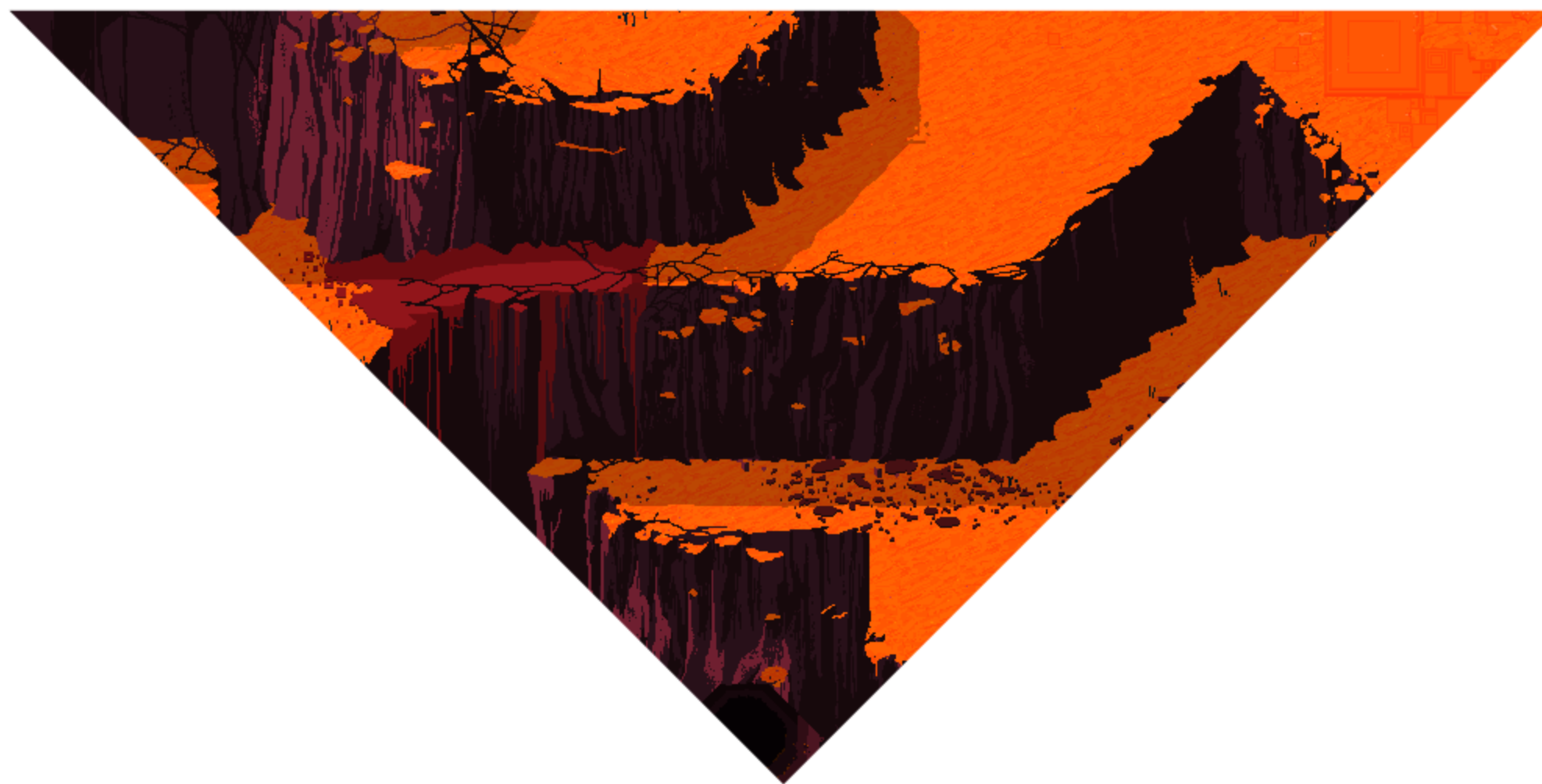
As Cloud City was our playground for the first year of development, it contained plenty of ideas and mechanics that we later transposed to other locations, reworked or dismissed completely. Some examples of cut content include small cutscenes with Alibii, various fire-weapons, and even a gigantic blob-boss which we never finished and eventually dropped, for better or worse.



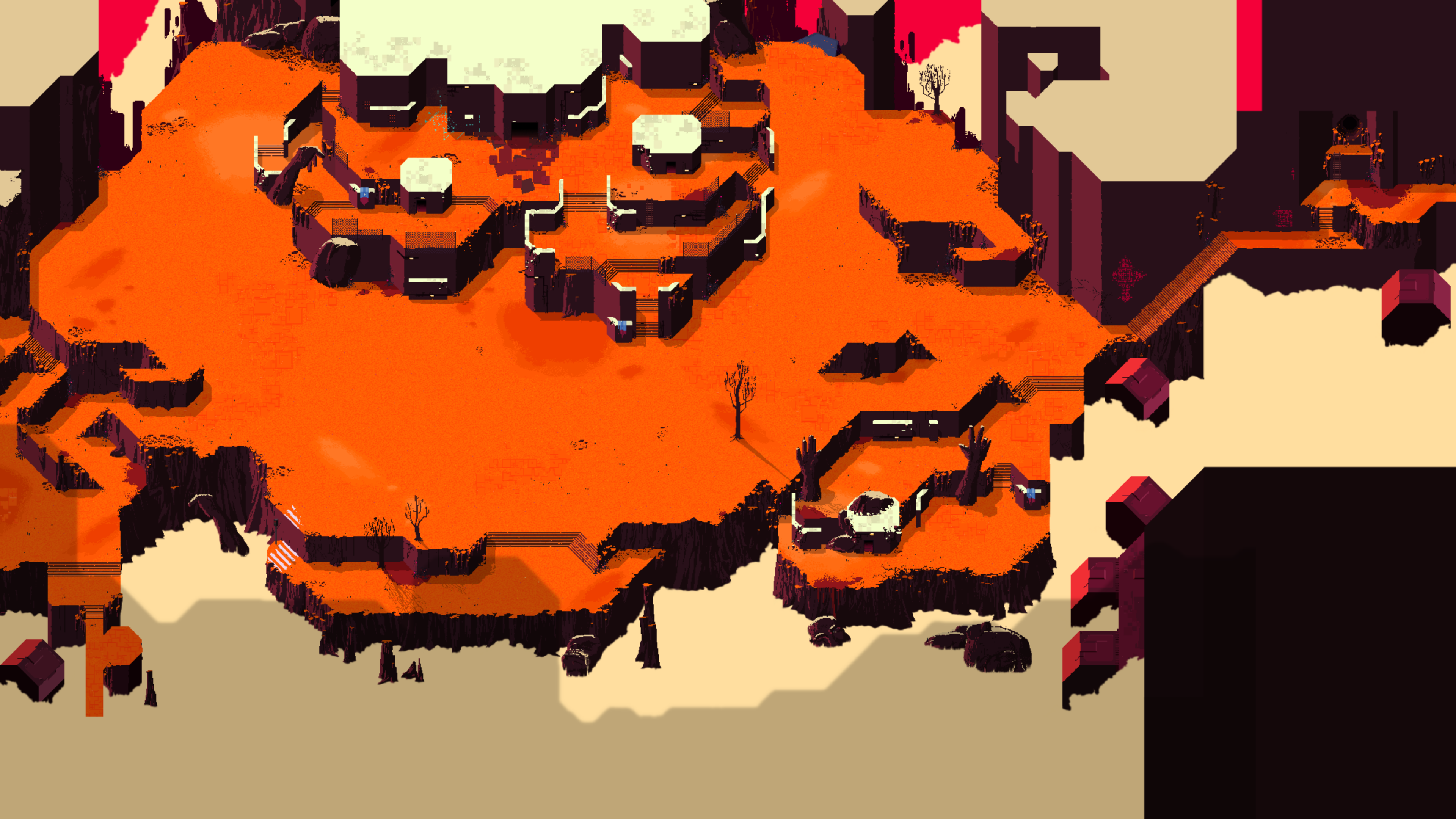


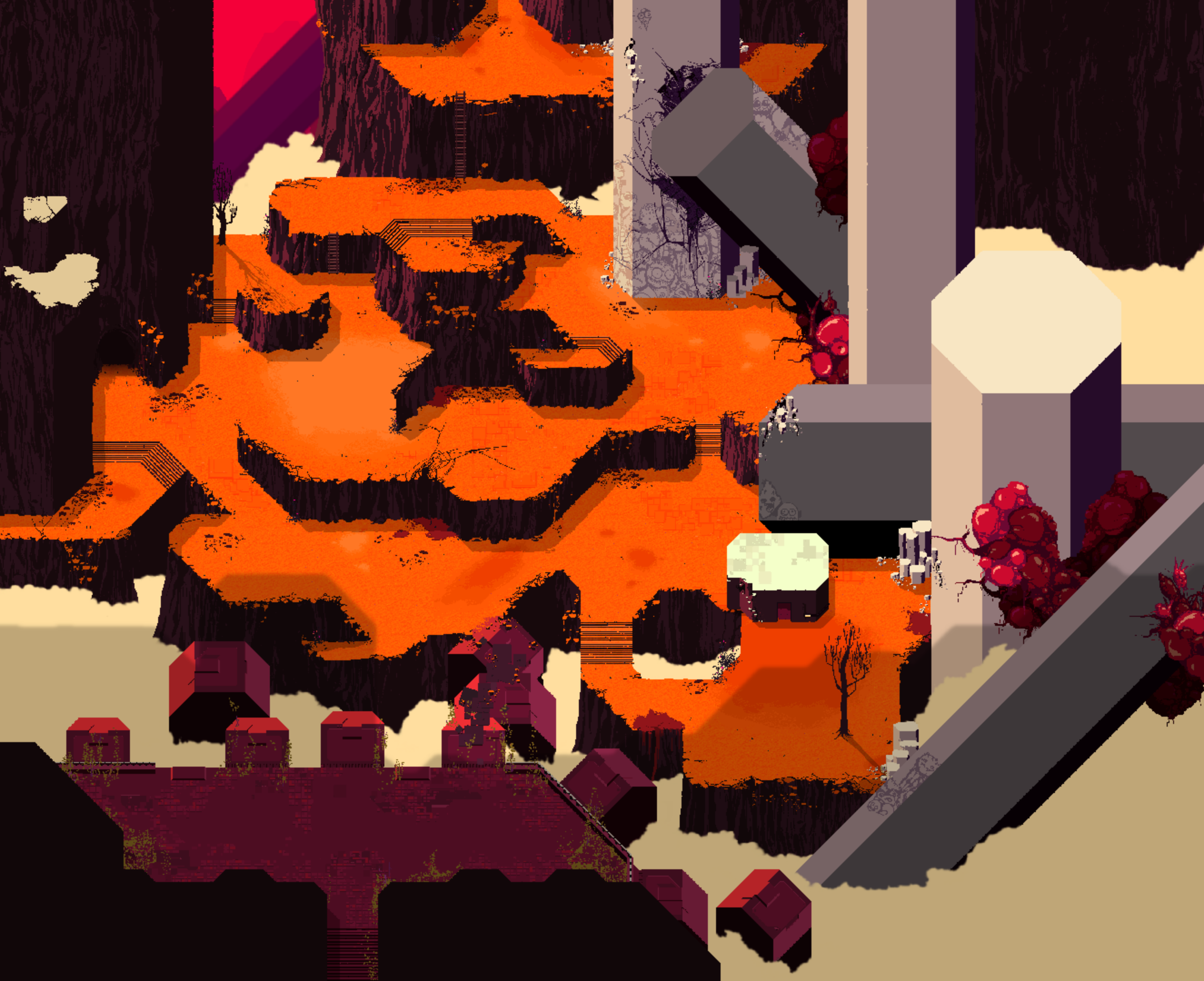
You're alright?
You're alright.
We're alright.
-Alibii

Desert of Giants









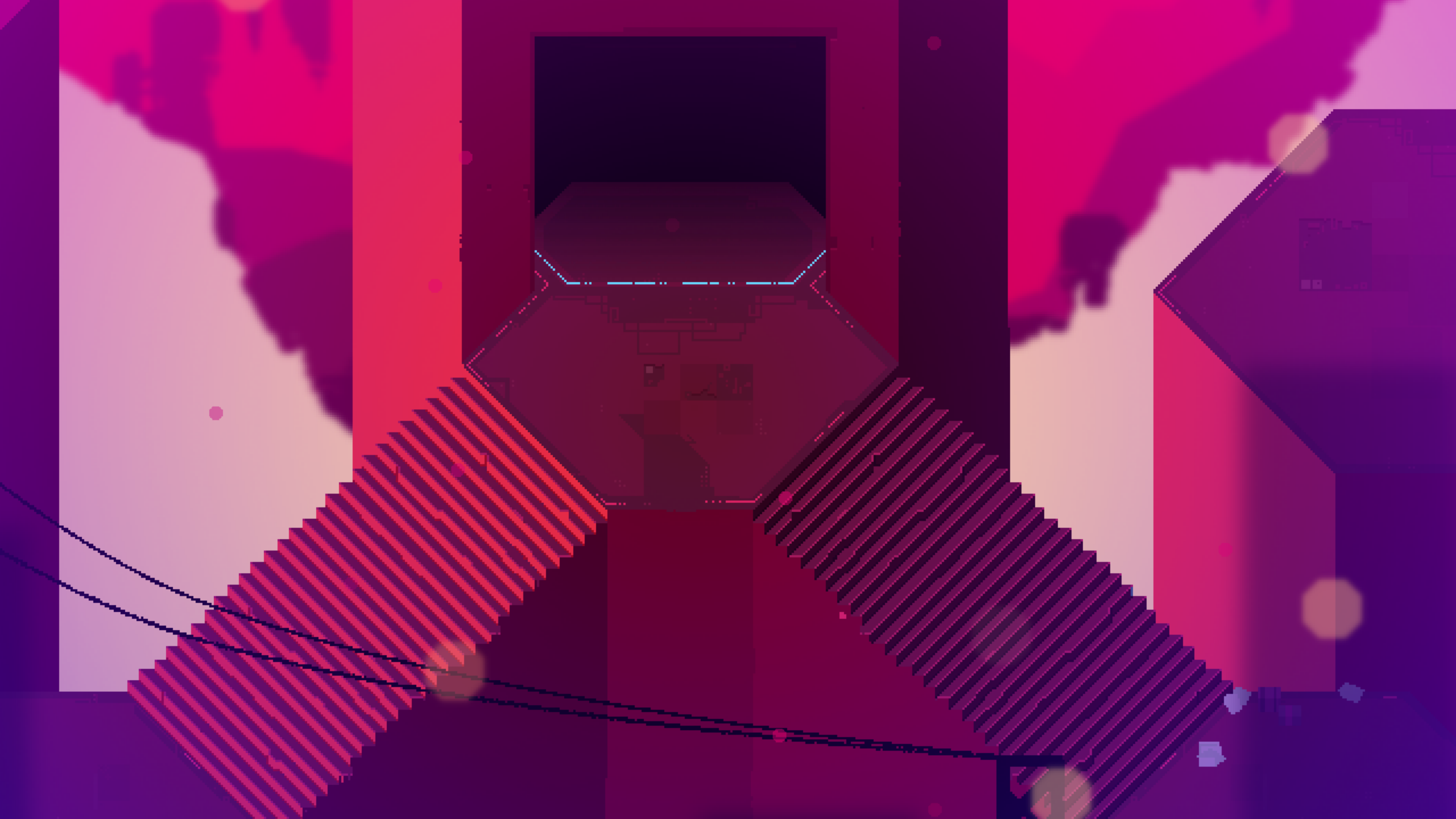
Desert of Giants

At the foot of Cloud City's core spreads a wasteland in all directions. The Desert of Giants is Resolutiion's hub area, connecting all levels with its long shadows and towering giants. War raged here in the past and war rages on, today.

The Freeman of the desert fight the Infinite Empire at the Library, both protecting their most valuable source of information, knowledge, and power — a shifting equilibrium.







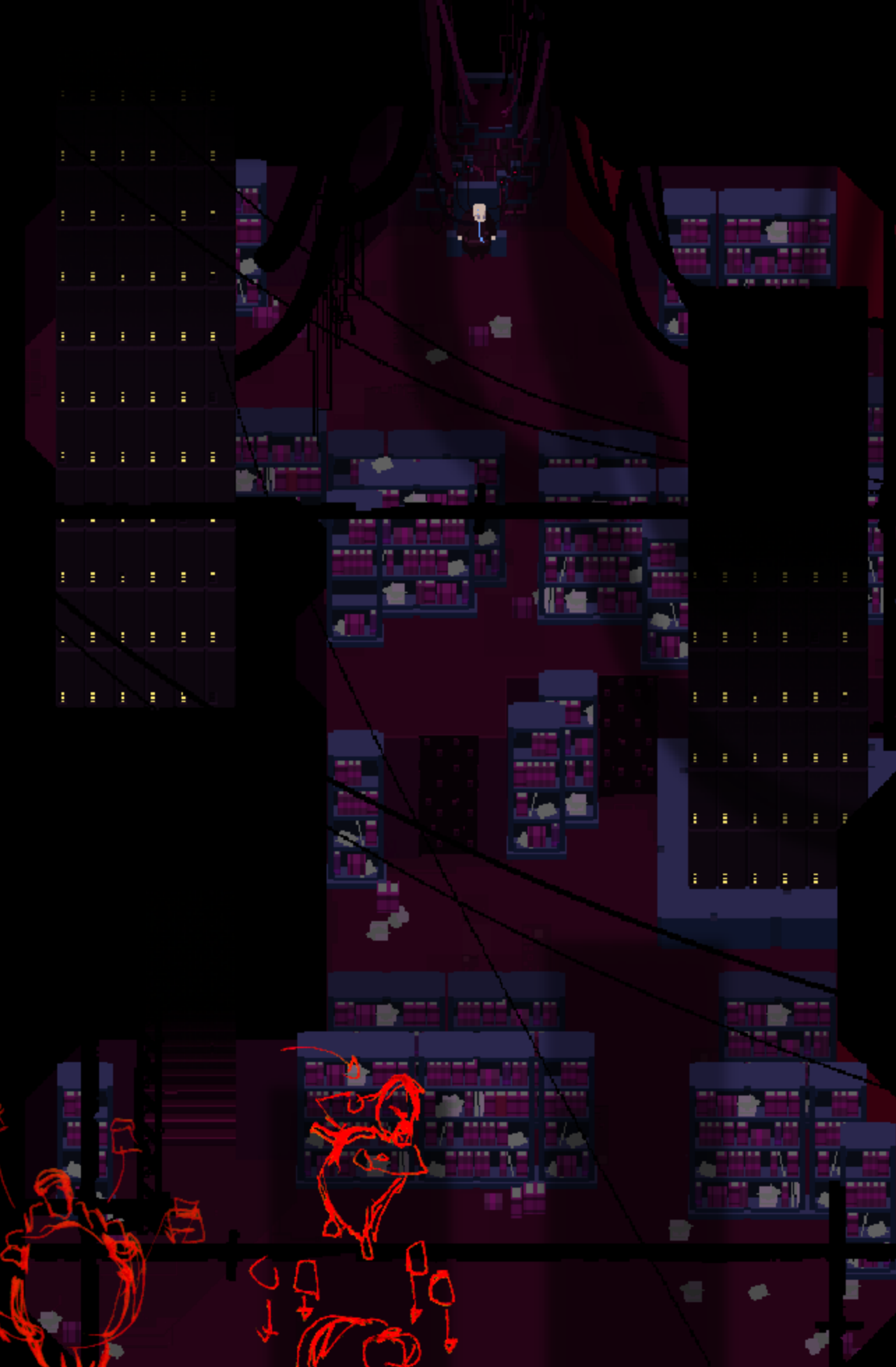


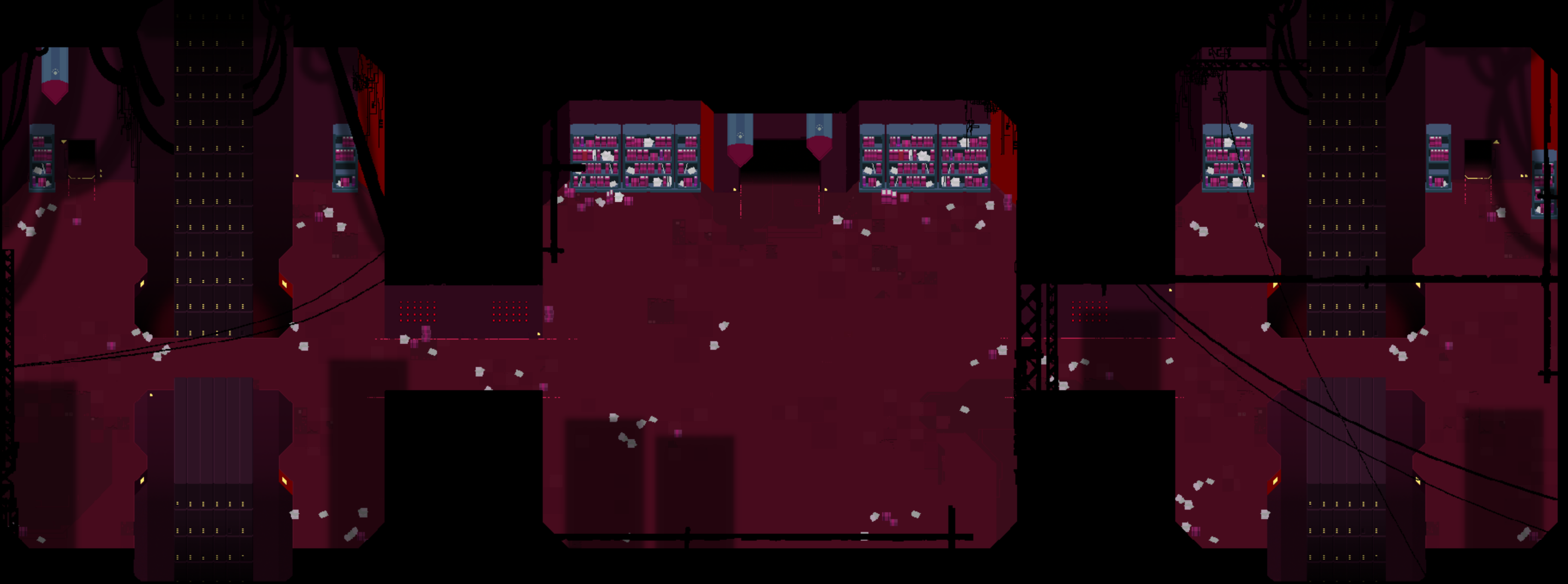
Preserver & Witnesses

The Preservers and their Witnesses control the flow of information within the Infinite Empire, particularly the interpretation of historical events and the political narrative. Therefore they are highly augmented and wired into the massive data-clusters within the Library.

On the lowest floor of the library resides the old Preserver. Replaced and forgotten, he shares his knowledge of the mysterious Red Code.

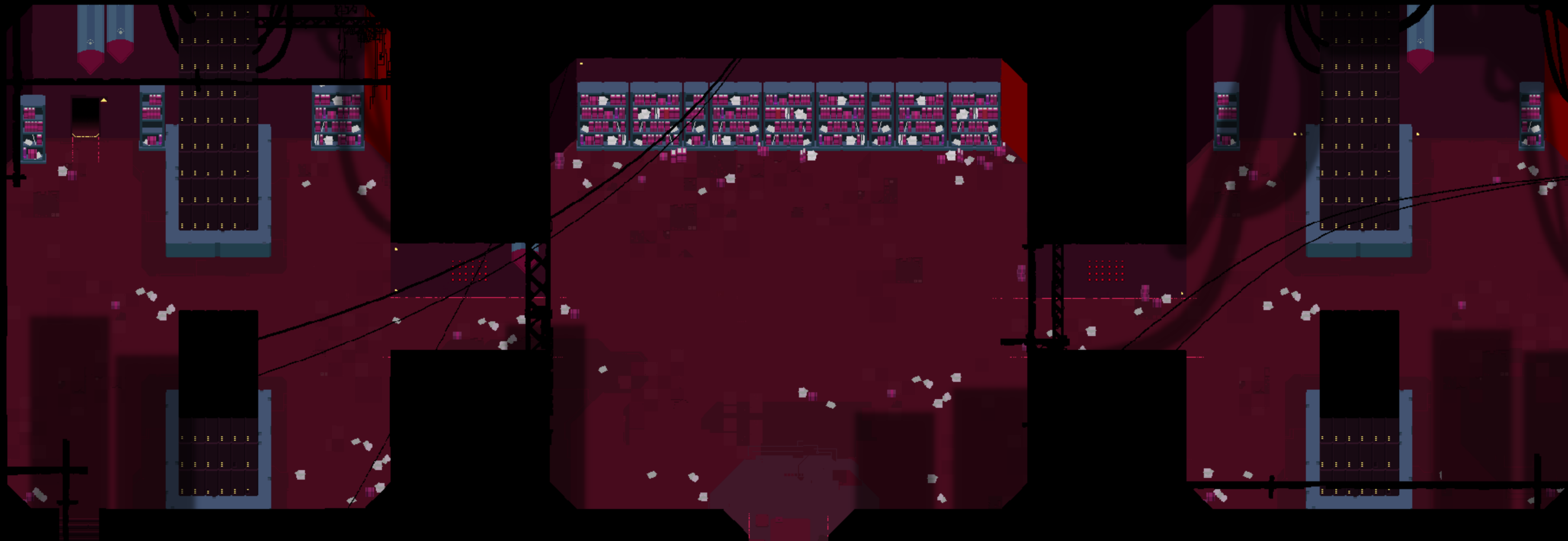
The original concepts of the Preserver and their minions wore smiling masks, revealing their robotic faces when attacked.





“Thirty years after the war and we’re still manually sorting information.”

—Witness





Mother

A gigantic cat, roaming the space around the library, hunting down every human who treads on the sand? — Sure, it's a video game, so let's do it.

Mother is certainly one of the most iconic characters within Resolutiion, but the big sprites and her unnatural movement under the sand gave us headaches. After many failed attempts and shifting blame, we designed a simple vector sprite sheet, that each of us could quickly modify. This helped us to explore her move-sets and decide on frames and transitions.

"Witness Benson went outside to collect samples. -look concerned-
He's late for scrabble. -sound worried-
You think he got lost? -look off in the distance-
Or eaten by that sand monster?"
-Witness





In addition to Mother's tracking and attack animations, we created a few special interactions for her. Including being reunited with her kittens and having mushroom-gas hallucinations.



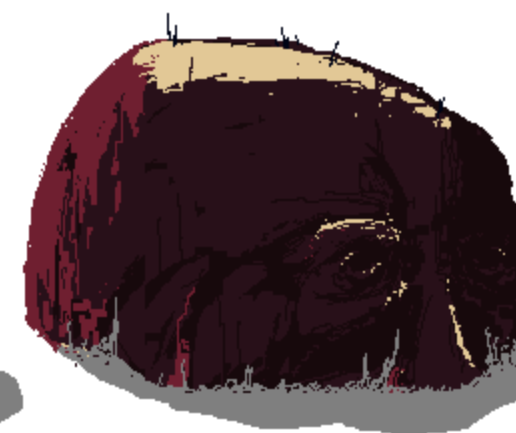
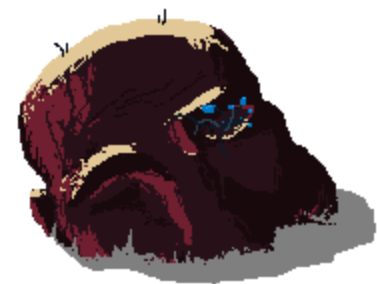
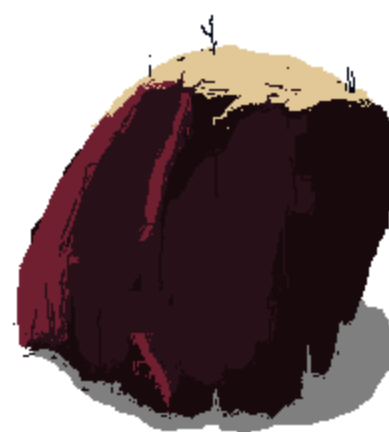
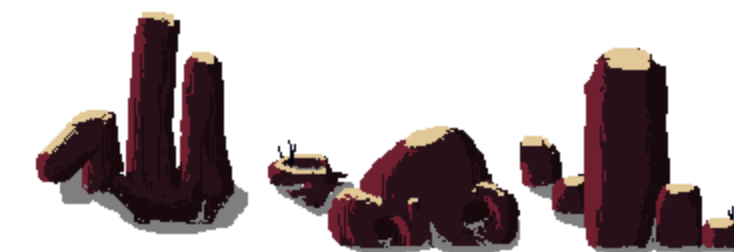
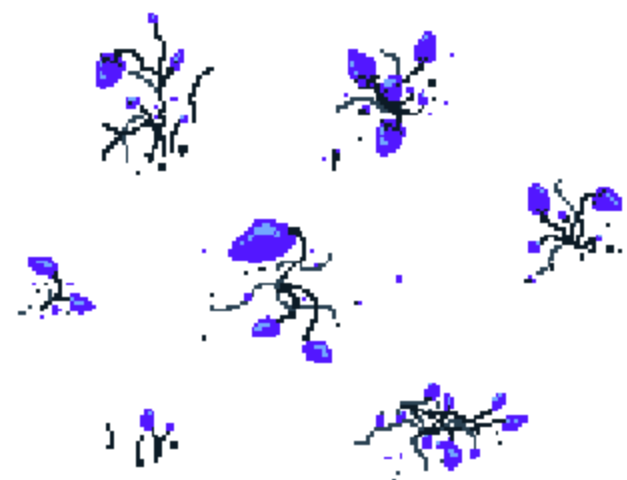


Desert Giants

The massive stone corpses who give their name to the Desert of Giants scar the landscape with reminders of past battles. They mark the first fantastic element on Valor's journey into the rabbit hole.

Mushrooms

The purple mushrooms are scattered throughout the desert and Divided Sea. Inhaling their spores will generally result in a good time.

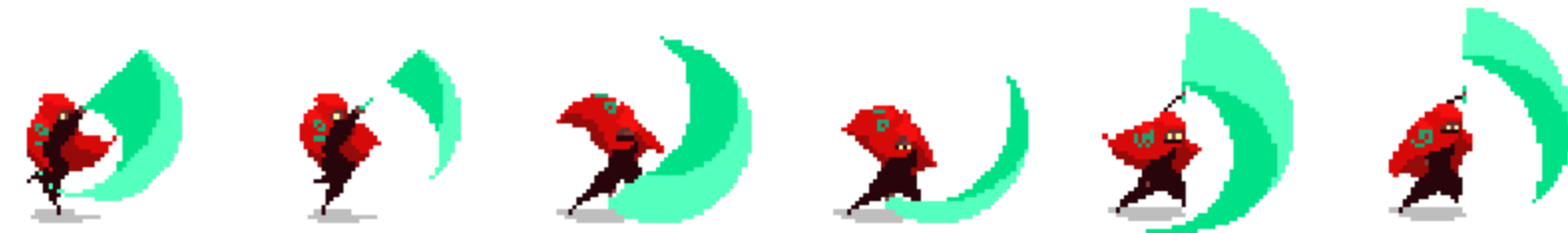


Freemen

The Freeman Brawlers hide under the dunes in the Desert of Giants.



As Valor is crossing the sands, Brawlers emerge behind him, striking with three quick blade swipes.



The Freeman Hunters on the other side keep Valor under suppressive fire.



Exhaling their last breath, the Freeman turn to stone statues; witnesses of the infinite war.



Early versions of the Freeman showed their social side, enjoying a break from the fighting.





"Once, on the path, I watched a young warrior
bow to Fear and ask: how may I defeat you?
Fear replied: my weapons are that I talk fast,
get very close to your face, and you obey ..."
—Green

Cradle Watcher

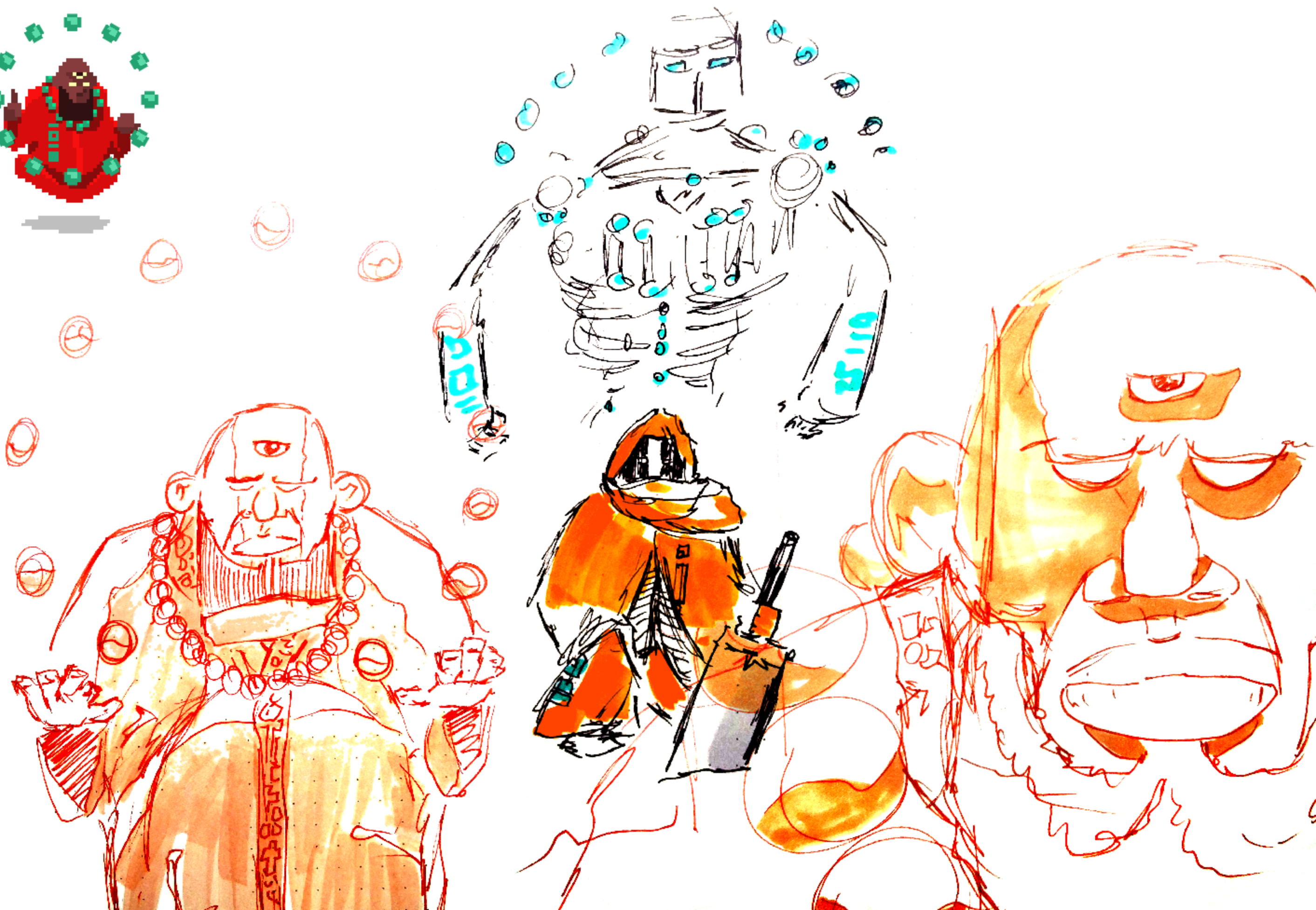
As the last line of defense, the Cradlewatcher
stands between the Puppet and the Freeman's
sanctuary. She's wielding an obscenely large sword
and is souled by their God: the entity called Green.

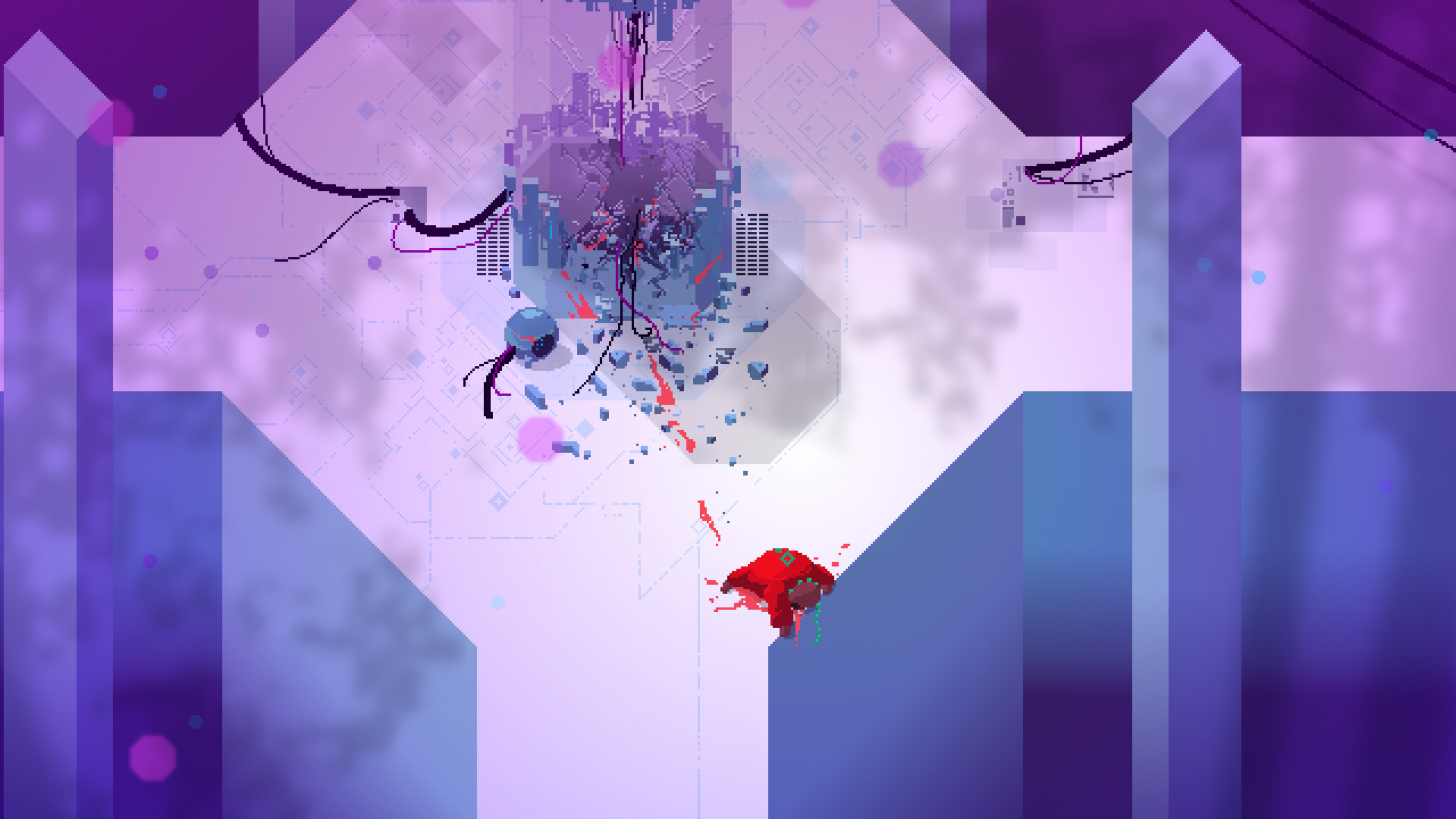



Green

We meet Green in the Freeman's hideout. He's the first of the three Entities — old beings connected to the shared dreamscape via Cradles. Appearing weak and unstable, he attempts to impart words of wisdom and slow Valor's progress.

Initially, Green was portrayed as a warrior type, standing tall and wearing a strange helmet. We later shifted those characteristics to the second Entity, Blue, and styled Green more like a Buddhist philosopher.







"Our network grows underground like a fungus; an infernal machine. When it reaches the surface it will erupt, drowning the old world in a cloud of life and possibility."

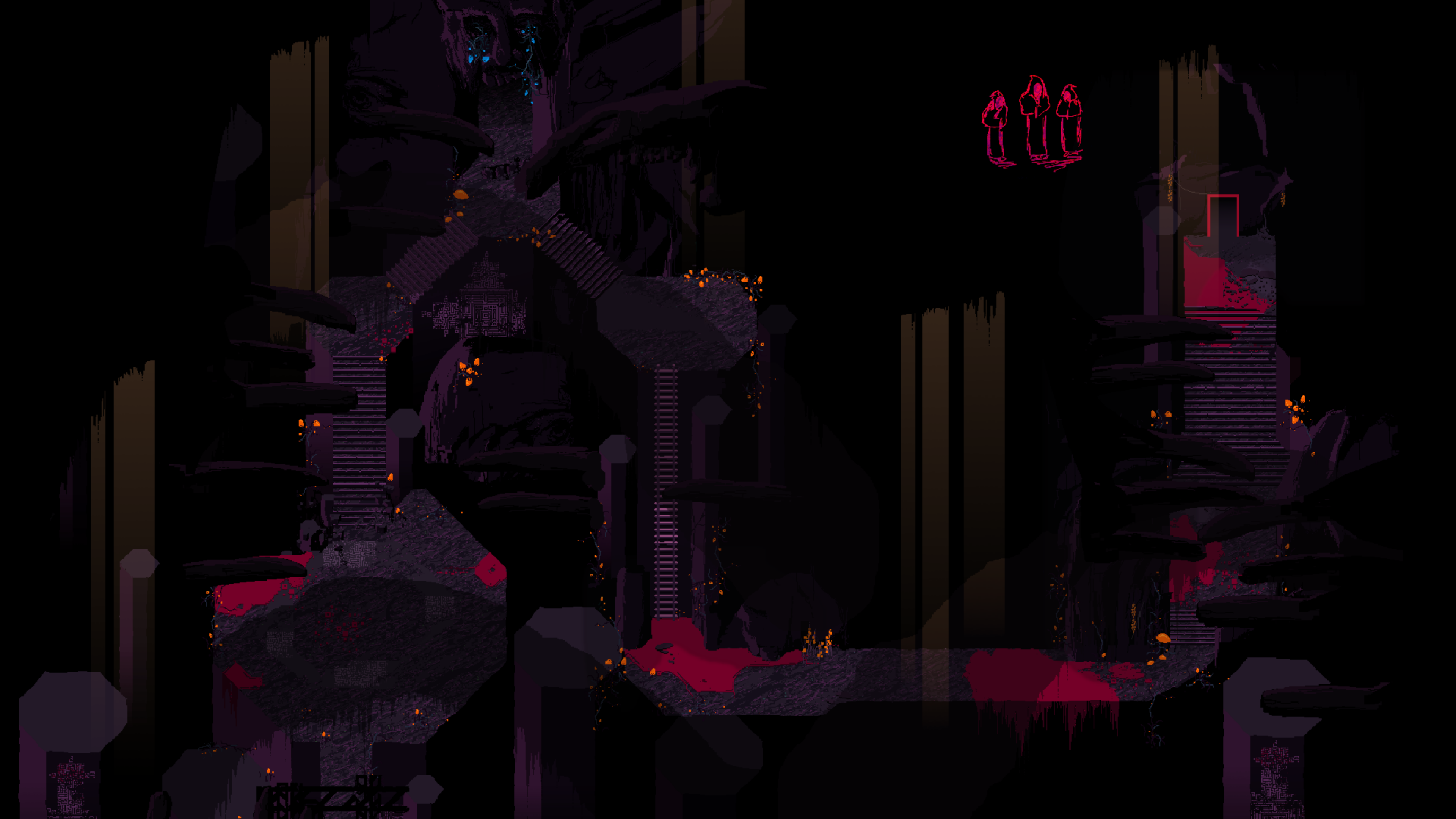
—Green

Cradles

Hidden deep under the earth and fortified by the Tribes' militia, Cradles are megalithic, autonomous survival machines. Within, a single dreamer sleeps an endless sleep, connecting to the malleable planes of the Red Code.









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Cons

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We had to p
Zelda in the f
melee extensi
Valor by a bear



Preserver sets healthy limits to help
humanity manage information overload.
-Witness

Resolutiion was always about venturing into the unknown, creating something larger than ourselves, and sharing as much as possible in the process. In compiling this book we noticed that while the images and anecdotes revealed a glimpse into the evolution of the artwork, the philosophy behind it remained unclear. How and why did things go in one direction and not another? The following conversation between the art team, Günther and Chris, seeks to explain some of their creative choices and reveal a little more about how Resolutiion became the game it is today.

Interlude

Design Dialog

Part I

Chris I remember, in an earlier conversation, you said that Resolutiion is pixel art not so much out of design, but out of luck or necessity. Was this game always going to be pixels?

Günther I grew up in the 80s, so for me, video games and pixel art are synonymous. Those tiny lights stand for well-balanced mechanics, interesting stories, action, and interaction. There's this ambivalence between clarity and interpretation in pixels that handpainted or 3D rendered games don't have.

When we started Resolutiion, I expected pixel art to be quick and easy to create. But early on, my first test-renderings told me better: when working in low resolution, every piece of information counts. In pixel art, there was no room for errors, and this became especially apparent in my animations.

You, on the other hand, are clearly capable of finer arts. What made you first pick up that 1px pen?

Chris Ten years ago, my friend and I started to make a point and click adventure game. Due to our focus on story and puzzles, we weren't really that bothered about the art style, whatever it was going to be, we just wanted it to look pretty. The quality of The Curse of Monkey Island's animation was our dream, but with just me doing the artwork, we knew before we started that wasn't happening. Then Sword and Sworcery came around and I thought, I can probably do that.

Like you, I severely underestimated the amount of time pixel art takes. How did you deal with that realization?

Günther Well, my first try at Valor's walk had only two frames. Obviously, this looked horribly stiff, so a few weeks later I tried again, this time with slimmer limbs and more pixels moving overall. Step by step I revisited every character, enemy and moving object in the game, gradually adding more detail, more motion. As my animations slowly improved, so did Richi's programming skills, which allowed us to push the art even further. What felt impressive to us in year one seemed amateurish twelve months later. So we continued to rework things, over and over.

Unfortunately, such a process is a dead end: you'll never be satisfied when you are continually improving by increments, everything can always get a little bit better. So after three years, we decided Resolutiion would ship at the end of year four, regardless. This meant we stopped trying to further improve the visual quality and instead shifted our focus to quantity.

Anyways, at that point you joined the team and started to push the envelope all over again.

Chris I think our individual approaches to game art was almost at the opposite ends of a spectrum when I started with you guys. With my own projects, my friend and I would push for final quality at the first pass, so we were pretty good at getting nice looking things quickly. Our problem was we could never contain the story, and our games always got so big we just couldn't finish them at the quality we had set and aspired to.

You and Richi felt a lot more kinda punk — like just smash it in, and we'll fix it later. I think with Resolutiion's maps you tried to push me into a "just add one more level of detail for now" mentality, it took me a while, but I think that's started to stick.

But in my defense, I think I was right when it came to the animations. I remember when we started you wanted six-frame walking loops and I had to really push for eight. My feeling, at least, is that pixel art is so precise it's almost harder to not aim for the final product right away, certainly with the animations.

Günther Haha, that is true. You pushed Resolutiion's visual quality substantially. Not just that, but your work made mine improve much faster, just watching you. I'm very grateful for that.

For the first two years, we didn't have any expectations or ambitions for Resolutiion. When we reached the point of "too big to stop", we knew the story we wanted to tell, but not how. Everything had to be better, and there were too many blanks to be filled in for a single designer. So we started to look around for someone with a pixel-style that could connect to our amateurish endeavors, yet felt professional enough to be in a quality game.

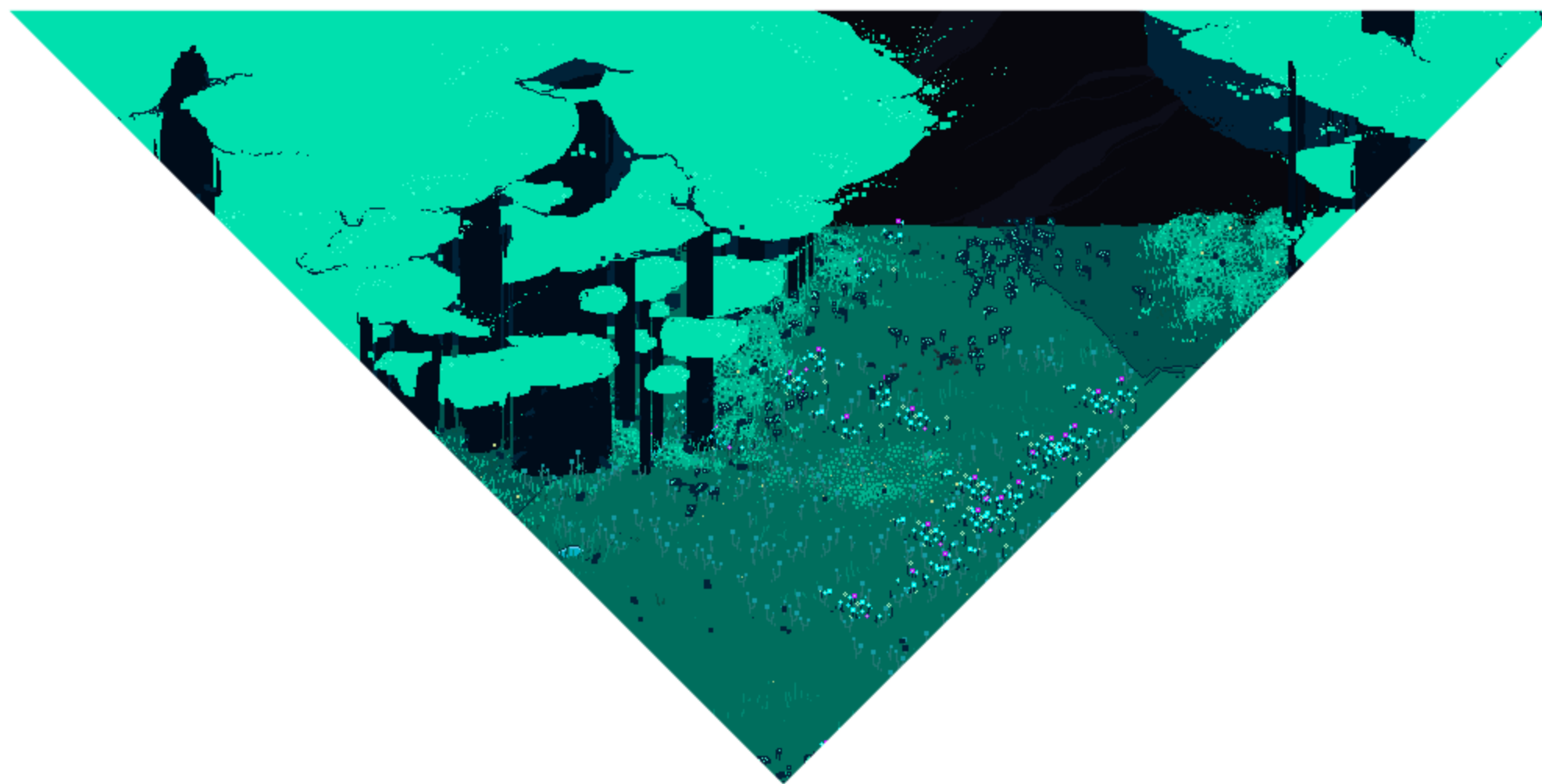
Of the five we reached out to, one never replied, another was overbooked, two were too expensive and —lucky us— you asked for a quick and straightforward video call.

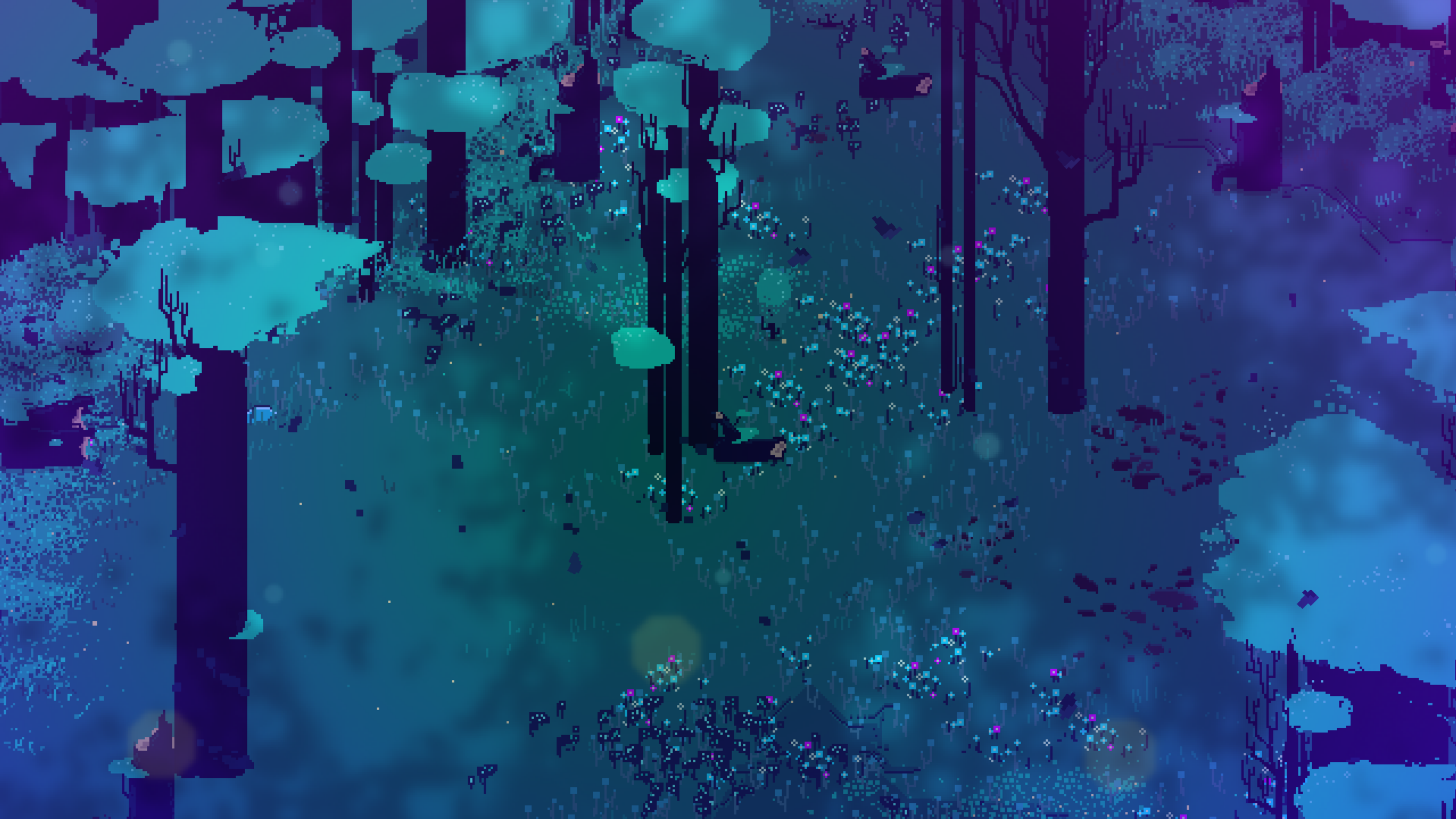
Chris Always good to hear you were hired by default.

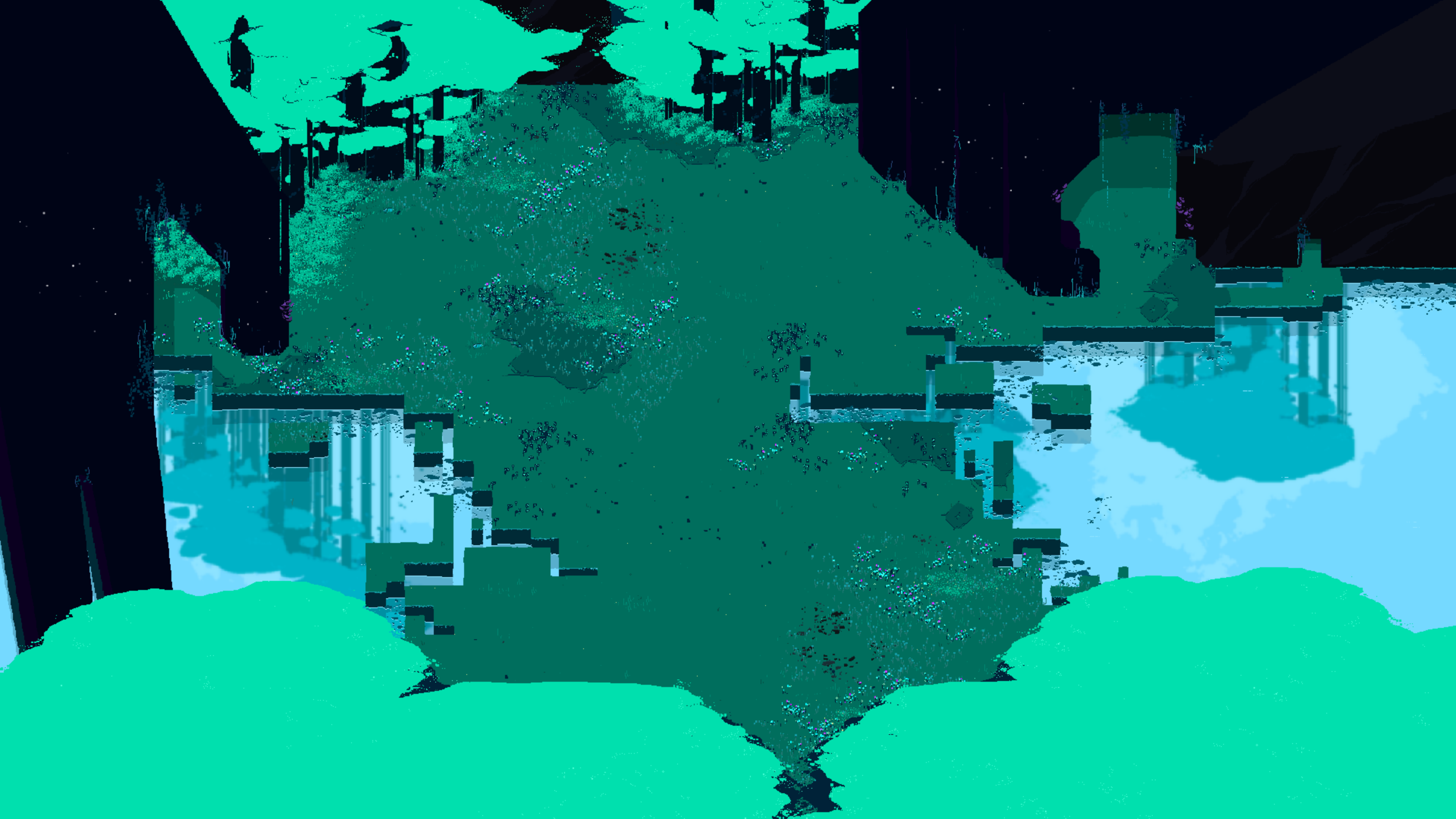
To be continued ...



Forest of Self





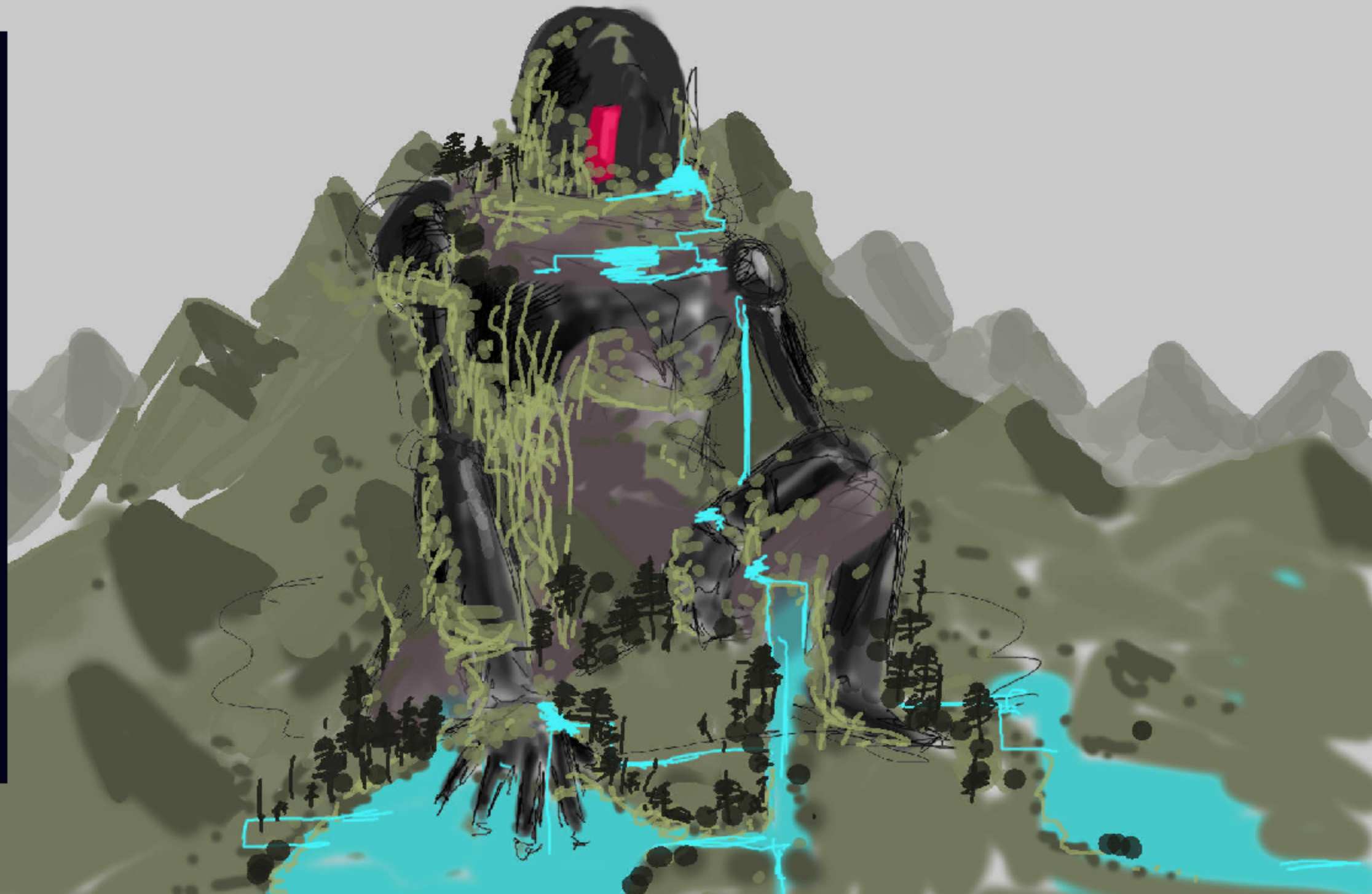
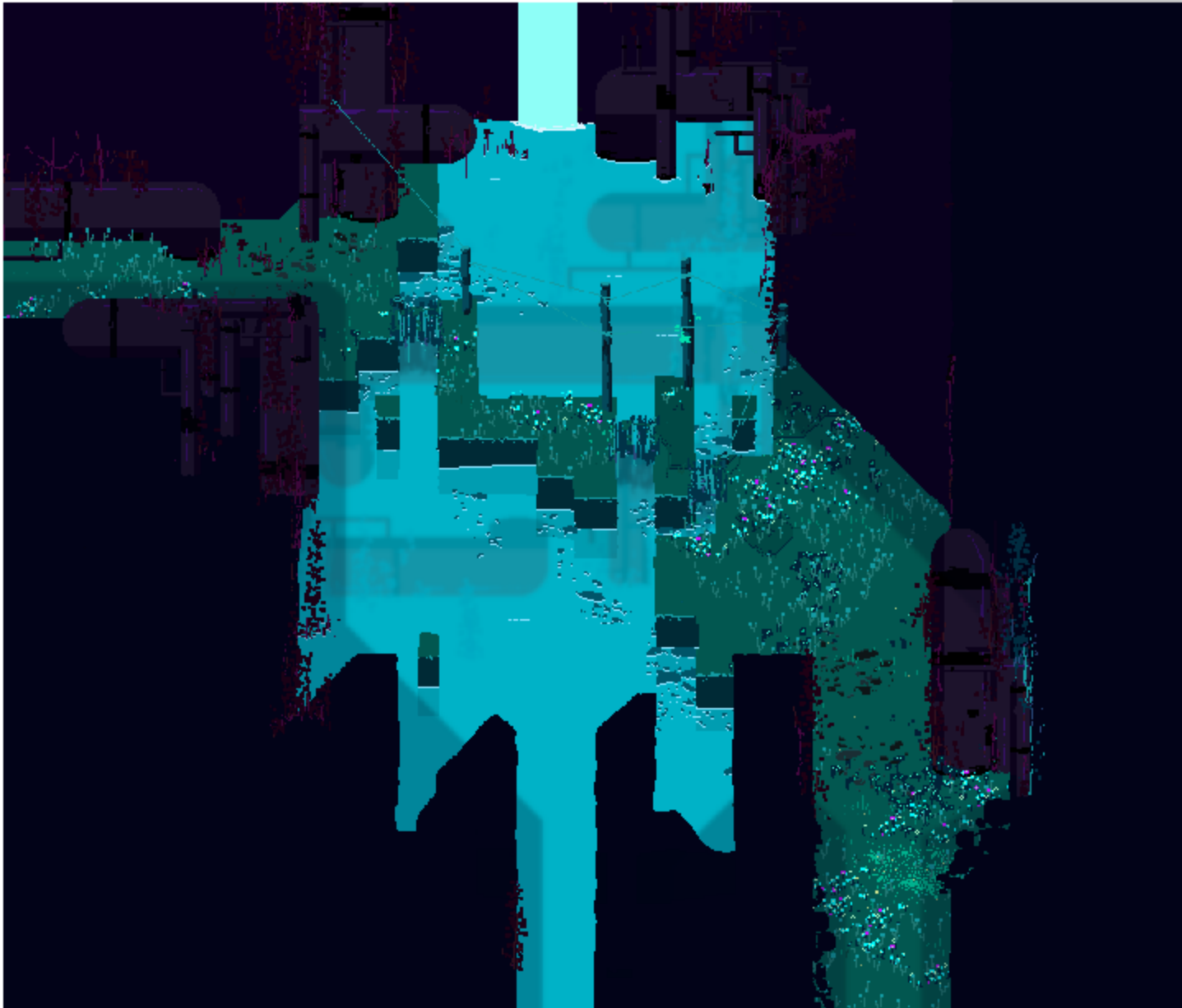


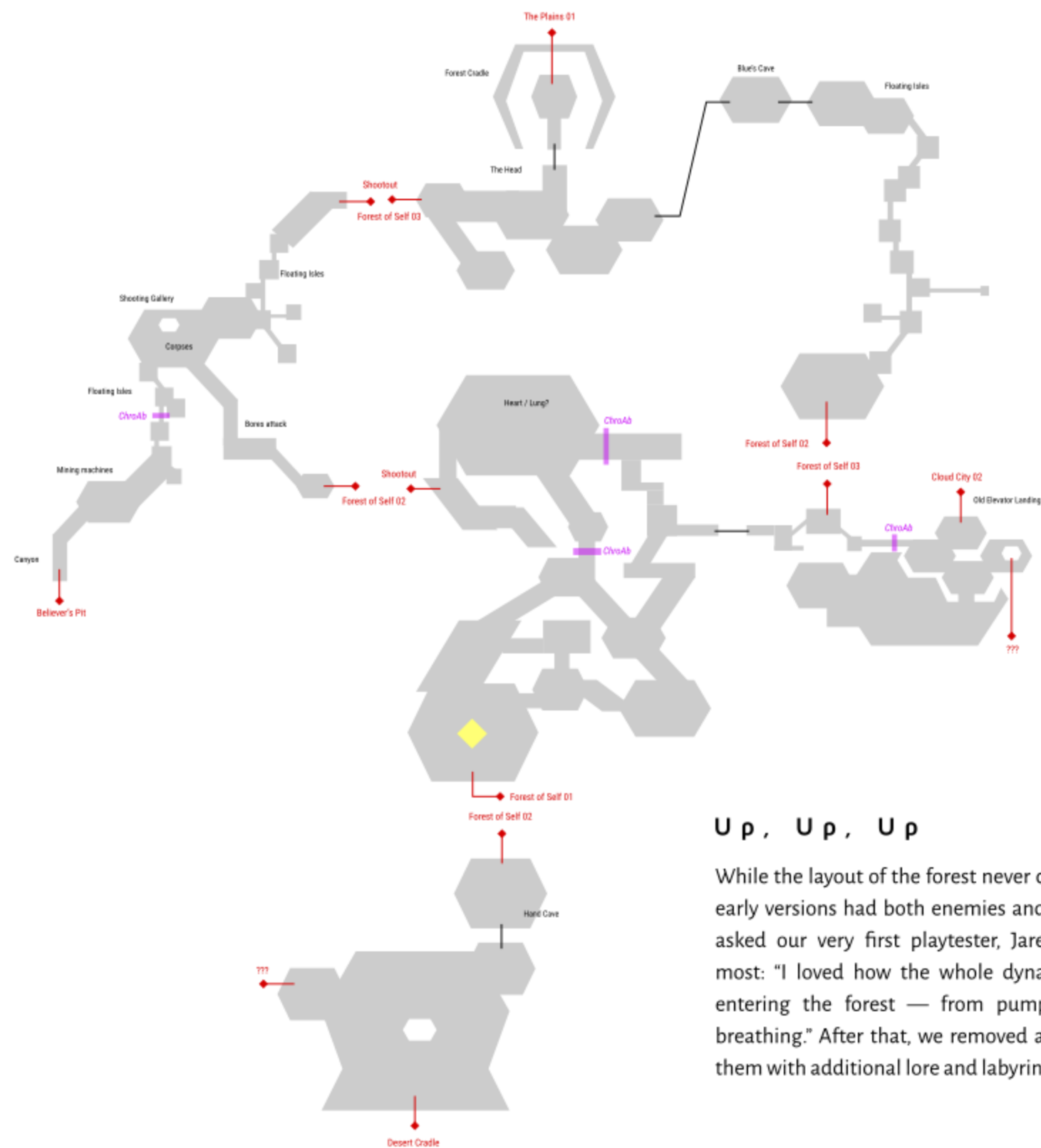
Forest of Self

From the Cradle to the ... Cradle. After surviving the first boss fight and passing Green's Cradle, the Forest of Self slows down the action and gives us time to reflect. There's no fighting in Blue's realm; just calm, leaves in the wind, reflections in the water, and smart-assing wildlife, stretching from the desert to the plains; from the clouds to the pits.

The forest's layout was designed around the concept of Valor's body, dead for thousands of years and overgrown with proliferate trees, roots, and dust. Early level names included 'The Hand', 'The Shoulder', 'The Chest' or 'The Head' to hint at the scale of this biome.

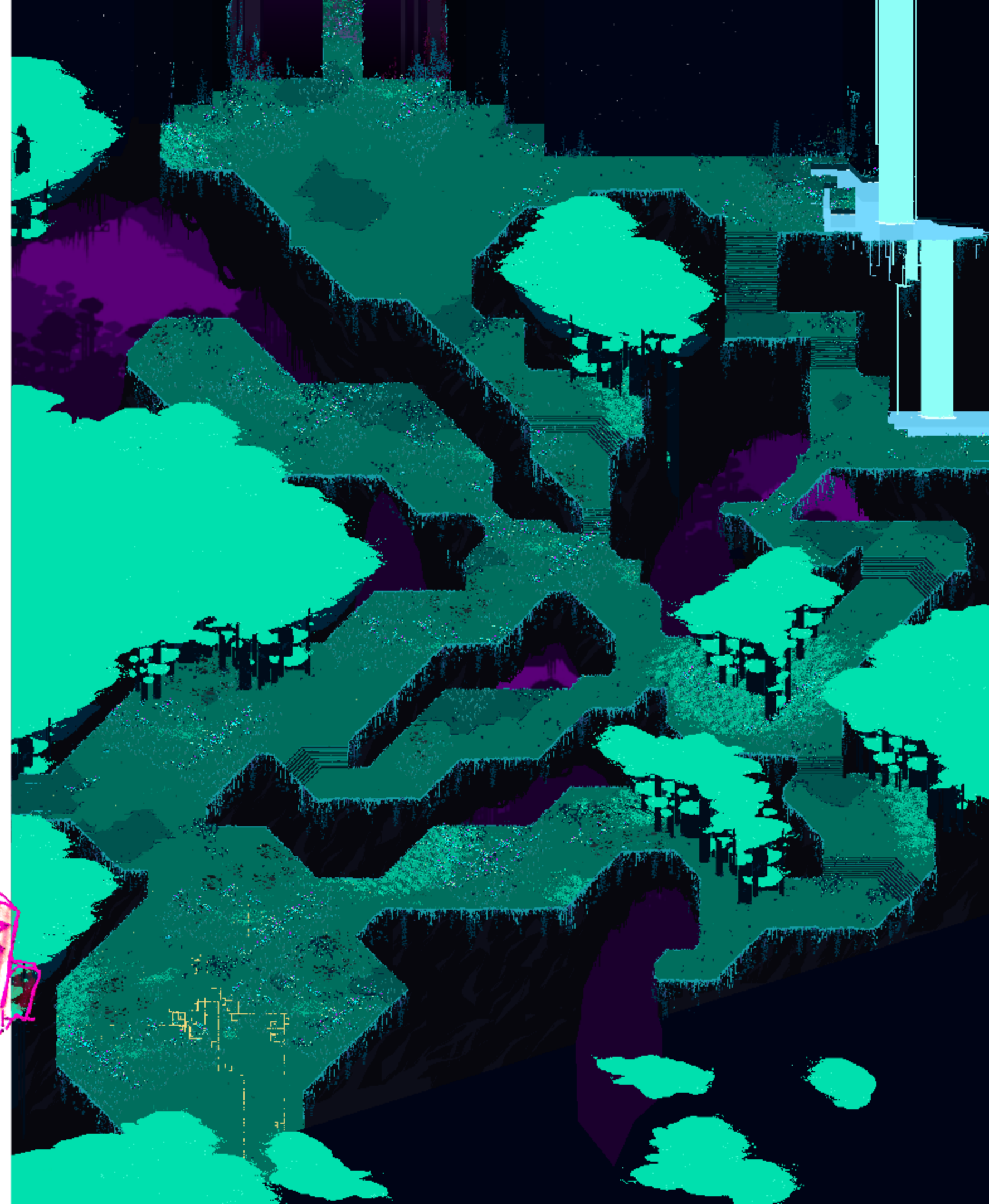
When Resoluiion was still called 'Red Wars', the Forest of Self marked the last level, with the final fight taking place inside the head. We wanted Valor to enter through a bullet hole in his metaphorical helmet, after about an hour and a half of playtime. Five years later, the same forest ends Phase I with a cutscene, and then open up the world with more than 12 additional hours of exploration and weirdness.

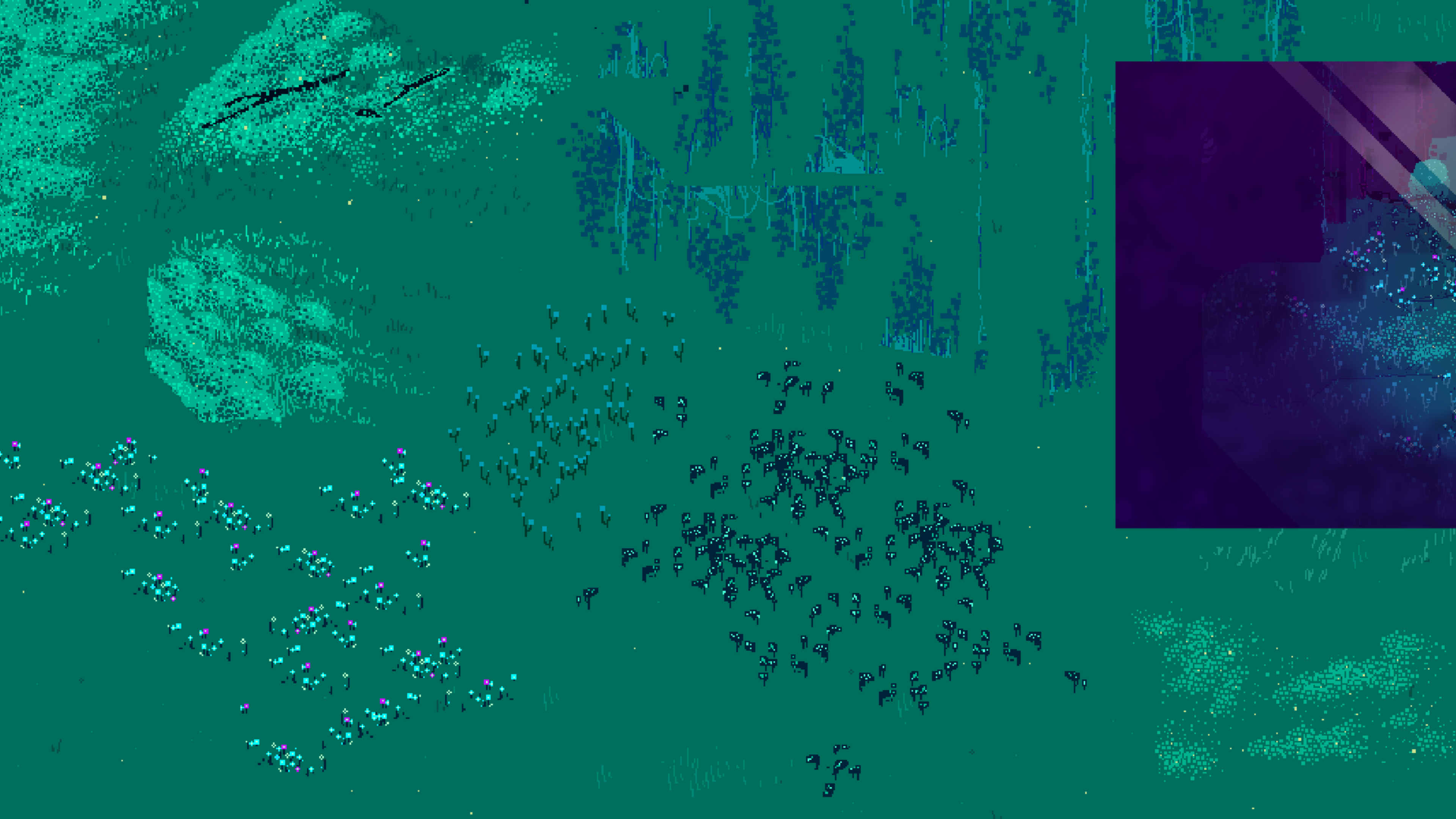


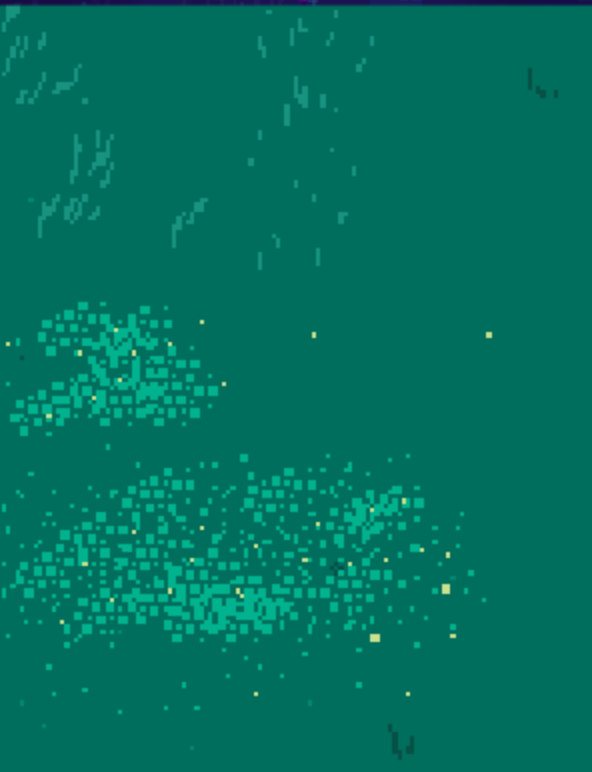
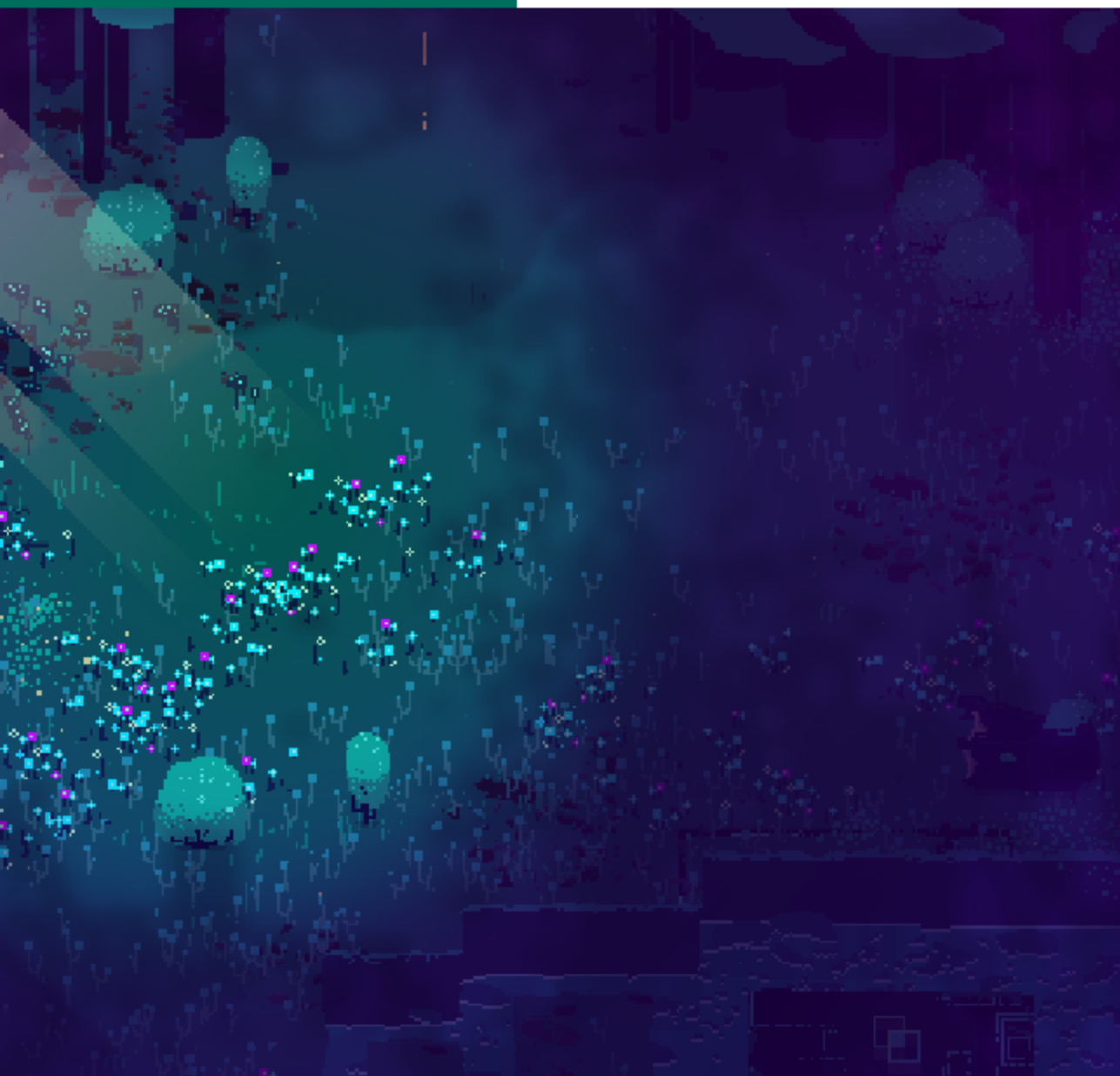


U p , U p , U p

While the layout of the forest never changed dramatically, early versions had both enemies and combat. In 2016, we asked our very first playtester, Jared, what he enjoyed most: "I loved how the whole dynamics changed when entering the forest — from pumping action to calm breathing." After that, we removed all enemies, replacing them with additional lore and labyrinthine paths.



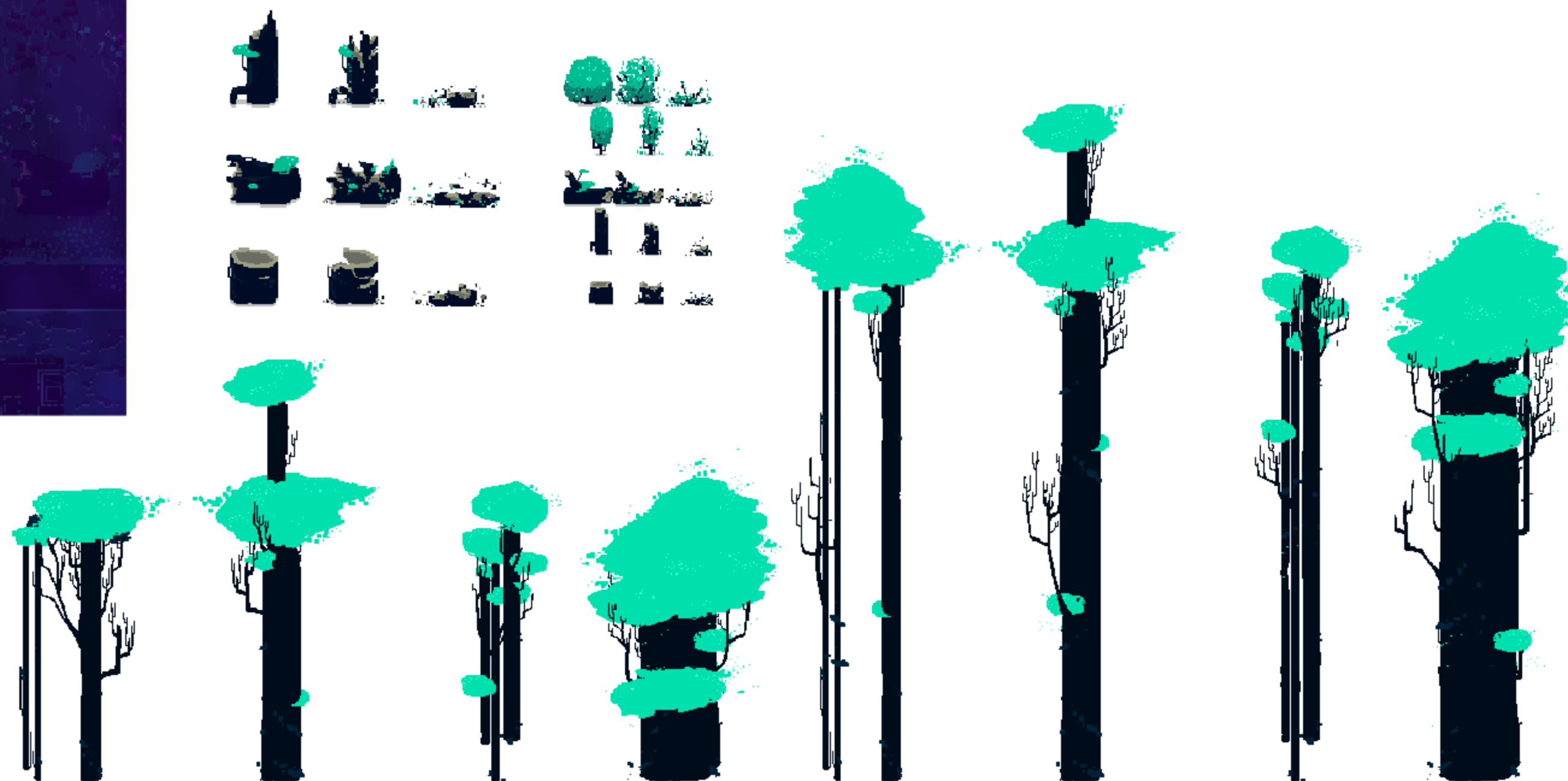


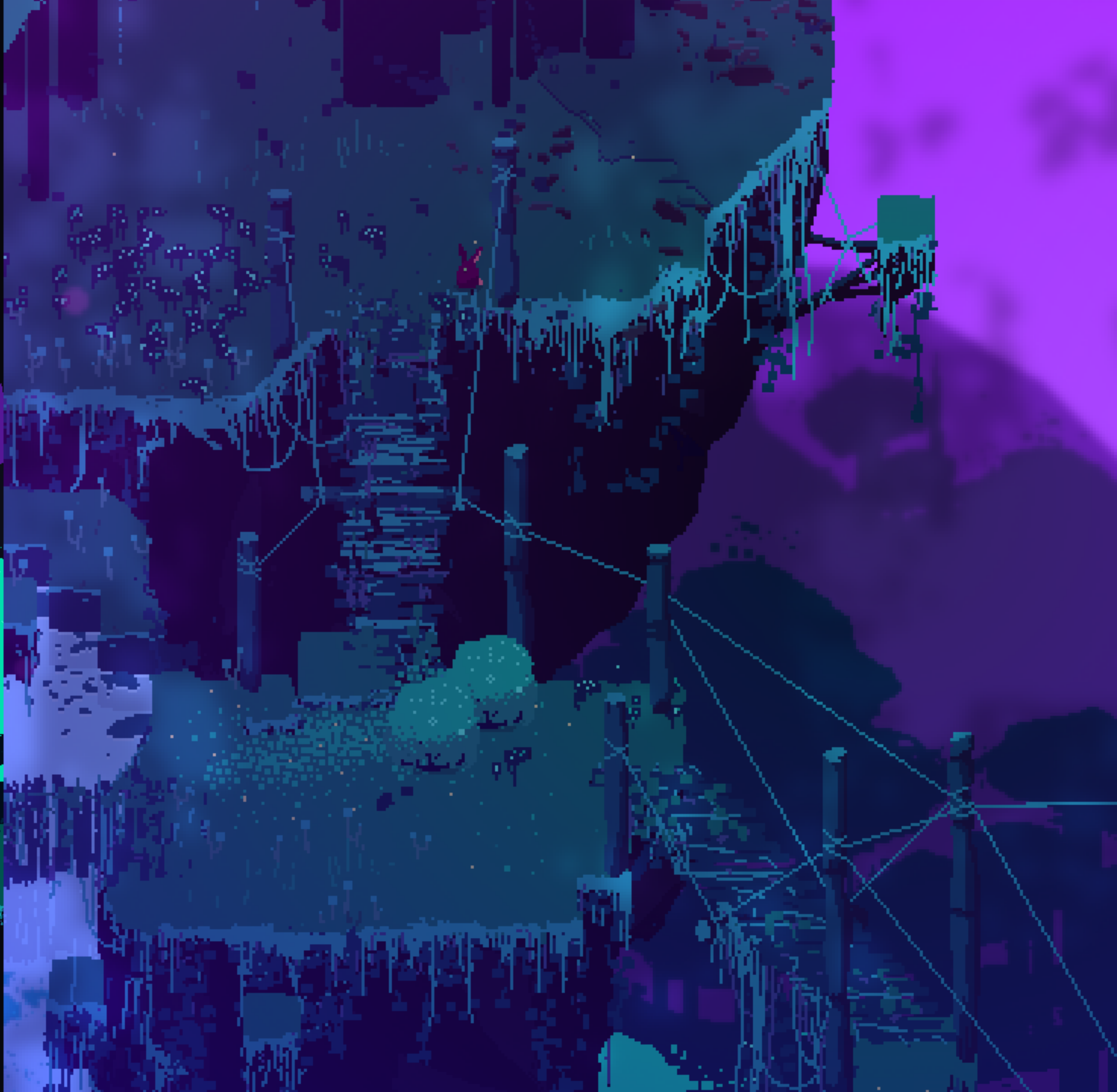
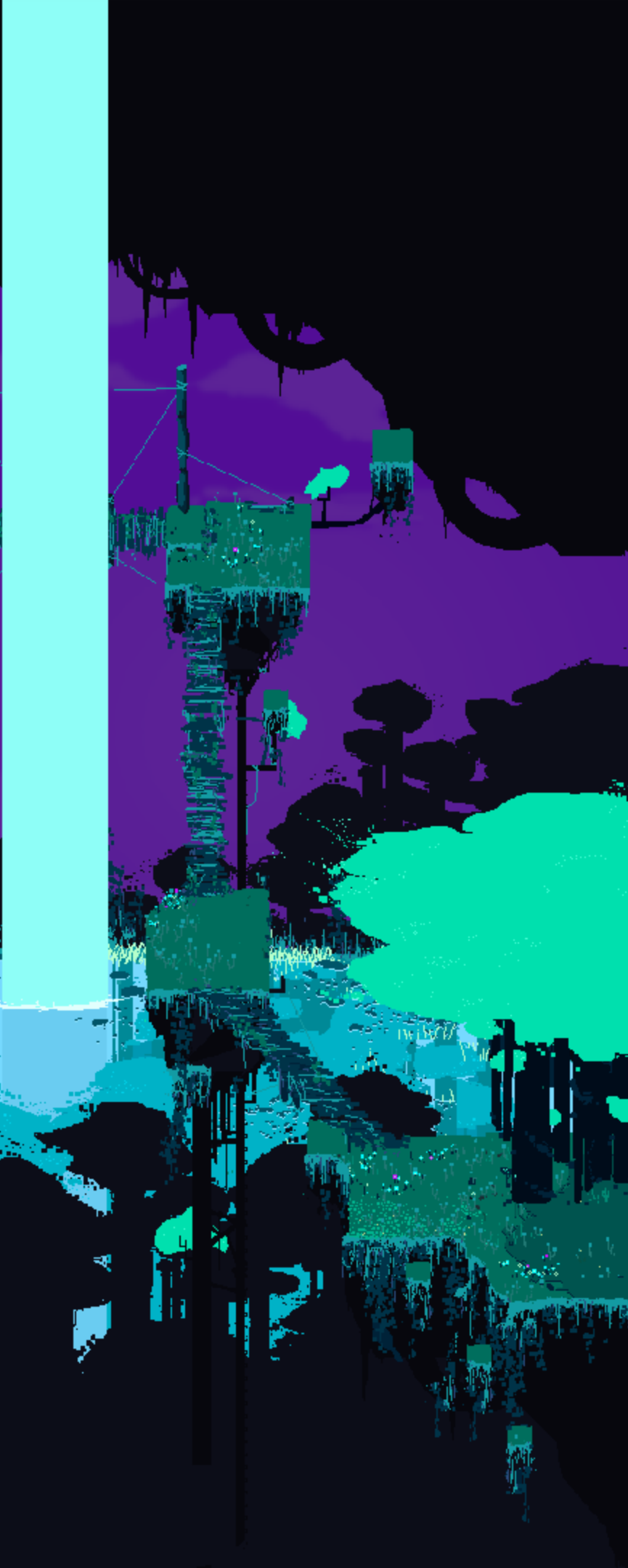
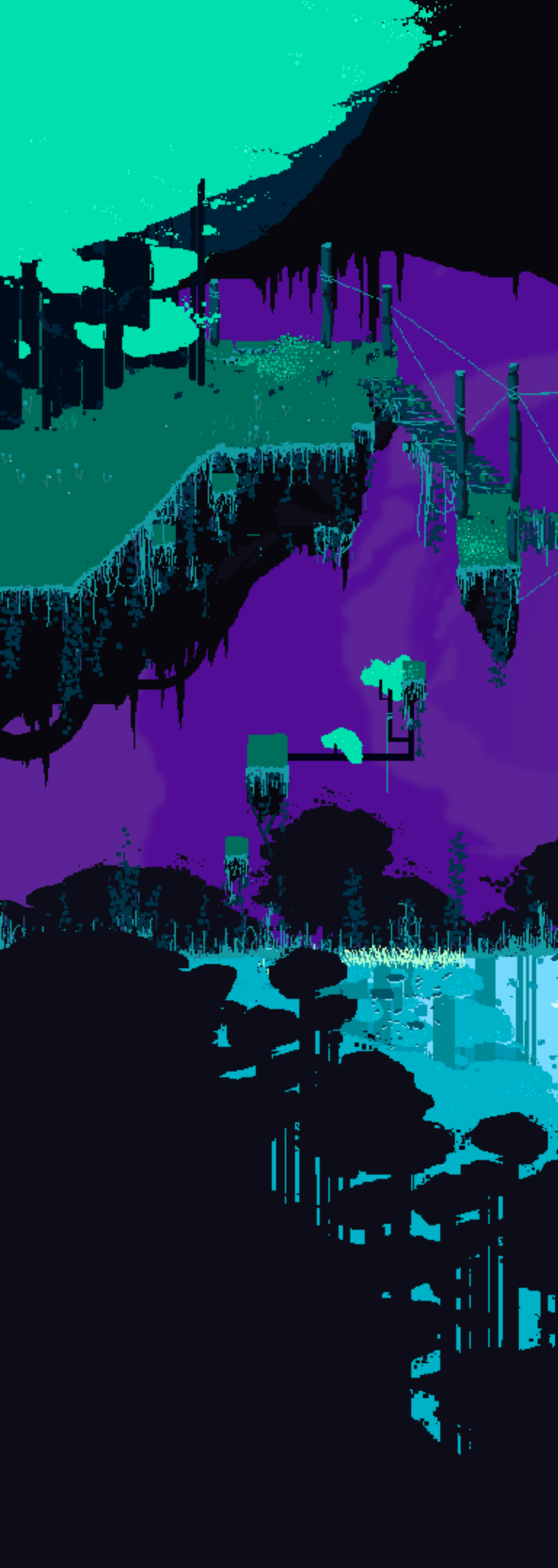


Growth

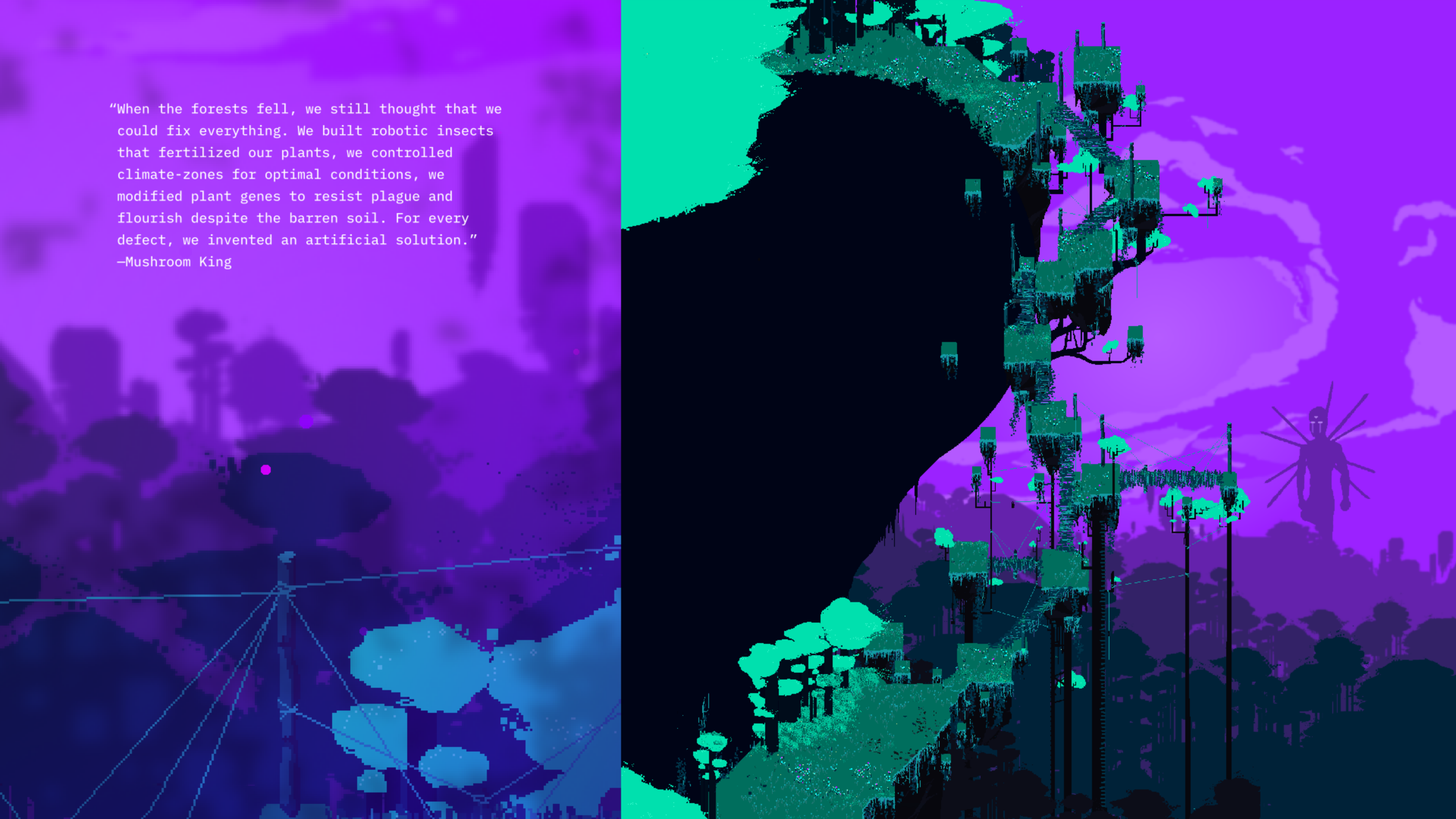
Battling enemies requires clarity in the level design, with space to recognize their patterns and evade accordingly. With the fights removed, we were able to add many more details to the landscape to sell the rich, thick atmosphere of an eons-old forest.

