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Level Design Test: Skyrim

Level Title: The Forlorn Caverns



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Level Story

Gragar is a Nord born to a tribe living in the Jerall Mountains along the southern border of the imperial province of Skyrim. One day while Gragar was out alone on a hunt a pack of rampaging cave trolls streamed down from the mountain caves above their village ravaging everything in their path. Gragar's village was destroyed and most of his tribesmen killed or carried off by the trolls. Those who were taken included Gragar's mother and sister, their only hope for survival resting on Gragar's shoulders now.

Gragar needs to track the cave trolls that attacked the village, following them up the mountains to a cave known to him as the Forlorn Cavern, which was an imperial mine to Gragar's knowledge. He finds the entrance littered with debris and several trolls rummaging around. After fighting his way inside, Gragar moves through the cavern to the central mine area inside. He discovers that the mine had a river running through it that now blocks his advance as the miners seem to have disabled the gondola cart used to ferry across it. He also finds his sister's amulet on the ground which must have fallen when carried off by the trolls.

After searching the mine for the gears for the gondola, Gragar can continue to push deeper into the caves after the trolls. He'll discover an evil mage deep in the caverns that seems to be controlling the trolls. Gragar must battle remaining trolls then defeat the mage to save his sister and mother from a grim fate. After the battle, the survivors can leave the caverns and rebuild their ravaged village.

Environment

The level takes Gragar across the ruins of his village, a short mountain pass to reach the caverns, a mine area, and concludes in an ancient ruin within the caves. The village and mountain pass are quick traversal areas that occupy a similar environment type while the caverns are more expansive.

The Village

The player begins in the village after the trolls have destroyed it. There are only a few structures and a central shrine with some surrounding farms. The village is in a mountainous region with surrounding forests with view of the mountain pass to the cave.

Mountain Pass

The winding mountain route up to the entrance of the caverns. It has the exterior mining house as well as some equipment with evidence of the trolls' attack. The river from the central mine interior flows out of a side cave mouth the player cannot reach.

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The Forlorn Caverns – Mine Area

The mines are comprised of the central operations area, entrance tunnel, the gondola and cave river, the river tunnel, and mine tunnel which connects to the ruins. The river runs through the length of this area and a player could follow it out into the exterior. This will drop the player over the waterfall near the main mine entrance area.

The Forlorn Caverns – Nordic Ruins

A single larger cavern with some portions of the ceiling open to the sky that contains the ancient ruins structure to one side. The ruins consist of a central disk area and the altar on a larger dais above it. This area contains the dungeon exit that is an offshoot from the main ruins area. It leads to a hidden overlook above the river in the exterior area. The player cannot reach or enter through this door, only exit.

Core Mechanics

Movement: Gragar can run, walking, and sprint through his environment. Walking and running are the normal movement modes with running being faster. Gragar can opt to sprint, but this drains stamina while doing so.

Jumping: Gragar can jump over smaller obstacles such as crates, railings, or smaller ledges. Movement is limited during the jump and the player has little directional movement control.

Weapons (Axe and Bow): Gragar can attack in melee with his battleaxe and perform ranged attacks with his bow. The bow has a draw period before the arrow can be fired. The axe can make lighter, rapid attacks as well as slower heavy strikes. Heavy strikes require stamina to execute.

COmbat Abilties

Berserk/Enrage: Gragar can enter a state of rage during combat for a short time. During his rage state Gragar gains resistance to damage (excluding magic), regenerates stamina faster (double rate), and does additional damage with his weapon attacks.

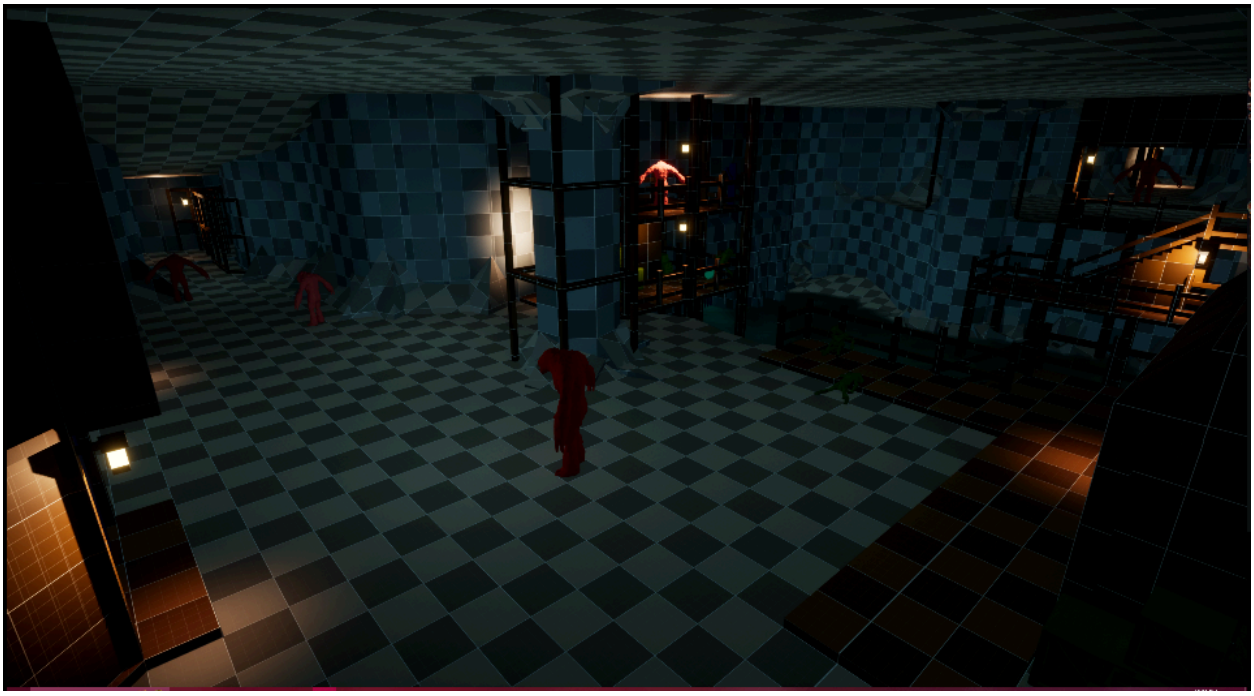
Sneak/Stalking: Gragar is an experienced hunter whose spent countless hours stalking prey silently in the wild. Gragar can enter a sneaking state where he moves slower but is significantly harder to detect by enemies. While hidden Gragar gets a major damage boost to weapon attacks.

