

Basket Belle sketchbook

by Michael Molinari

Prologue

When I first started thinking about BasketBelle, it was just an idea about a boy traveling through a city. At the same time I wanted to do a story about family, and also to experiment more with visuals and audio. What came out of that has been a grand adventure. I've learned a lot while developing this game, and these sketches will show just how much change is involved in the creative process of any project.

A unique aspect of my design process is that I will usually go for months thinking about a game without ever writing anything down. This is dangerous as I could easily forget something cool within a day. However, it also allows the game to change shape rapidly in my mind, turning into the things it naturally wants to become. If I forget something, it was meant to be forgotten. If I keep coming back to an idea, it should probably be explored more.

When I do sketch, it's very seldom. I do most problem-solving in my head and then put it straight into the game to see if it works. This is why you'll note many things are missing from this book, despite it being the entirety of my sketches for BasketBelle.

During the development process, I'll of course get ideas all the time, either for the current project or for something new altogether. This is why I only designed parts of the game as I was creating them. If I had planned every detail out from the beginning, the fun part would be over and it would just be a matter of creating those ideas.

This isn't entirely true, though. I absolutely love art, visuals, audio, and the interaction that takes place between them and the player. If I ever have more time to work on a game, I would just continue improving the visuals and the audio, rather than be concerned with issues in design, for example.

It's this rawness in presentation that I love about this project. Its seams are visible, and in turn an honesty and openness that can connect with the player as well. I hope you find the same joy in playing BasketBelle as I had creating it.

Happy Dunking,
-Bean :D

Characters

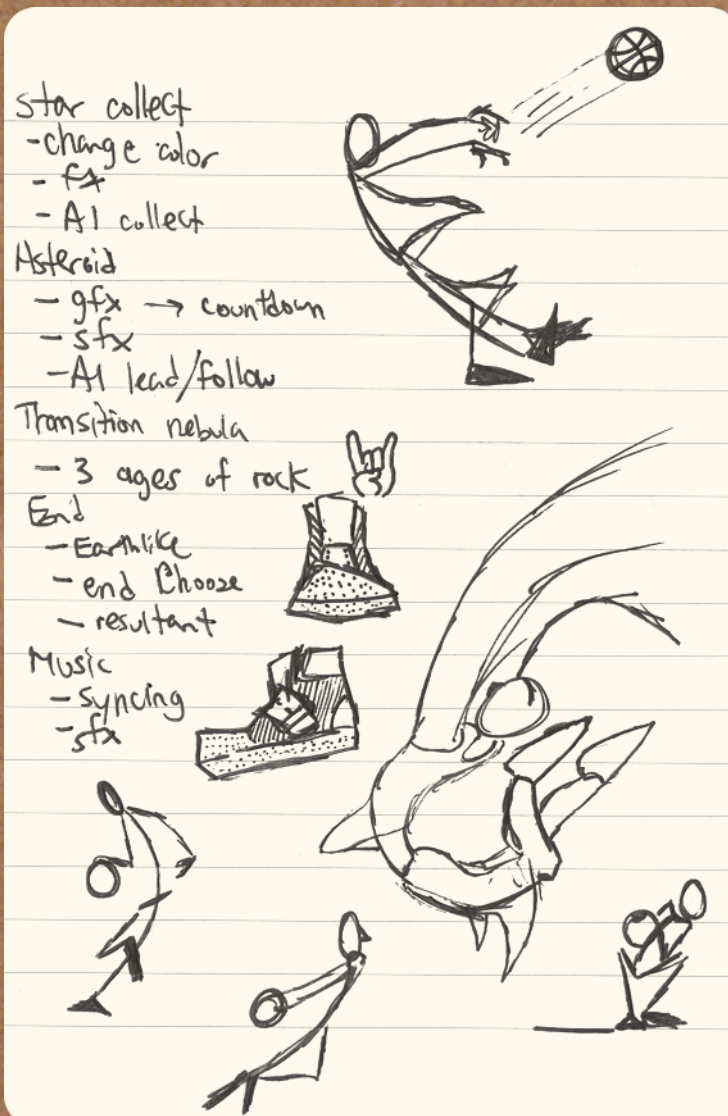


Here are the very first sketches for BasketBelle, featuring Luc, the main character. They were drawn sometime in early 2011, one and a half years before the game's release!

From the beginning I wanted his poses to be pushed to make his movements come alive. I also knew very early that I wanted him to have that "gumdrop" shaped head.

There were two things I knew that needed to look cool: dunking and his sneakers. I also wanted him to have some loose fabric so you could sense his motion even from a screenshot.