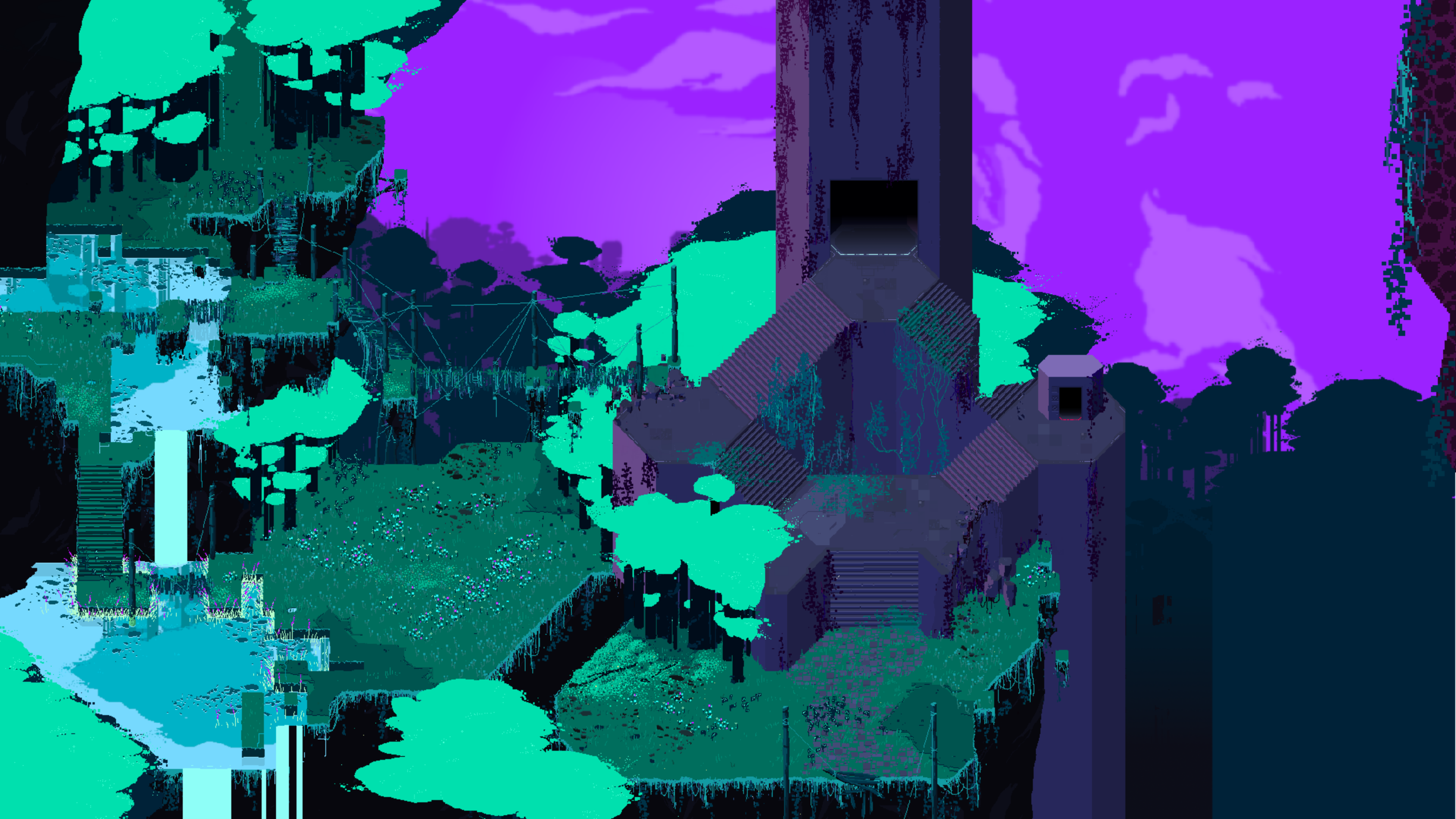
Grass, flowers, leaves, moss, vines, spores, puddles, reeds, ferns, ivy. Layers upon layers of growth and plants were crafted and distributed by hand, copy/pasted/recolors from other regions until we achieved the feeling of an untouched grove.





"When the forests fell, we still thought that we could fix everything. We built robotic insects that fertilized our plants, we controlled climate-zones for optimal conditions, we modified plant genes to resist plague and flourish despite the barren soil. For every defect, we invented an artificial solution."
—Mushroom King





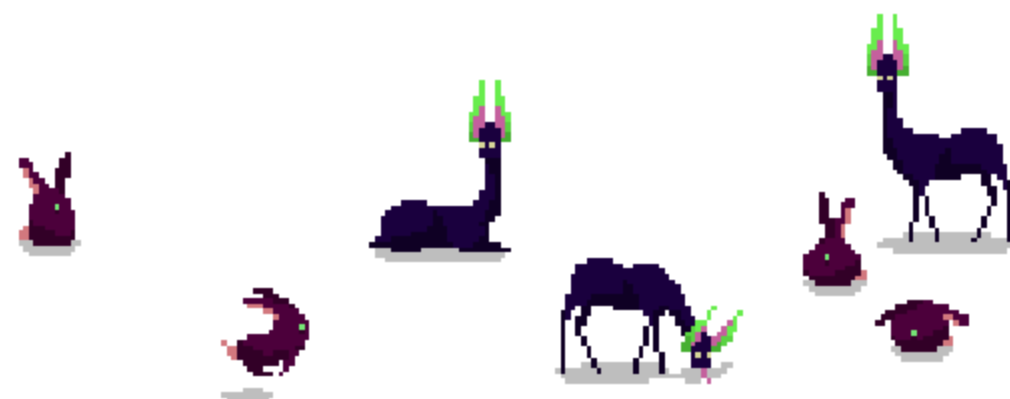
Wildlife

Plants alone don't make a mesmerizing forest: we required movement beyond the occasional falling leaves; we needed fauna, and we needed plenty. Like 'Wes, the Lizard', who tells us about his dreams of fields filled with blood ...



Cyclops Bunnies & Not-Really-Deer

Initially, we designed simple rabbits and deer to roam the forest. But with most things in Resoluiiion, the obvious was just not fun — we were always striving for some 'Alice in Wonderland' lunacy. So rabbits became cyclops-bunnies and deer just became not-deer. Problem solved.



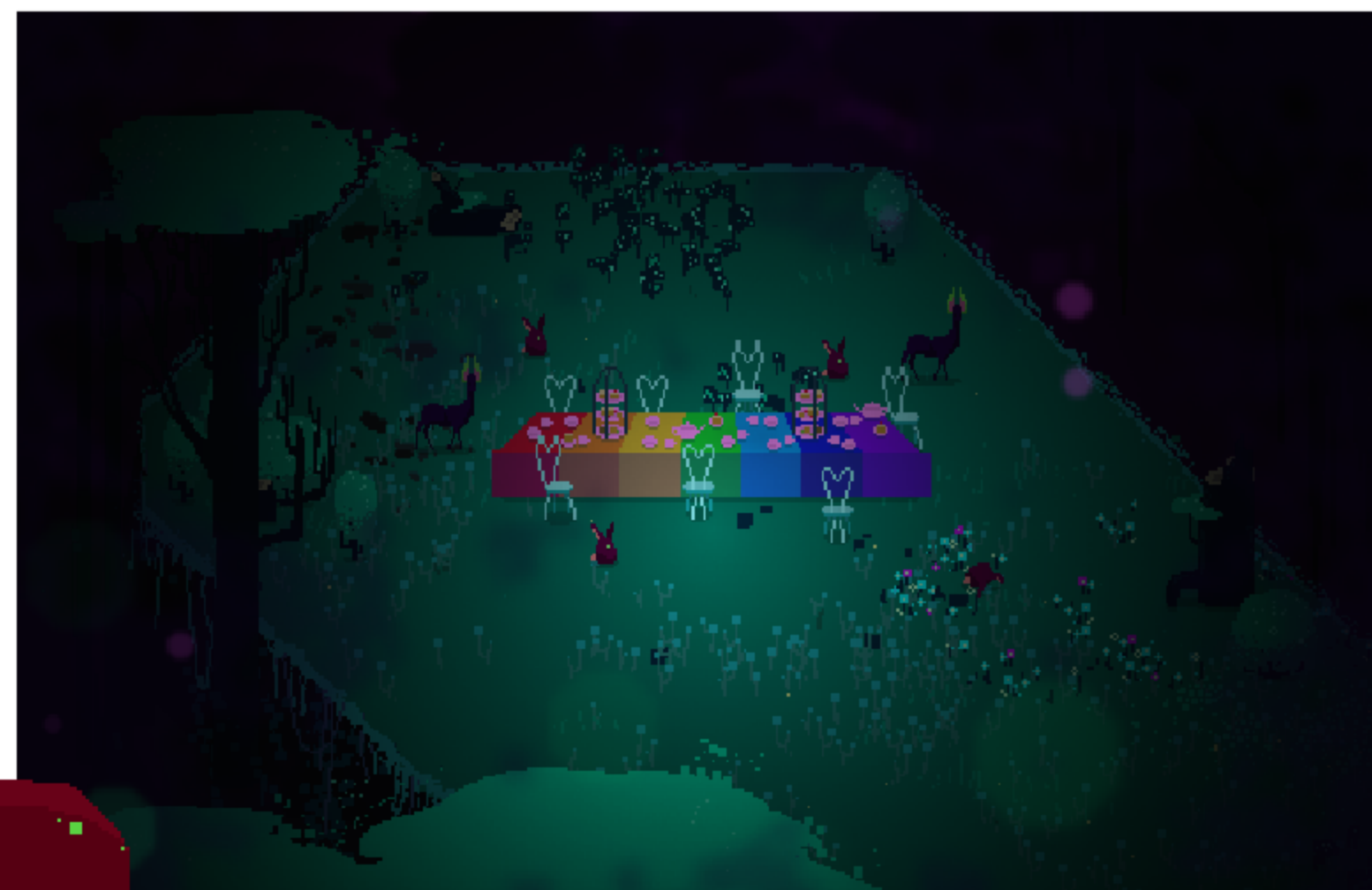
Richnoceros

The big guy here with the stone head is called 'Richnoceros', because Richi wanted his name in there, somehow. The Richnoceros is followed by its children, which have yet to grow a body. Fun fact: the Richnoceros is the only animal that doesn't flee after being attacked. Instead, it tries to hammer down Valor with its forehead as if he were a little nail.



Corruption Machines

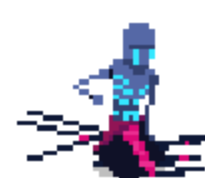
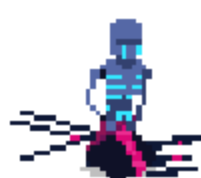
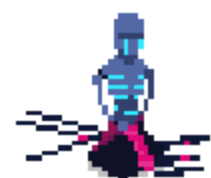
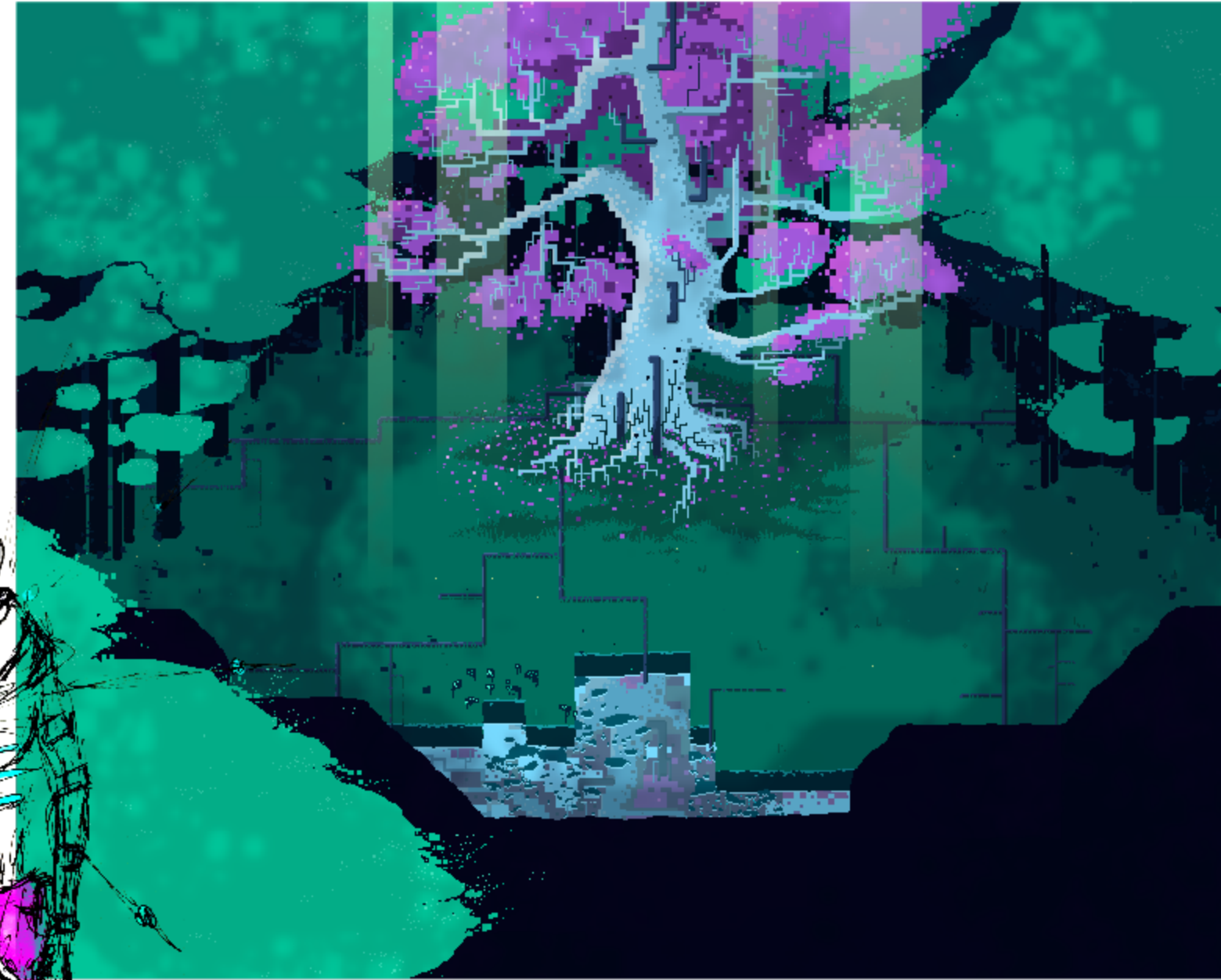
As noted earlier, the original Forest of Self had enemy encounters in the form of huge machines, cutting down trees and polluting the soil. Those were the double-headed 'Dragoons', firing off their saw-blades while spitting out smoke and death alike. Instead of relocating, we killed off this enemy completely: in a fast-paced game, such a static enemy was just no fun to engage with.





Blue

The second Entity we meet resides under the world-tree (every game needs one of those). He is angry, he is violent, and he hates you to his barely-existing-bones; the perfect villain. While Green will try to persuade Valor with wisdom and guidance, Blue is willing to fight, which he clearly states at your first encounter atop the Forest of Self.



We explored a couple of variations of Blue's appearance, but most of his defining features carried through each iteration. His presence is that of physical, natural life; his weltchmerz is symbolized by the 'river of tears' facepaint; and the spears on his back are arranged in a circular pattern to give him a distinct silhouette.

"There's something about you that I don't understand.
Did Green see it?
Is that why you killed him in his sleep?"
-Blue

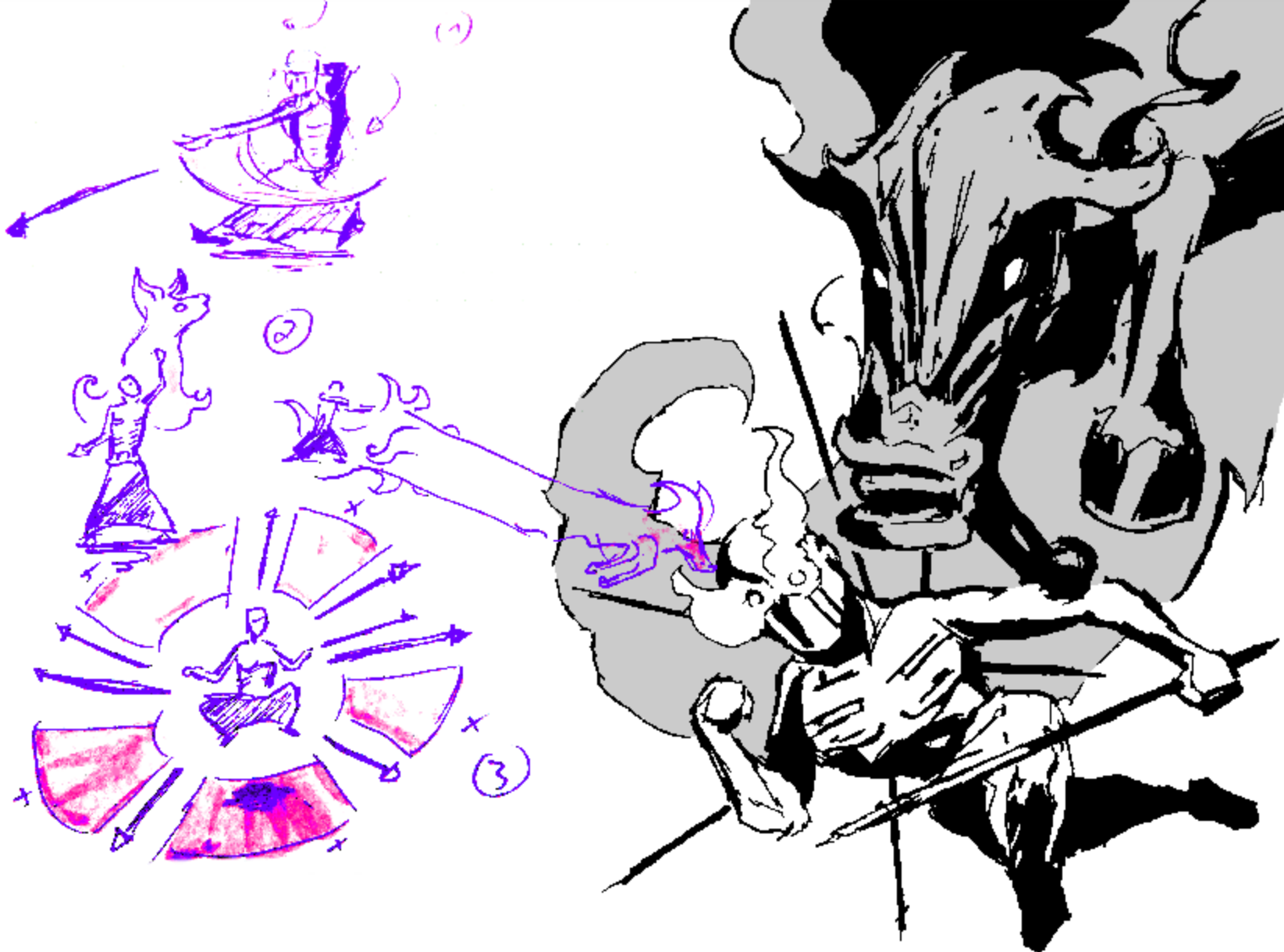




Blue's Head

Every time we attempted to make Blue's head more iconic, the design clashed with his spear-halo. In the end, we kept him bald and established Blue as the Dr. Evil of Valor's world: violence vs. violence.

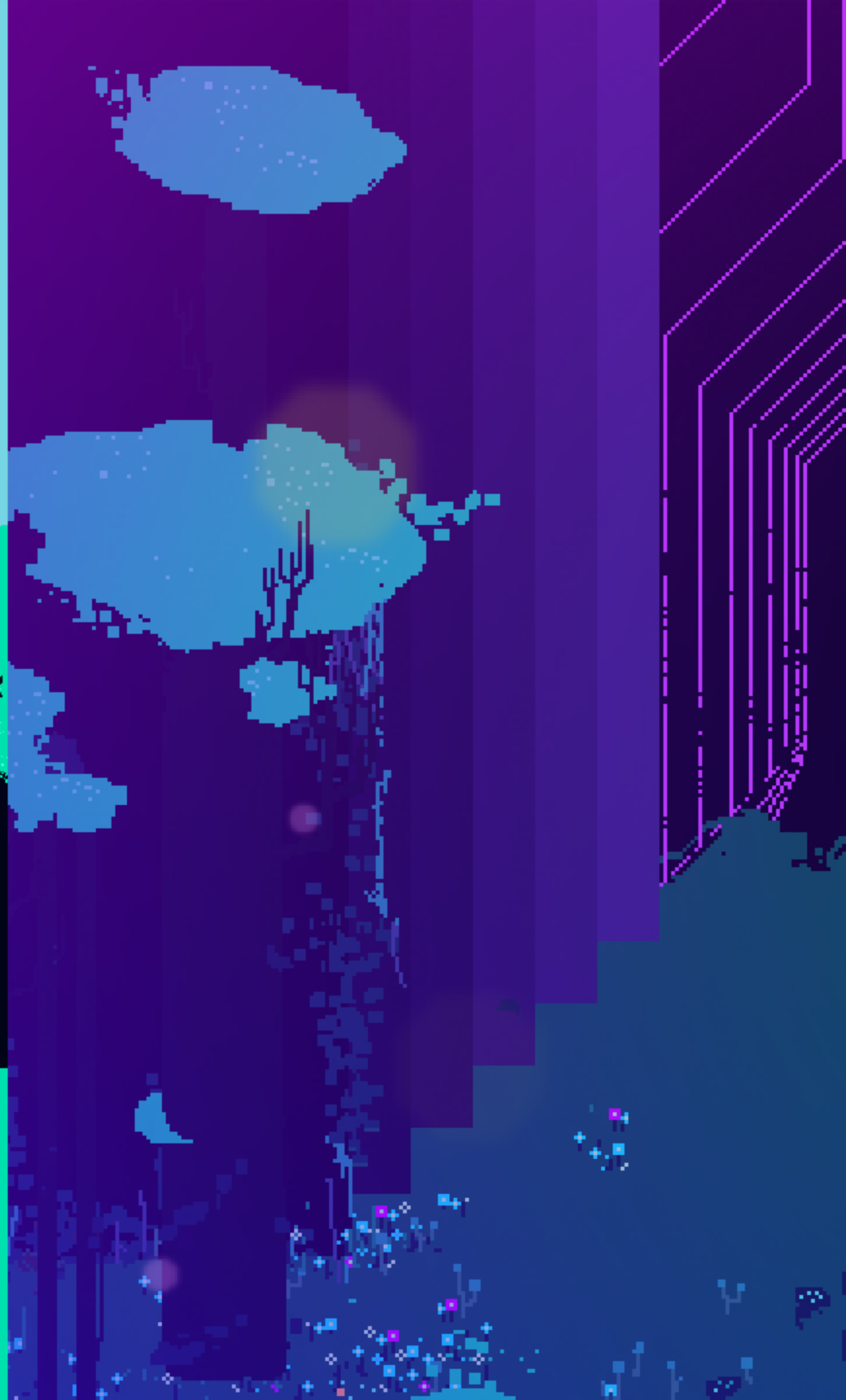
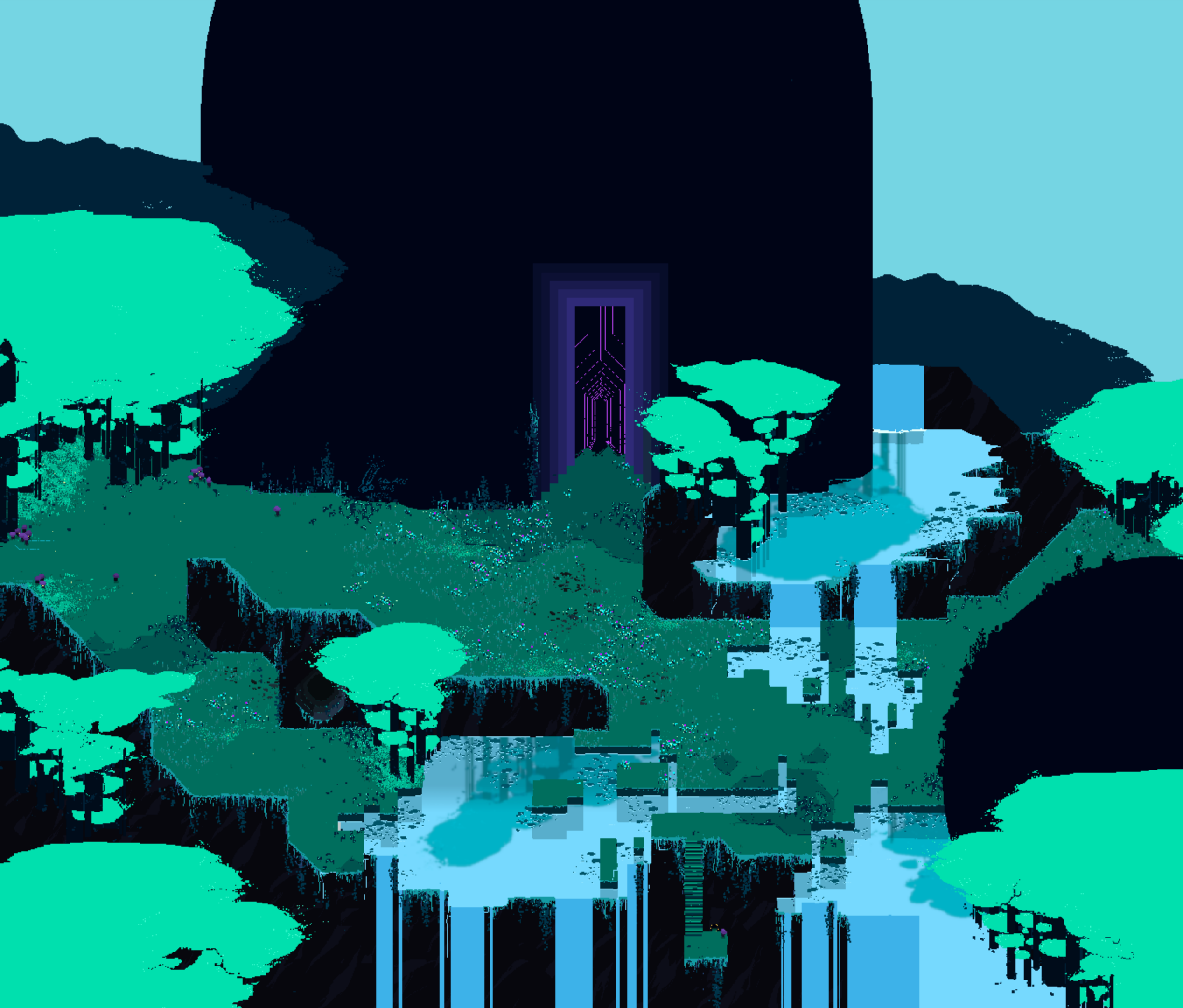


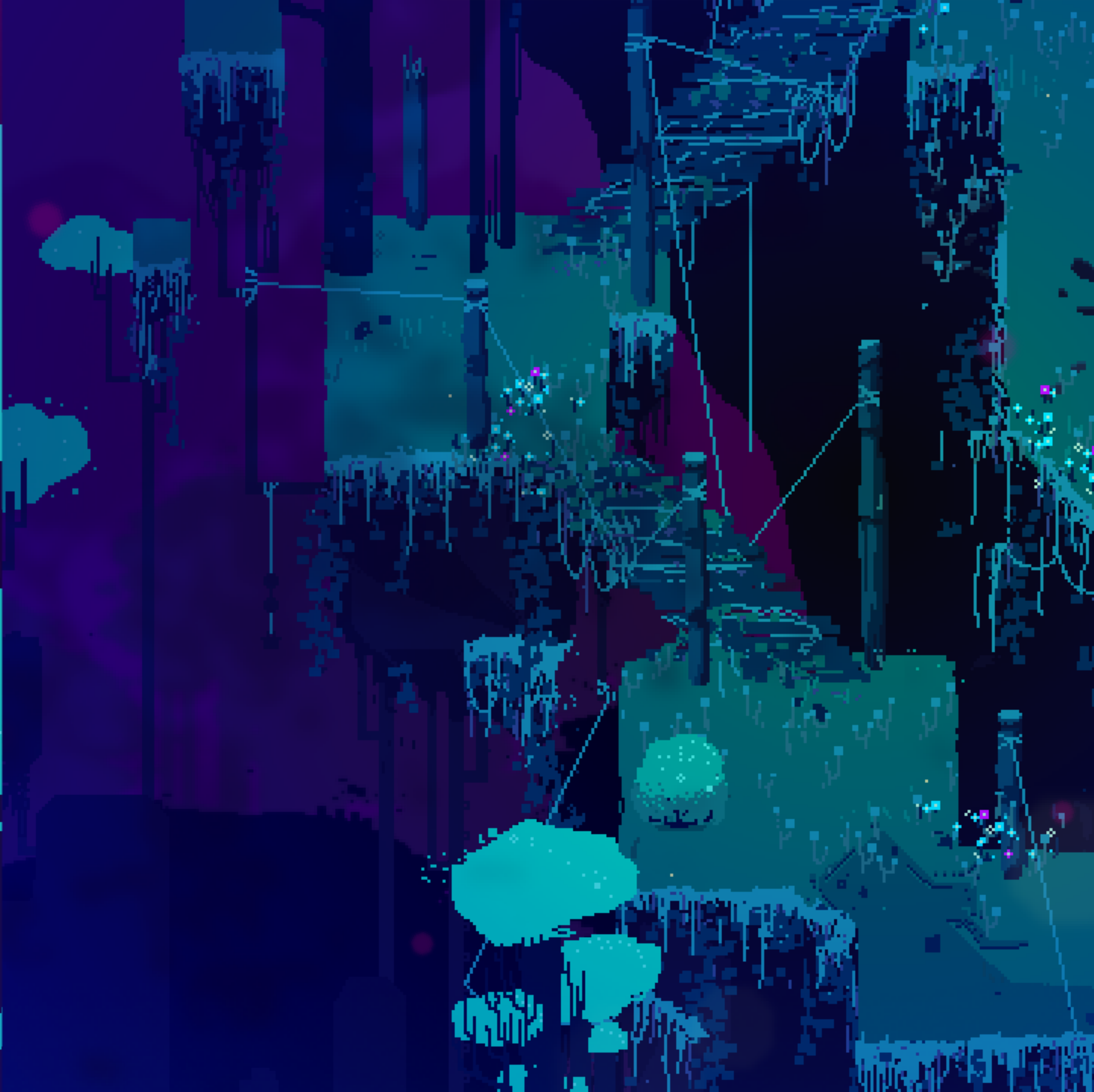
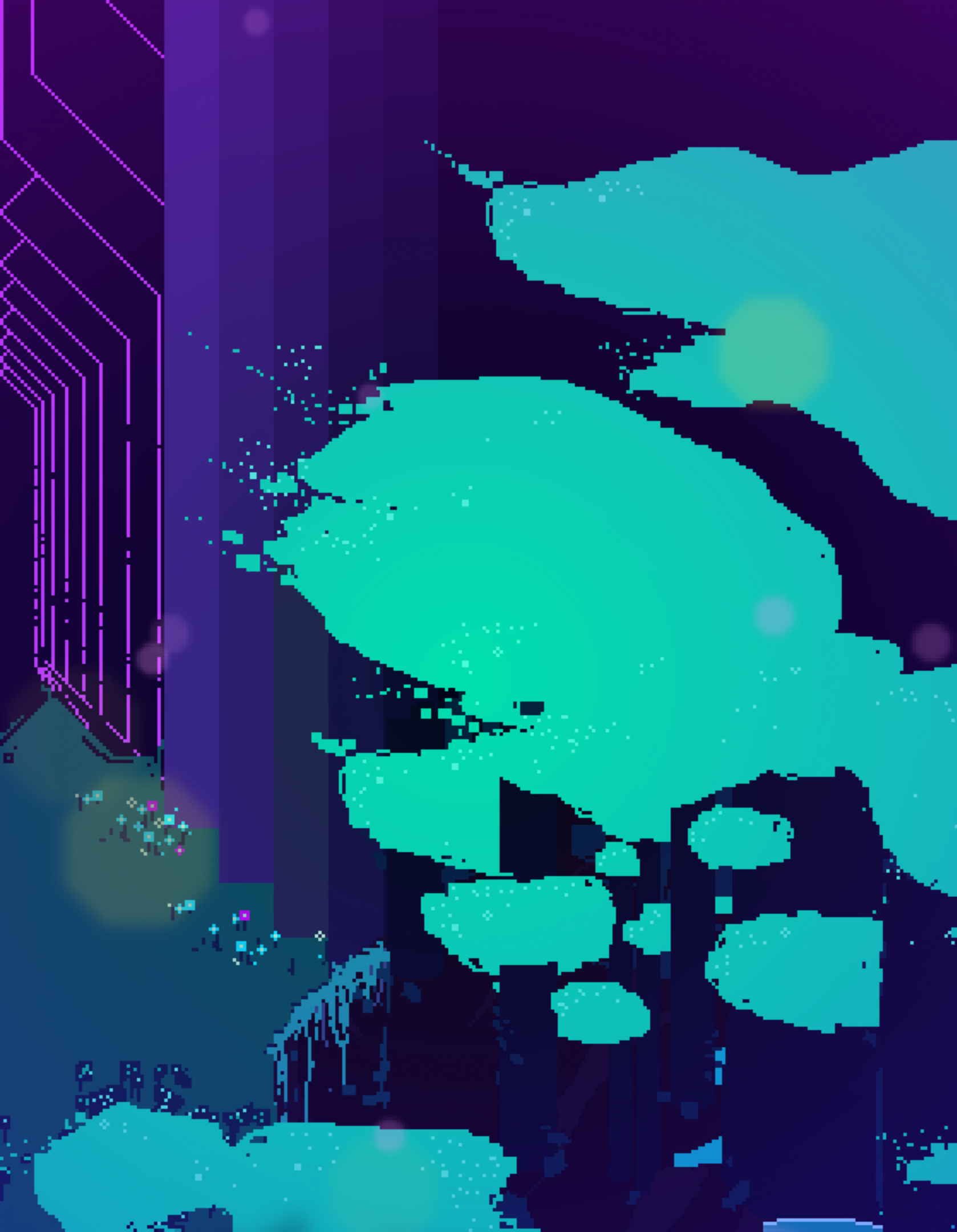


Fighting Blue

Within the Forest of Self, fighting is prohibited, but Blue doesn't always follow his own rules. He attacks quickly with stabs, spear barrages and by spawning a fire demon called 'Ed'. Poor Ed.









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Heart Cave

Appropriately placed, the Transient can be found
in the heart-cave.

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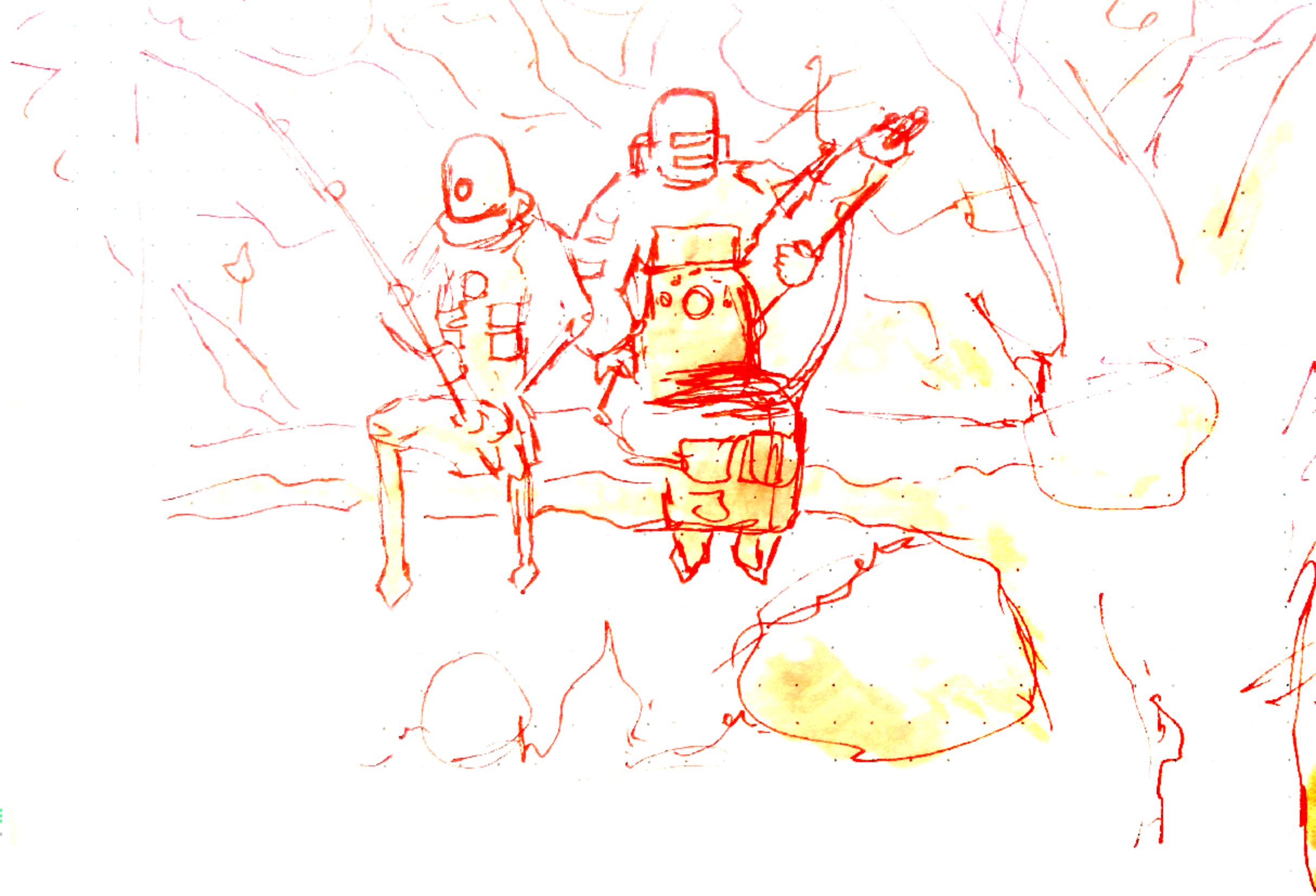
People's Power

Multiple instances of People's Power agents are present in the world of Resolution, with Valor being the assassin type. Halo —the first mini-boss— is a kind of a special forces commander; and Solace and Doughty the typical grunt forces: stupid, violent and effective.

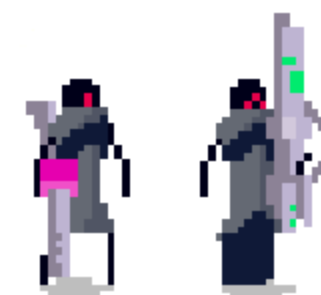


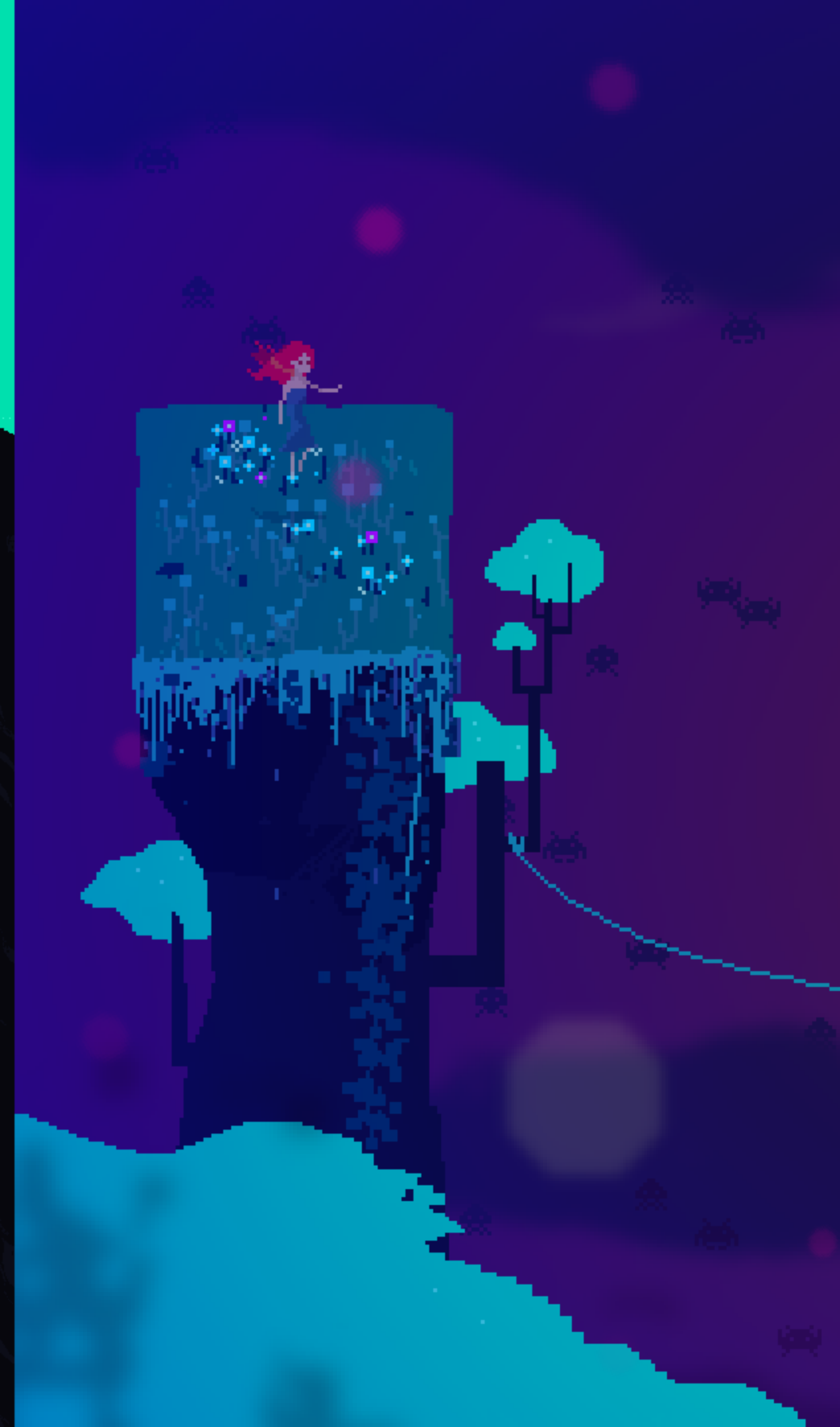
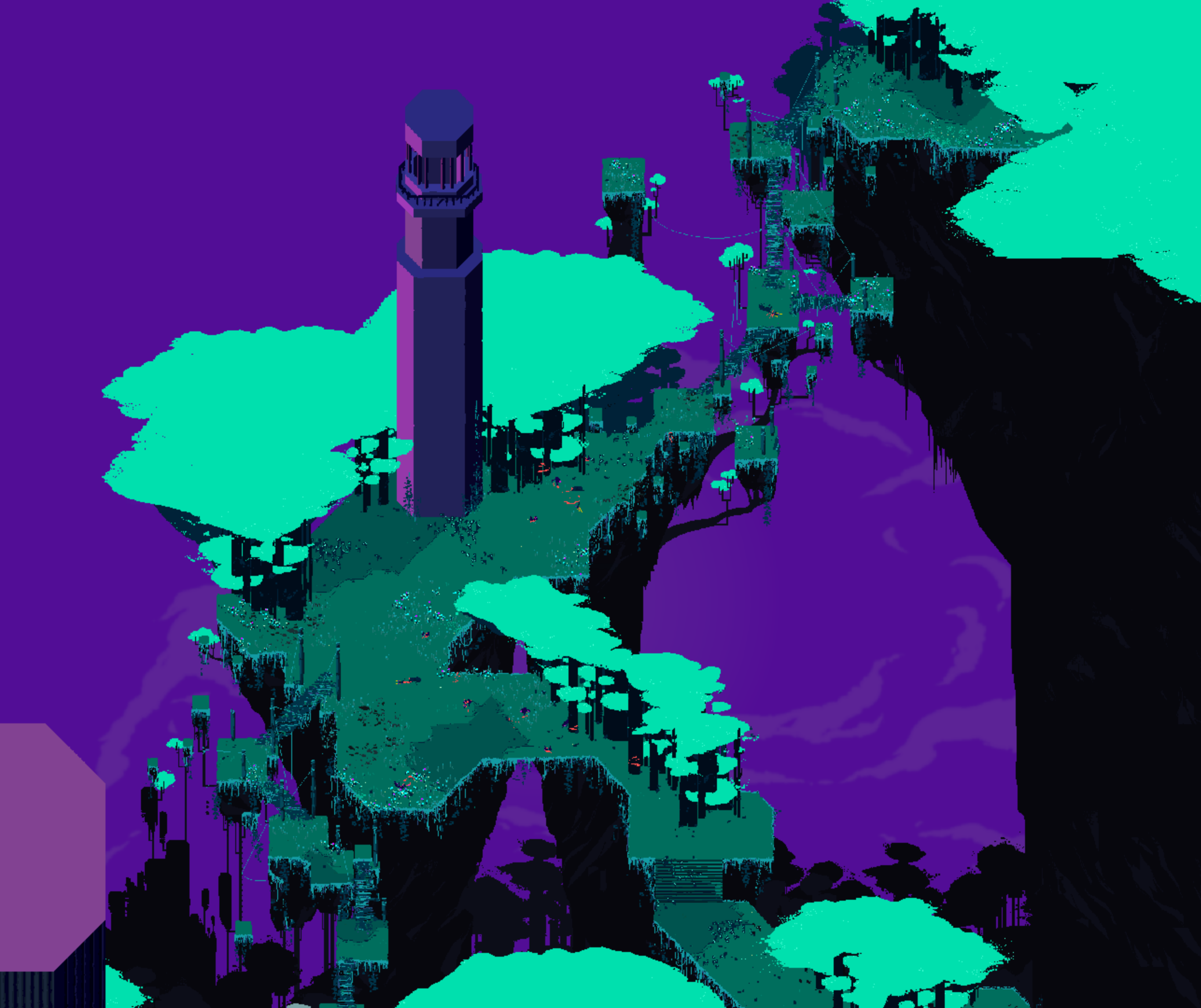
Solace & Doughty

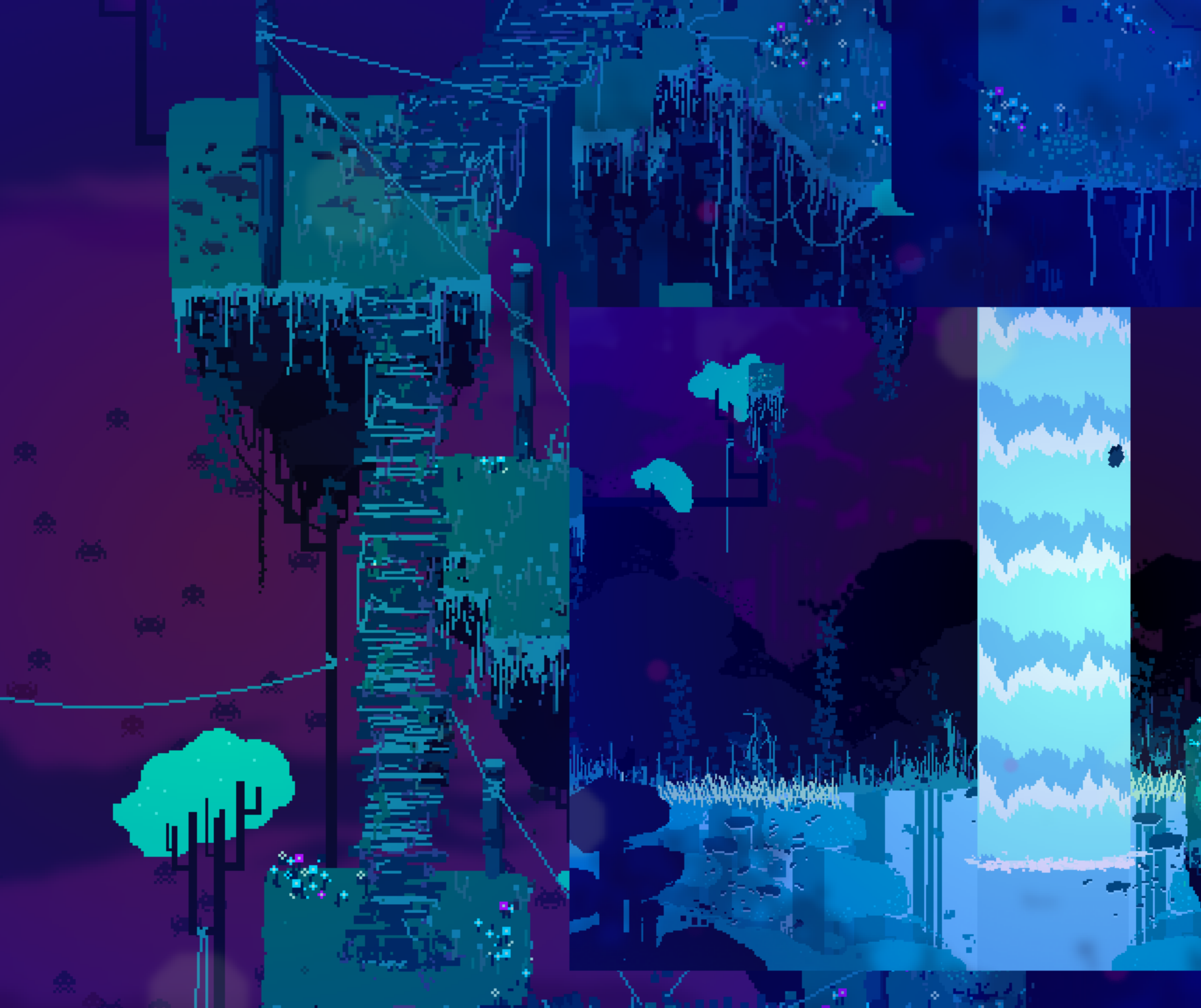
Hands down, these two morons are the best. Designing them, writing their dialogue, and placing them all over the place has been a blast. They talk trash, shoot fast, hit hard and die gruesomely, all the while distributing little love letters for you and each other — everything you want from a fun video game.



Up until early 2019, we used slightly adjusted versions of Valor's old spite sheet for Solace and Doughty. But as their characters grew more prominent, eventually we decided to gift them some proper designs of their own, clearly inspired by 80s action-heroes.

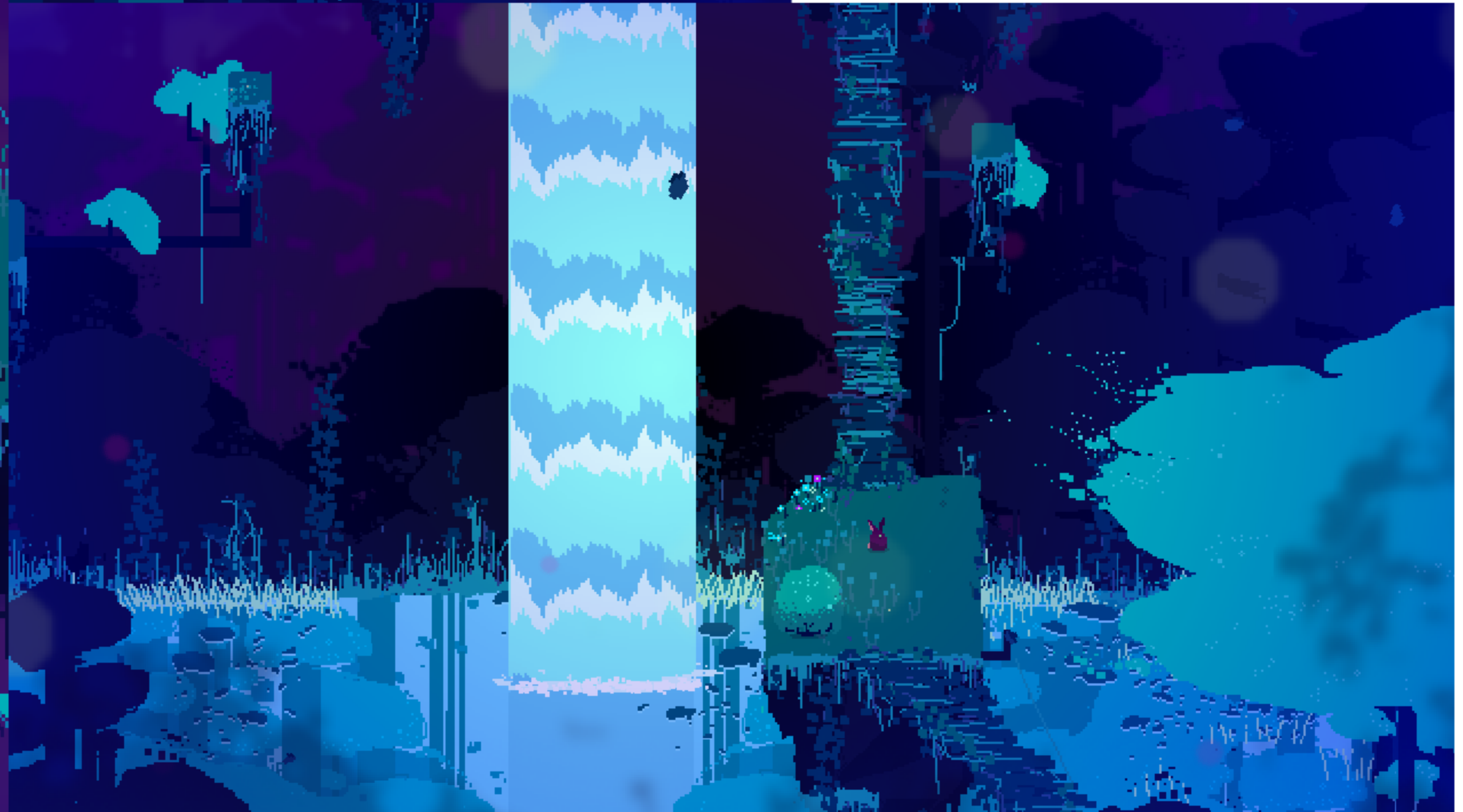






Phase II

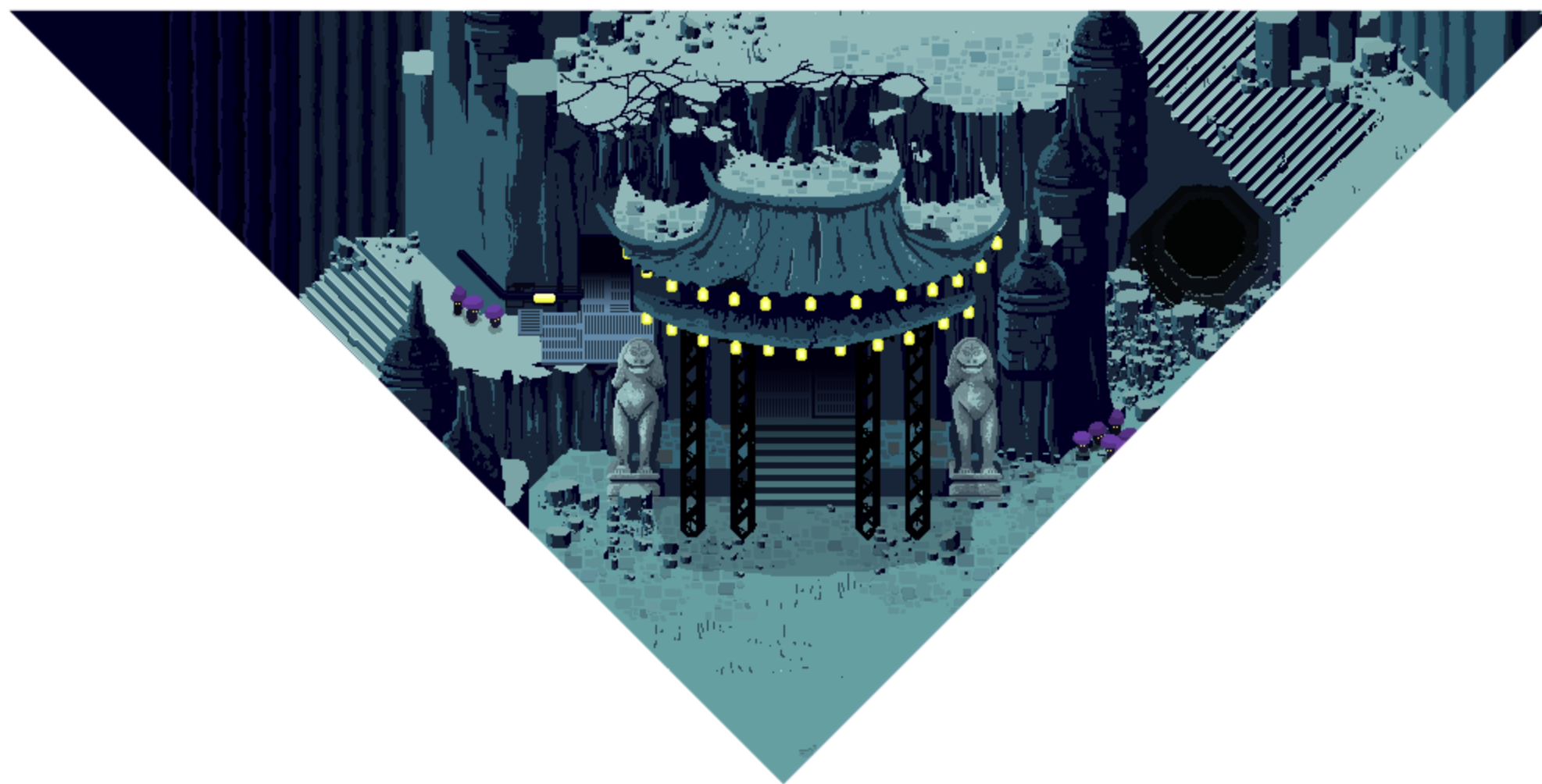
After visiting the Plains for the first time, Valor will be sent out again, to search for three strong memories. This assignment will take him down the western side of the Forest of Self, past Red, past the soldiers, past Space Invader aliens to the Phantom Pit, where the yellow death awaits.



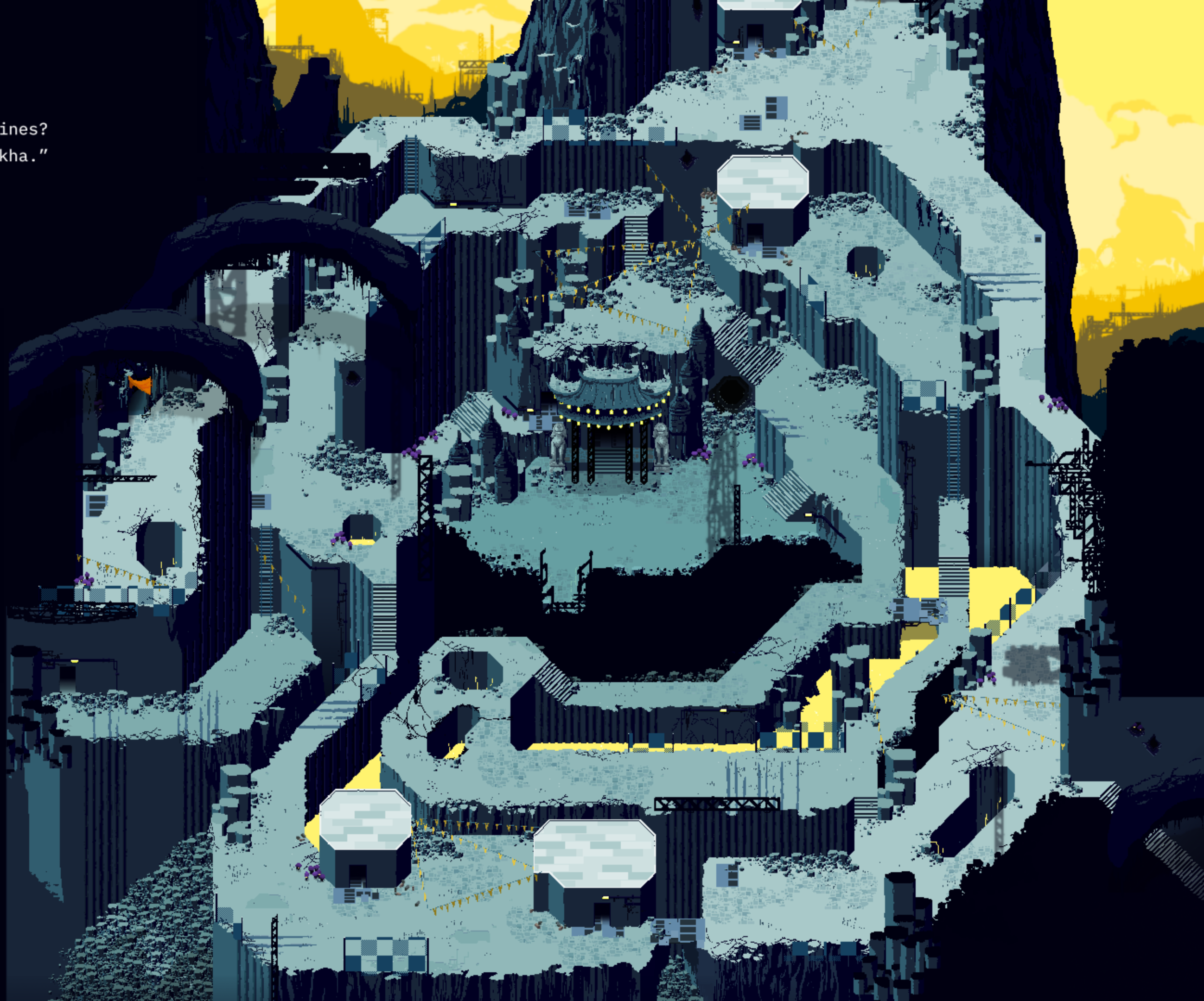


Wake up, killer, wake up!
The Red-Code alone is infinite.
-Blue

Phantom Pit



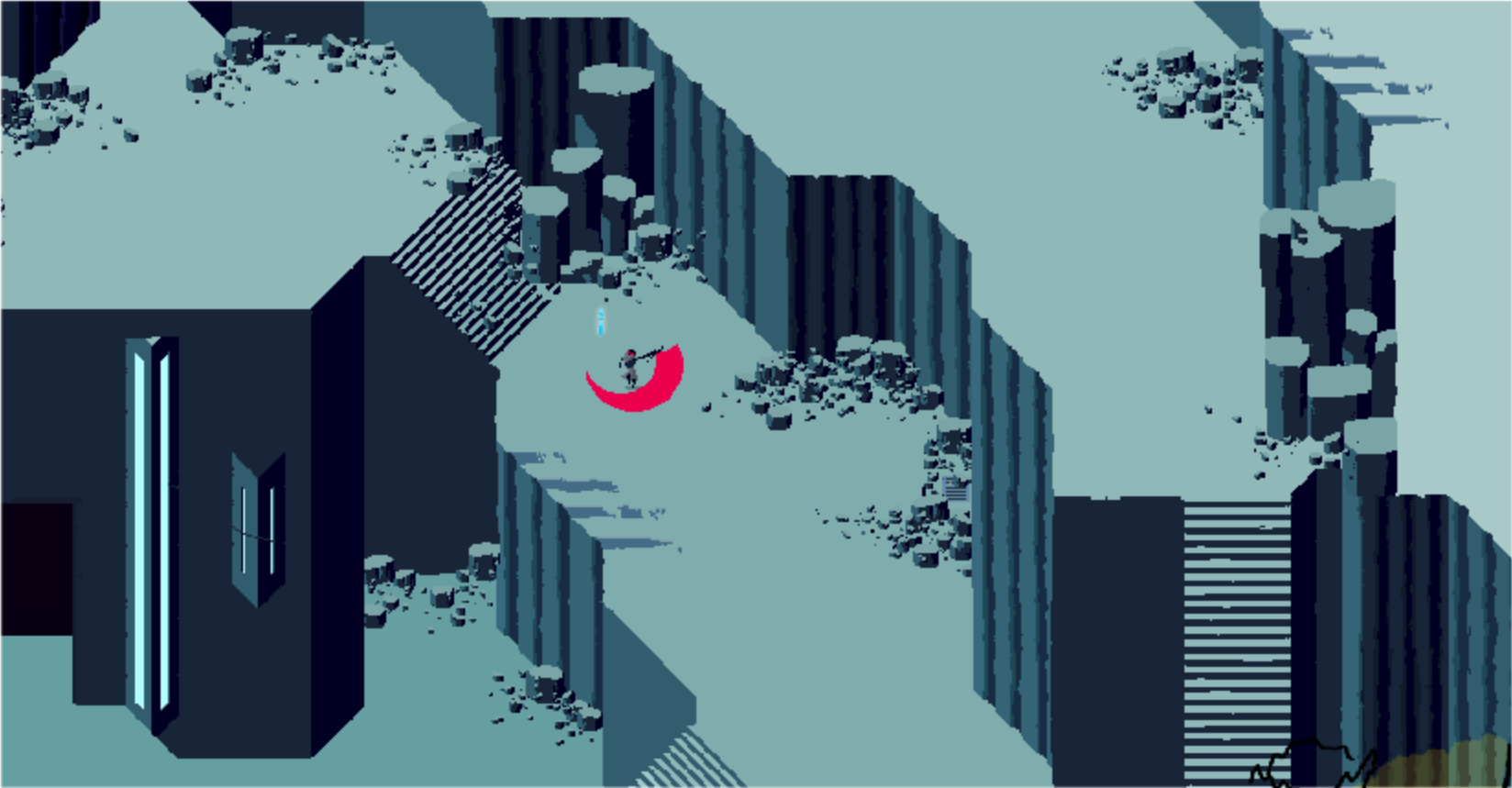
"Are you visiting our Sangha to inspect the mines?
Lately, we're suffering through times of dukkha."
-Bhikshu Dillon



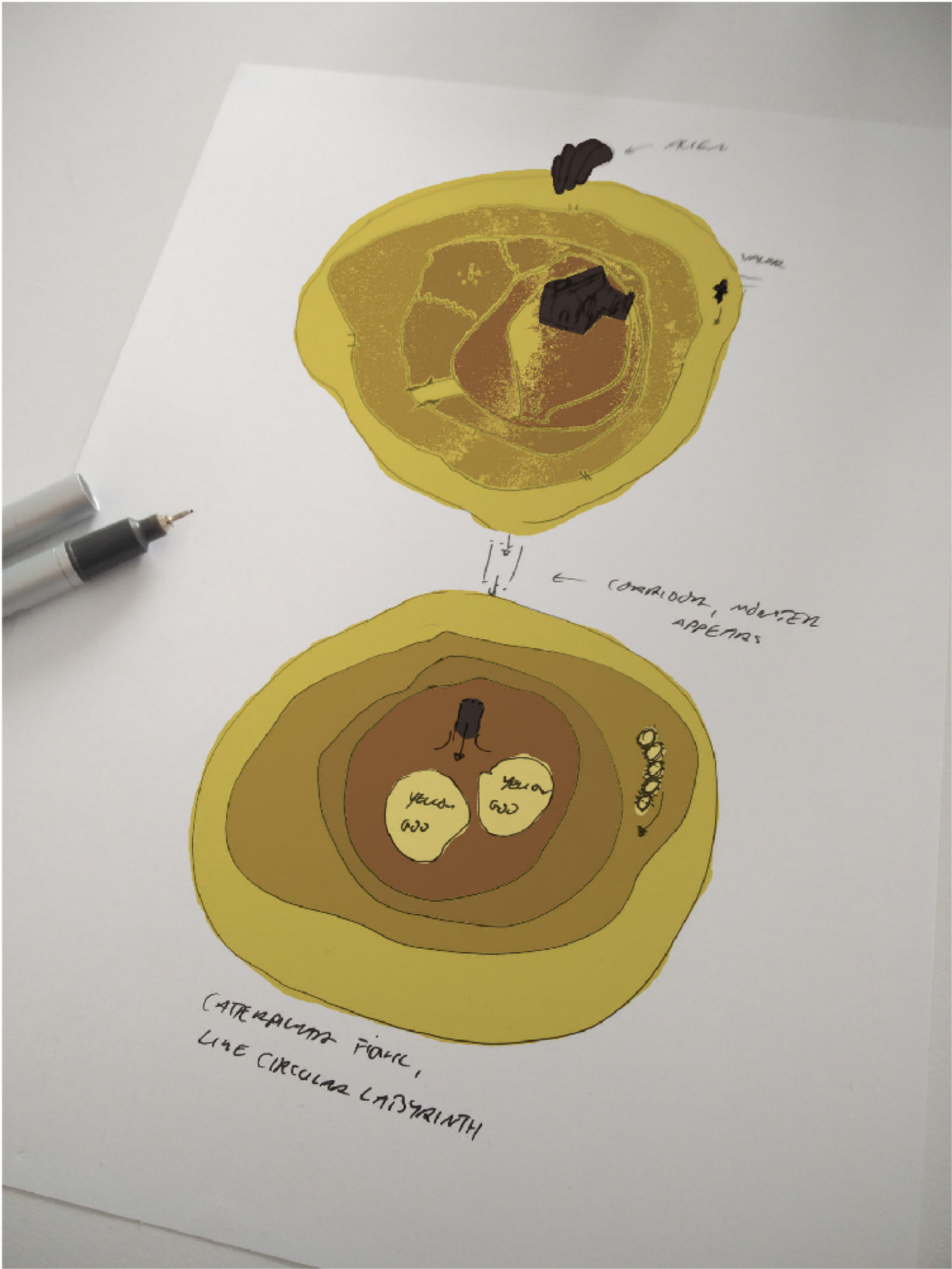
Phantom Pit

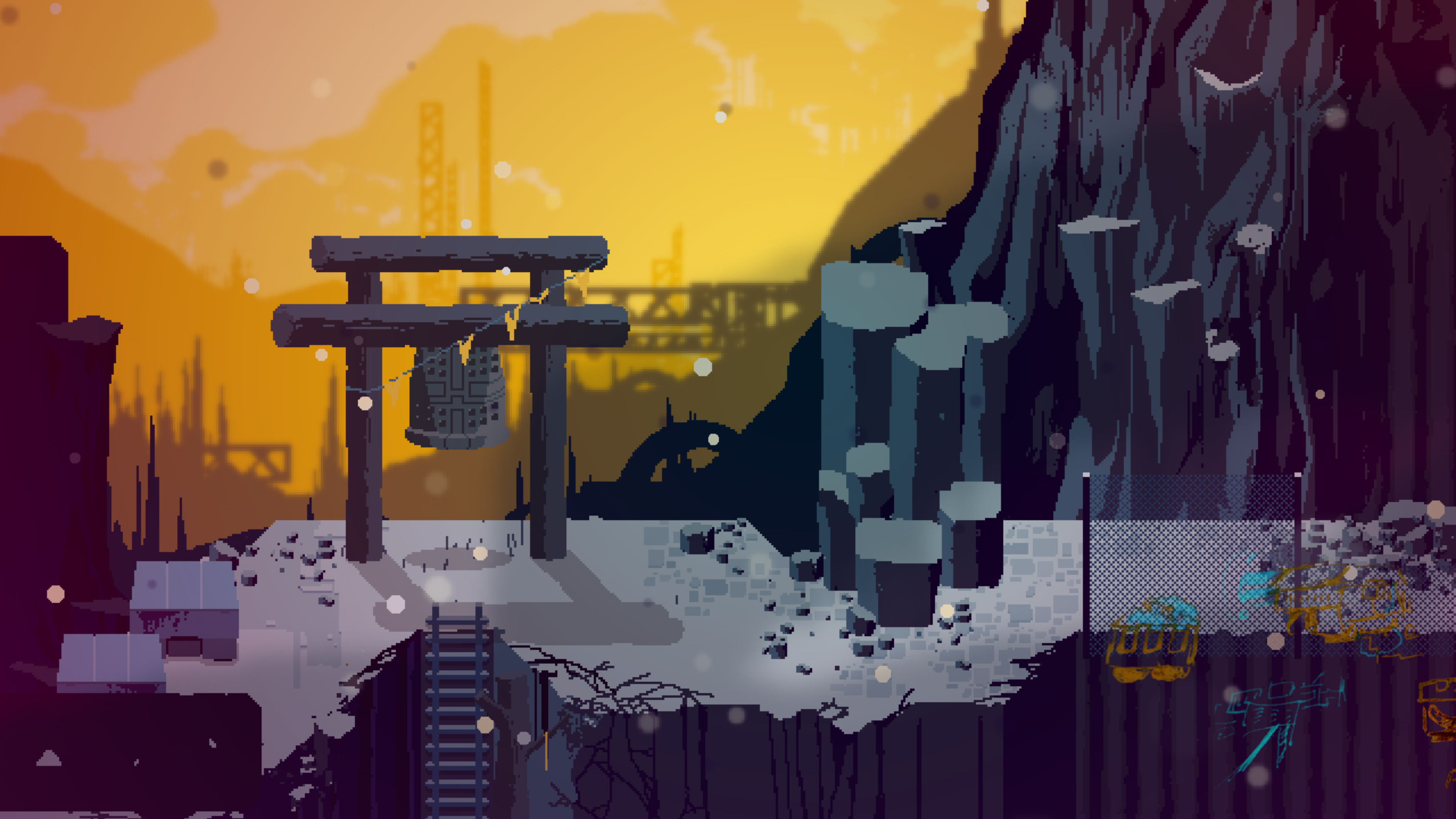
After the vibrant Desert of Giants and the soothing Forest of Self, we wanted Phase II to start by dropping the vibe to zero. The Phantom Pit is a desolate place, barren of life, filled with rocks and shadows — more reminiscent of a graveyard than a place of sweat and labor.

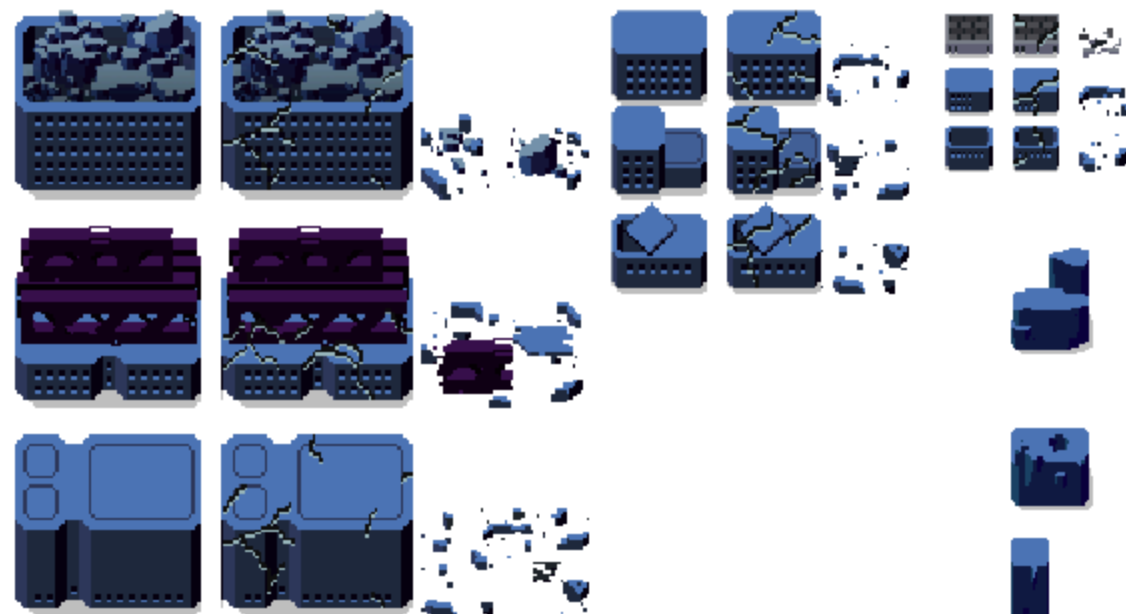
As you'd expect with an excavation site, the level's architecture revolves around narrowing rings, each deeper than the last. Two of these pits are connected by a tunnel, with each having a different purpose and different mechanics.



Crafting a lifeless place seems easy. We just skipped details and worked with shades of grey for the whole area. But making something seem desolate without slipping into boring and unfinished took many iterations... and rocks. So many rocks.

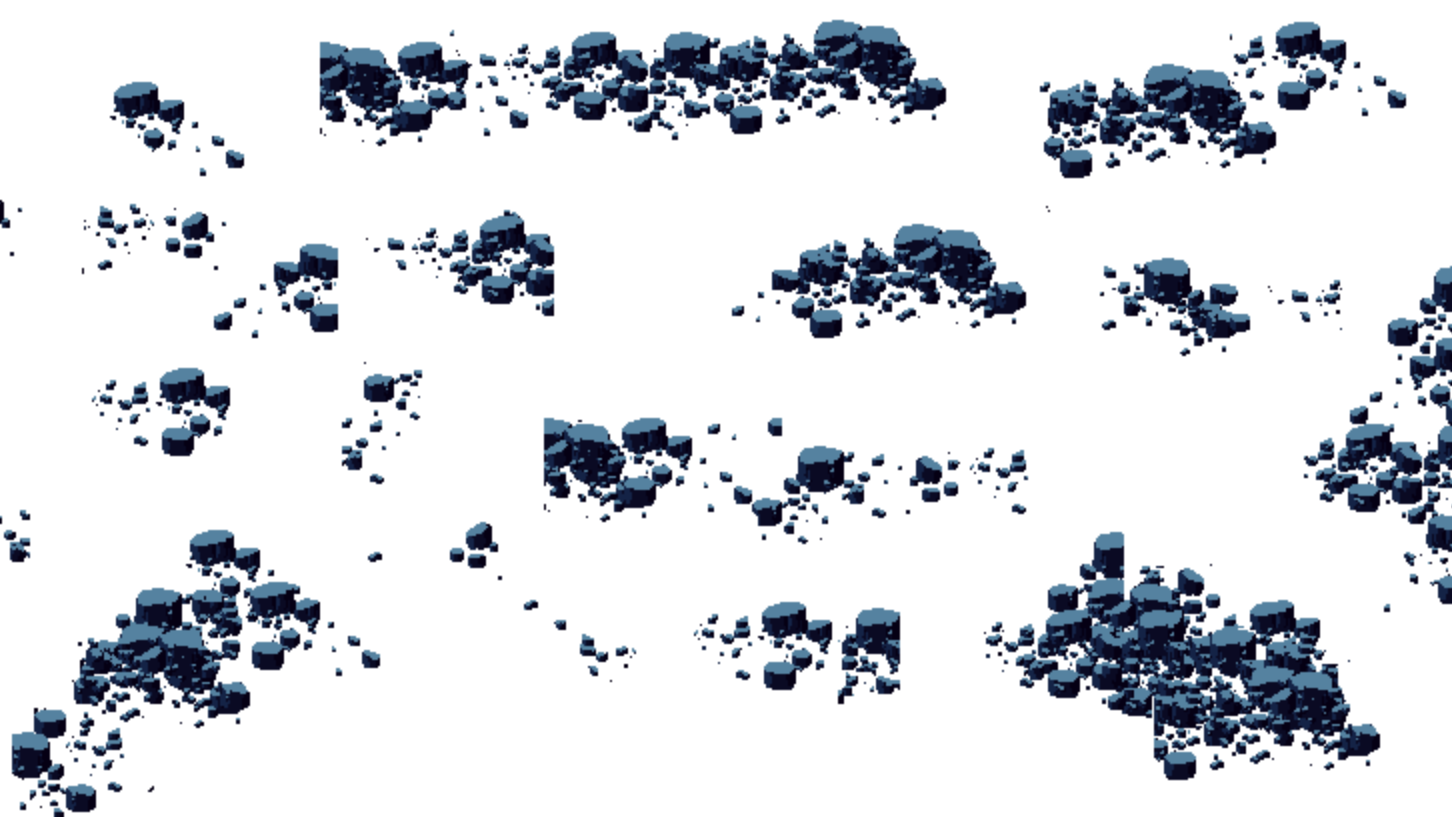
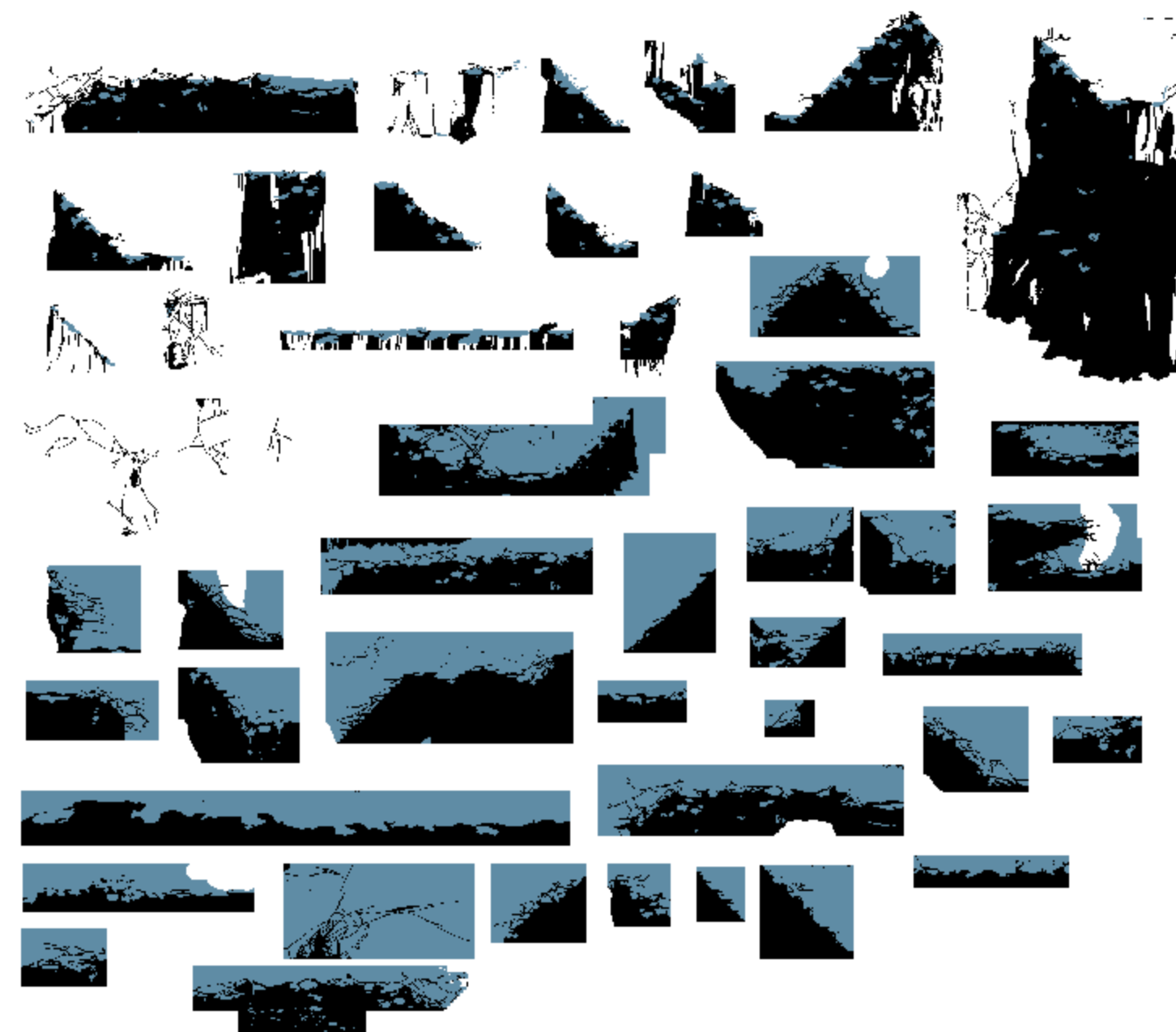
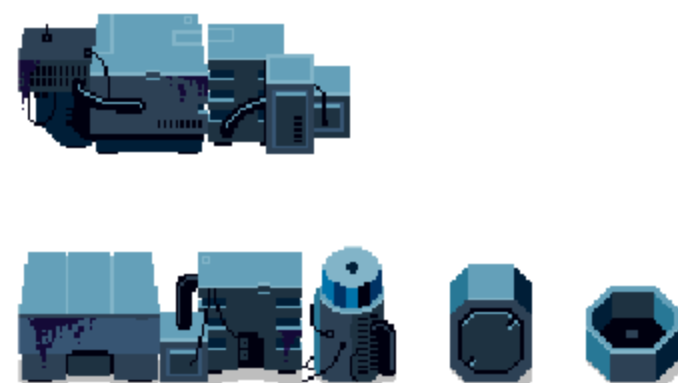
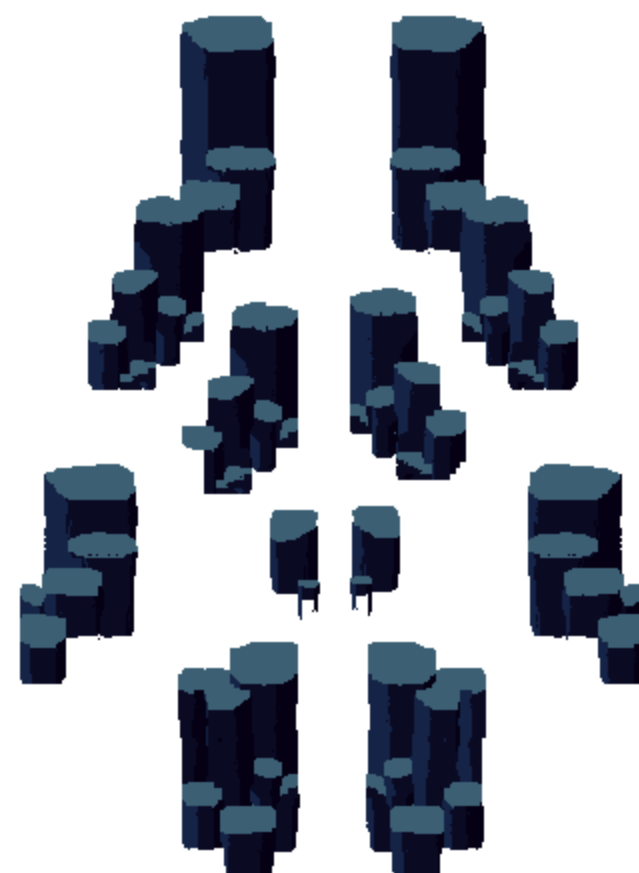
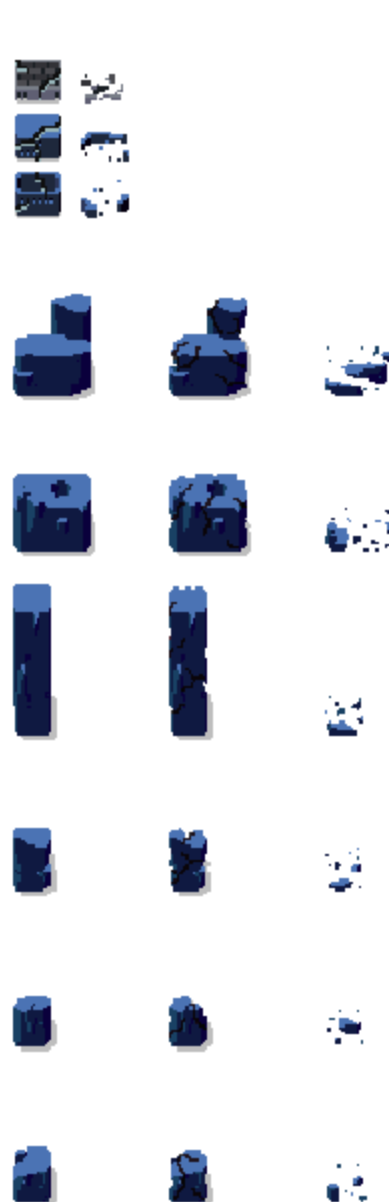






Rocks & Cracks

To populate the flat rings of the descending pits, we created plenty of rocks, rubble, machines, and cracks. Distributing them by hand took many hours of copy and pasting madness, but the effort helped bring the pits up to par with the rest of Resolution's maps.

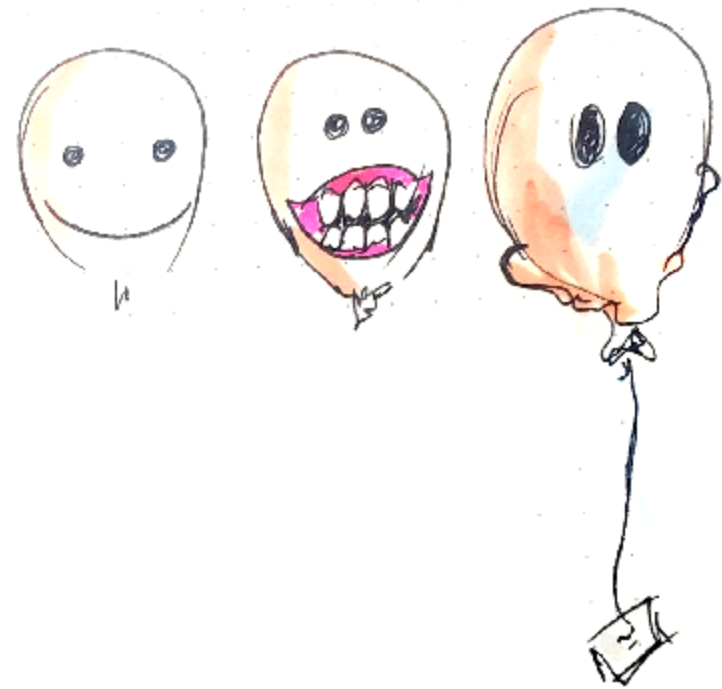




Making it Weird

While Cloud City, the Desert and the Forest each have their fair share of otherworldly goings-on, we wanted Phase II to ramp up the “Alice in Wonderland” strangeness. Still, we had to balance our ridiculous ideas with the depressive tone of the Phantom Pit and keep the weird at a minimum.

