

Level Design Document
“Shattered Skies of Aurelia: Skygräd”
Philip Michael Norris

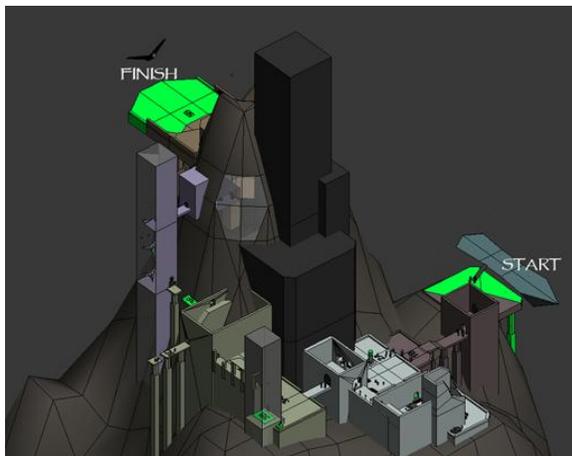
<u>Level Genre</u>	High Gothic Fantasy w/ Steampunk elements
<u>Gameplay</u>	Hack & Slash RPG
<u>Players</u>	Single player & multiplayer (1-4) options

Level Overview

The progression of this level leads players through a steeped mountaintop fortress. The tiered, semicircular shape of the level makes it difficult for players to anticipate the obstacles ahead and keeps them on their toes. Instead of including additional non-linear side paths, this level features several large "playground" areas along a linear path. A similar design feature can be found in the Left for Dead games. This design provides players with the illusion of non-linearity while restricting them to a single path.

Numerous fractal props such as collapsing architecture and crumbling statues constantly reshape the environment as the player progresses through the level. Akin to Hunter: The Reckoning, I made use of specialty weapons (“King Killer” crossbow) in this level. Such items are only usable until their limited ammunition is depleted, at which time the item disappears.

One mechanic I sought to implement into this level was an alternative to standard jumping. Instead of jumping over debris, fences, logs, etc. players will gain leverage with one arm and propel their bodies over obstacles, albeit in a single smooth motion. In order to reflect real-life swordplay (at least as depicted on film), melee combat will utilize a mechanic allowing both players and enemies to block, parry, and anticipate strikes. Additional detail could allow for enemy weapons to break outright if a weapon takes too many hits.