Enemy Types

Forest/Cave Trolls: These are simple trolls that roam about the level areas. They occasionally stop to feed on the corpses in the area or fiddle with the items left behind by the miners. These

trolls use their fists as melee weapons to attack Gragar. They are weak, not particularly intelligent, and have minimal regeneration which can be prevented by fire damage.

- They regenerate a small amount of health per second but can be killed if damage outpaces the regeneration.



Greater Trolls: These trolls are slightly larger than the cave/forest variety and wear some makeshift armor on their chests and heads. While they make attacks in much the same way, the Greater Troll has an additional type of attack. The Greater Troll can charge Gragar with a heavy attack that will knock Gragar down if he does not dodge or block. In addition, the Greater Troll has a much stronger regenerative property and requires Gragar to use fire damage to finish the creature off.

- A Greater Troll must have taken fire damage within the last 24 in-game hours otherwise it will not drop below 1 hit point.

The Mage: The mage uses magic to attack Gragar and defend himself during their battle. He has three types of attacks that come from spells and one defensive spell: Flames, Ice Spike, Thunderbolt, and Greater Ward.

Flames: A burst of fire in a cone-shaped melee attack. Damage is applied instantly to health with some damage over time applied to health afterwards.

Ice Spike: A ranged frost attack that shoots a shard of ice at the target. The damage is split across health and stamina.

Thunderbolt: A ranged lightning attack that shoots a bolt of electricity at the target. The damage is split across health and magicka.

Greater Ward: A shield that blocks incoming damage by increasing armor rating and mitigating spell damage.

In addition, the mage can also command the trolls who function as his allies. This is negated if the player lights the braziers which prevents the trolls from entering the fighting area. The mage is an Imperial man wearing set of enchanted robes and hood. He carries a dagger though he uses magic instead.

Game Objects

There are several traps that Gragar can avoid or trigger which could be dangerous to him and his allies depending on when they trigger. Gragar must also repair and use the gondola to cross the river in the main mine cavern.

Gondola and Gears

Gragar rides the gondola across the river in the main cavern to access the other side which is otherwise unreachable to them. The gondola has been sabotaged by the miners during the troll attacks to prevent them from crossing. The miners took several of the gears and hid them in the caves. Gragar must recover and reinstall these two gears to use the gondola.

Dam Portcullis Gate

The dam that divides the two river cavern areas has a portcullis that allows the river to flow through it but blocks larger objects (like Gragar) from passing too. The wooden platform overlooking the portcullis has a lever on the second floor that will raise the gate to allow passage. Activating the lever will toggle the portcullis' state (raise if lowered, lower if raised).

Rolling Log Trap



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The cave slopes downward near this trap with the logs braced against a beam on a platform at the top of the slope. There is a tripwire at the base of the slope which causes the bracing beam to drop which allows the logs to roll down the slope. Getting hit with the logs causes damage for the player and enemies.

Collapsing Ceiling Trap

Several areas of the caverns will have a slight ceiling collapse when the player goes through the area. The ceiling collapse is several larger boulder stones that fall to the ground when the player hits a trigger volume. Only the player can trigger these volumes.

Ruins Braziers

During the final battle against the mage in the Nordic ruins the player will notice a series of stone and metal braziers around the ruins arena. If they have a torch, the ring of ignition, or the staff of flames the player can light the braziers during the battle. This is discussed through several in-dungeon notes/journals to indicate this option to the player. Once lit, the braziers repel the trolls and prevent them from attacking Gragar while he battles the mage.

Collectibles/Power-Ups

Sister's Sapphire Amulet: Gragar can recover his sister's sapphire amulet while exploring the caves in search of her. His sister was training with their mother to become the village's healer and sorcerer and the amulet is a magical item that she has used to assist her. The amulet grants Gragar the ability to heal himself in a short burst of restorative energies as well as make an area attack. The area attack is a burst of cold magic that blasts outward from Gragar in a sphere doing some damage to anything within and has a small chance to freeze them temporarily.

Ring of Ignition: Gragar can acquire this ring by exploring the Forge/Smithy building in the main mine cavern. The ring grants Gragar the ability to utilize a weak ranged fire attack as a magic attack. The ring allows the player to cast this magical ability if Gragar still has Magicka remaining. *The ring grants the player the FireBolt spell if the ring is equipped.*

Staff of Flames: Gragar can acquire the Staff of Flames from the hidden treasure chest in the ruins area. The staff allows Gragar to spread flames in a small cone in front of him. The staff is an enchanted magical item that has a specific number of charges. When the charges are depleted, the attack no longer functions until Gragar recharges the staff with a soul gem.

Scroll of Flames: Gragar can find several Scroll of Flames items throughout the mine areas. These scrolls are a single-use consumable that cast a base game Flames spell.