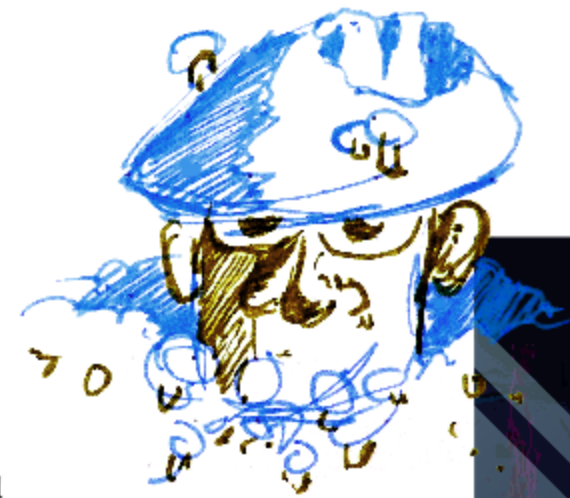
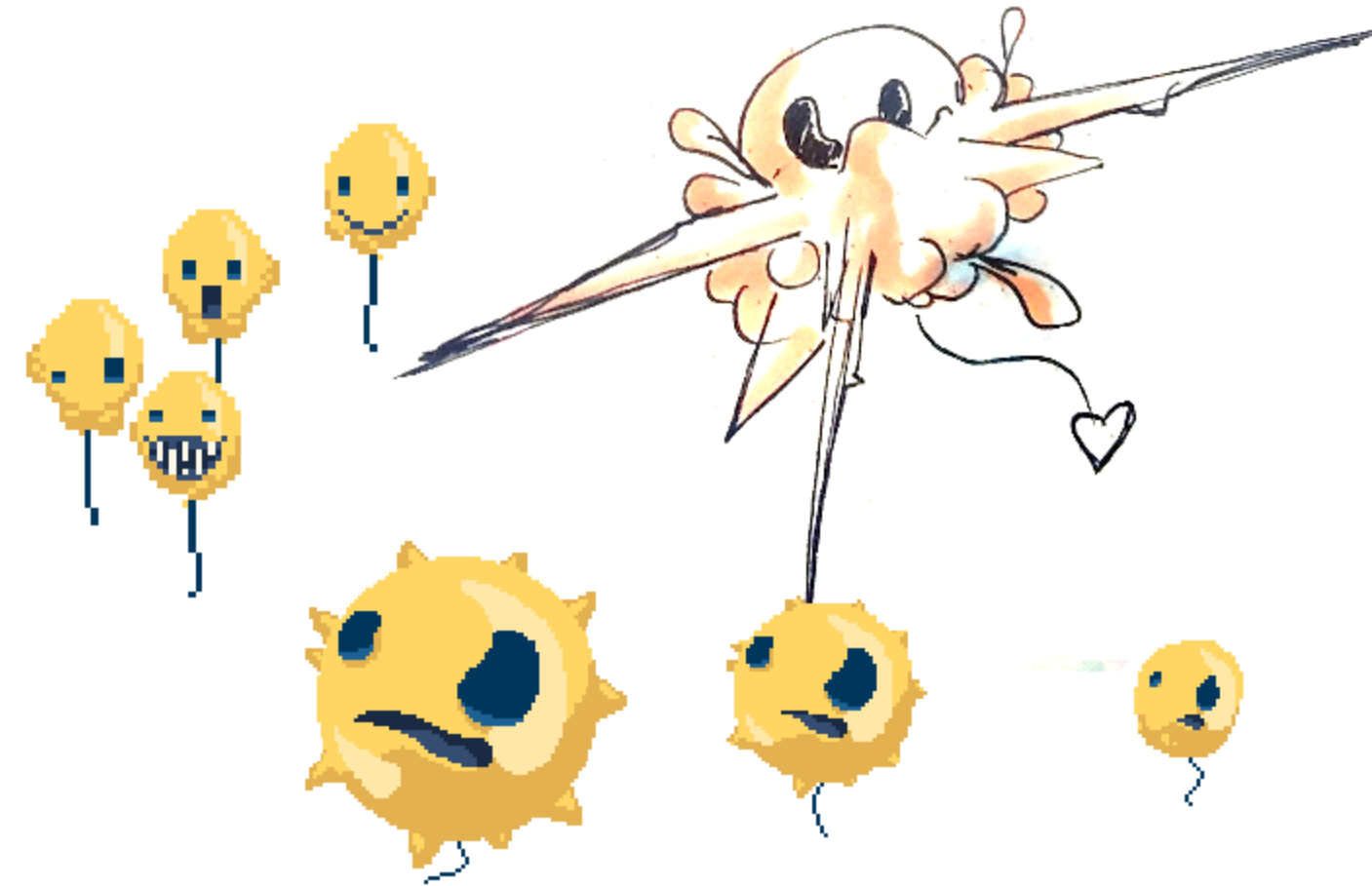
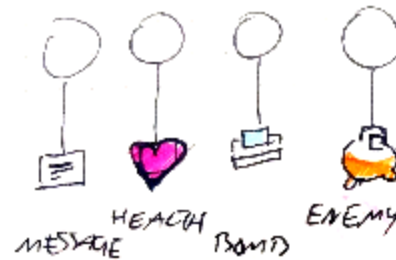




Aloons

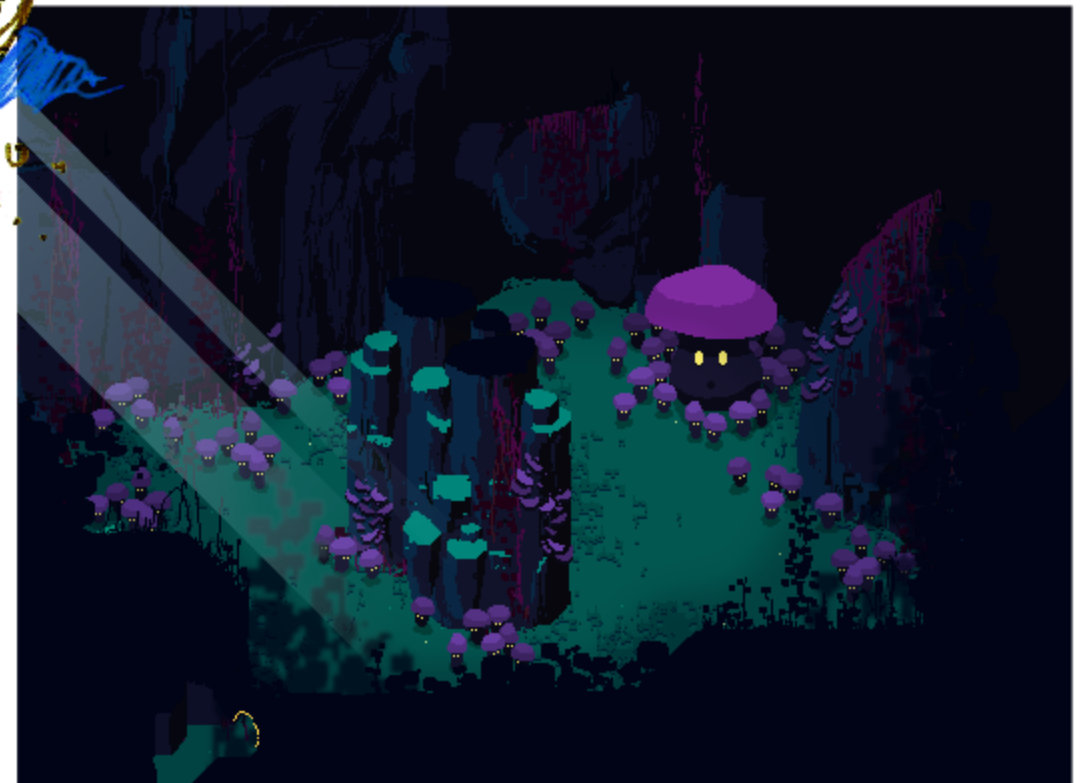
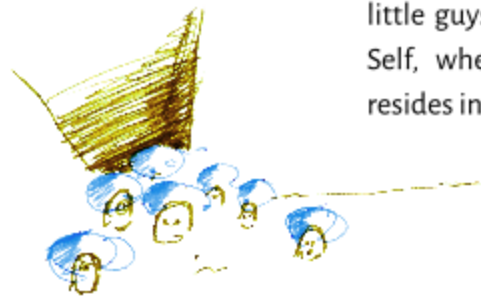
Speaking of weird: the Aloons are mutated balloons —“Al-ien Bal-oons”—drifting around the place. They attack in classic blowfish manner, puffing themselves up dramatically to reveal their deadly spiky needles.

At some point, we wanted to extend the Alloon’s capabilities into carrying other enemies or objects, or even crawl on the floor when landing. But that never happened.



Mushroom Babies

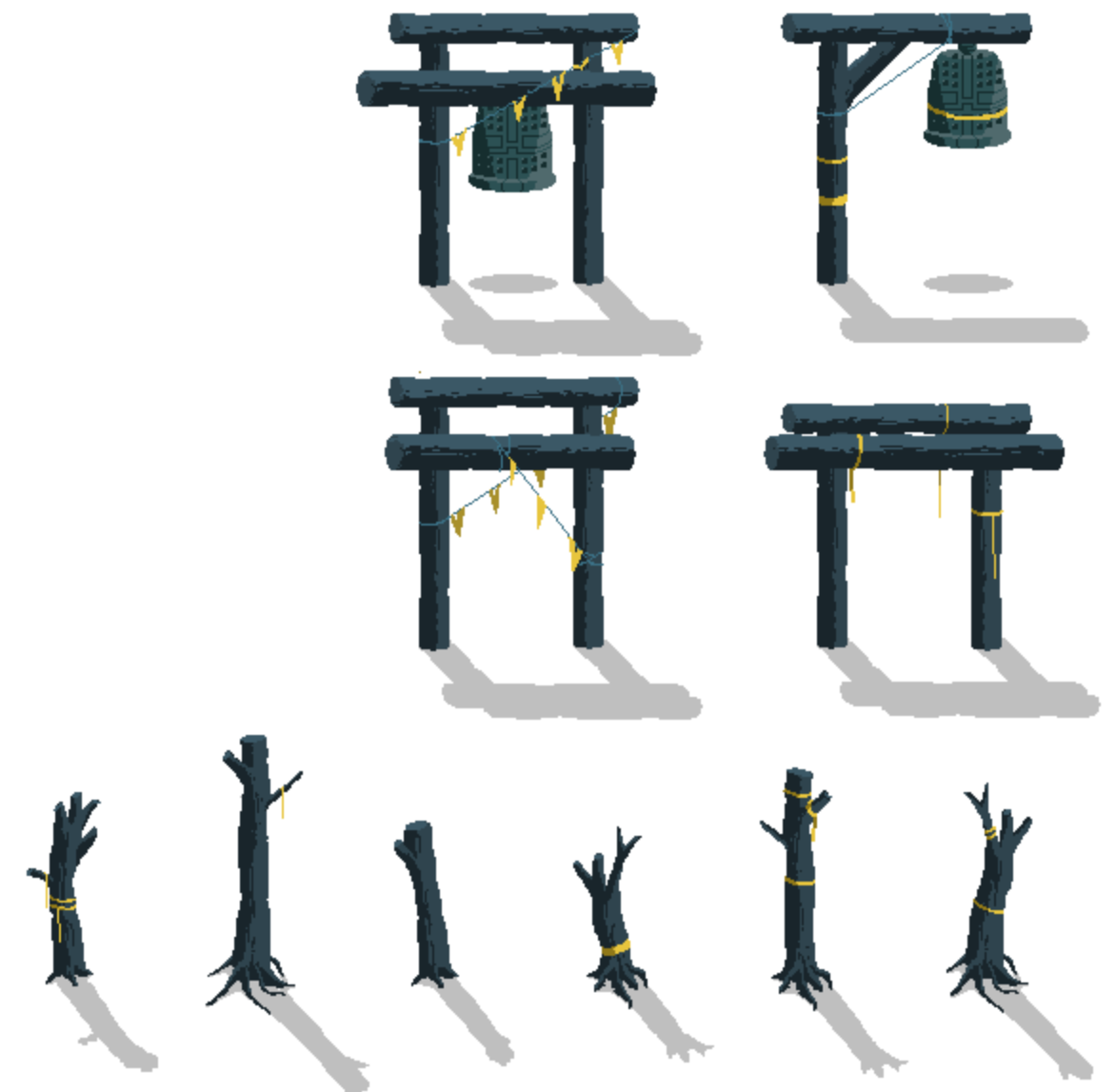
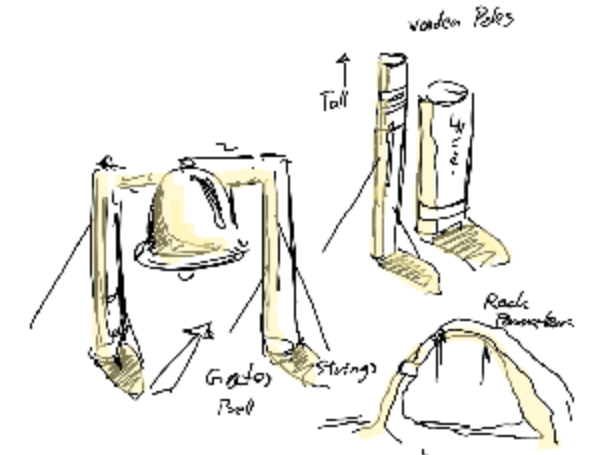
Bowing their tiny heads respectfully to the red super-plumber, our mushroom clusters have tiny eyes and serious personality. While they are most present in the Phantom Pit, these little guys can be traced back to the Forest of Self, where the legendary Mushroom King resides in his cave. Yeah, weird.

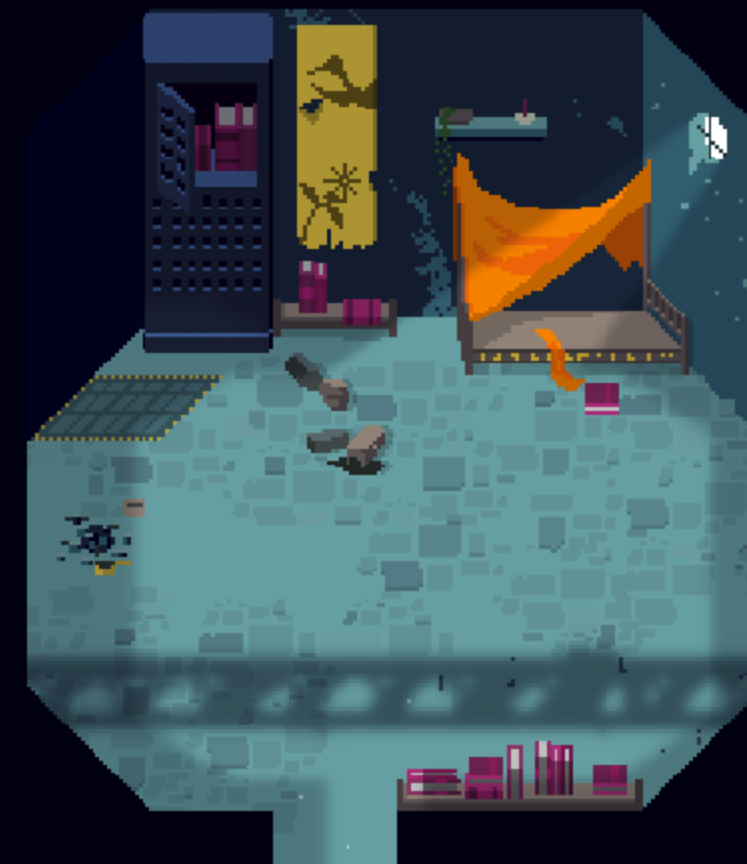
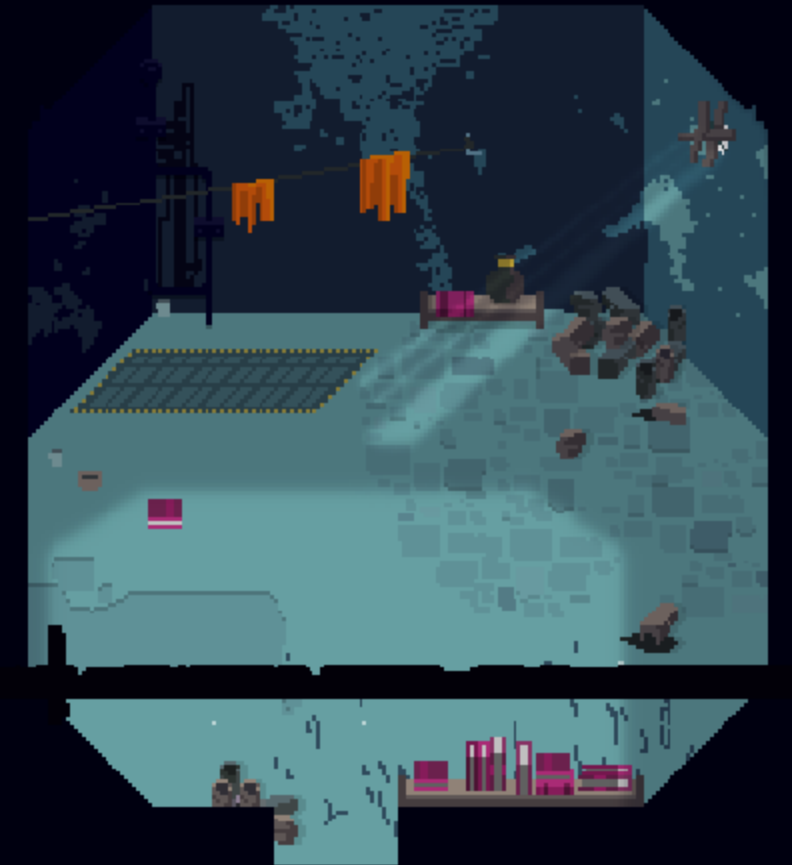
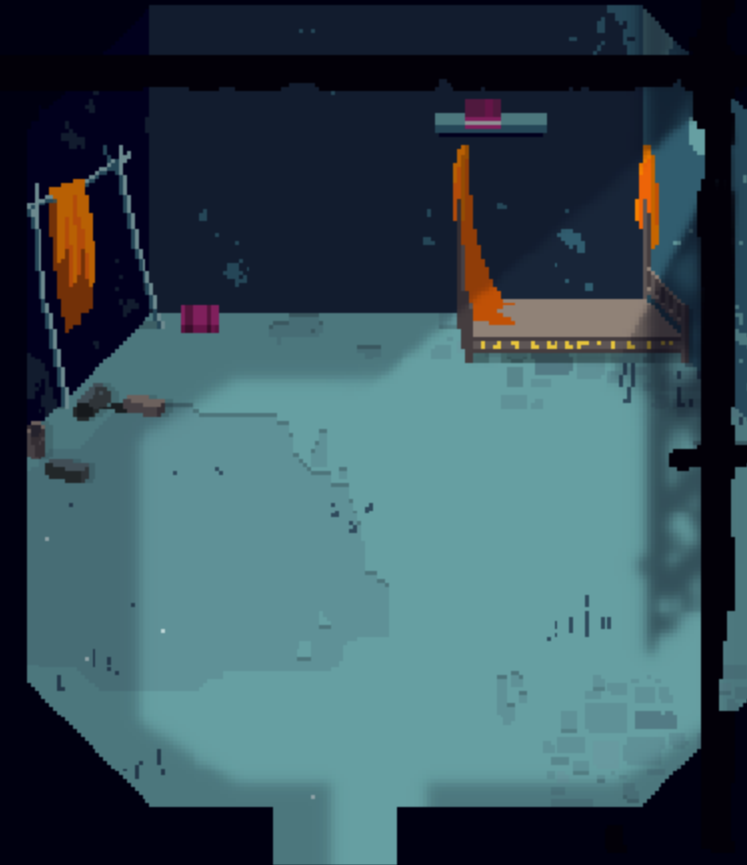
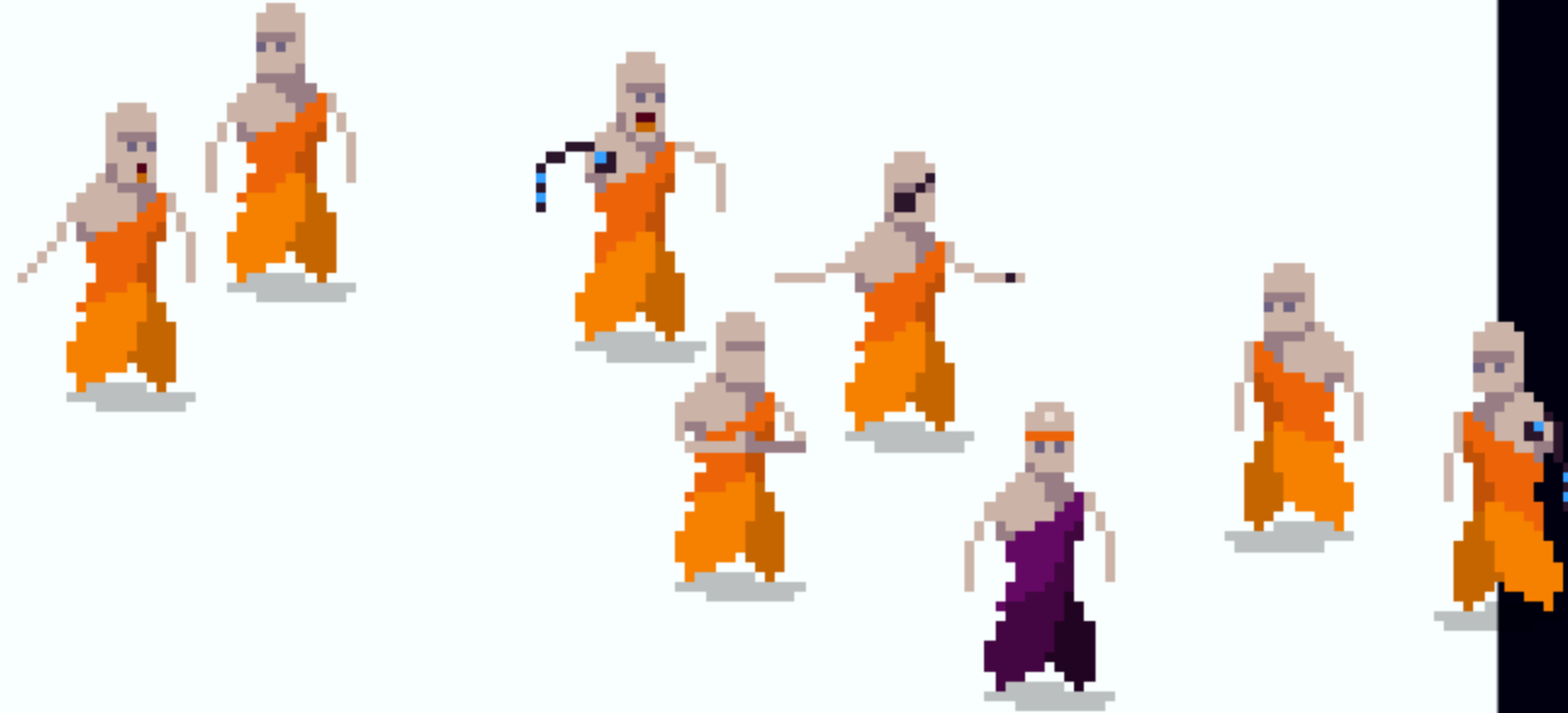




Religion

As Valor moves towards the Phantom Pit, he notices a big Buddha statue and similar spiritual icons: prayer flags, ribbons and large bells. The Bhikshus work here, criminals and sinners turned monks that converted to the empire's official religion. They repent through the dangerous and hard labor of excavating Link Fluid.





"The second mechanistic revolution was followed by a general rejection of religion. While worship was never prohibited by law, the pious were despised by the masses: prayers do not rebuild civilization."

—Bhikshu Clemens

Labor Monks

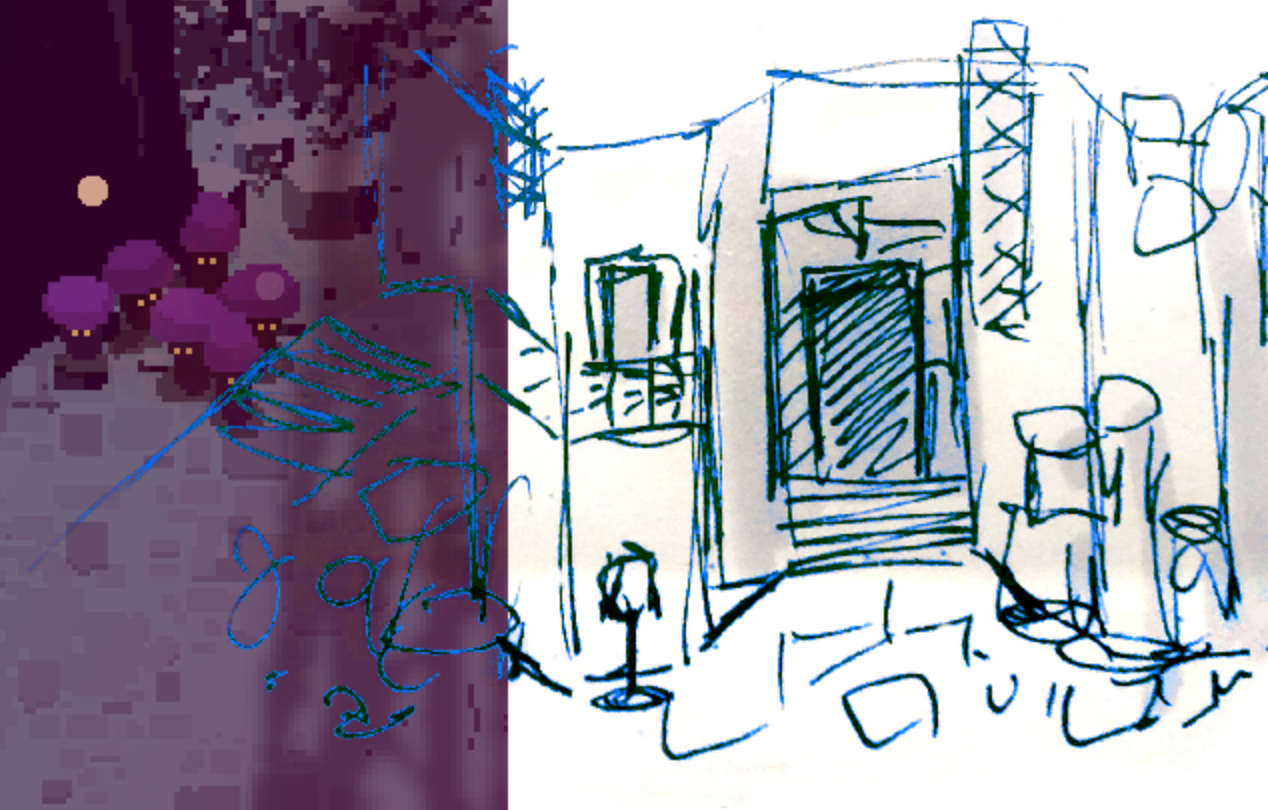
Usually, the monks work the excavation site and the mine below. For now, they are confined into their claustrophobic houses filled with worn-out furniture: outside, their mutant brothers are on the hunt, while the great Nage ravages the neighboring pit.

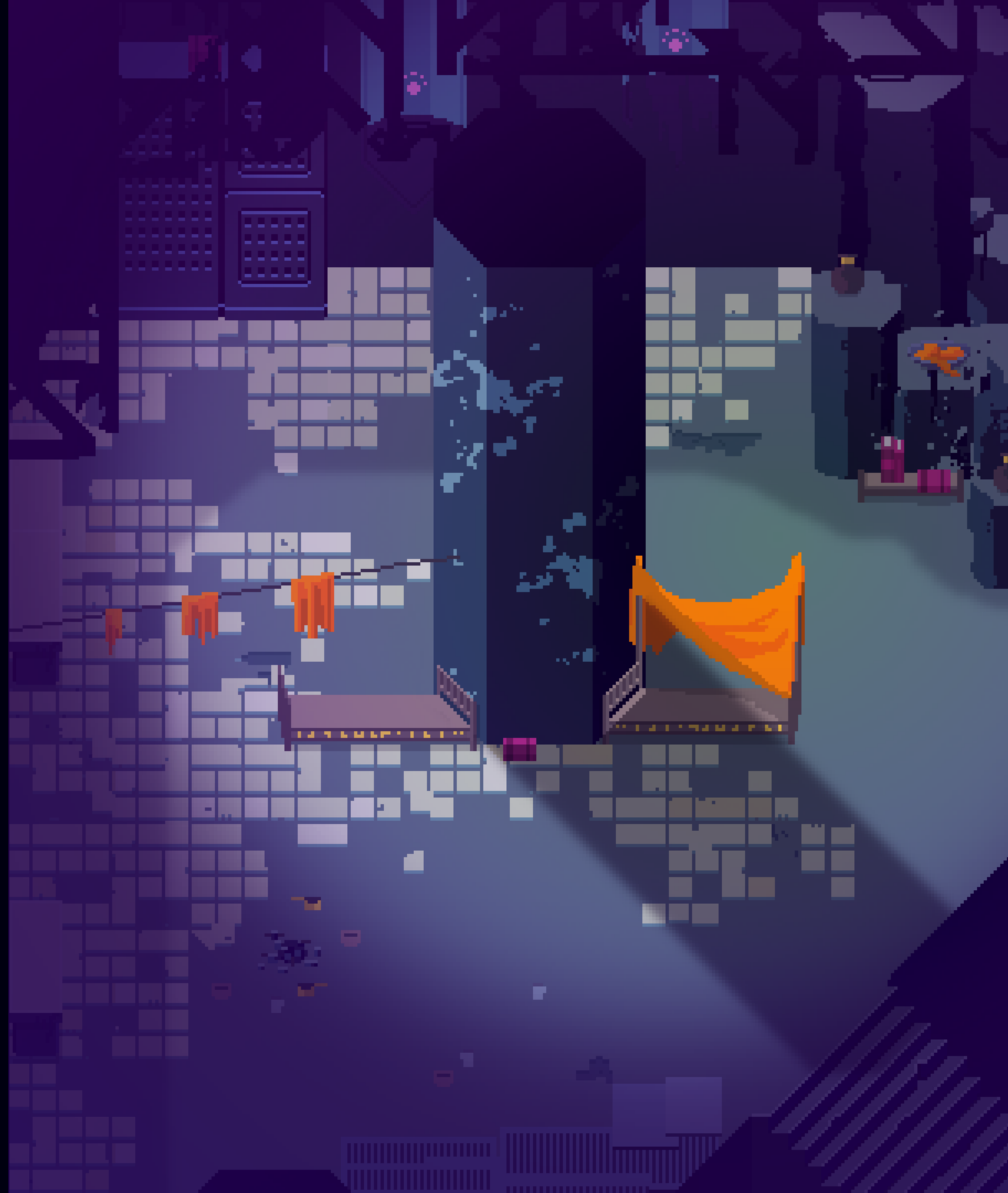
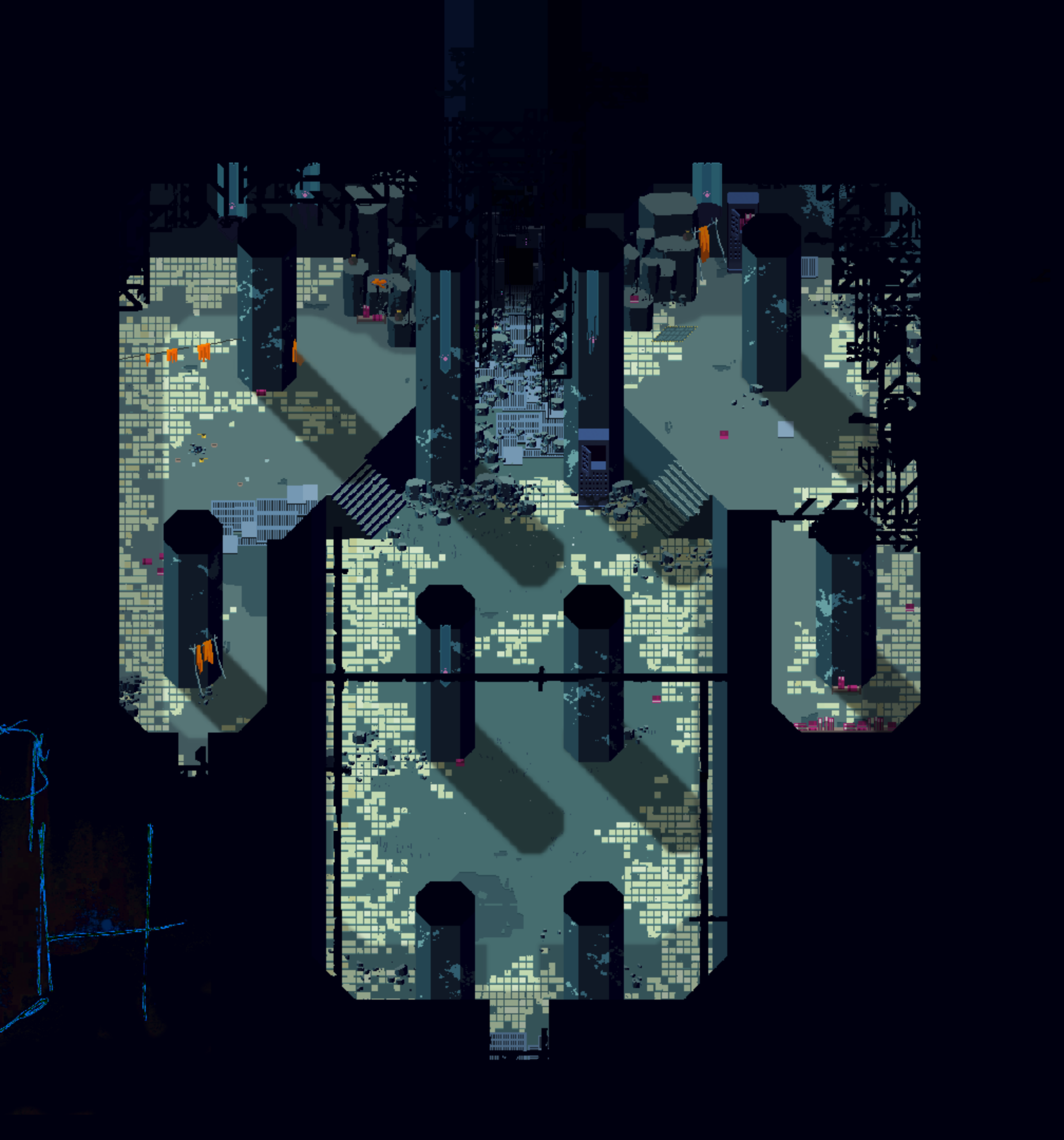


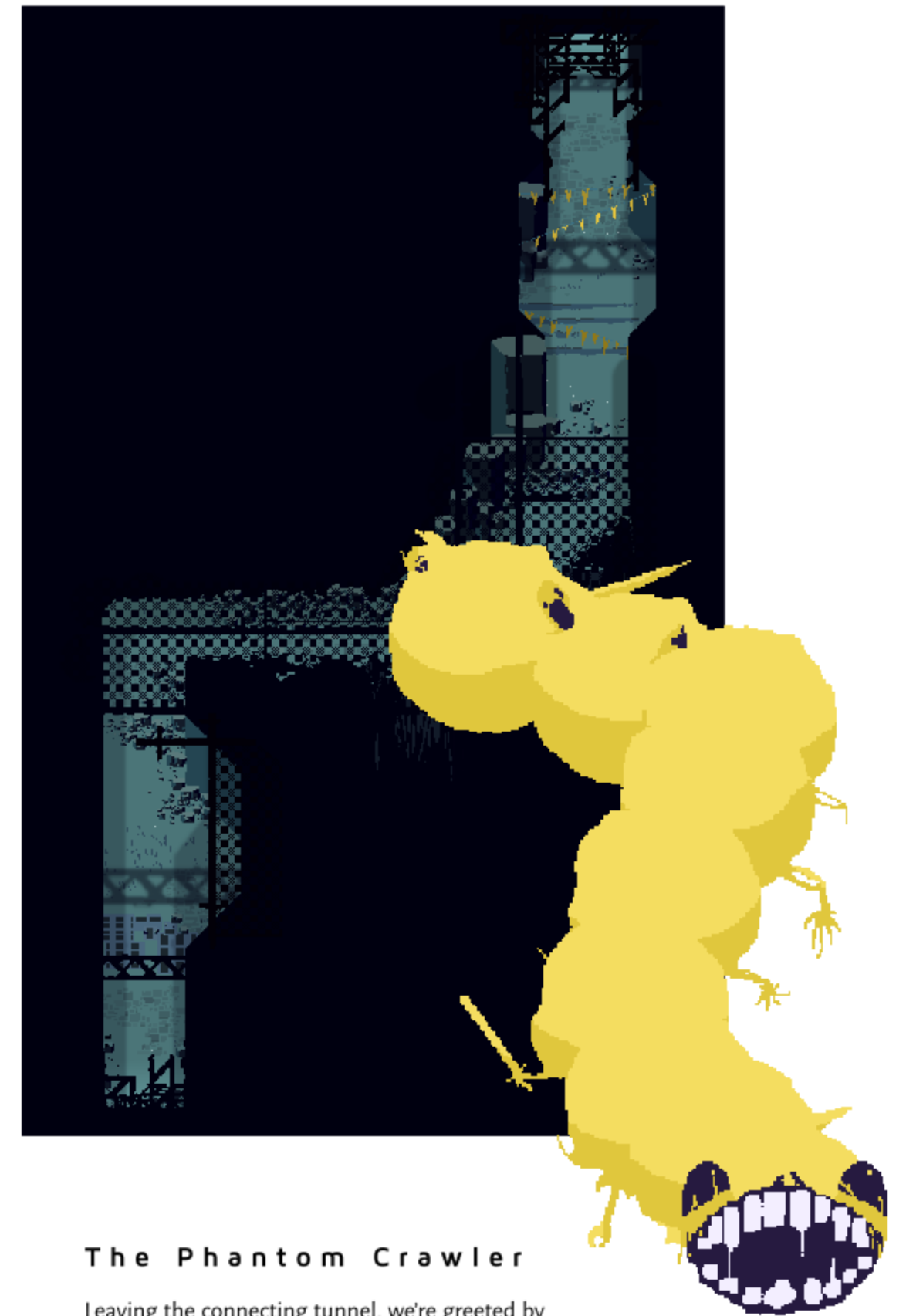
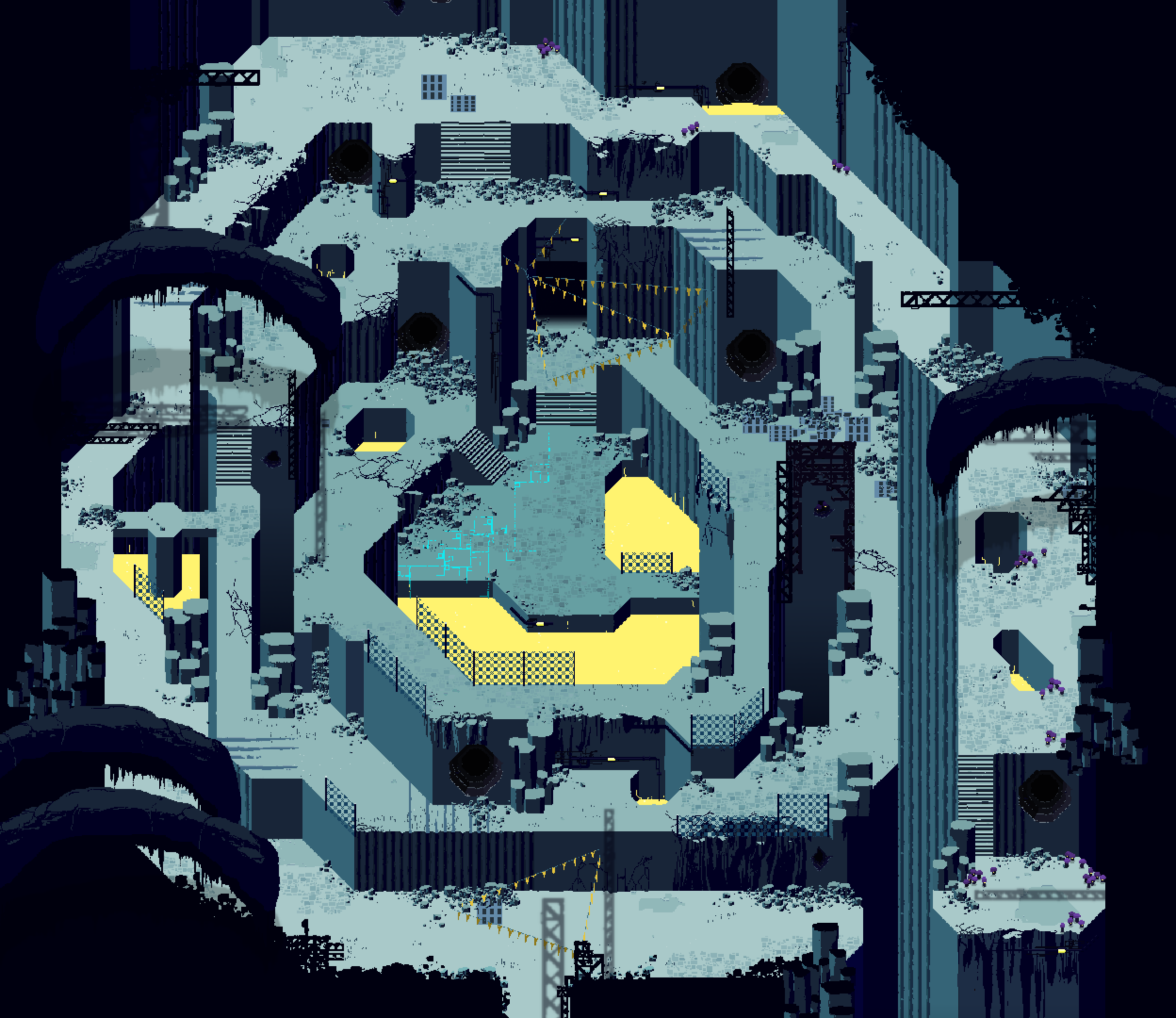
Monastery

Carved into the walls of the deepest ring stands the monastery. Here resides the Arhat, praying with his brothers and teaching them to be humble and less shit-heady — with moderate success.

It is also the entrance to the Mechanical Mines — blocked by an accident that caved in the ceiling around the elevator. We need to go south and retrieve some explosives if we want to descend.

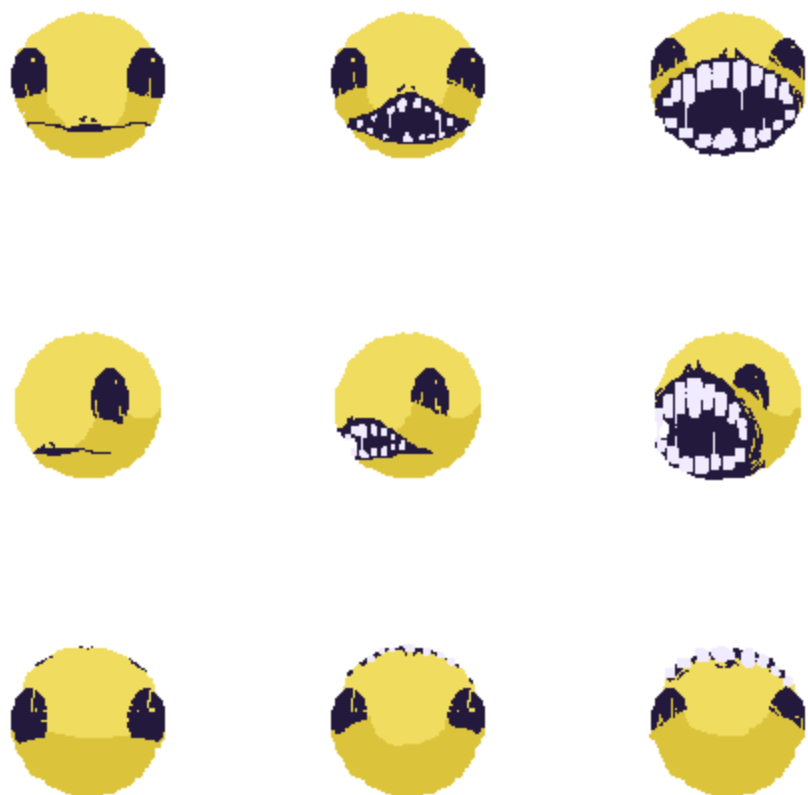






The Phantom Crawler

Leaving the connecting tunnel, we're greeted by a most unsettling smile: Bolshie the yellow zombie-worm breaks from his hiding-hole and chases us along the rings of the southern Phantom Pit. Big mean, and closer to a rabid Pacman than you are comfortable with.



Bolshie

The core idea for this chase-level came from the 1992 movie *Alien³*, where Giger's most famous creation is chasing its prey through a labyrinth of shafts within a rusty foundry. Well, along the way the foundry turned excavation site and the Alien turned yellow worm, but the chaos remains.

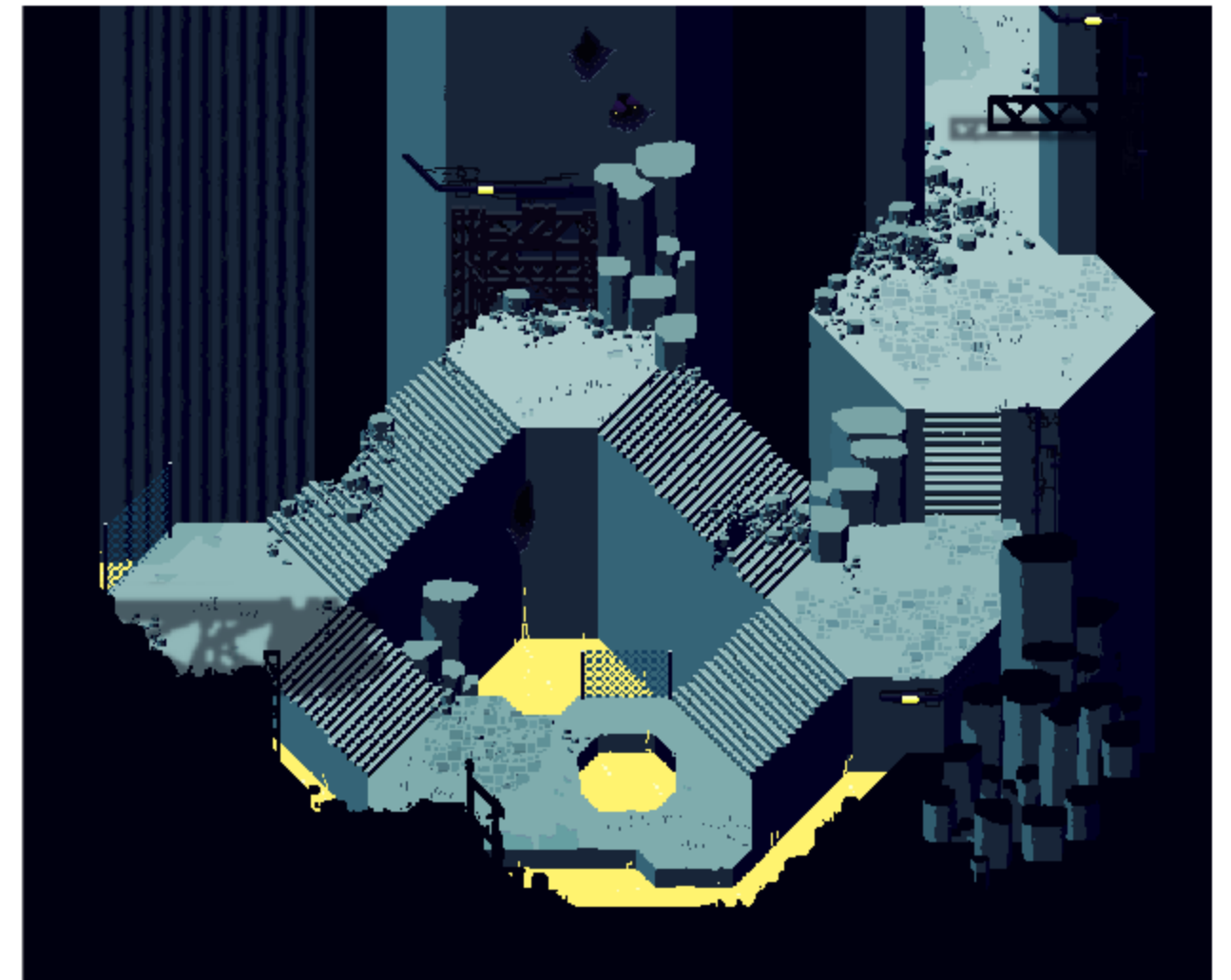
From here on, Bolshie will appear all over the world of Resolution — sometimes as an obstacle, a boss, or various means of transportation. It might be its equally mesmerizing and unnerving smile, its huge dead eyes, or those useless arms, but we just love this twisted creature.







"Dismantle matter with nano-bots. Slave monks call the effect Stardust."



Stardust

Stardust Bombs are probably the first item we ever designed. Strangely enough, they worked so well that we barely changed them along the way. The little cubes release a swarm of nanobots that break down various metals on an atomic level, melting whole structures into grey goo in the process.



The Clearing Below

Before we take the newly acquired Stardust back to access the mines, there's a secret area to be visited... Here we find... and he won't be happy.

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My brother is a fool... he
lost our best grinder.

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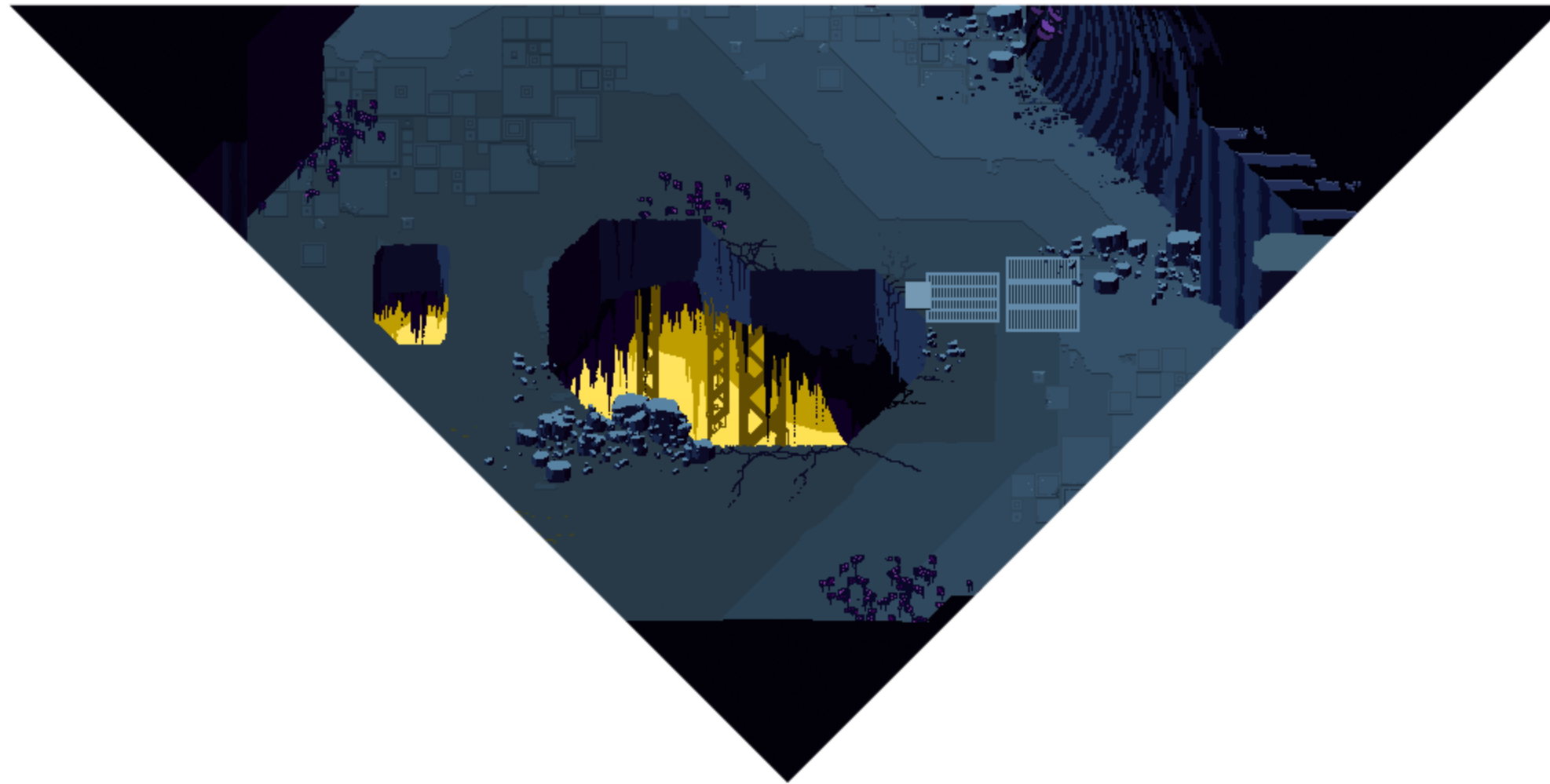
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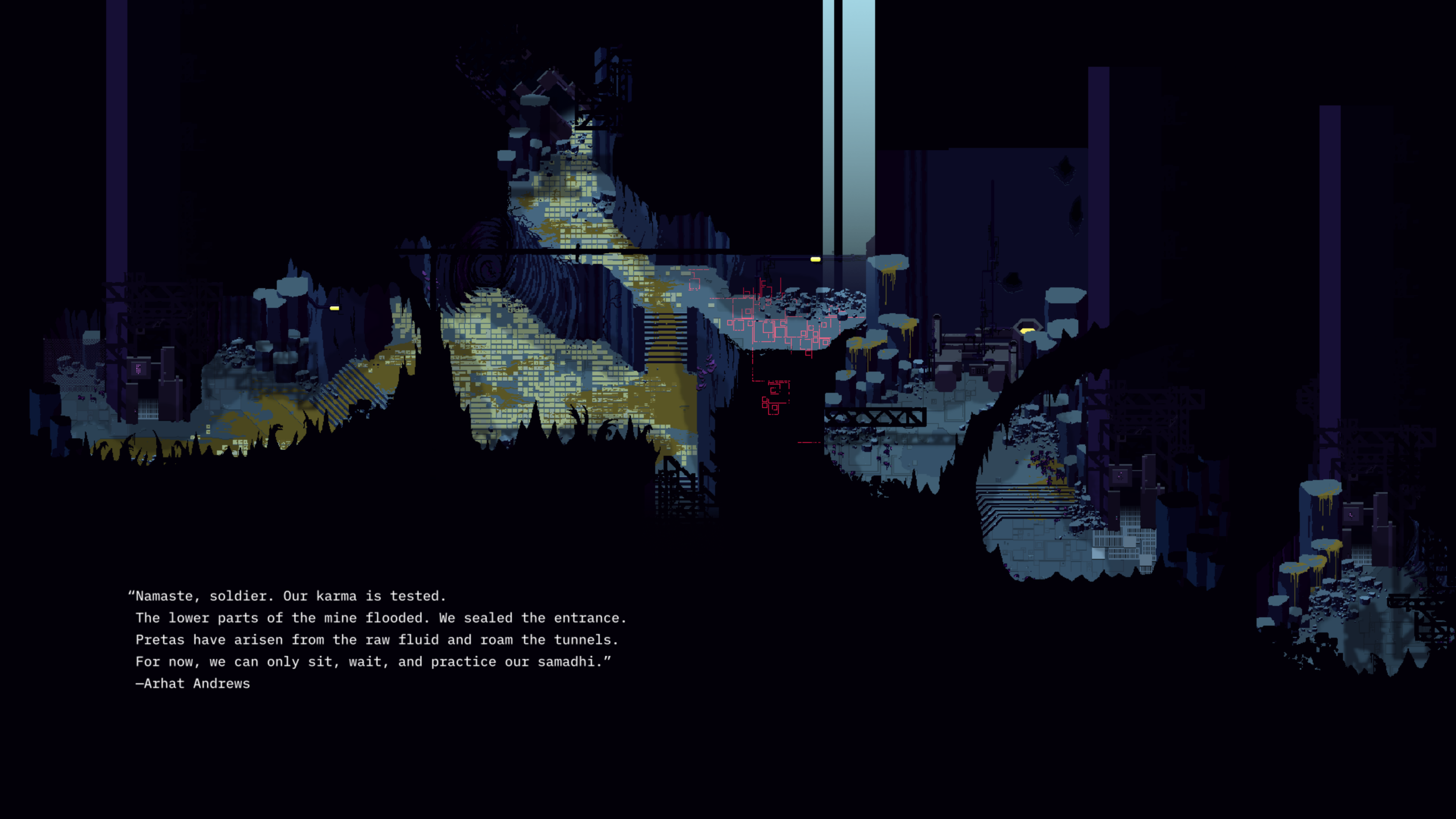
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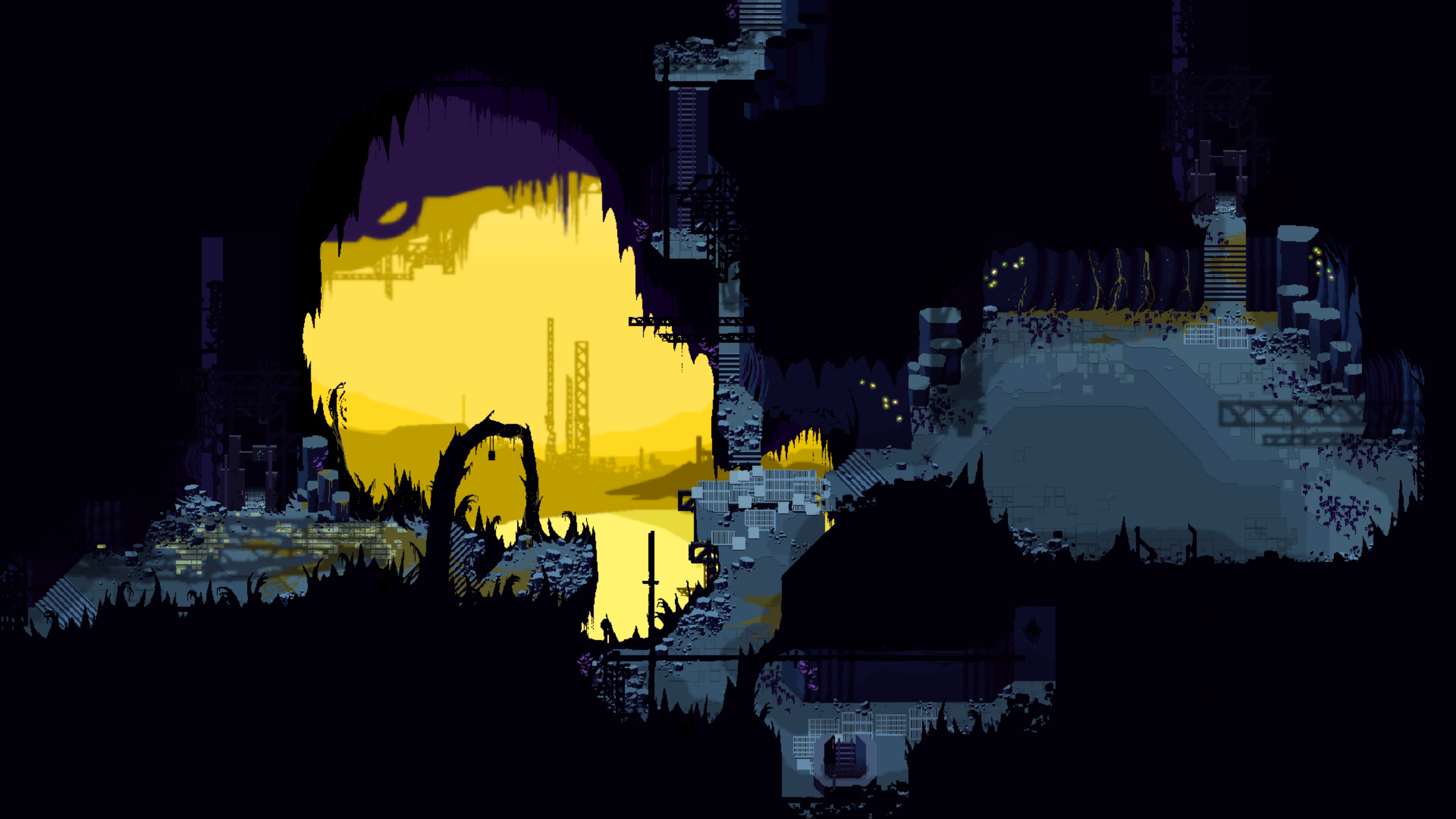
She was wild and restless,
her dvesha destructive.
—Bhikshu Boggs

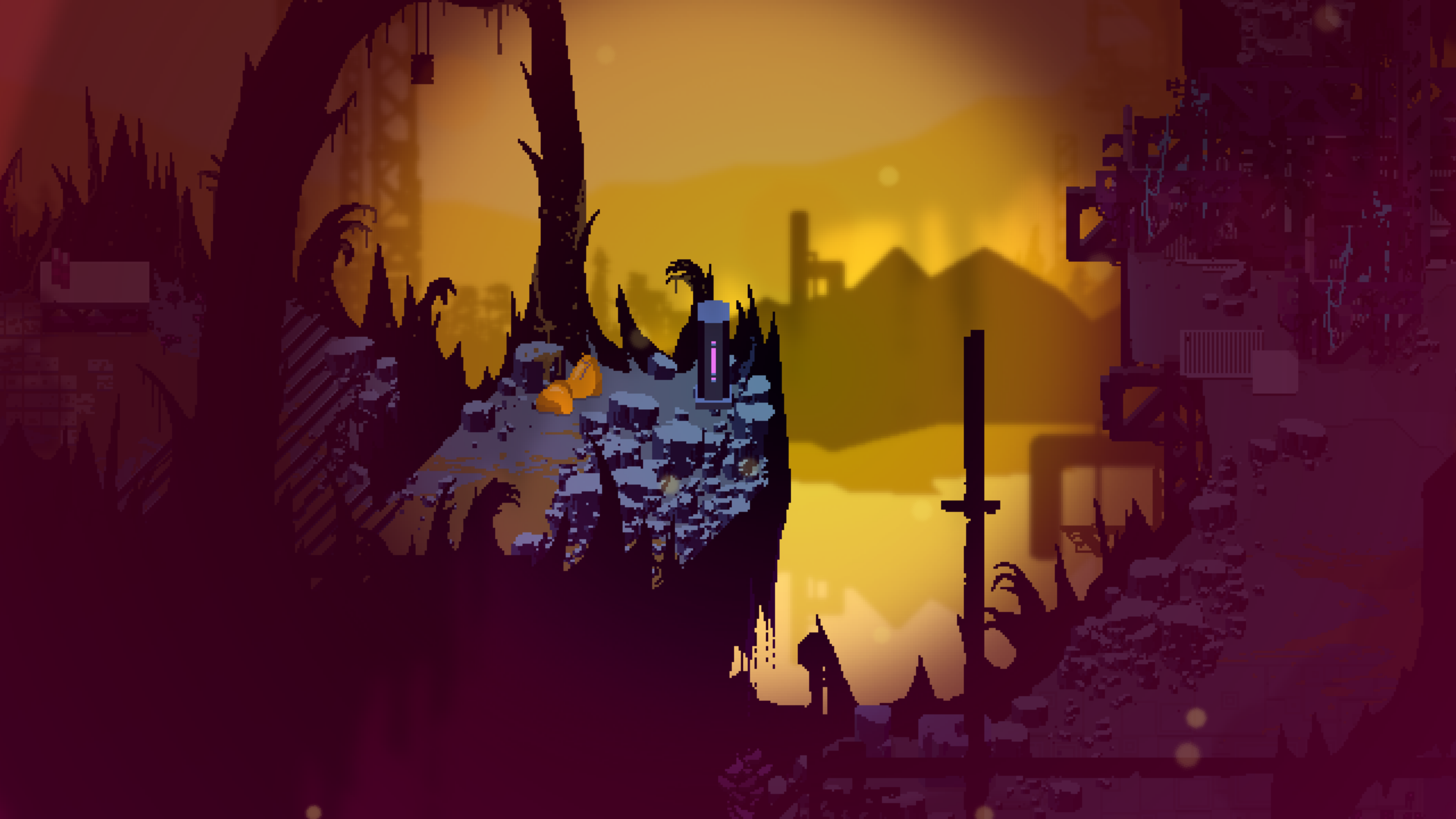
Mechanical Mines





“Namaste, soldier. Our karma is tested.
The lower parts of the mine flooded. We sealed the entrance.
Pretas have arisen from the raw fluid and roam the tunnels.
For now, we can only sit, wait, and practice our samadhi.”
—Arhat Andrews



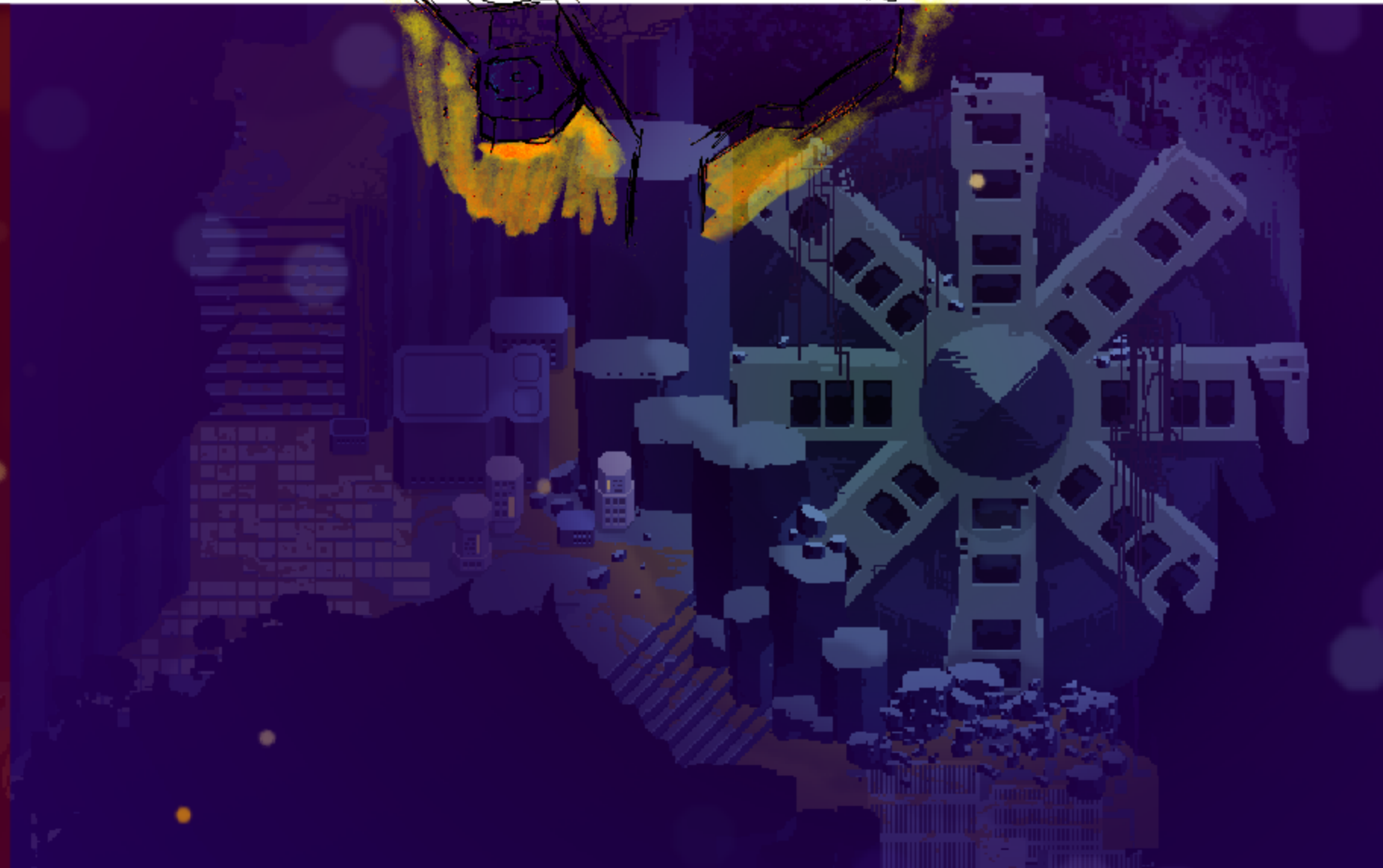
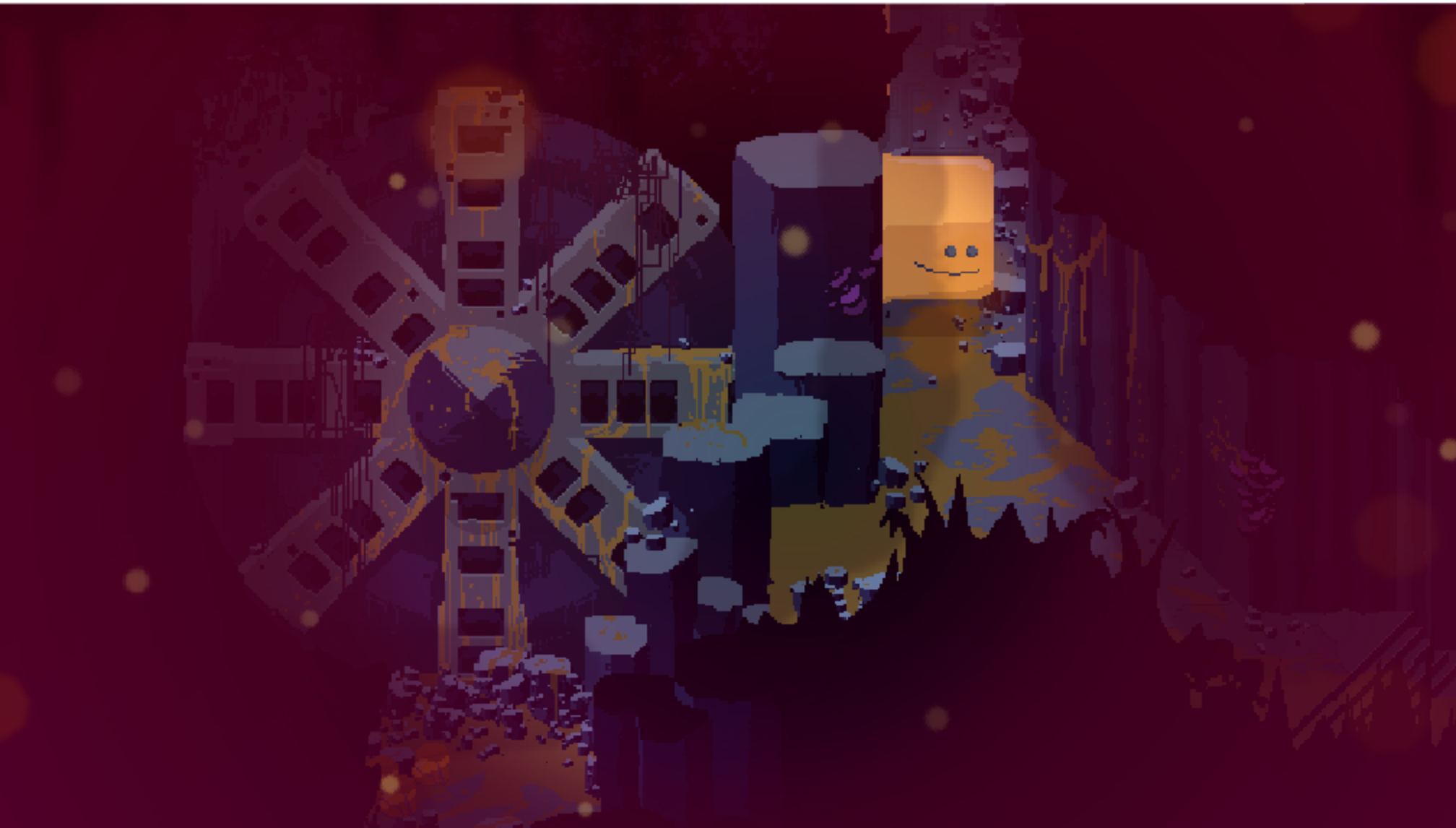
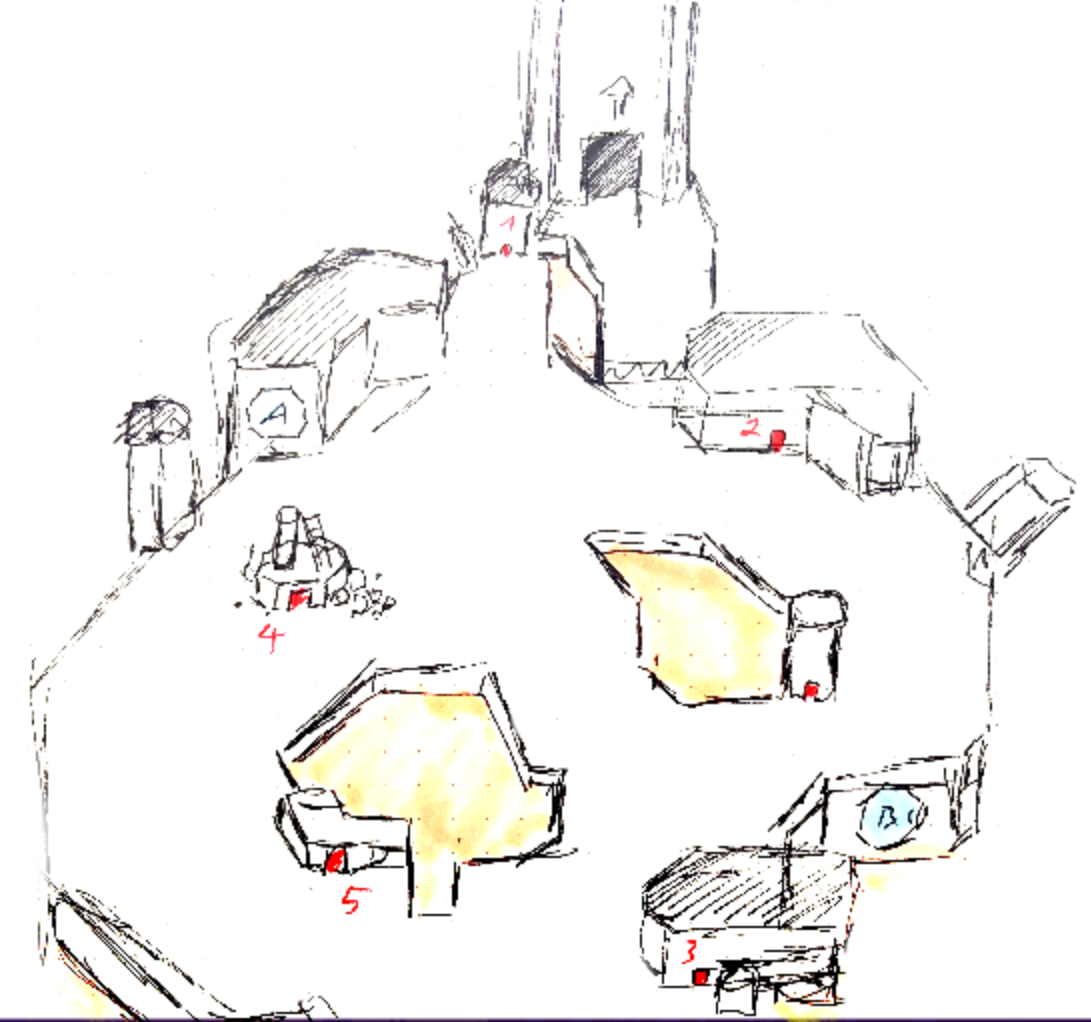


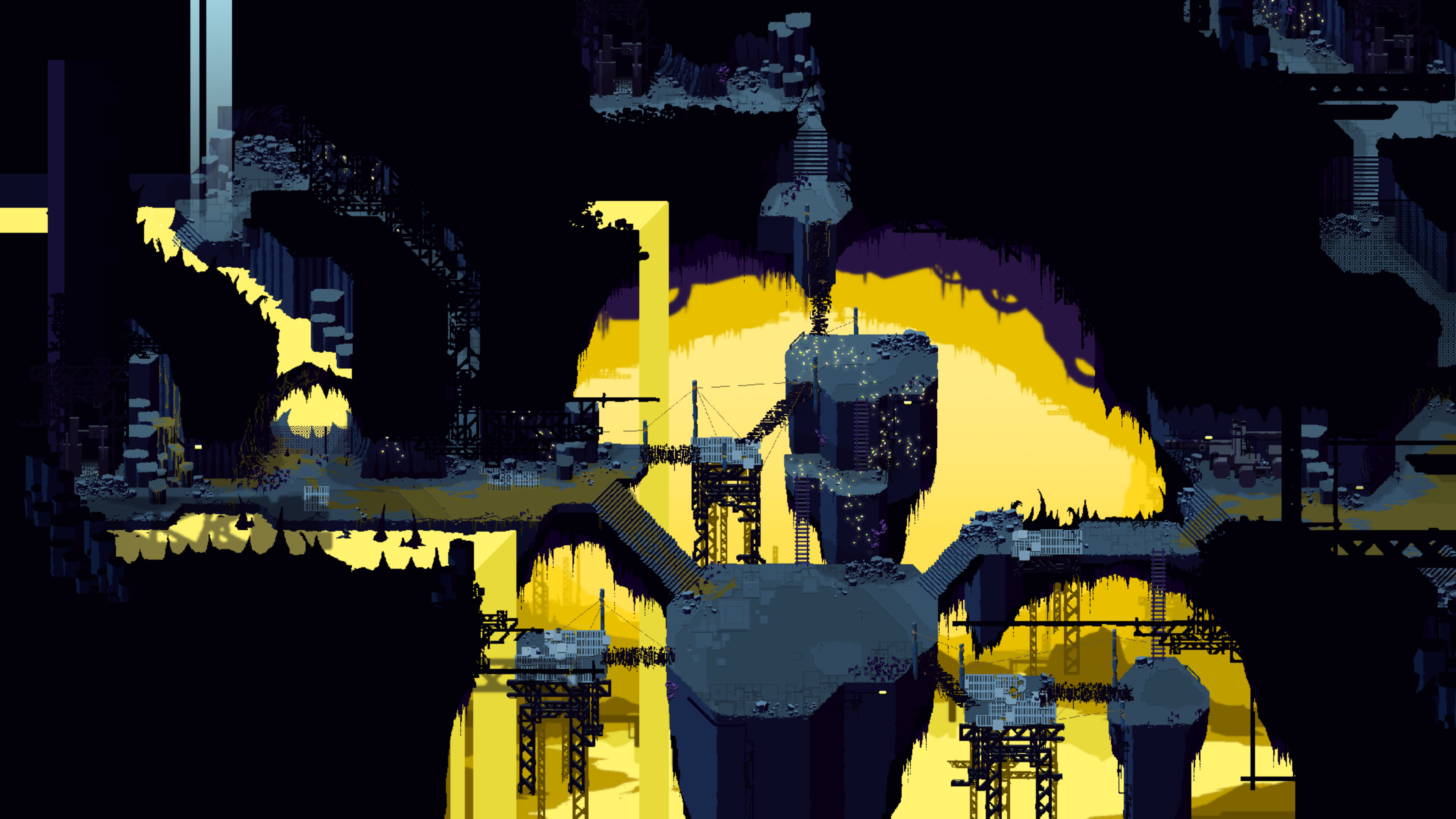
Mechanical Mines

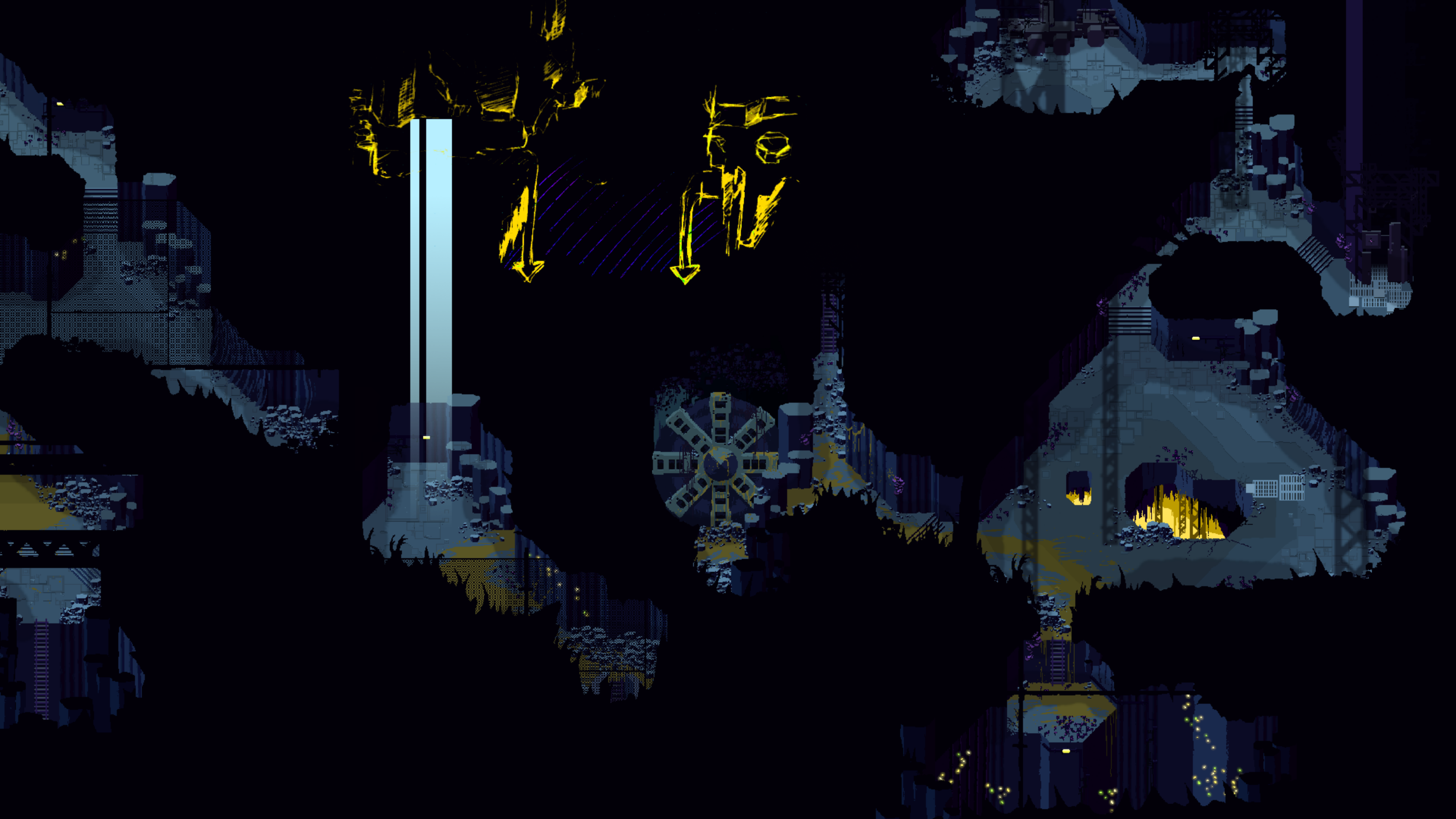
In the depth of the Mechanical Mines, the Infinite Empire yaws for their most precious resource: Link Fluid. Massive drills have carved deep tunnels through the earth, where slave-monks labor between corrosive rivers and sharp rocks for survival and transcendence.

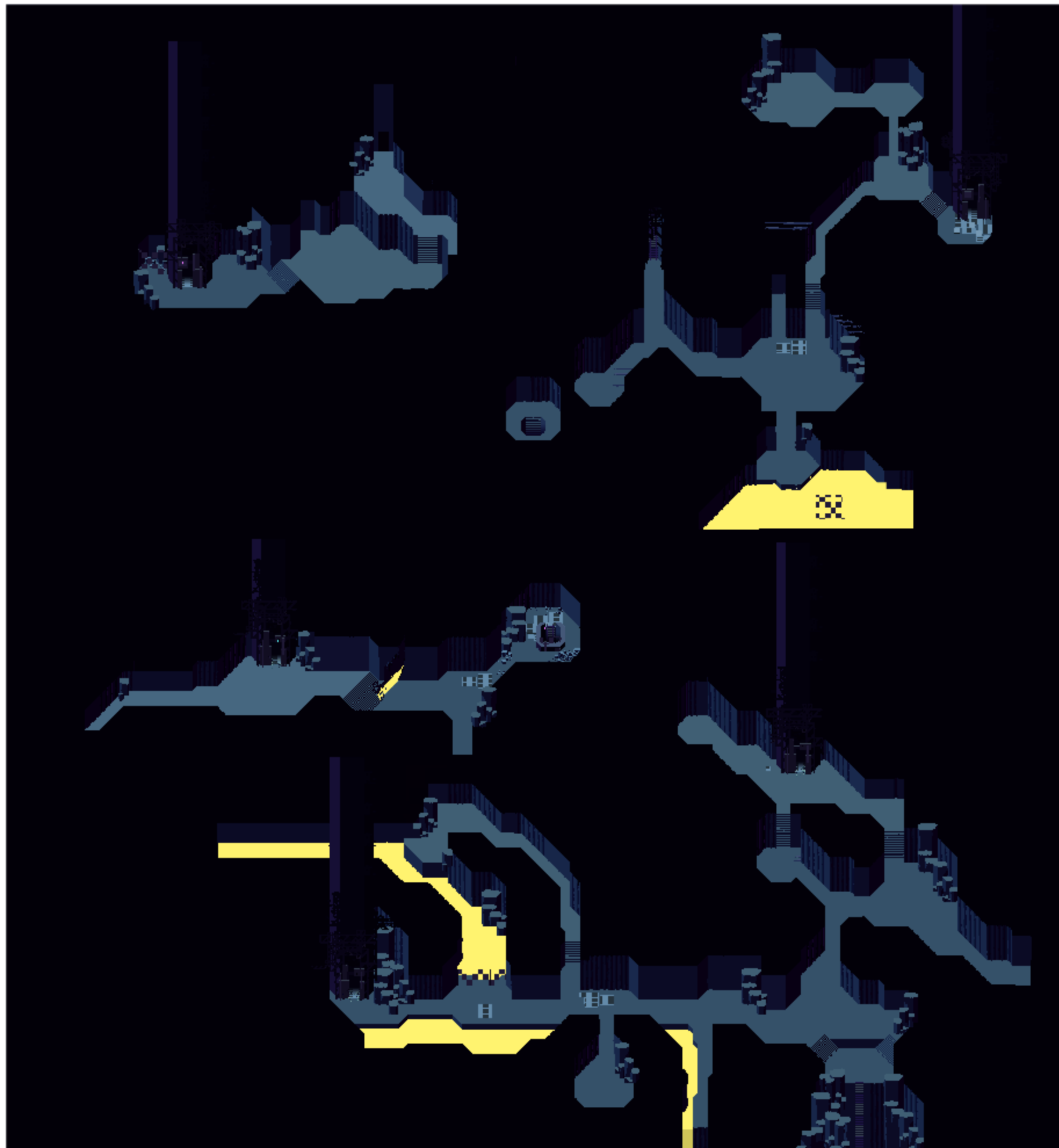
As soon as we leave the collapsed elevator, we learn that the lower levels have been flooded. To get there, three pumps need to be activated, taking Valor full circle through the blackness.

These dark corridors are Resolutiion's horror level, filled with moving shadows, children's screams, and happy mutants. One of the last levels we finished, it really came to life with the addition of the black spikes and the toxic yellow vignette.



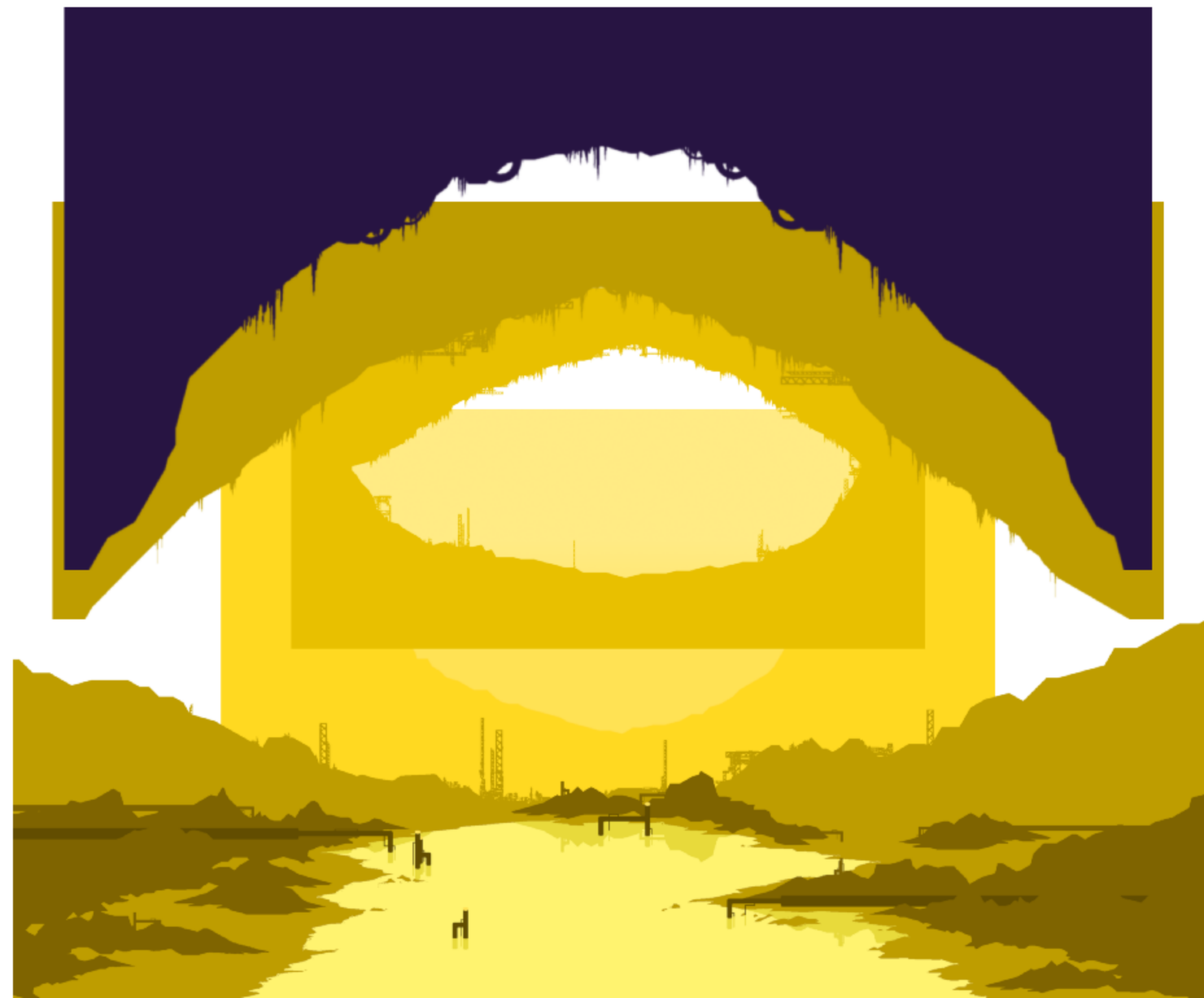






The Yellow Lake

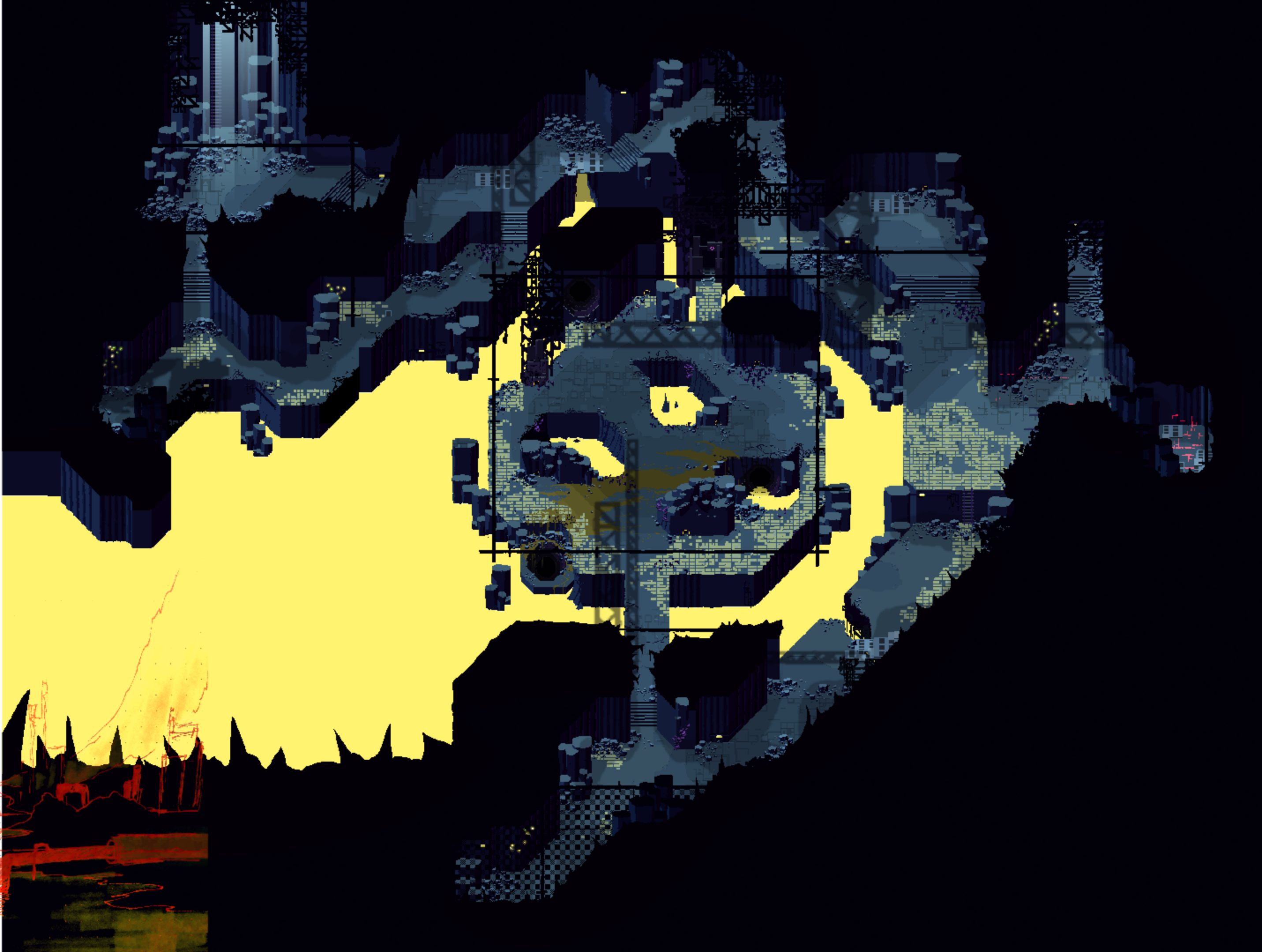
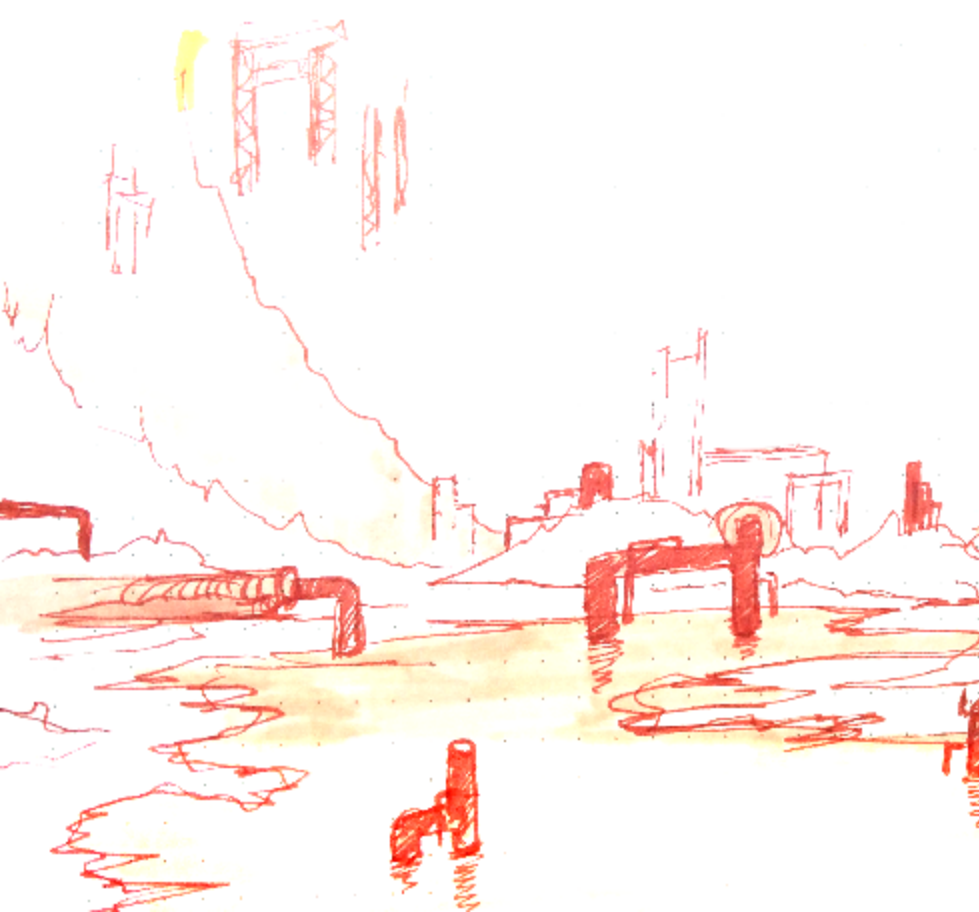
Earlier versions of the mines were almost similar in size, but exploring them from top to bottom felt flat and purposeless. This changed dramatically as soon as we opened up the backgrounds, and added the radiating Link Fluid lake. The main path now leads around the lake, always adding a sense of scale and orientation





Link Fluid

The transhumanists of the early 21st century dreamed of infinite potential, but technology hadn't progressed satisfactorily. Artificial limbs and sensors were clumsy and rejection rates high. This changed with the discovery of Link-Fluid: a yellow, viscous substance with a strong, mutagenic effect on living matter. With proper refining, its effects enabled controlled regeneration, leading to the Cybernetic Renaissance.