Backstory

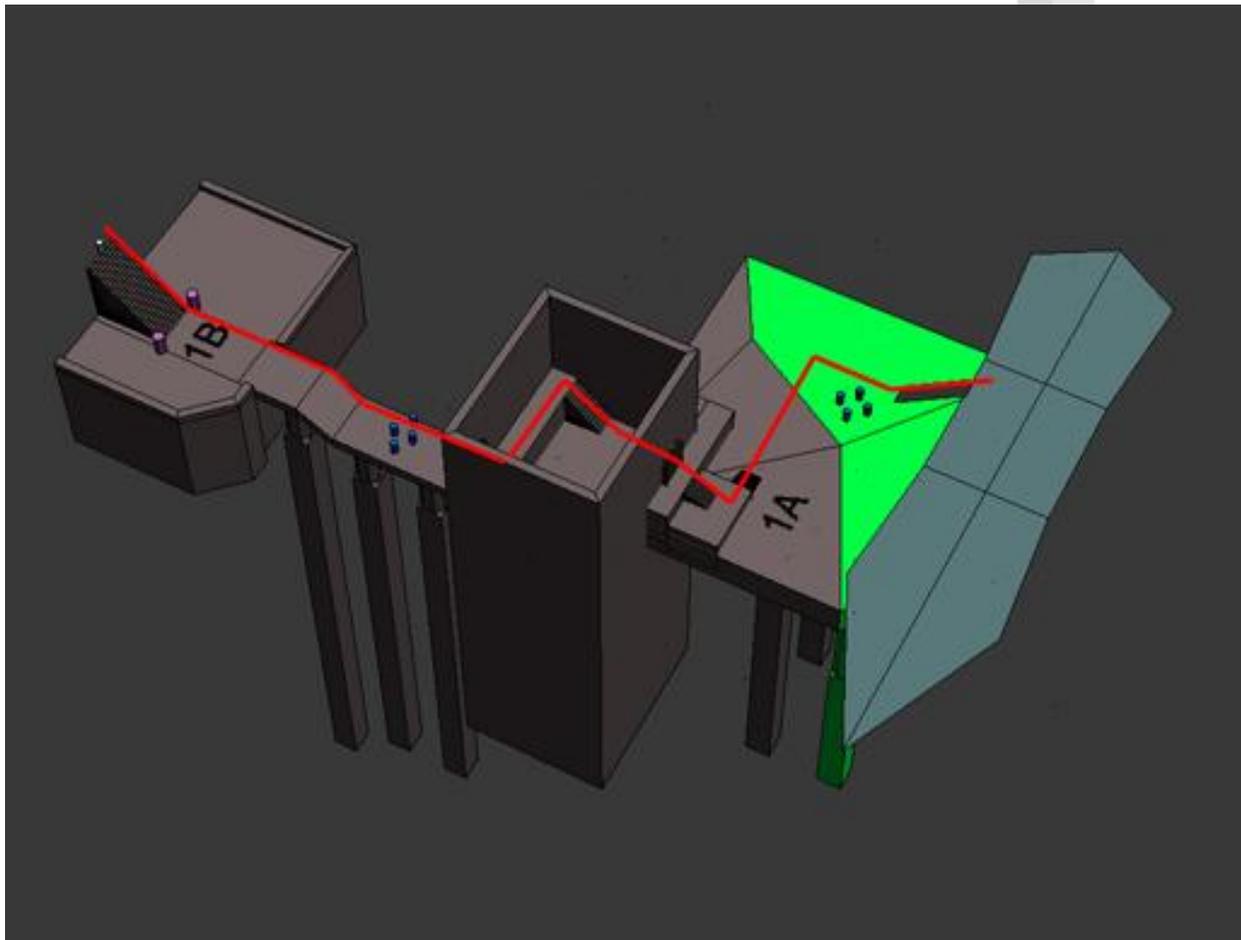
Skygräd was once an impregnable fortress that fell derelict following the demise of its governing empire. A powerful sorcerer took up residence at the site shortly thereafter. Here, he practiced his necromancies and summoned otherworldly beings in his quest to build a deathless army. Among the beasts he conjured was Yaara, Bird of Pales. However, the demon bird proved too powerful for the sorcerer to control and he ultimately fell victim to her bloodlust. At the time of the sorcerer's demise Yaara's spirit was still imprisoned within a gem called a Shadestone, leaving her forever bound to Skygräd. Many ages passed before Saigo, a sage and gemhunter made an expedition to the site in search of the artifact. After Saigo fails to return, our characters are deployed on a rescue and retrieval mission to the fortress.

Level Intro

The character(s) approach Skygräd via airship, but as they approach the site their vessel is briefly attacked by a giant, mysterious apparition. They recover and dock at the landing zone (A1), where they depart ship.