Walkthrough

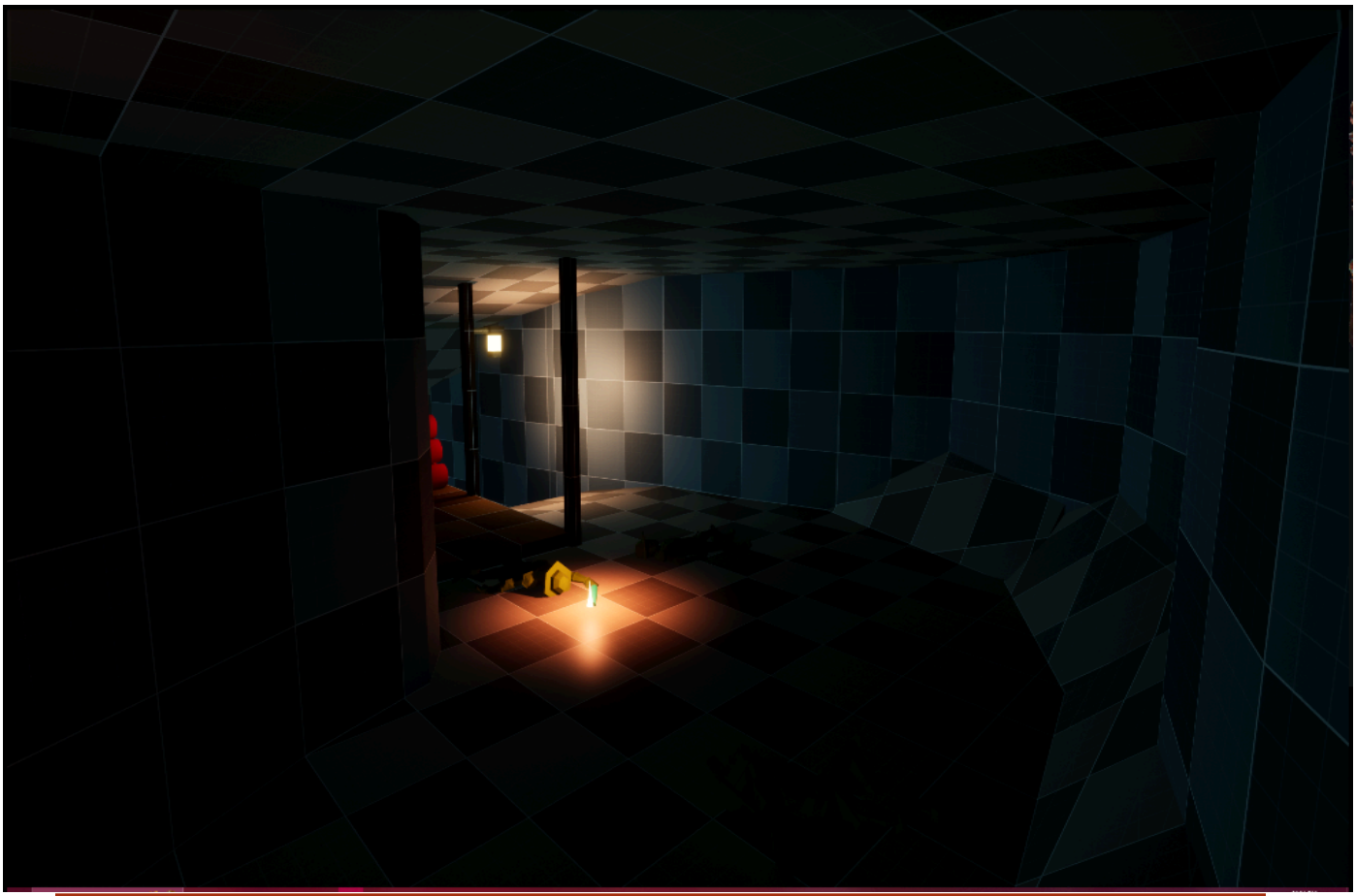
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Gragar needs to move from the village through the mountain pass to access the Forlorn Caverns and the ruins hidden within. The pass is an upward climb through alpine forests with scattered snow where Gragar will see several signs of the trolls' path. The exterior of the Mines is a small valley area with a lake that is fed from a waterfall emerging from a narrow cave mouth. To the side of that waterfall is a pathway up alongside the cliffs to another entrance to the cave. This entrance has various mine details surrounding it.

The Forlorn Caverns – Mines

Main Entrance (1)

Gragar enters the mines through a wooden gate to find a passage heading into the mountain. Two cave trolls are immediately visible and will attack if alerted. The area has limited lighting with some exterior light passing through the entrance and several smaller lanterns hanging along wooden supports by the wall.



Miner Bodies (2)

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After dealing with the trolls at the entrance Gragar can proceed a bit further down the passage to discover several dead miners in various states of decomposition. The bodies make it clear that the trolls must have killed them and have likely been eating them too. The player can loot *Scroll of Flames* (3x) from the bodies as well as several clothing items and some gold Septims. A note on the bodies with the scrolls mentions that they're needed to bring the larger trolls down, as fire is required to kill them.

Rolling Log Trap (3)

Gragar will round a corner in the tunnel then see the logs stacked along the bracer beam. Immediately in front of them is a sloped path downwards that bends slightly back in the original direction. The bottom has some wooden structural elements visible from the top and several trolls just around the bend. *See "Rolling Log Trap" in the Game Objects section for a description of the trap's functionality.*

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Mine Cavern – Sister's necklace (4)

After moving passed the log trap and barred gate to the old tunnel Gragar will see the main cavern area of the mine. Gragar's sister's necklace was dropped when she was taken through this area right near the entrance. This area has plenty of supports along the walls, several larger wooden structures built in, the river which flows from outflows built into the far wall, and the gondola construction. This area is well lit, much more open than the previous tunnel, and features a good amount of explorable space. Gragar will encounter a *Greater Troll* immediately in this area as well as several cave trolls.