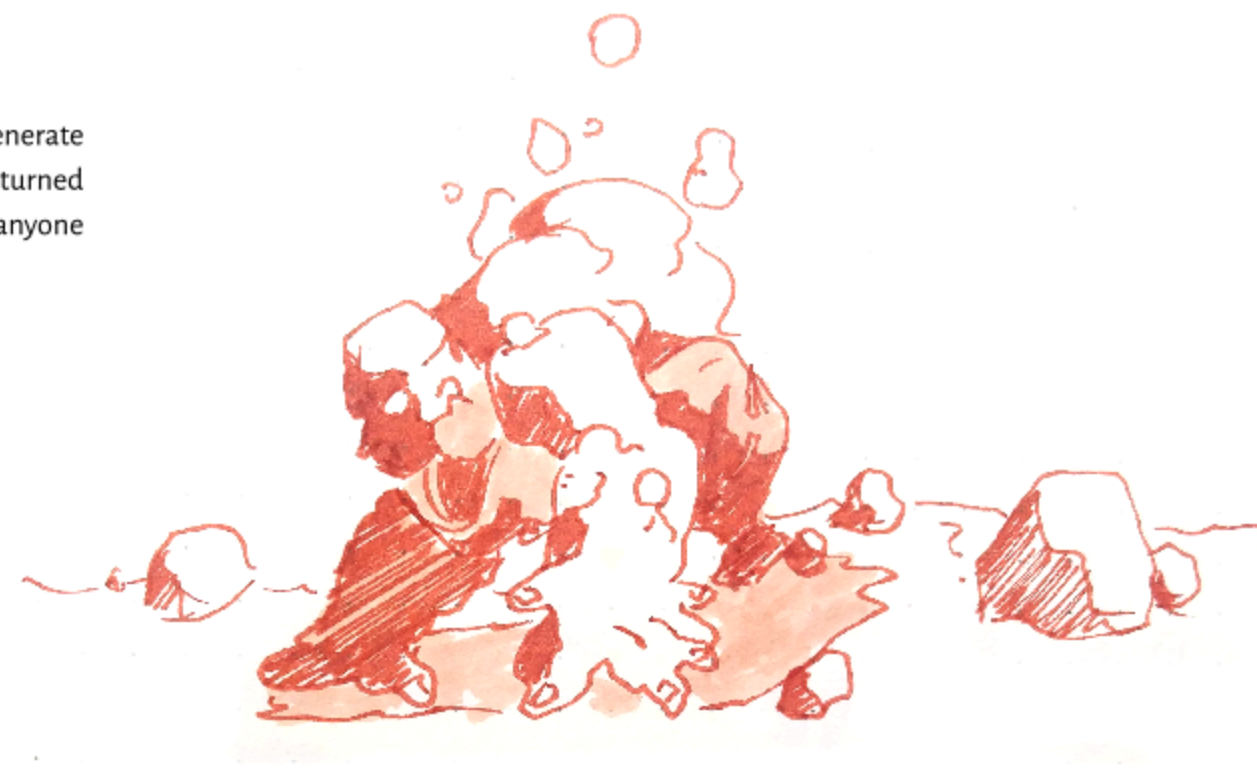
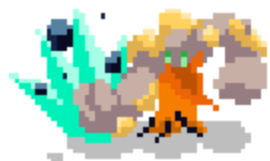




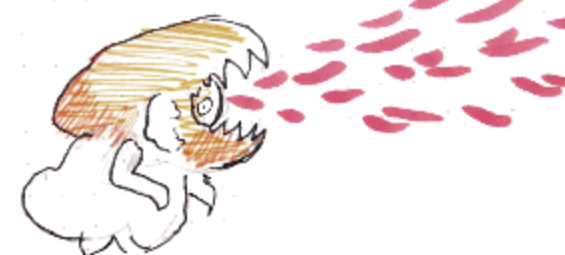
Mutated Monks

After the accident and the flooding of the lower levels, the Monks exposed to the yellow mutagen turned mad and transformed: their flesh and bones twisted and morphed into shields, claws, and spikes.

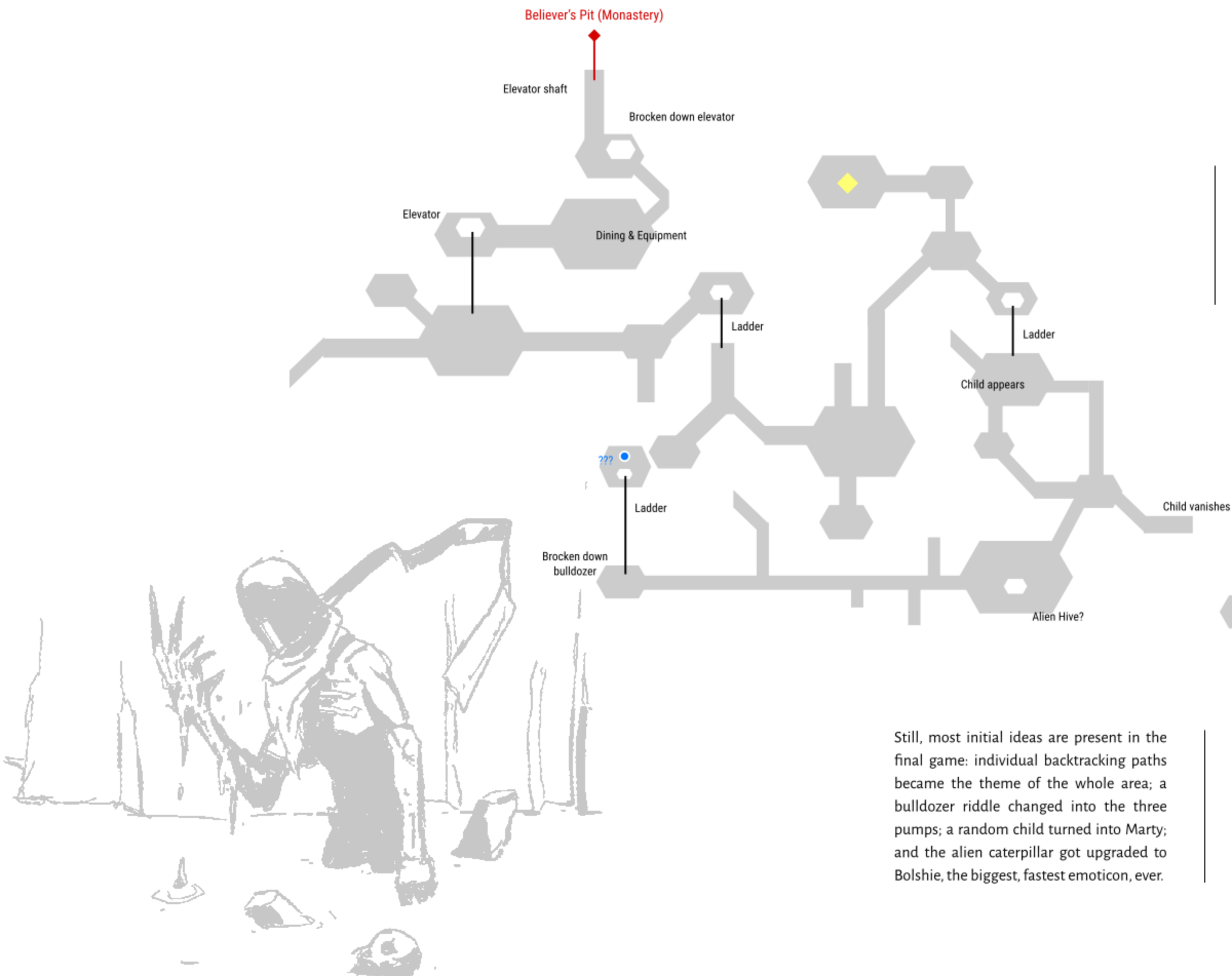
Slinger Monks flail around their degenerate arms in a frenzy, while the Mortars have turned into immobile brutes, hurling debris at anyone entering their suffocating cave.



We sketched and prototyped multiple further stages of mutation for the monks, but eventually scrapped them: introducing too many new enemy types in the narrow shafts was tedious and felt like we were just adding cannon-fodder.

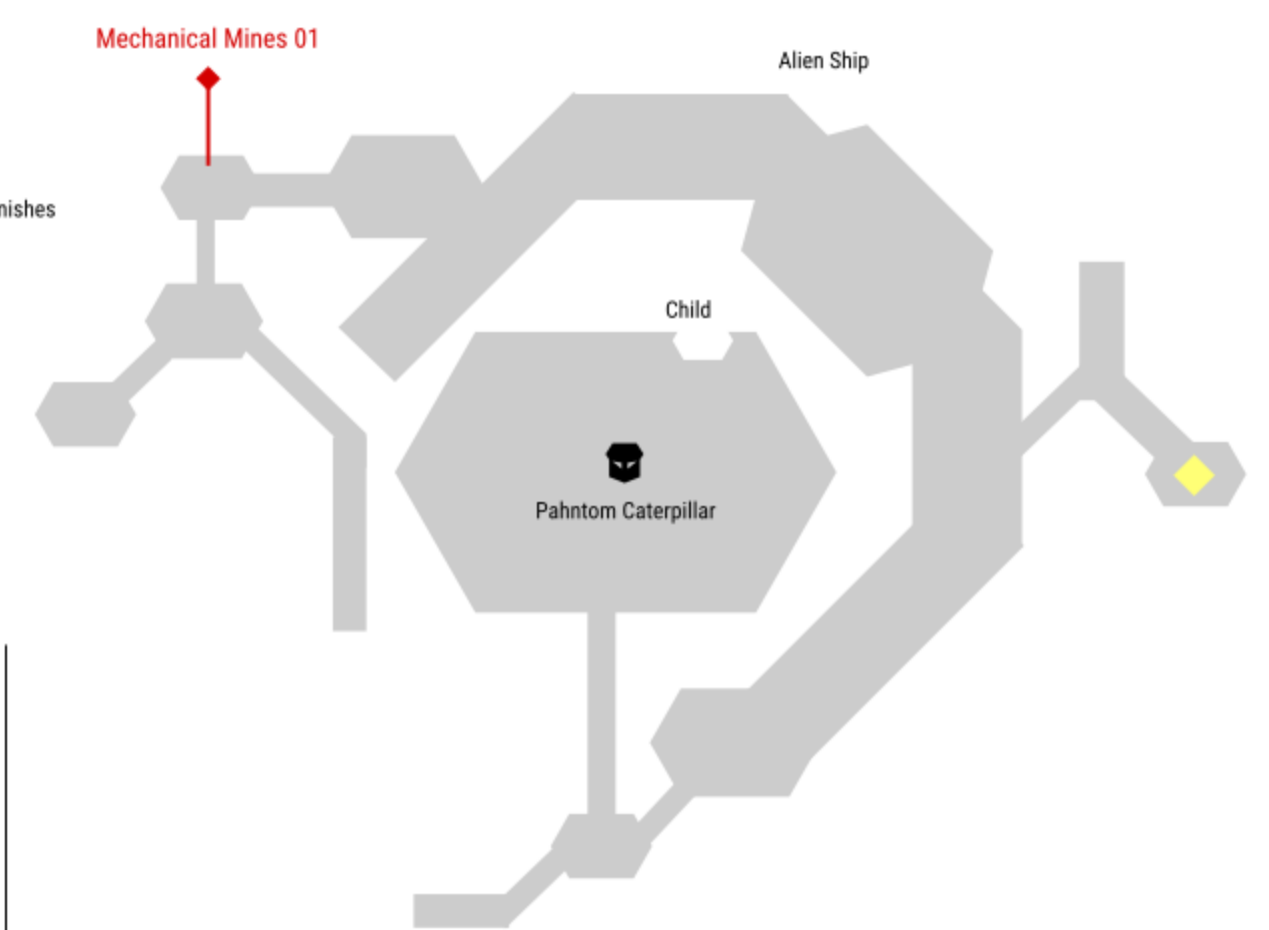






Original Map Concept

As with the majority of levels, the Mechanical Mines started as just a few connected pathways with random ideas sprinkled in. As we revisited each level over and over, the maps grew bigger, the assets more detailed and the interactions more clearly connected.



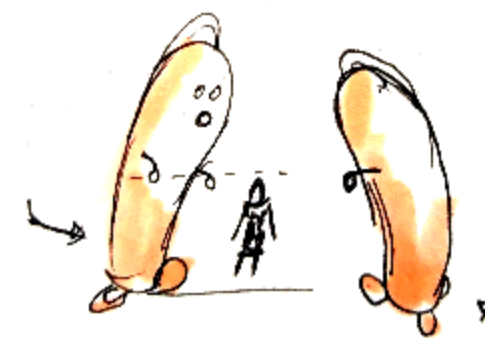
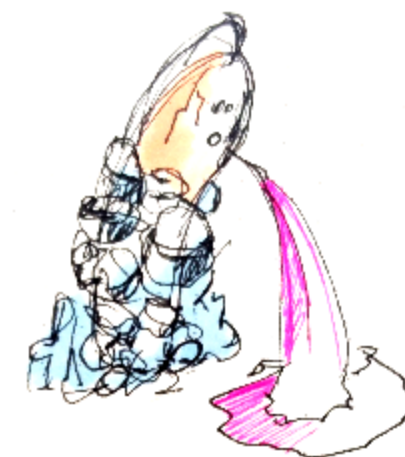
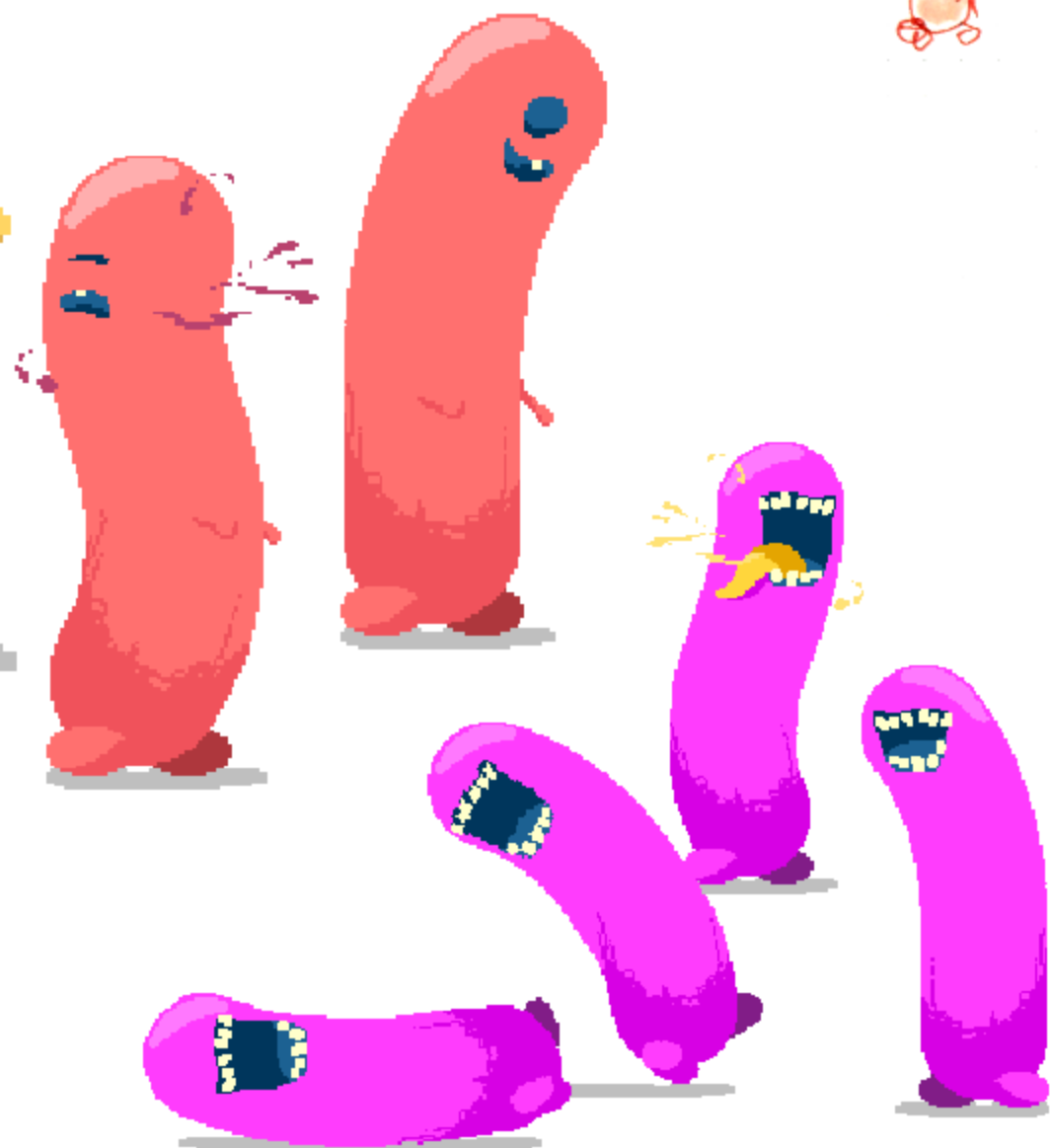
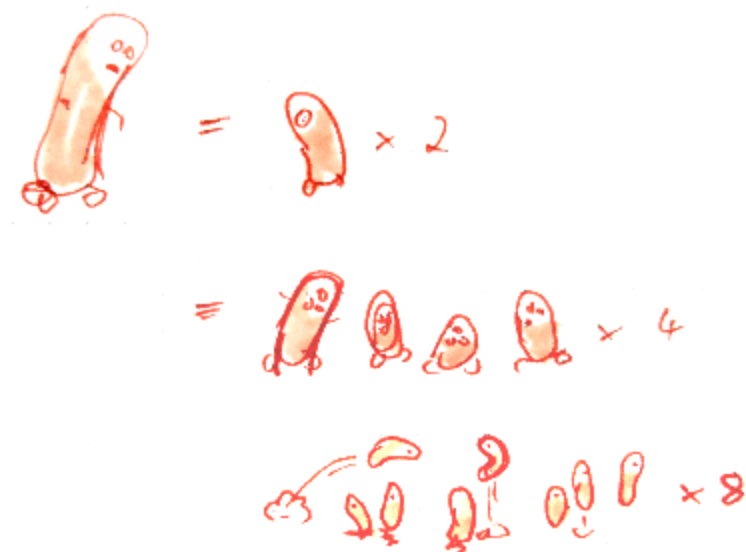
Still, most initial ideas are present in the final game: individual backtracking paths became the theme of the whole area; a bulldozer riddle changed into the three pumps; a random child turned into Marty; and the alien caterpillar got upgraded to Bolshie, the biggest, fastest emoticon, ever.



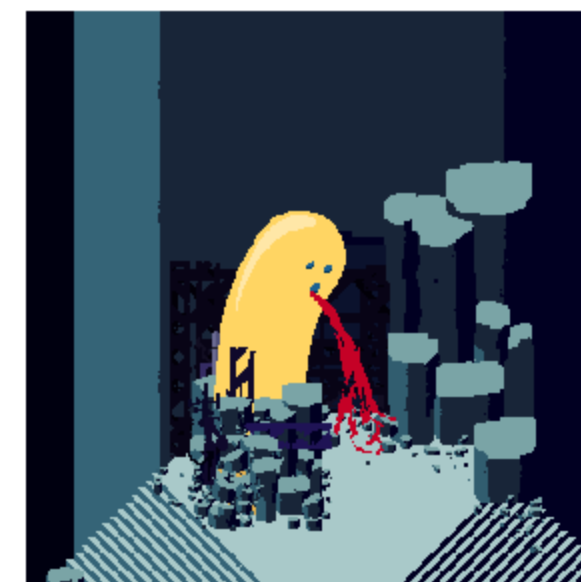
Mr. P

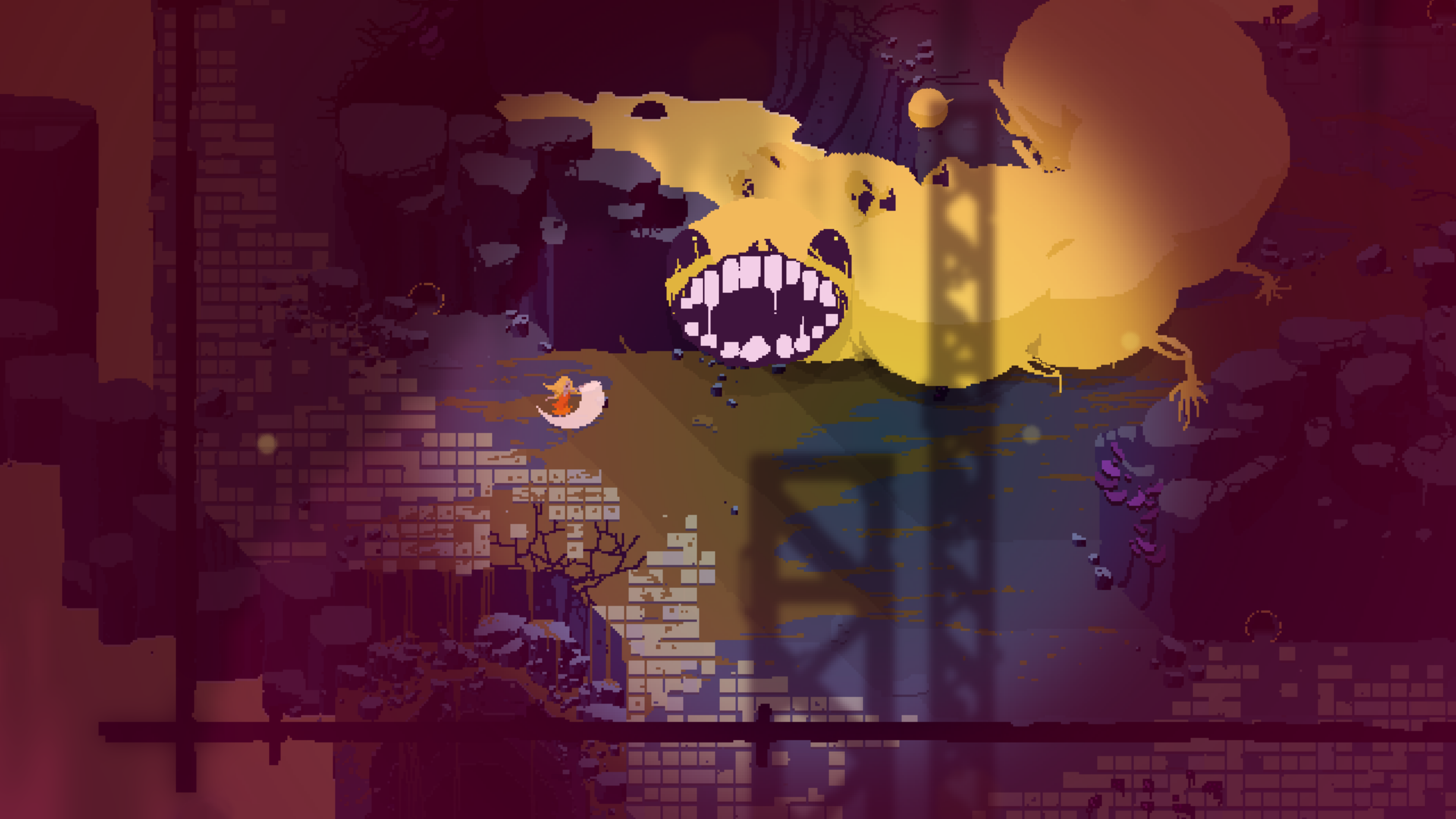
Is it a sausage? Or a strange balloon with feet and T-Rex arms? Well, whatever you see in this mini-boss, Mr. P earned the title of "Weirdest Resolution Character (except God)". In classic video-game-gimmick style, the creature splits into smaller versions of himself, each dancing to a faster disco-beat.

While the character seems simple in design, it took us a lot of exploration and... let's say "banana"... sketches to link his frames into proper animations.



The earliest concept set Mr. P as a normal enemy, captured in a pile of rocks and metal, spitting acid at the passing player. Boring, right?







Marty

Bosstime: Marty carries the first main memory, and you need to defeat her to access it. Strangely, Valor's childhood friend has not grown up, rather she has turned into his most ardent enemy. Why is she roaming the dangerous mines, and where did she lose her second boot?



The Phantom Crawler; Caterpillar of Fear; Mutant Smiley: it's not clear why Bolshie is protecting Marty, but their fates are somehow intertwined. The yellow worm will chase Valor around the battlefield, while the augmented super-soldier tries to catch the hysteric girl.

"Trying to retreat further away from the main shafts, the bugs, worms, and roaches have become my friends. They are good listeners."

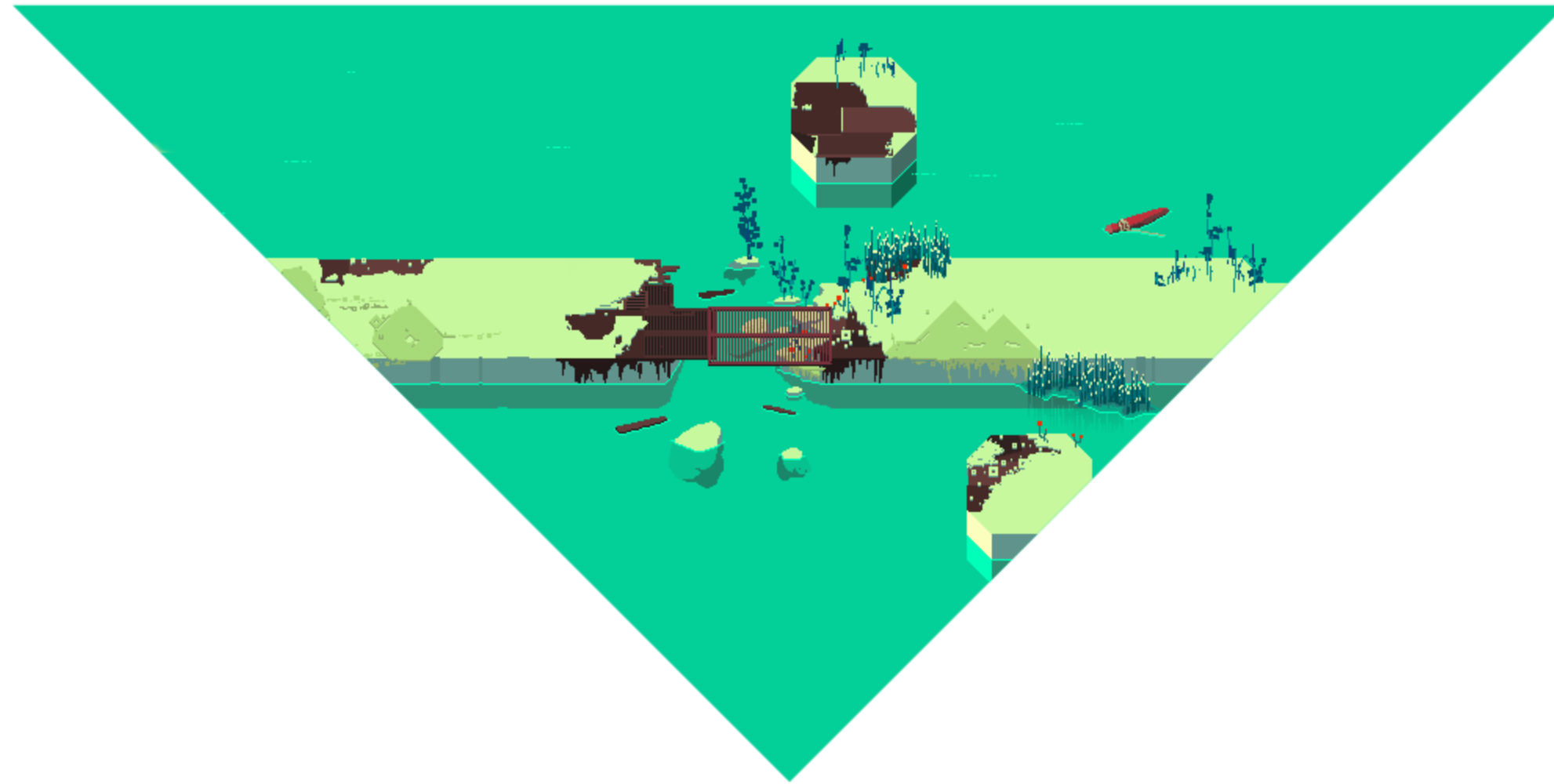
—Marty

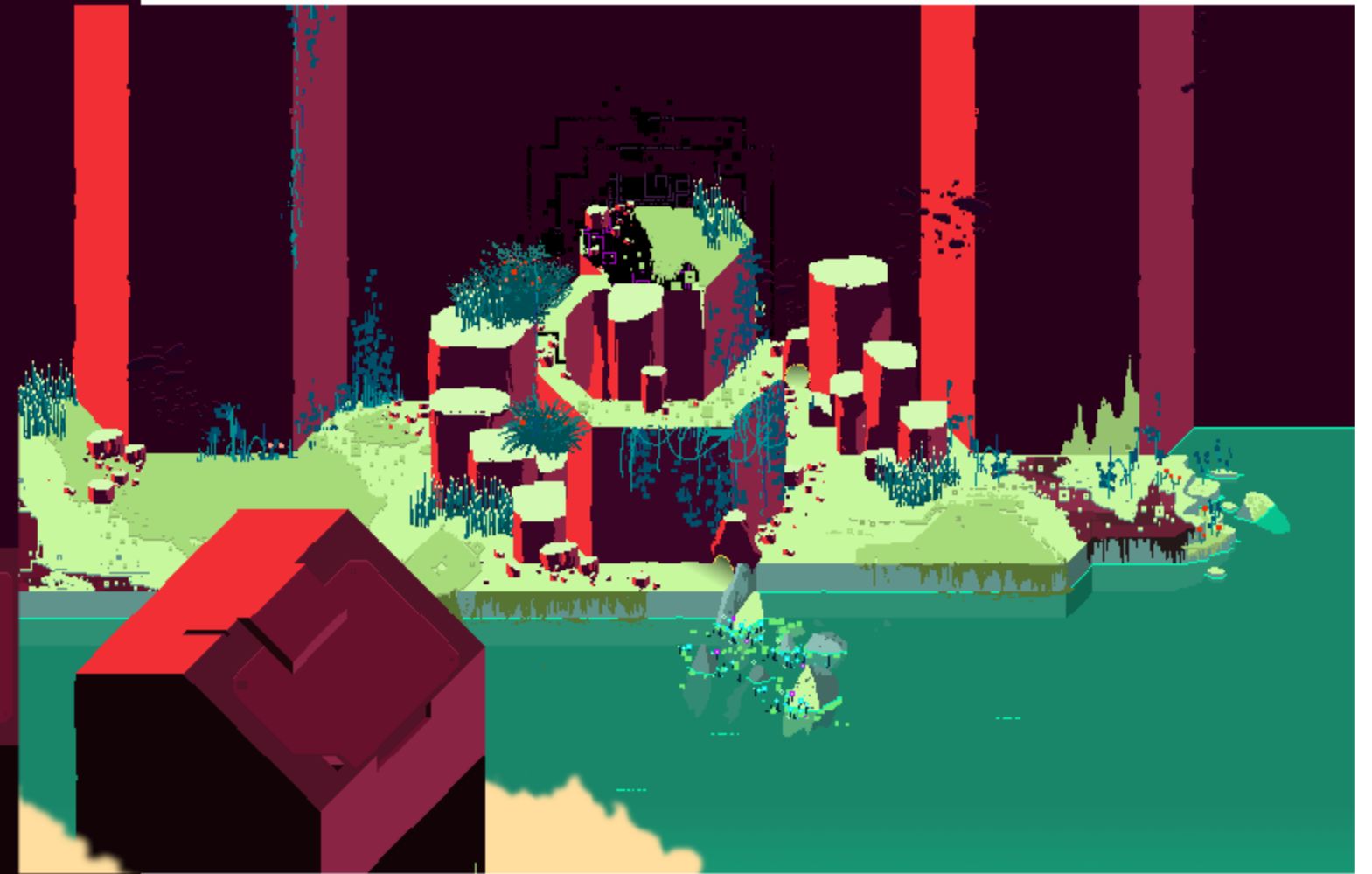
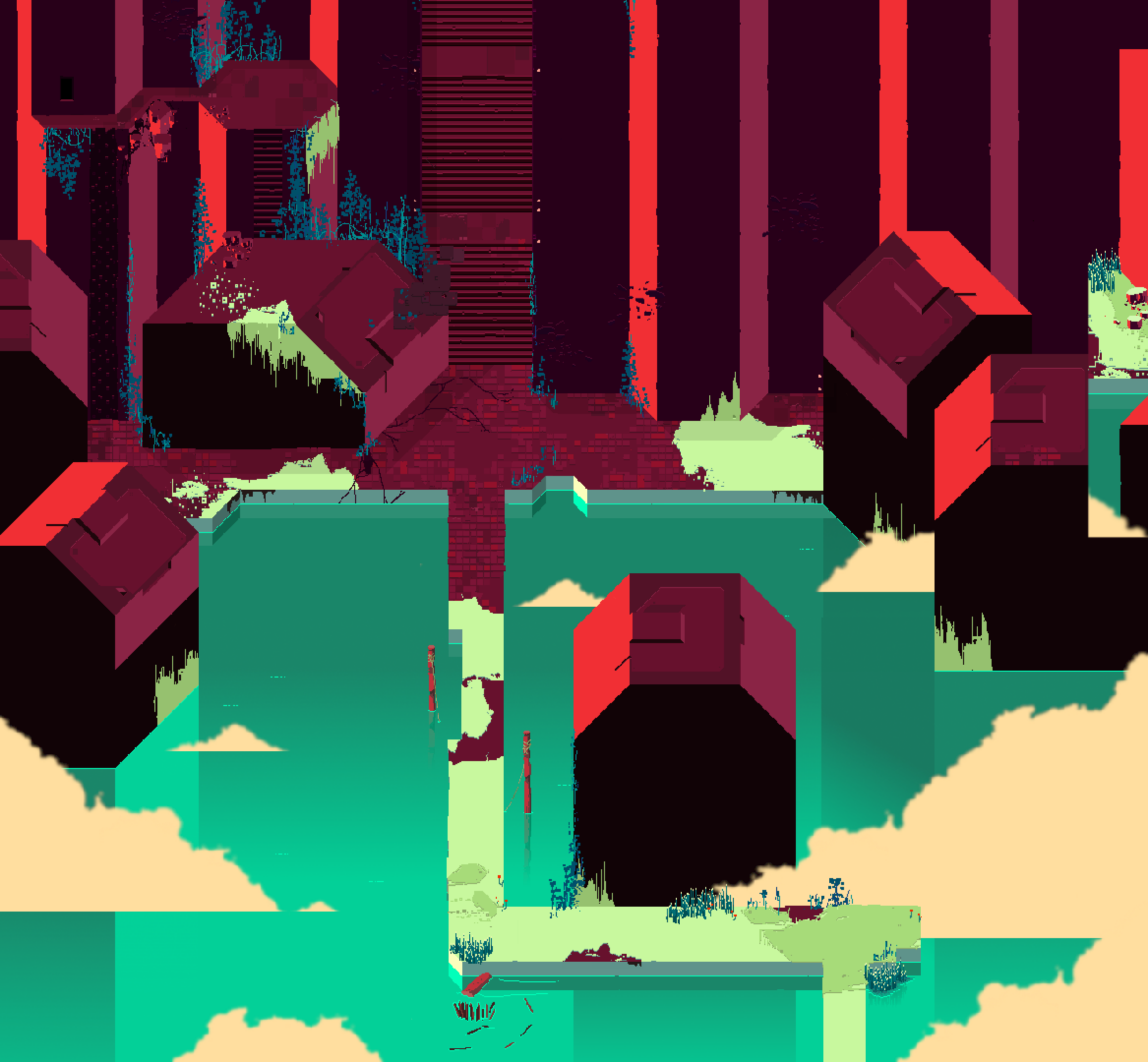




I have been dead for a long time.
It's you.
You have to let go, now.
-Marty

Divided Sea



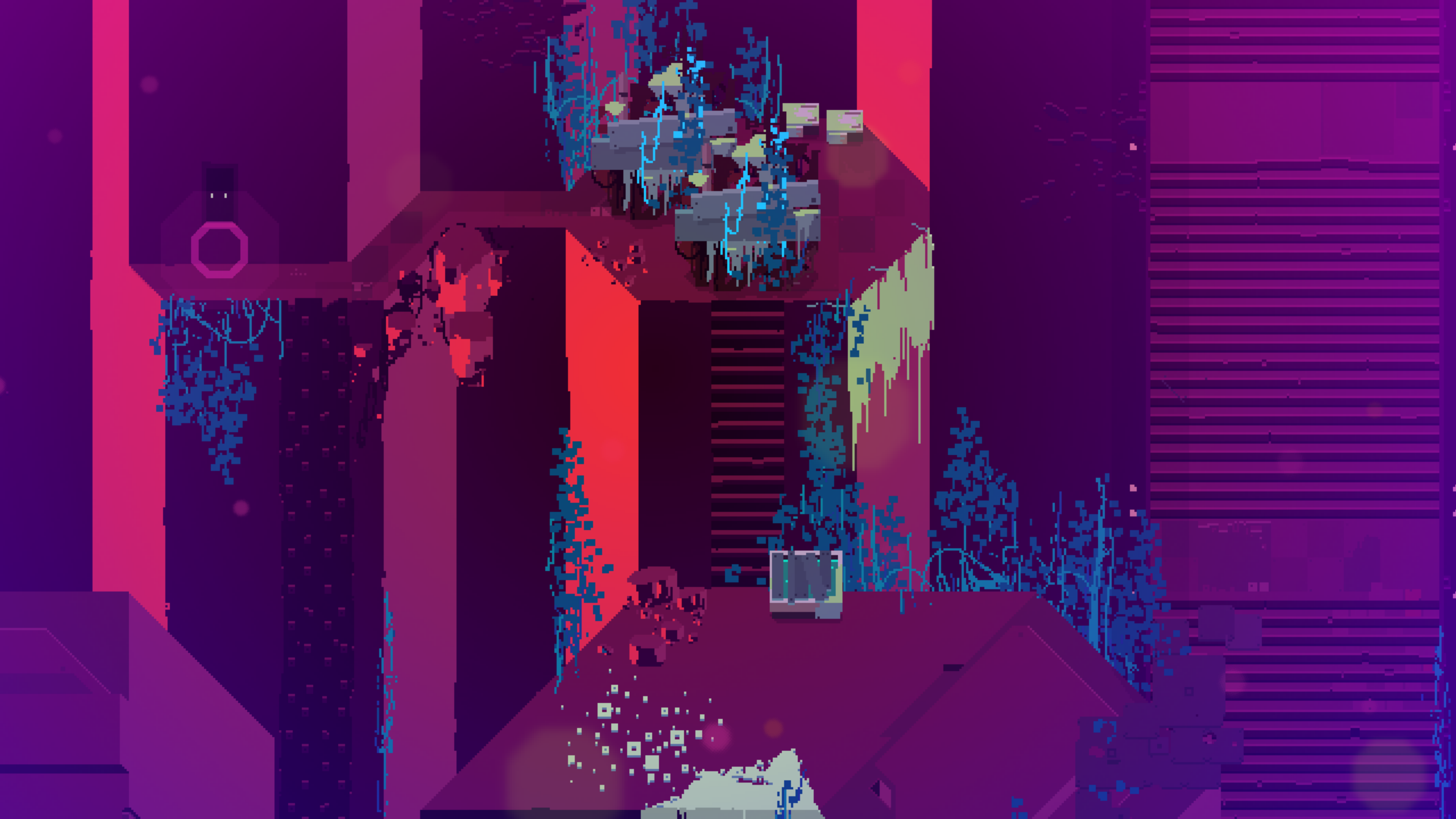


The Dam

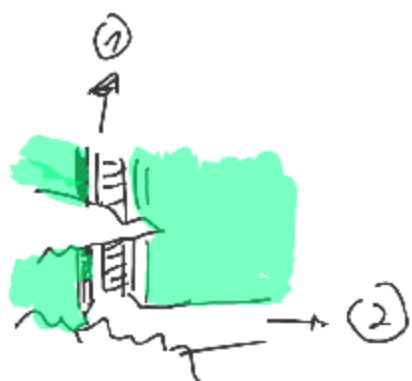
Welcome to the Divi... no, not yet: before we can take a stroll above the sparkling water, we need to pass the Dam. Here, War of the Five forces have dropped concrete segments from above, flooding the cities on one side of the continent and creating a desert on the other — a beautiful apocalypse.

“Warfare on a global scale knew no boundaries. As long as nobody pushed the red button, every destructive force to harm population, infrastructure and economy would be unleashed. Military Anarchy.”

—Safe & Sound Crew



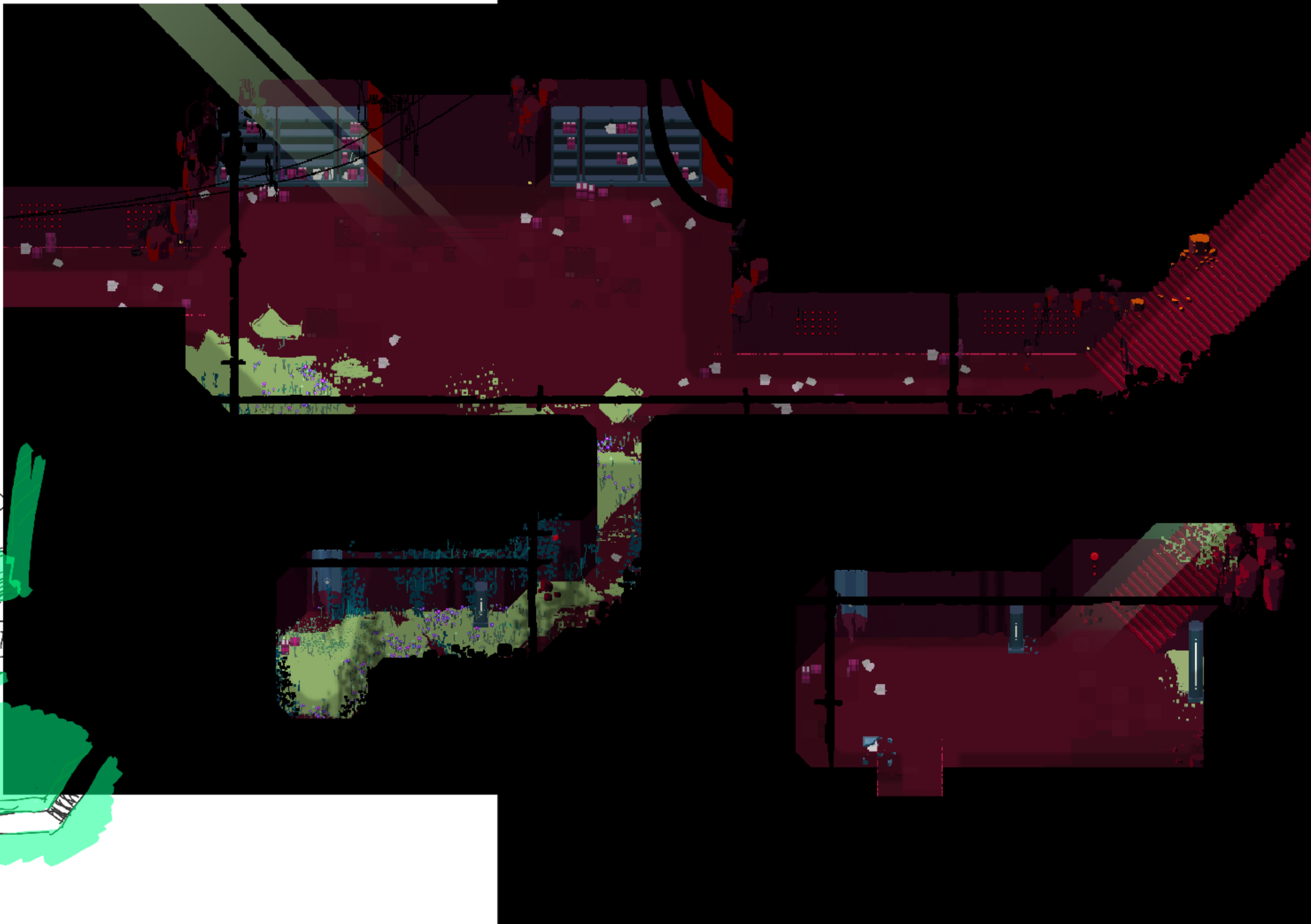
Door



Door



Haven



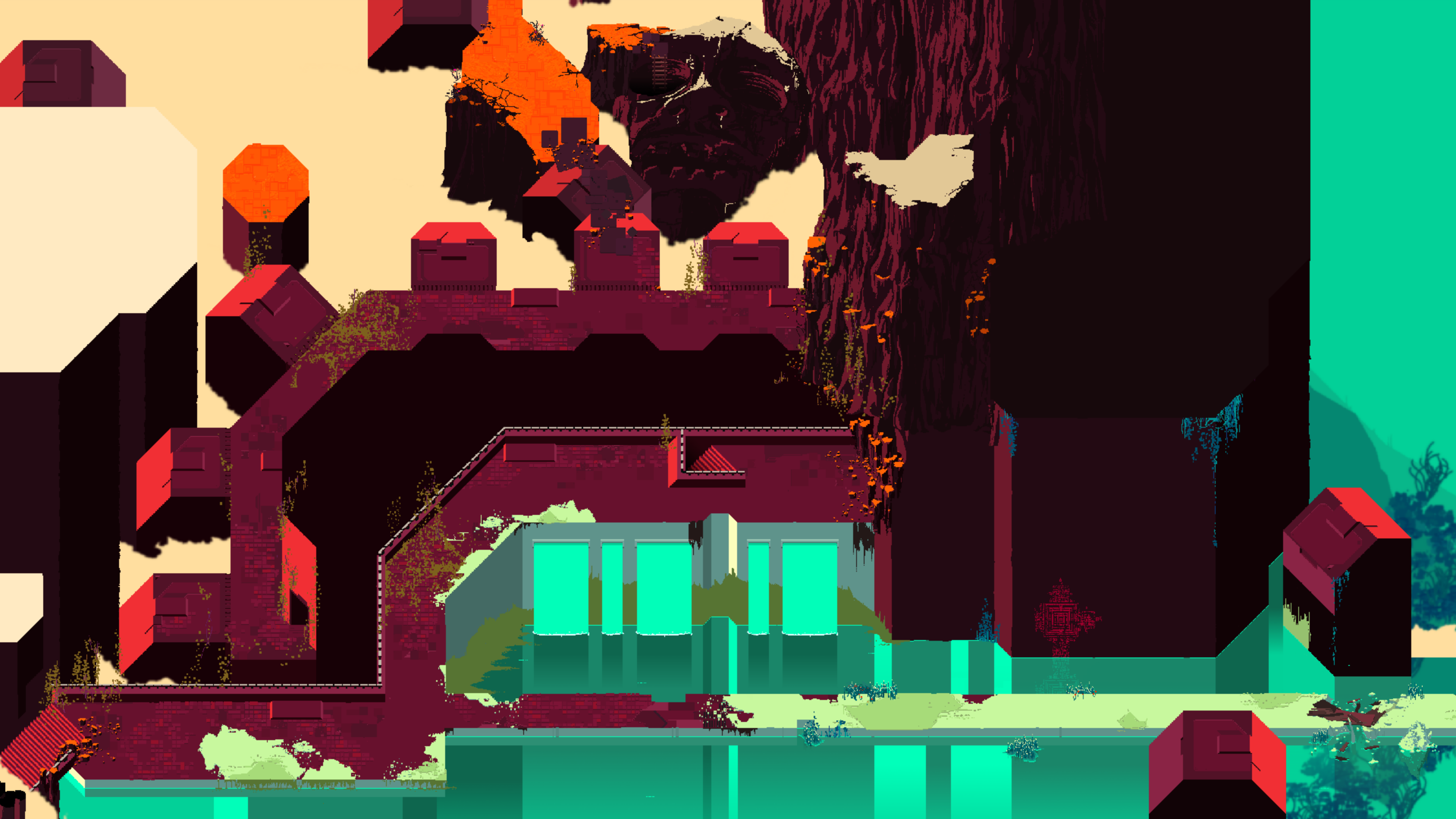


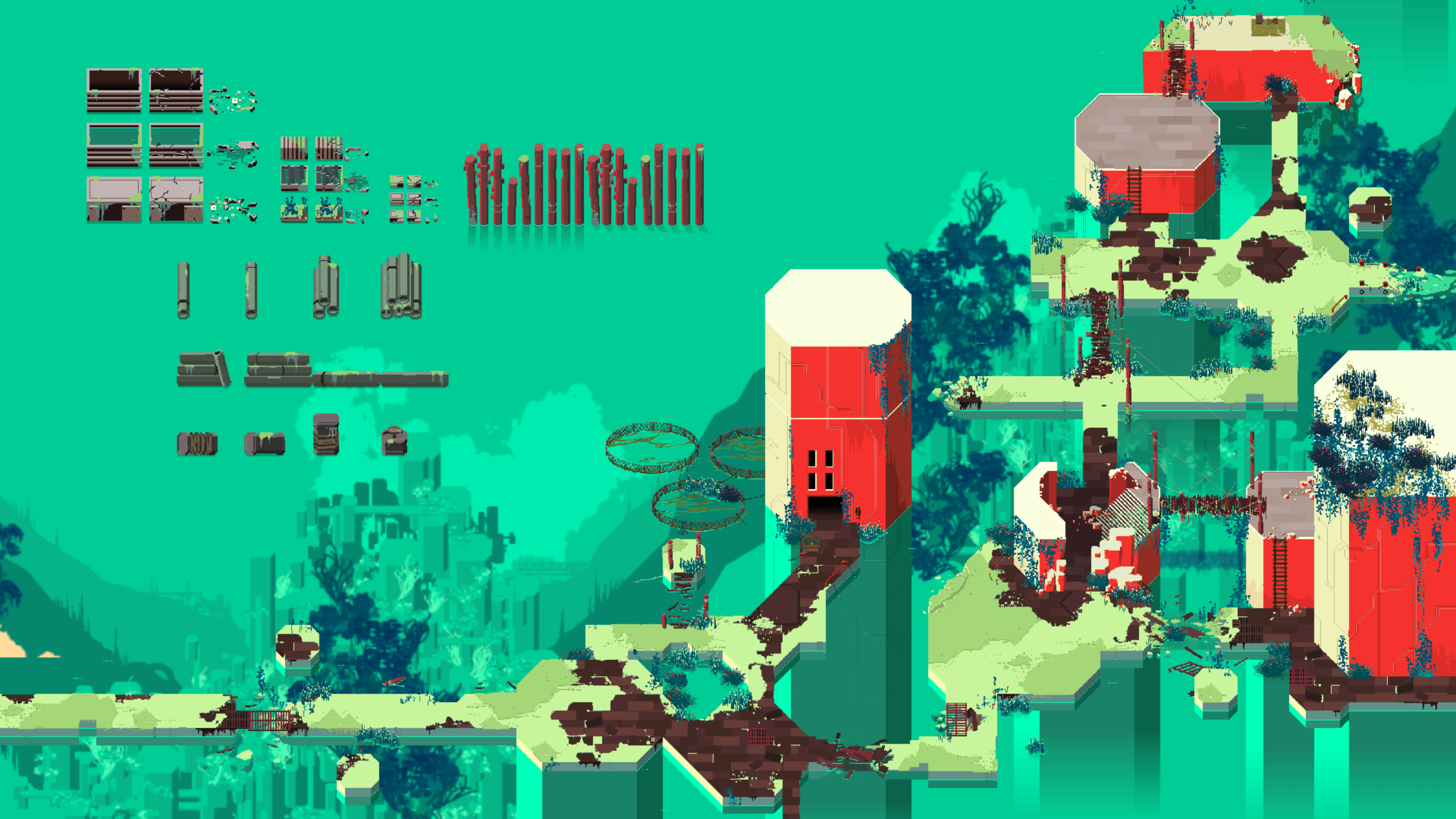
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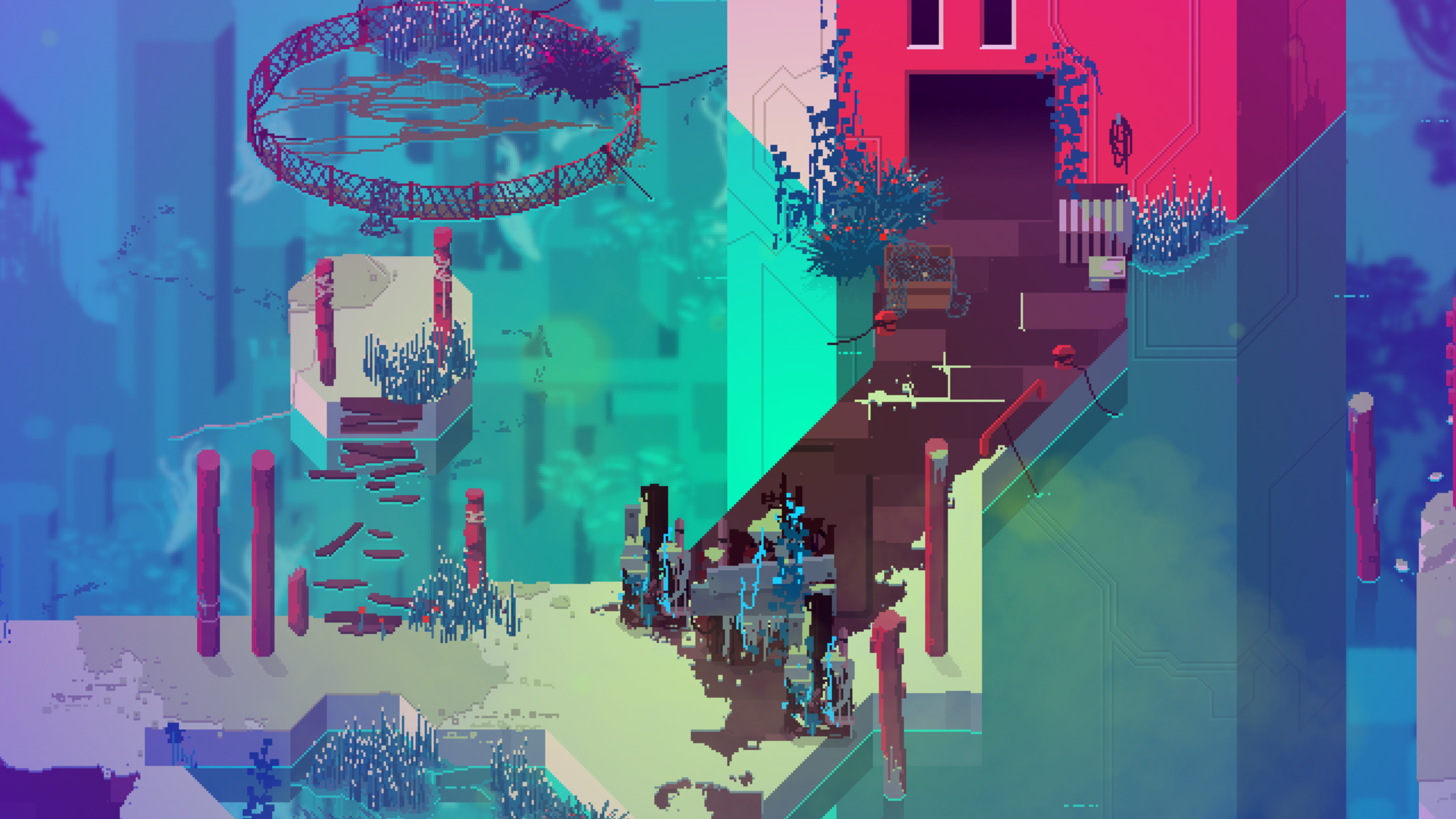
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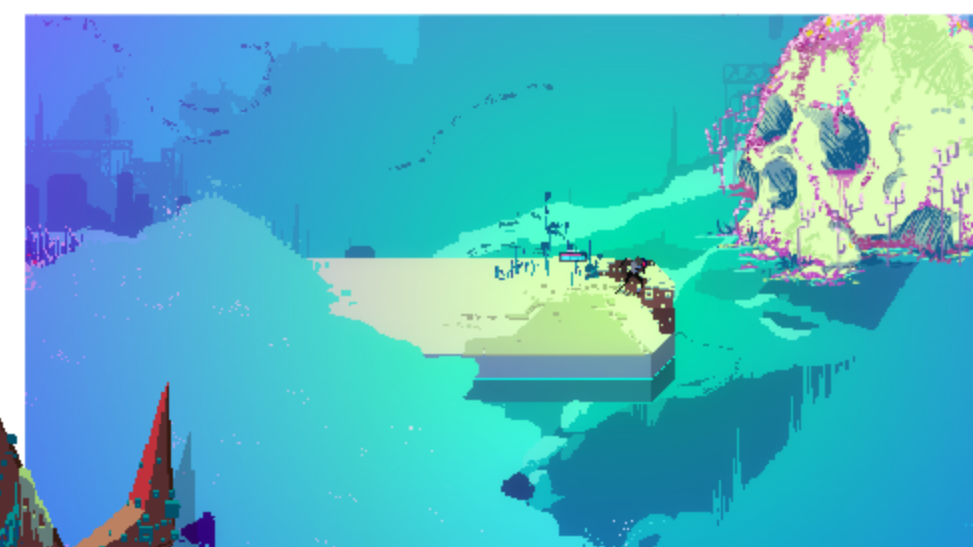
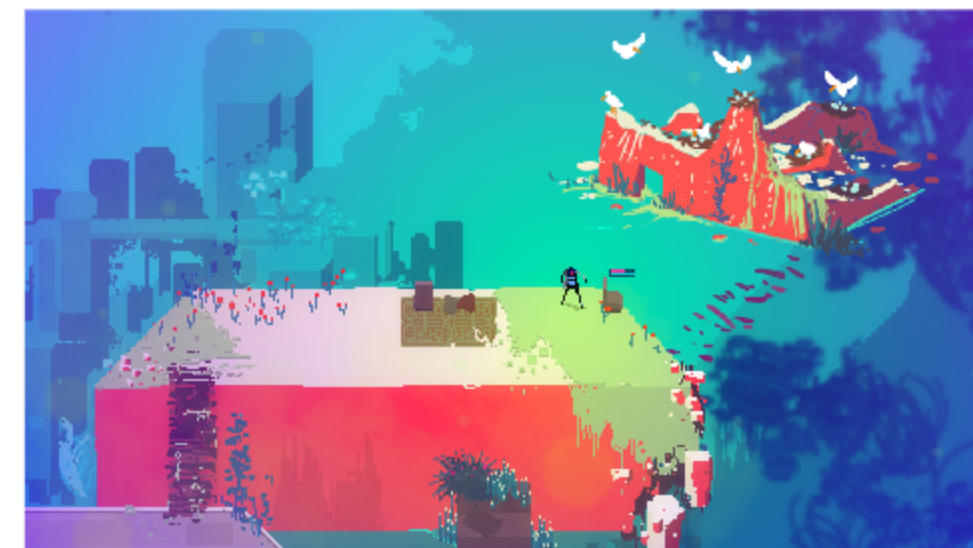
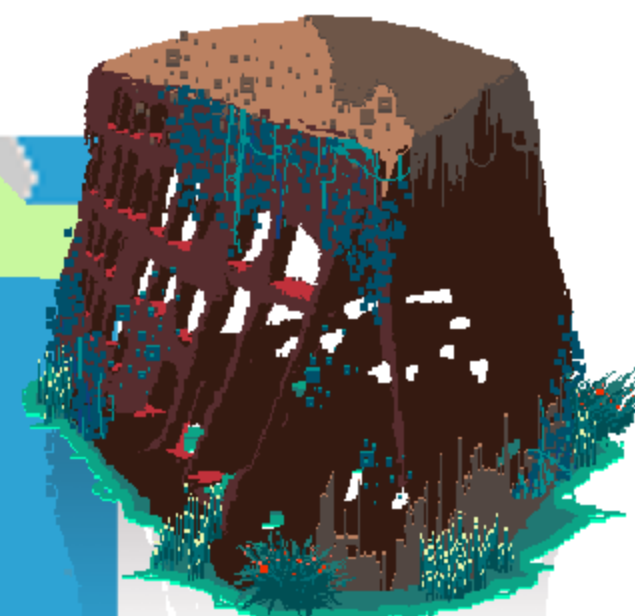
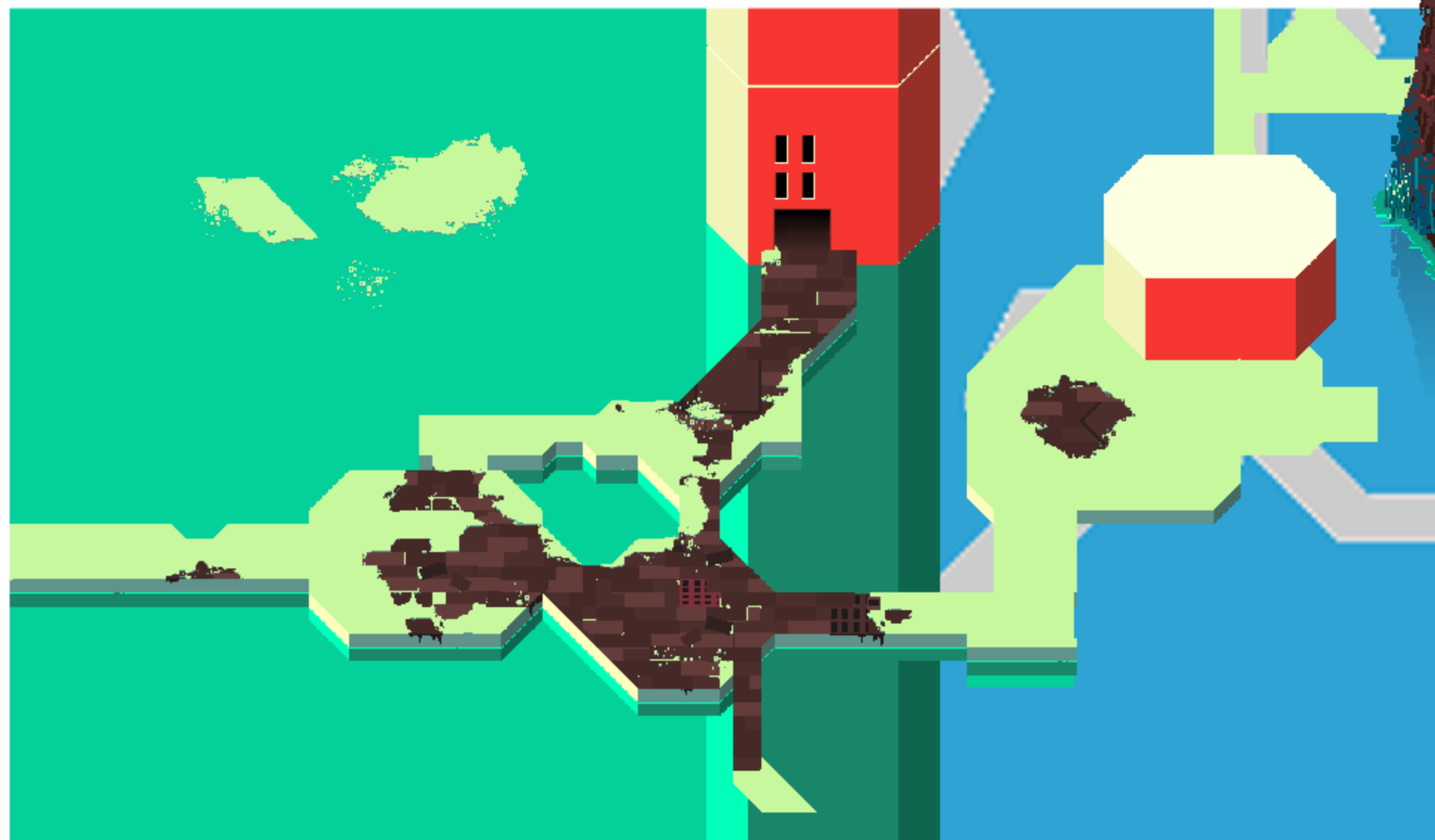
Divided Sea

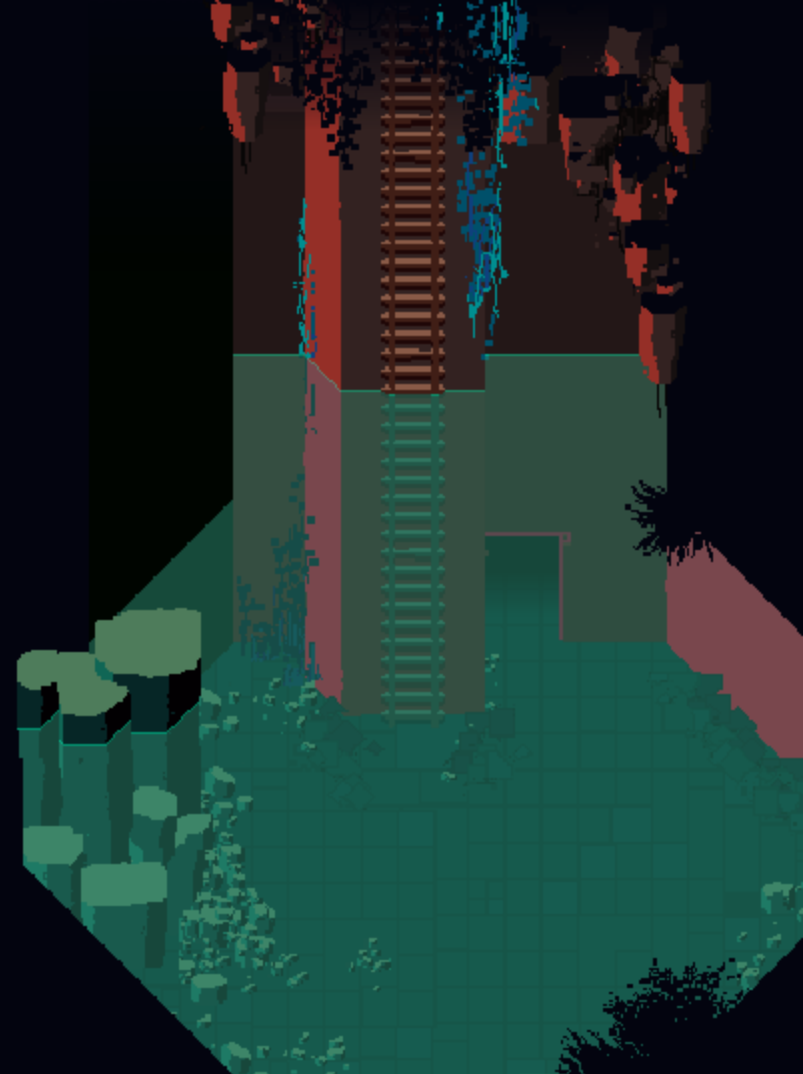
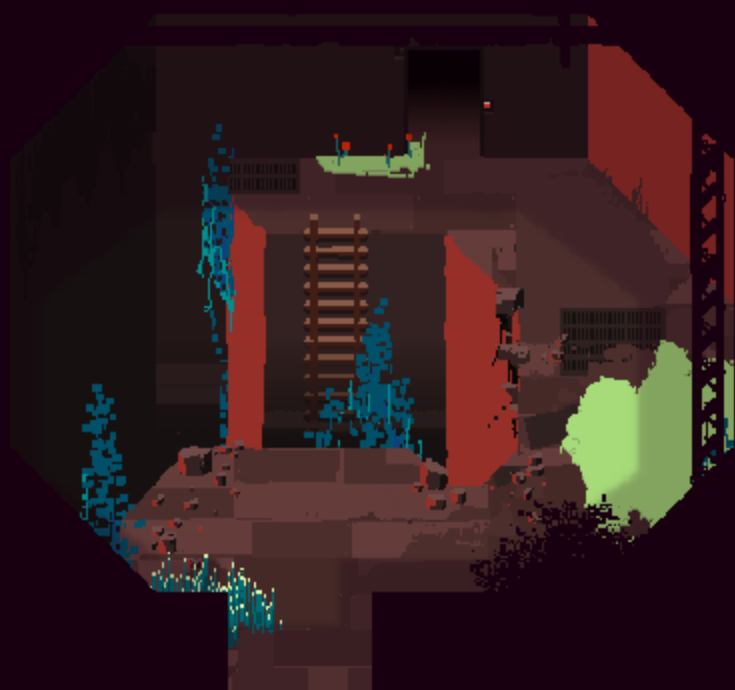
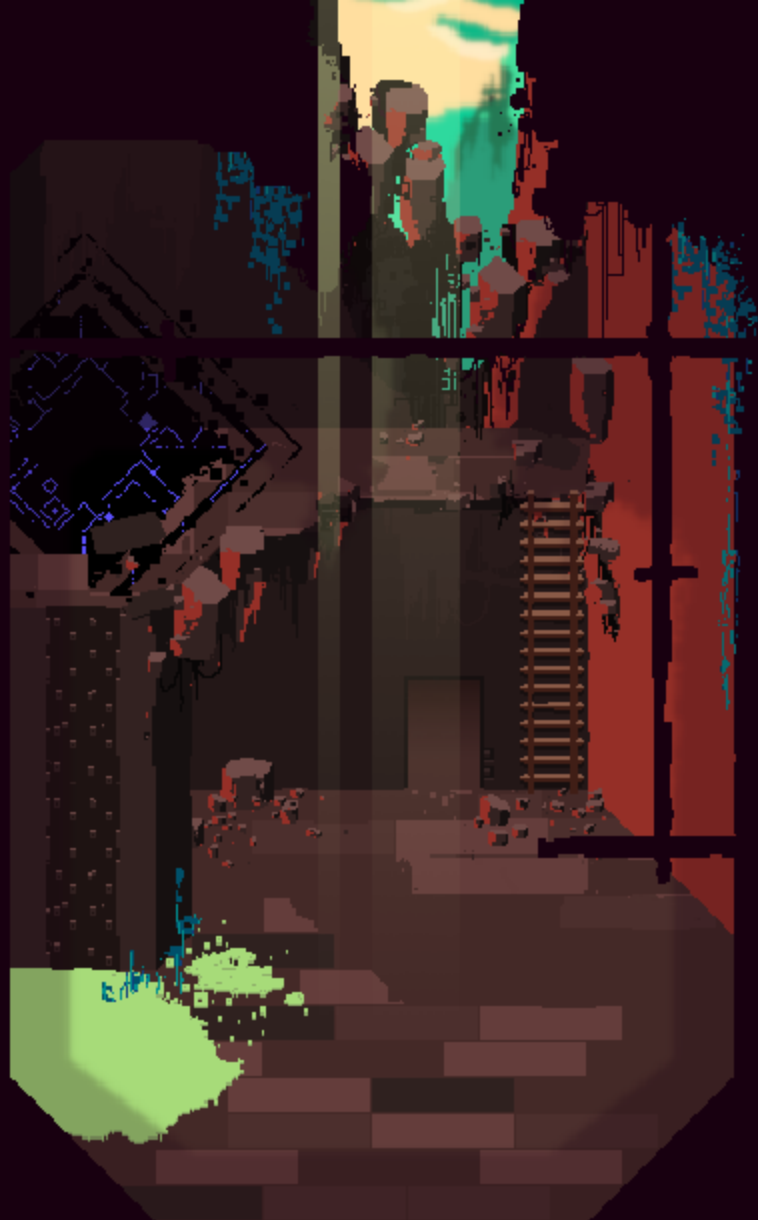
Well equipped for the journey ahead, we can finally breathe the fresh ocean air, rich with notes of rust and rotten corpses. The sun is warm up here on the path, but below we can see an entire city of death: parents and children, brothers and sisters, drowned and forgotten.

Like no other level, we wanted the Divided Sea to bring forth the subliminal theme of Resoluiion: beauty and death; good and bad; chaos and order — neither exists on its own, they must always travel hand in hand. To get this right, we had to create many objects and details, on one hand showing the destruction, on the other the emerging plants and life. Forever walking the thin path between the Yin and the Yang.

Lost Civilization

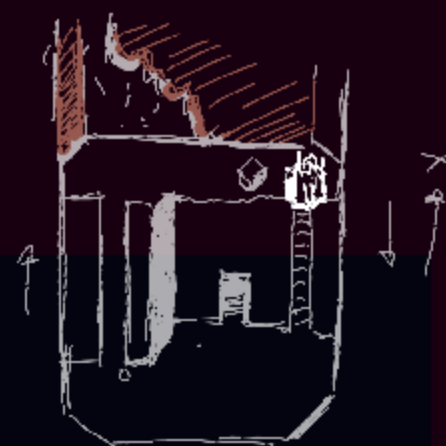
To properly illustrate the city below the surface, we wanted some of its elements to protrude from the water a little. What started with obvious ruin-tops and towers soon turned into monstrous eyeballs, skulls and more disturbing depictions of human suffering. We eventually decided against these themes to more clearly differentiate the Divided Sea from the Desert of Giants.





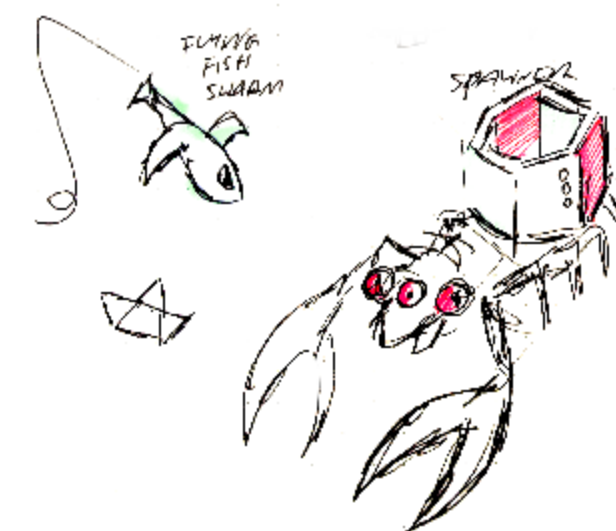
Sunken Towers

Travel between the ocean floors and drifting docks happens via flooded skyscrapers. Valor enters through sun-baked roofs and leaves as wet as it gets, somewhere deep below sea-level, greeted by algae and swarms of fish.



The Dead

The dead are roaming between the Divided Sea and the Sunken City: corpses of the past war come crawling up from the deep to drag the few who remain living into the endless dark with them.

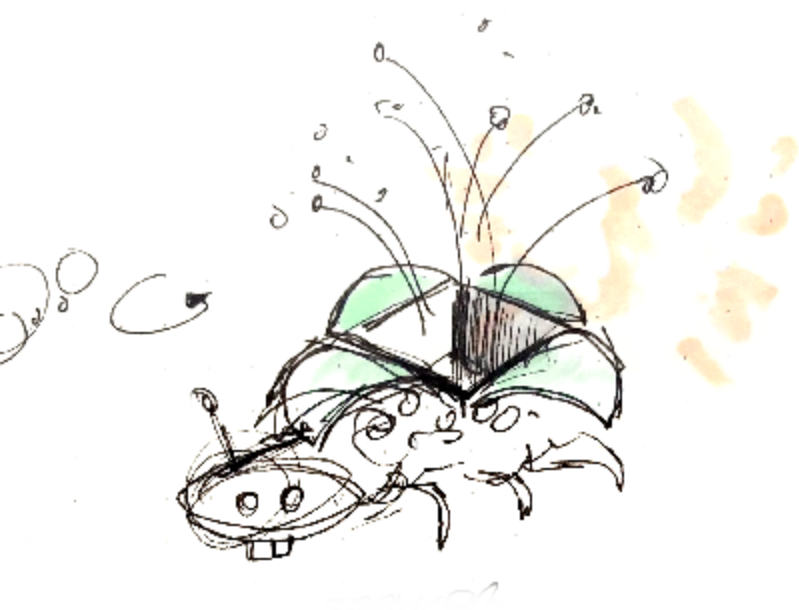


Atollers

While we explored various nautical animals, we quickly settled on the undead as a theme for Arc II's enemies. And by "undead" we mean hordes and hordes of zombies. Hacking your way through armies of lumbering, brain-hungry ghouls is just too much fun for any action video game to let slip.

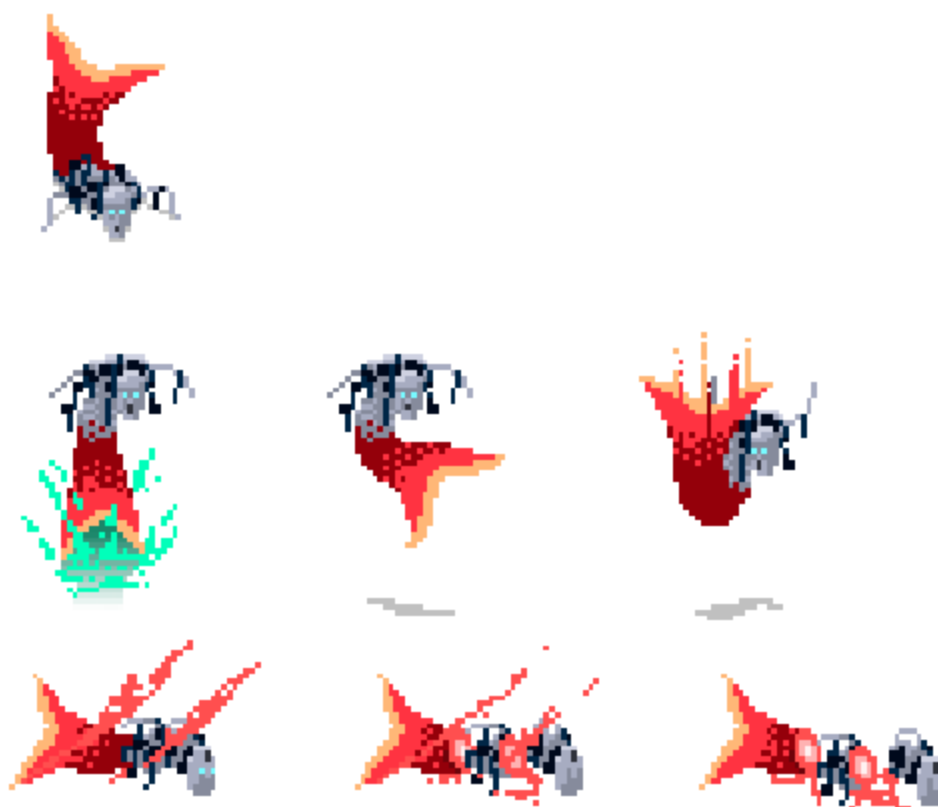


But since "just zombies" didn't do Resolution's philosophy of ambivalence justice, we made our Atollers more human by letting them perform some Yoga asanas.



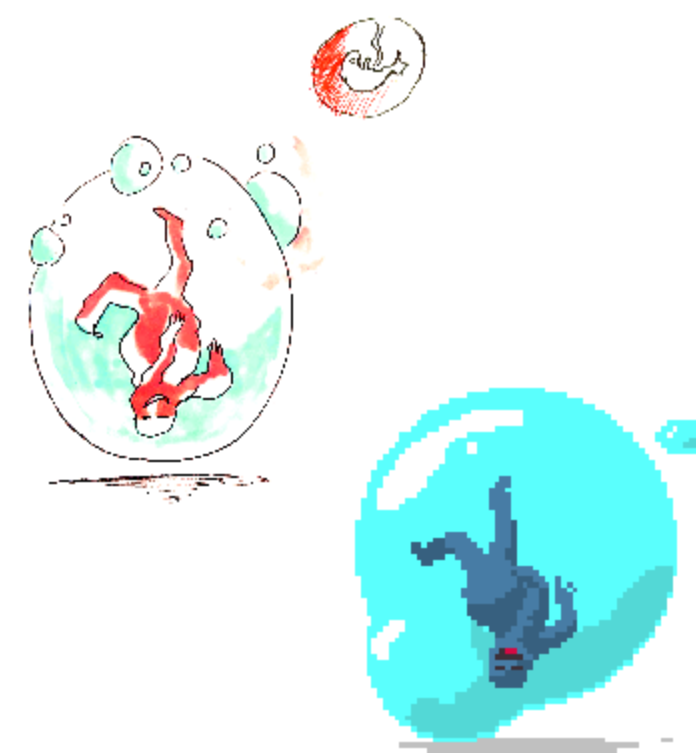
Deacons

To balance out the slow-moving Atoller hordes, we partnered them with another, much faster and dynamic, undead enemy: Deacons. These guys float in the water until they suddenly fling themselves into the air, dive-bombing Valor with their fat, red fishtails. If they miss, we'll have sushi tonight.



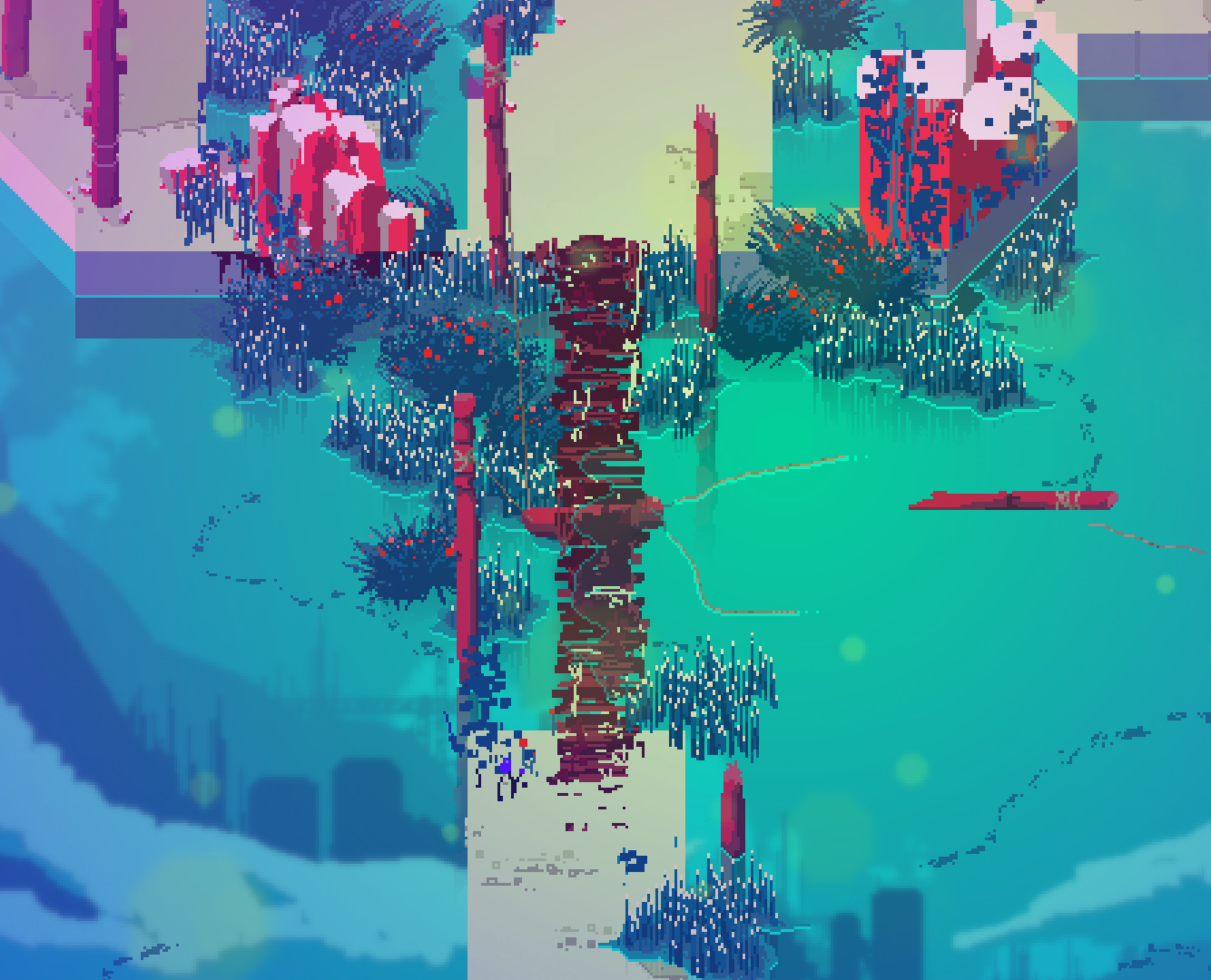
Drifters

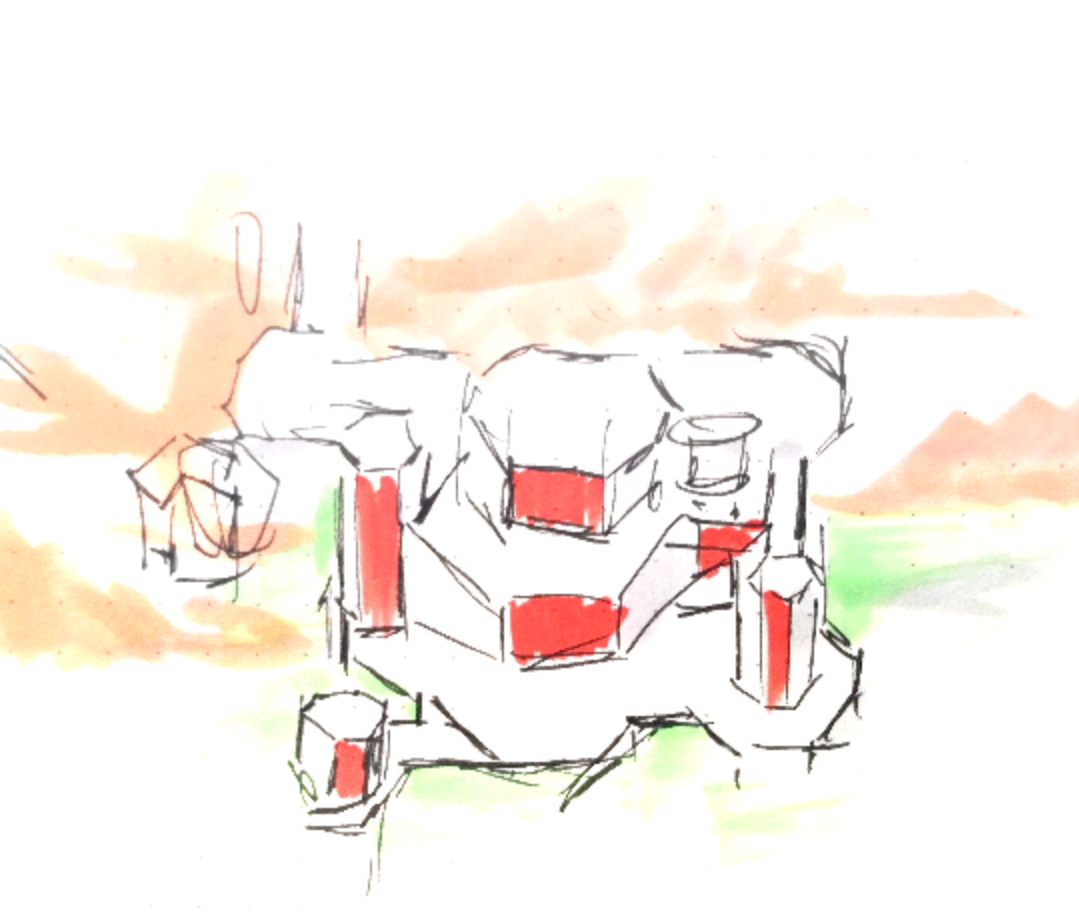
Further on the "cute and disgusting" side are the Drifters: drowned bodies, floating in a water-bubble, spawning Atoller flocks, while they mock you with their happy smiles.



Since we had zombies with fishtails, we figured how about some fish with zombie-tails? Well, let's see if these guys make it into some future DLC...



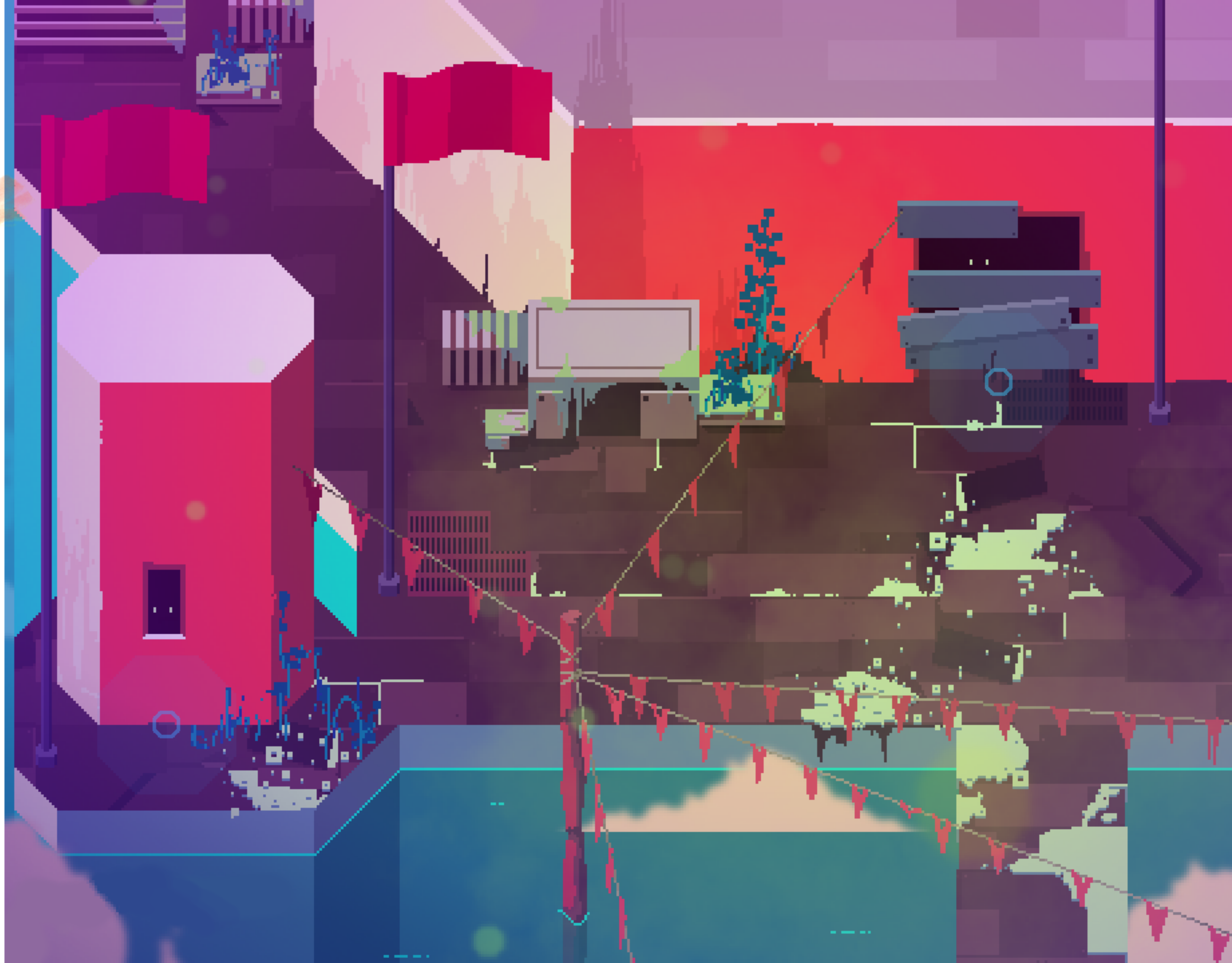


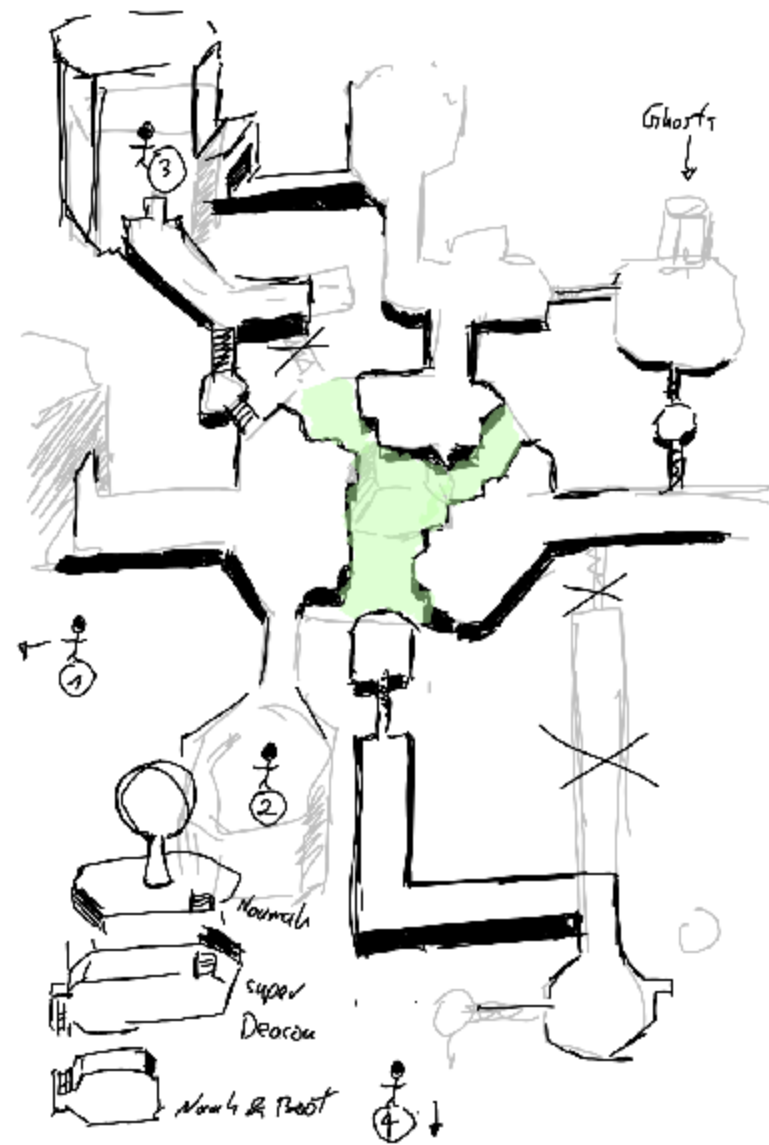


At the Crossroad

The second part of the Divided Sea gave the area its name: in the south, a madman and his family build a strange ship/animal shelter; in the north resides the Safe & Sound Crew in their rusty bunkers, welcoming strangers with their middle finger. Both parties have their fair share of problems; both could be fixed by cooperation; both are stubborn.