Level Guide

Area 1



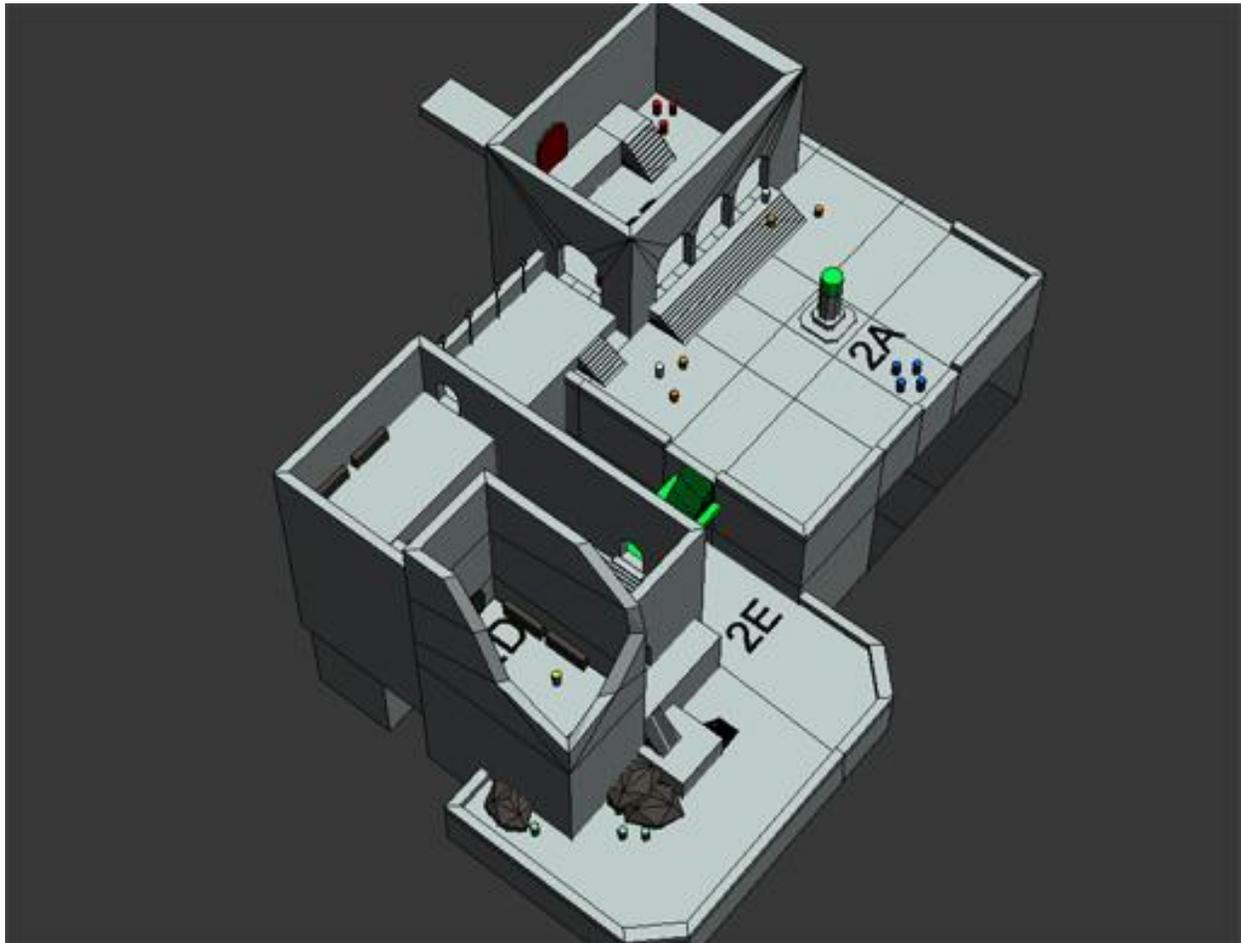
1A—Landing

The level begins at Skygräd's landing platform where the player(s) depart from an airship. As they progress up the first set of stairs the landing platform (green) gives way to the weight of the airship. Both vessel and platform disappear into the abyss.

1B-Gatehouse

- Doom Guard (2)
- Pale Huntress (1)

Area 2



2A—Lower Bailey

Two Pale Huntresses flank the large statue in the lower bailey, each holding a pair of Hell Hounds via leash. When the players step onto the terrace the huntresses release the hounds on the players before firing arrows.

- Pale Huntress (2)
- Hell Hound (4)

- **MECHANIC**—Fractal Statue: If the players venture too close to the statue at the center of the bailey, the huntress to the right will firing upon it, bringing it crashing down on the players.

2B—Cloister

- Revenant (4)
- Locked Door A (Key in 2D)

2C—Dungeon

The dungeon floor is fitted with cachots containing undead livestock. Traversing over these grates will provoke them to reach out and attack the players. The undead within these pits are immune to attack, acting merely as an obstacle for the players. The far left wall is lined with locked cages containing hungry ghouls (see mechanic 2E).

2D—Armory

A Frozen Shade resides just outside the Armory’s ruined outer wall overlooking the cliff. When the players enter the room she flies in and freezes the door closed behind them. After destroying her, the door can again be opened. Upon exiting 2D (on balcony) the players receive a transmission via wrist communicator from the airship telling them to rendezvous at a platform near the summit of the mountain (5B). The armory also contains a specialty crossbow and one dozen silvered bolts.

Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy	Special
Crossbow	40m radius	high	med	25% damage vs. heavy armor 25% holy damage

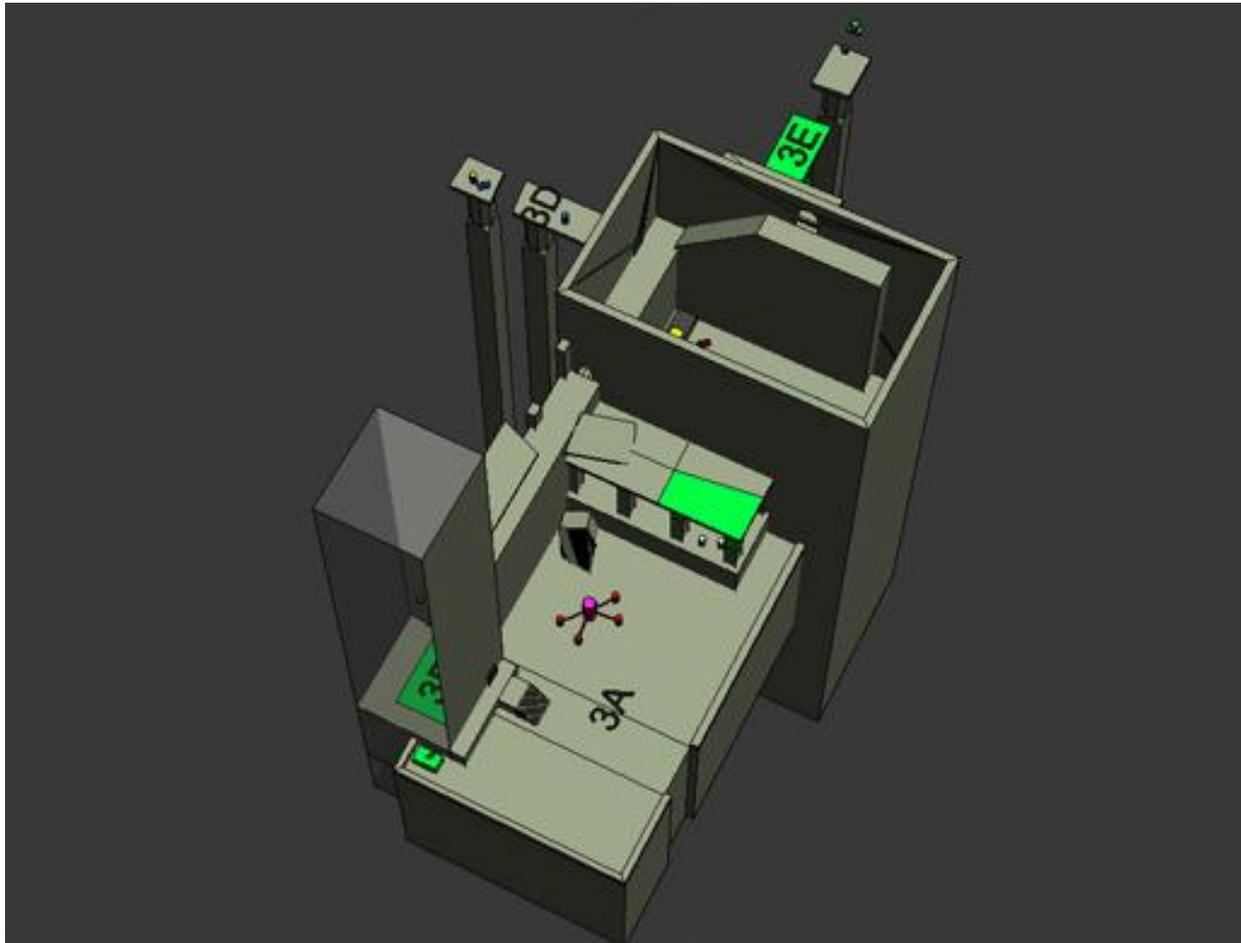
- Frozen Shade (1)
- Key A
- Crossbow “King Killer”
- Silvered Bolts (12)

2E—Dumping Grounds

This open area contains heaps of bodies, frozen solid by the harsh climate. Several ghouls are burrowed here digging for scraps, but do not emerge until the players enter 2E. The Ghoul Lord drops the elevator cog, required to repair the elevator in 3A.

- Ghoul (6)
- Elevator Cog (Ghoul Lord)
- **MECHANIC**— upon retrieving the cog from the Ghoul Lord, the causeway leading back to 2A collapses. While the debris from the bridge is easily hurdled, the players find they cannot leave the Dungeon without being inventive. The cages in 2C can be moved and kicked over to form crude steps to the Armory balcony. Kicking the cages over causes the latches to break, releasing ghouls.