The notes on the side are from another game I worked on, "The End of Us".



star collect
- change color
- fx
- AI collect

Asteroid
- gfx → countdown
- sfx
- AI lead/follow

Transition nebula

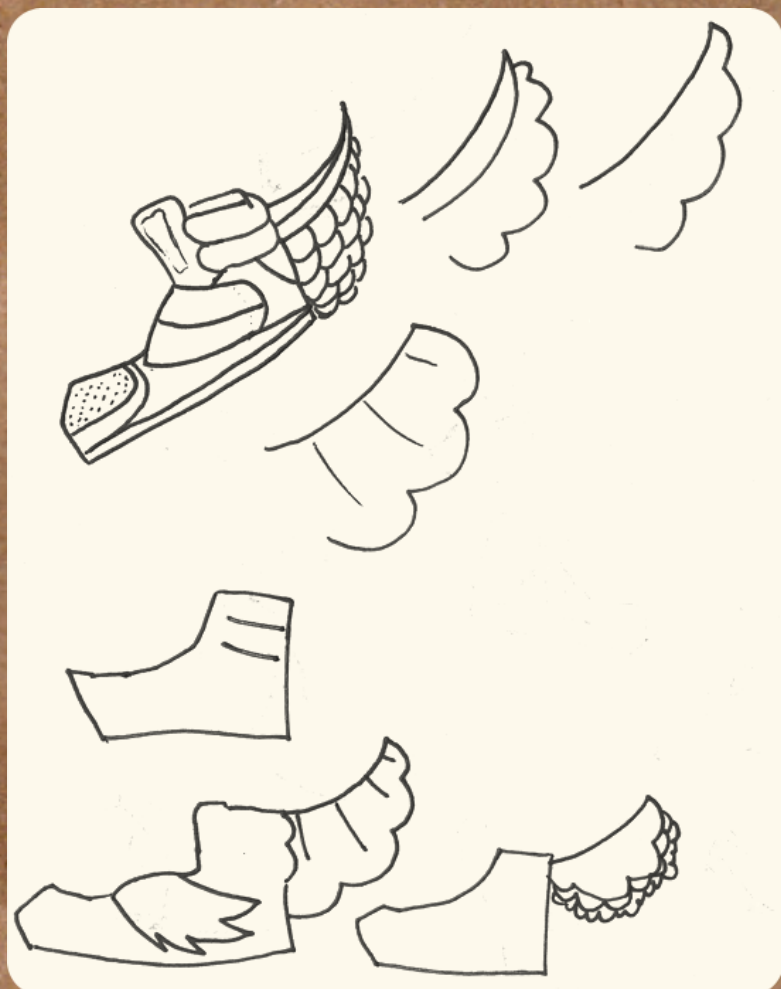
- 3 ages of rock

End
- Earthlike
- end Choose
- resultant

Music
- syncing
- sfx

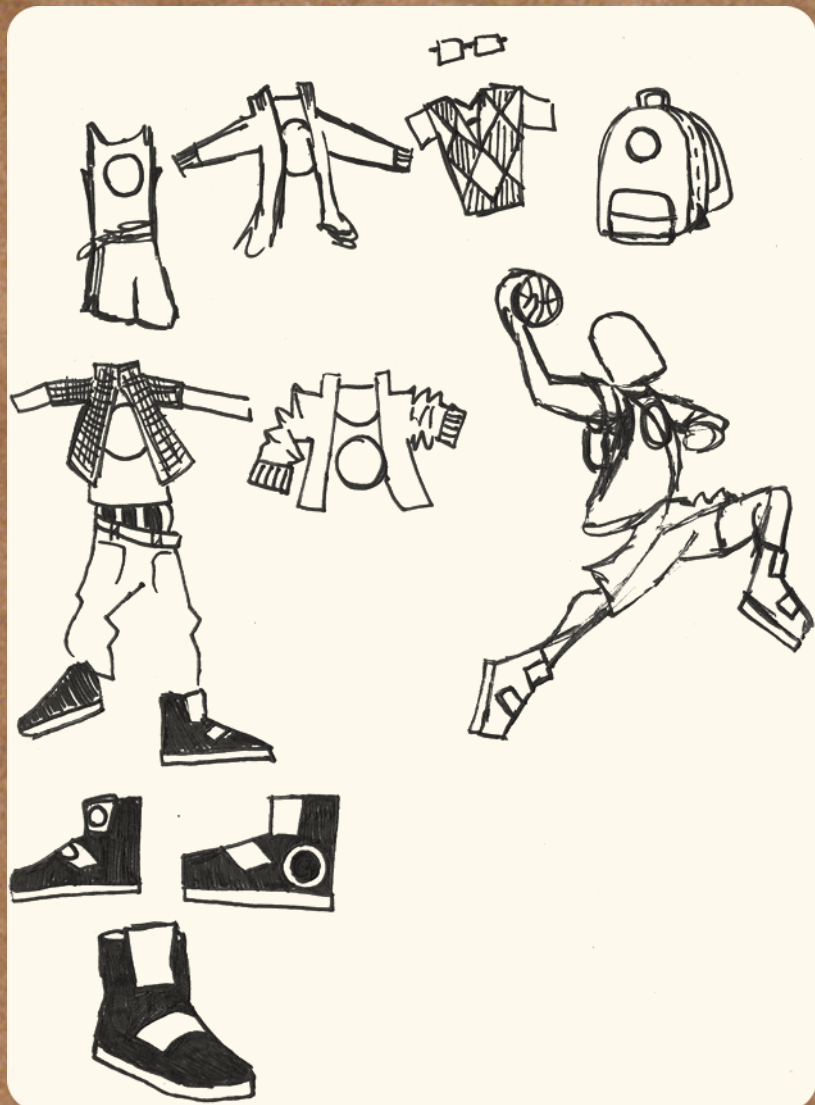
This was an attempt to show force and motion, something that doesn't come easily, especially when there's no solid ground to push against while shooting.