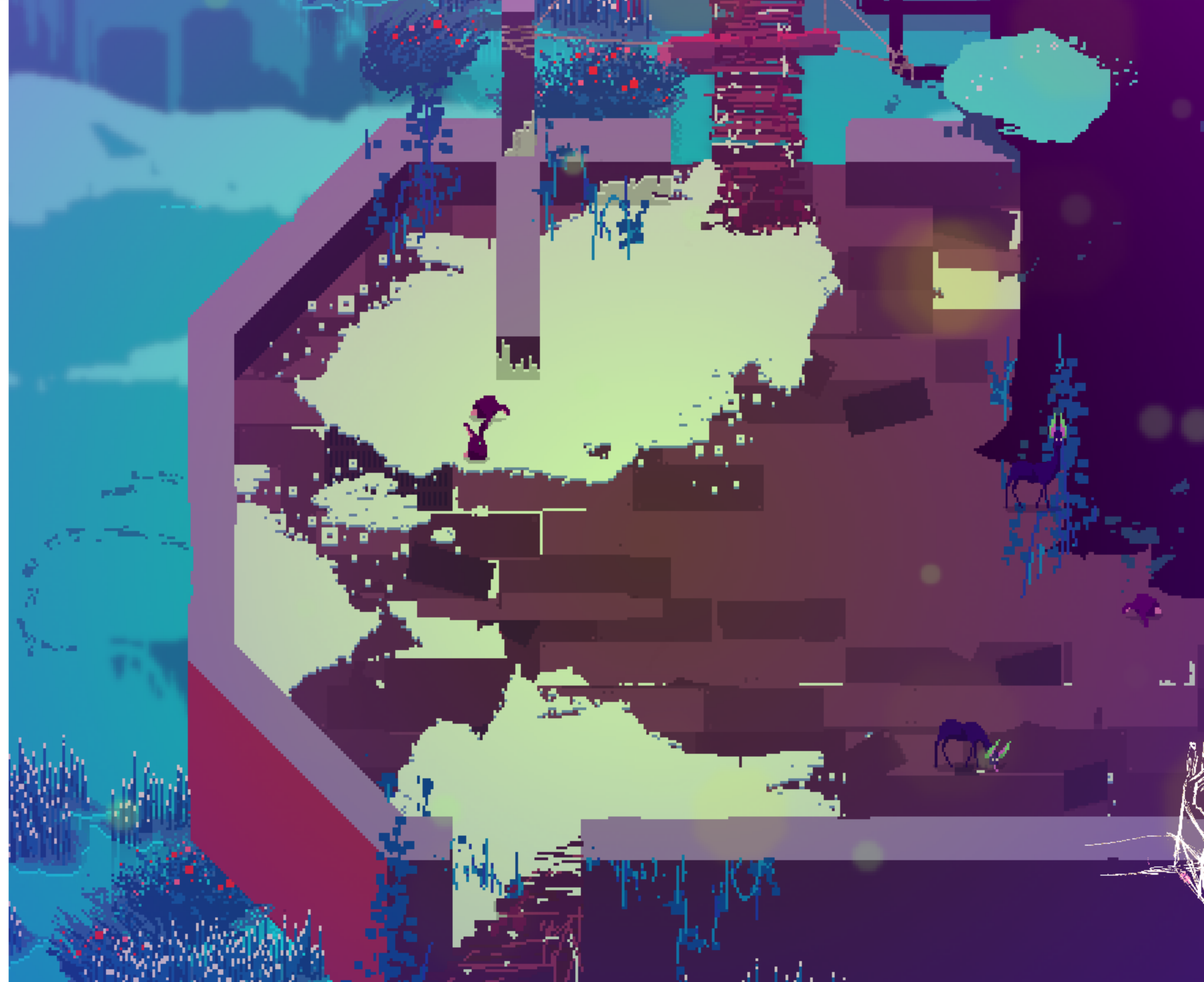
"We're not buying any more goods or services from your glorious empire. Swim off."
—Safe & Sound Crew

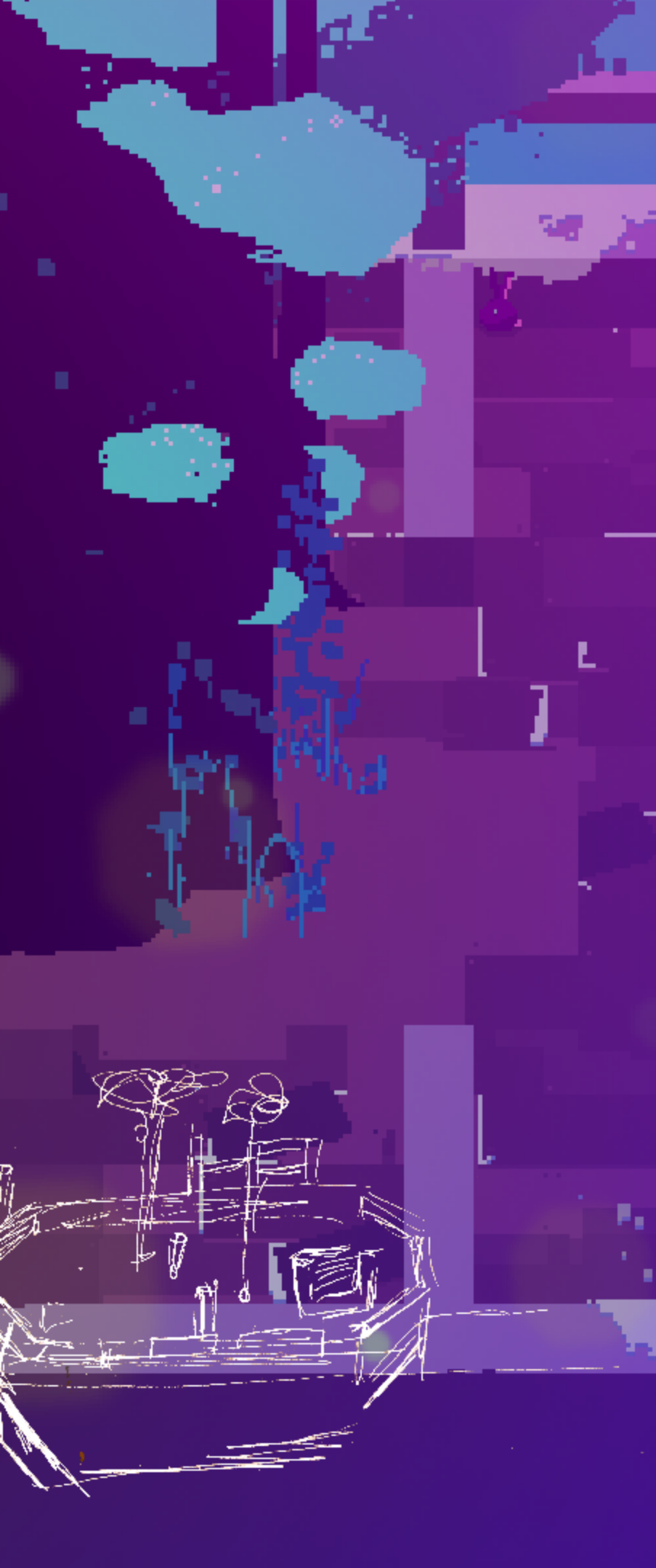




The Ark

Originally, the character named Noah was purely an early prototype placeholder. But the idea of infusing the second Ark with a Christian motif grew on us: what would a broken man at the edge of a polluted world do with the rest of his life? Maybe find purpose in helping those who suffered the most: the animals that never stirred up war in the first place.

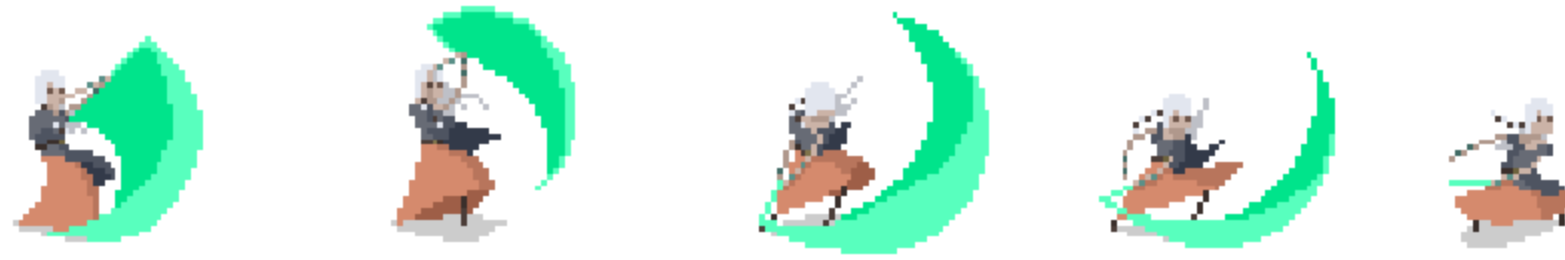




Noah & Naamah

Noah was Marty's father and Valor's instructor at the People's Power. His apprentice's betrayal threw him into a severe identity crisis, leaving the empire behind, searching for redemption at the lost shores of the Divided Sea.

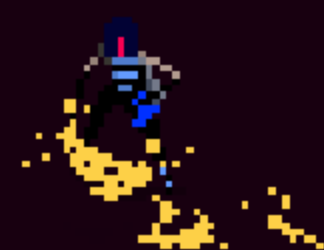
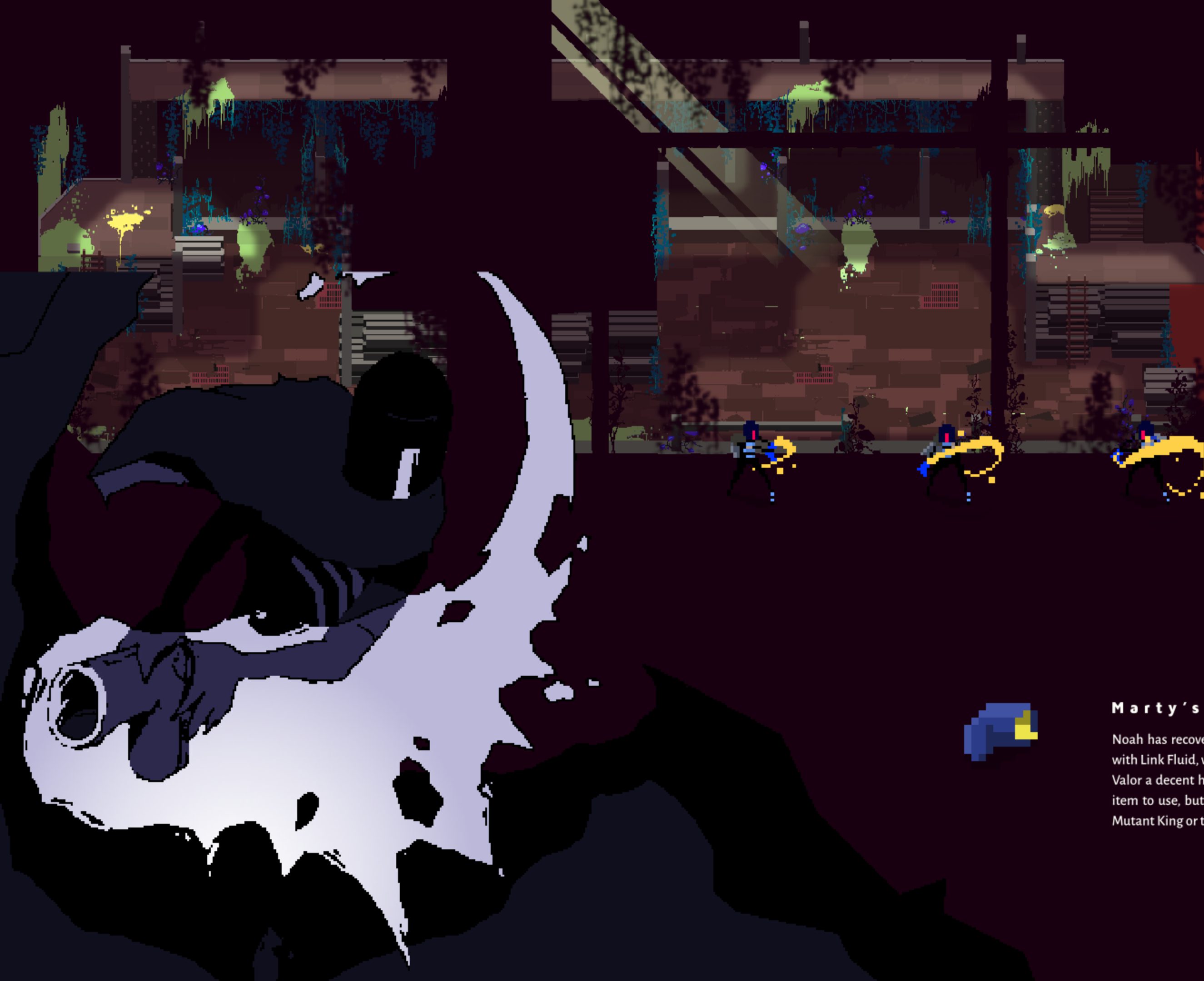
Naamah's story is mostly unknown. She has three wild sons and a temper to match when fighting for her family. But she also keeps Noah grounded, helping him to not drown in resentment and hate.



Sem, Ham & Jafet

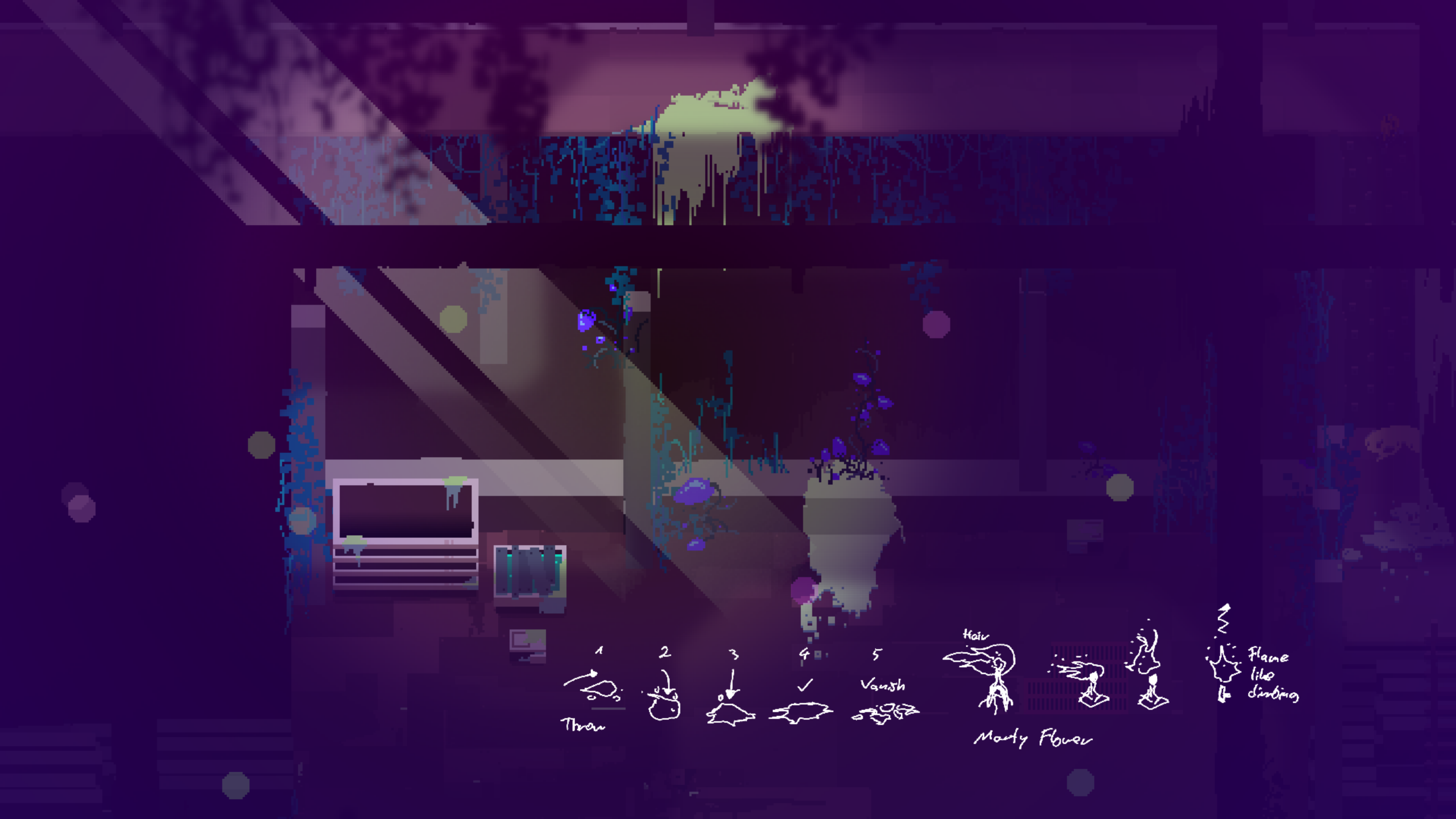
These boys are either the founding fathers of humanity after the flood, or just some brats joking about Valor's outdated augmentations. Anyhow, we enjoyed animating each one's fancy hairpiece, grooving with the wind.





Marty's Boot

Noah has recovered an iconic, blue boot from the mines. It is filled with Link Fluid, which mutates plants and smaller animals, and gives Valor a decent hallucinogenic trip. Marty's Boot seems like a simple item to use, but has plenty of hidden functions: try using it on the Mutant King or the Herald for a deep dive into its dark lore.



1
Thorn

2

3

4 ✓

5 Vanish

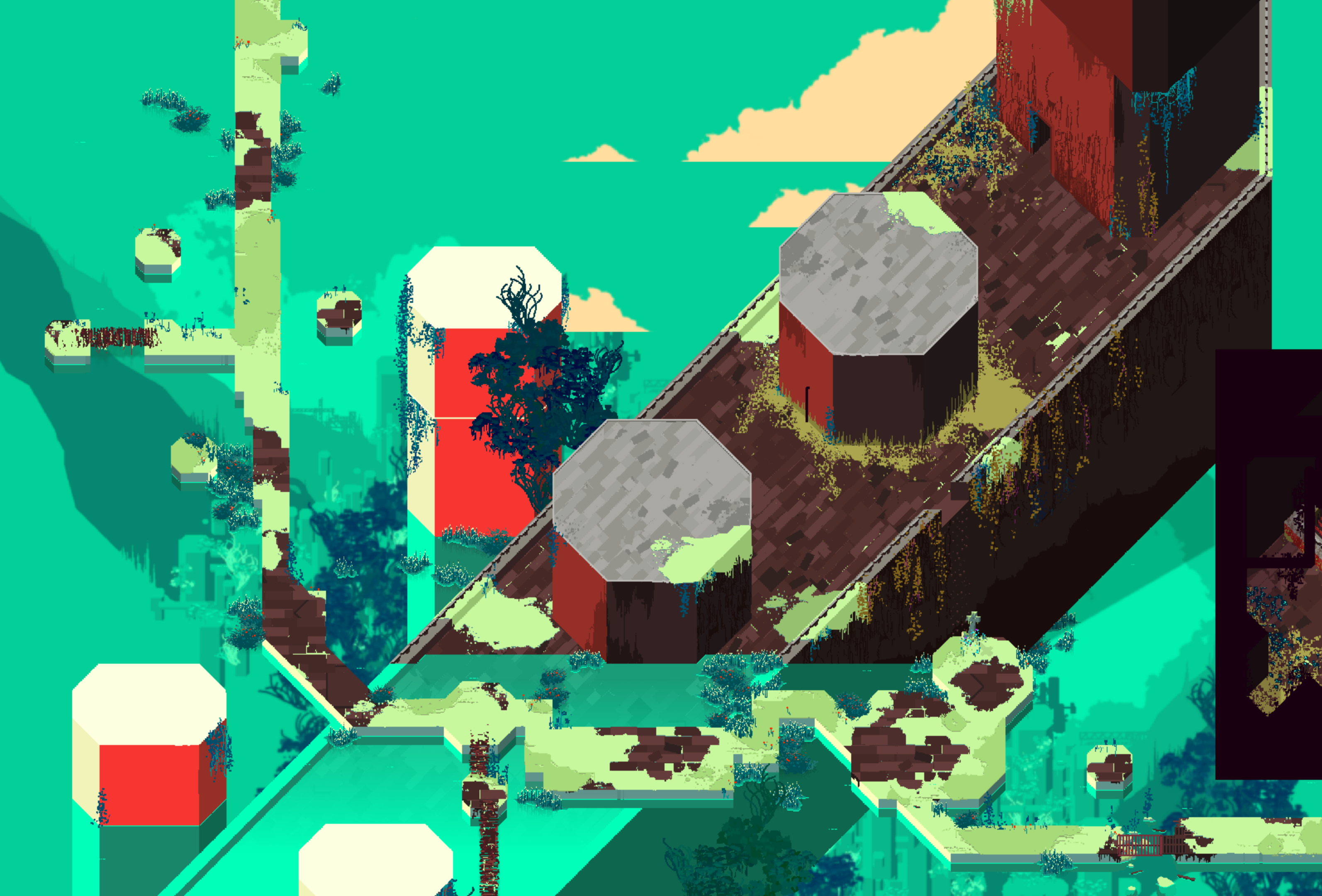
Hair

Marty Flower

Flame

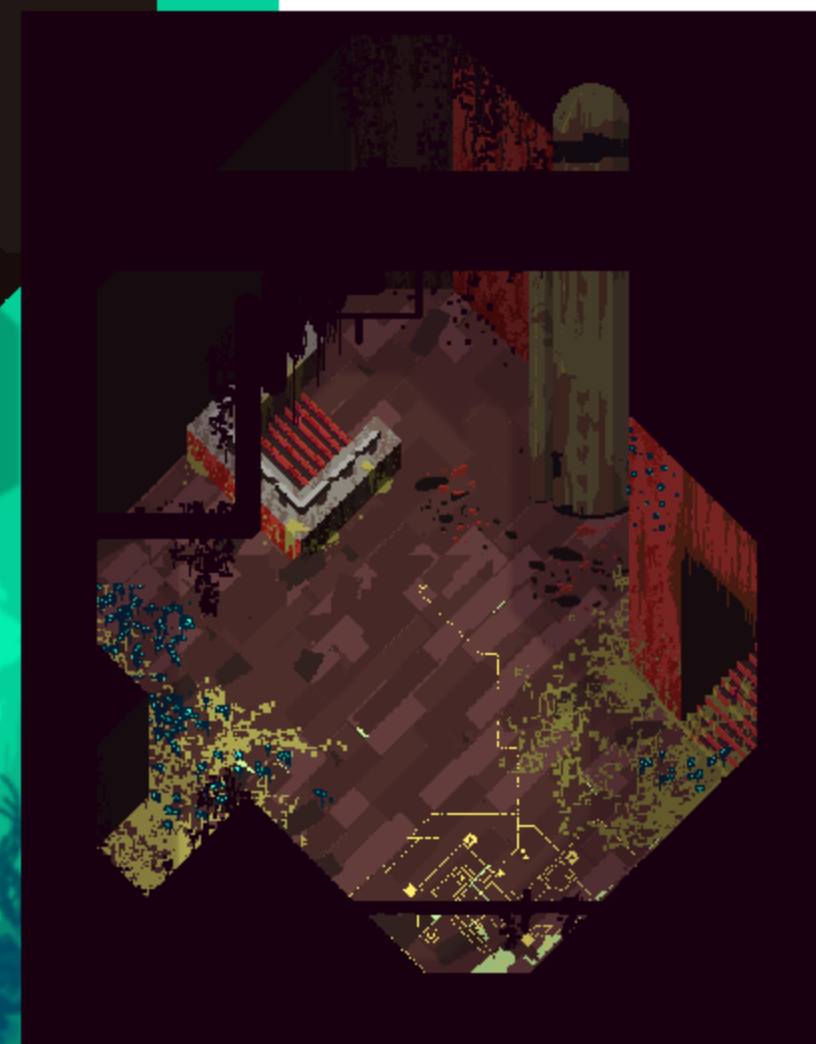
like

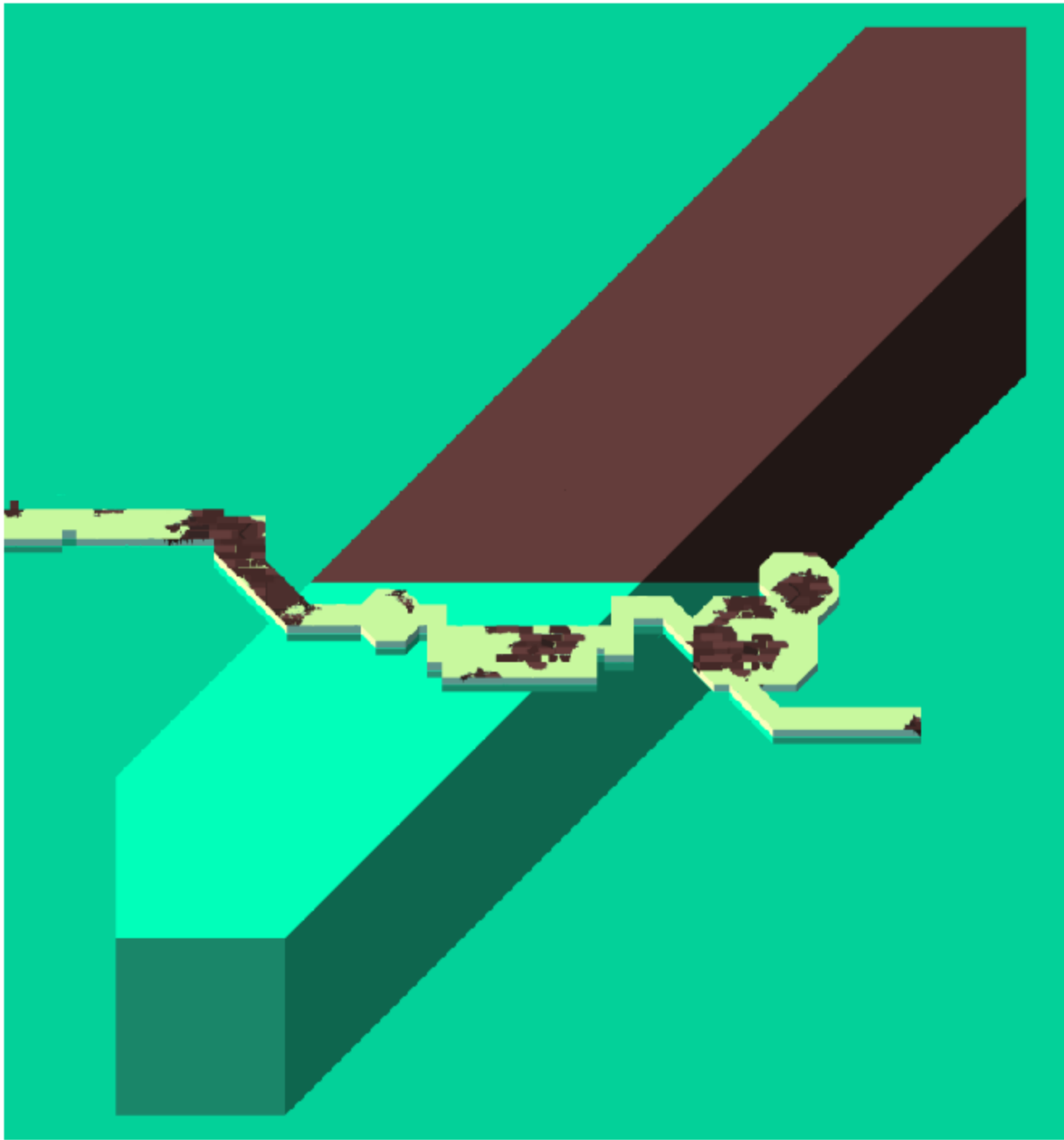
Flame
like
dancing



Hallow Valdez

At the eastern corner of the Divided Sea lies a huge oil tanker, capsized and half-sunken — the Hallow Valdez. Entering it (by using Marty's Boot) will take us into the deep.





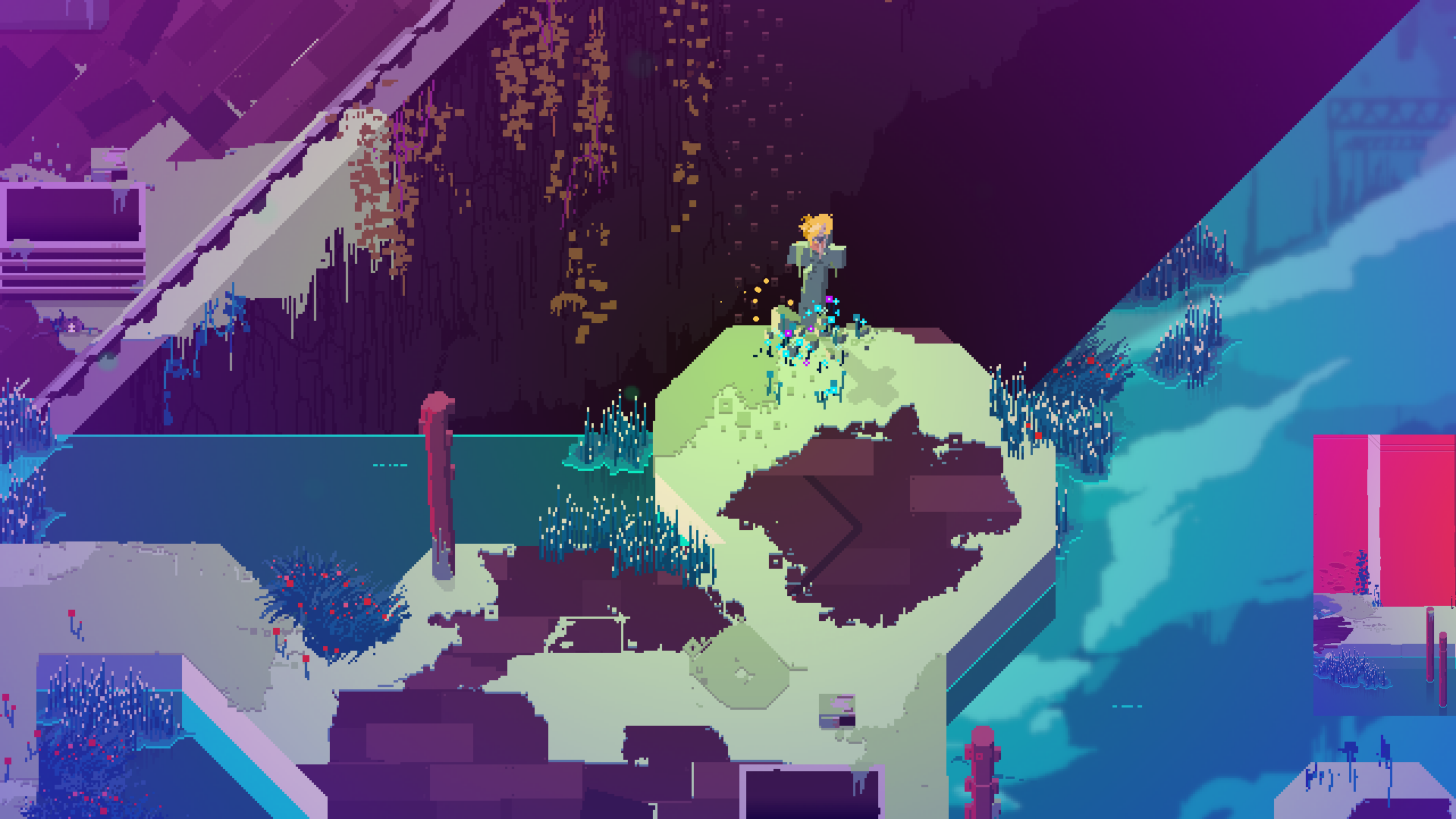
HV Prototype

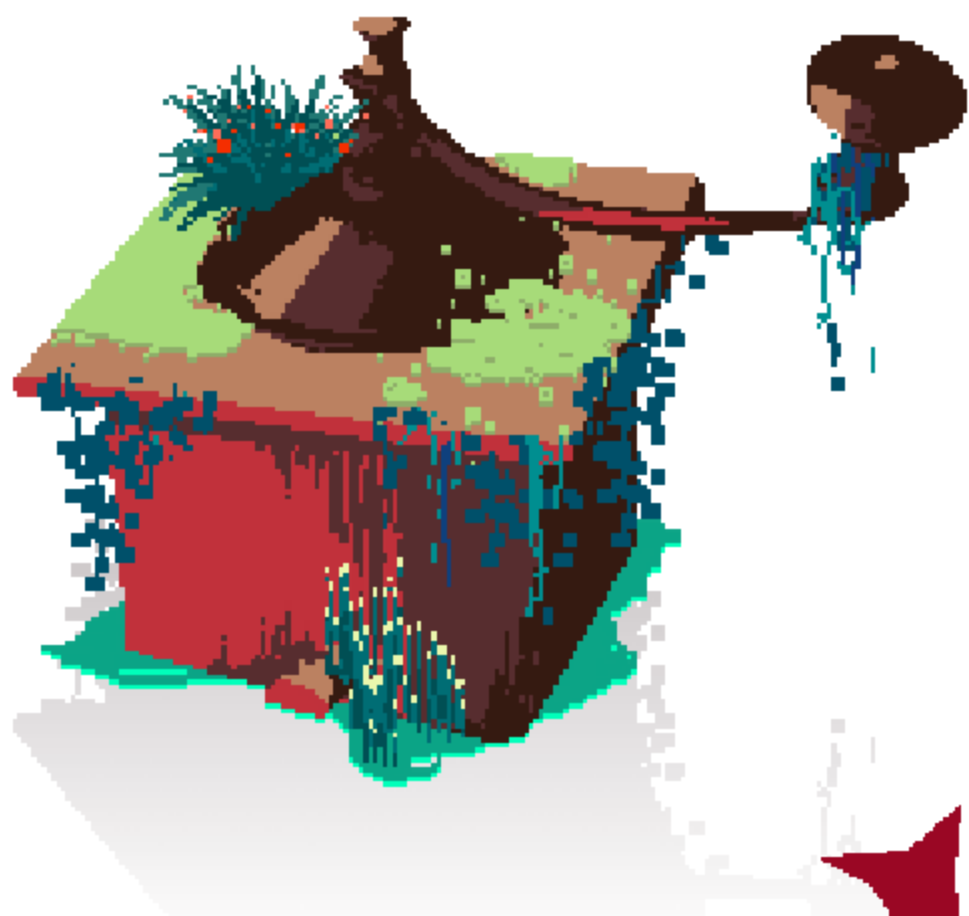
Designing such a big setpiece with the twisted architecture turned out much harder than expected: it's huge, but we wanted to make sure that the scale is tangible within a couple of screens. On top of that, having some areas above water and some below was a challenge to draw with our 2.5D perspective, let alone the possibility of walking around its bulkhead.

HV Tower

The Hallow Valdez's tower features a distinctive tree — an homage to the HBO series "Carnivàle". The world of Resolution is inspired by many undisputed classics of contemporary culture: Star Wars, Alien and Dune to name a few. Chris also wanted to give some love to this under-appreciated series, and with its shared themes of duality, the Divided Sea complimented it perfectly.



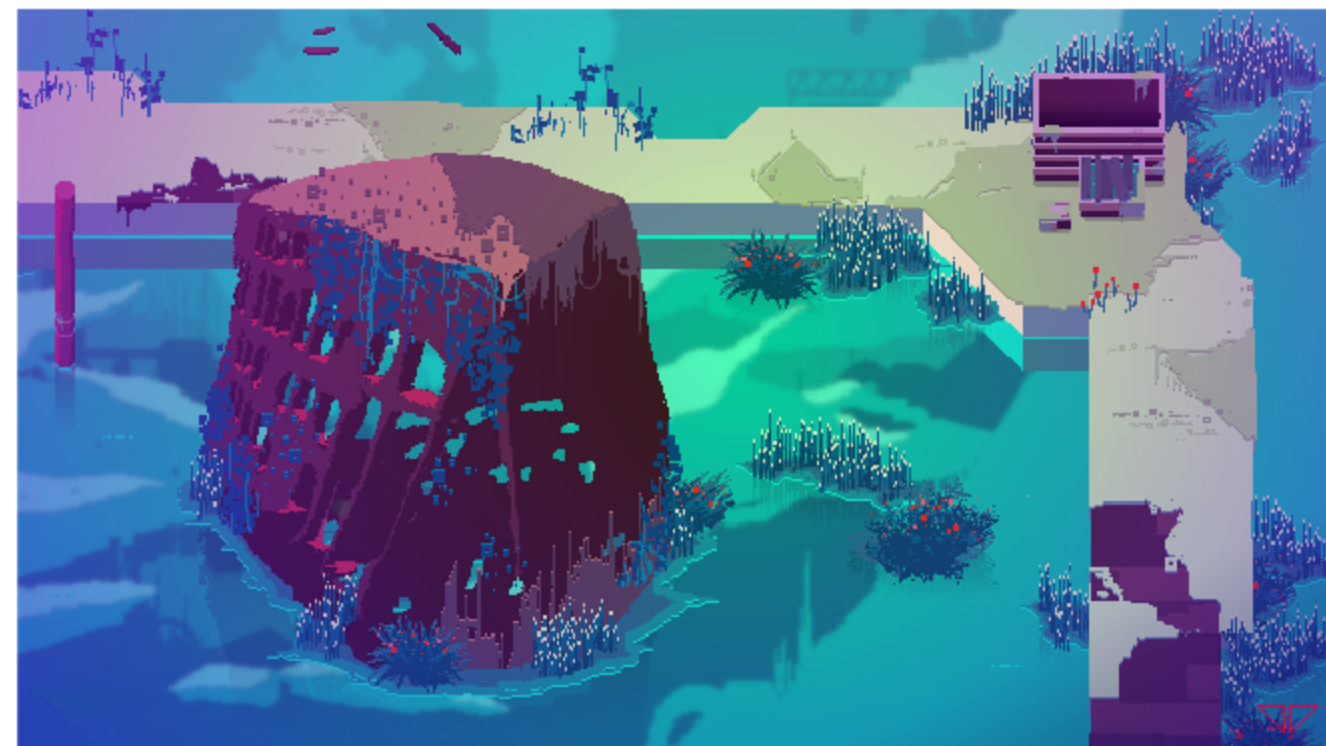
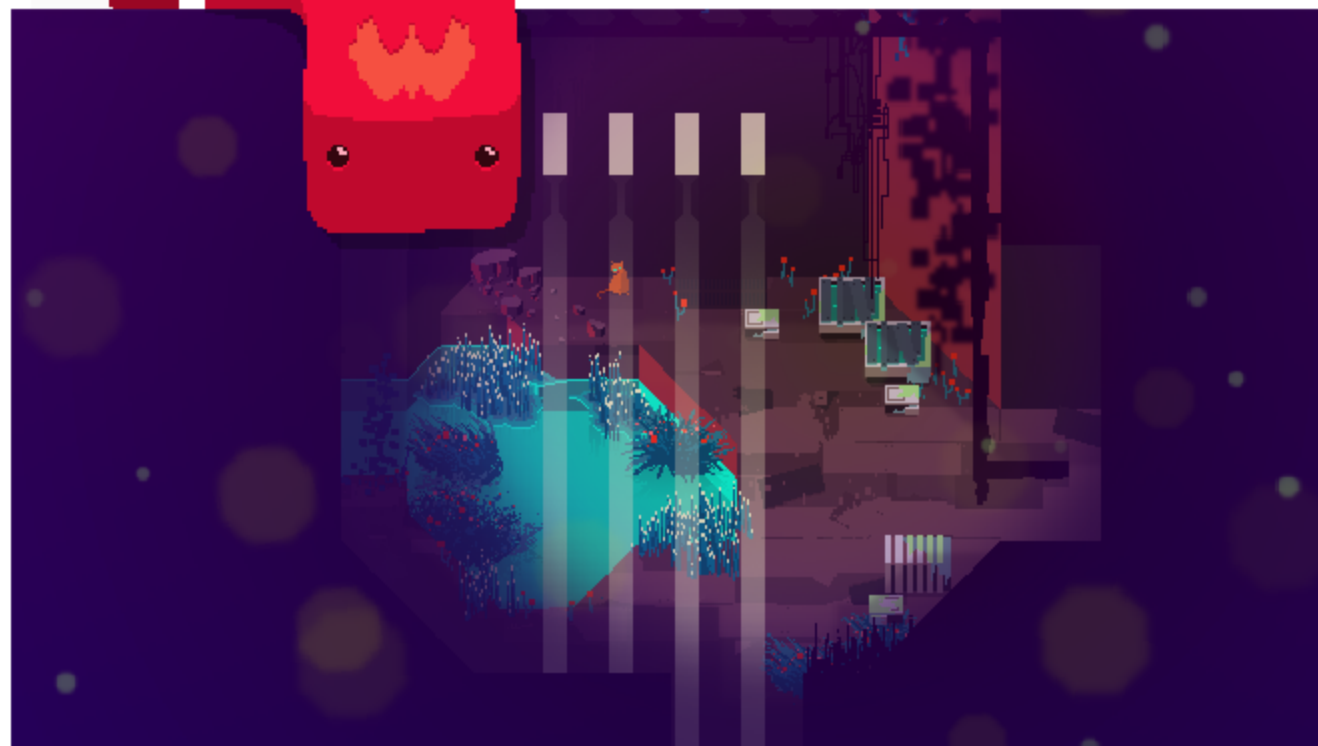
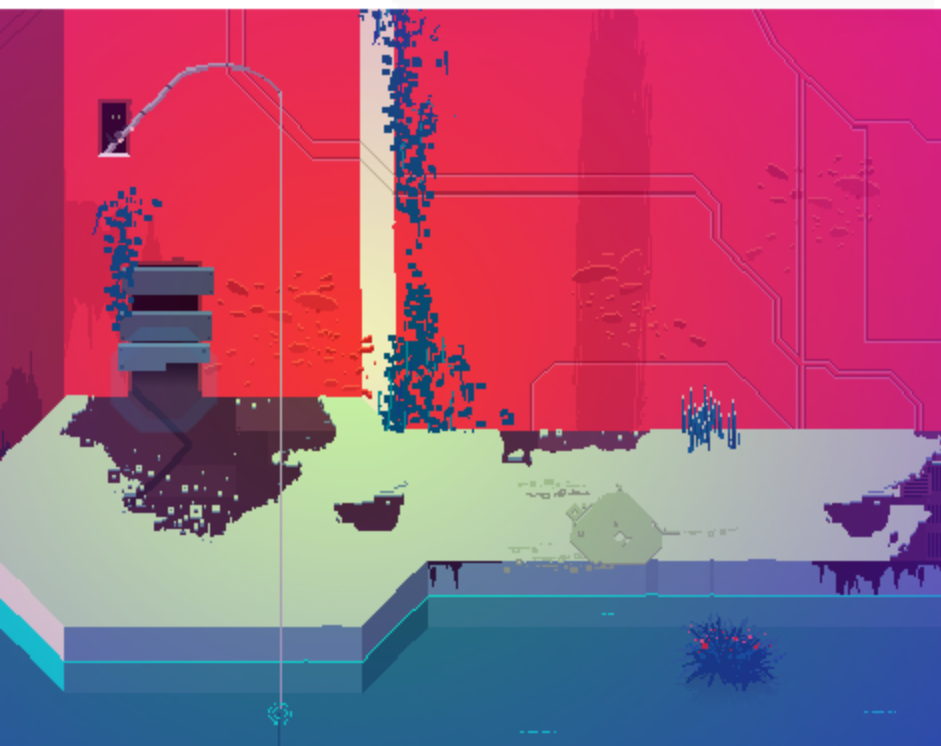




Divided Sea Conclusion

From abandoned dams over rusty docks to a sunken ship, above the water and below, between angry farmers, bible-fanatics and zombie hordes, the Divided Sea is the most versatile of Resolutiion's areas.

It's also the level where the tone most obviously shifts from sci-fi-serious to sophisticated weird-ass: talking seafood; Noah and the Ark; red whales and blue piggies. We have come far in our journey through Resolutiion, and the madness is just getting started.





Noah made you what you are,
and you made him what he is now.
—Naamah

Interlude

Design Dialog

Part II

Chris The first thing I remember saying to you, based purely on screenshots, was that the game looked promising, and it reminded me of Sword & Sworcery and Hyper Light Drifter. It was a compliment, but even then I could tell you were tired of the comparison to HLD. And as we approach launch, we're hearing it made quite frequently, but you're taking it more positively now... How fair do you think the comparison is? Was HLD a big inspiration, or do you think this is just what any modern Zelda-like game is going to look like based on the current technology? Do you think we could have done more to distance ourselves from HLD, and if we could have, should we have?

Günther Well, Hyper Light Drifter has been this double-edged sword for a while. The comparison comes up frequently, positive and negative alike.

Sure, people on the internet try to judge Resolutiion's whole experience based only on a few screenshots: both games share the same perspective, sci-fi setting, and a very vibrant color palette. Gamers are passionate; I don't blame anybody for such a comparison — the contrary is actually true: comparing one of the best looking pixel games of the decade, produced by an insanely talented team of seven, and a budget of \$350,000, to our first, part-time, low-budget endeavor is just mind-boggling. I can not be more proud of that.

But as we said earlier, the general style of Resolutiion emerged by trial and error, our initial lack of experience, and plenty of inspiration from other games, including, but not limited to HLD.

Chris Lots of AAA games have very similar visuals to one another, and no one cares. On the flip-side, if an indie-game even vaguely resembles another, people are very

quick to call rip-off. I wonder it's maybe because they usually feel more like personal endeavors, so it's probably natural that fans are more protective.

When I started on Resolutiion, the levels were quite sparse, but I think your vision was noticeably present. Although the maps lacked detail, they somehow still had a defined ambiance. The flat purples and blues in Cloud City had a kind of industrial feel before any details appeared. The flat oranges of the desert had the dry, barren look of sand.

You'd already established these two-tone color schemes for the maps which somehow gave them a lot of character without all the extra details. You certainly had the cyan and magenta established in the health and stamina indicators. Was there any reason for the dualistic color thing that runs throughout each element of the game?

Günther The first mockups of Cloud City had muted hues: white floors, orange clouds, beige enemies, etc. From past work, I knew that limits—even forced ones—

are the key to creative work. So without hesitating, I simply decided to build each level with two core colors and plenty of nuances. With all possibilities on the table, you want to set yourself some healthy restraints to avoid option-death. That's not just true for color-themes, but also everything else in the game. Saying that, technically balancing a set of fully saturated colors is hard work — that's a beginner's mistake, but I think it worked out.

Chris Visually, this really worked for me in the desert most of all. There's something about that area where I think everything comes together kind of perfectly. The combat, the stone giants, it all just works. It's maybe not unique to Resolutiion, but when you walk through the giant's mouth and pass through the ribs down into darkness like you've been swallowed... it really sets the tone of the game.

Günther The desert certainly carries plenty of character due to the giants and vibrant orange tones. I love it, but thinking about it, my favorite area would be the Divided Sea.

Plenty of scene changes, ravenous zombies, and bible fans. The reds and greens are also strong. But what strikes me most is that this level above all carries Resolutiion's subliminal theme of "ambivalence": beauty and decay; good and bad, chaos and order — neither exist on its own, they're always together.

But the theme of duality is all over the place: as we said, each level is prominently colored in two hues, but whatever you do or whoever you talk to — you will soon encounter its opposite.

Talking about it now, I remember this all came up when we discussed the logo sometime in early 2019 — left, right, and transcendence from the duality, three points shaped into a triangle. You especially pushed this visual metaphor quite a bit, and also did the first take on the branding, right?

Chris I remember my first iterations of the logo were based more around organic and inorganic. Veins becoming electrical circuits, and that sort of thing. It eventually skewed to being more like folk art vs.

circuitry, tradition vs. modernism. The circuitry side was cyan, to show that's the realm of Alibii and the Infinite Empire, while the folky side was magenta, and that was supposed to represent the more human, rebellion side.

I wanted to develop that color symbolism more, really push it as a big part of the game, but we never did. Was it a creative choice on your part to be more ambiguous with the dual-color motif?

Günther Yeah, I remember. We tried to incorporate the cyan/magenta idea in a few areas of the game, like the menu, and some illustrations. But eventually, it just started to work against the brutally saturated color palette — this was when we went monochromatic for anything that was just "information", eventually creating a clean distinction: color for anything diegetic, black and white for everything else.

That's probably what I enjoyed most about us collaborating over the last two years: you going for the fancy detail, me just keeping it as simple as possible. Eventually,

we'd find the right balance in every single area. There's not one element in Resolutiion's overall experience without at least a little bit of both of us — backgrounds, animations, key art, logo, etc.

Looking back over all those individual parts, would you have done anything differently?

Chris I definitely tend to want everything tied together in a really narrow thematic framework. You and Richi are much less uptight about that kind of thing, and tended towards stuff that felt right, looked cool, or was just interesting in its own right: you've got giant coffee equipment scattered around the maps, and your only explanation was that you liked it — I'd love to have that confidence.

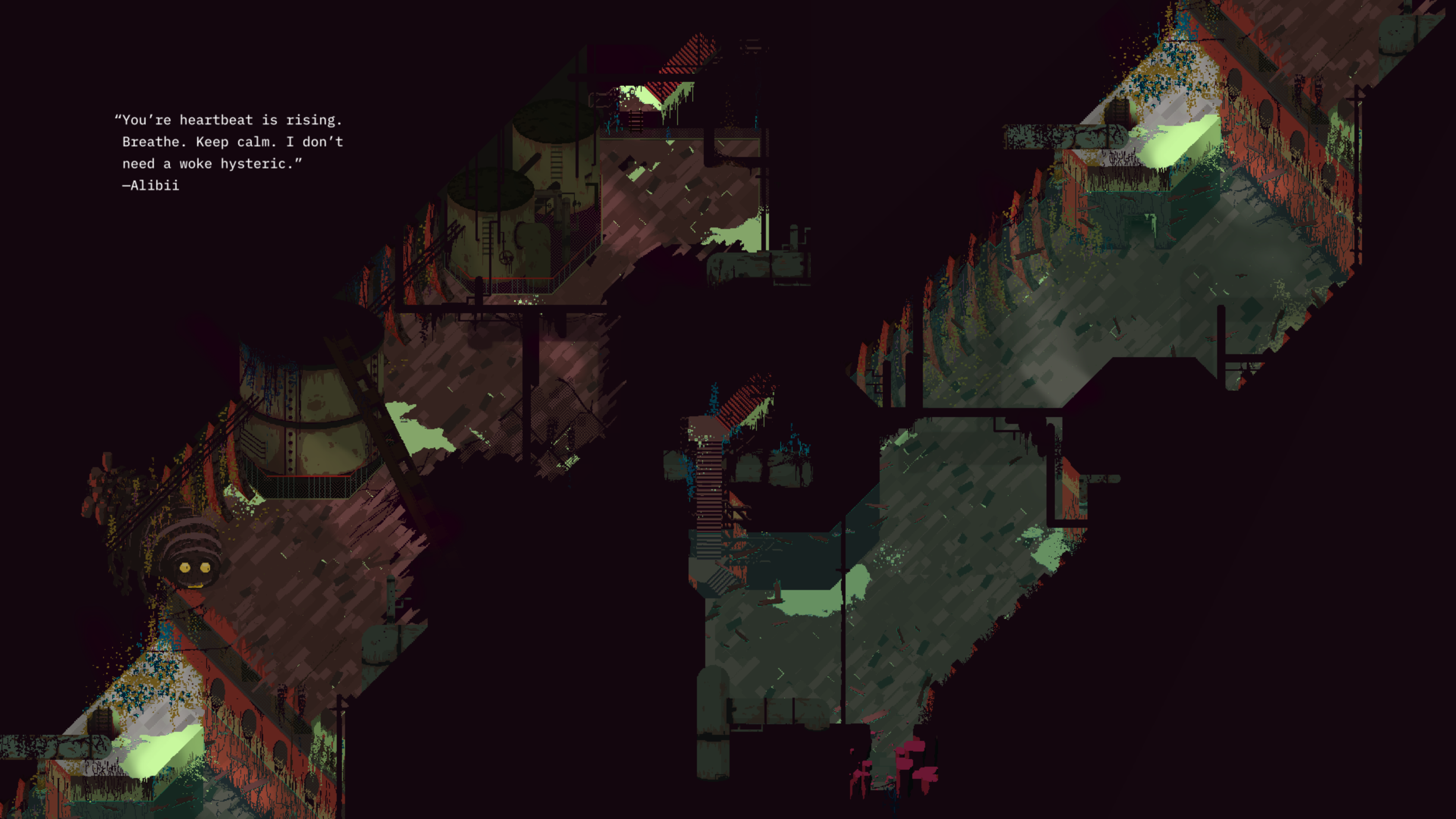
To be continued...

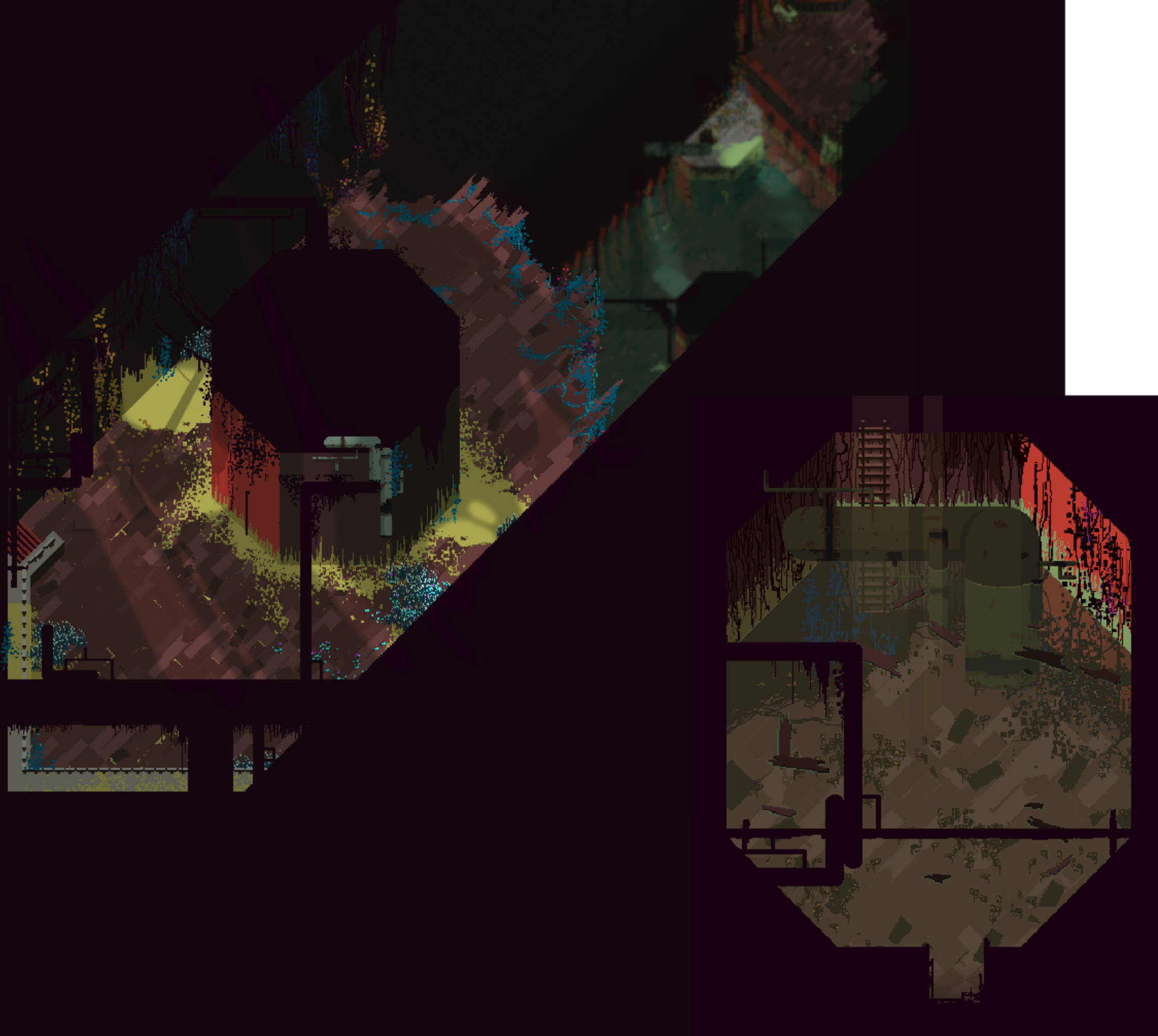


Sunken City



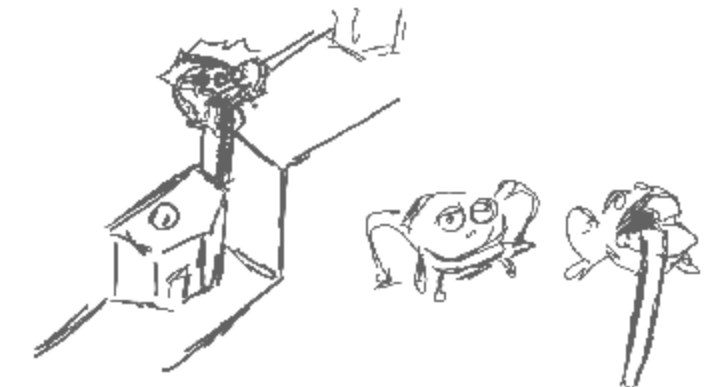
"You're heartbeat is rising.
Breathe. Keep calm. I don't
need a woke hysteric."
-Alibii





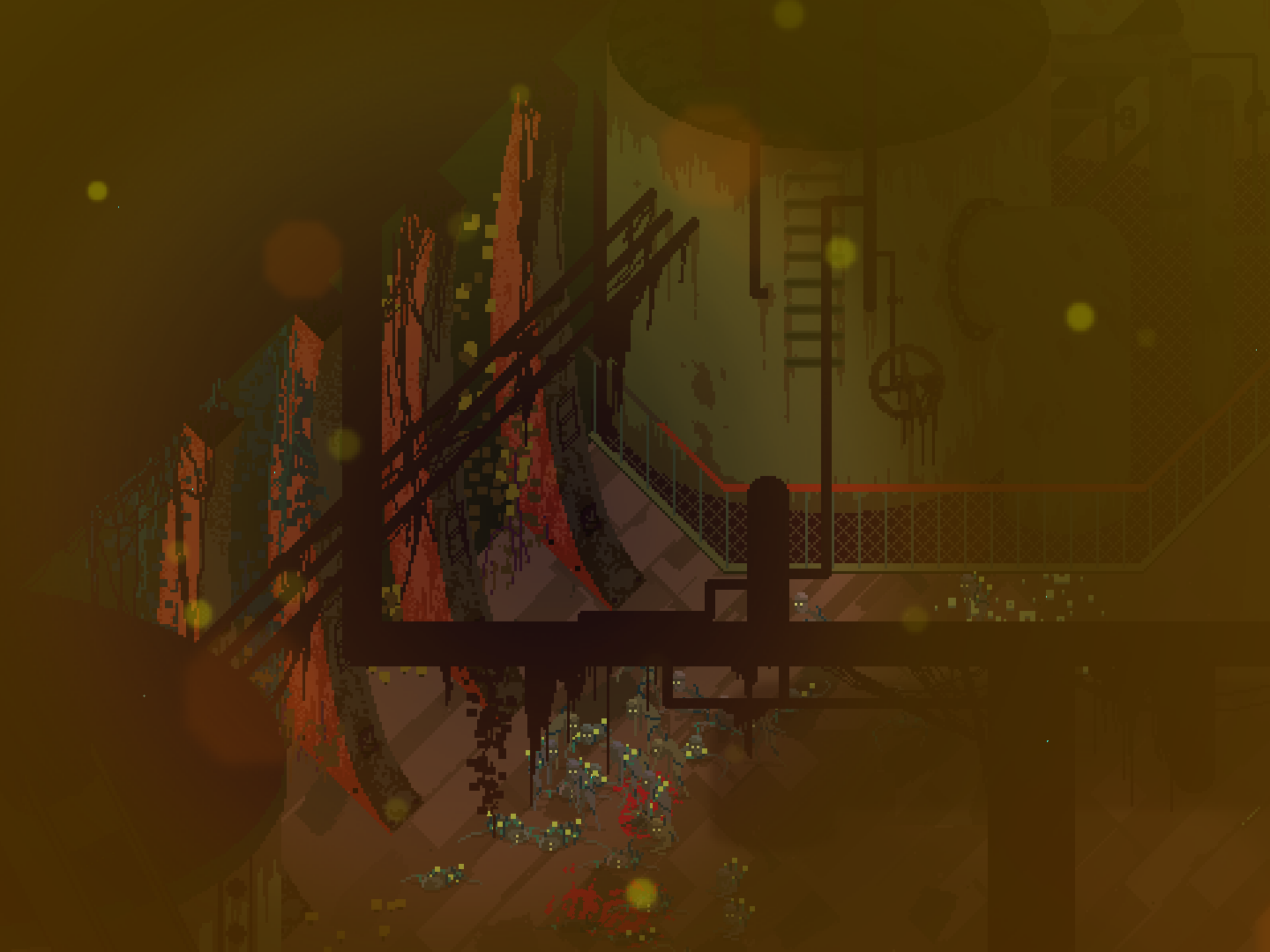
Sunken City

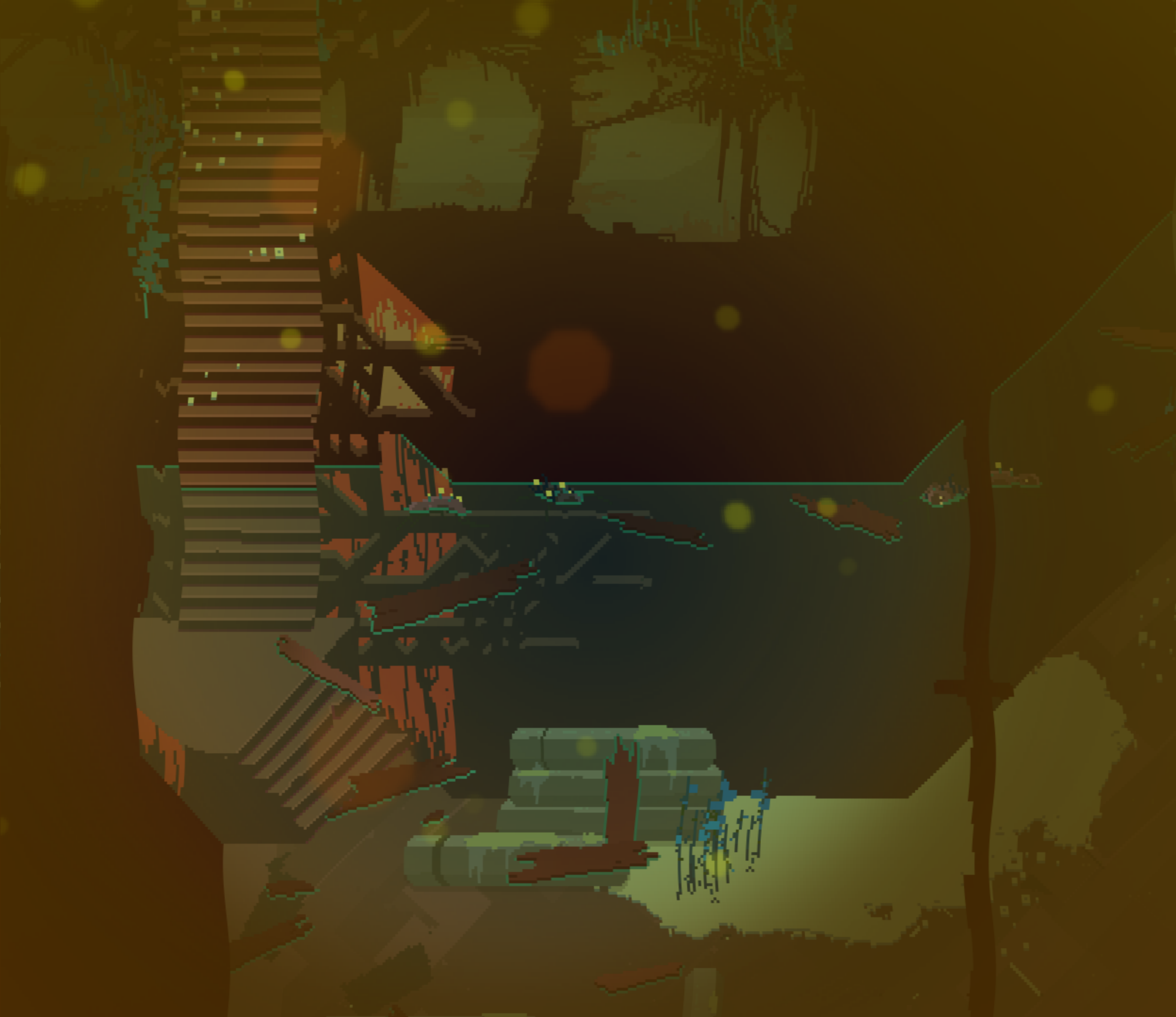
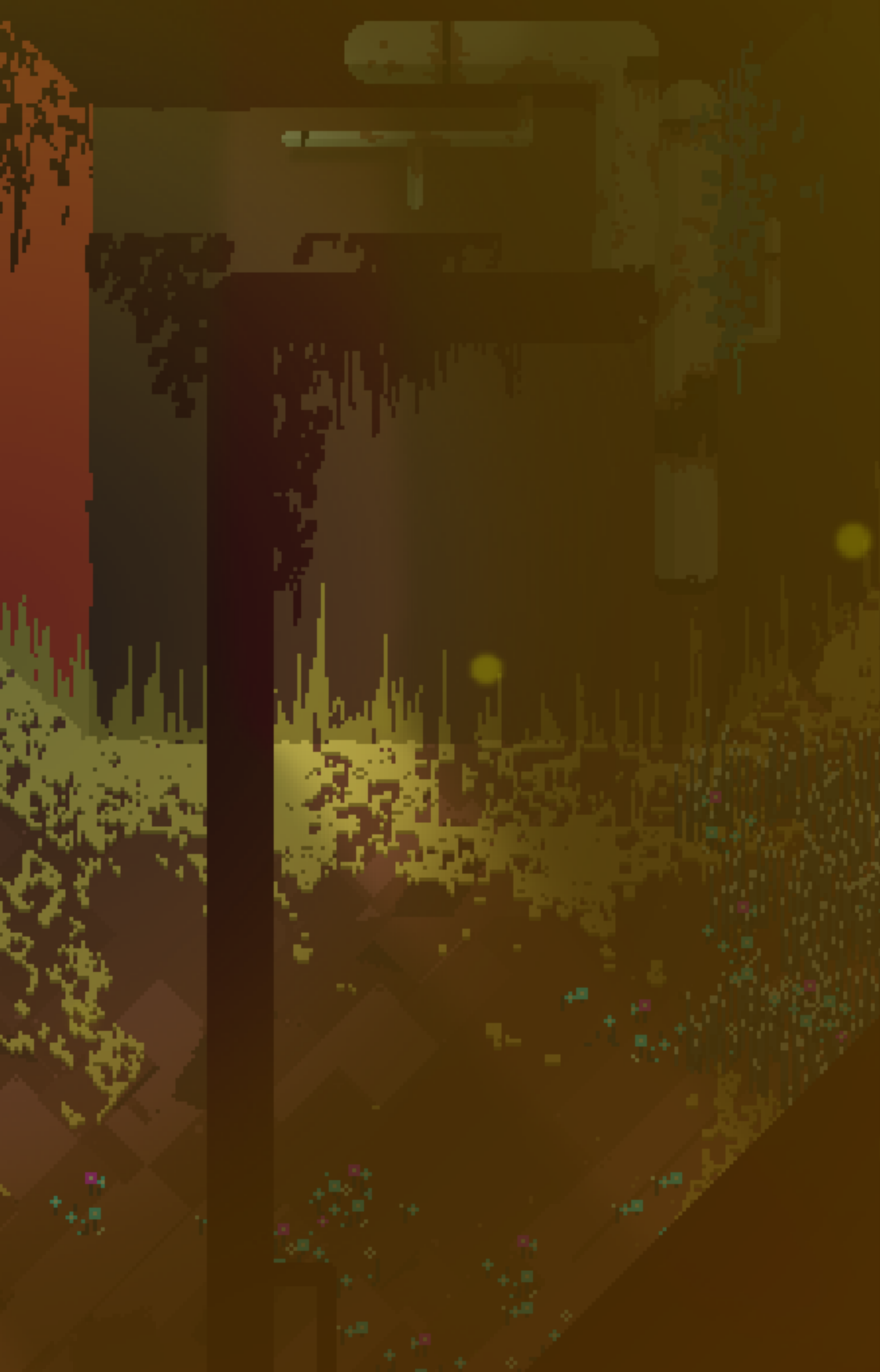
We make our way to the ocean floor through the disemboweled belly of a stranded tanker. Originally called "The Gauntlet", the bright and combat-light tone of the Divided Sea shifts here: the Hallow Valdez is a dark, infested tunnel, where Valor has to cut his path through hordes and hordes of zombies.

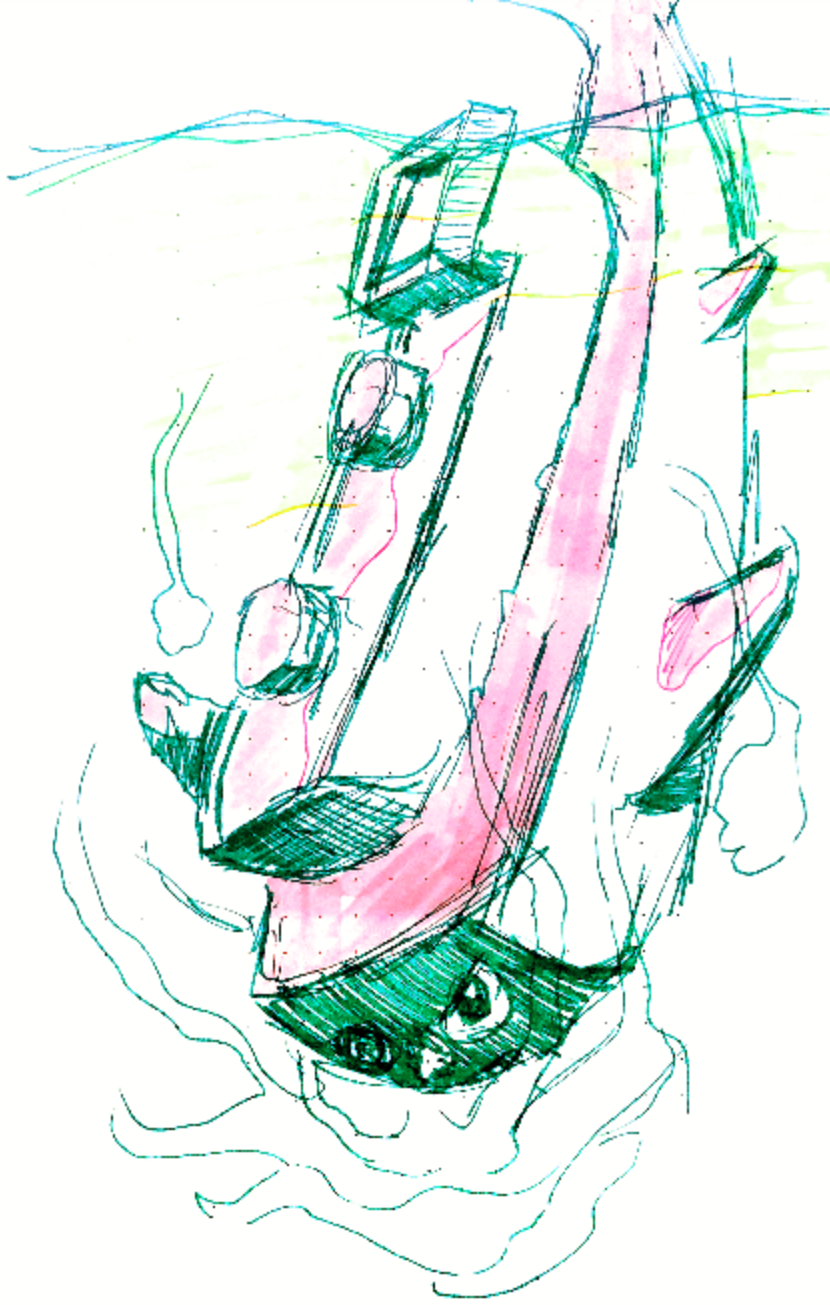


Through the Ship's Hold

Striking the right balance between interesting details and visual clarity has been a challenge throughout Resoluiion's development, especially in combat-heavy areas. Here, in the Hallow Valdez, we solved this by distributing plenty of growth, spores, debris, and floating corpses alongside the walls, while keeping the rusted floors contrastingly simple.

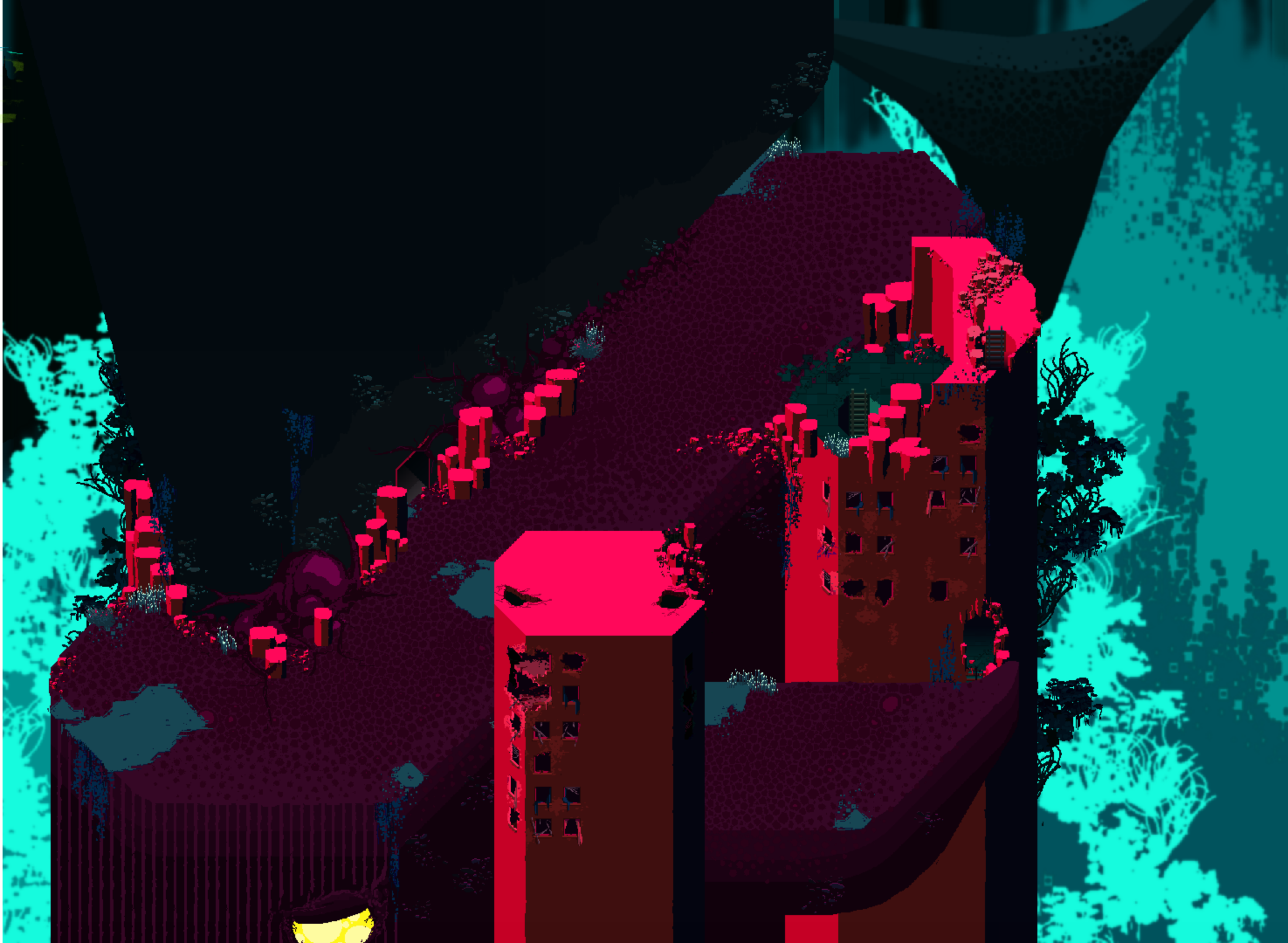


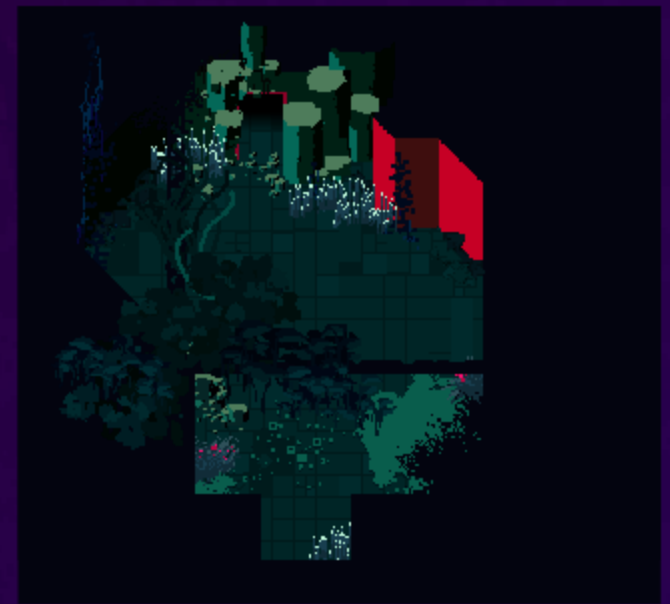
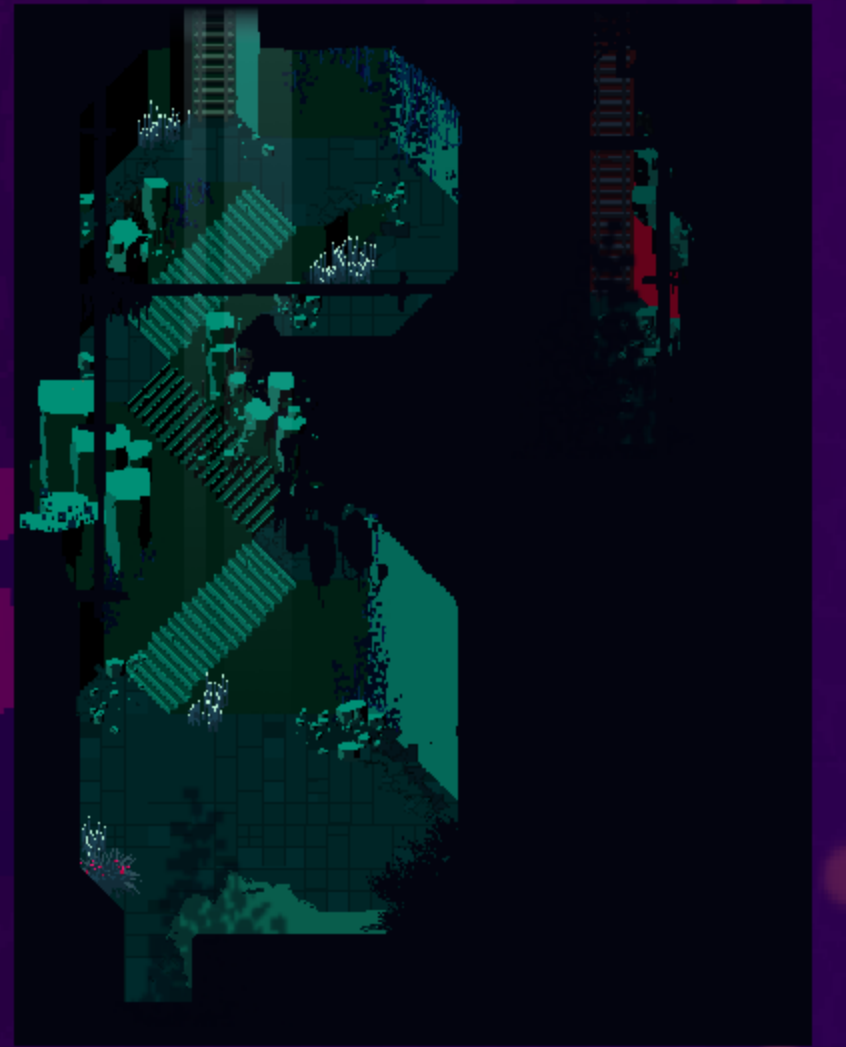


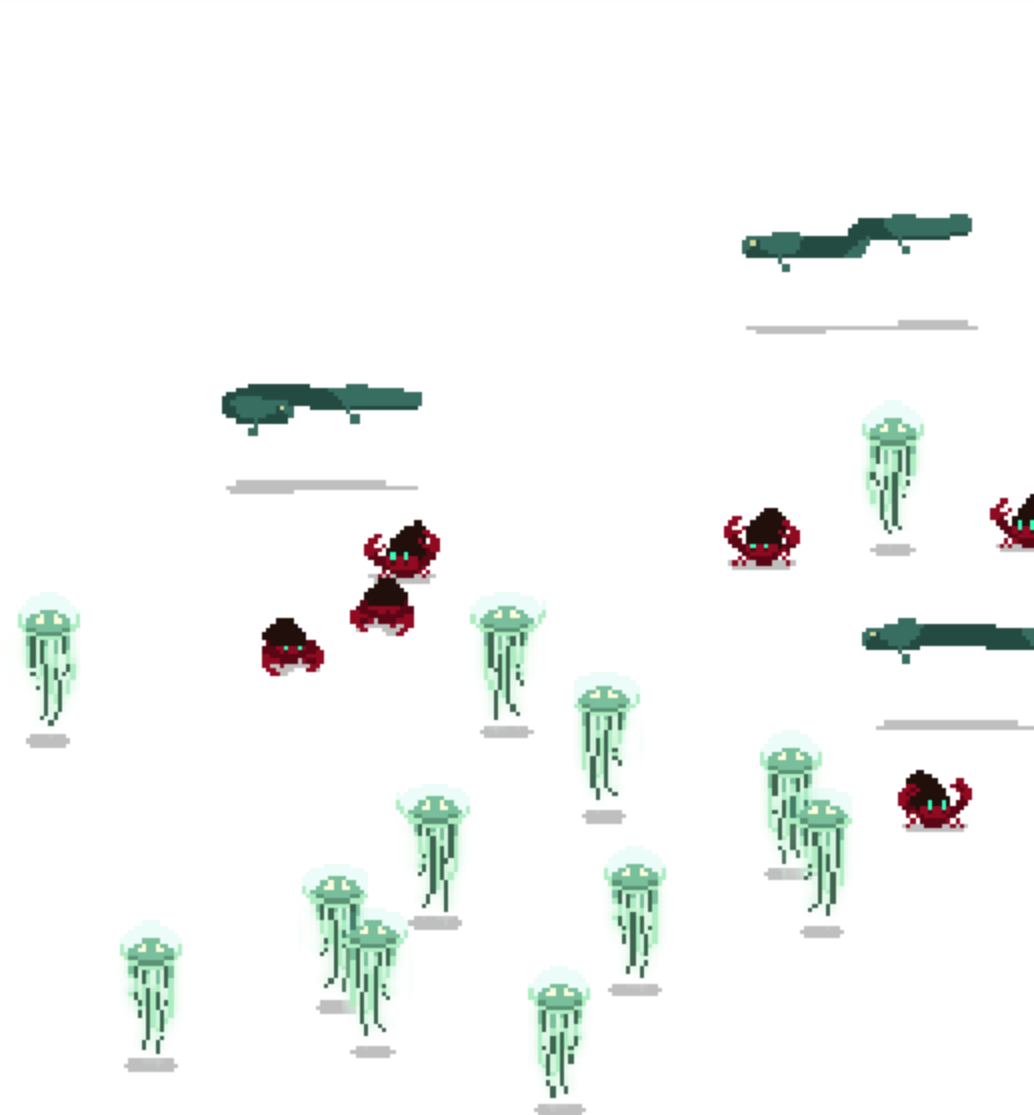


Stranded

The weird situation becomes even weirder as we emerge from the tanker's hull to find ourselves at the bottom of the sea: the ship is stranded on the back of a giant whale. Anchors and chains keep both perilously intermingled, forcing them to the ocean floor.

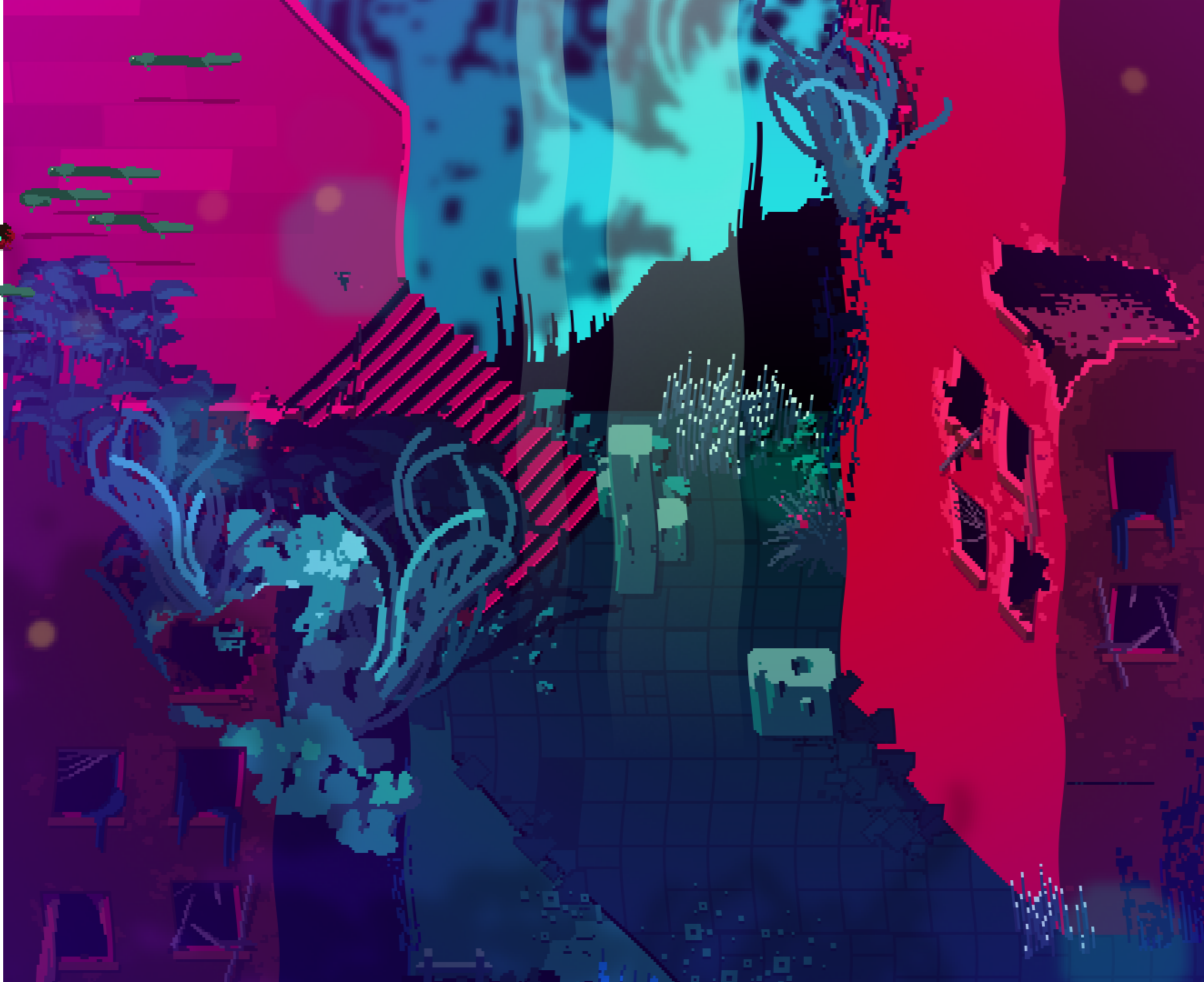


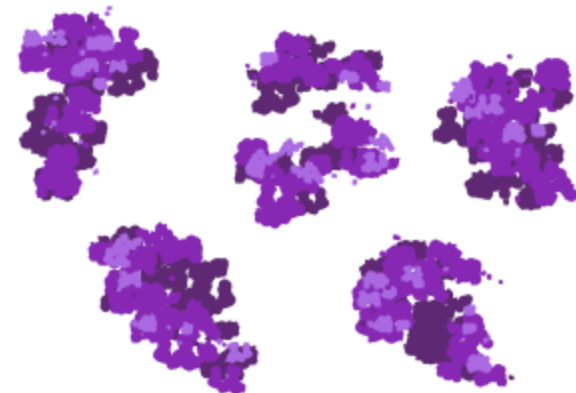
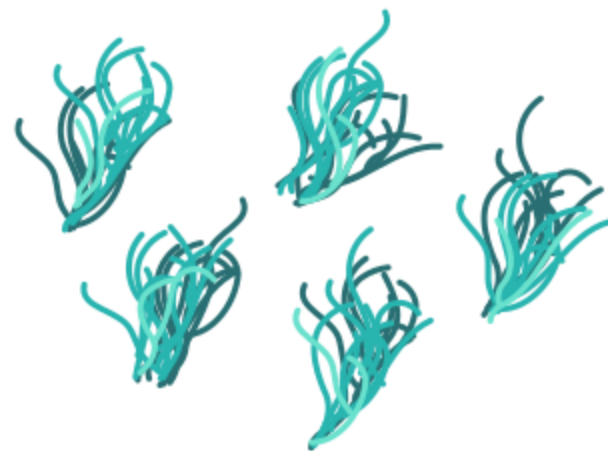
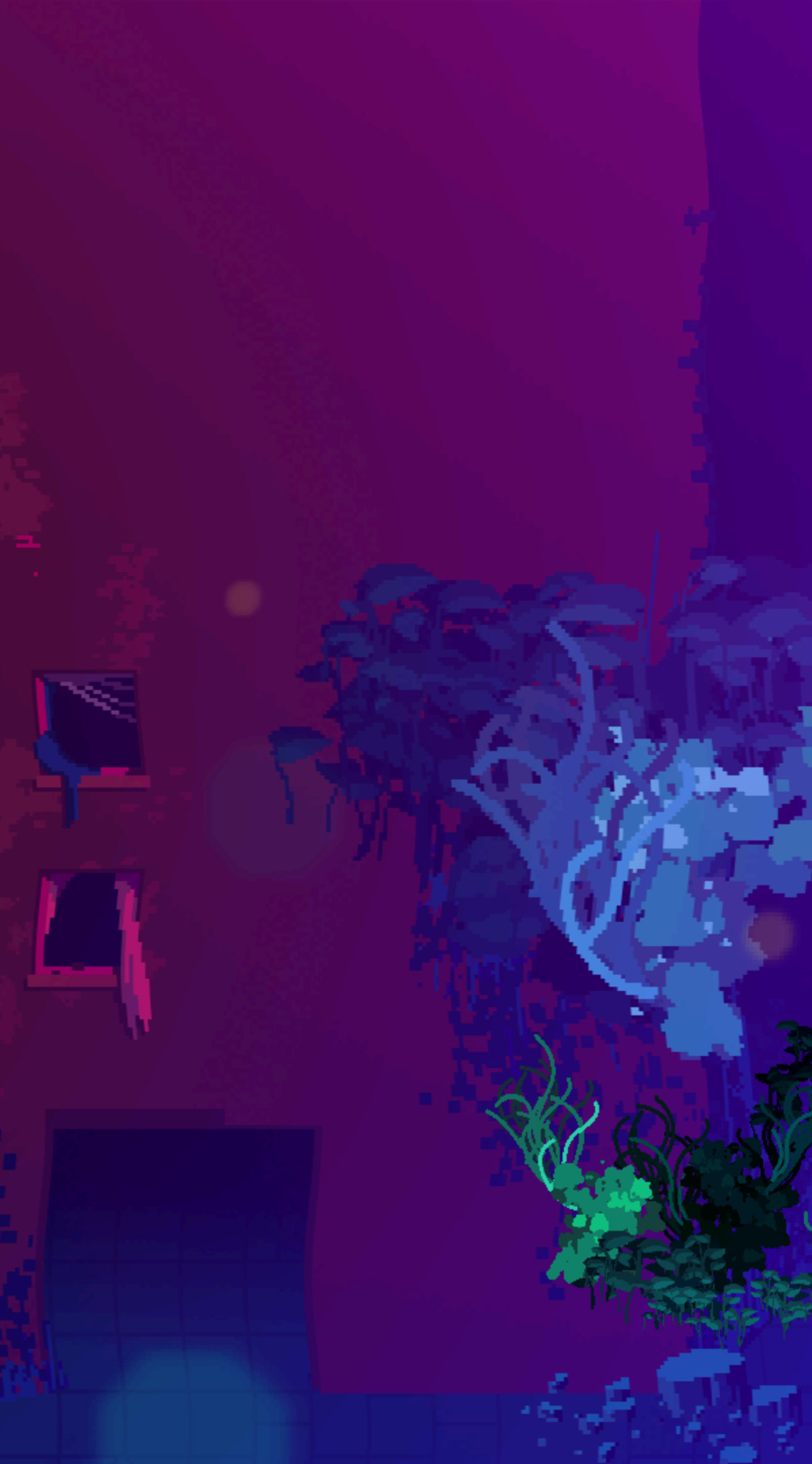




Sea Fauna

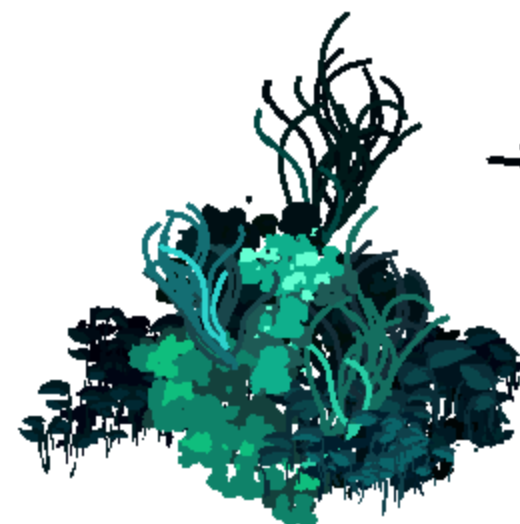
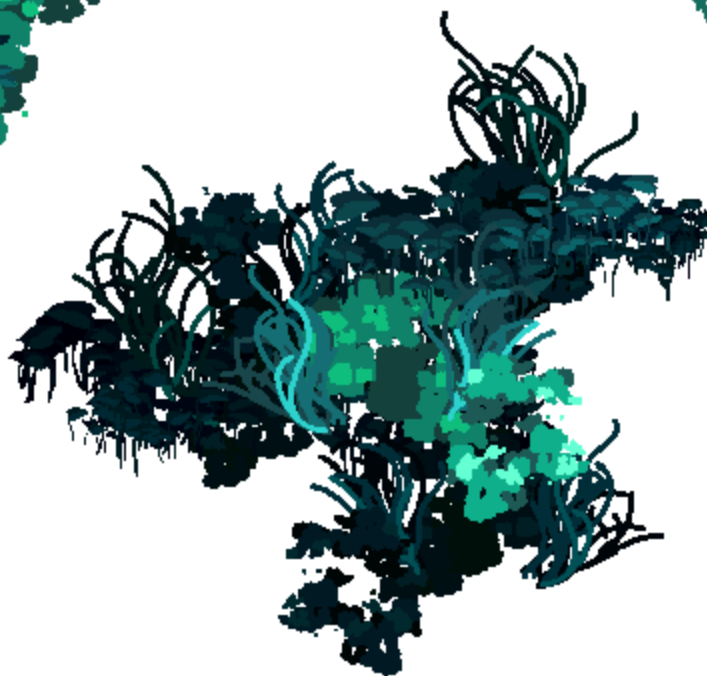
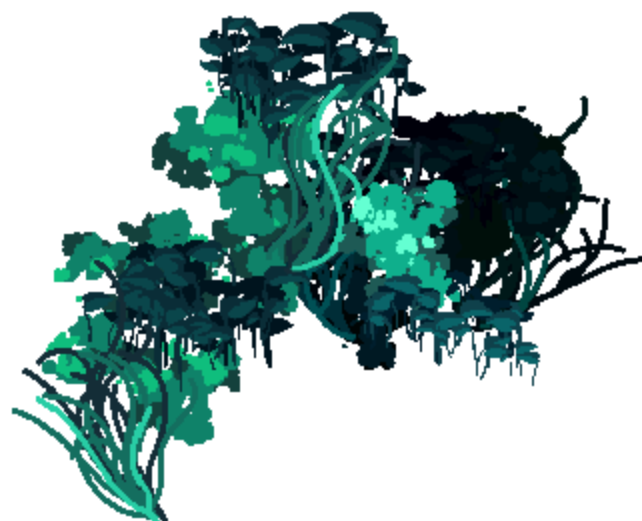
We realized early on that lots of combat was not the way to structure the underwater areas. The colors, light-rays, waves, and the slowed movement created an ethereal beauty we didn't want to distract from with cheap fights. To add some life and motion to the place, we re-skinned forest animals into crabs, eels, and plenty of lazy jellyfish.