Area 3



3A—Upper Bailey

The Humungolous is stationed here, held at bay by four Revenants via chains. To gain access to 3C since the stairs in the bailey terrace are out, the players must destroy the veranda (see below). Once collapsed, the geometry will create a ramp to 3C.

- Revenant (4)
- Humungolous (1)
- Pale Huntress (2)
- **MECHANIC**—Elevator: The elevator can be repaired with the cog retrieved from the ghoul in 2E. Fitting the cog takes about 10 seconds at which point revenants begin to spawn and lumber toward the players. Once repaired and activated the spawning stops.
- **MECHANIC**—Melee combat against the Pale Huntresses is not possible from the upper bailey, and their high agility paired with partial cover from the columns makes them difficult to hit with ranged attacks. The weak columns supporting the veranda (green) are a quick fix to this. A powerful ranged attack on the columns will bring the roof down upon the Pale Huntresses.

3B—Elevator

- Raven (2)
- Elevator platform

3C—Lab & Storeroom

Buried somewhere beneath the many tomes and trinkets is the Shadestone, which houses Yaara spirit. If the players retrieve the stone, they can either a) send the bird back to oblivion for extra experience/equal payoff, but only after she has been weakened to half strength (through combat); or b) save the Shadestone and kill Yaara the old fashioned way. If the players opt for “b” they could take the stone to town where additional options become available. The sorcerer’s personal journal is also found here which recounts the events leading up to his demise (optional backstory). The key to the Journal can be found on the sorcerer’s body, which is also in 3C.

- Undermage (2)
- Shadestone
- Journal
- Healing potion (2)
- Arcana potion (1)

3D—Arch I

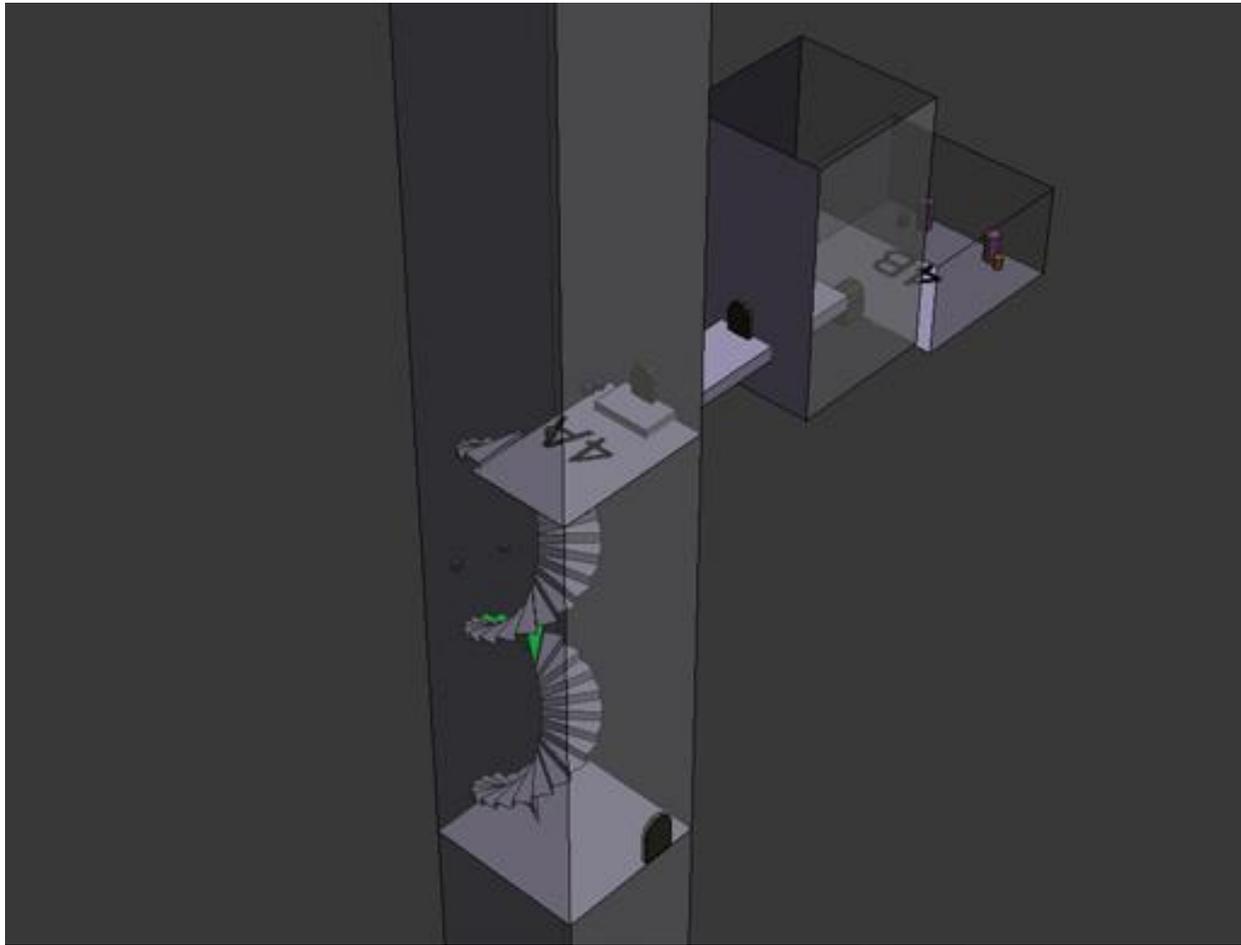
A lone Revenant stands over the body of Saigo.