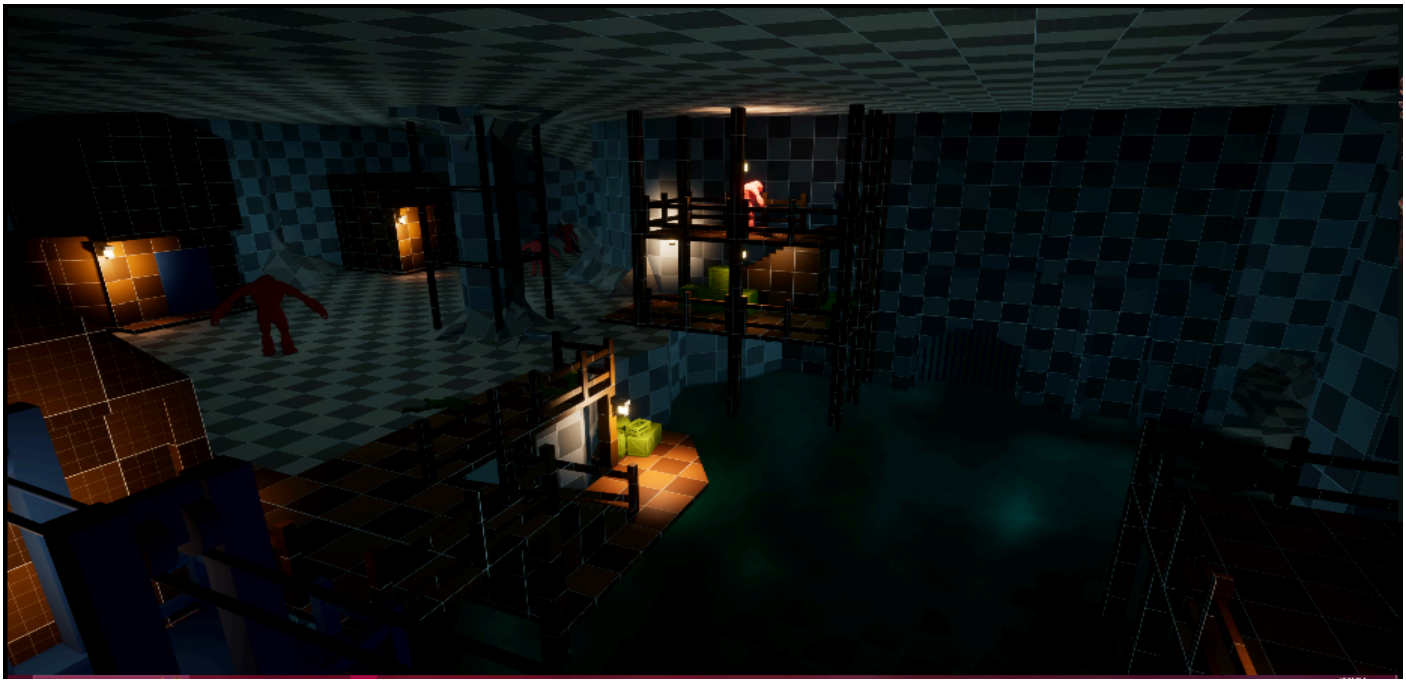
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Gondola Cart/Operations (5)

This wooden platform serves as the boarding area for the gondola cart as well as a small dock to access the river below. The gondola is currently on this side of the cavern though it is not operational. There is ample evidence to show that the gondola seems to operate from within the nearby structure. (Interior Area D)

First Gear – Corpse Across Railing (6)

This is another wooden platform that has two levels overlooking the river and stone dam with the portcullis. On the first level Gragar will see an iron gear next to the corpse of a miner fallen across the platform's railing. This is the first gear Gragar needs to repair the gondola. The second floor of this platform contains a hidden lever/switch to open the dam's portcullis which allows the player to cross into the next chamber with the second gear.



Dam Portcullis (7)

The portcullis allows the player to see through to the other area where they could see some candlelight on the ledge containing the second gear to draw their attention. The portcullis starts in the lowered position blocking passage and must be raised using the lever in section 6.

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Narrow Tunnel/Collapsing Ceiling Trap (8)

This is a narrow cave passage off to the side of the portcullis partially hidden from view. If the player discovers this route, they can bypass the portcullis but might get hit by the collapsing ceiling trap. A cave troll sits passed the ceiling trap and will rush the player when the trap is triggered. This troll can still attack the player if the player goes through the portcullis instead.

Ramp To Overhang/Troll Ambush (9)

The second chamber is poorly lit with mostly dim ambient light reflected from the water. Along the side of the river is a small ledge with a slope up to the higher areas above the water. Several cave trolls will attack the player when they move up this slope, rushing down from the upper area.



Second Gear/Miner Corpse with Note (10)

There are several candles still lit here as well as a miner's corpse and a few crates. The miner's corpse contains a note mentioning that the trolls seem afraid of open flame and that they had some success using braziers to ward the trolls off. The second iron gear for the gondola is located to the corpse's side. A couple cave trolls remain here and will attack the player as he gets to the ledge.