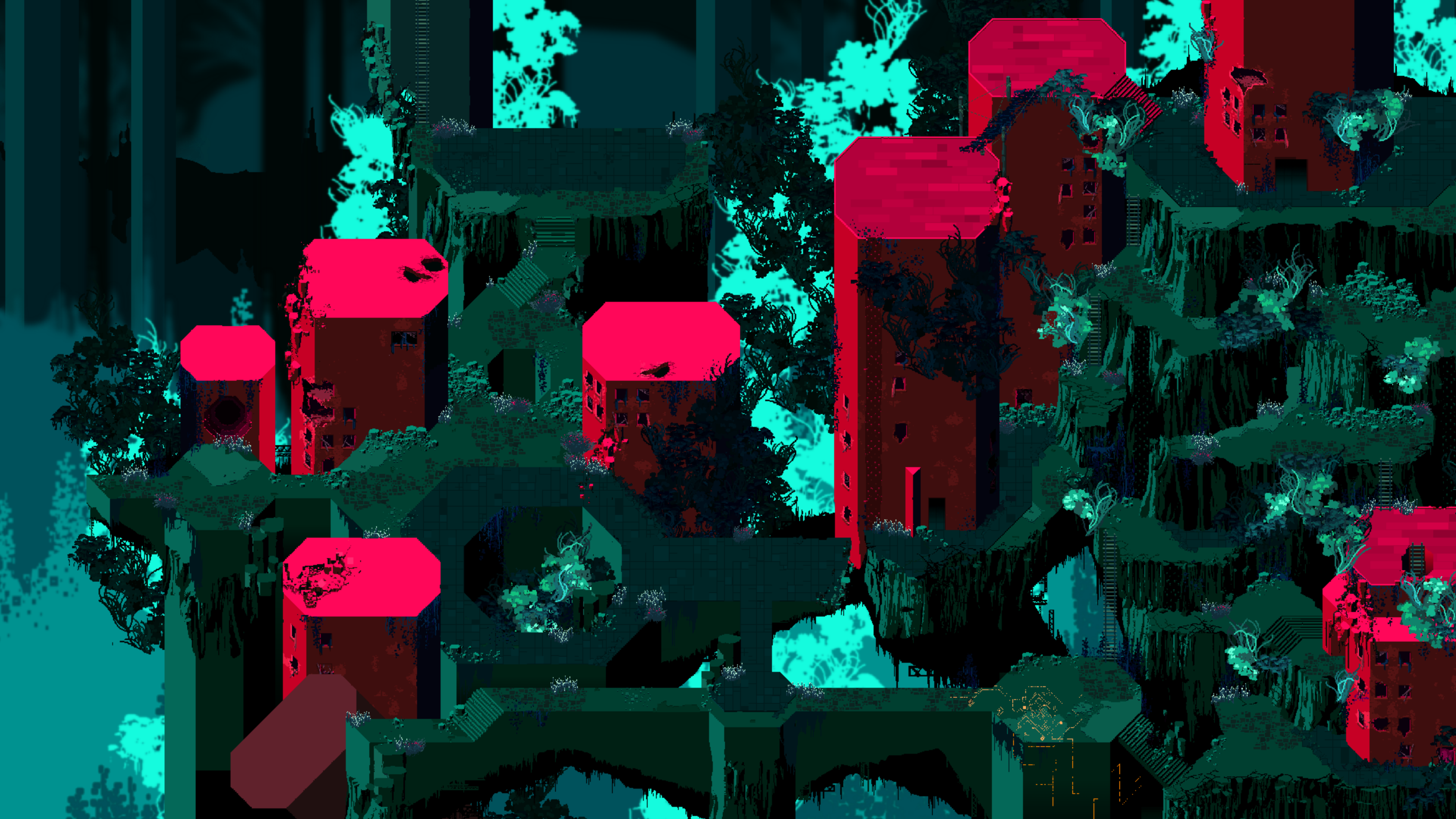


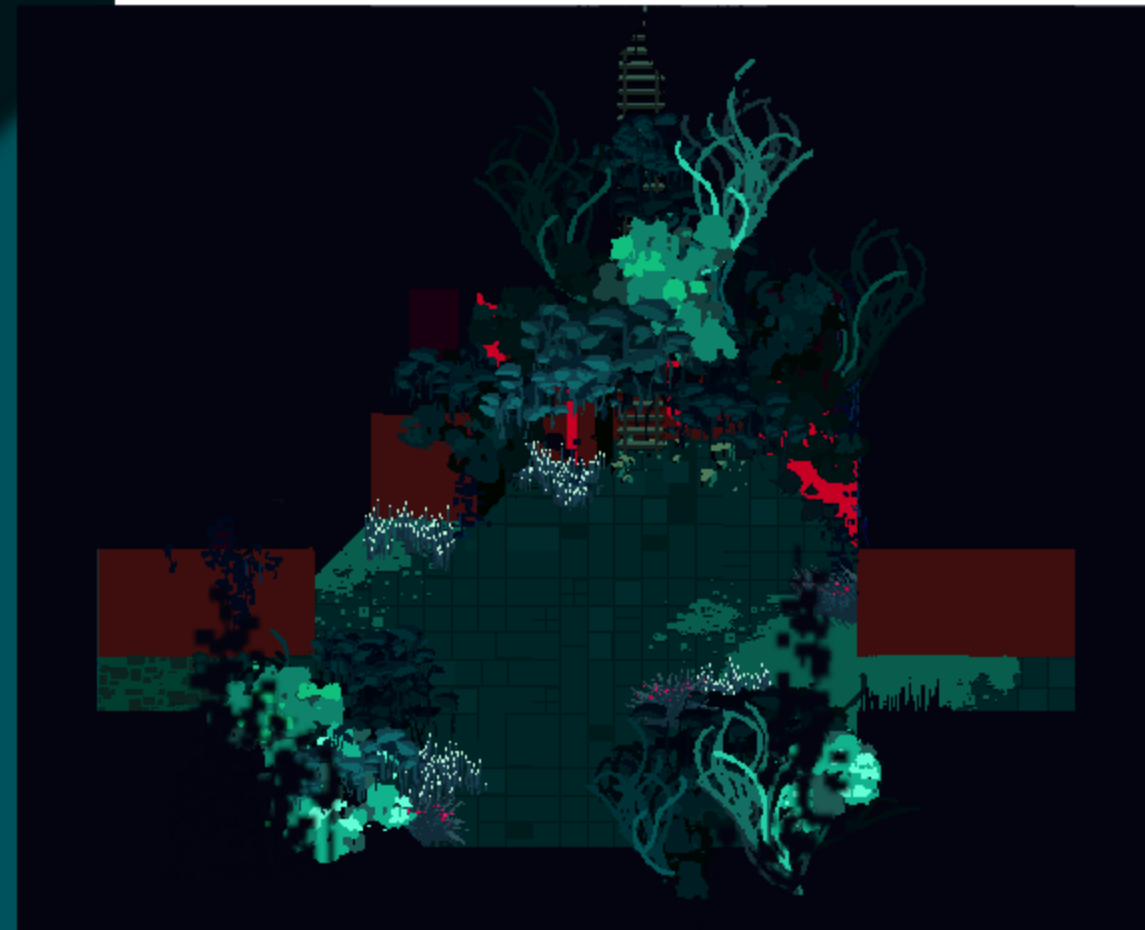
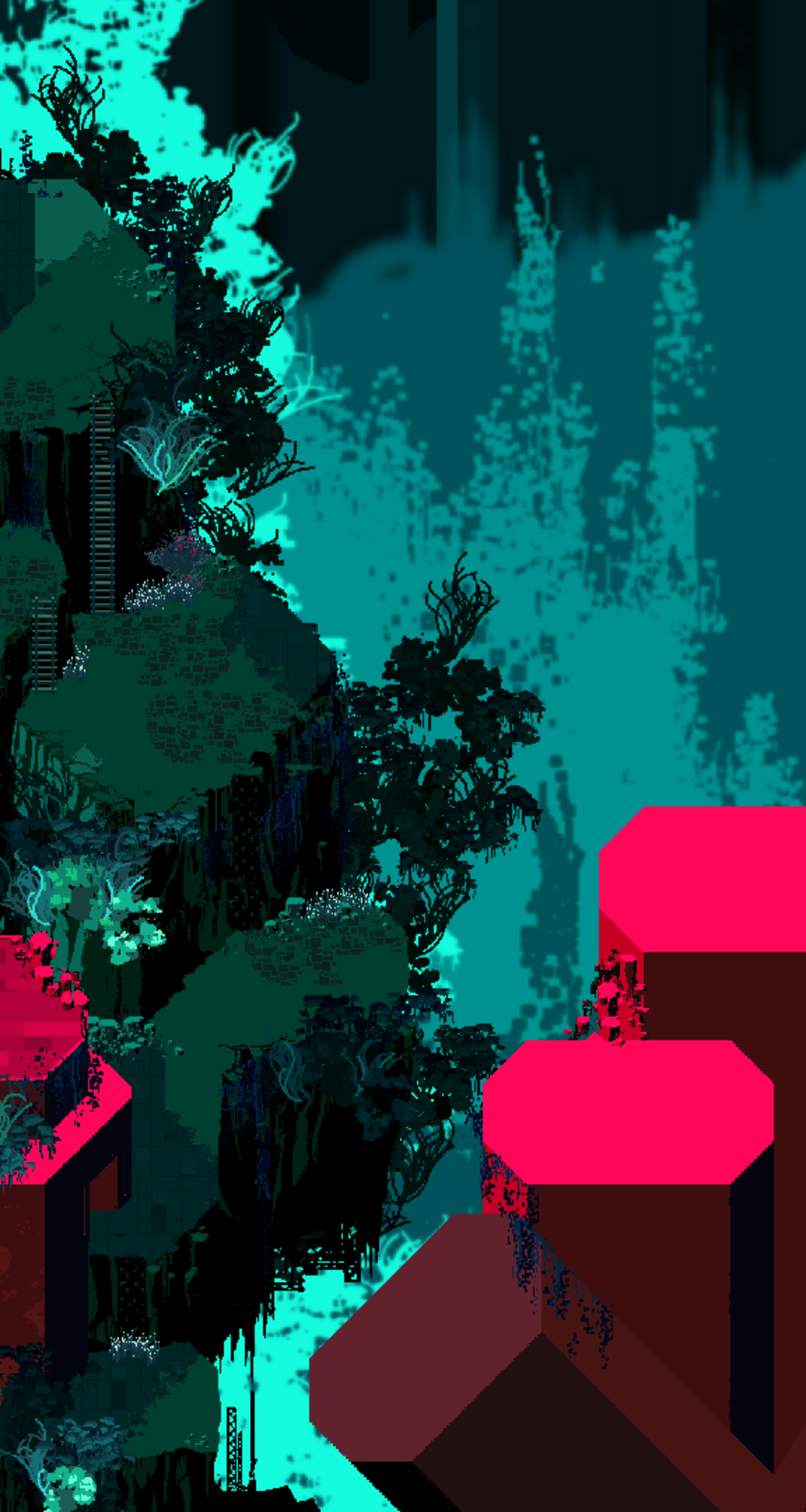


Sea Flora

We experimented with various styles of water plants, but quickly reached our capacities: hand painting individual hydrophytes was not feasible. Instead, we reused Cloud City's asset generation techniques, and built a simple vector-based library of plants, then randomized, scaled, flipped and recolored them endlessly.



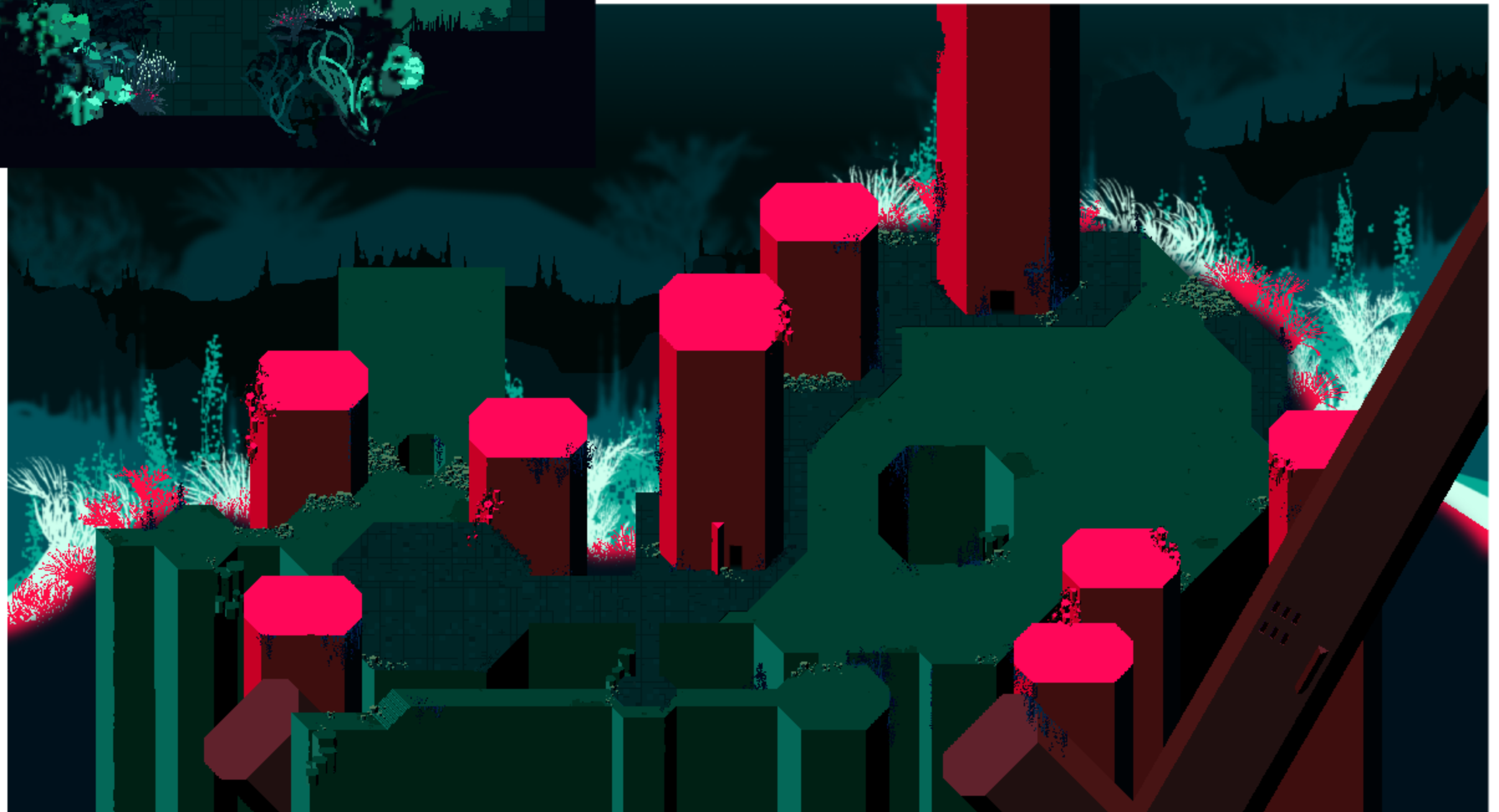


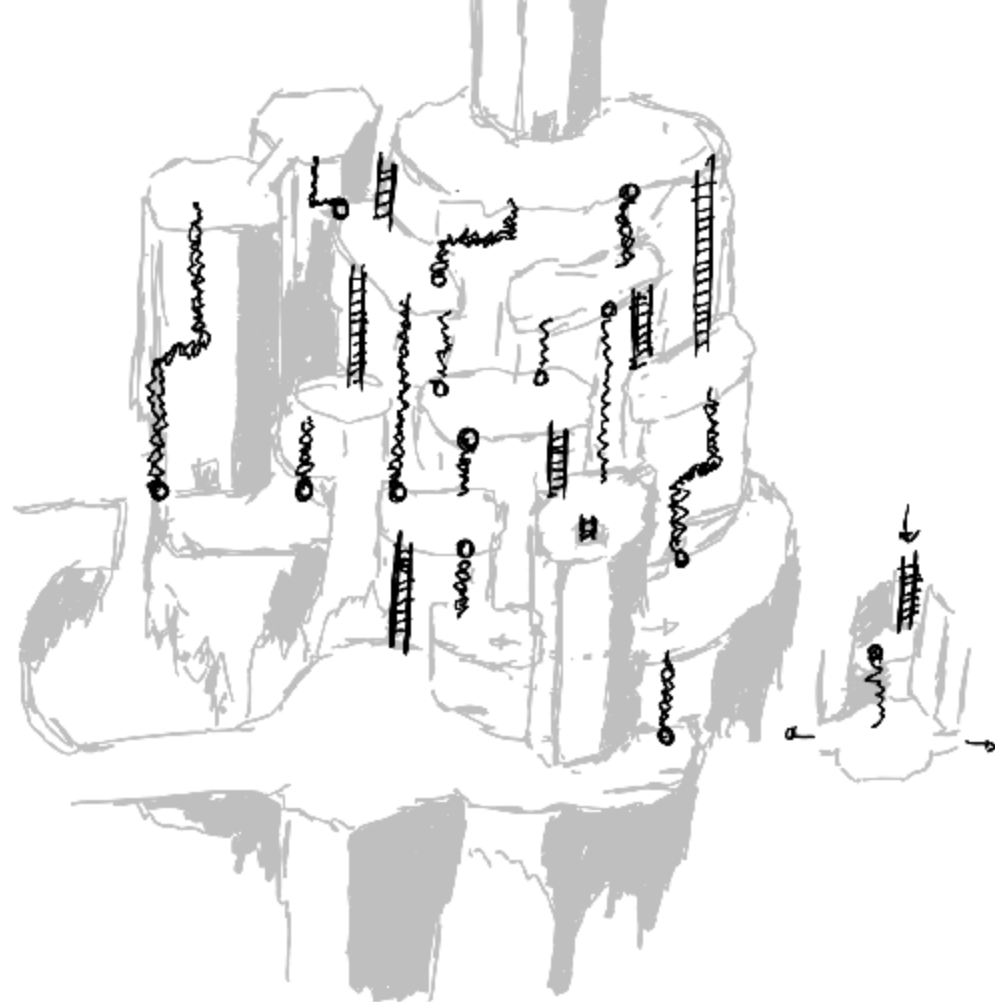


The Garden

Noah, Naamah, and their three sons; the ark; a flooded city; Bible references run deep in the second arc, and the Sunken City is no exception: you have reached the Garden (...Eden, ooooobviously).

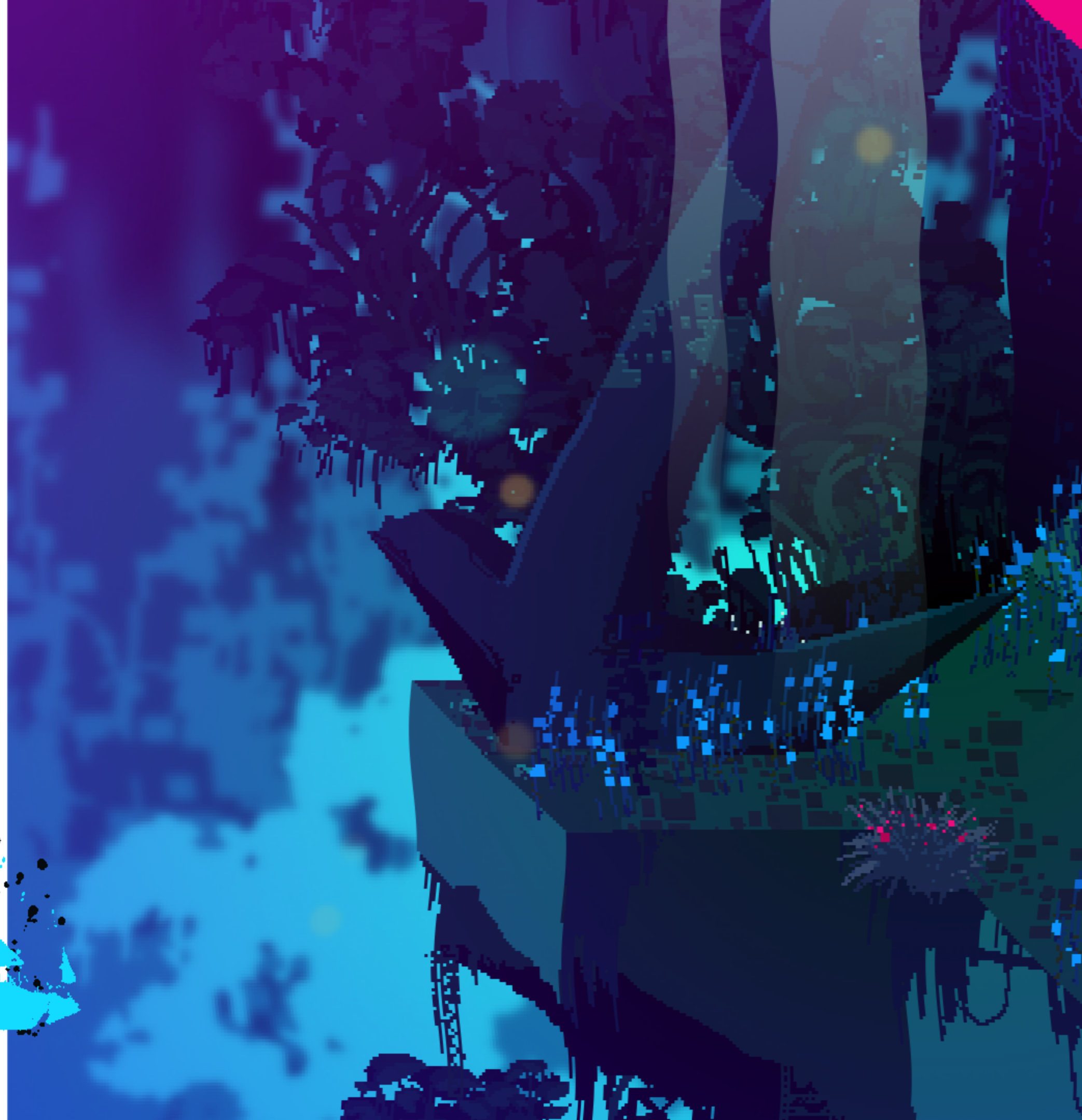
For too long, we had no idea what players would get up to on the eastern side of the map. Sure it looked pretty, but without some fights (which we decided against) it would just be a boring walk from one side to the other. This changed when we redesigned Marty's Boot to a one-directional lock/key item: we could now build a vertical maze.

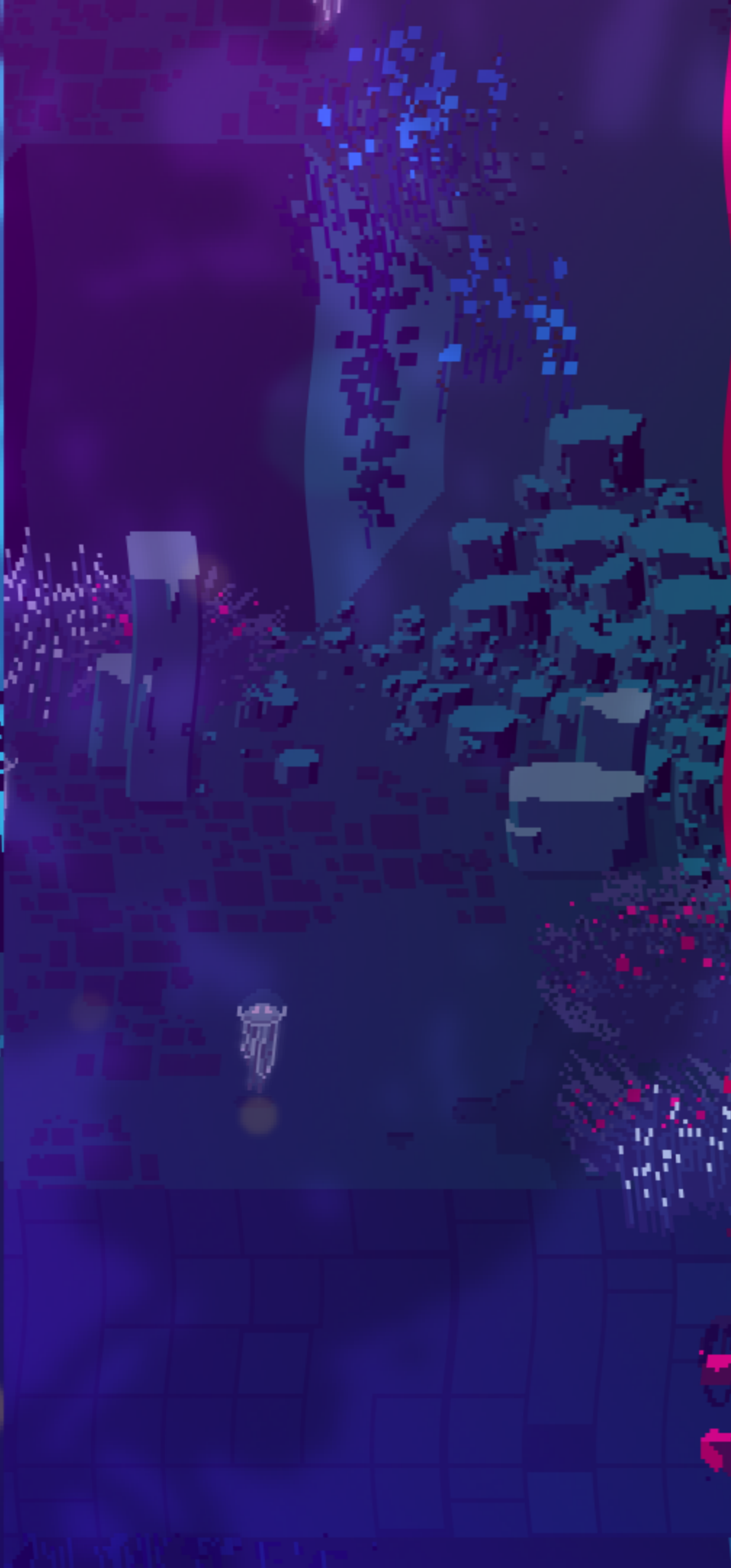
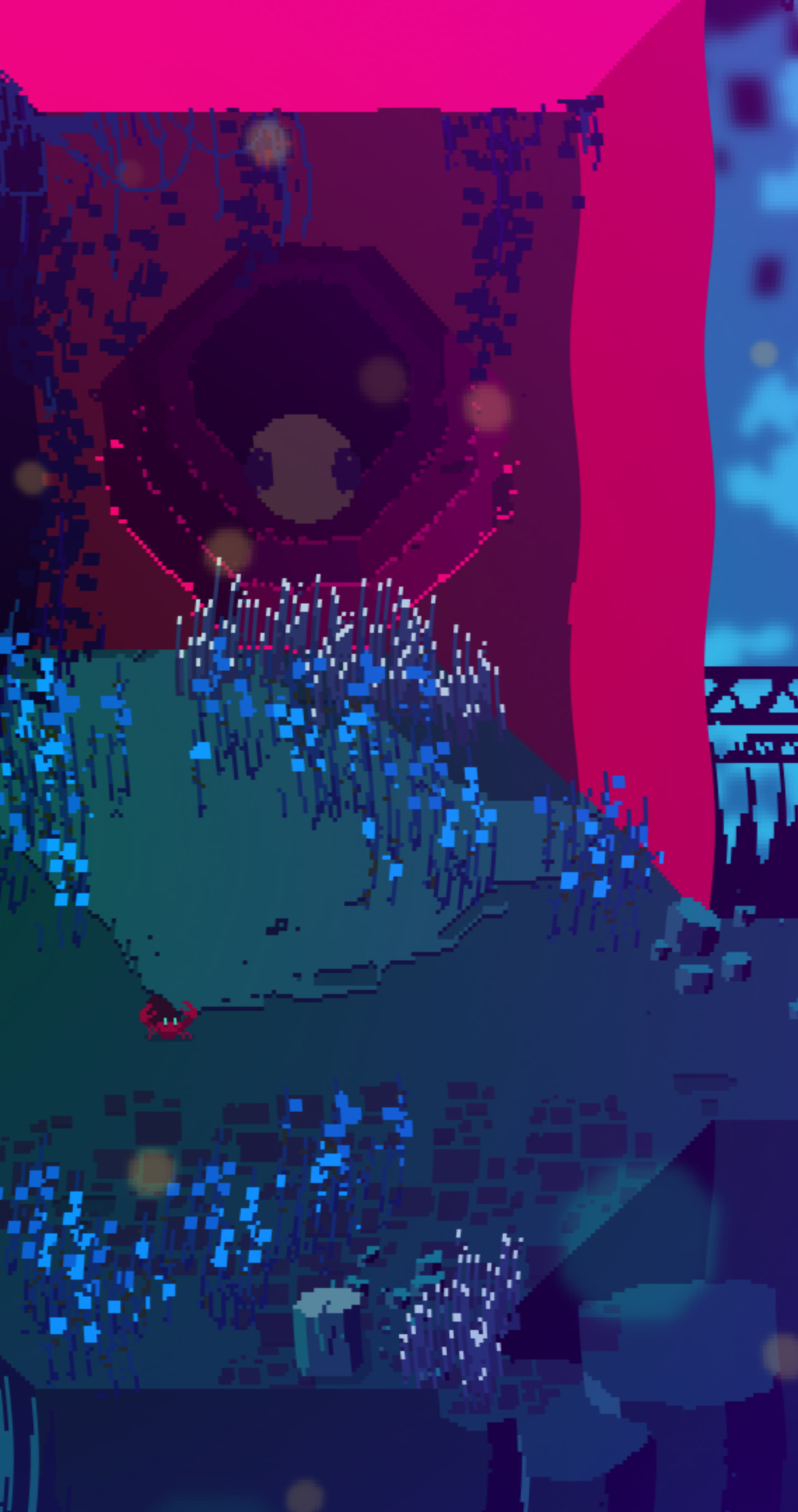




Ladders & Anchors

The maze is made up of various platforms connected by ladders and so-called "fertilizers", to be activated with the dead girl's boot. While there is only one legitimate route to crossing this section, its layout gave us the opportunity to distribute more destructibles, animals, and the infamous anchors.







The Whale

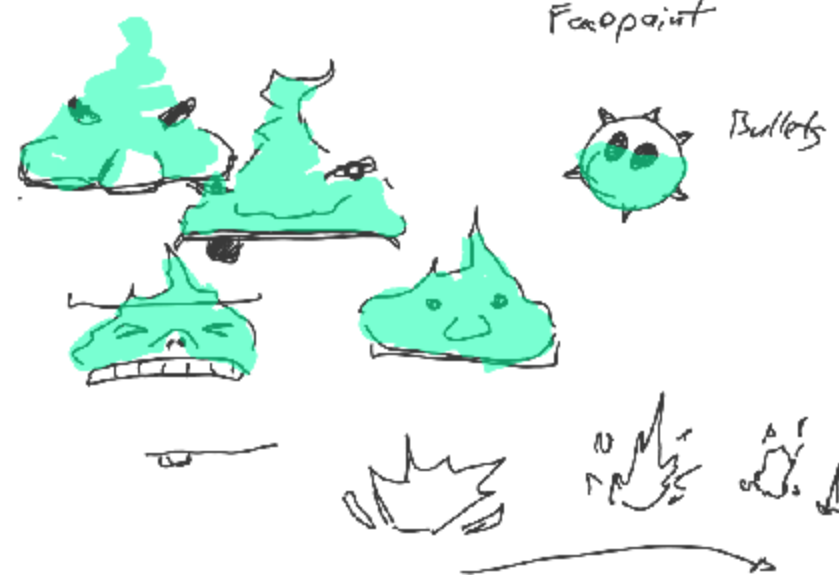
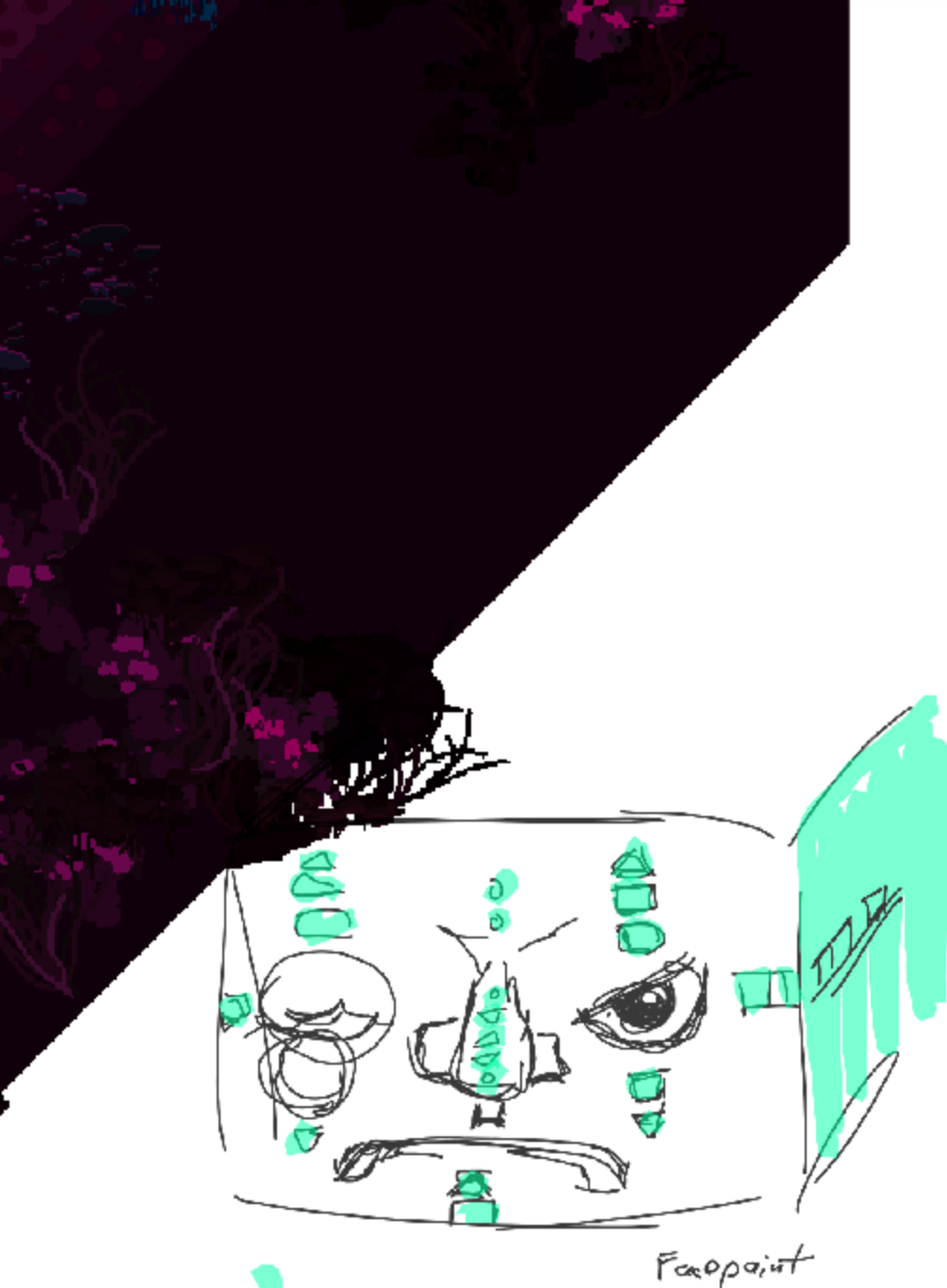
We loved the concept of a whale with a ship stuck to his back so much it was only natural that he became the level's boss. But eventually, we had to ask ourselves who this monstrous ... fish actually was. Does it have a personality? A name? Why are we fighting it?



Originally it was simply called "Whale". Then it turned counterpart to the desert's cat, so we called him "Father". But as the Sunken City's themes progressed and became heavily steeped in religion, our whale became...

God

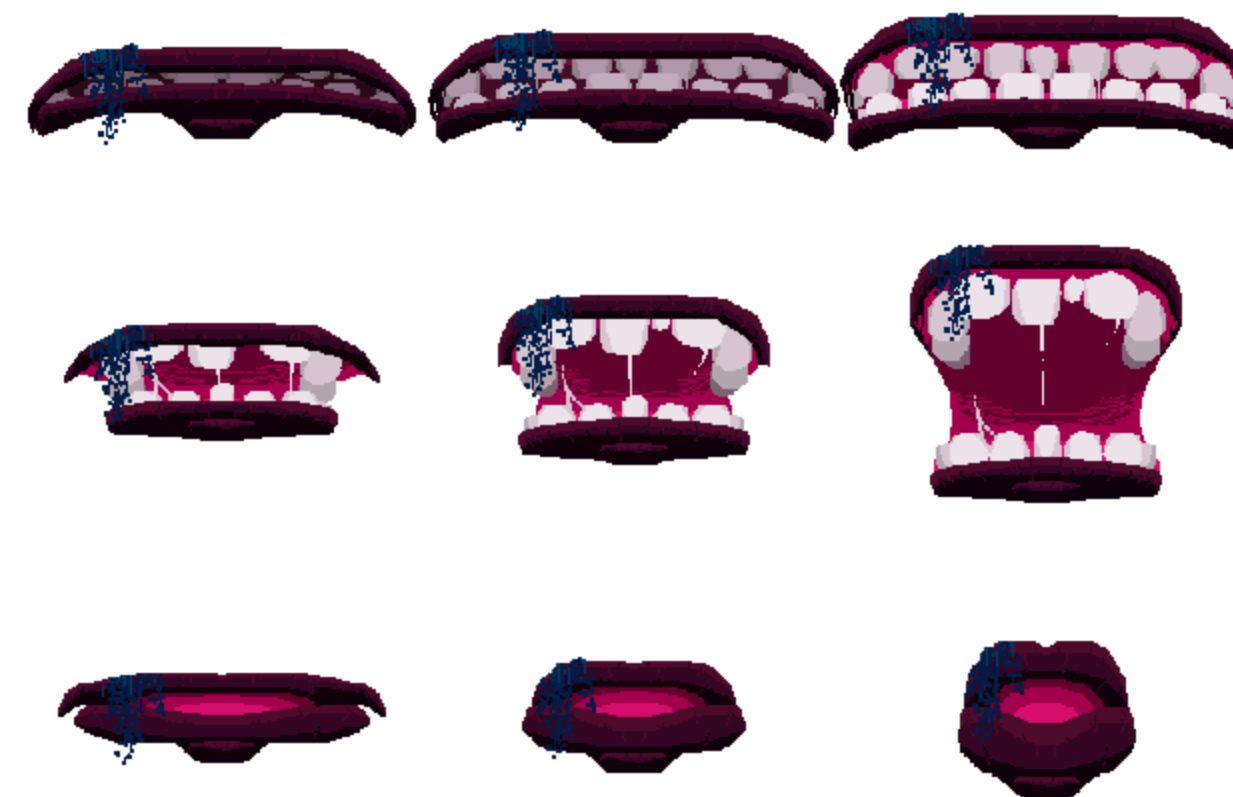
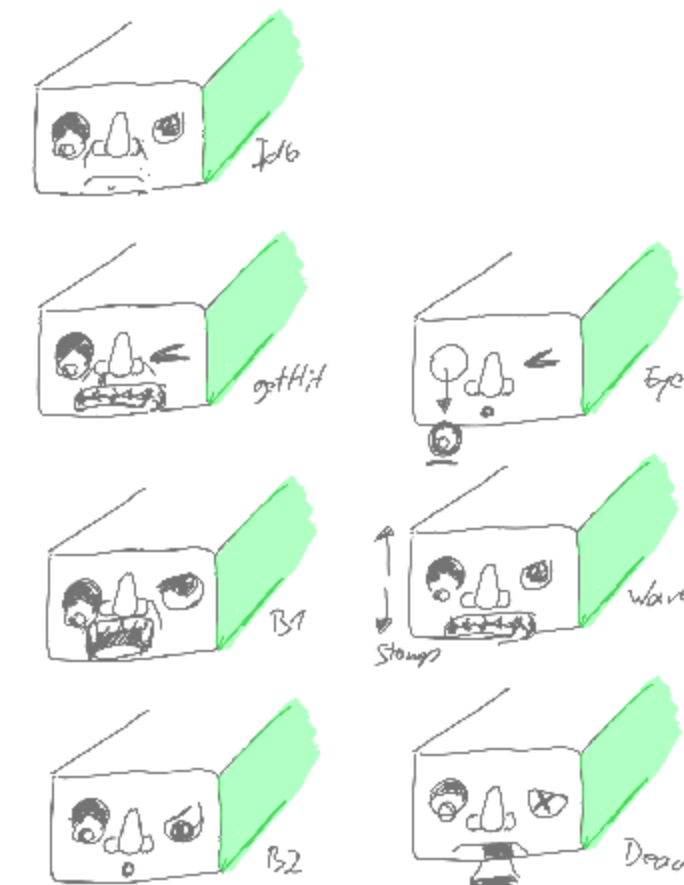
The idea of meeting God as a giant whale and punching him on the nose was just too intimidating to not do. It's just a video game, after all.

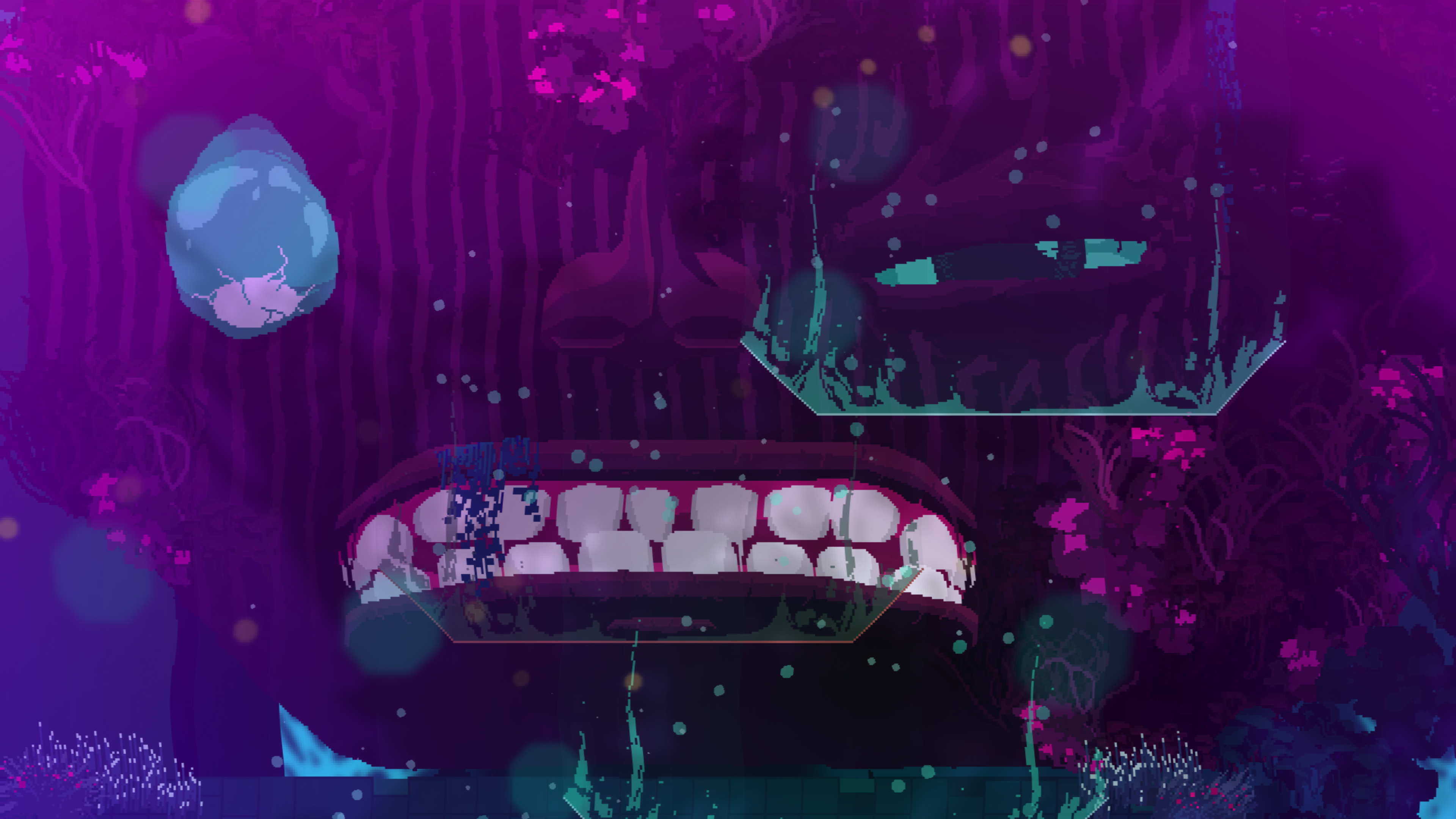


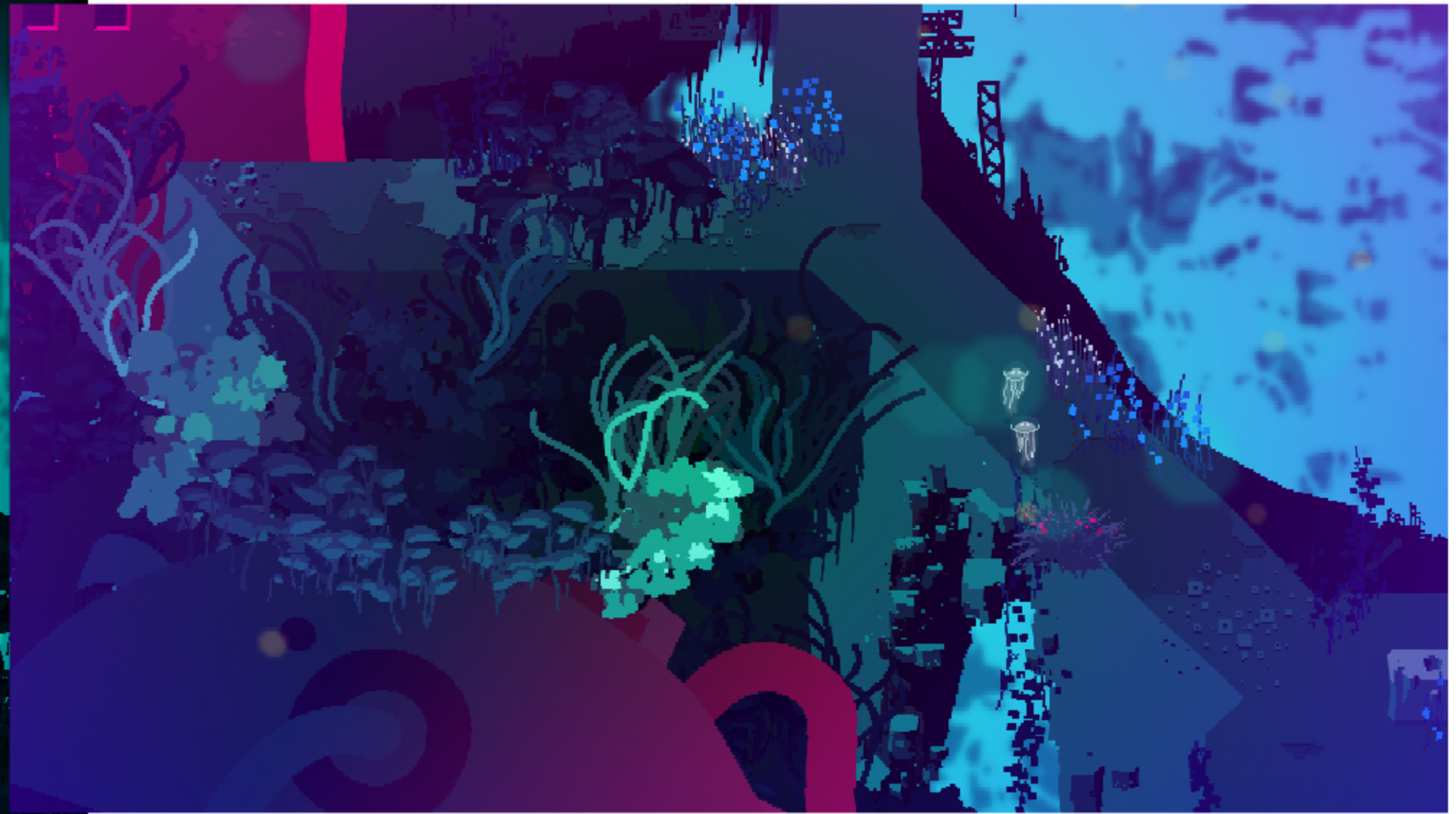
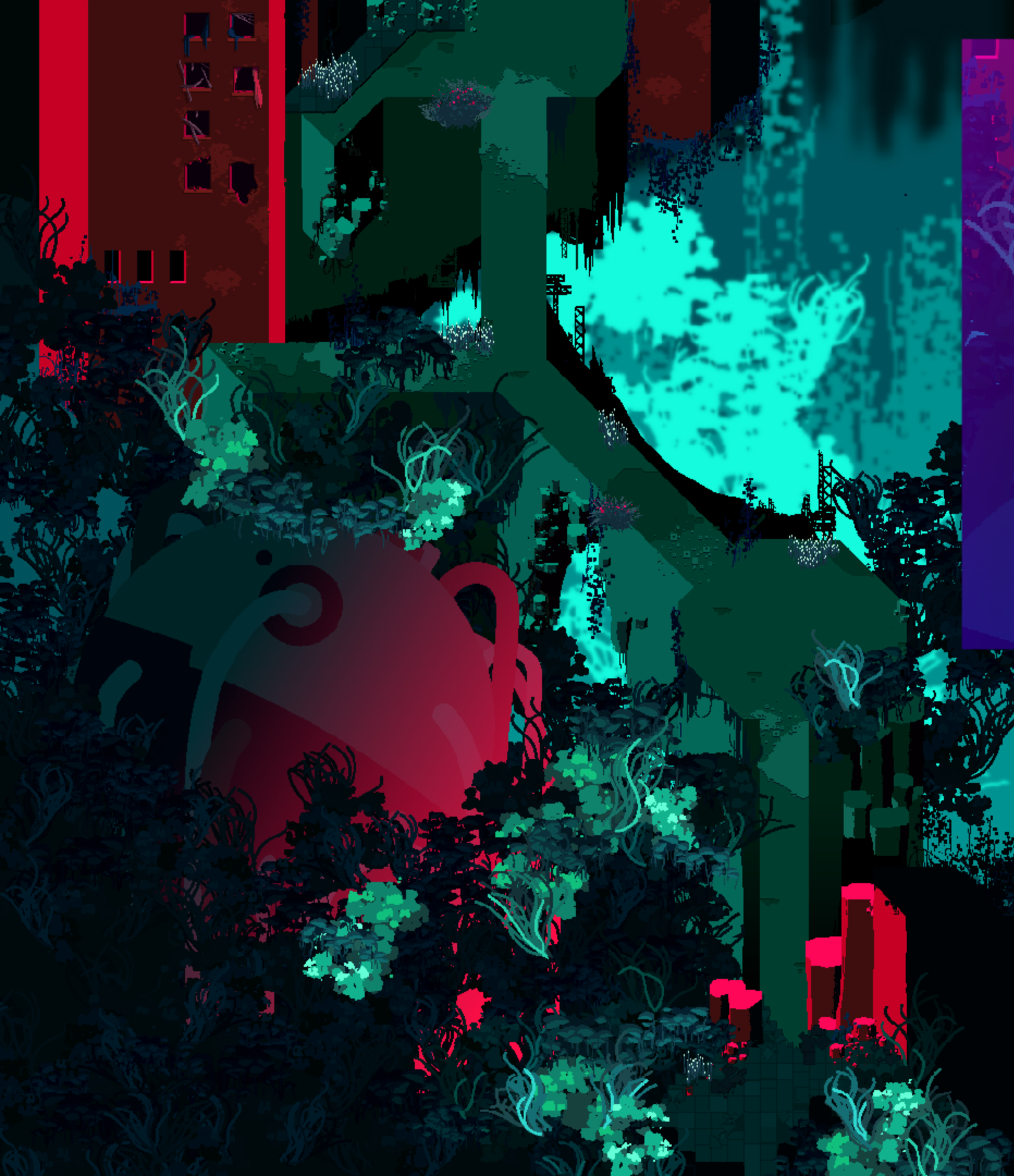
Moving Parts

Creating big, screen-filling encounters is complicated. On top of the action, we needed God's face to communicate patterns, interact with the environment — and on top of that we had to find a way of hiding a secret in the arena as well. It took many sketches, brainstorming sessions and prototypes to tame this monster ... at least a little.

"I'd love to sweep the world with another flood. But you didn't learn from the last one, mmh?"
—God







Leaving the Sunken City

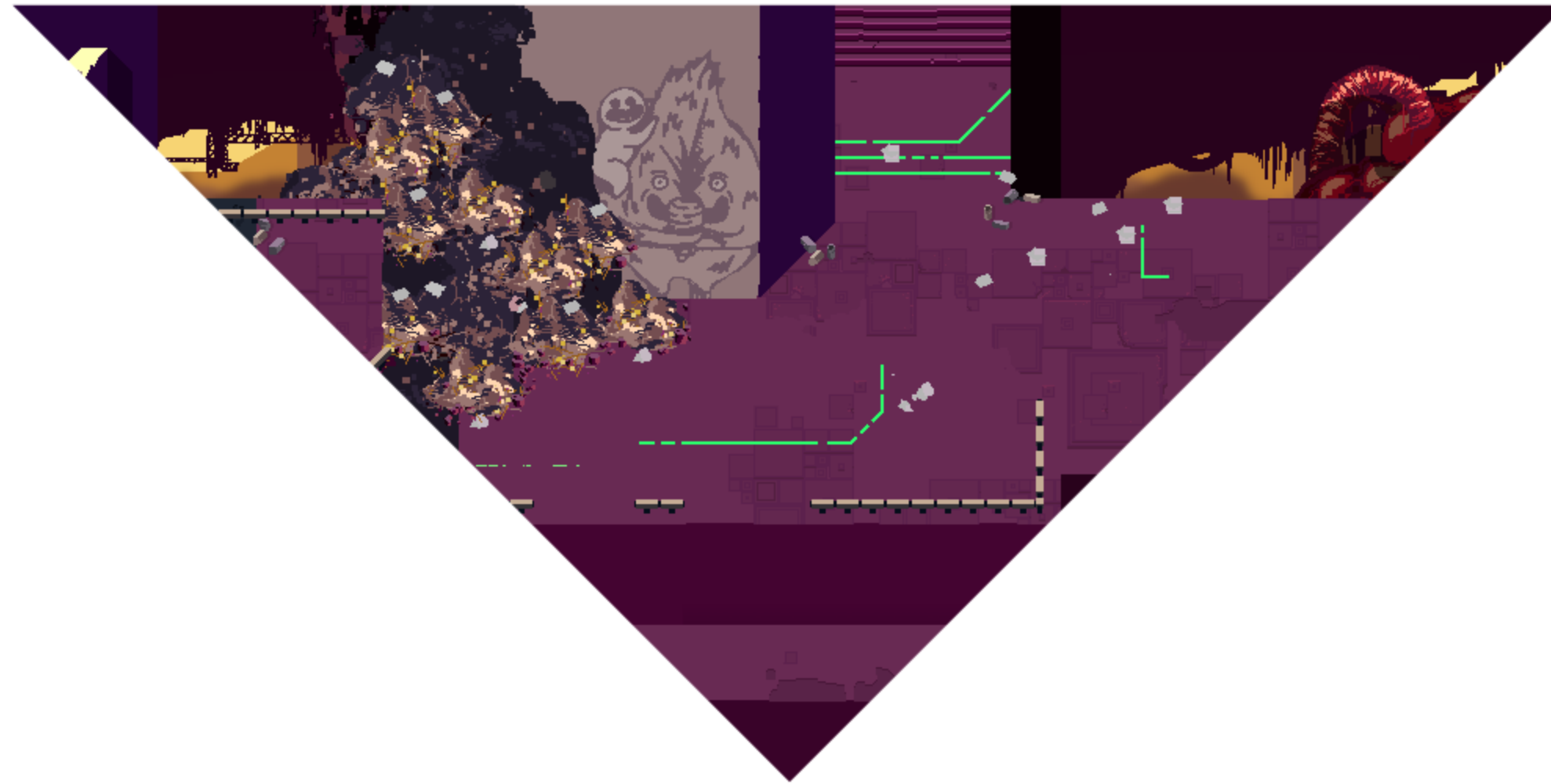
Skipping the “God is dead” cliché, we can get a glimpse of another Cradle on our way out of the Sunken City: this is neither Green’s, Blue’s, or Red’s Cradle, but that of a fourth entity. Unfortunately, this one remains shrouded in rumors, since we were not able to work this character into the initial release of Resolution — maybe a future update will reveal the “Kvmot Bjy”. For now, let’s head north, towards the Kingdom:

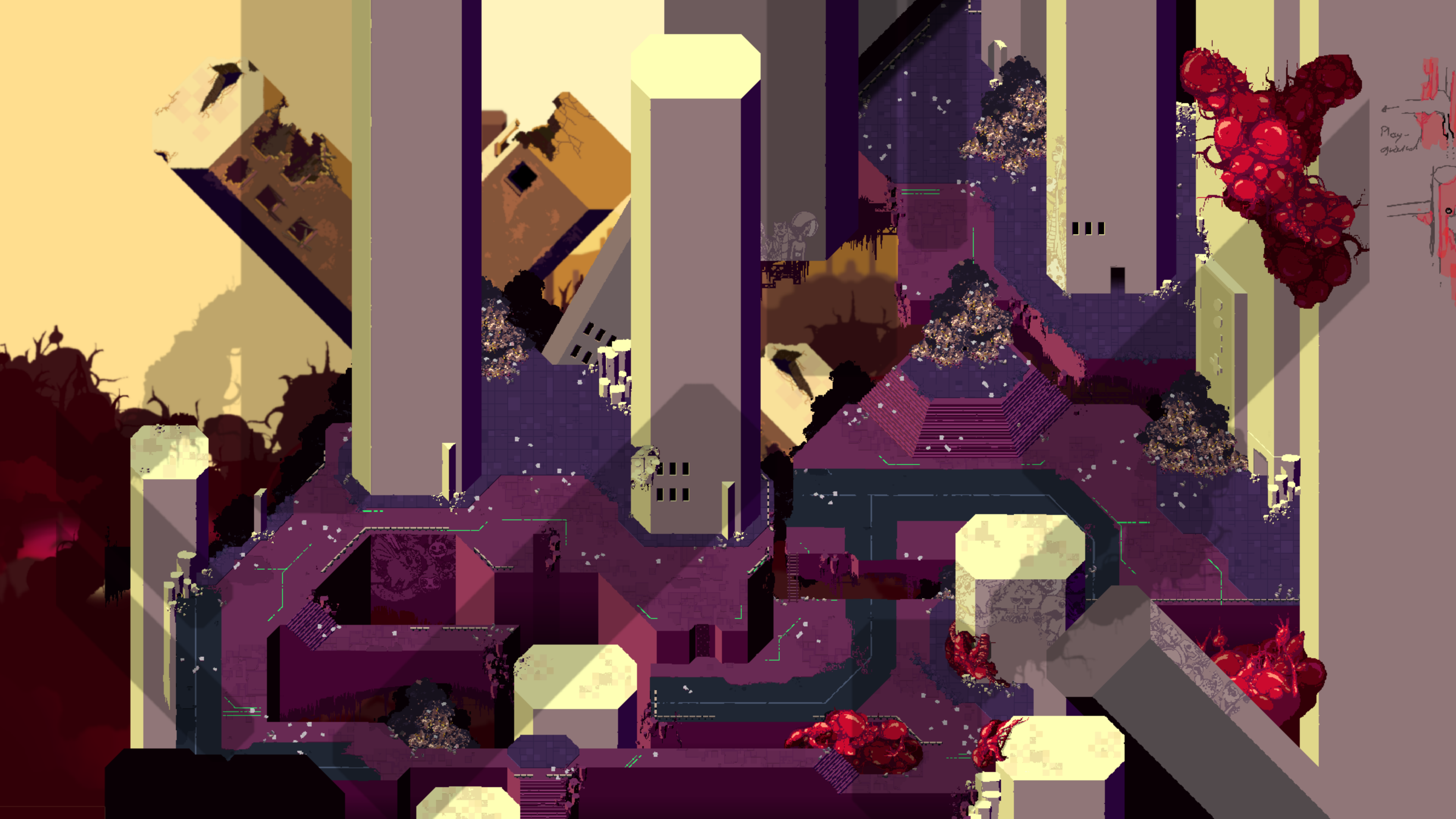
“Hearken, noble folk of the dry lands, hearken to me! A tragedy:
The King has vanished. The King is missing. Our lands forsaken.
We hereby call on brave warriors in search of a quest:
Find and return our King safely, and thy reward shall be generous.”
—The Herald Party

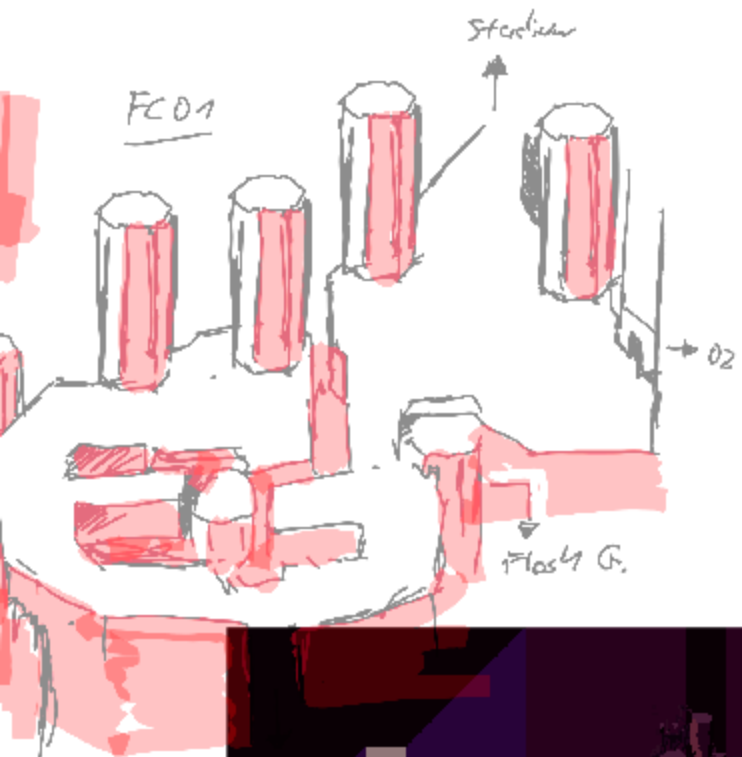


God will judge you.
-A Jellyfish

Fallen City



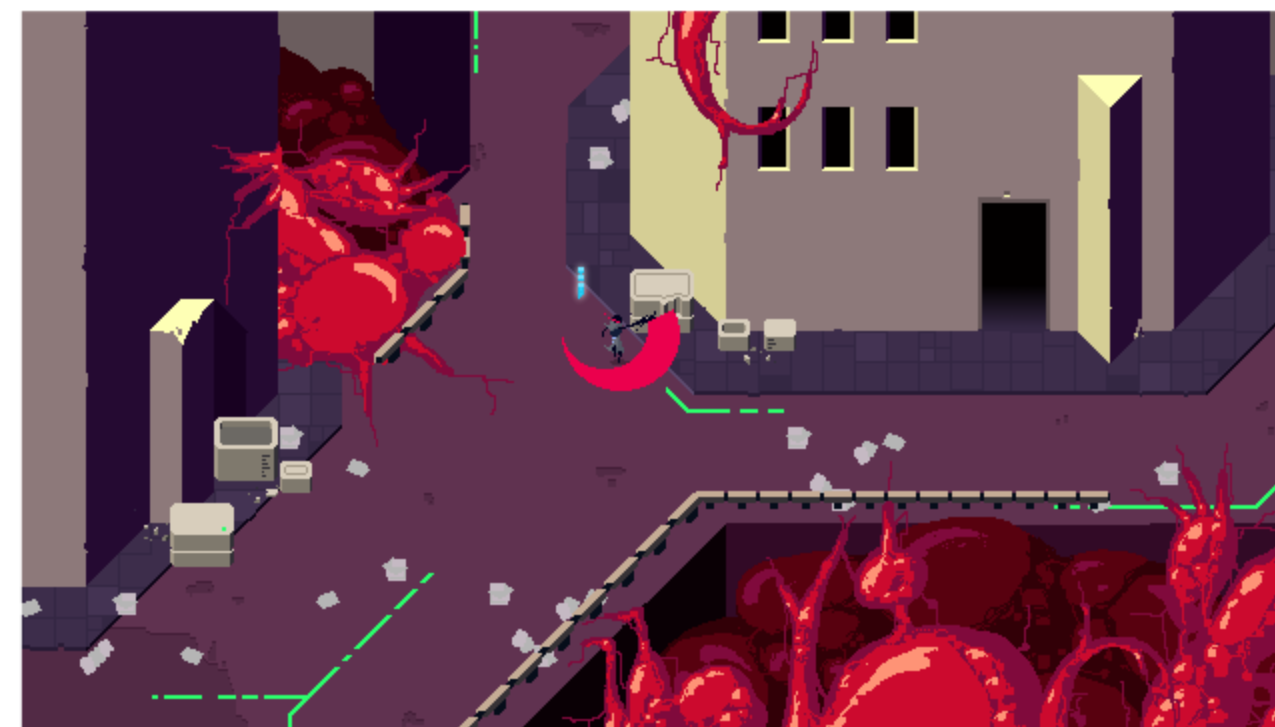
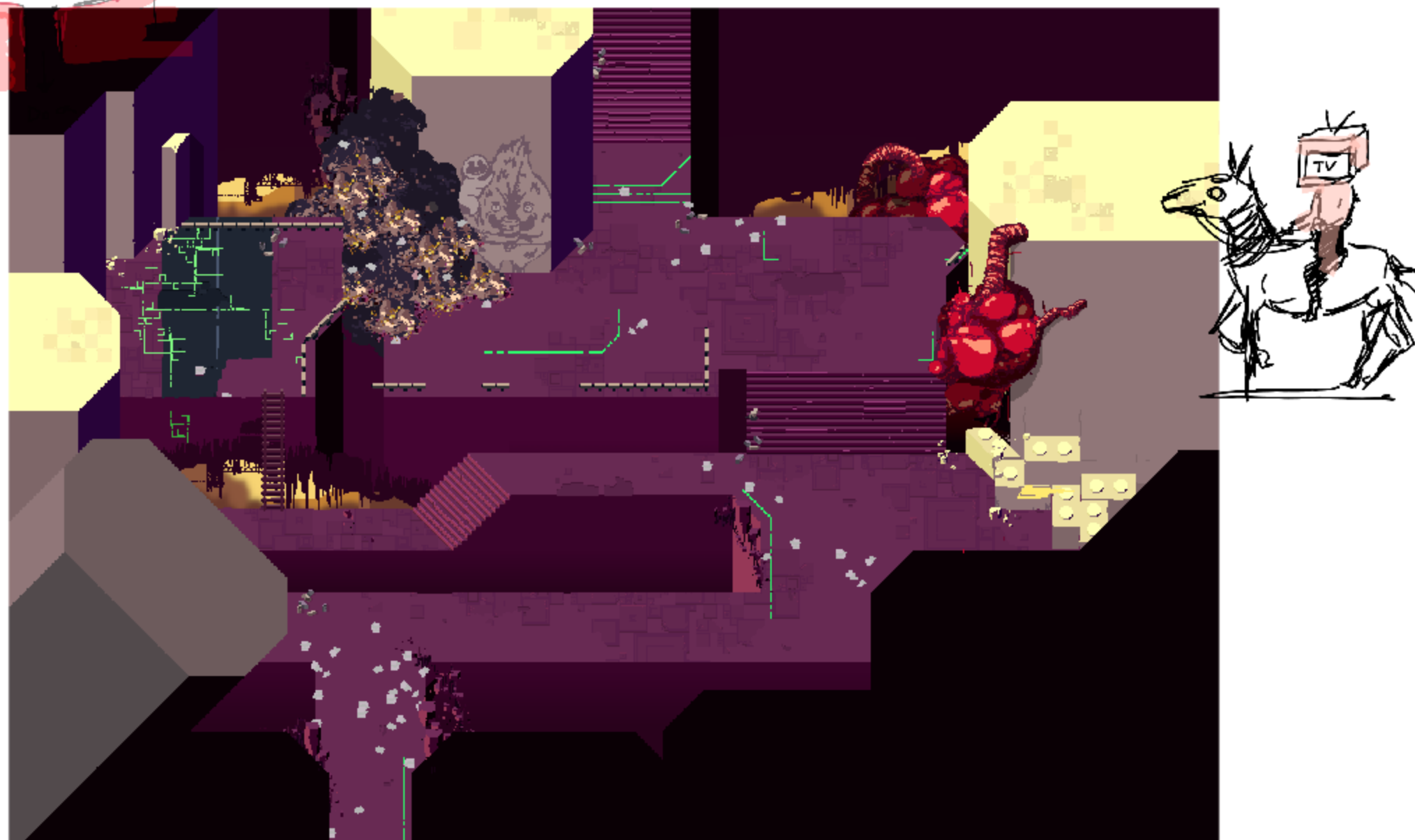




Fallen City

200,000 plus tons of metal, concrete, and fuel were prone to technical failure and many floating structures came crashing back to earth with the force of slow, stupid asteroids, grinding cities, trees and flesh to dust.

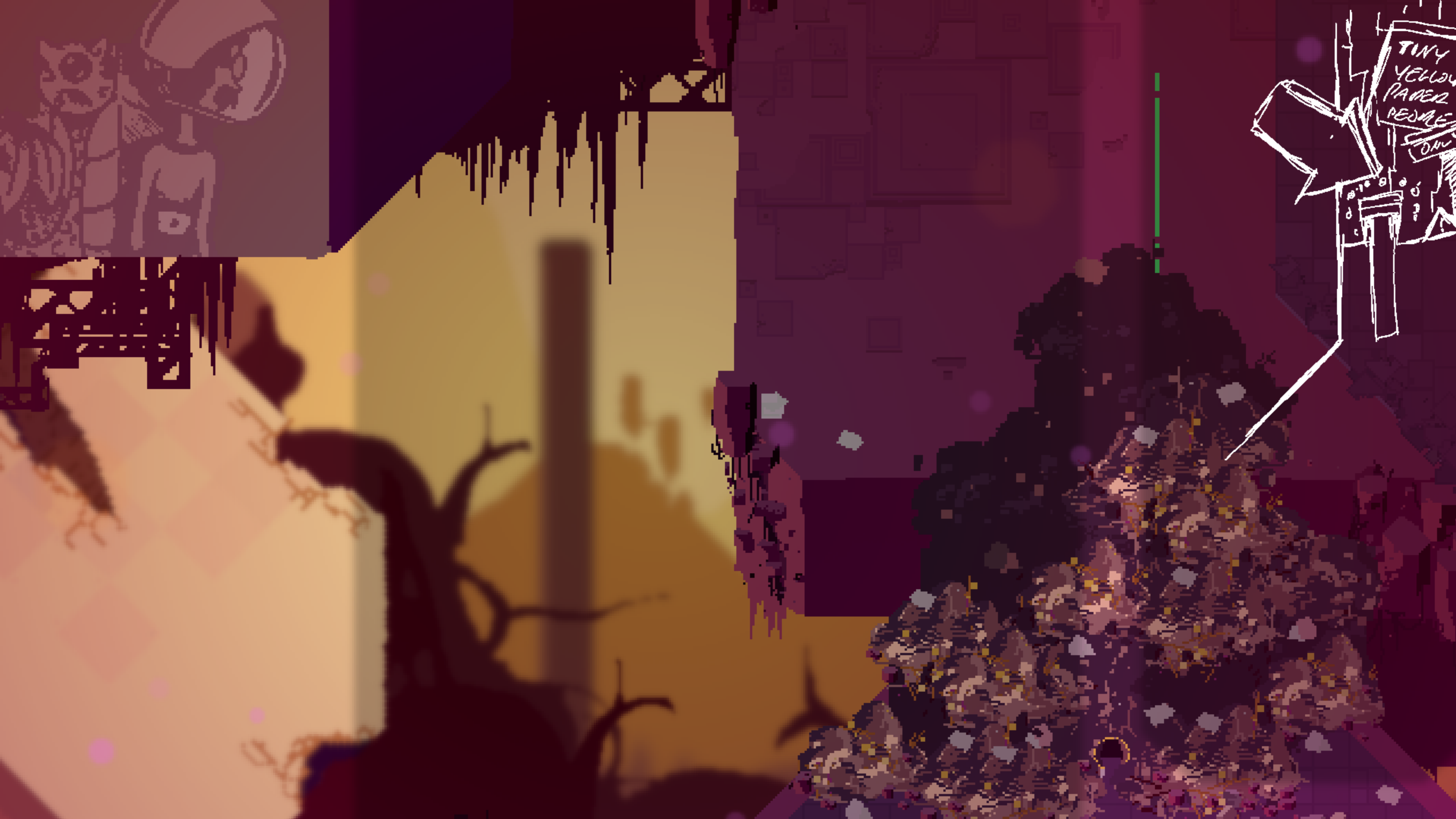
The Fallen City is home to the lost and the outcasts of the Infinite Empire. A grave for many, but a kingdom for a few. We designed the ruined wasteland as the predecessor of Cloud City, mimicking architecture, colors, and patterns but in a slightly more primitive style.



Herald

Here we meet a guy on a strange camel with a TV instead of his head: the Herald greets all travelers, introduces them to the kingdom and tells the King's story as only a broken toy robot could — with cheap rhymes and awkward phrasing.

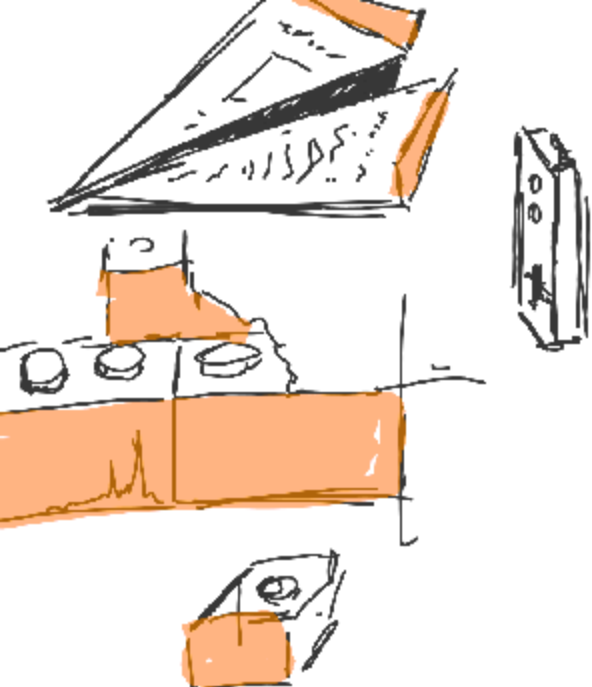




Debris

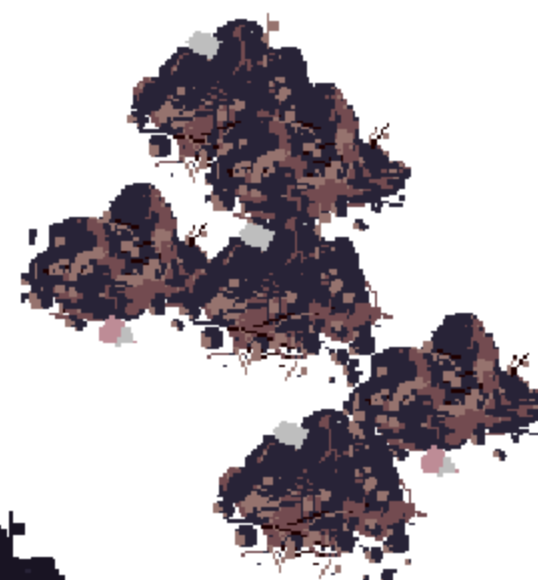
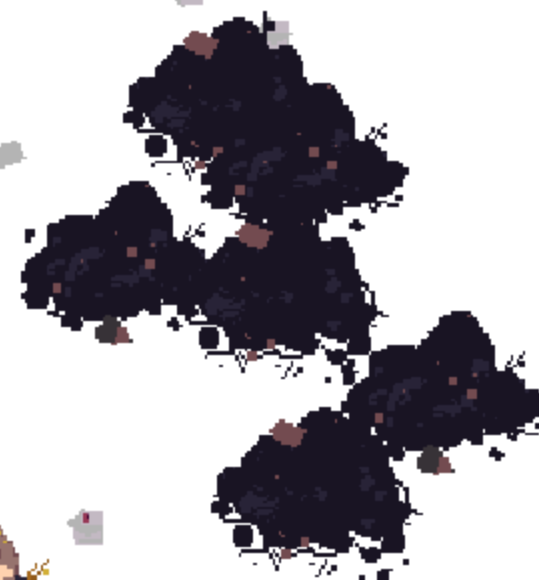
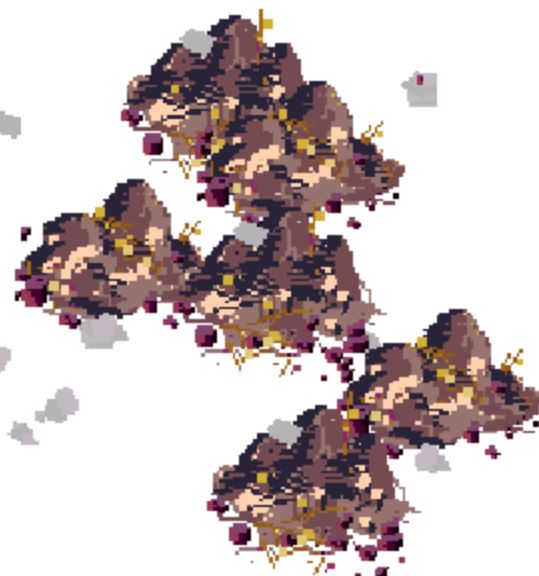
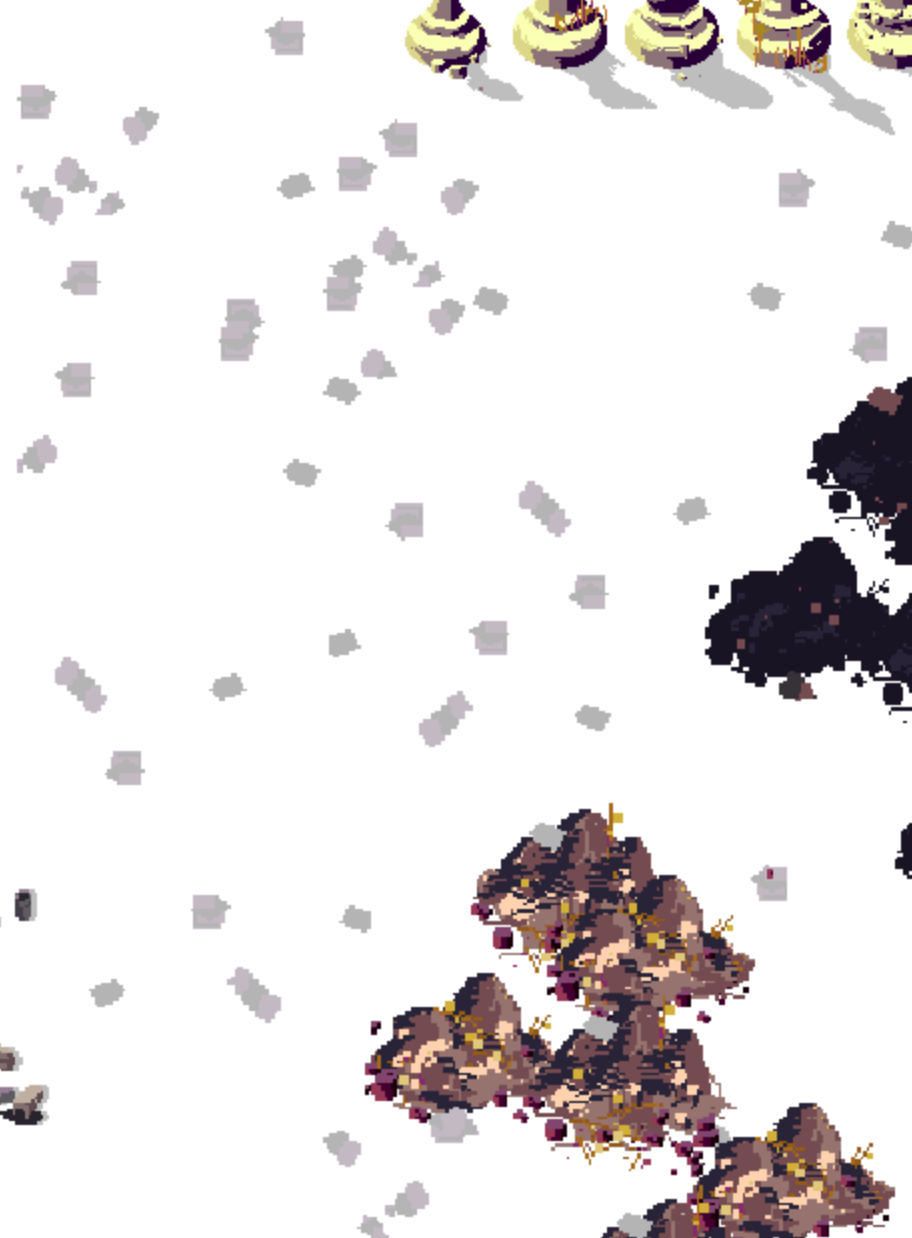
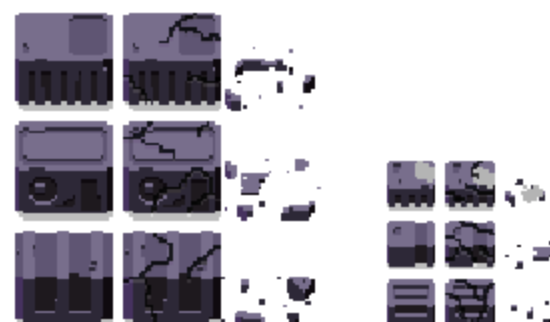
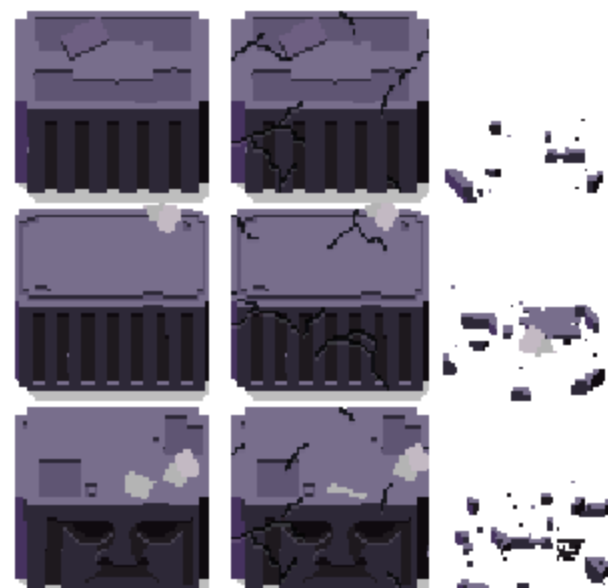
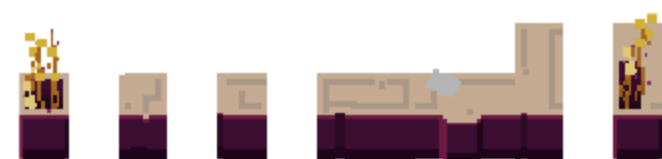
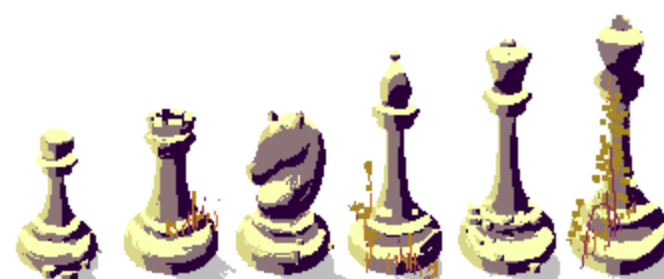
The Fallen City is littered with piles of trash and fragments of collapsed skyscrapers, some still bound to their drifting engines. Between those signs of the past, decay and life are fighting for permanent dominance or an overdue comeback: rotten flesh crawls from every gap, while the brave toy-knights fight for king and glory.



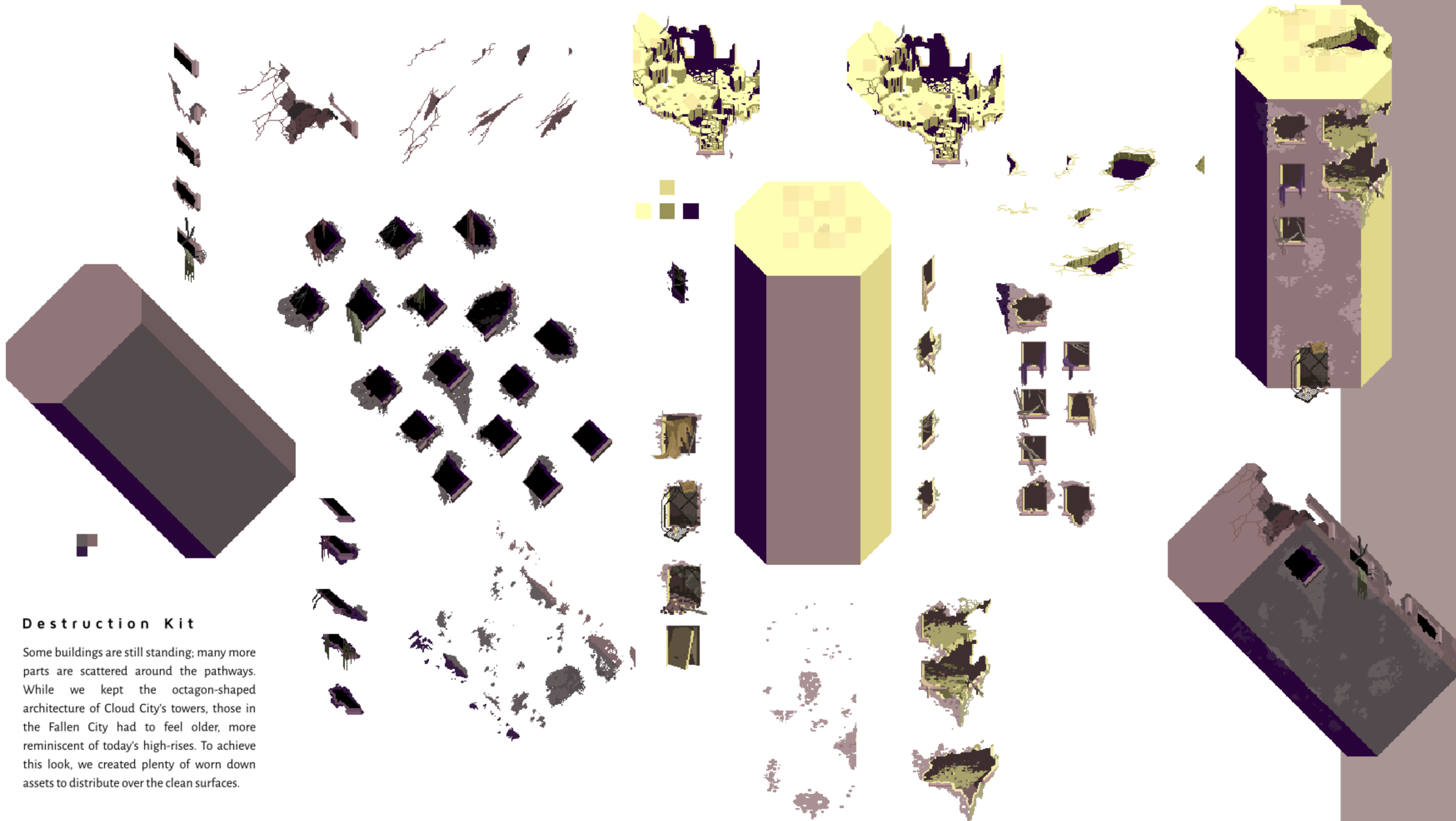


Trash, Drops & Props

To get the look of the Fallen City right, we built a plethora of design elements, objects, and destructibles that would feel at home in a junkyard: piles of trash, cans, loose paper, brittle poles, garbage bags, crates, dustbins... LEGO bricks, paper planes, chess pieces and huge NES controllers.







Destruction Kit

Some buildings are still standing; many more parts are scattered around the pathways. While we kept the octagon-shaped architecture of Cloud City's towers, those in the Fallen City had to feel older, more reminiscent of today's high-rises. To achieve this look, we created plenty of worn down assets to distribute over the clean surfaces.

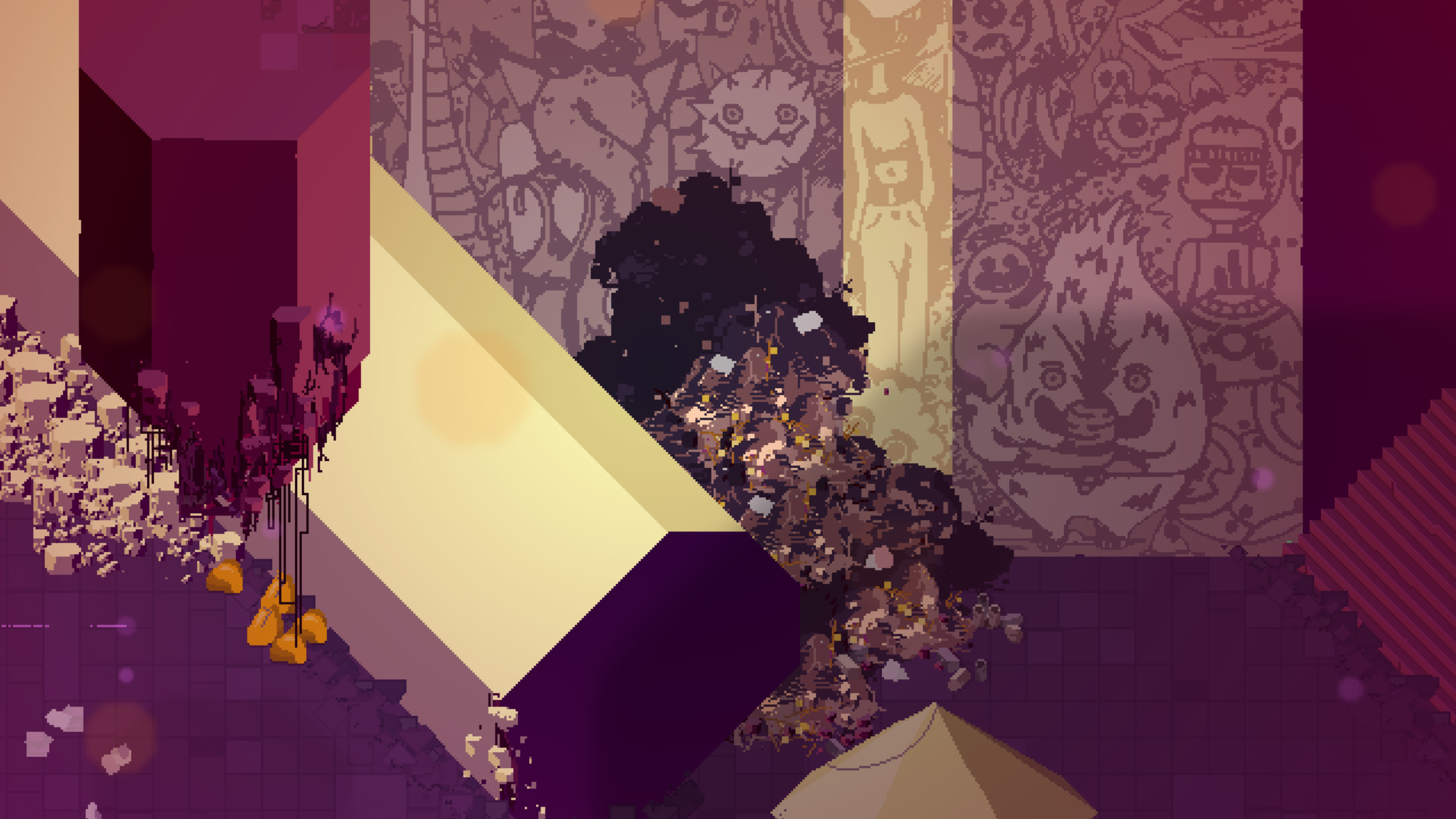
A collage of various horror-themed illustrations. At the top left is a woman with a very long, thick, braided blonde hair that reaches down to her waist. Next to her is a man with a long, dark, shaggy beard and a balding head. To the right is a woman with long blonde hair, wearing a black corset and high heels, holding a handgun. Below the woman with the long braid is a woman with a large, brown, rat-like head and a small body. In the center is a woman with a large, dark, swirling eye on her face and a long, coiled tail. To the right of the woman with the large eye is a woman with a large, dark, snake-like head and a small body. At the bottom right is a woman with a large, dark, open mouth and a small body. The background is a light blue gradient with faint, stylized clouds.

A collage of various horror-themed illustrations. At the top left is a woman with a very long, thick, braided blonde hair that reaches down to her waist. Next to her is a man with a long, dark, shaggy beard and a balding head. To the right is a woman with long blonde hair, wearing a black corset and high heels, holding a handgun. Below the woman with the long braid is a woman with a large, brown, rat-like head and a small body. In the center is a woman with a large, dark, swirling eye on her face and a long, coiled tail. To the right of the woman with the large eye is a woman with a large, dark, snake-like head and a small body. At the bottom right is a woman with a large, dark, open mouth and a small body. The background is a light blue gradient with faint, stylized clouds.


A collage of various horror-themed illustrations. At the top left is a woman with a very long, thick, braided blonde hair that reaches down. Next to her is a man with a long, dark, shaggy beard and a balding head. To the right is a woman in a black corset holding a long, ornate gun. Below the man with the beard is a large, multi-eyed tentacle monster with a long, curled appendage. To the left of the tentacle monster is a small, pale creature with large, round, black eyes and long, thin ears. At the bottom right is a woman with a large, dark, scaly snake coiled around her head and shoulders. The background is a light, textured grey.

A collage of various horror-themed illustrations. At the top left is a woman with a very long, thick, braided blonde hair that reaches down. Next to her is a man with a long, dark, shaggy beard and a balding head. To the right is a woman in a black corset holding a long, ornate gun. Below the bearded man is a large, multi-eyed tentacle with a face. To the left of the tentacle is a small, green, frog-like creature with large eyes and a wide mouth. At the bottom right is a woman with a large, dark, multi-headed snake or dragon-like creature emerging from her head. The background is a light blue gradient with faint, stylized clouds.