- Trapped Revenant (1)
- Body of Saigo
- **MECHANIC**—The key to 3C can be seen in Saigo’s open hand. The Crown of Thorns weapon is required to retrieve the key.

3E—Arch II

- Undermage (1)
- **MECHANIC**—Bridge Crossing: The bridge is out! Again, the Crown of Thorns is necessary to complete this task. The player(s) must first gather on the (green) section of bridge, then use the Crown of Thorns to latch onto the adjacent gargoyle over the tower door. Once a successful latch has been made, the player can tilt the section by pulling against the chain.

Area 4



4A—Bell Tower

Halfway up the staircase small portion falls out.

- Raven (5)
- Collapsing stair (green)

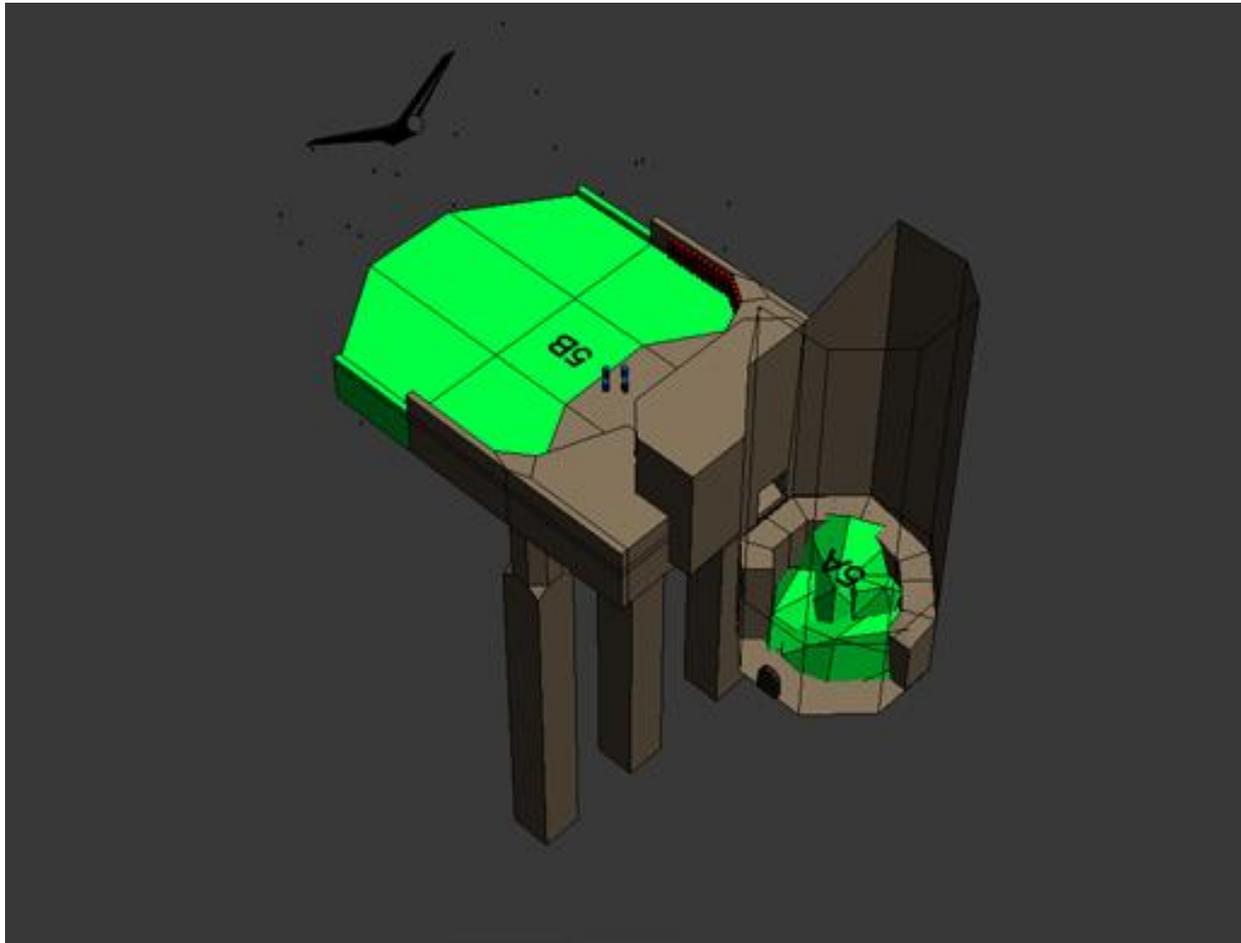
Note: The Cam4A1 would be fixed to the player party, following them closely up the staircase.