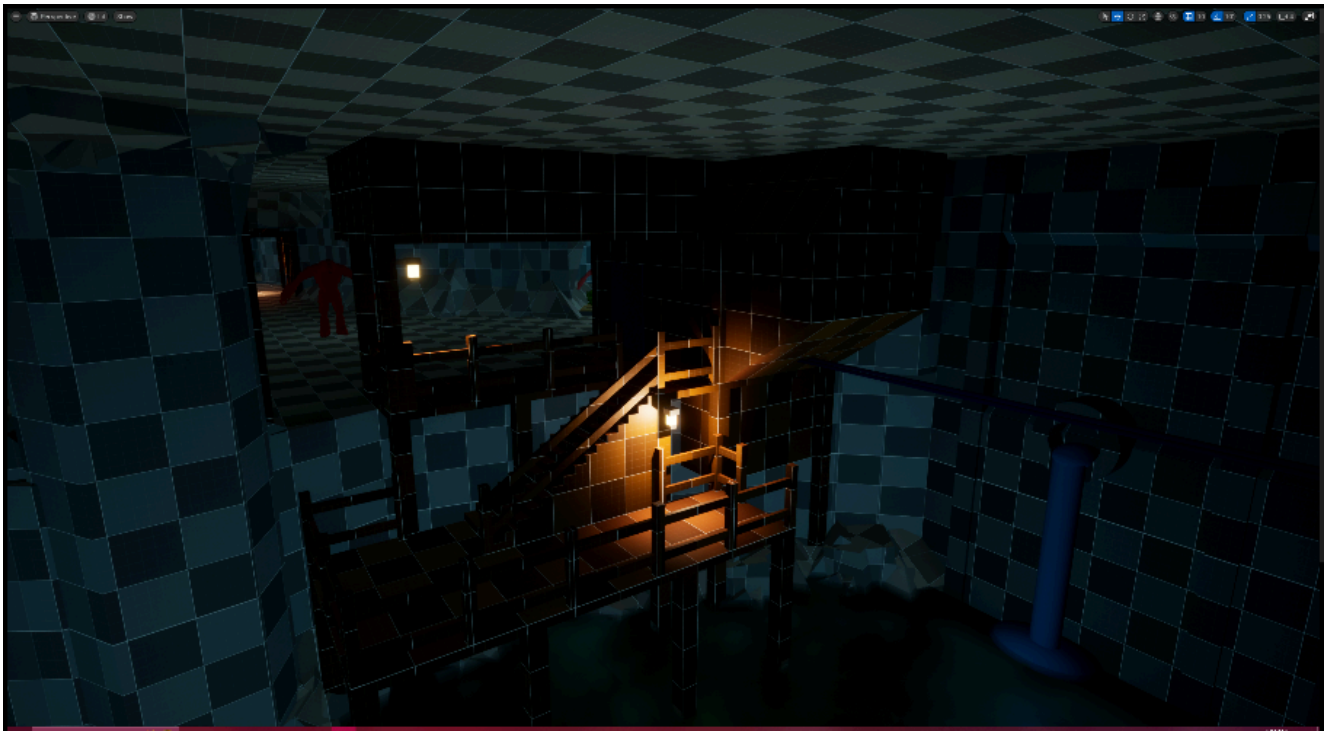
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Barred Gate/Old Tunnel (11):

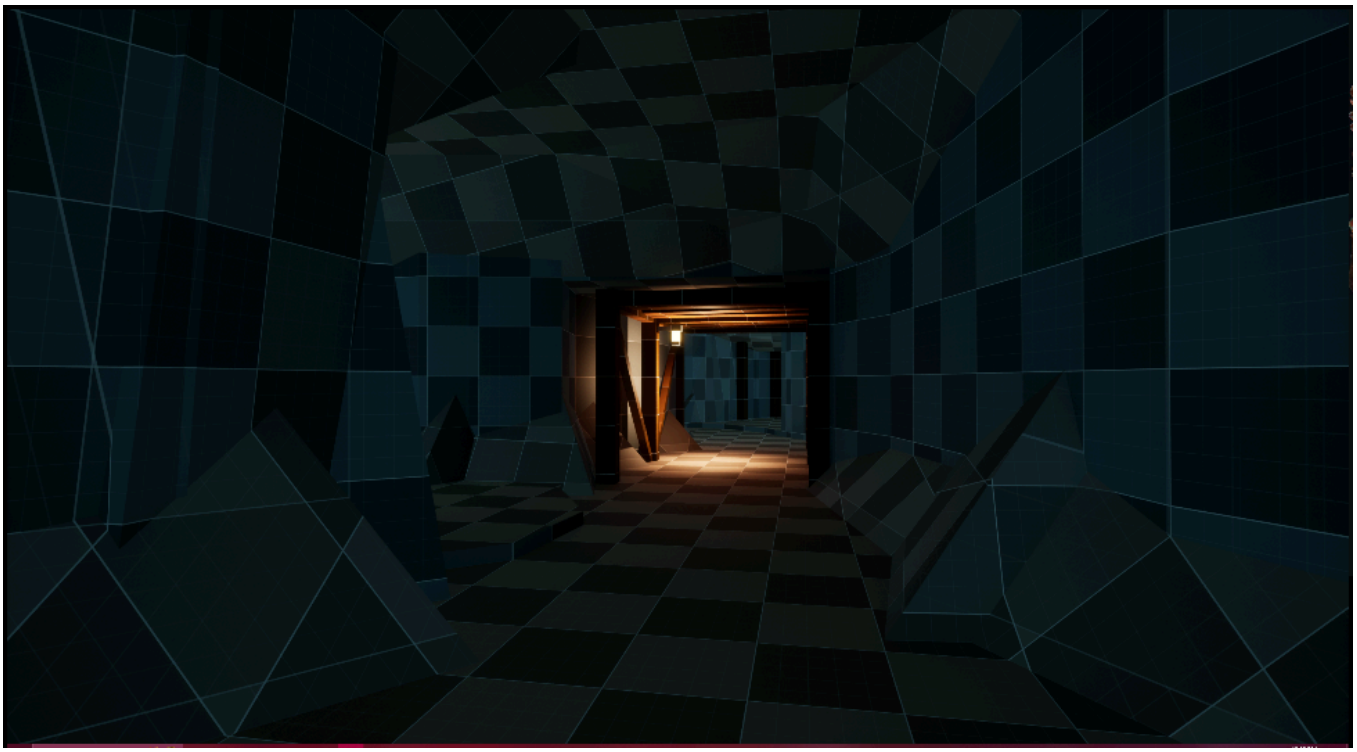
The side passage will bring the player to the barred gate they first came across when moving beyond the rolling log trap. The player can unbar the gate and move through it for a faster route back to the main cavern of the mine. Several *Scroll of Flames* can be acquired here.