That large-armed fellow was supposed to be an enemy that pounds the ground to make a shockwave, similar to Hulk from the Marvel vs. Capcom games. He eventually turned into the wall creature found in Chapter 5.



Anyone familiar with my work knows that I find a way to add in flying or a grand sense of motion when I can. I really wanted the flying level in this one to be special, so I tried something different.

Even though the wings on the shoes would be tiny in-game, they needed to be visible in silhouette with every flap, so it would make sense why jumping suddenly can take you into the sky.



Luc's clothing needed to be something loose-fitting, but appropriate for adventuring through Paris. The doodle on the right immediately felt like the character I wanted, hardly changing when added into the game.

The plaid shirt design would come back later in a flashback sequence in Chapter 1.

I wanted the flying to look a bit silly, as this would be Luc's first time getting used to the sensation. He gets into some awkward poses based on how you're moving. The bicycle pedal is my favorite.

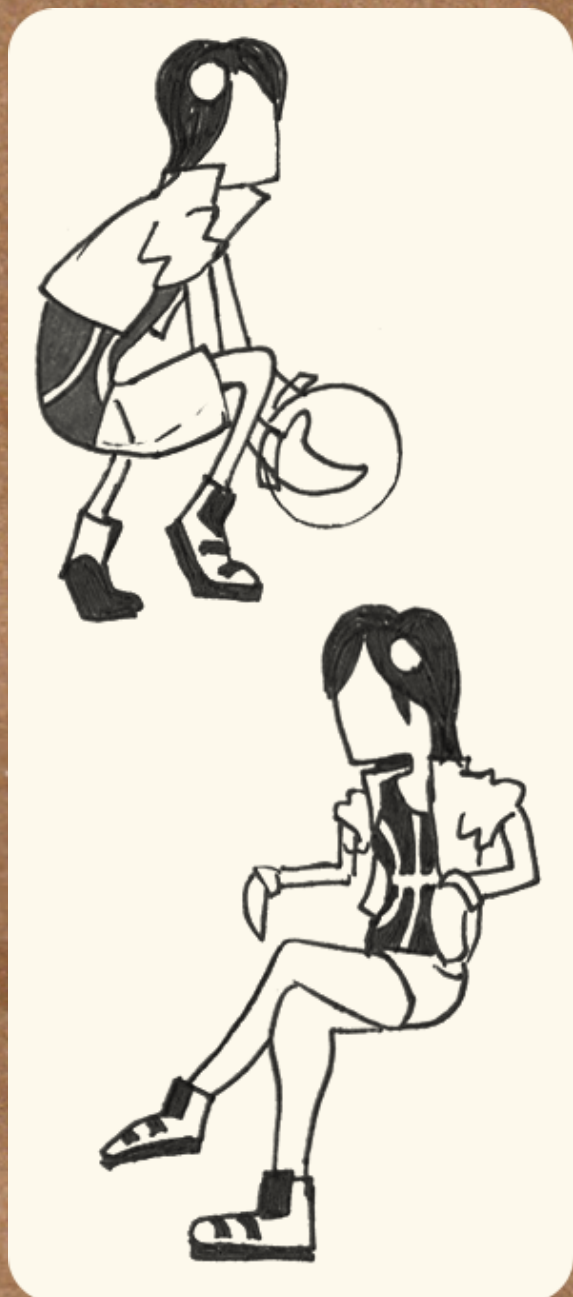
In the corner is an alternate version of a room from Chapter 2 that ended up getting cut out of the game. I had trouble with it in each iteration, so I took that as a sign that it didn't want to work out.



QueenB was fun to design since she needed to feel like she grew up without ever growing up. She's almost the inverse of Luc's colors, making the two of them feel like opposites when battling each other.

I ended up picking a loose hair style because that's one of my favorite things to animate.

The shirt pattern I liked the most felt too much like Japan's old flag design, so it was simplified to look like both a basketball and a court.

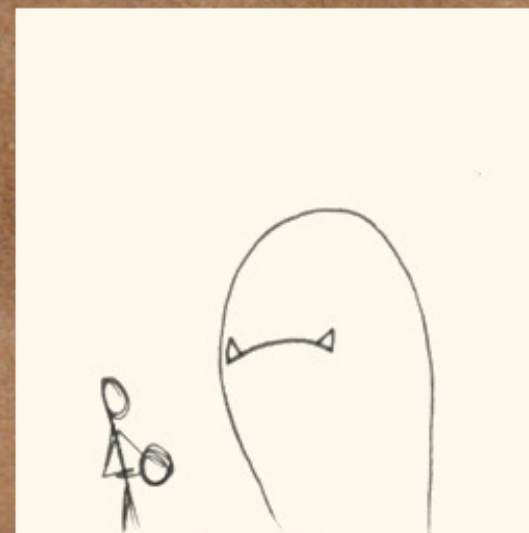
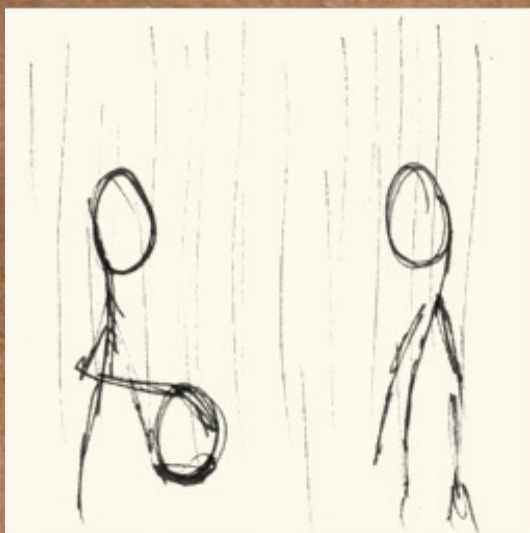


These two poses are the iconic moments of the player's time with QueenB, that being her trademark underhand toss and how she sits in her throne when first introduced.