"Curse the flesh, praise the machine.
Oh, help us now, almighty paper."
—Sir Galahad

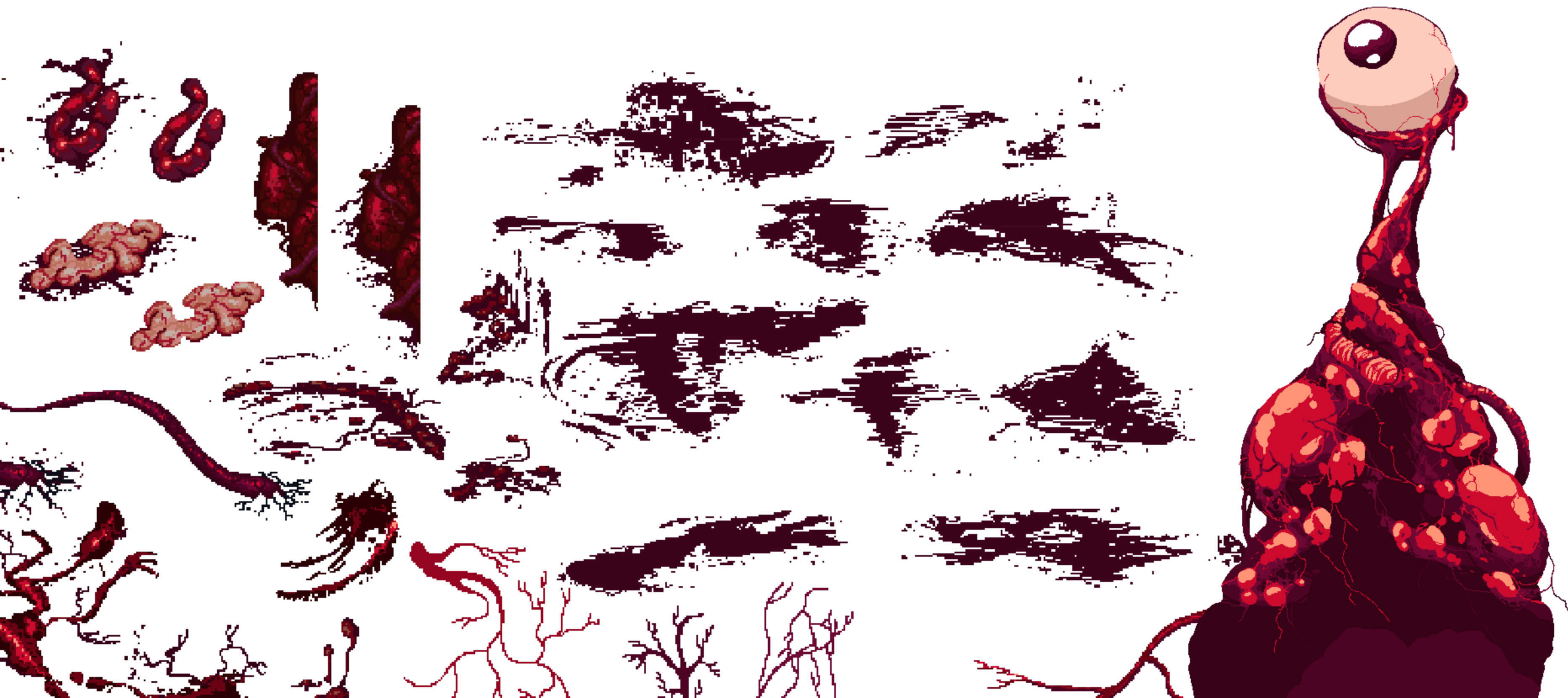


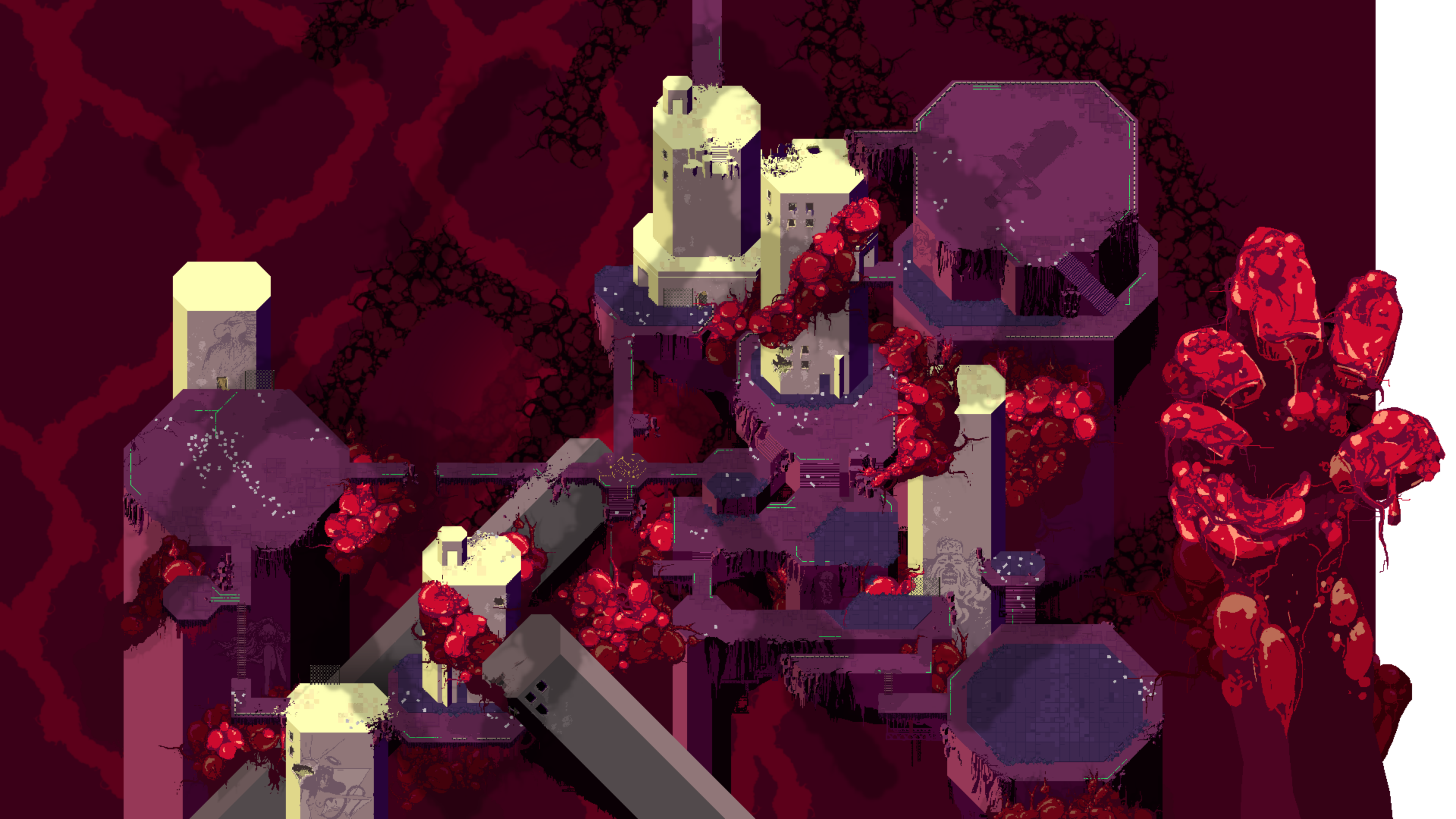
Gore

Progressing through the Fallen City, it becomes obvious that something strange is going on here: fleshy tumors are growing from the pits and corners into the streets, foreshadowing an eerie secret.

Creating those piles of gore became a never-ending story: we added layer after layer of cancer, veins and blister details, but the flesh always demanded more — like a drug addict, craving shot after shot.

Even as we put together this art book, we continue to add more disgusting elements and layers to the spread and the source of the mutation. It has become an inconvenient obsession.





Generals

In the Sea of Flesh shall we find the salvation of the land: three of the King's generals set out in search of the holy paper. Yet, they did not return. It would appear that they have succumbed to the corruption. And the corruption is playing a game with us...

Cleric

The generals appear as three mini-bosses. Defeating all will open the path to the source of the corruption. The Cleric is based on the Slinger-Monk enemy, but stronger and with additional attack patterns. When beaten, each general disappears in an explosion of smoke.



Smith

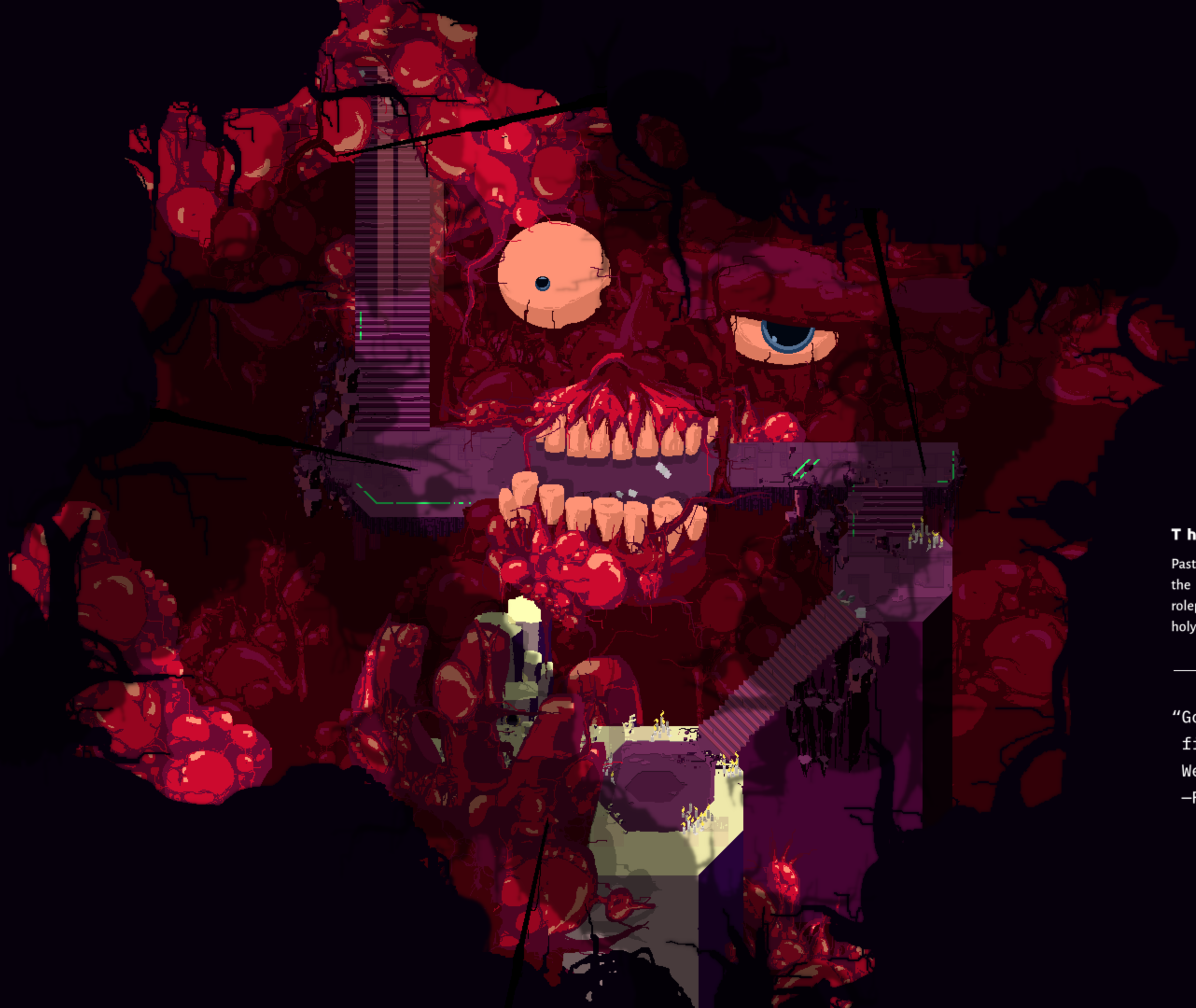
Based on Cloud City's Naught, the Smith is a towering presence. Wielding his huge hammer and invoking holy light from the skies, he can be quite intimidating. But the farce breaks down quickly when this general loses his helmet upon defeat: a familiar face emerges.



Wizard

The Wizard attacks with fireballs from his wand and by transforming into a baby griffin. Why a baby griffin, you might ask? Because a baby griffin is much cuter than a war-giraffe or six-armed-gorilla-ballerina.



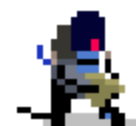


The Flesh Giant

Past the three defeated generals, we enter the cave of the Flesh Giant. This mutant is a big fan of classic roleplaying games, passing his time protecting the holy paper. Still, he seems strangely familiar.

“Good evening, fellow Wanderer. Sit by the fire, grab a drink. The story is prepared. We’ll make a great team.”

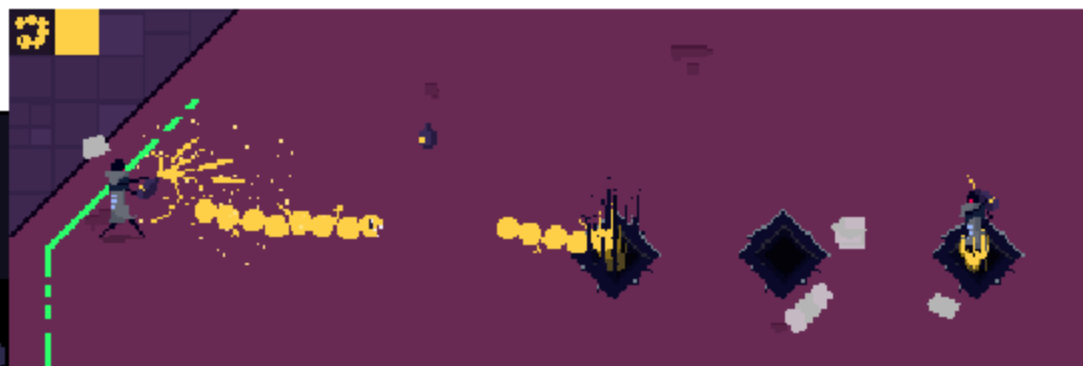
—Flesh Giant



Farewell Note & Bolshie

It's Bolshie again. This little badass is all over the place, giving Resolution a run for its name. This time, he emerges when Valor reads the Farewell Note — a sad letter reminding him of yellow worms.

Before we settled with the full Valor-Bolshie-transformation, we explored many alternative movement patterns. At one point, Bolshie could dig underground tunnels for his summoner to slip through. Our early prototypes were so slow to execute, that the whole endeavor became tedious and pointless.



A much earlier version saw Bolshie activated through the Marty's Boot item. But since both boot and Farewell Note were tied to the same part of the lore, we easily swapped them out by just changing some lines and a few of Valor's sprites.



"Hear, hear, traveler, the tale of the land:

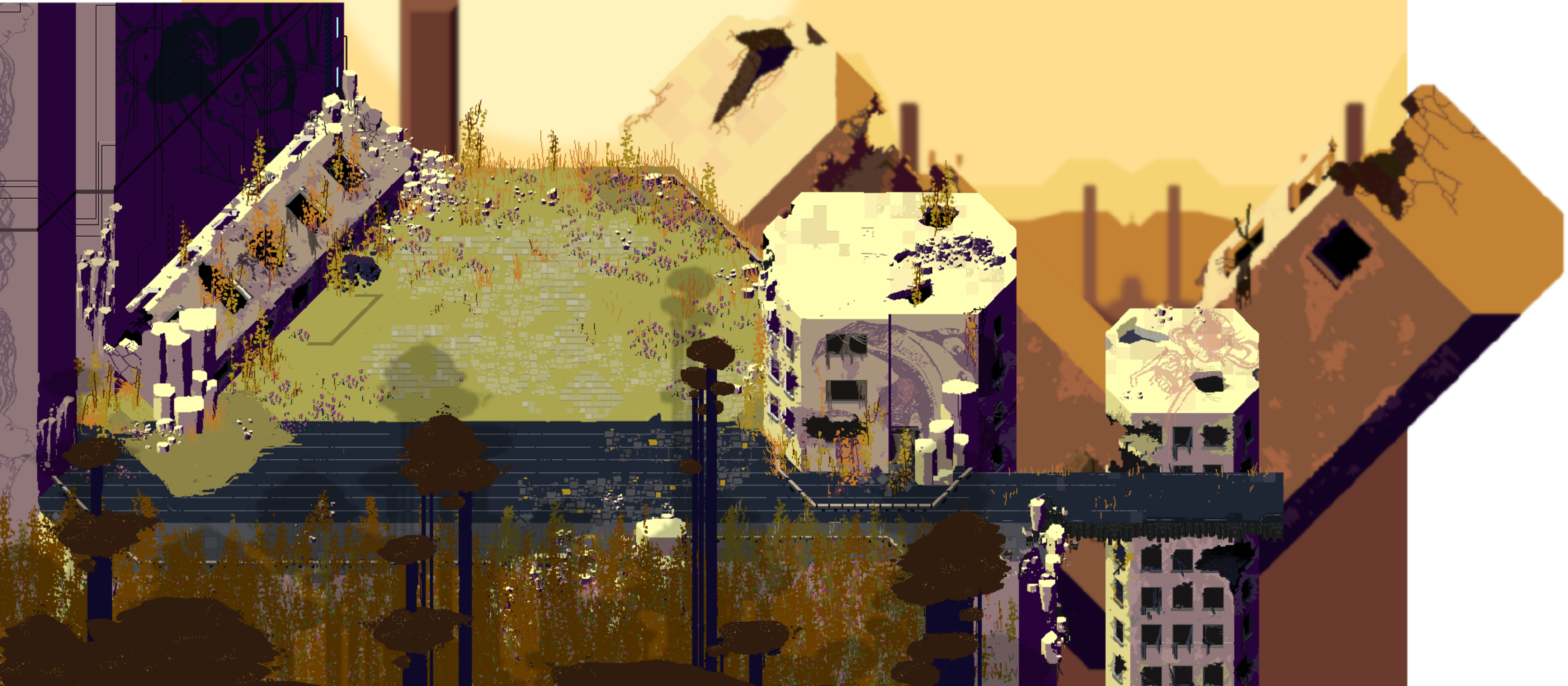
Black was the knight, and so was the night, when he and his henchmen lead the kingdom to blight.

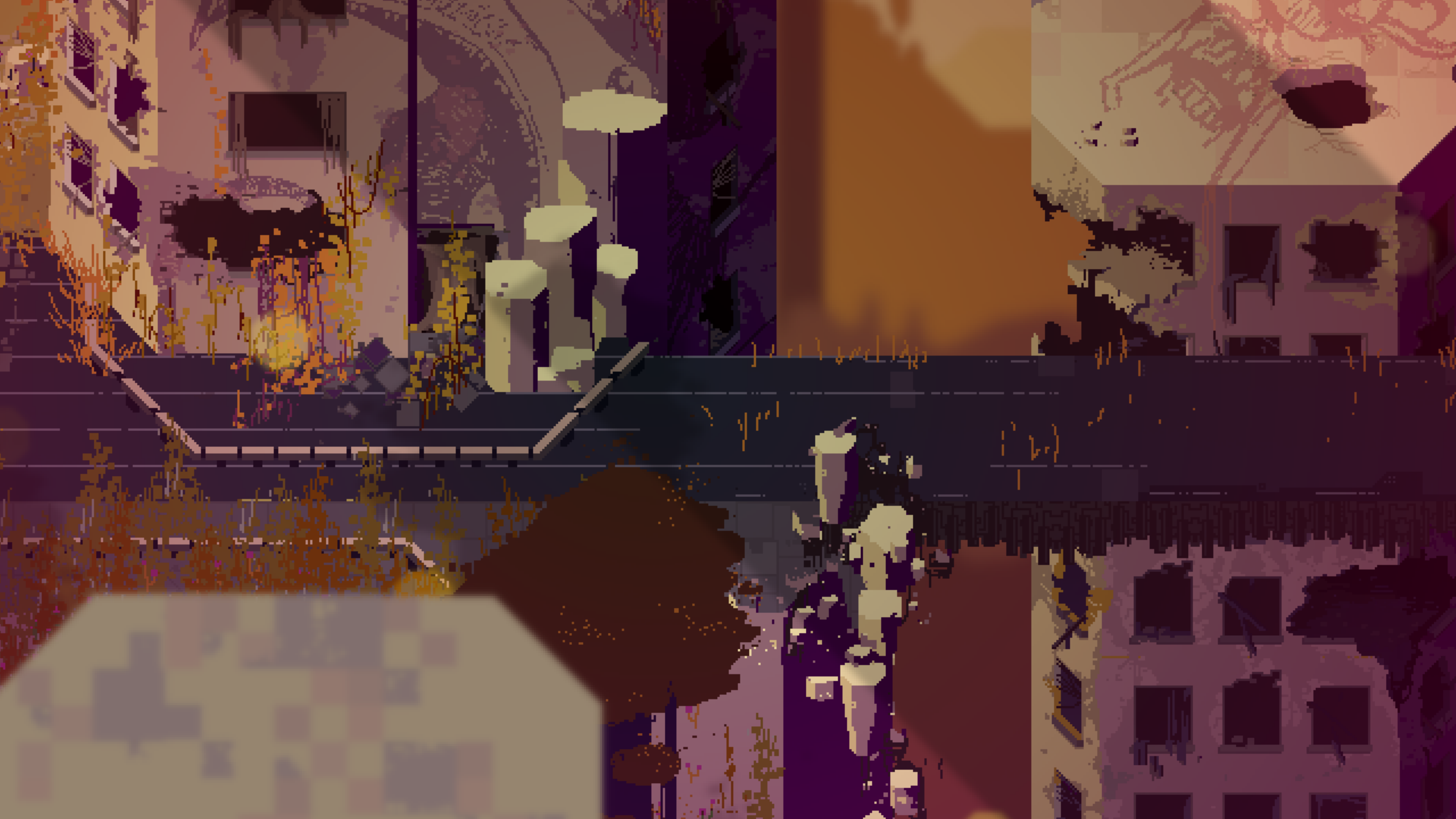
They captured the queen by the power of law, and dragged her away with the king in awe.

To the yellow lair of the dragon they went, and forced her below, never to ascend.

Betrayed by his brother, forsaken by love, He screamed and grieved and moaned thereof."

-The King's Herald

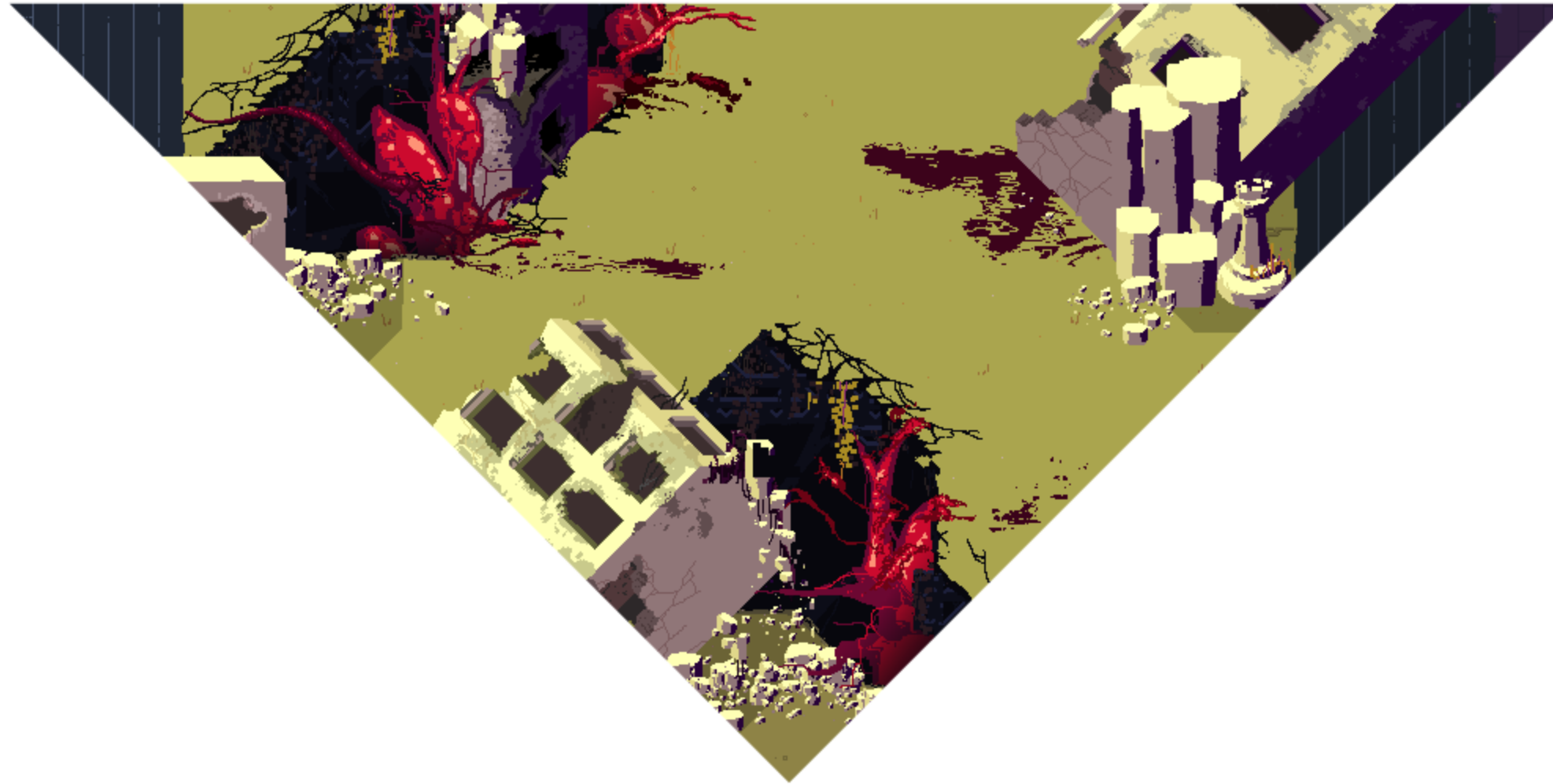


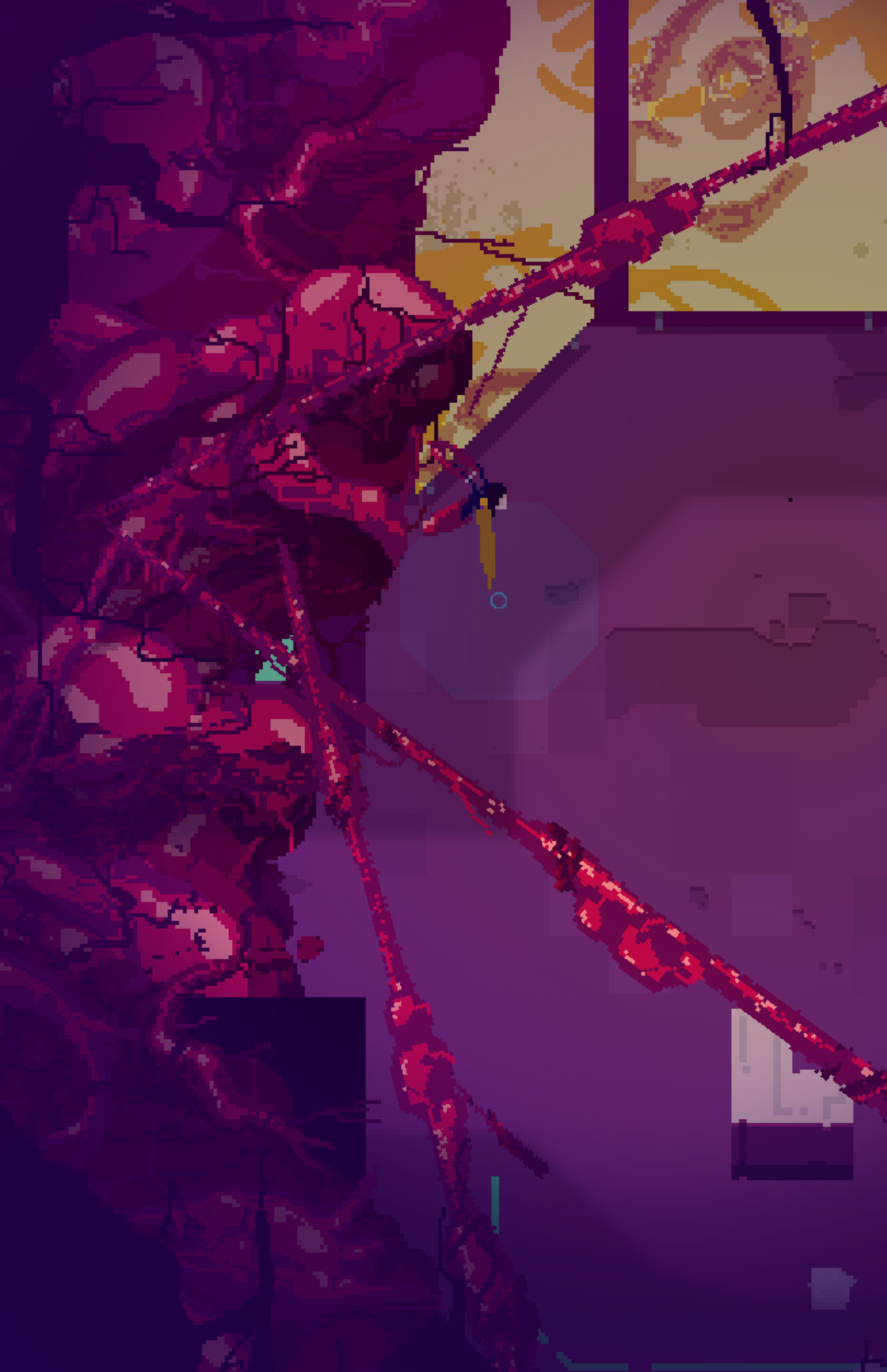




The city has fallen.
Quite fitting,
don't you think?
-Sir Gareth

Stadium



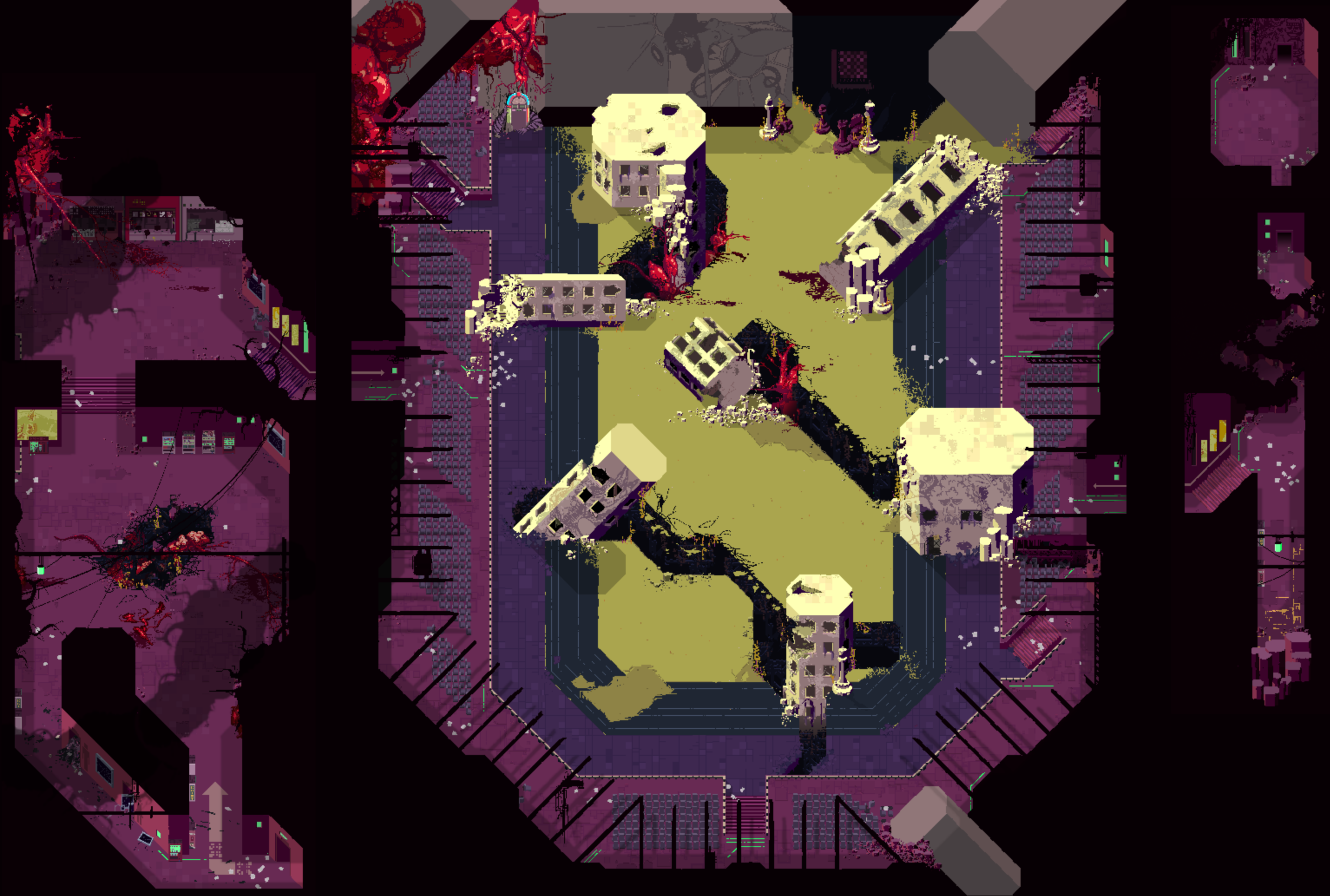


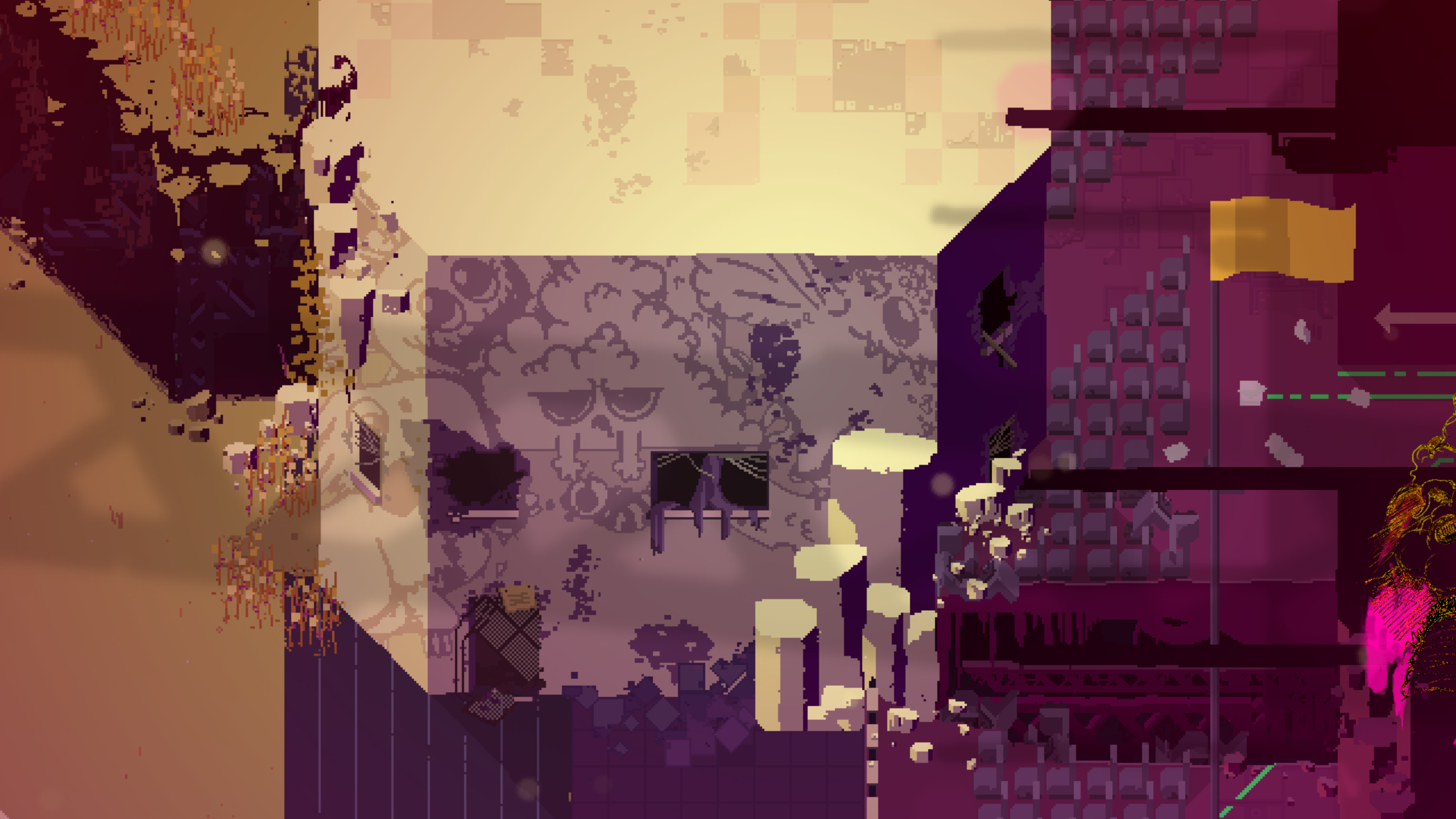
“Few made it out of the castle in time.
Even our king is still trapped within.”
—Sir Lamoak

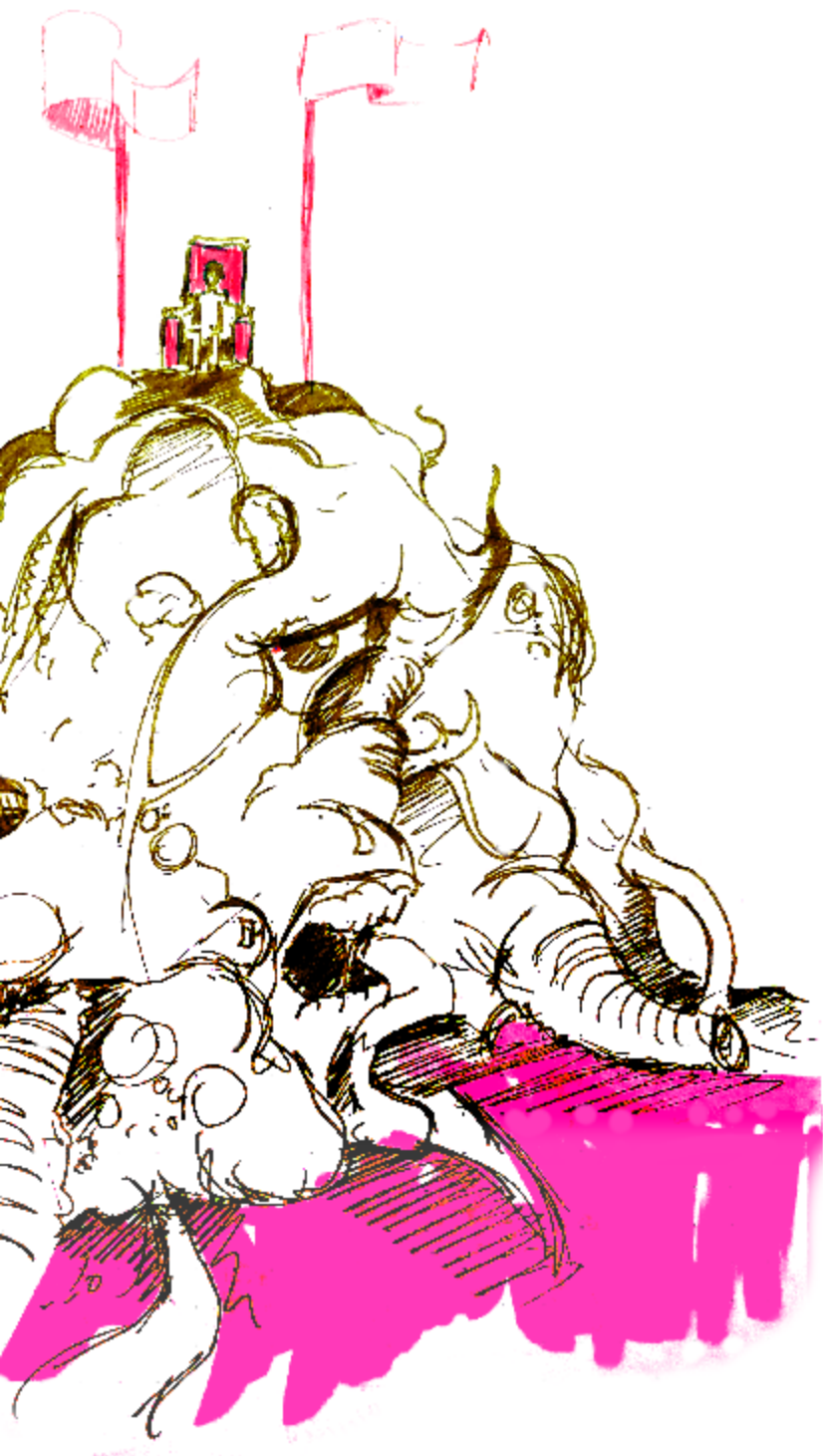
S t a d i u m

As it turns out, the noble castle is a stadium: ruined, packed with waste, and overgrown with pulsating gore. Here we wanted to continue exploring the decomposing atmosphere of the Fallen City but in a much more confined space.

Being the last level on Resolutiion's main path, the Stadium had to be short and brutal. A gauntlet of narrow hallways, bleachers, and sports fields, all filled with enemies and traps. And the guy in charge of it all awaits us right at the start of this onslaught: the missing king, pinned to the walls, begging for help.







The Fallen King

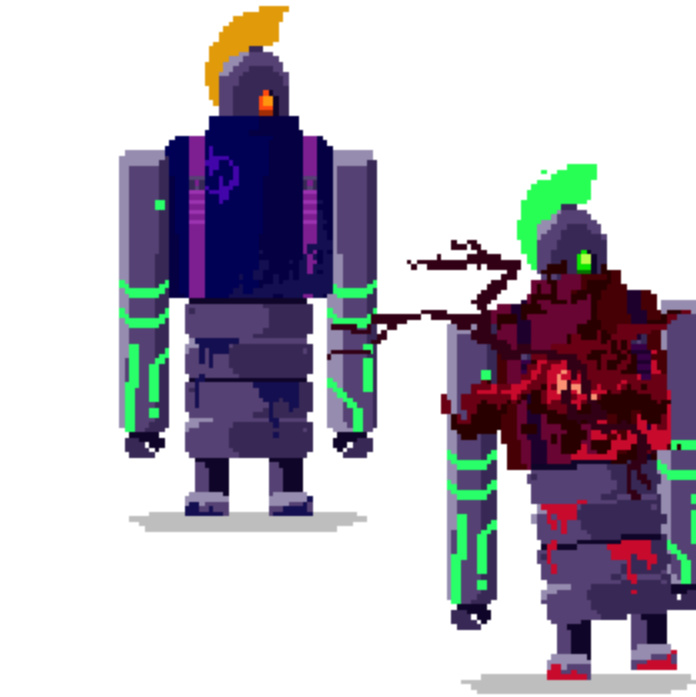
When we finally meet the ruler of the fallen lands, he seems familiar. The king is Varty, Valor's little brother, and he is playing a dangerous game with us. Somehow all this corruption and mutation is connected to him.

"Th... thank you, bro- brave knight. Most of my servants have been corrupted and will stand in our way. But with your might and the holy paper, we can reclaim this kingdom! Onward, to the throne!"
-Varty, the Fallen King





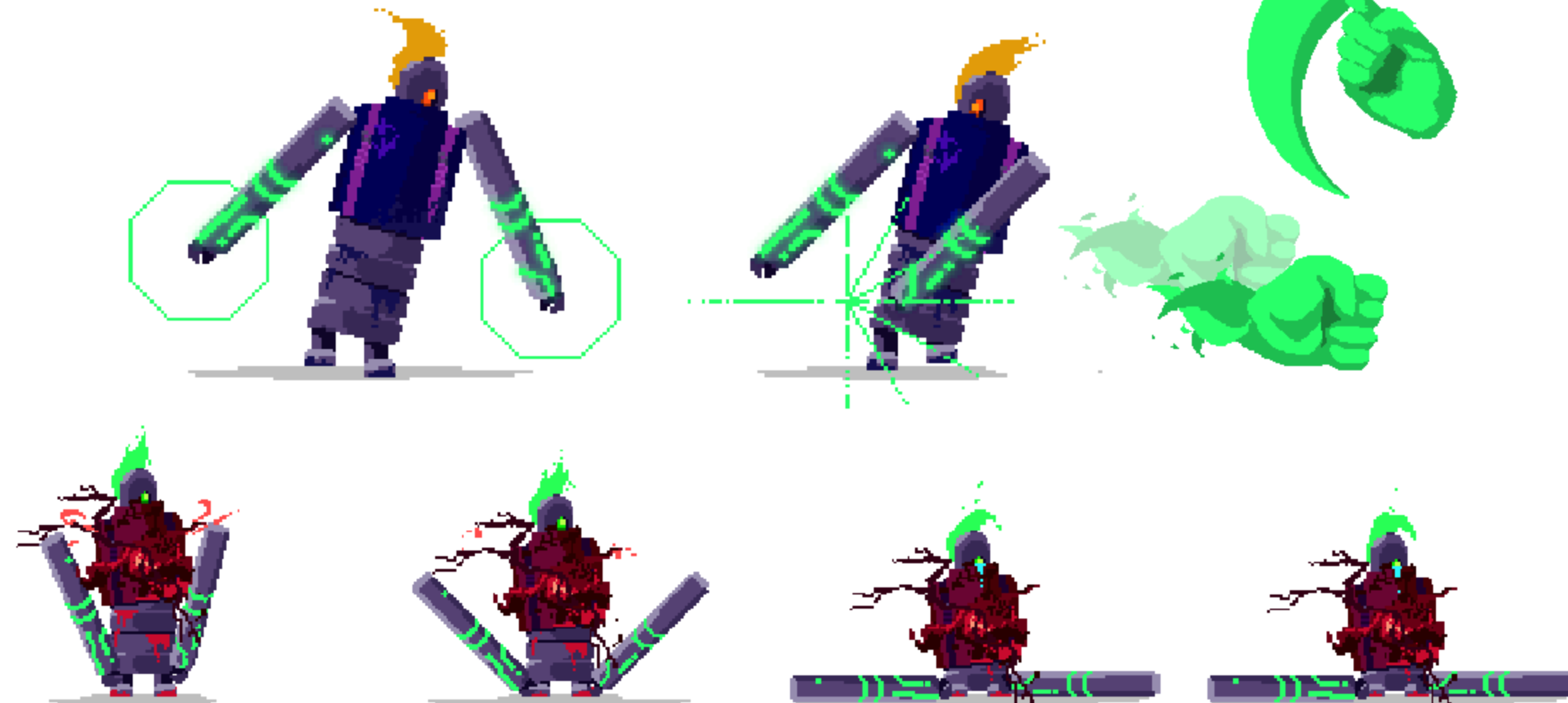
Hey...
I missed
you...



Sir Thomas van Scrap

If the Stadium's enemies move in strange ways, it's because they are robots made of trash. Make no mistake, though: this trash is dangerous.

Sir Thomas van Scrap is a slow walking trashcan, who's able to summon magical hands from his stiff limbs. His hipster haircut and the purple suspenders make him a serious contender in combat and for the city's fashion award.

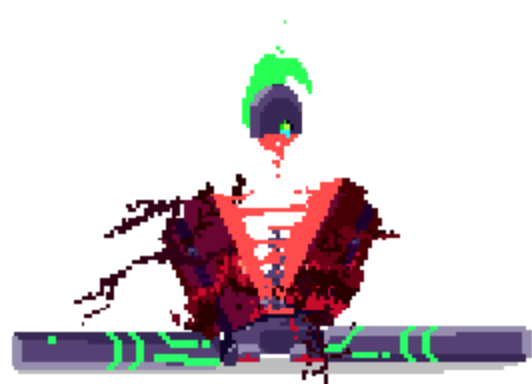


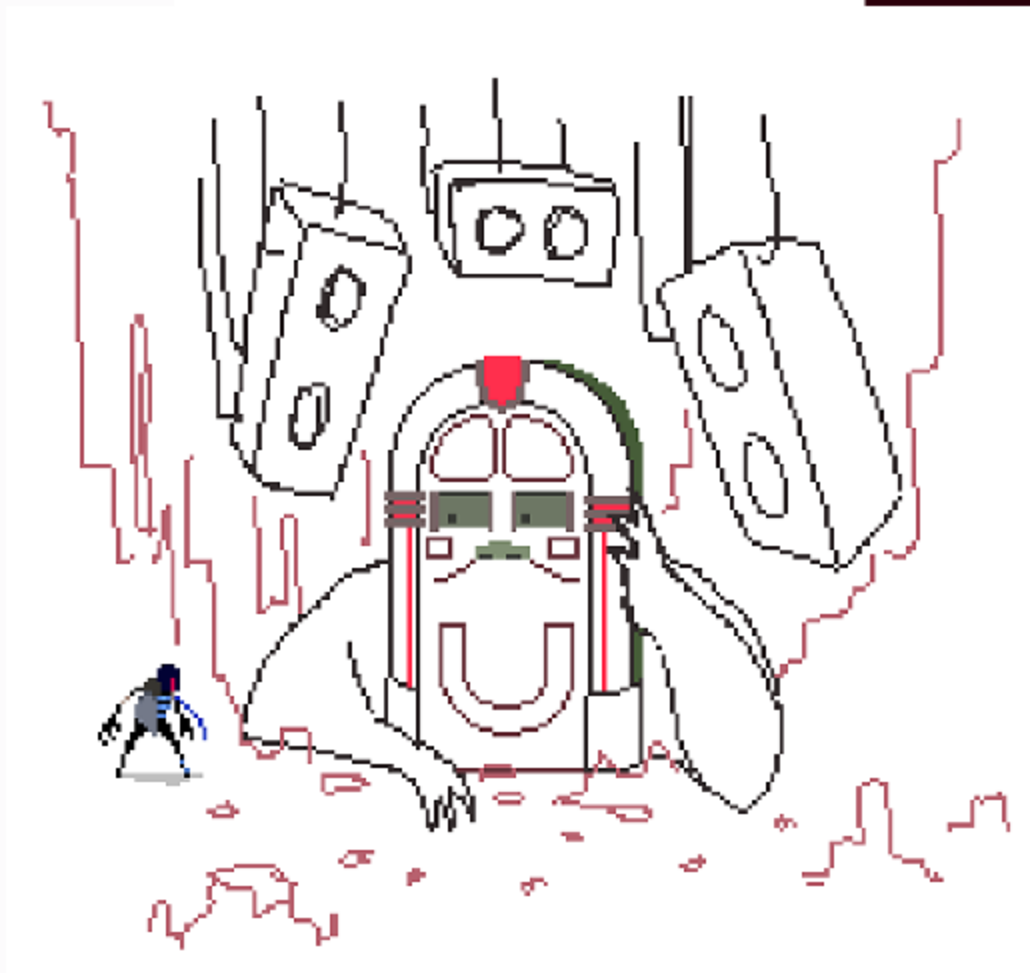


Unfuni

This confused jester does what all jesters do: wears a funny hat, juggles balls, sets everybody's teeth on edge, and rides decapitated heads through the air.

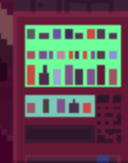
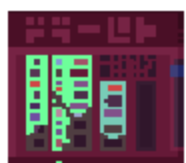
Enemies encountered in the Fallen City and the Stadium come in both good and evil versions, to indicate varying levels of corruption. But that does not mean that any of them are happy to see Valor invading their realm.

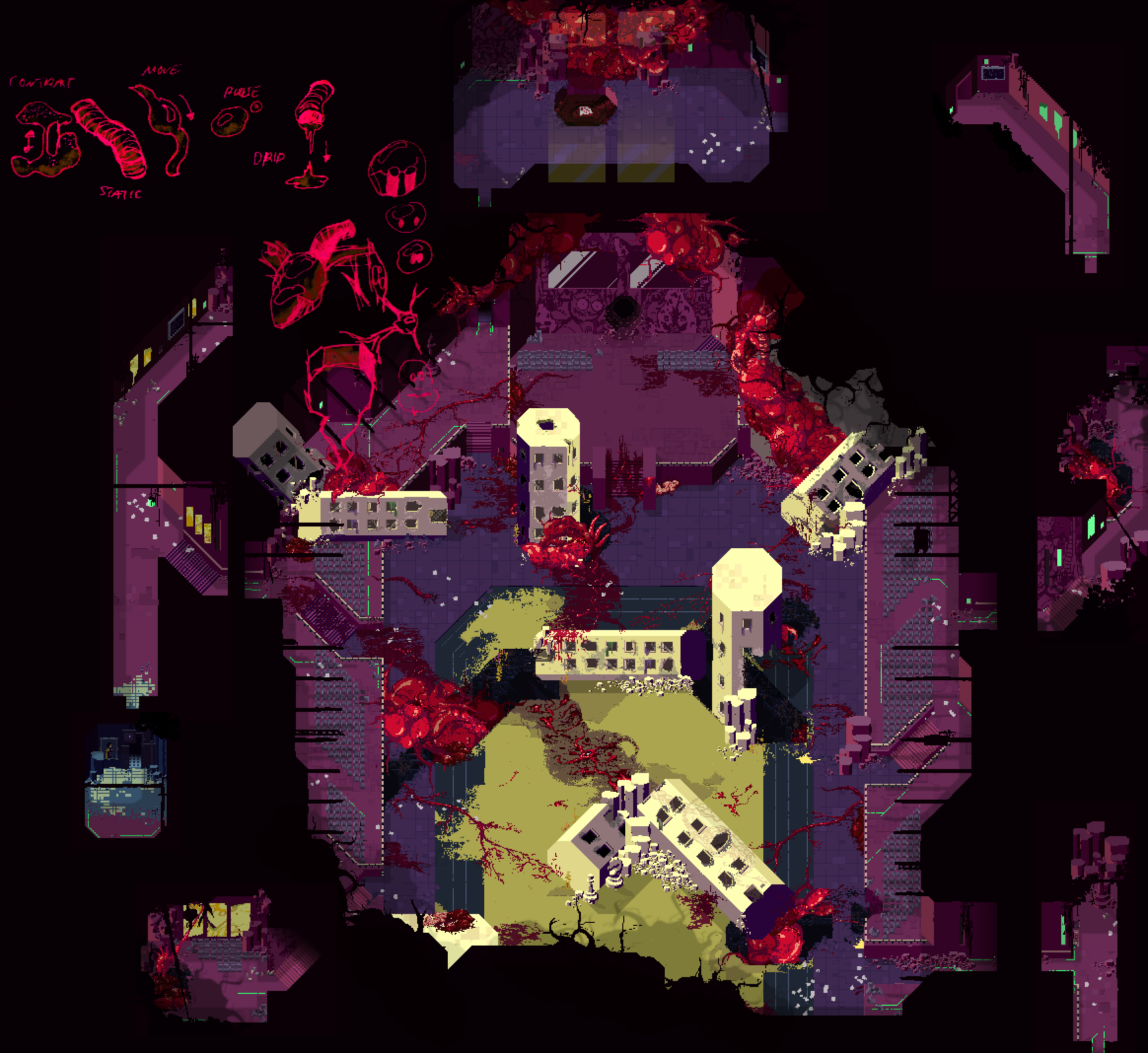




Jukebox

Nobody remembers why there is a jukebox in the Stadium, but it has a friendly face and plays great tunes, so better throw it a coin.



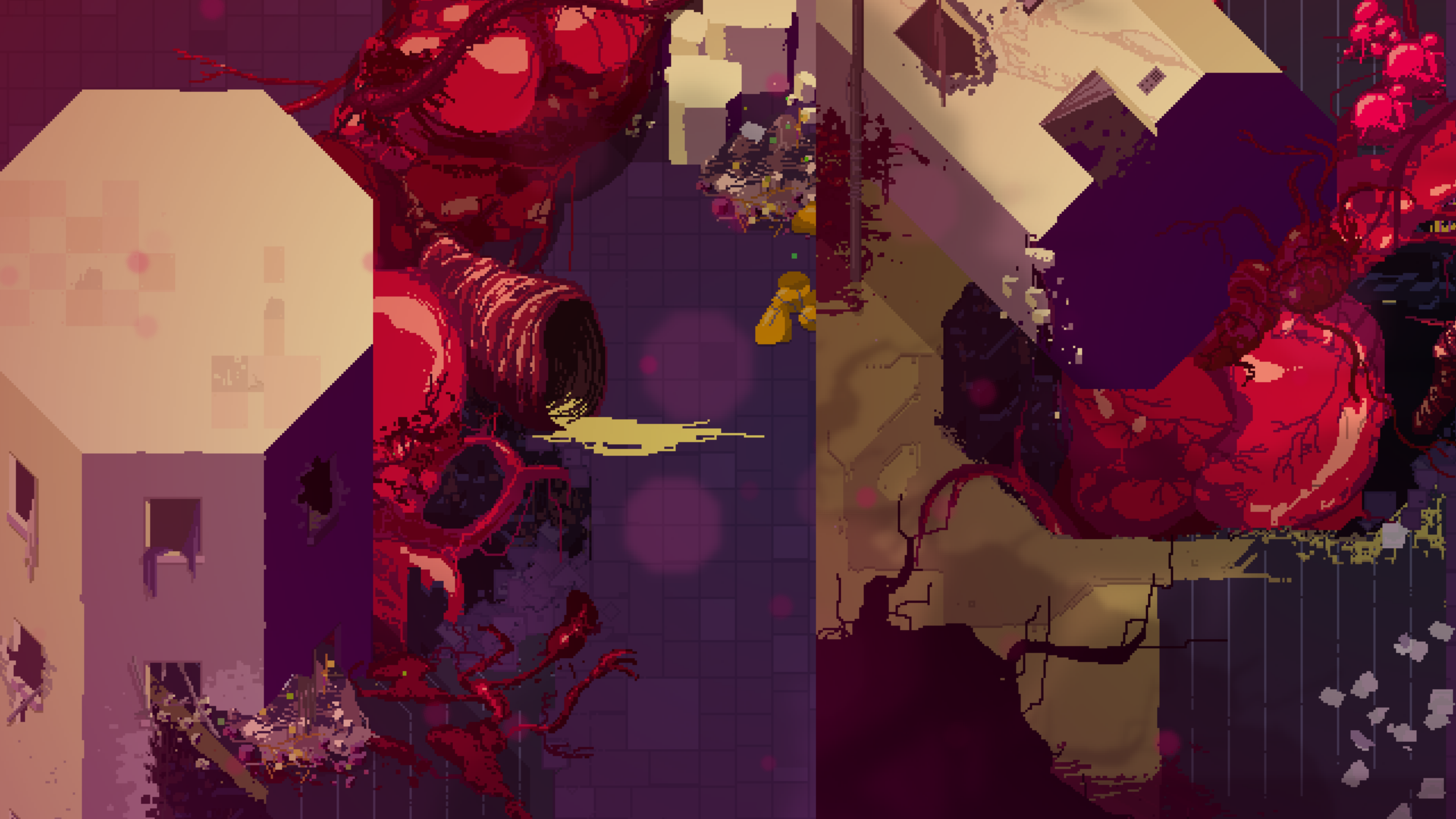


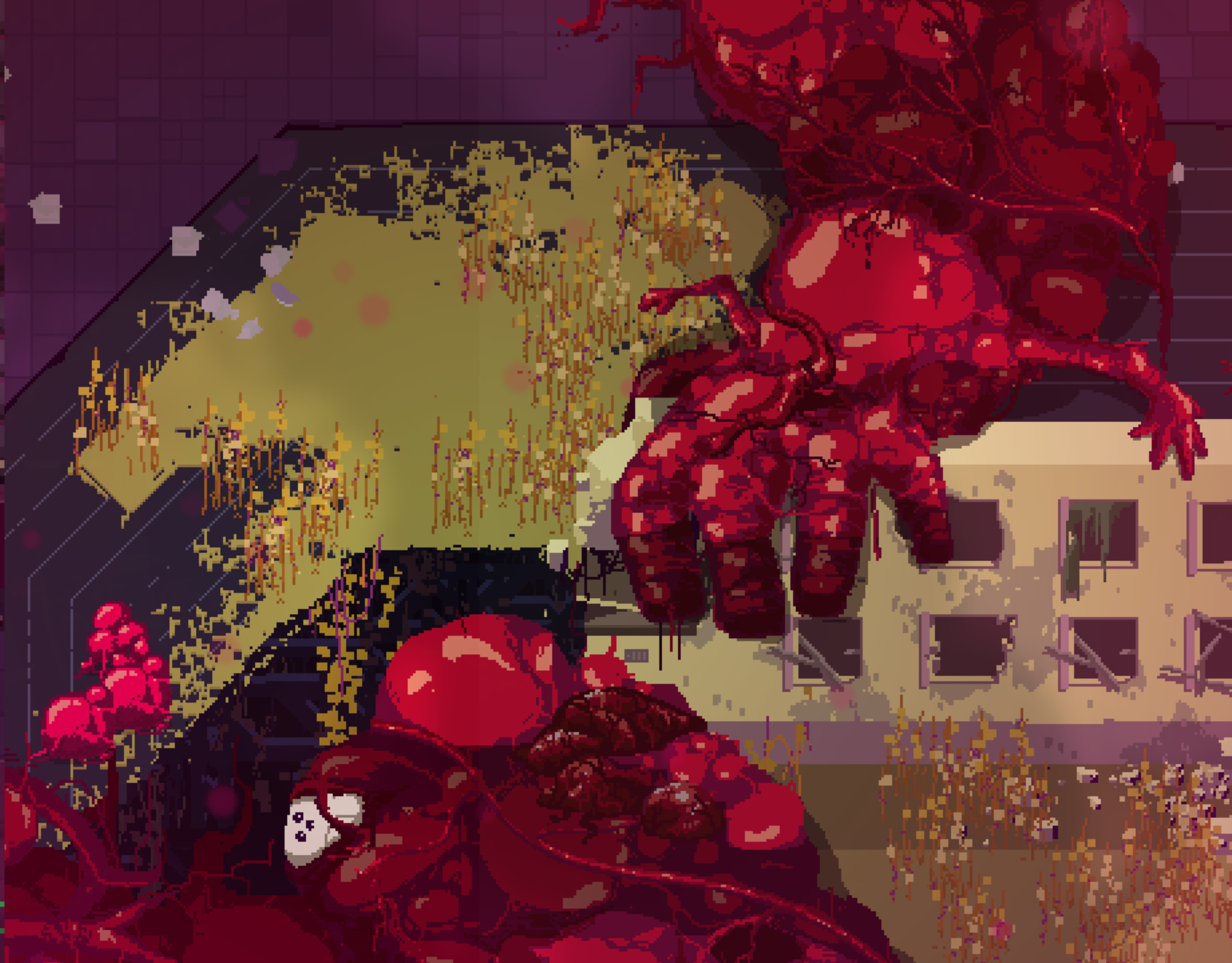
The King's Labyrinth

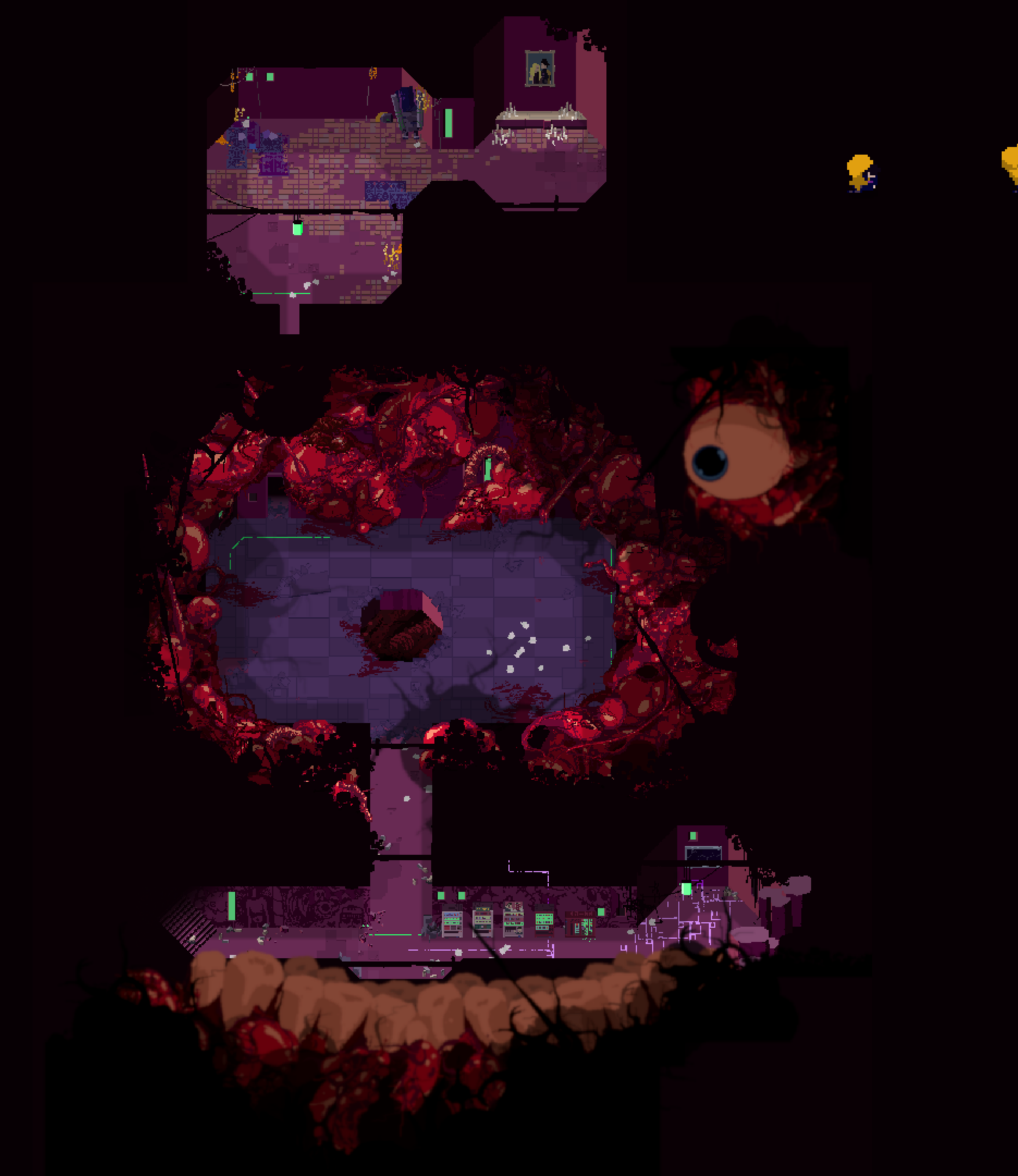
The second part of the Stadium is a maze of moving flesh-barriers. Finding the three respective switches to navigate the area is not so hard, except the King is tagging along, pestering us with his pompous insights.

"The sculptures of the Corruption are certainly impressive, wouldst thou not agree?"

—Varty, the Fallen King







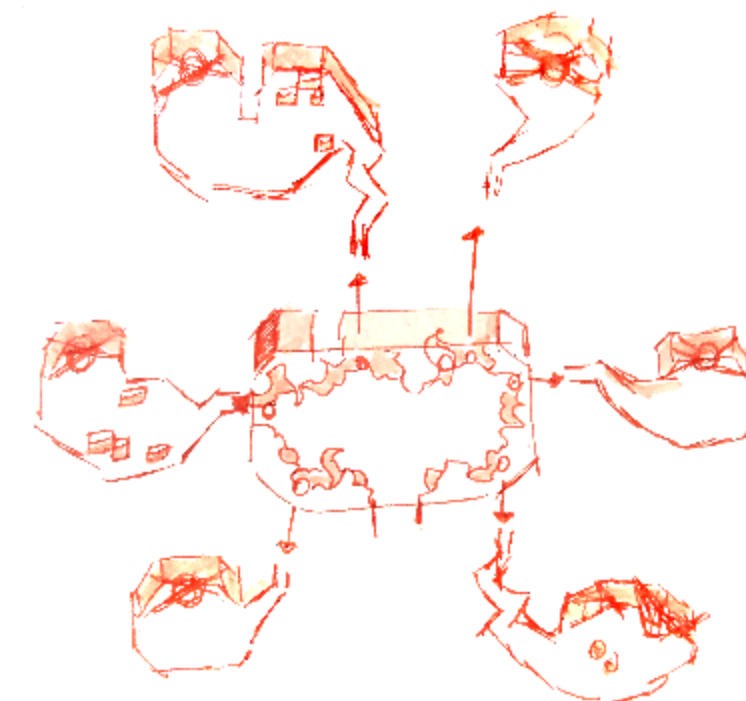
Mutant King

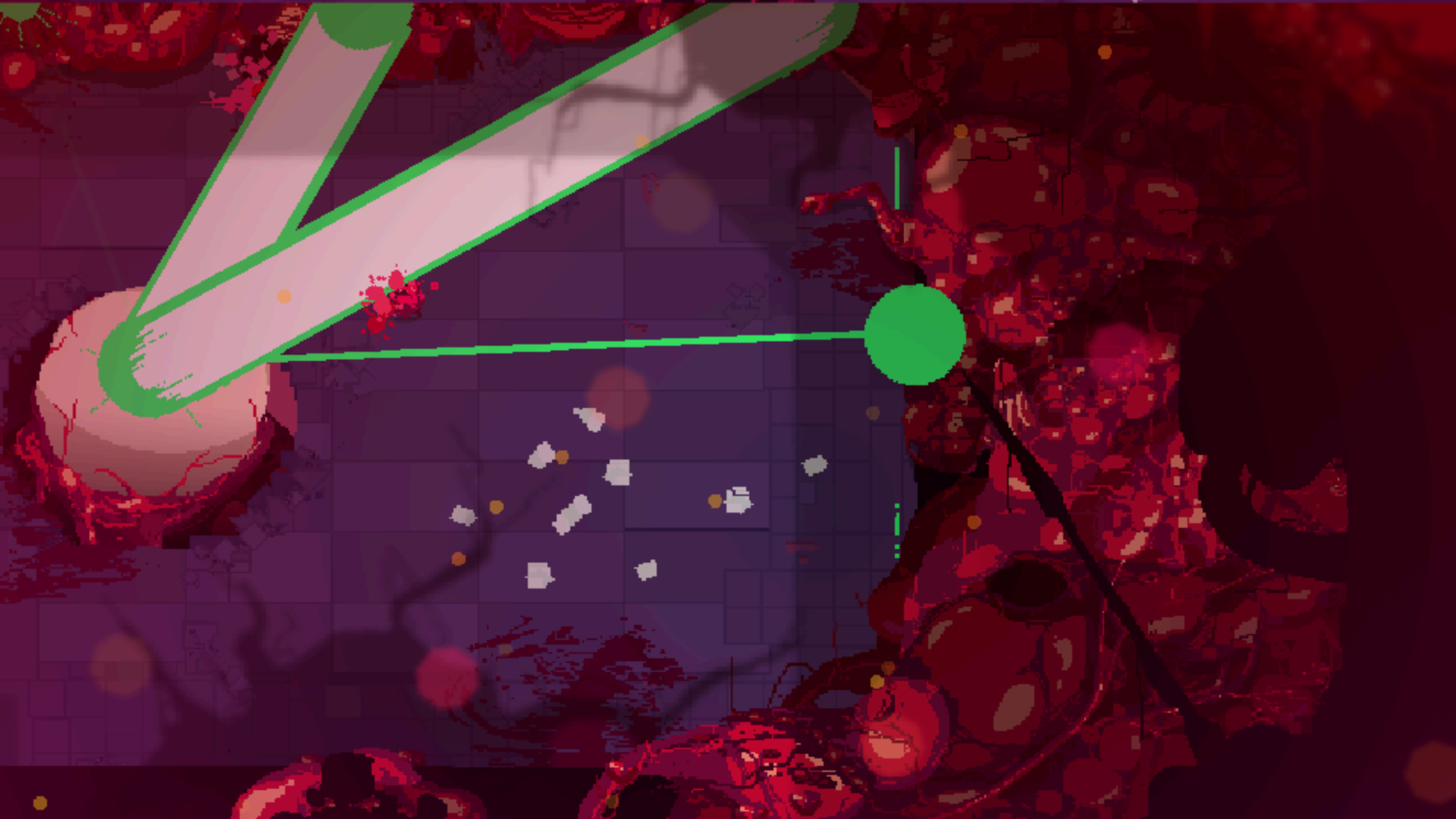
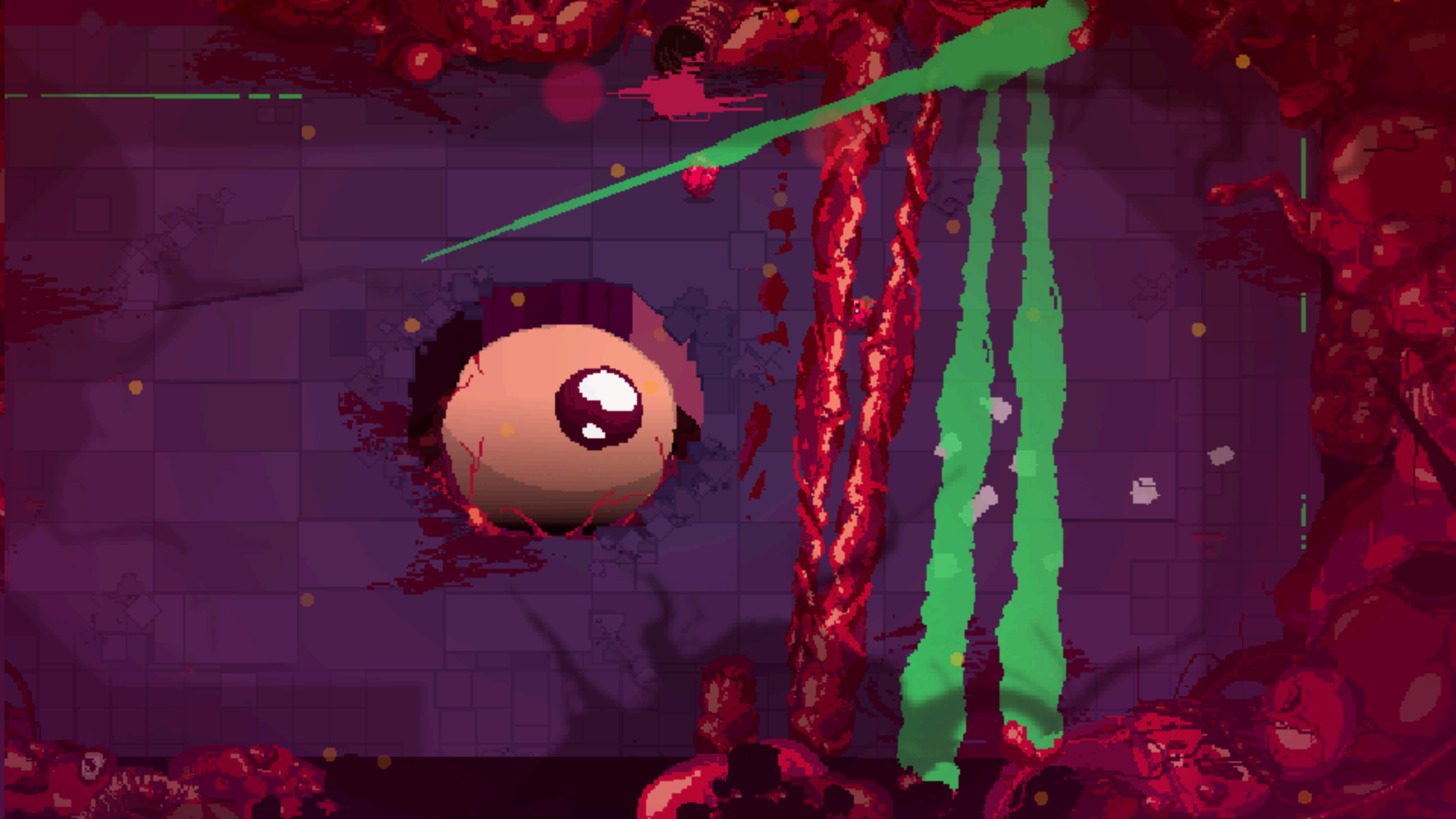
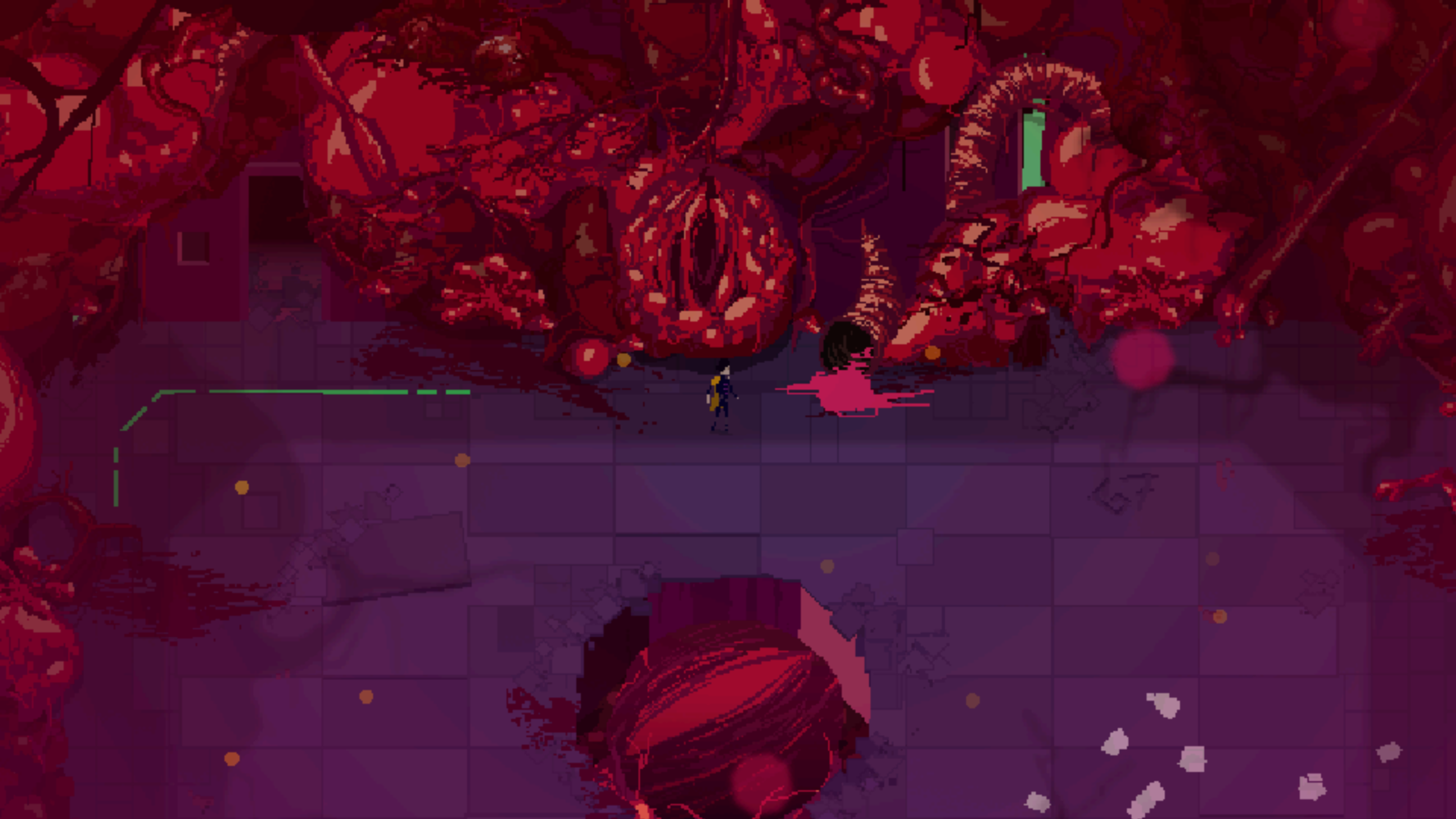
Now, who would have thought that escorting the Fallen King to his Throne Room would result in him exploding into a shower of blood and gore, breathing life into the surrounding walls?

While this creature consists of a plethora of moving eyes, spikes, Flesh Pod spawning tubes, hearts, and a horrible uterus, we had originally designed even more: little chambers accessed via the Farewell Note, acid-spitting organs, huge fists, and teeth biting from the ceiling. You can imagine that things got a bit out of hand...

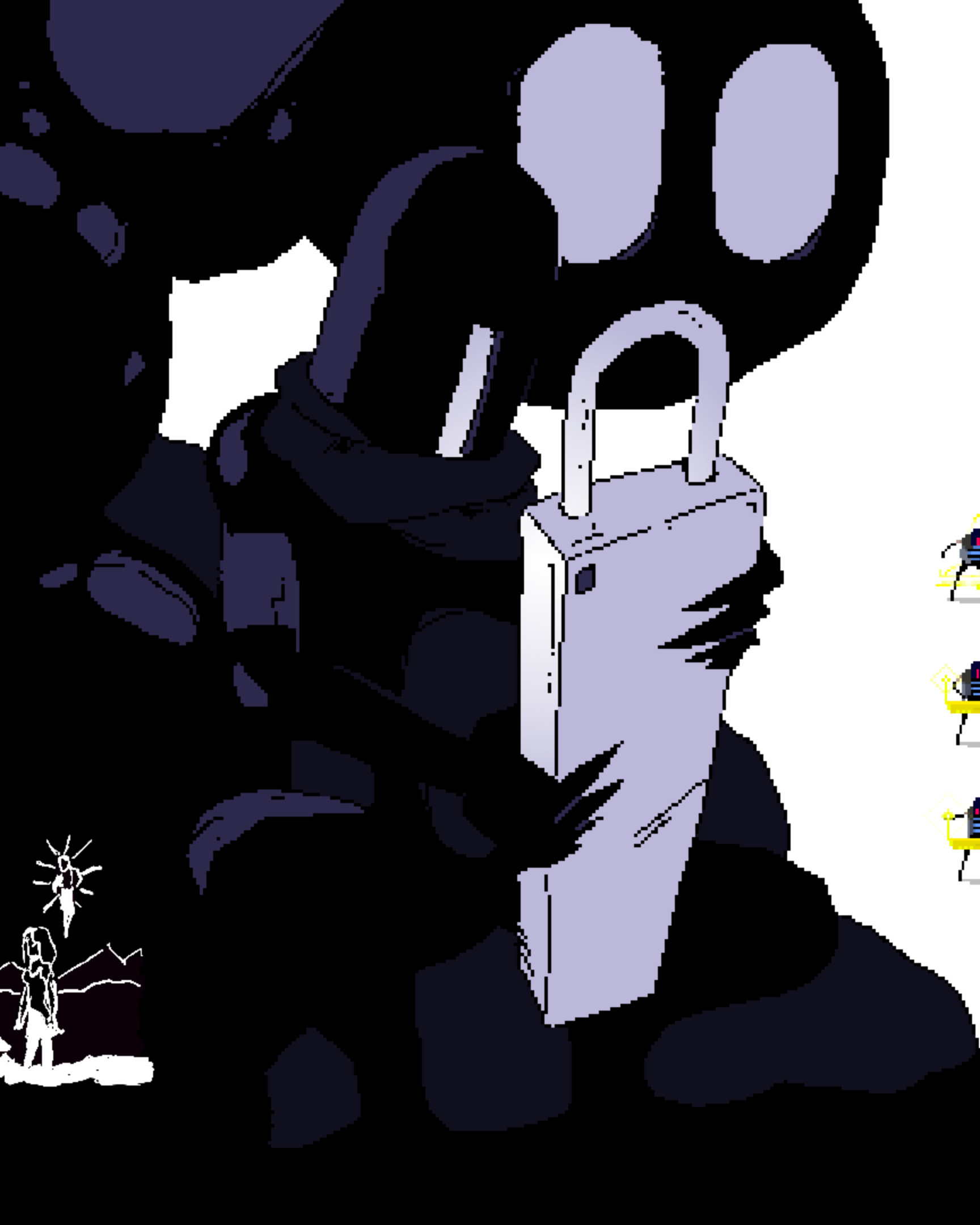


Designing the Mutant King boss took forever, and he was the last to be completed, in late 2019. We always liked the idea of a static wall of attacks, but could not figure out patterns that were fun to navigate. This ultimately changed when we added the central eyeball, which was able to shoot lasers in all directions, and kept Valor evading constantly.



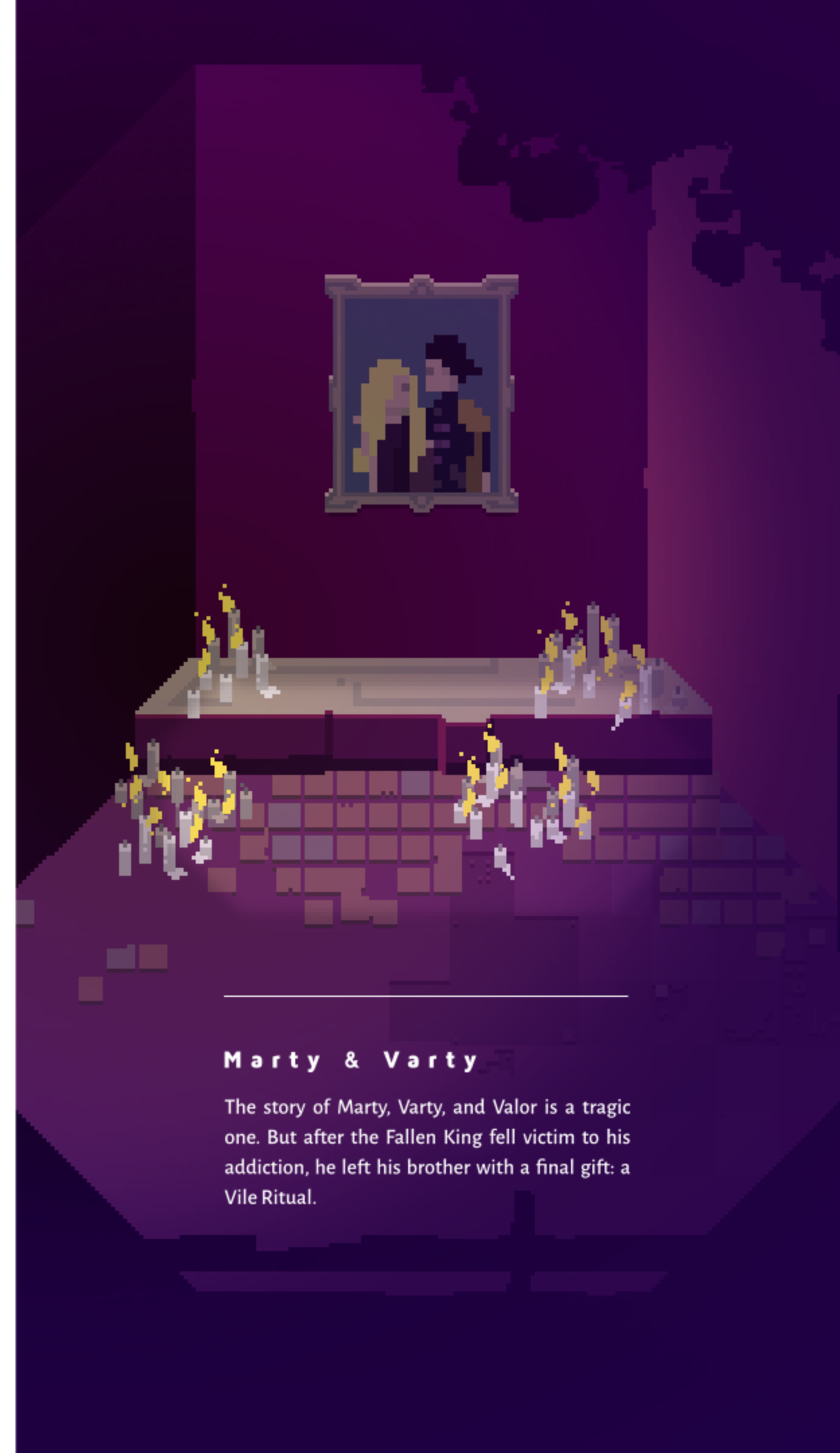






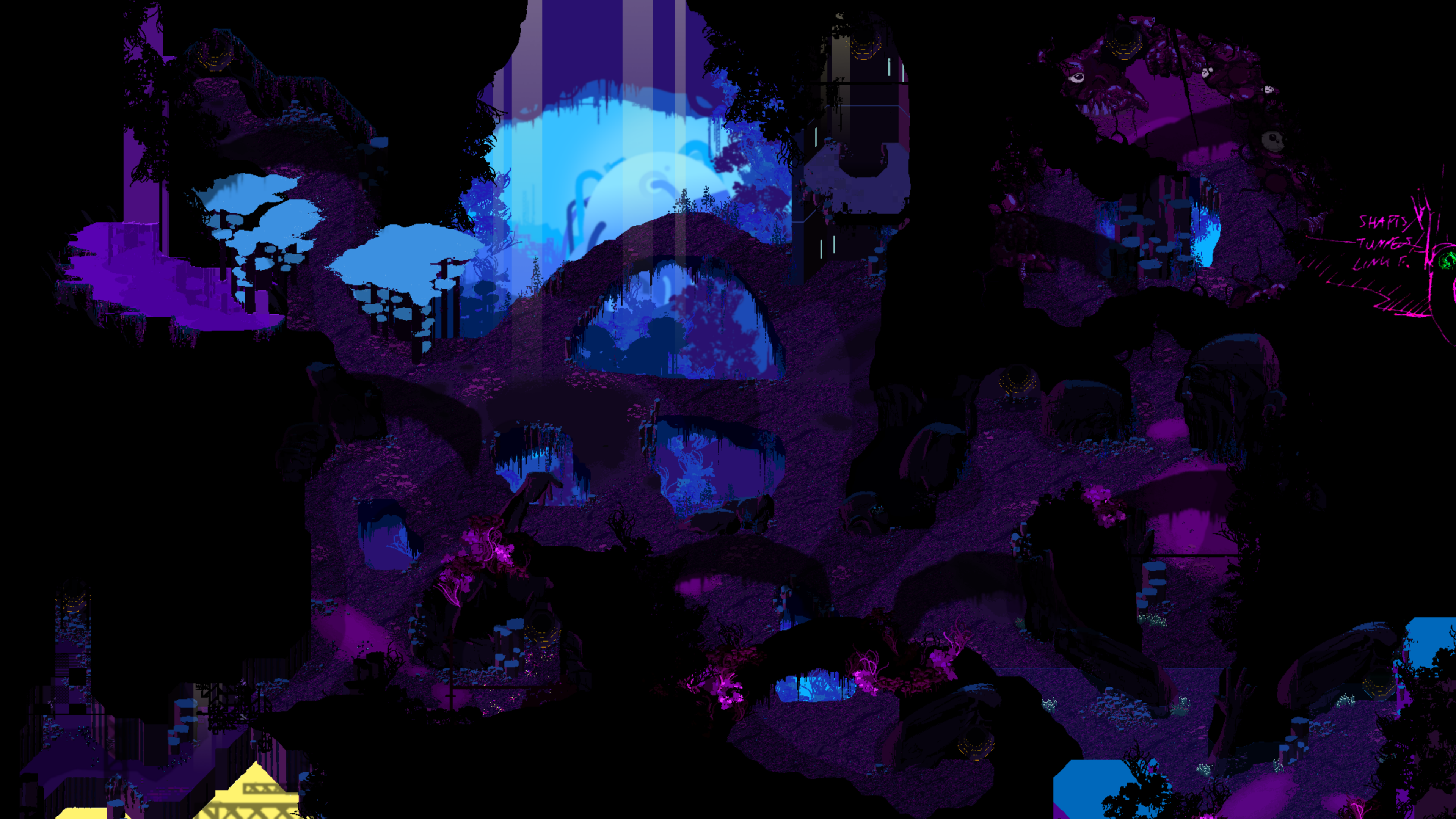
Vile Ritual

Probably one of the weirdest instruments known to humanity, the theremin creates alien sounds that permeates matter and air, drawing out the creatures of the underworld. Play it in front of a huge hole and meet your old, yellow friend.

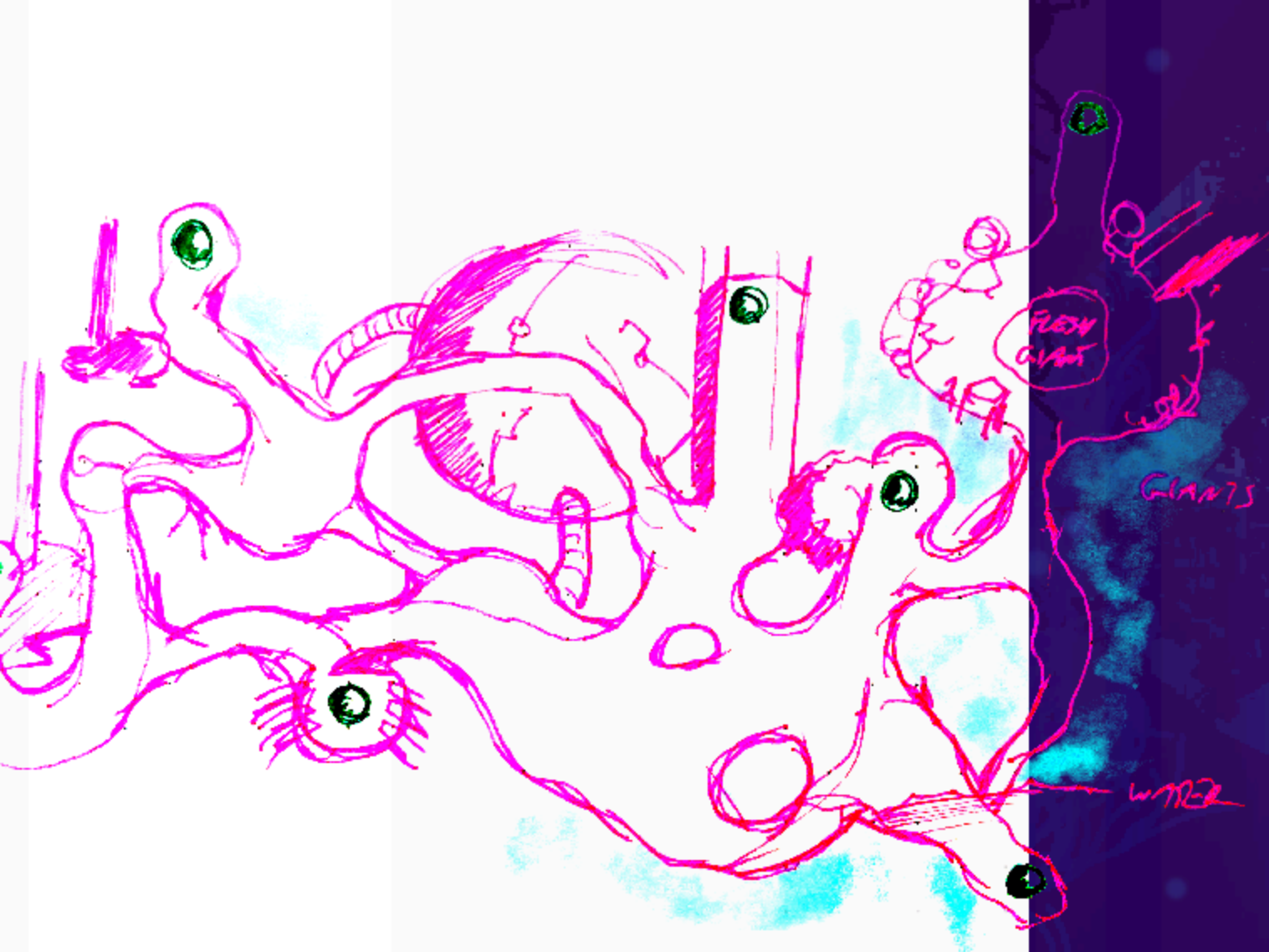


Marty & Varty

The story of Marty, Varty, and Valor is a tragic one. But after the Fallen King fell victim to his addiction, he left his brother with a final gift: a Vile Ritual.



SHAPIS
TUMPEX
LINK F.



Tunnels

Big Bolshie, lured out by the Vile Ritual, will swallow up Valor and transport him through tunnels beneath the world. Our abstract fast-travel-system is the final building block in Valor's navigational arsenal, following the Screen-Tearing and Farewell Note, helping reach even the farthest corners in decent time.



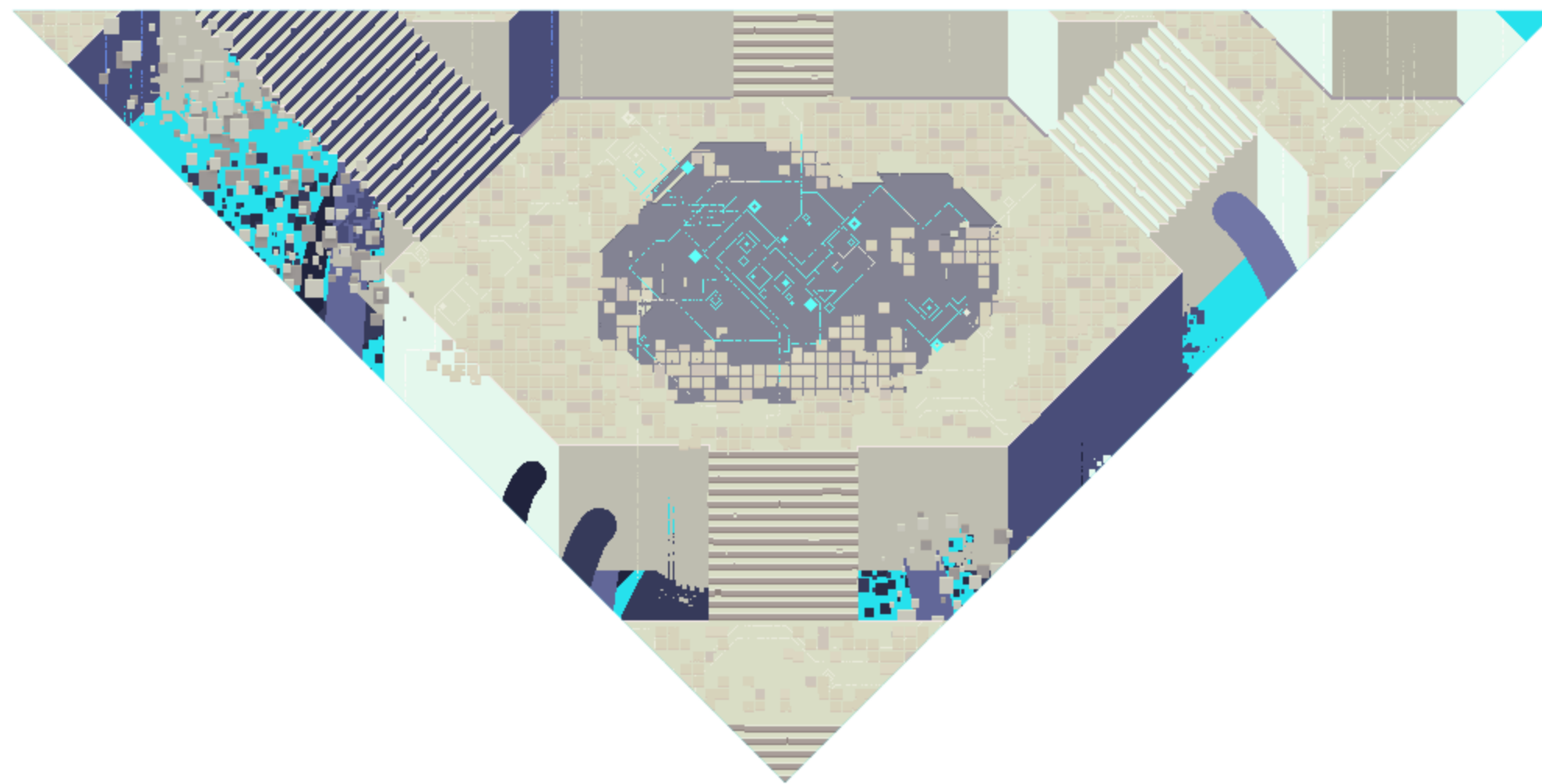
Sentient fruits complete our Pacman homage to the infamous, ghost-chasing yellow face.