Gondola Destination (12)

When the player returns to the central cavern, they need to enter the Gondola Control House and install both iron gears to reactivate the gondola. Once this is complete, the player can board the gondola and ride it across the river. Once the ride is complete the player can hop off on the platform and walk up to the other area. A *Greater Troll* will immediately attack the player in this area and must be defeated to proceed.



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Troll Nest/Offshoot Tunnel (13)

A smaller cavern off the larger one that contains a troll nest and several damaged mining equipment. Three cave trolls are resting here and will attack if the player enters the nest. The nest itself has hay and other refuse scattered around it as bedding.

Storage Area (14)

Several crates and barrels are piled up here offing the player some additional loot. In addition to random clutter items the player can also get several healing potions. A few extra *Scroll of Flames*, a stamina potion, and a magicka potion.

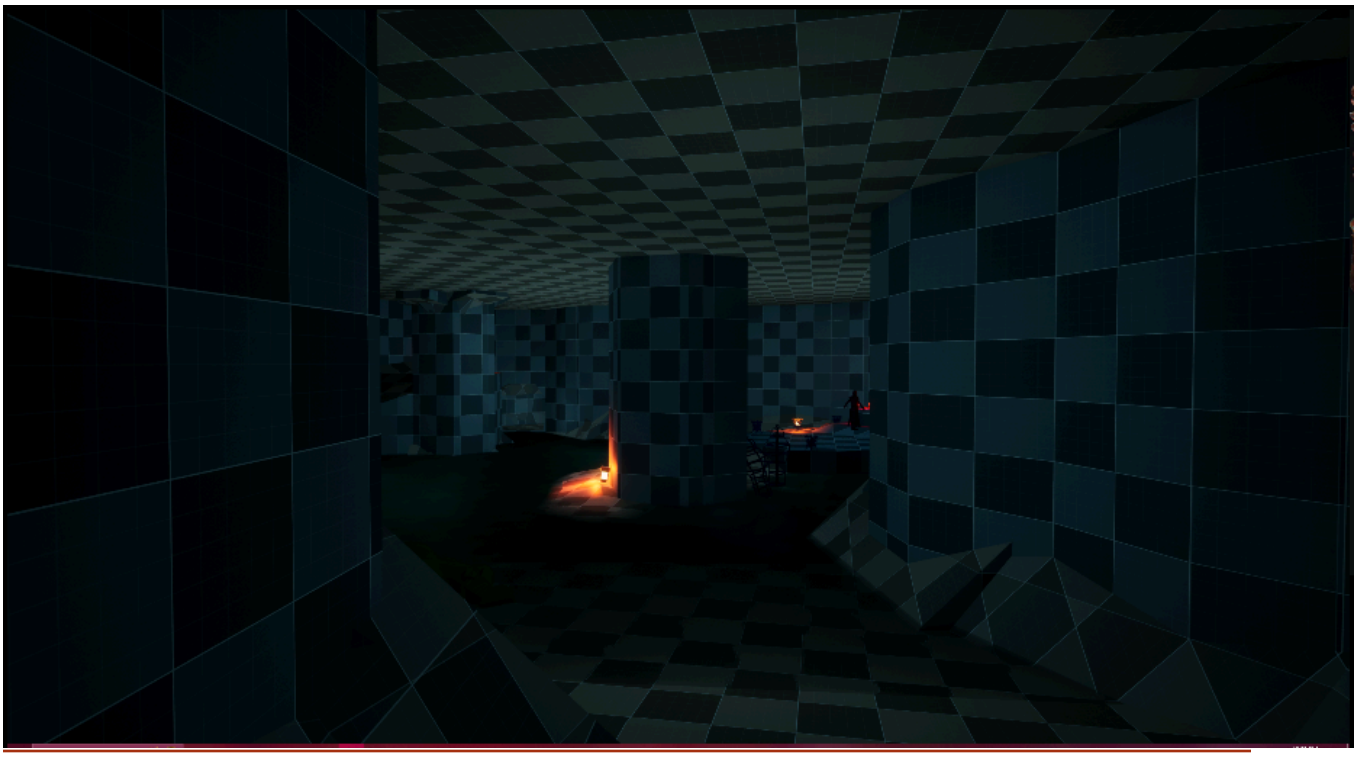
Offshoot Tunnel (15)

This area looks like a tunnel actively being mined. There are a few ore nodes for the player to use as well as another cave troll. A corpse in the area will contain a note describing the breakthrough to the ruins in the next tunnel. Another note will mention seeing braziers along the ruins in the chamber and wonder if they were made to repel the trolls.