She almost has two personalities: the new confident QueenB, and the younger inexperienced Belle. Her sides come out at different times, hinting that perhaps she's not quite ready to grow up after all.

Cinematics

These early Post-Its show the original story of BasketBelle. It's certainly changed over the months, but the journey itself has stayed true throughout.





This sequence was pretty straight forward in my head, but sketching out these thumbnails showed me how important staging is. It's my only chance to let the player get closer to the characters, so I made sure to give the moments a bit more impact.

I realized about halfway through development that I hadn't really sat down and studied the Eiffel Tower, despite it being a significant monument in the game. I tried to pick out the simple shapes that define it, adding in the final tentacle creature.

Noting the importance of the creature's shape around a well-known landmark, I tried to find other shapes to help sell the moment, but that first one was too organic to be topped.



I have little experience in dialogue exchange, so writing for the family was both exciting and difficult. I wanted certain ideas to be communicated without saying them, so the challenge was to give a conversation multiple layers.

I ended up using a lot of lines from my favorite movies and TV shows, being inspired by them and sometimes just stealing from them. On this page alone, there are influences from Hook, The Fifth Element, The Simpsons, and likely others.

The column on the left is a checklist for the sequences in Chapter 4. It helped me make sure the tension built up at a proper pace.

Fly	1	
Rise Up	1	... Belle?
	1	Sorry kid, the name's Queen B.
Catch Up	1	But you look just like my sister.
	1	Well I'm not her. I have no brother.
Some Clouds	1	This can't be. You have to be her.
(catch up)	1	I've been looking everywhere for you.
Wall	1	You don't remember me? Or Dad?
	1	Look, I'm not... Belle.
Ring → Wall	1	You're not my family. This is my family.
(catch up)	1	You've been brainwashed.
Lotsa Clouds	1	These... creatures aren't family.
(& rings)	1	I'm facing you home now.
(catch up)	1	I am home.
Storm Paths	1	Do you know how long it's been?
(+ lightning)	1	Long enough for you to
(+ Rings)	1	defeat most of my family family.
Lotsa Rings	1	I had to go through them, ^{to get} to you.
Get Ball	1	Well now you have to get
Air Dunk	1	through me, if you want
Shatter	1	to keep searching.



Originally, Luc's father was going to appear in the clouds once Luc was flying, similarly to Mufasa's cloud head in The Lion King. I realized that he should instead help his son learn to fly in the first place.

Gaining an ability simply by being told you can do it is a common design theme in games, though here I wanted to make it seem like in being told, Luc was taught, however long that would have taken. It's instantaneous here for the sake of letting the player get right into the action.

Game Design

worries

drowning
being alone
physical danger ...?
held captive

} Elements/Nature
} People/Creatures

rain → underwater
wind → above the clouds?

Powers/Moves

Run →	speed → ... a blur?
Dash → →	power → wall
Jump ↑	flight → bird
Double Jump ↑, ↑, ...	size → jungle
crouch/slide ↓	
shoot [X]	

This page is kind of a guideline for developing the game and story at the same time. I wanted there to be memorable battles that each felt unique, but each needed to make sense in context of the storyline.

For a while, there were going to be two different end levels, depending on if you joined QueenB or if you chose to fight her. I decided to move away from this idea since I wanted Belle to snap out of her trance and realize she was always a good person on the inside. Joining her would have boosted her ego and kept her from finding herself.

Originally, each enemy in the game was a fear that Luc had about Belle's whereabouts, which would manifest itself into a purple blob that he would have to overcome.