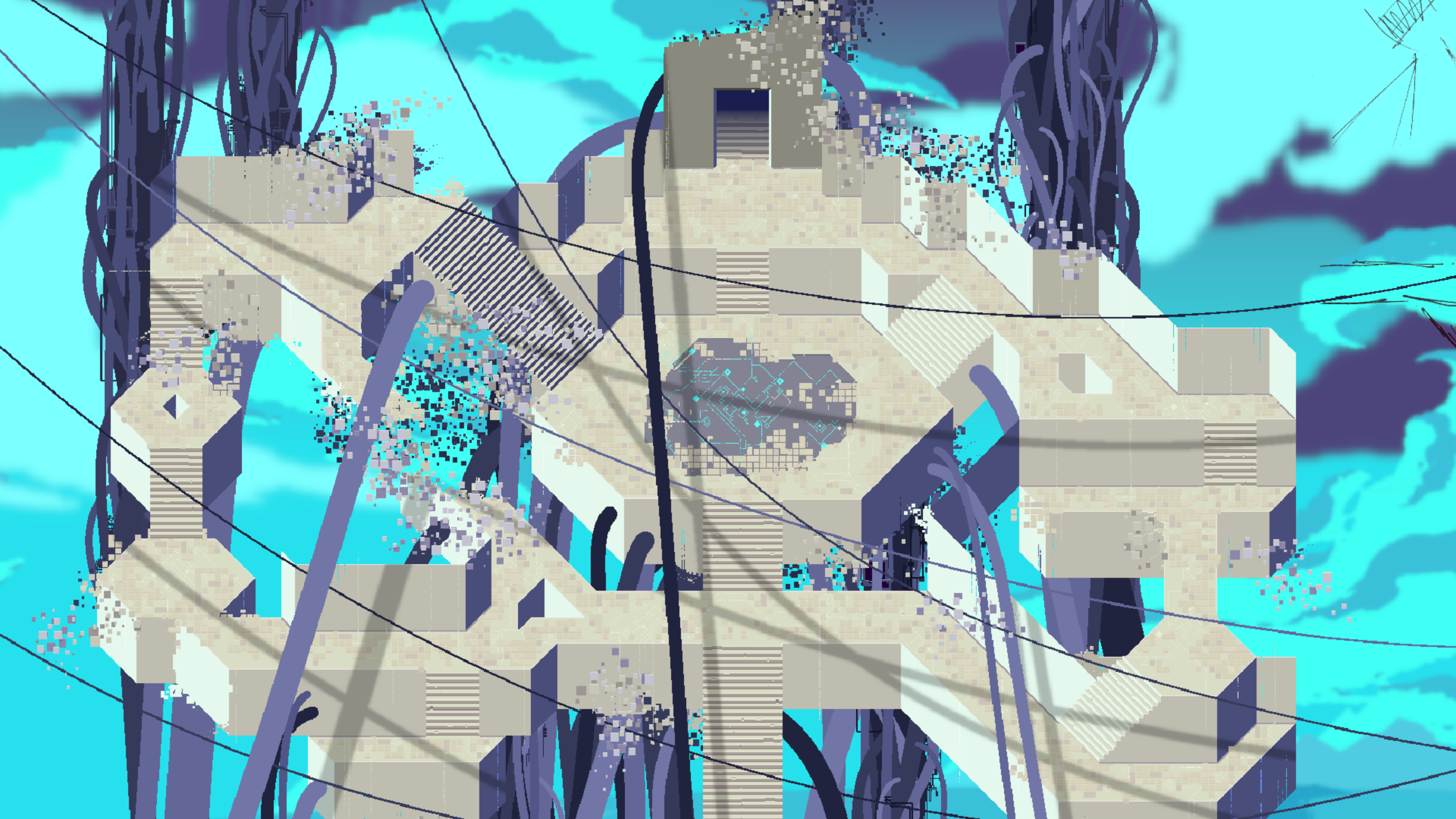


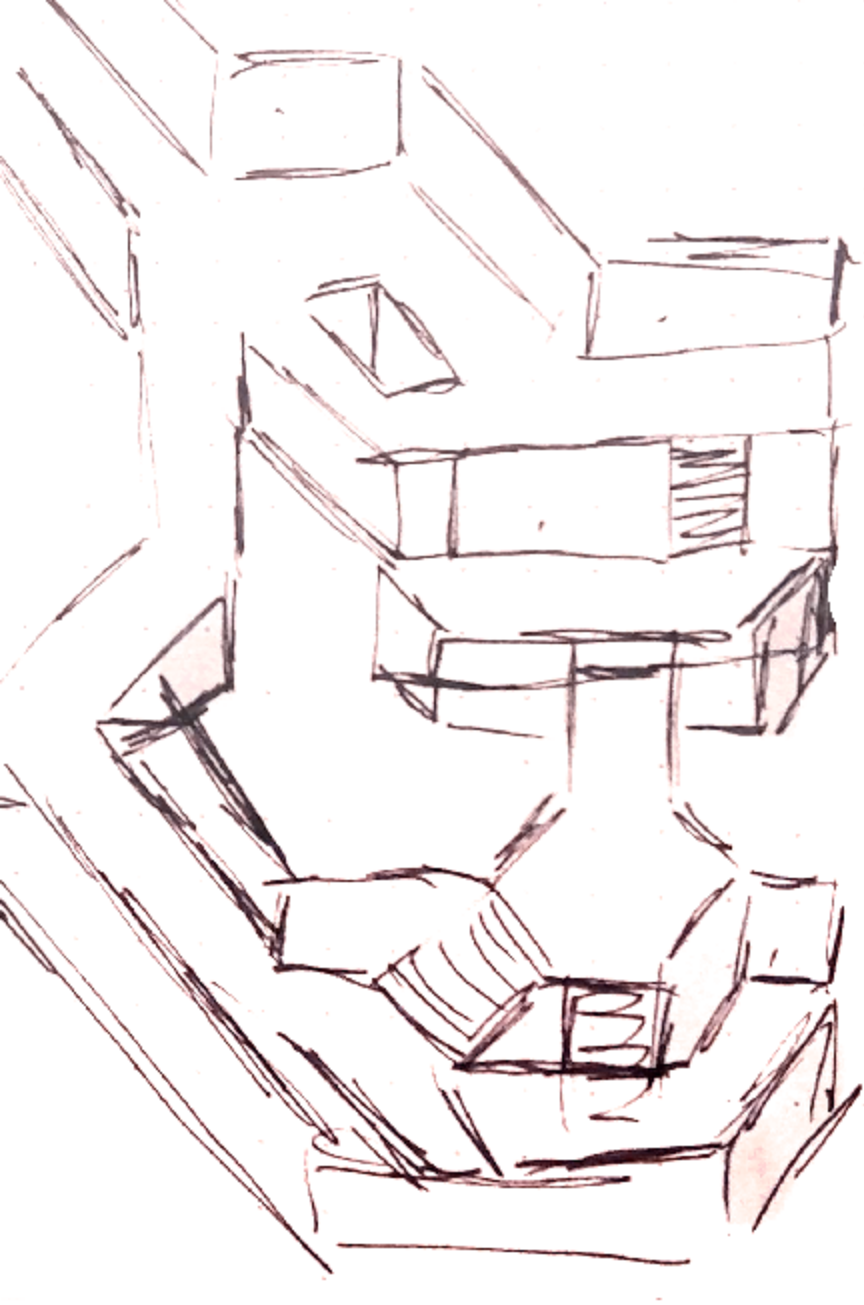


But trust me: real magic only happens in love.
-Flesh Giant

Plains







The Plains

The Plains. Alibii's home in the Red Code. It's a digital work in progress. Bytes pass by as the AI analyses memories, compares signals, and builds pathways just wide enough for Valor to follow.

"...merging memories...
...constructing Plains..."
—Alibii





"Focus on our shared goals, showing only what you need to see."

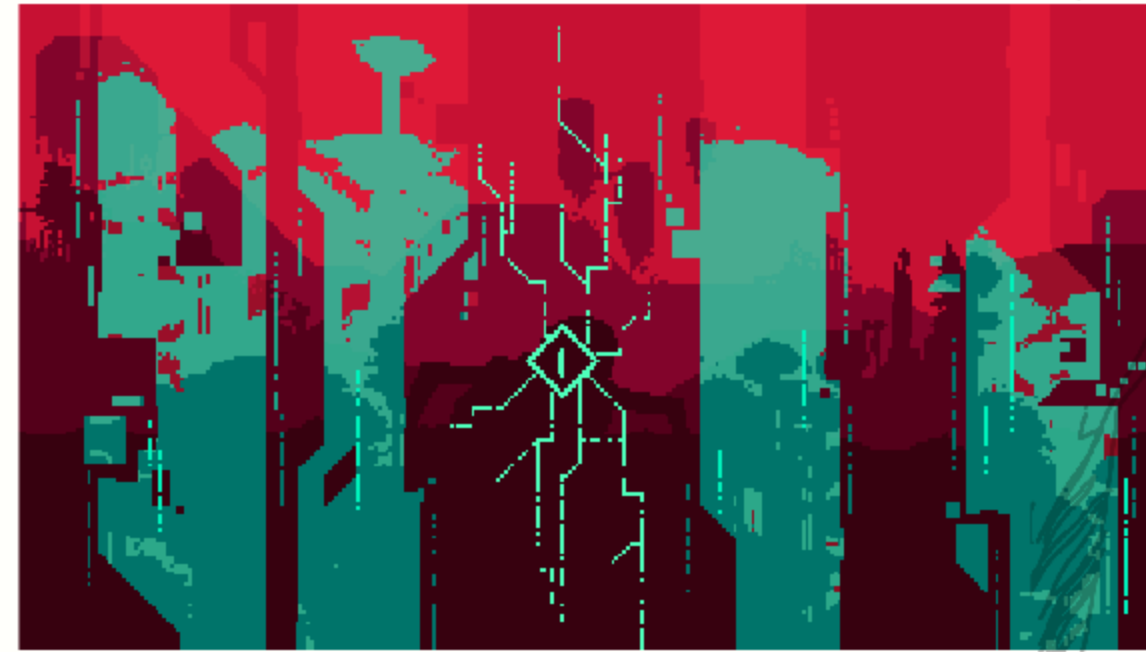
Chromatic Aberration

Like many things in Resolution, the Chromatic Aberration's name has been hijacked from a video-technology term. In this case, it refers to Valor's helmet, with its iconic magenta visor. Barely wide enough to reveal a glimpse of the outside world, this narrow point of view is a metaphor for highly conditioned soldiers, acting on orders, oblivious to the wider implications of their actions.

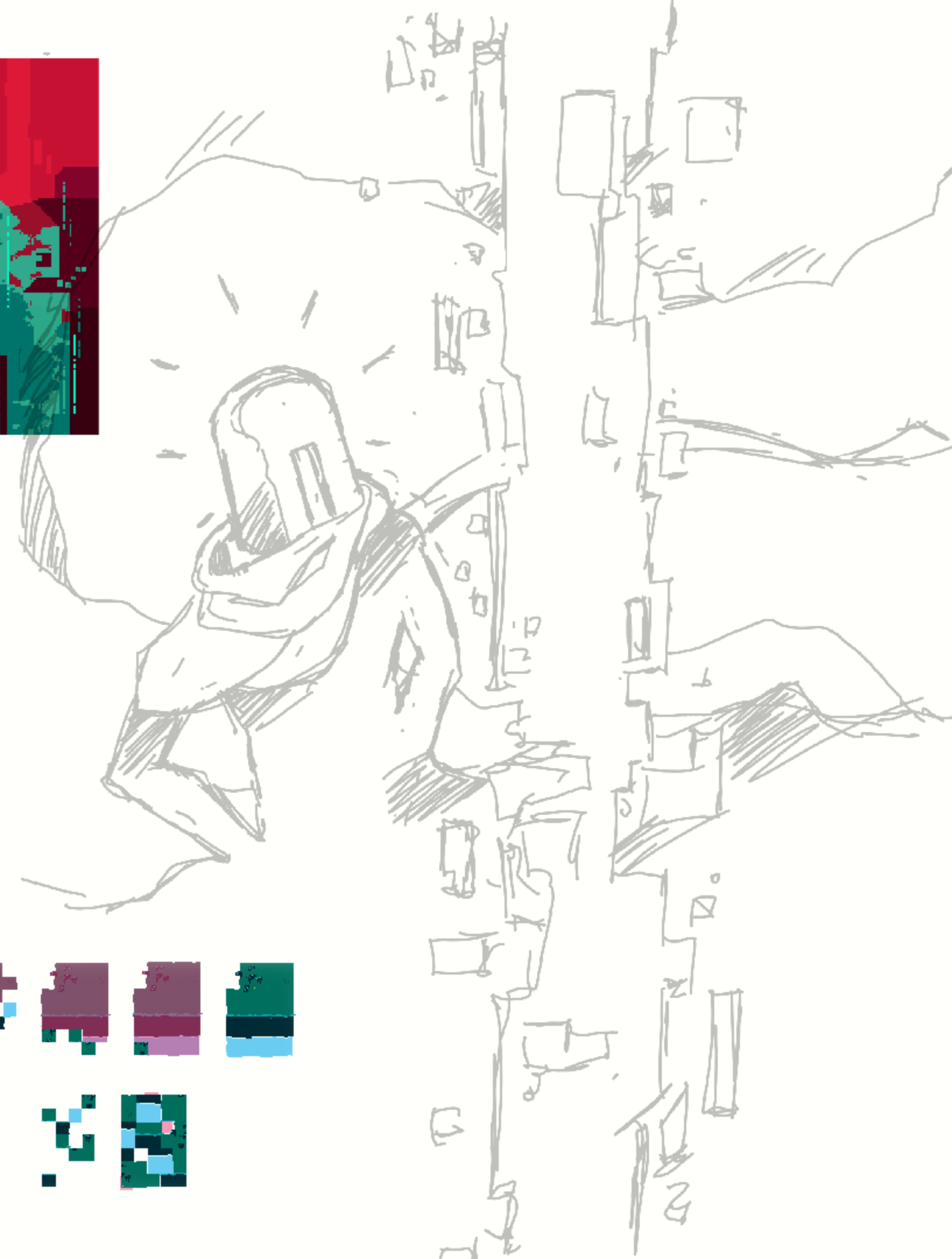
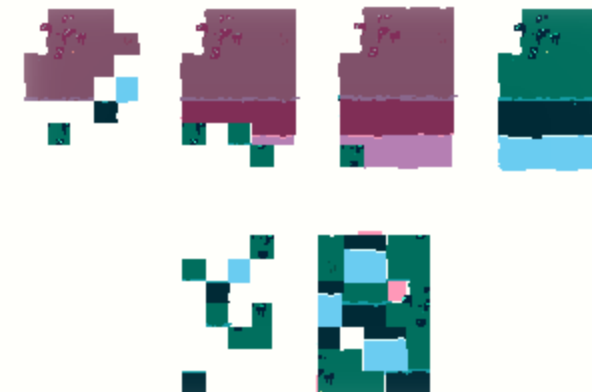
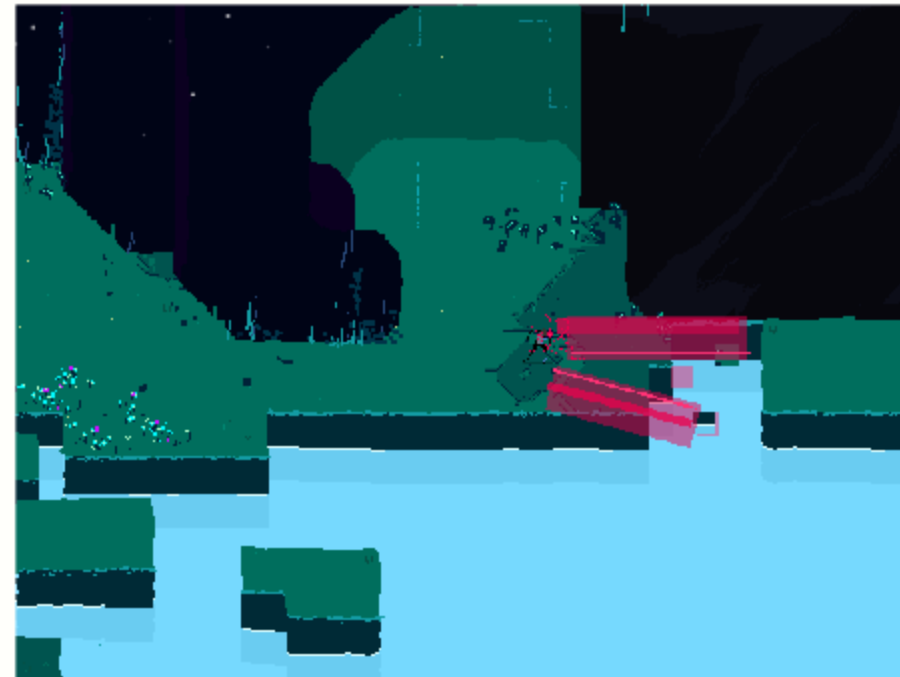
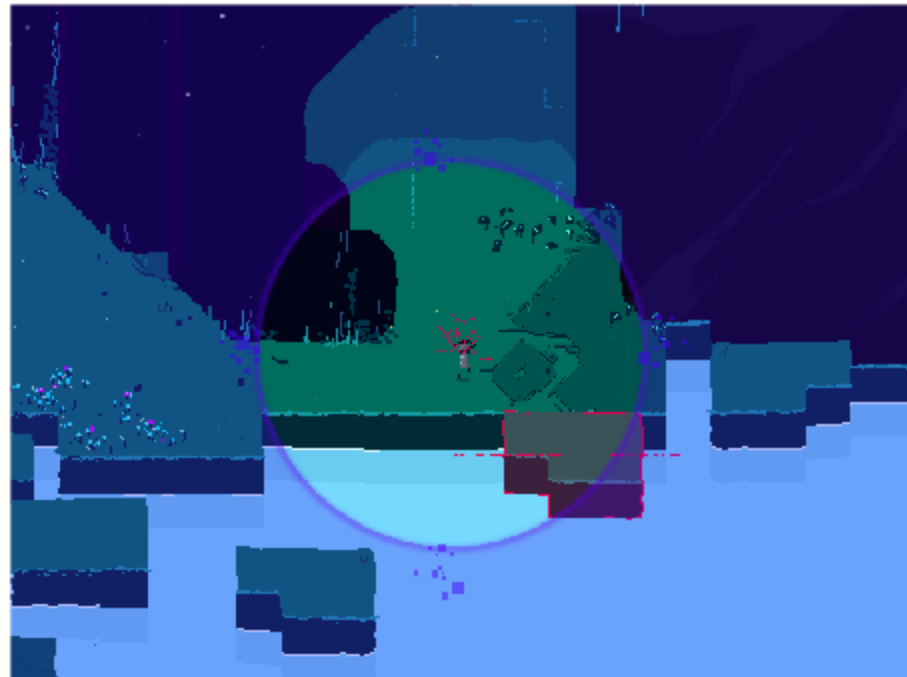
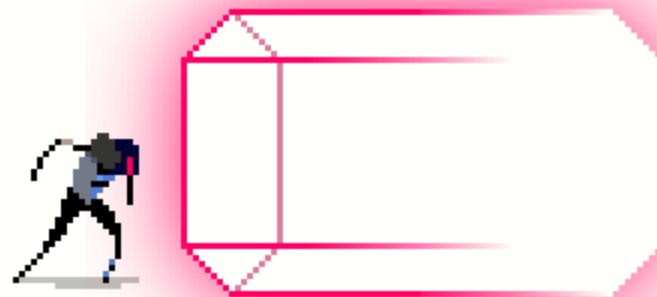


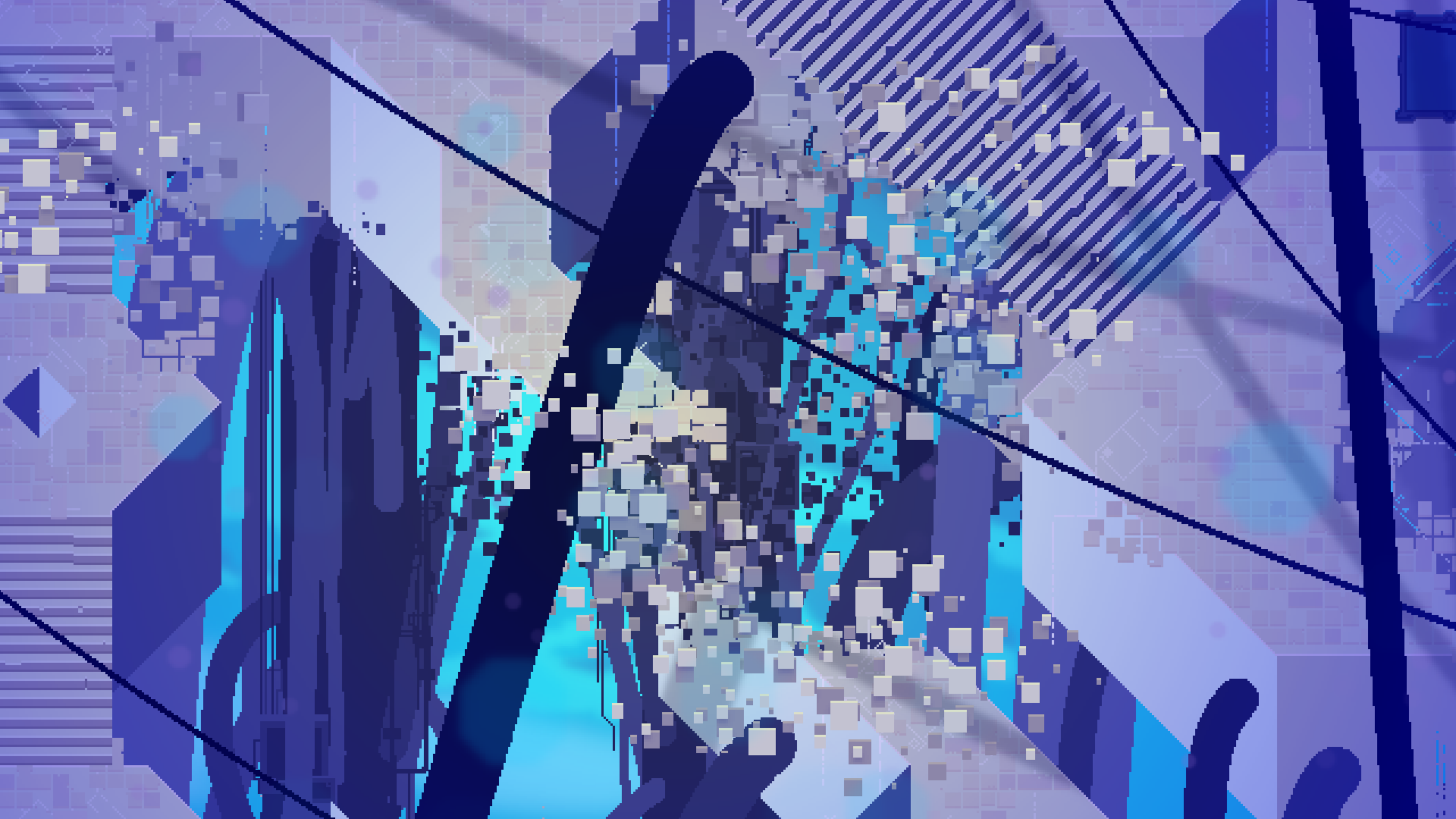
Test, Fail, Repeat

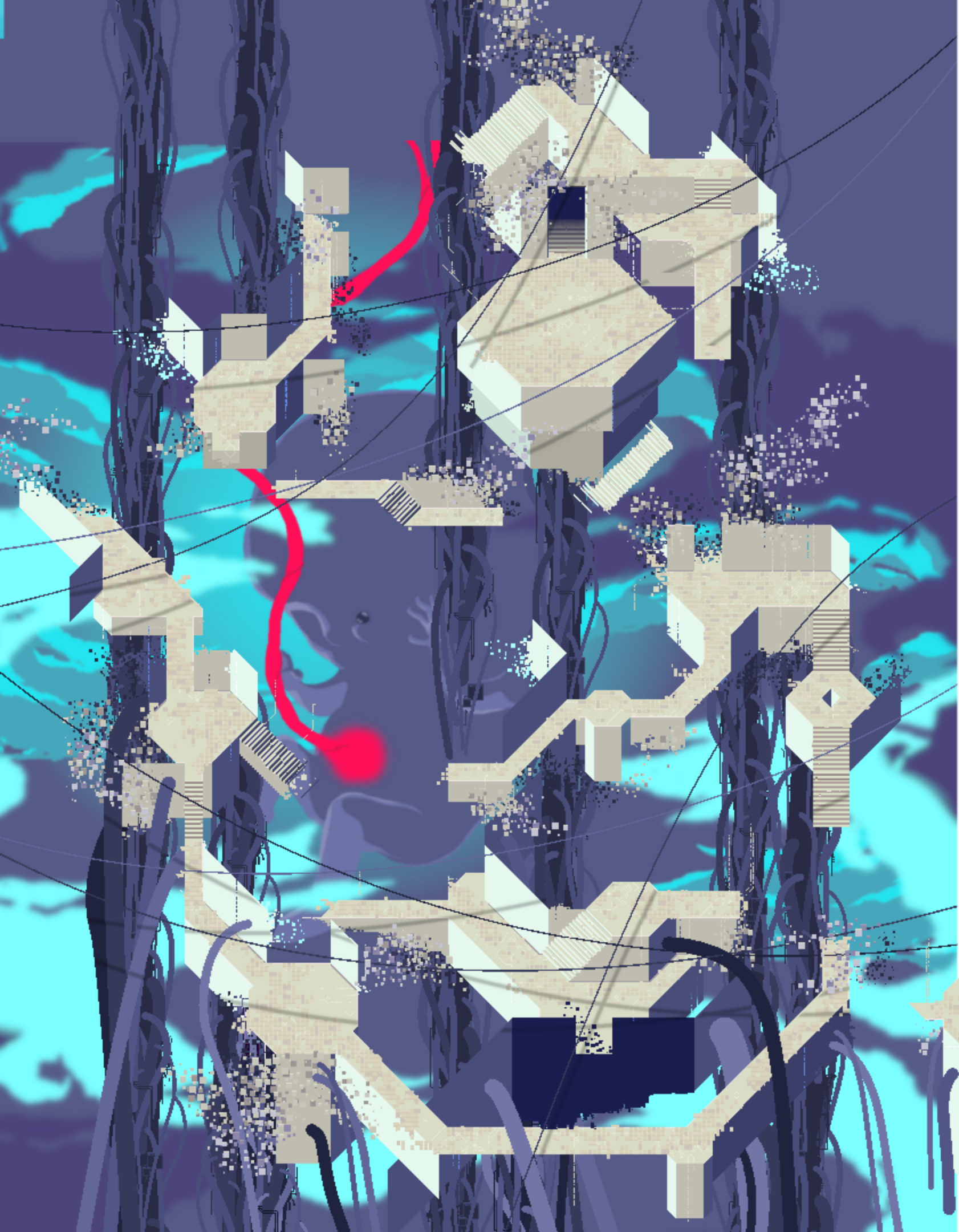
This item, in particular, was a challenge for us inexperienced game developers. Conceived as a tool to modify parts of the world, open up a path or read invisible signs, the Chromatic Aberration never really worked. We went through nine iterations of moving sprites, inverting collisions, scanning tiles and flipping squares, accompanied by plenty of light, particles, and screen-shakes. Things were either technically complex and error-prone, or just not fun to execute.



Very frustrated, we stopped and had a good look at the concept: could we reset and create something much closer to the original idea of the limited sight? Attaching the beam to Valor's head and having the player move it around, changing the targeted environment finally saw the pieces fall into place. Barriers changed to bridges with a satisfying sense of achievement.





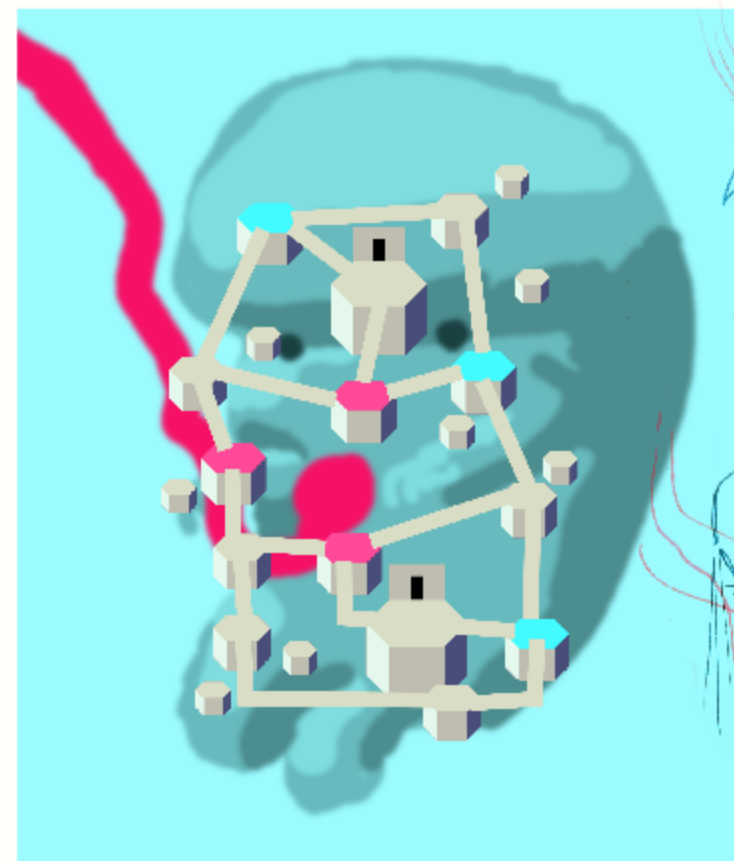


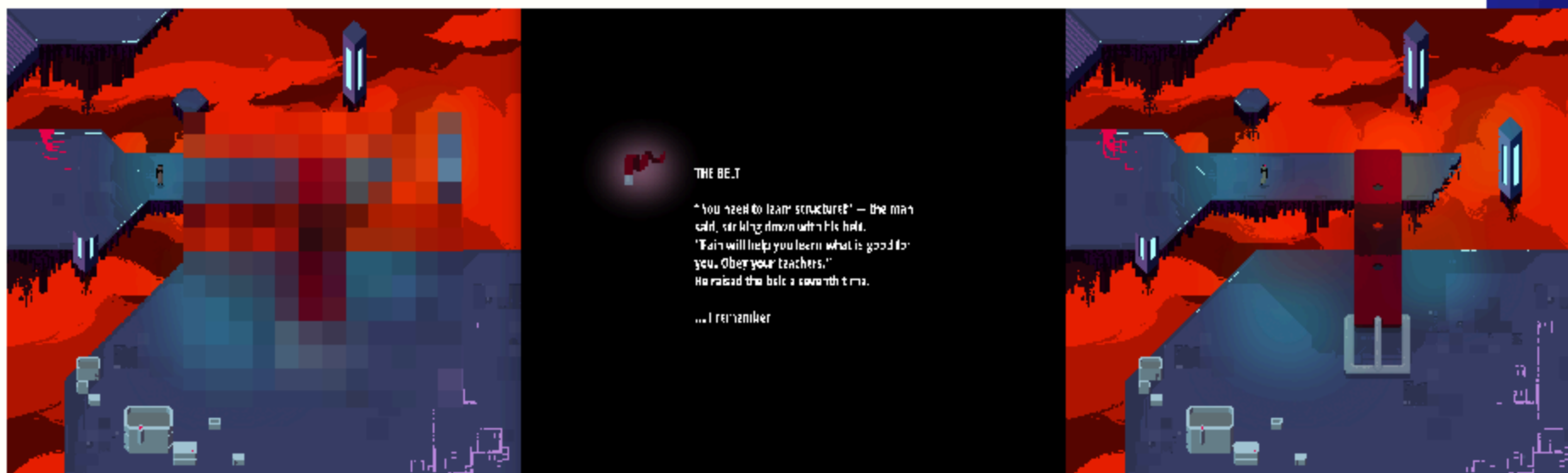
"Can you find more emotional memories?
Three memories should give us enough
patterns to model their encryption."
—Alibii

Where Memories Live

We've been here before. The northern Plains are the gateway to Resolution's finale. We designed a structure of narrow ledges, that can only be crossed after fulfilling Alibii's request to return with three powerful memories — each appearing on an emerging platform that expands the path a little further.

In the distance towers a huge, observing embryo. Its magenta umbilical cord — a metaphor that appears as early as the Fading Playground — represents the idea that each experience and its consequence which we endure, could result in the birth of a new being.





THE BELT

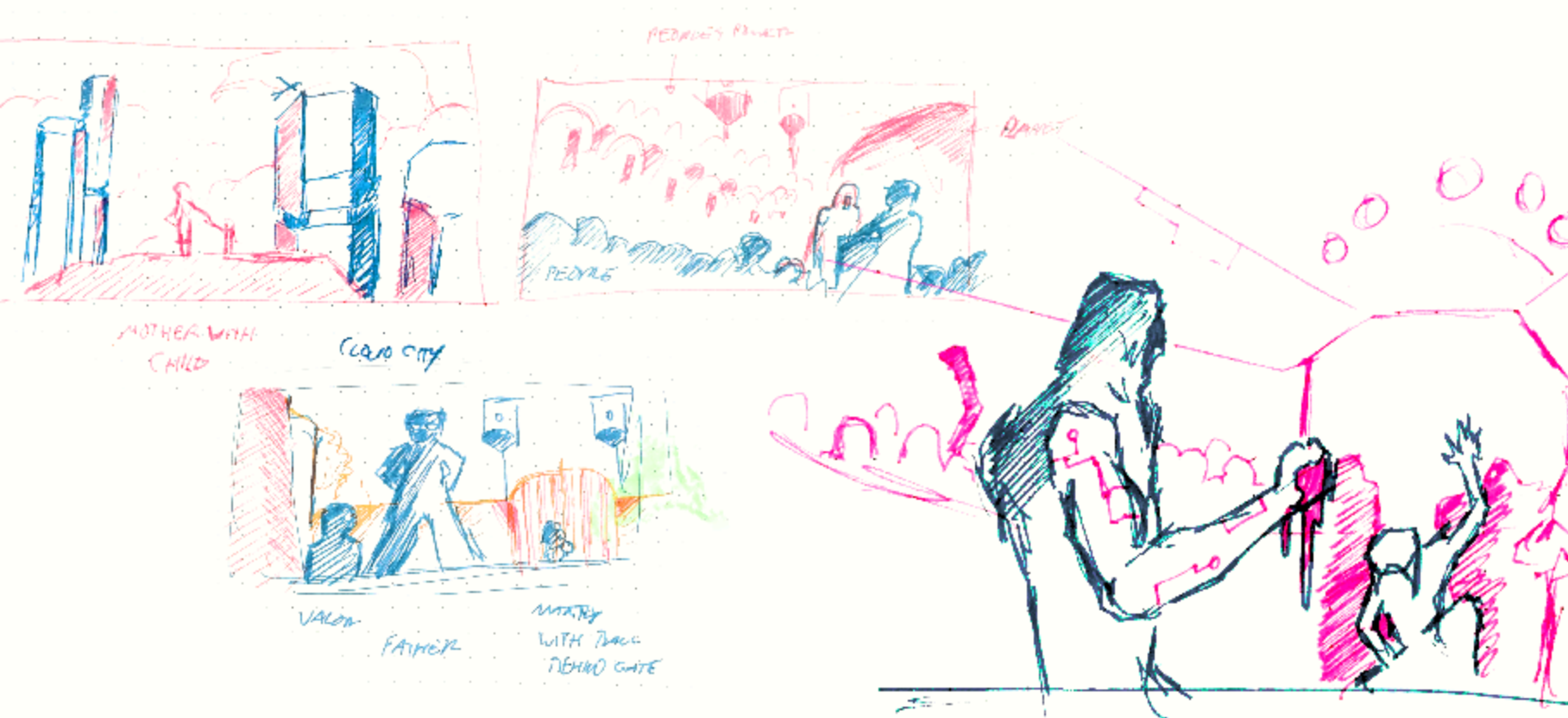
"You need to learn structure" — the man said, striking down with his fist.
 "Fain will help you learn what is good for you. Obey your teachers."
 He raised the belt a seventh time.

...I remember

I Remember ...

In case this is not yet clear: Resolution plays out in a dreamscape called The Red Code. Everything Valor remembers shapes the world he moves through: a Flag of the Infinite Empire, a belt-like bridge, it always comes back in some way.

We had to be careful with how we revealed these memories. Early versions of the game gave away too much backstory too quickly, and we realized it was far more effective for the player to tease the memories out of the world, rather than have them spooned directly into their mouths. In the end, there are six key memories to be discovered, which are collected in the Plains' gallery for your viewing pleasure.



Memory Frames

Each memory in Resolution is
represented within a picture frame.
Each frame is a memory of a moment

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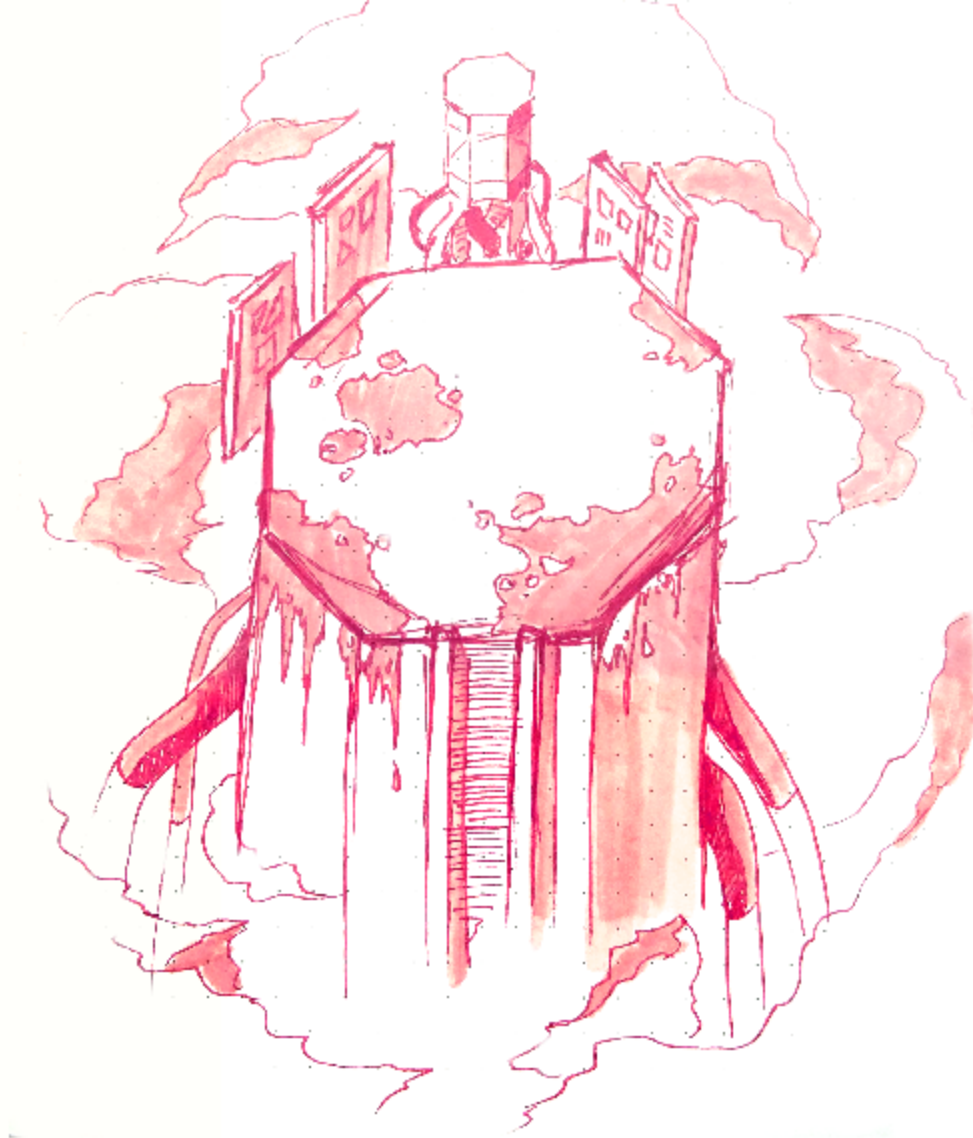
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The Queen's Chamber

Having obtained all the data she requires, Alibii settles down in The Queen's Chamber: from here she can hack the Red Code and corrupt the terrorist communications, one step; one connection; one byte at a time.

"You bought me so much time Valor.
You've given me everything I've asked for.
How can you stay in the dream a little longer?
Can you still fight?"
-Alibii



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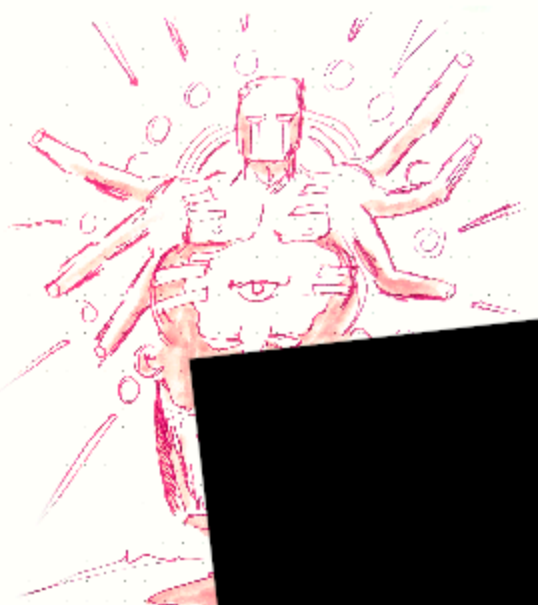
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ymbiosis in a desperate
attempt to strike his
nemesis. Too late: Alibii has
gained access to the Red
Code and simply deletes the
"blue signal". This is the end.
Or is it ...



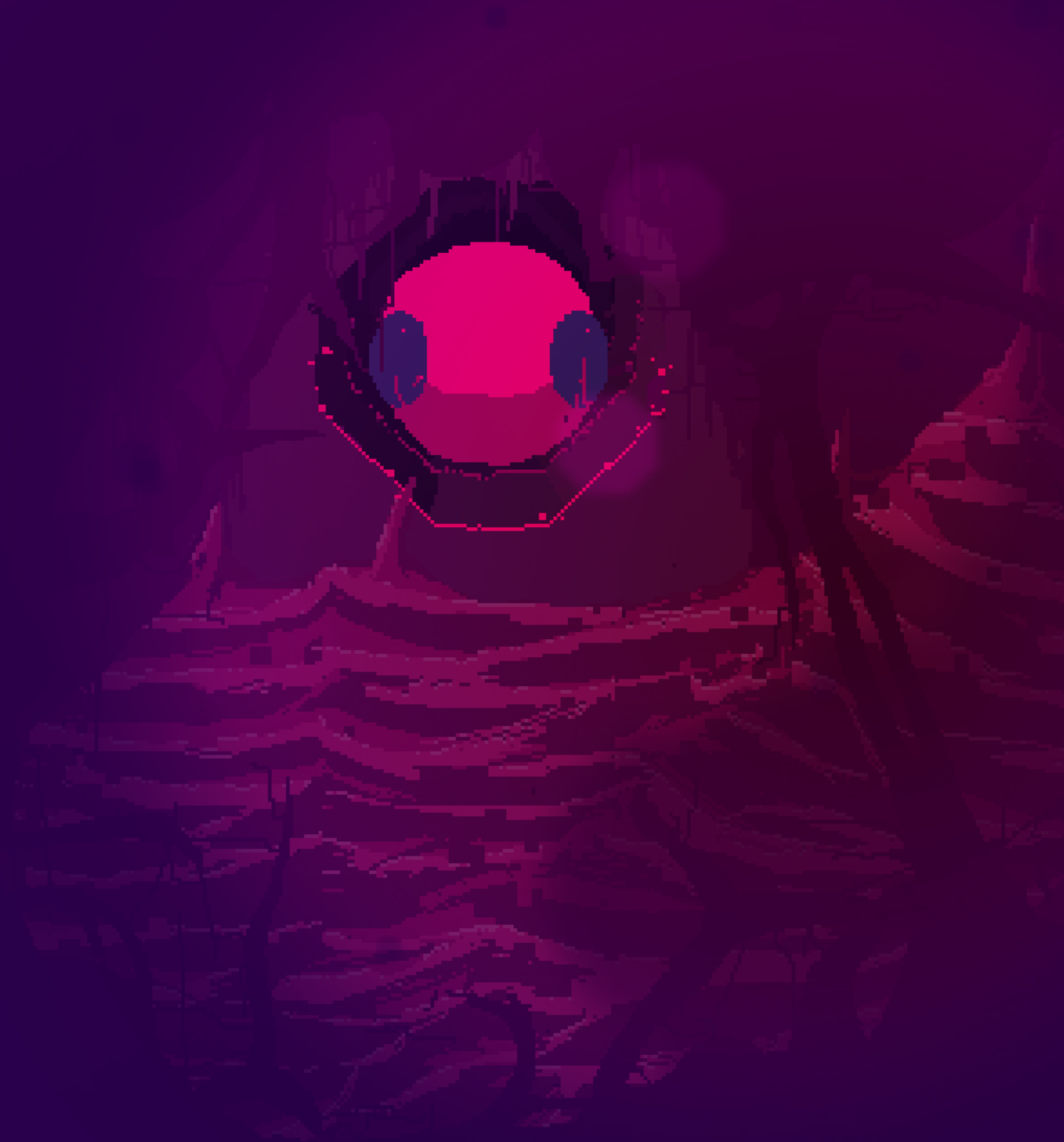
Red


Deus Ex Machina. The ghost in the machine. Eponym of this world. Red.

She has been watching us from afar throughout the long journey but reveals herself after Blue falls. The oldest and most powerful of the Entities is not the judgemental kind — she won't tell Valor to stop and save the Red Code. Instead, she has a simple message:

Into the Red Plains

Red has many friends in the realm, amongst them a megalomaniac ladybug and Red Bolshie. The later will tear a hole into Valor's reality, and take us to the other side of the Plains if we pay the price: three flipsides of our memories and a fresh tune on the Theremin.





"Haha, I'm still shaking ...
probably because she's draining
me. Don't go up there."
—Red

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RUNNING--.-.-.-
OUT.-.-..
OF--.-.-..
MEMORYY.Y.yy.Y..-y.yy-y.y..-....y.....-.-.-..
-Alibii

Interlude

Design Dialog

Part III

Chris So yeah, there's definitely things I would have done differently along the way, but having seen the final thing come together, I don't know if there's anything I'd change now.

How about you? Is there anything you wish you had the time to change?

Günther Well, keeping in mind that when I started I was having to learn all these techniques, how to create game assets, I am crazy happy about how far we've come. I'd certainly go with a different workflow—more planning, documentation and smaller spaces to iterate on—that might result in a much faster asset pipeline, leaving more time for exploration, concepts, and variety.

To elaborate a bit more on this: extreme polishing was something Richi and I decided against very early on in the development. On one hand, we didn't have the skills to compete with some of those amazing artists out there; on the other, we enjoy indie-games the most if they are rough around the edges and let the developer's identity shine through. Polishing means that you are narrowing a game's features closer to the average player's expectations. Too often this results in politically correct characters, clichés or stereotypes—and I'm certainly not buying an indie-game to get bored with those.

Chris I generally tend to keep away from indie-games that lack visual polish because I think if the developers haven't polished the art, the game will be low quality too. But the indie-games I do play are usually a bit uninspired... I've started looking at titles like *Baba is You* and hearing how good the game design is, so you might be right. But I got into games first to tell interesting stories, and second to draw nice pictures, so I find it hard to look past the value of these things.

Günther I'm with you on the “cool story and nice art” side of video games, but I'd add “amazing soundtrack” to the list. Luckily, Richi came in from the other side of human perception—fast action and fun mechanics. Honestly, his complementary approach made *Resolution* a full game, instead of a pretty but boring art showcase.

But since this is an art book, let's not get too deep into anything other than the visuals. One of the last things I polished was the gore elements in the *Fallen City* using an epic sprite sheet you provided, filled with little details of pure disgust. How did you approach that kind of task—the growth in the *Forest of Self*, the rust inside *Hallow Valdez* (sunken ship), or the veins and bloodstains for said guts?

Chris In the early days, the levels looked a bit like they'd been put together with tile-sets. It was all about creating a space to test the mechanics. Platform edges were uniform, the ground was endless paths of single, solid colors. The few details present were almost like notes to your future self: put flowers here. I saw my job at being to

disguise the patterns and make each space look hand-crafted.

You always had a first iteration on the details in the form of giant sprite sheets you'd made for the asset library. My initial step was always throwing these details all over the place and adding in a few additional entries of my own. But I guess the trick was to then add broad strokes of unique details around the scores of reused ones. Where I'd clustered a bunch of mushrooms I might add some slime that was specific to that spot, dripping down the wall, giving the fungi some context.

With the gore, I'd add spindly veins across the floor, I'd snake it around columns, or off the edge of a platform or up some stairs. It was all about trying to sell an illusion that these weren't just the same assets repeated ad nauseam, floating on a color, but that they were in that space, interacting with the things around them.

Günther And you did one fantastic job there. Almost all amazing looking set-pieces in the game have your handwriting all over them.

I remember that we split work into two categories: “boring work”, which was all about repetition, patterns and additional layers of detail. And then there was the “fun work”, which was unique elements or little vignettes, that we scattered across the pixel landscapes to draw players through the game. We wanted there to always be something new and shiny to look out for.

Quickly shifting between the boring parts and the fun parts is certainly something that creates Resoluiion’s unique charm. But as designers, this meant we had to constantly change our mindset all the time, which is not easy. For the longest time, I had so many rough parts to polish to a decent level that I barely freed up the time to work on a unique, fresh set-piece. How did you deal with this challenge over those 24 months of collaboration?

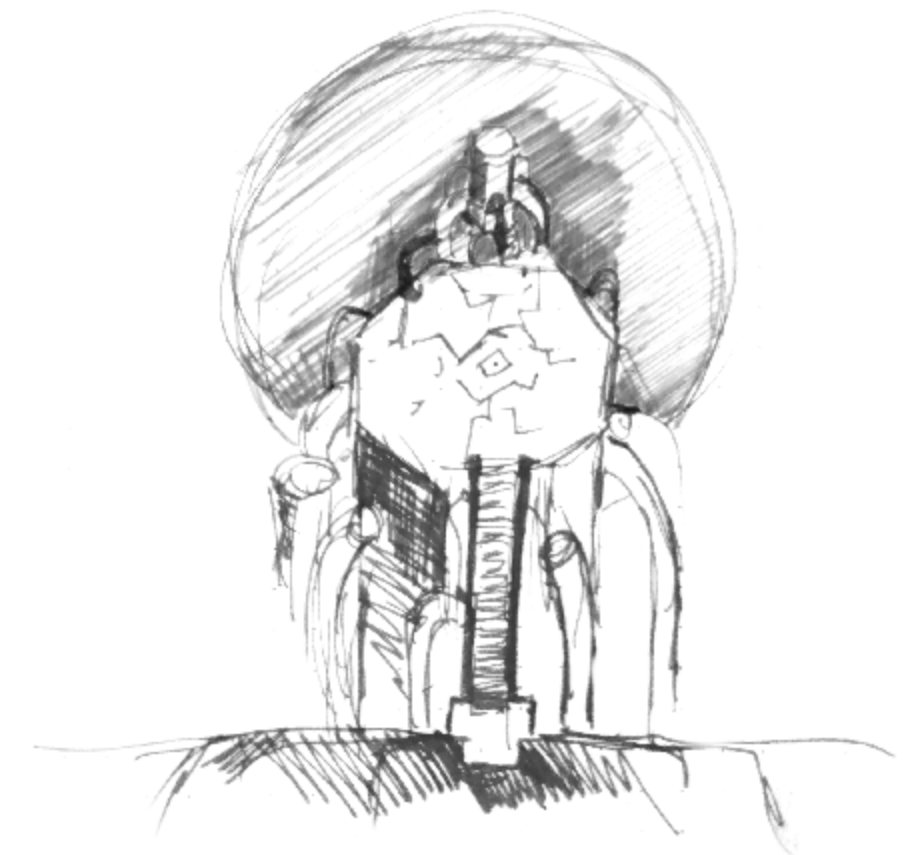
Chris It was tough in the beginning because back then it was almost exclusively the boring stuff I was working on: adding cracks and rock details. But it got easier as we progressed. Eventually, working on areas started to feel more like

expanding massive illustrations rather than a copy-paste collage of assets.

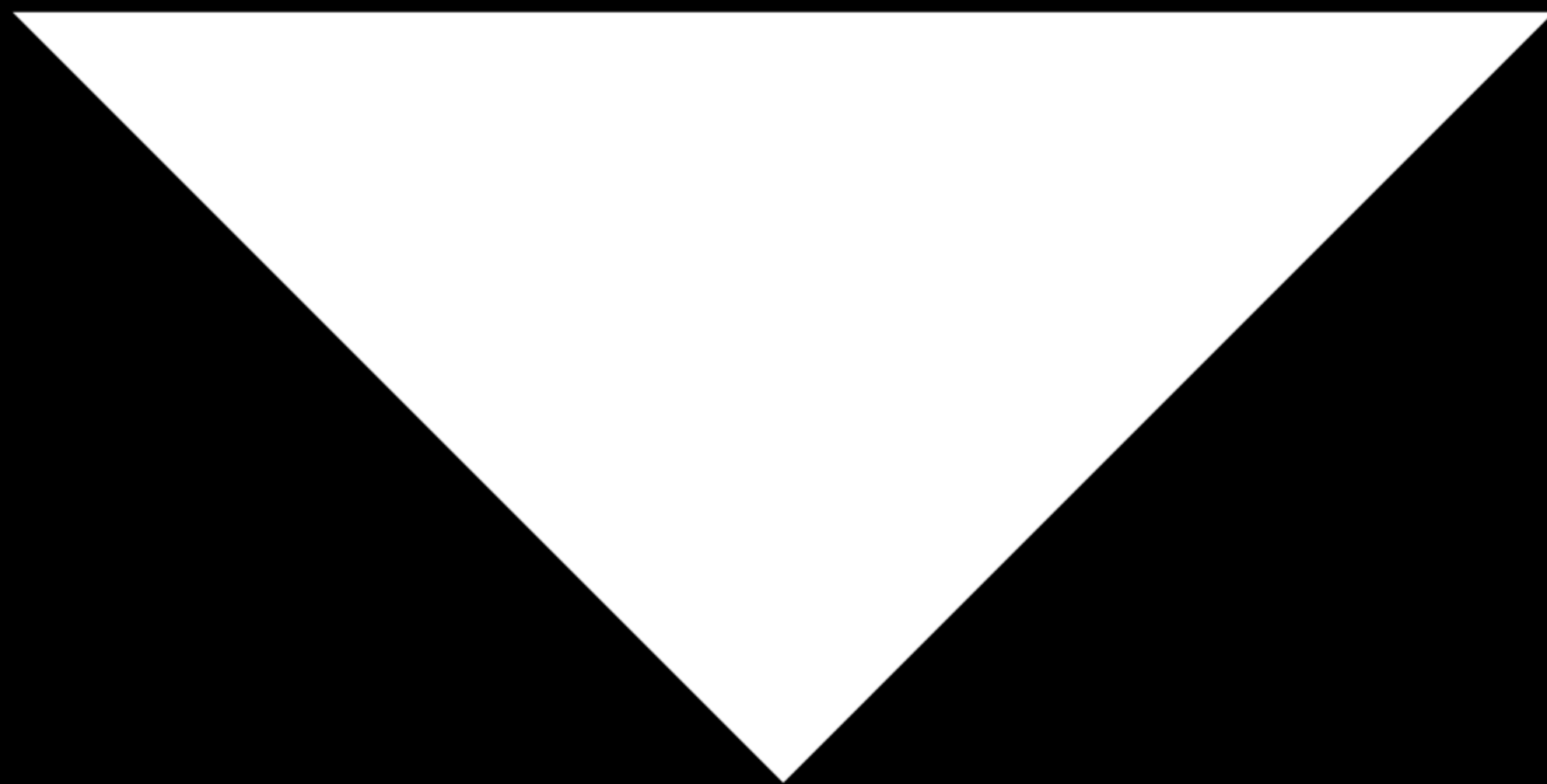
The Hallow Valdez, in particular, had quite an illustrative quality. The maps were big enough that we could have different types of details close together, yet small enough that the flow appeared to have a narrative.

Günther That’s true: the levels more and more changed from stitched together snippets of platforms, paths, furniture, and props, to fleshed out illustrations with variation and details at every corner. Another clear tale of how we learned to create a technical system, and slowly fleshed it out into a living and breathing world.

Hopefully, this artbook gets exactly this point across: be open to new challenges, apply what you have learned, and then just stick to it.



The End

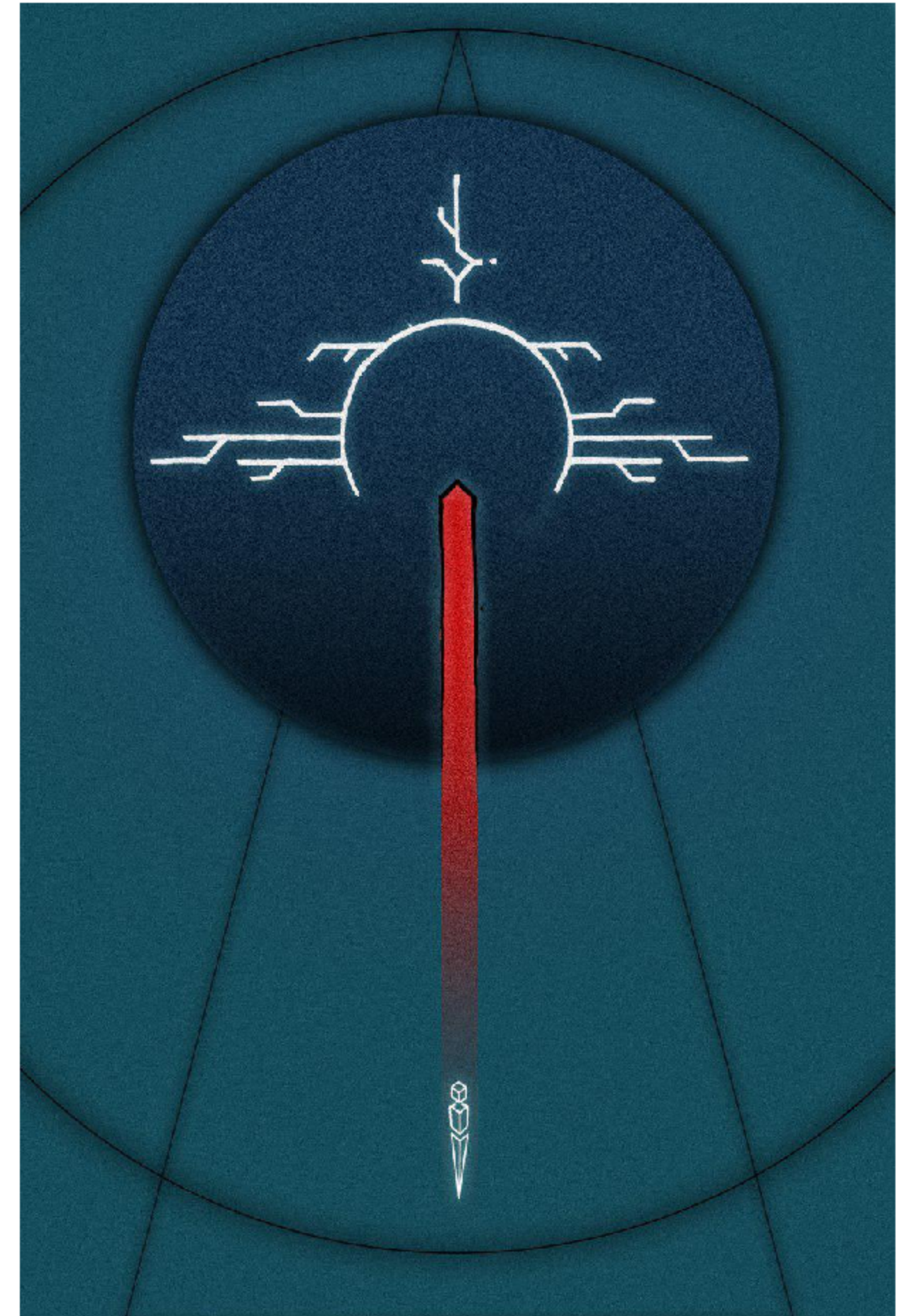




Oh, Resolution

With Alibii deleted and the Red Code saved, we had told the story we wanted to tell. There was one more thing to do though, something we had pushed to one side for the longest time ... Resolution needed a face. It required a piece of artwork, a logo, that would sum up the entire experience while being recognizable enough to be deployed across a wide range of media.

But how do you do that? How do you craft something that encapsulates five years of a team's hard work? How do you capture everything we put into our game in a single image? What sounds obvious in hindsight turned out to be our final challenge.

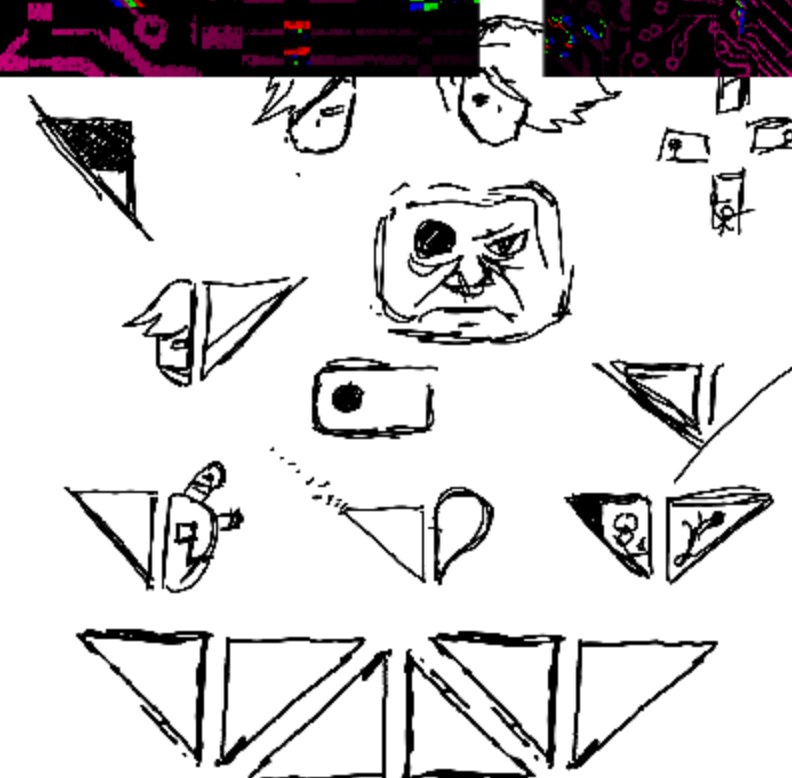




Duality

When putting our heads together, and pulling out our teeth, debating what Resolution was at its core, one concept came up time and time again: duality — the idea that everything has another side. Life and death; the Infinite Empire versus the Tribes; flesh or machine: this eternal struggle defines the human experience and every decision we make. The only way out is what we call “transcendence” — escaping duality to another plane of existence.

Trying to visualize the concepts of duality and transcendence, we ended up with the simple shape of a triangle, split in half: one side to represent the technocracy, the other our natural, feral side.

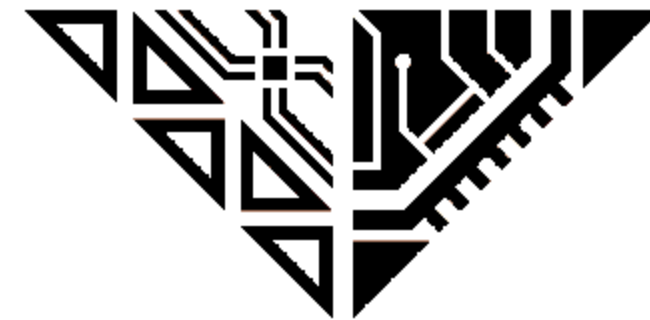




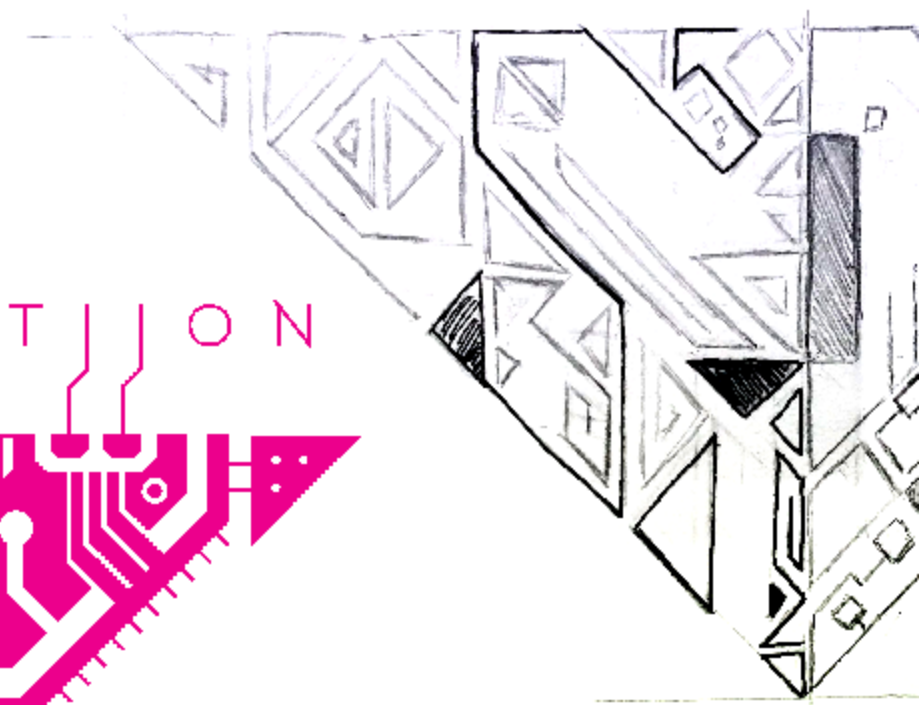
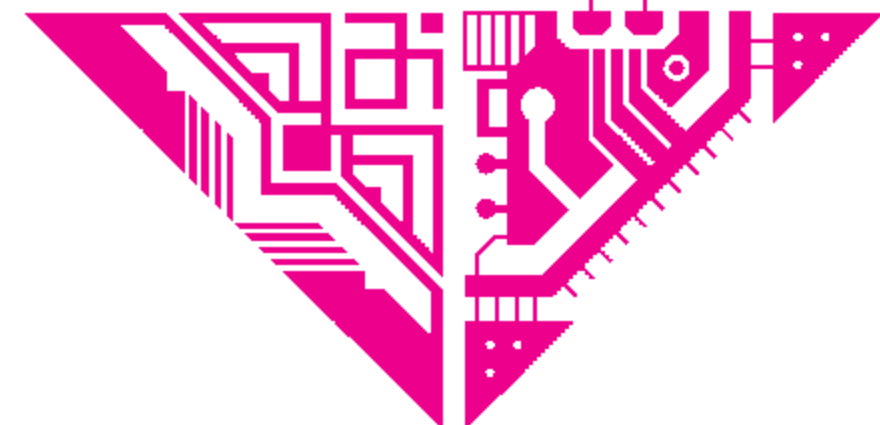
Refining the Shape

With the main idea in place, it became a matter of testing and refining the shapes: one side evolved into tribal lines and angles, the other electronic pathways and transistors.

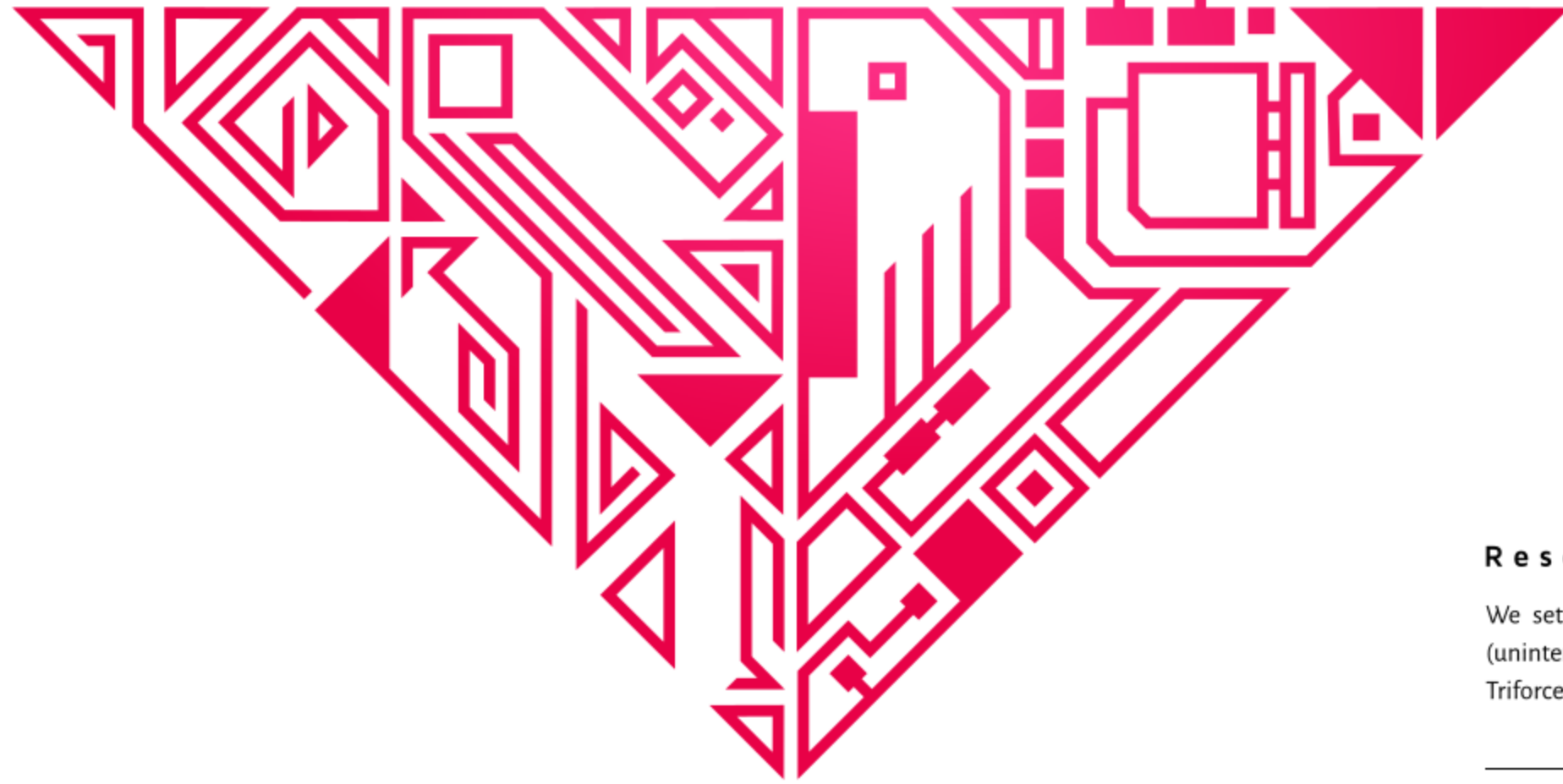
RESOLUTION



RESOLUTION



RESOLUTION



Resolution's Triforce

We set out to make a Zeldesque game and (unintentionally) ended up with our very own Triforce. Mission accomplished.

"Between order and chaos lies harmony.
Only from harmony, can you transcend to
a higher form of existence. A triangle."
—Mr. Kiepchen

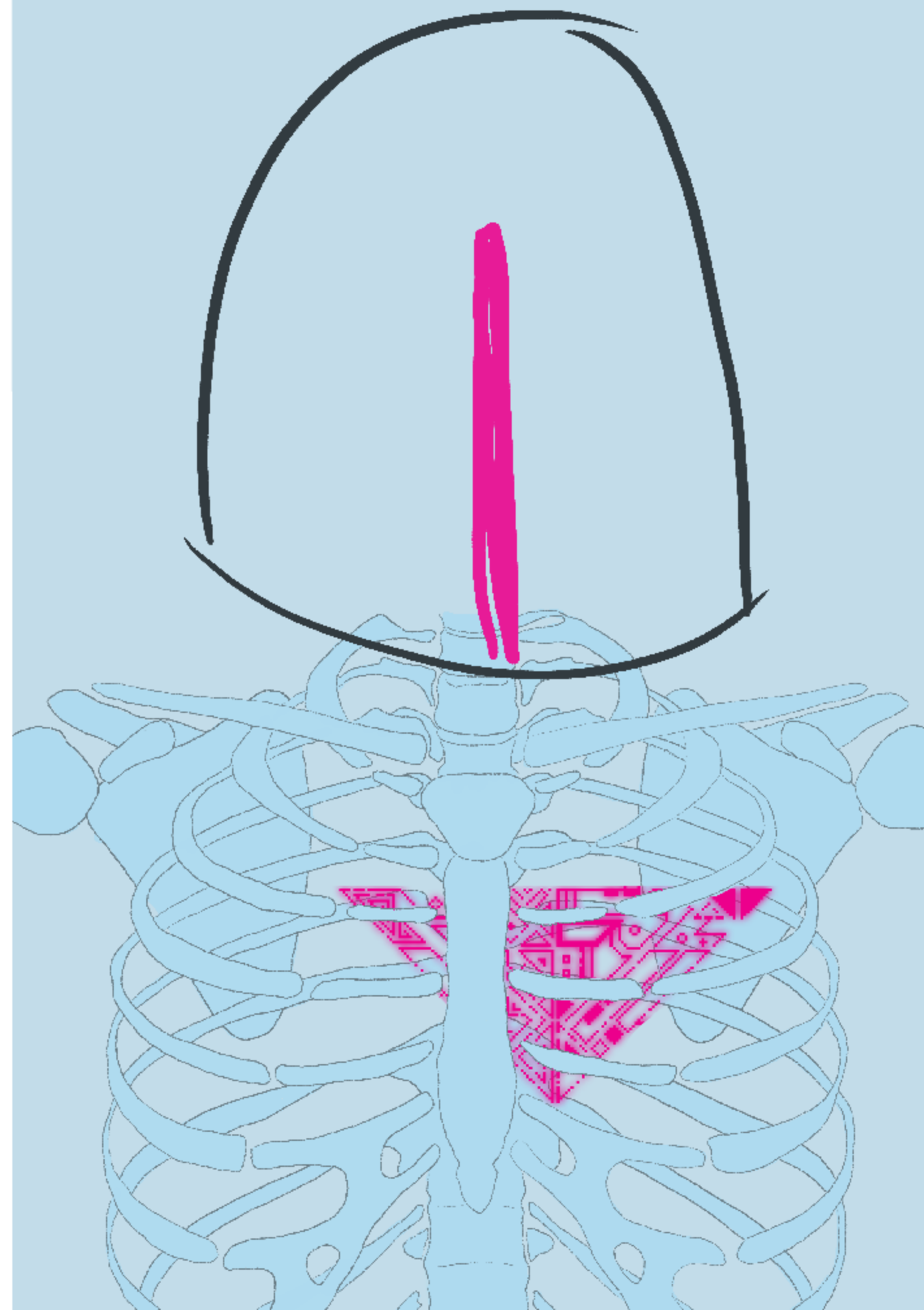
RESOLUTION

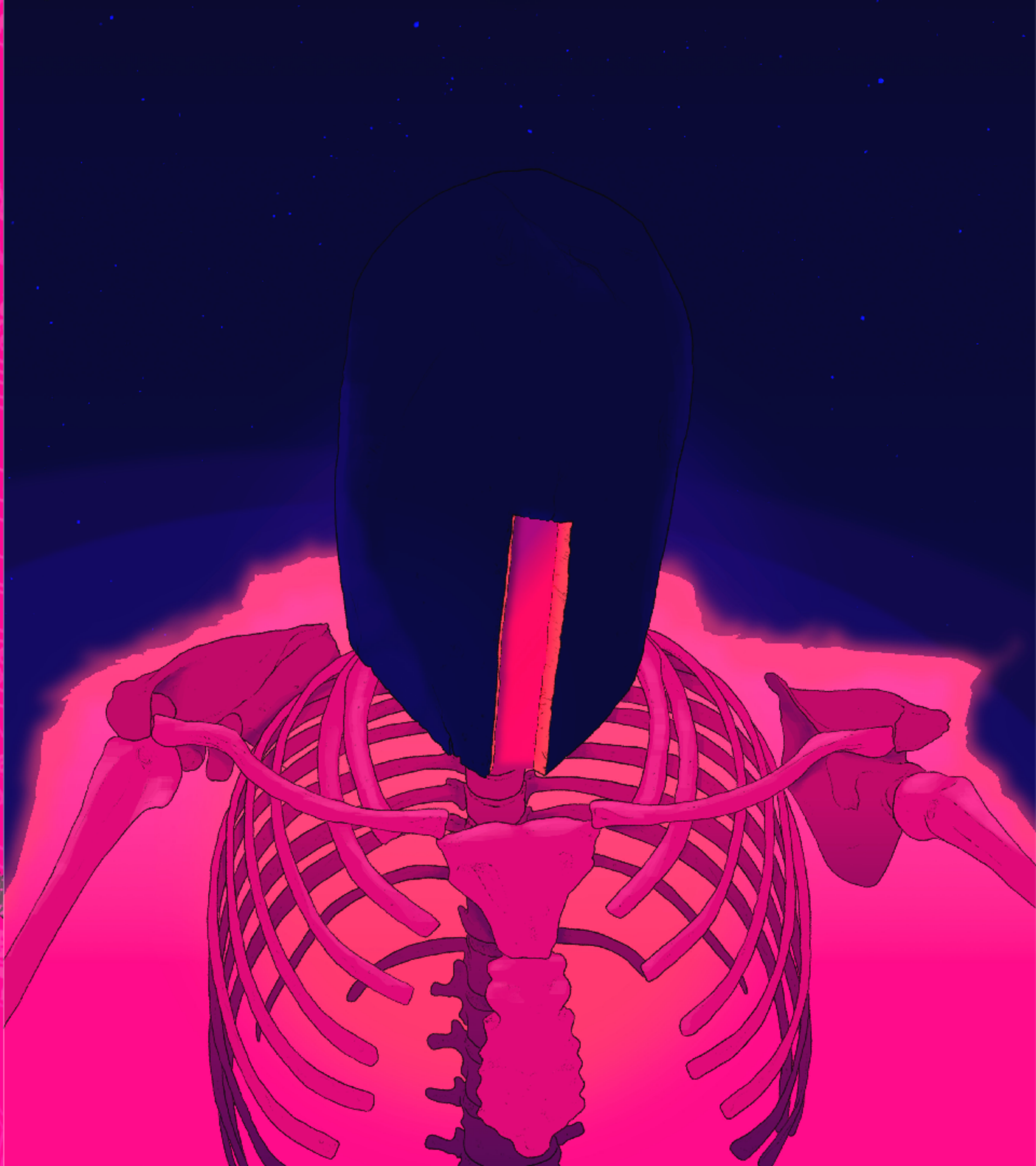
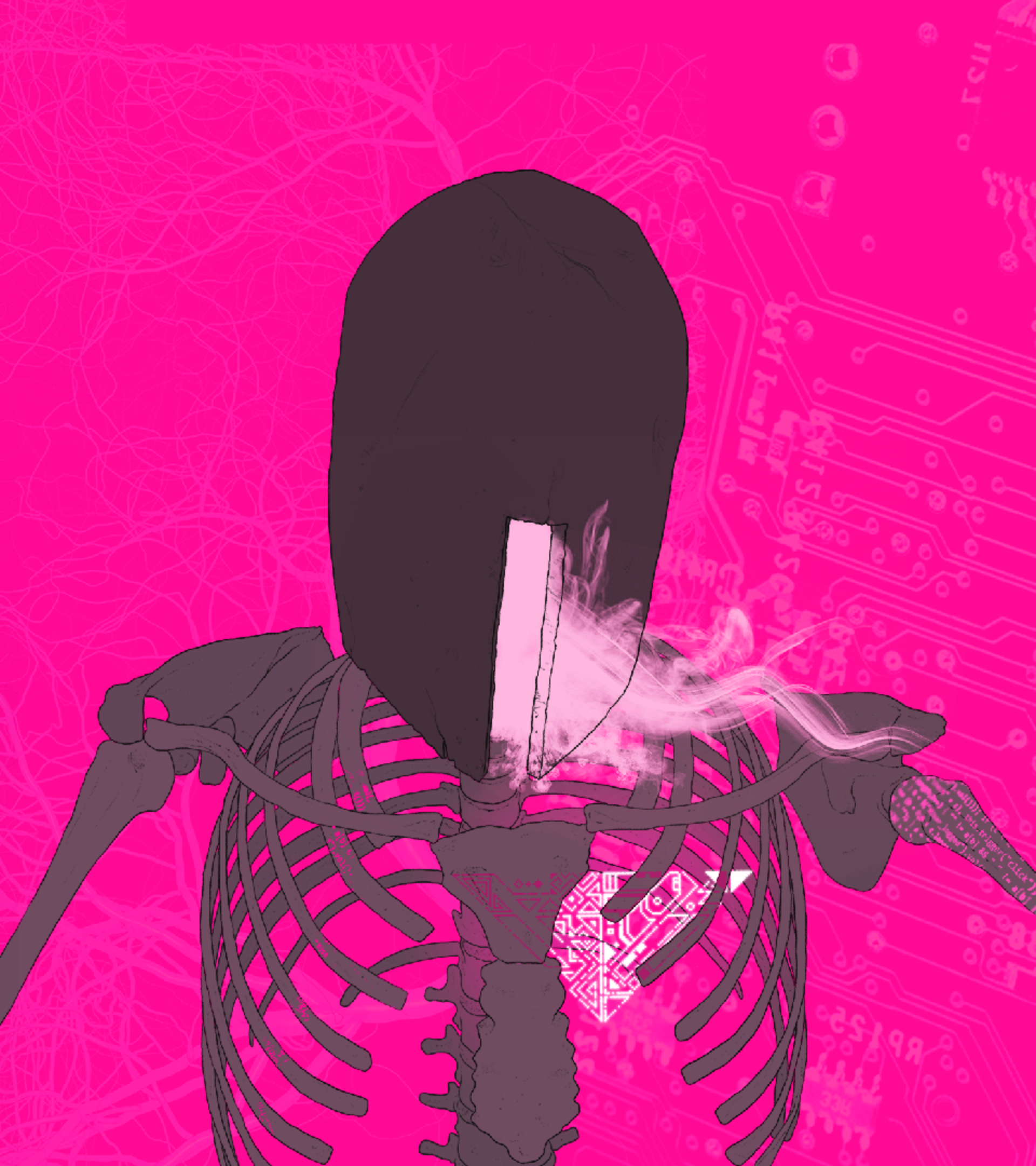


Who's the Hero here?

The final piece of our puzzle was some solid key-art. We started to explore Valor in various combat poses and encounters, but quickly realized that this wasn't the way to go — Resolution was never about combat or mindless destruction; really, it wasn't even about Valor at all. Our hero was a monster, and we certainly didn't want to present him in iconic victory poses.

We considered outsourcing the job to another illustrator but struggled to communicate the number of ideas and meanings we wanted this unique piece to convey, even within the team. We didn't know what we wanted, so how could anyone else figure it out?



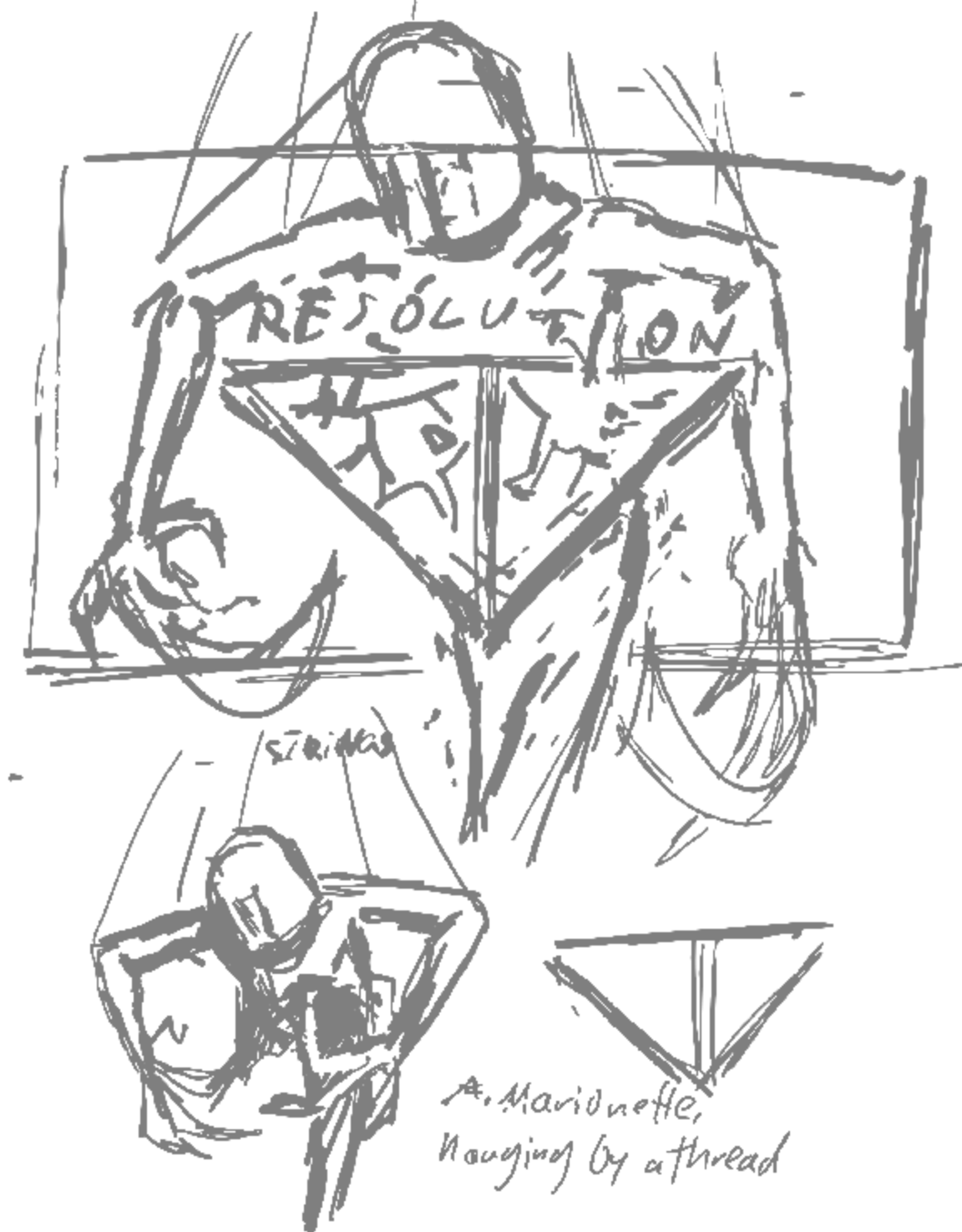


MONOLITH OF MINDS

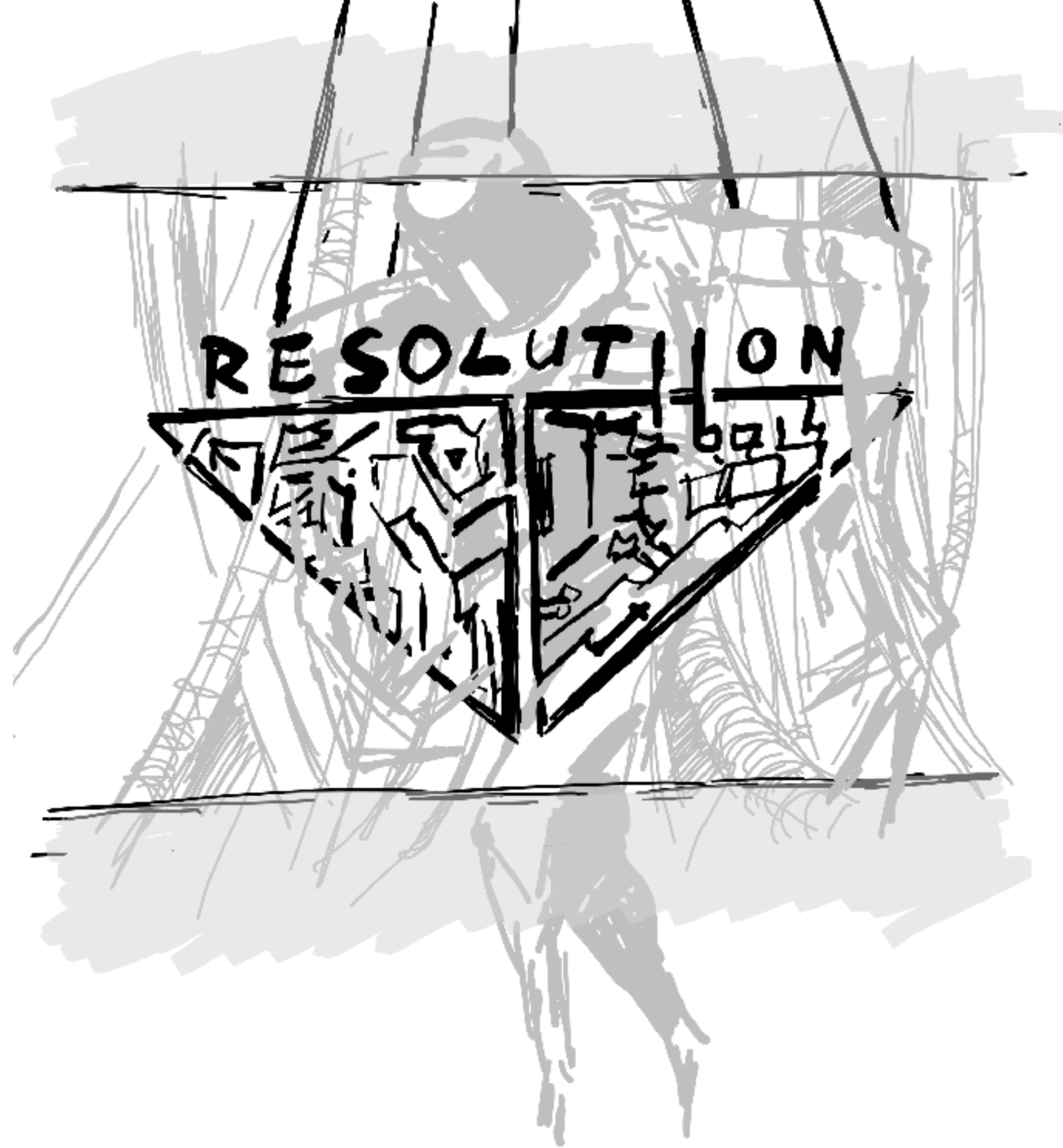


Marionette

Testing Resolution extensively in summer 2019, we finally got to play our own game start-to-finish over a few dedicated sittings. One metaphor emerged multiple times, that until then we hadn't fully realized: Valor doesn't act on his own decisions, but is controlled by invisible strings; the parasite called Alibii.



Sketching out this image of a limp, yet dangerous marionette worked great with the logo and even made Valor seem like a crucified martyr — an intriguing image. But with his head hanging loose, what would the eyes of this broken killer be forced to contemplate below?



War of the Queens

The real conflict in Resolution never involved Valor: Red and Alibii are the queen's of their realms, fighting for dominance, one over the other. Valor is just the pawn on the field.

Valor threatening Red, being played by Alibii — the composition resonated with all of us, hinting at enough story in advance for it to become more intriguing the more you know ... and even teasing the resolution of Resolution.

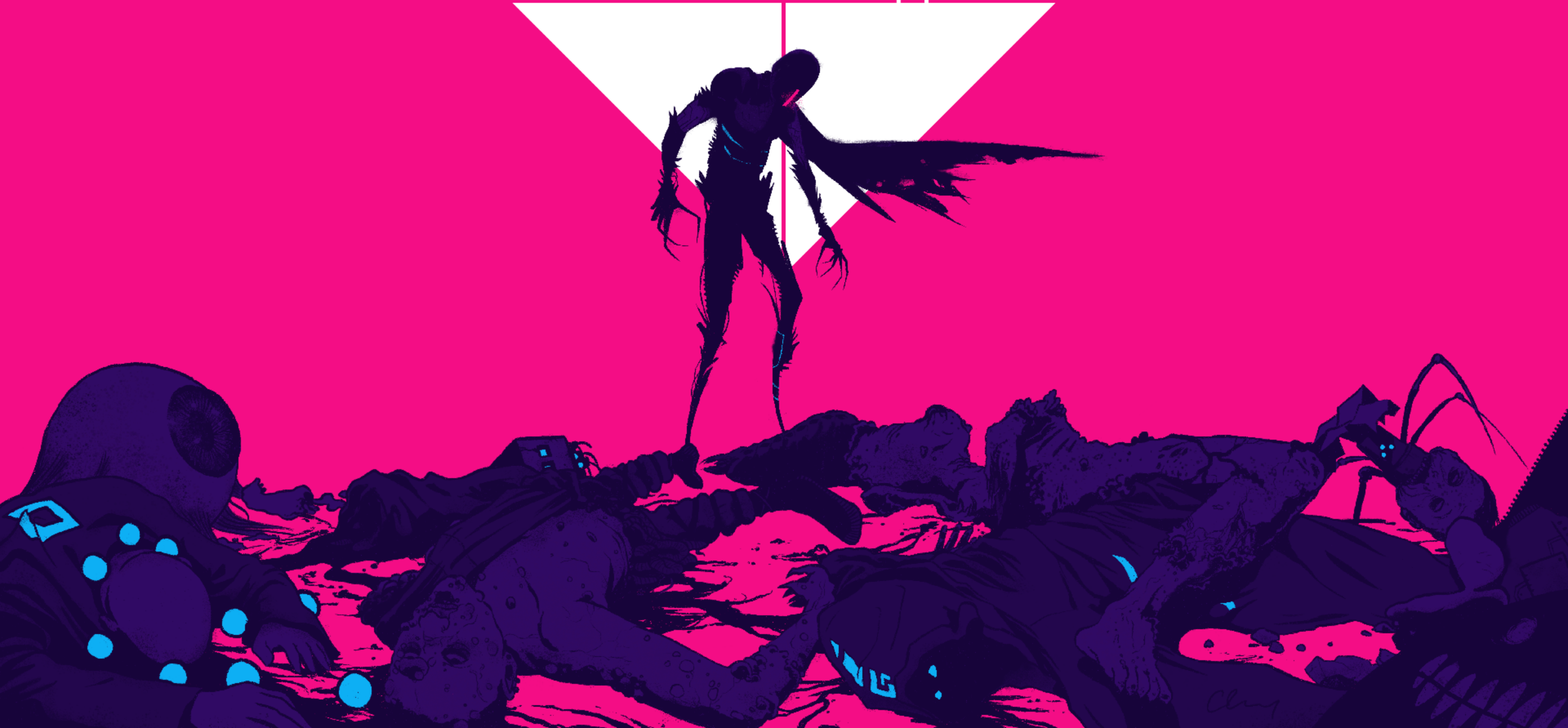
The End.







RESOLUTION





"Thank you, but Red is in another Cradle."
—Mr. Kiepchen



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IBM Plex Mono *github.com/IBM/plex*

Made with
Inkscape *inkscape.org*
Gimp *gimp.org*

See you in the next Cradle.
—Monolith of Minds