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Ancient Cavern/Collapsing Ceiling Trap (16)

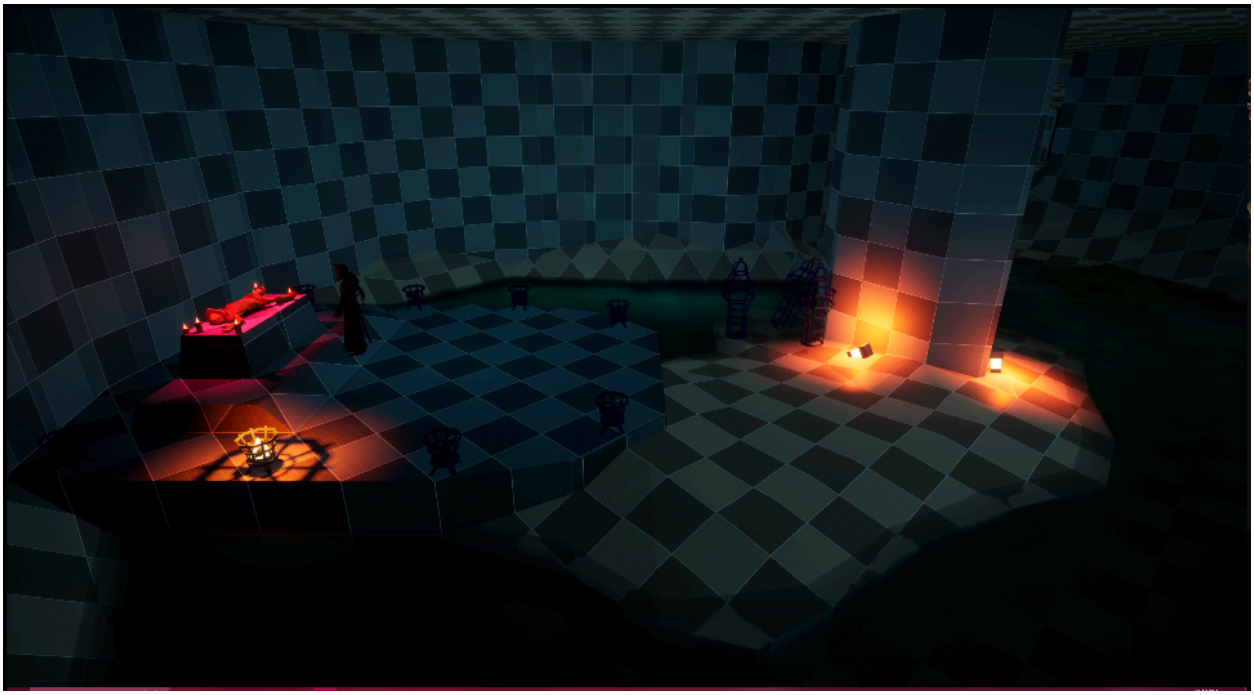
This tunnel contains the smashed wall where the miners originally break through to the ruins. Several dead miners litter the area and a *Greater Troll* stands guard by the destroyed wall. It will attack as soon as it sees the player. As the player moves through the tunnel into the next cavern they'll trigger a collapsing ceiling trap.



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Villager Cages (17)

Several iron cages sit here with the villagers locked inside. By the time the player arrives there are only three villagers left alive, two of which are Gragar's sister and mother.



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Altar/Mage Arena (18)

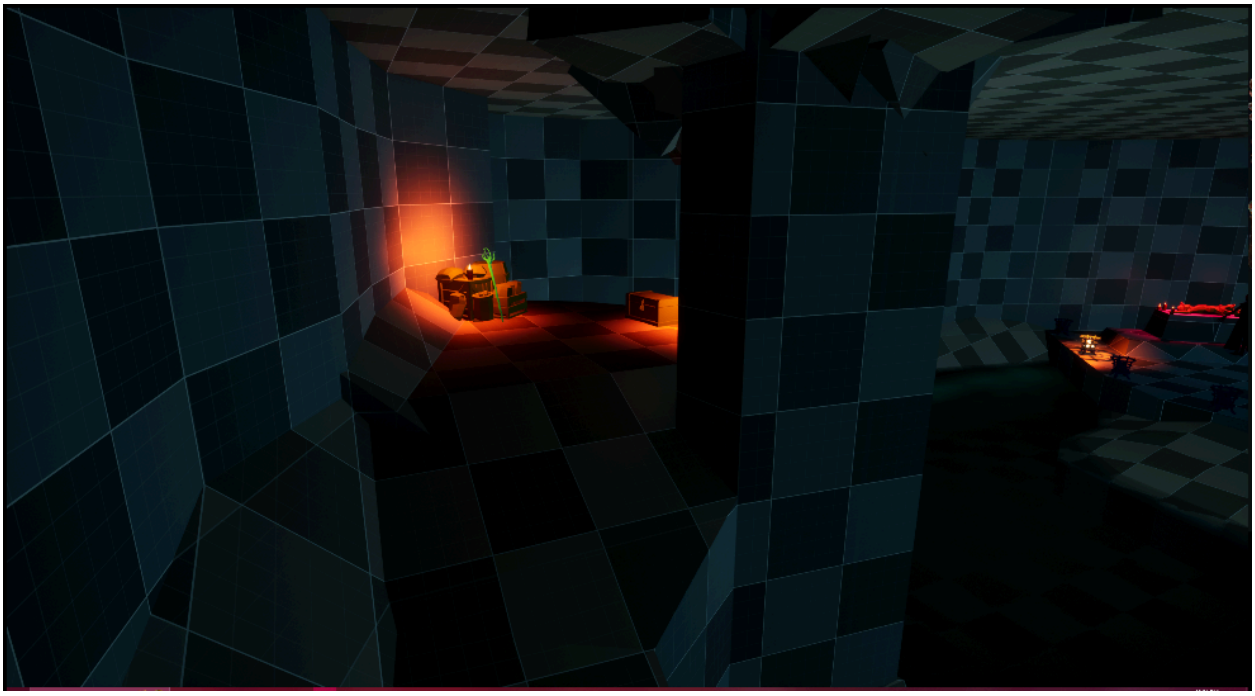
The Nordic ruins form a semi-circle around a raised altar area. The ruins are dotted by numerous braziers that the player can lit if they have the necessary items. The mage will engage the player immediately and continue to call more trolls into the battle if the braziers are not lit. Once the mage is defeated the trolls will stop spawning and attempt to retreat, leaving the player to depart with their family.