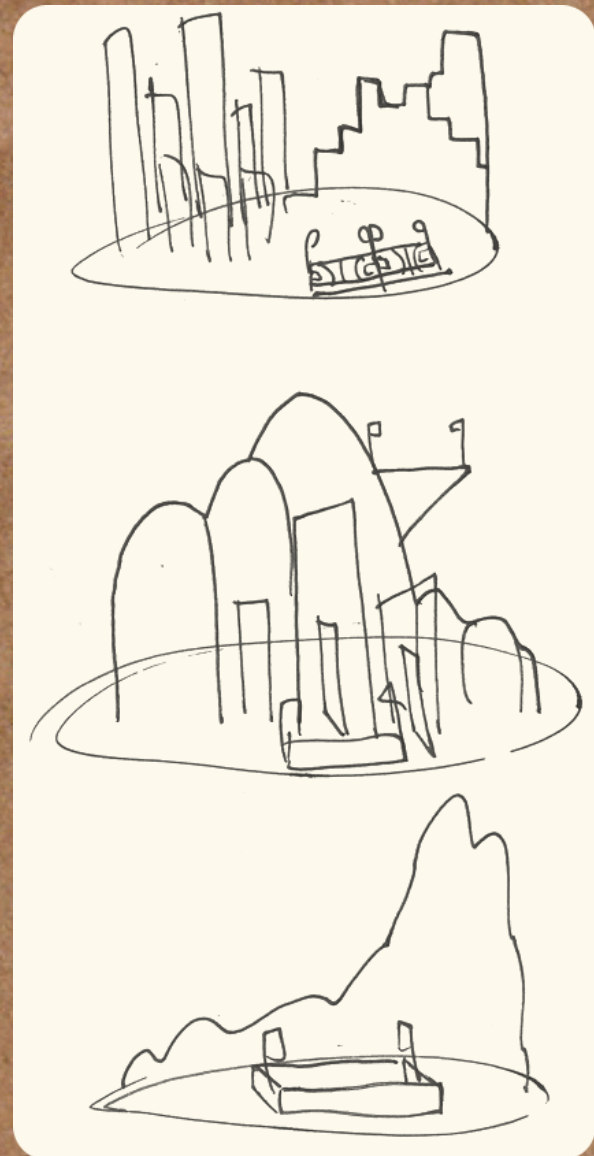
The double jump ability here would be swapped out for flying. The ability to dash was cut out as it didn't really fit in. The idea was that you could teleport a few steps in any direction, theoretically being able to pass a ball to yourself. The idea came from finding out ways to make it feel like you have a teammate while still playing a 1-on-1 game.

Distinguish Between Father/Son/Daughter

- Father passing his ball to the Kids
- The Kids are then playing ↔

- Flashback — training / story unfold (beginnings)
- Small slices — variety, importance, value
- bosses — "actual gameplay"
 - 3 main — each a different solution
 - 1 final — unique solution combining above
- Possible alternate endings
 - team up — one last time?
 - moving on — sibling battle
 - (team up becomes moving on anyway, except the final battle is different)
- how to decide ending?
 - time of day? (No.) — choose A or B?
 - performing better? — random? (I hope not)

The presentation of the island and its ability to rotate into view came straight out of Yoshi's Island, except here it would have been made out of strips of cardboard.



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shoot from: ground air

- tutorial flashbacks only appear if you clearly don't know how to do something
- no need for flashbacks if player understands/remembers them
- doing something in flashback connects back where you left off.

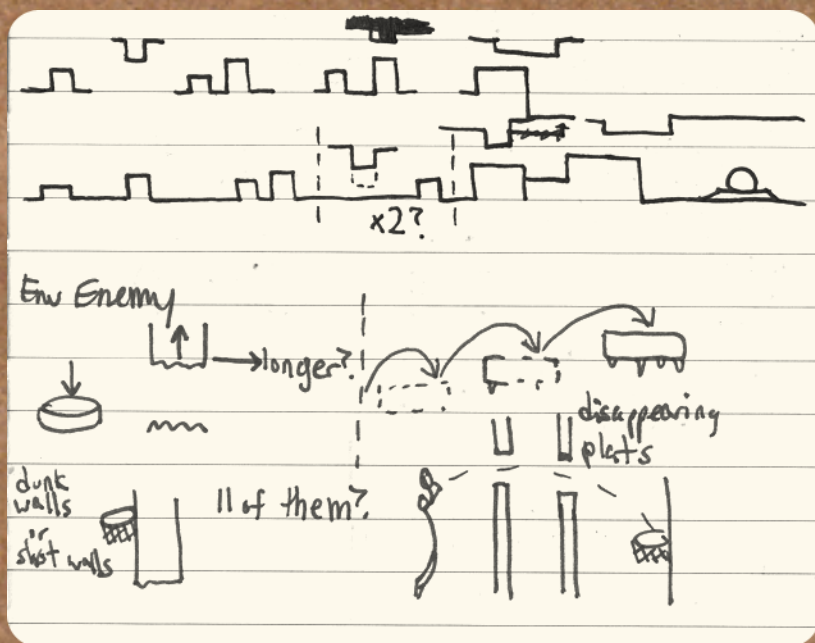
- speech bubbles : loopable instruments while text appears

enemies
 jumper
 env
 dash
 bird
 wall
 final blob

This is a set of rules I made sure to get on paper, as I knew the game would be constantly changing in my mind. I ended up not sticking to any of them for design purposes, but they each still remain in the game somehow.

The circles were an attempt to make a different kind of display for the score, which at the time only had to get to 3 to win. I ended up going with traditional numbers, their tallness based on the test chambers in Portal (not pictured).