4B—Hall

The hall is guarded by two Doom Guards each with a Hell Hound on a leash. When the players enter, the Doom Guards release the hounds.

- Doom Guard (2)
- Hell Hound (2)

Area 5



5A—Arcane Sanctum

- **MECHANIC**—Collapsing Rock: As soon as the players enter this rotunda the high ceiling gives way and several large boulders crash down. The rocks take out the spiral stairs leading up to the terrace, but can be climbed with some effort. The opening in the roof allows sunlight and snowfall in for ambience.

5B—Final Terrace

As the players gather here to rendezvous with their airship Yaara appears through the snow clouds.

- Boss/Level **Mechanic 1**—The walls surrounding the majority of the terrace are lined with frozen body-blocks (Revenants), fitted together like gruesome masonry. As Yaara breathes her fire (Blackflame), the ice melts releasing three to five of these creatures, who attack the players from behind.
- Boss/Level **Mechanic 2**— Yaara hovers low over the ledge flapping her wings to create a gust of wind (Cyclone) that pushes the players back against the wall, rendering them helpless. (This mechanic is more of a precautionary measure in that no one falls within the fractal zone). With the player(s) incapacitated she uses her hammer-like head to knock out a portion of terrace. As the battle rages on, the playable area becomes ever smaller, making it more difficult for the players to evade subsequent Blackflame attacks.

5C—End

Once Yaara is near-death, the airship arrives and rams into her. She grapples with the bow before sliding off of the deck and disappears into the abyss. The airship lowers and releases ropes equal to the number of players. As they depart, the vibration from the airship's propulsion rocks the mountainside and Skygräd finally crumbles.

Characters

Saigo (dead)

The notable sage-turned gemhunter came to Skygräd some weeks prior in search of the Shadestone, but was slain by the Revenant in area 3D before he could locate the item.

Enemies

Doom Guard

Doom guards are hulking knights clad in heavy black armor. They stand motionless like statues, holding their shields to block most ranged attacks. Once players come within close range, the Doom Guards charge.

Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy
Bardiche	Melee	high	med
Hand axe (boomerang)	15m arch	med	low

Hell Hound

These skeletal canines are held on leashes by their respective masters until players come within visual range, at which point the hounds are released. There is nothing spectacular about the hounds' fighting style apart from circling the players while attacking.

Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy
Gnash (bite)	melee	low	med

Ghoul

These creatures remain half-buried until the players come within visual range, at which point they lunge forth lashing with their claws. They have a frenzied combat style in that is fast but clumsy.

Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy
Claw	melee	Med	low

Ghoul Lord

Same as the Ghoul

Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy
Claw	melee	High	med

Raven

This small undead bird circles over players' heads (10 meters) before swooping down for an attack. While circling they can only be reached by ranged weapons.

Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy
Peck	Melee	Low	med

Frozen Shade

The former elf maid turned restless undead resides just outside the Armory's ruined outer wall overlooking the cliff. When the players are all inside the room she flies in and freezes the door shut. Her attack leeches heat (health) from the players, followed by a blast of cold wind that momentarily slows their movement.

Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy
Absorption	20m	Low	med
Breath of Frost	15m	High	med

Pale Huntress

Pale Huntresses are ethereal female archers capable of firing arrows up to 40 meters. Every few rounds they fire a volley of arrows at the general party area. Their high mobility makes them difficult to hit, and can evade most ranged attacks. The Crown of Thorns is an ideal tool when engaging these enemies as it has the ability to wrap around and incapacitate them.

Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy
Arrow	40m	med	Med
Volley	40m	high	Low

Revenant

These are standard undead soldiers equipped with various rusty weapons & armor. Revenants have a healing potion drop rate of 10%.

Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy
sword/axe/mace	Melee	low	med

Humungolous

The Humungolous is a revolting four meter tall abomination composed of various cadavers bound together by chains. Barely contained by the four Revenants that flank it, the monster quickly breaks free of its tethers and attacks the nearest character(s). Having multiple appendages it is able to attack up to three characters at a time. Two of its arms can bludgeon, while a third wields a chain. Every few rounds the Humungolous drops a pair of ghouls from its shambling body that in turn attack the players.

Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy
Arm 1&2	Melee	Med	Med
Chain	15m	High	Low
Purge (Ghoul)	-	As Ghoul	As Ghoul

Undermage

Undermages appear as flying withered torsos clad in dark robes. They are adept magic users who fly about freely casting spells. Never coming within melee range, they always cast from a distance. Their primary attack is Deadlight, which temporarily incapacitates a single player in a beam of pale light while the creature feeds upon his health. Firebomb is the Undermage's secondary attack, which it deploys

every few rounds. This spell releases a ball of fire that explodes in five directions upon impact. The residual fire does half damage at half accuracy. Undermages have an arcana potion drop rate of 25%.

Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy
Deadlight	35m	low	Med
Firebomb	20m	high	Med

Yaara, Bird of Pales (Boss/Miniboss)

Yaara is a demon from the outer planes summoned to Skygräd to aid in the sorcerer's army. Her primary attacks are directly tied to the mechanics of the level (see 5B). Additionally, Yaara may close in on a single player and snatch him up in her talons. If successful, she will carry the player upward fifteen meters before dropping him for moderate damage.

Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy	Note
Blackflame	30m	high	med	Players will continue to burn for minor damage unless they put themselves out. This can be done simply by running in place/circles a few times
Cyclone	50m	-	Inescapable	Temporarily prevents player movement
Snatch/Drop	Melee	med	High	

Level-Unique Weapon—Crown of Thorns

The Crown of Thorns sounds more like an uncomfortable headpiece than a deadly weapon, but when it comes to battling the undead or navigating past obstacles; few items hold a candle to its versatility. The weapon is a serrated chakram of blackened steel and gold, bound to a length of spiked chain. While grasping the chain the disk can be thrown up to 30m for moderate to severe damage. Ideally the analog control would operate the Crown of Thorns like a yoyo, in that it can be thrown around various actors/objects and always returning to the player. As the player advances in level so does the Crown of Thorns, allowing for greater damage, accuracy and distance. Several passive functions are also available when equipped with this weapon.

Offensive Function	Range	Damage	Accuracy	Special
Slice Rank I	20m radius	Med	Low	-
Slice Rank II	25m radius	Med	Med	Holy damage 20%
Slice Rank III	30m radius	High	Med	Holy damage 50%
Passive Function	Range	Special		
Grapple	30m max	Latch onto remote environment objects for various uses. Can be used to incapacitate a single enemy, or bind several enemies together. Spiked chain causes enemy minor damage while grappling.		
Trip	30m max	Can opt to trip most bipedal enemies by locking onto legs.		
Retrieve	30m max	Collects remote items, similar to the Hookshot/boomerang from Legend of Zelda.		
Disarm	30m max	Can opt to disarm most enemies by locking onto their weapon.		
Block	self	The chakram can be held to ward off some arrows and other non-magical missiles.		

Character Mechanic—Shadowfall

Shadowfall is a handy passive utility whereby the player is able to fall into his own shadow. Once in shadow form he can target any number of adjacent shadows within range and on the same surface. Once a target is selected the player's shadow darts across at which point he reemerges, similar to teleportation.

Utility Rank	Radius
I	20m
II	25m
III	30m