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Hidden Treasure Chest (19)

There is an overlook off to the side of the ruins in the cavern that can be reach by a narrow-sloped path. The overlook contains several miscellaneous loot, the mage's journal which explains the braziers, and the *Staff of Flames*. The player can reach this area before triggering the battle against the mage if they use their stealth ability.



Secret Exit/Dungeon End (20)

The player can lead their family out of the cavern through a smaller offshoot path underneath the overlook from area 19 which leads to a hidden exit. This exit puts the player back in the valley where they first entered the caves overlooking the lake.

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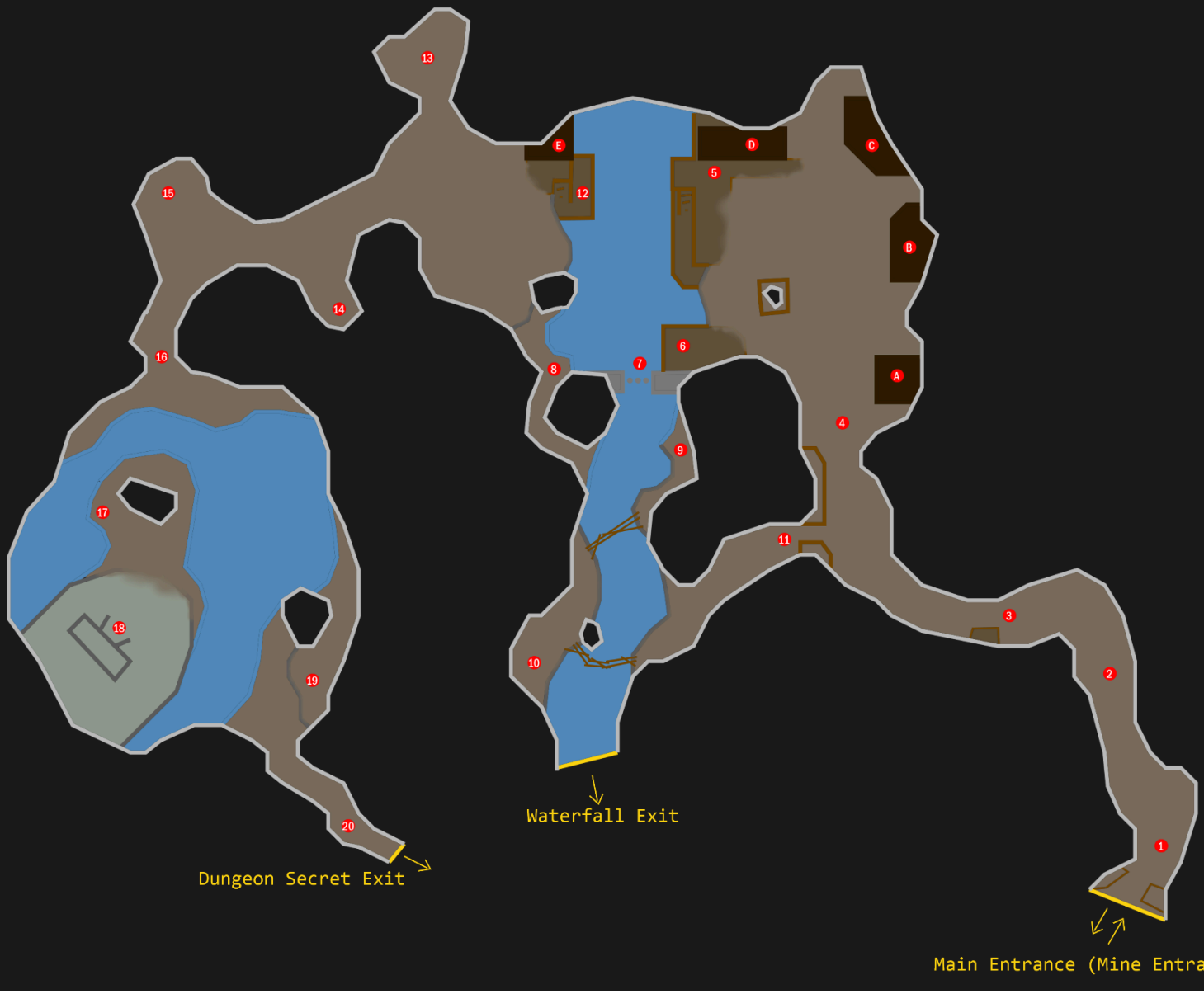
Topdown View Map

Walkthrough Notations

1. Entrance Area
2. Miner Bodies
3. Rolling Log Trap
4. Mine Cavern (Sister's Necklace)
5. Gondola Cart/Operations
6. First Gear (Corpse Across Railing)
7. Dam Portcullis
8. Narrow Tunnel/Collapsing Ceiling Trap
9. Ramp To Overhang/Troll Ambush
10. Second Gear (Corpse With Note)
11. Barred Gate/Old Tunnel
12. Gondola Destination
13. Troll Nest/Offshoot Tunnel
14. Storage Area
15. Offshoot Tunnel
16. Ancient Cavern Access/Collapsed Mine Tunnel
17. Village Cages
18. Altar/Mage
19. Hidden Treasure Chest
20. Secret Exit (Dungeon Complete)

Interior Cell Transition Spaces

A. Mine Storage Building
B. Forge/Smithy
C. Barracks/Bunkhouse
D. Gondola Control House/Machinery
E. Gondola Destination House



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Sideview Map