Level Design

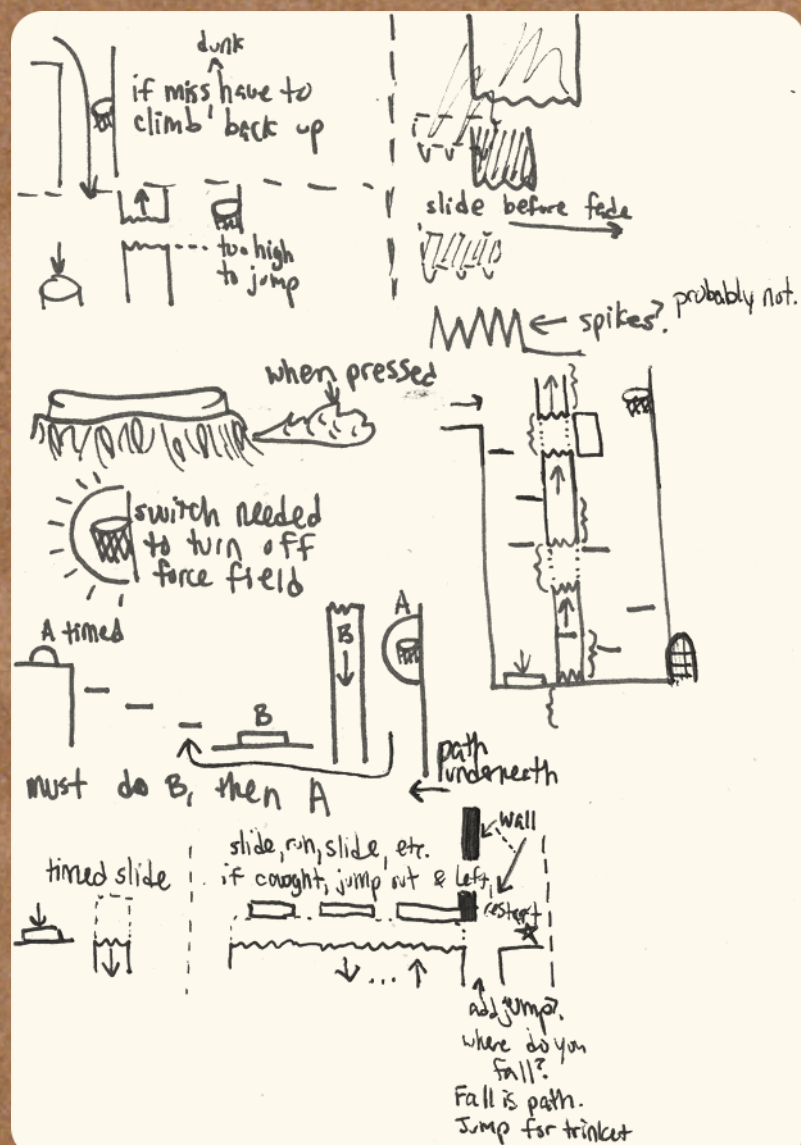


The forest flashback in Chapter 1 was so fun to design, I decided to base all of Chapter 2 on environmental exploration.

I created only a few elements for the rooms in Chapter 2, forcing me to apply them in unique ways that gradually ramped up in difficulty, introducing new ways of thinking in each room.

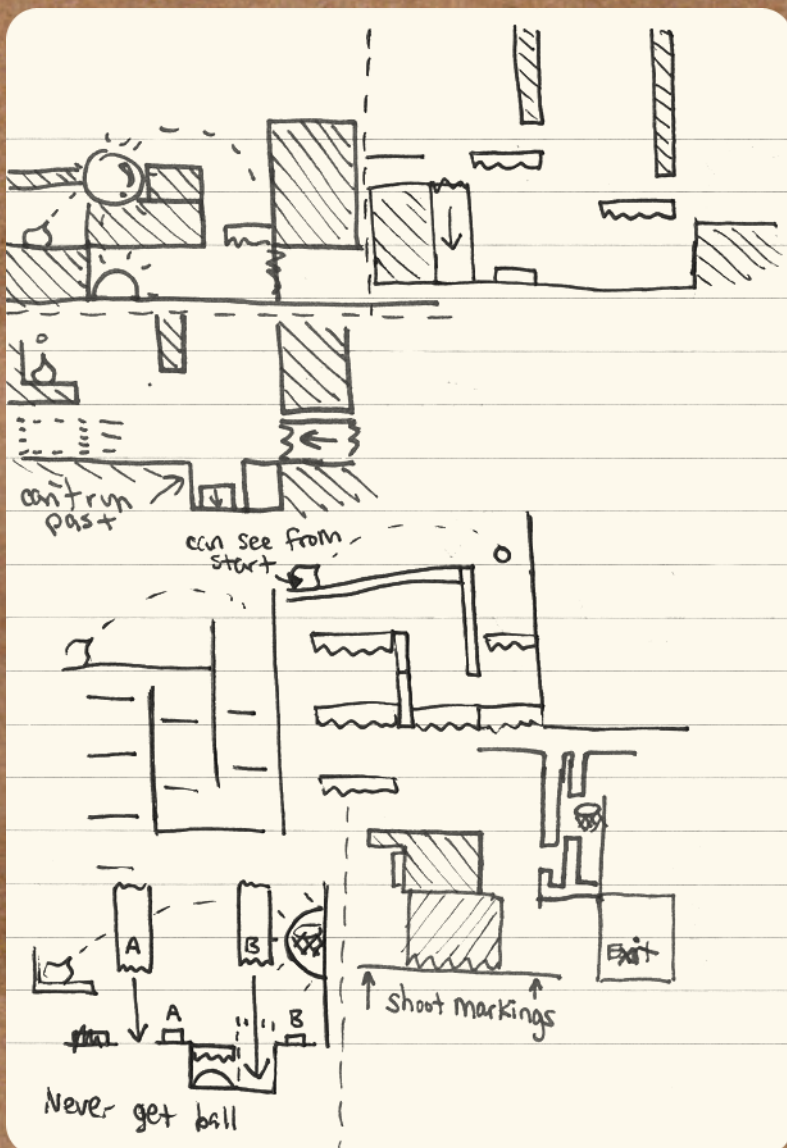
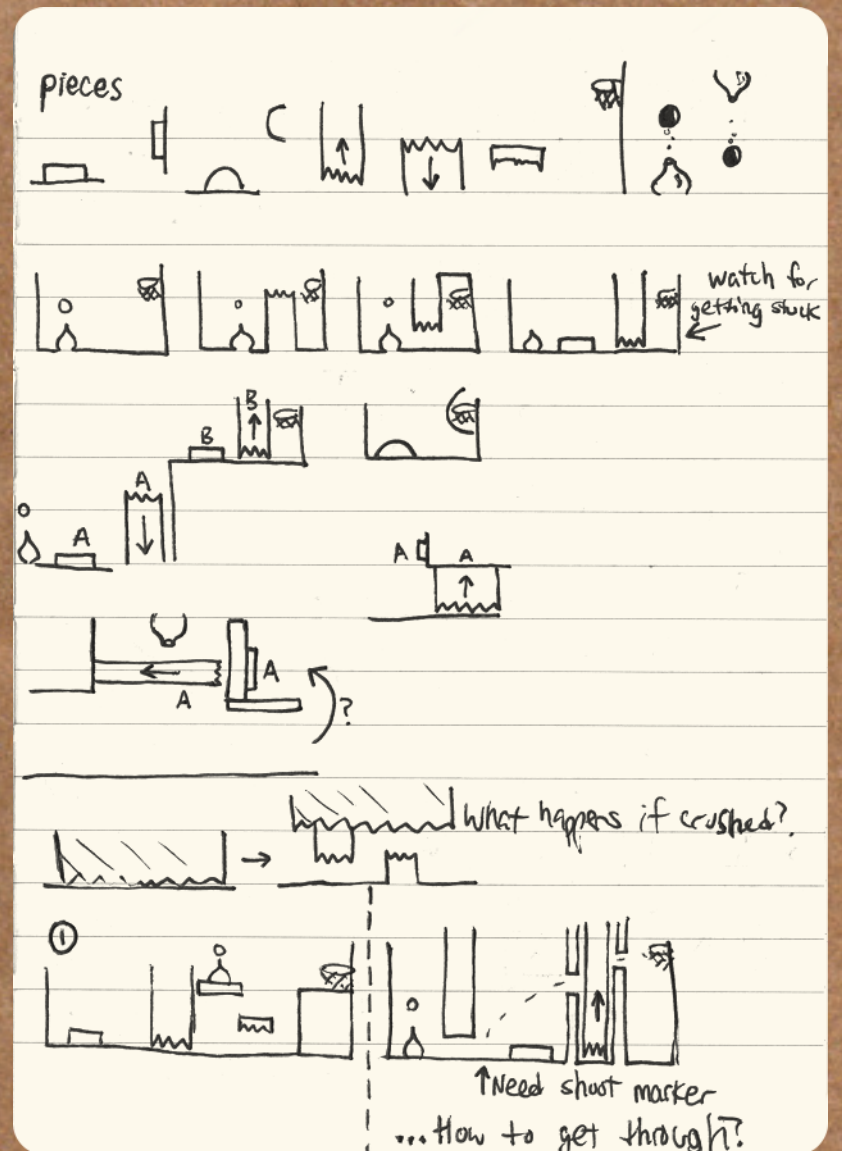
While most of the levels in the game are a flat court, Chapter 2 stands out by having platforms, tunnels, and moving walls. My normal approach of thinking about visuals would not work here as I really had to sit down and figure out the logistics of each room.

Most rooms sketched out had to be tested and iterated upon many times in-game before being finalized. This is a case where the only way to know if something works is to test it out in the game.



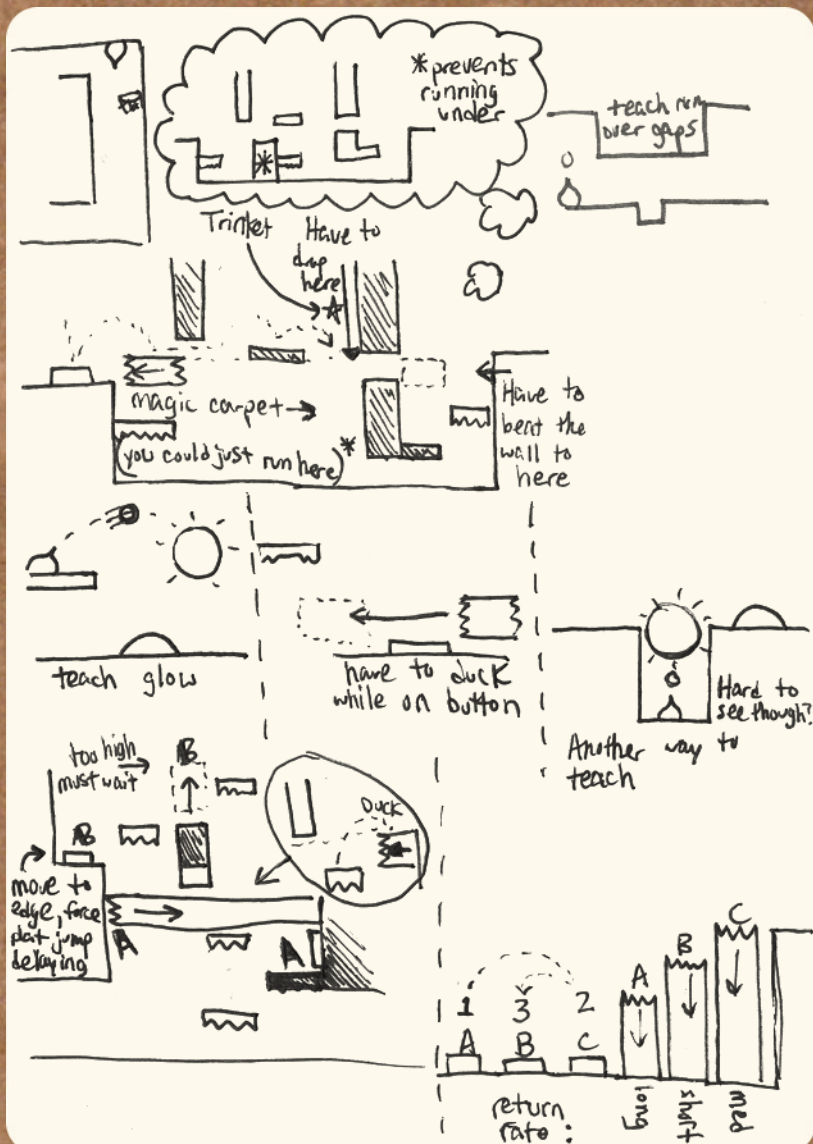
Here I tried to find out how combinations of room pieces could fit together to make interesting scenarios. The second row explores tiny variations on the same room, creating different feels each time.

As a fan of Indiana Jones, I had to make sure to include sections where you have to slide and avoid getting crushed by a slowly-lowering ceiling. It's a relatively easy maneuver, but the effect it creates is quite rewarding.



The circle/dome shape seen in the top and bottom is a forcefield that was cut from the game once it proved to be too complicated. It required too much skill and had a weak payoff. Some of its elements remain in the form of switches.

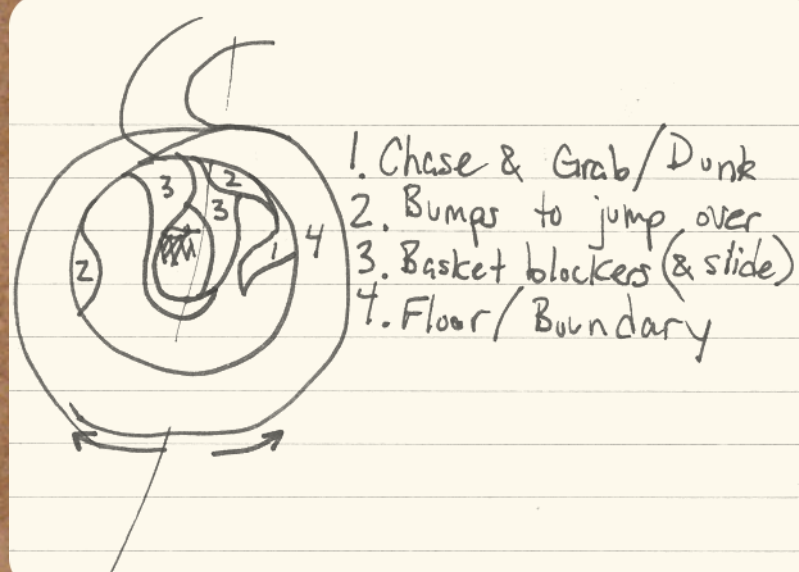
There are also rooms here that would have been too slow to maneuver through, so they were either shortened or turned into something new.



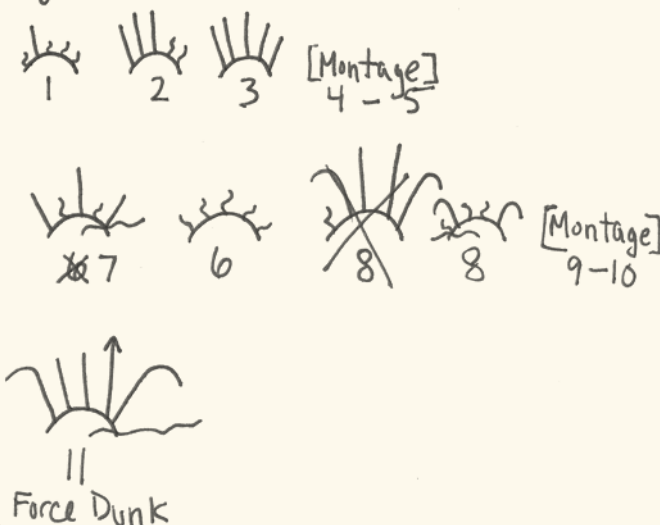
The thought bubble here is actually a room thinking about a better version of itself. I would go on to improve this room several times to make sure it had an enjoyable flow.

The switch puzzle in the bottom-right required a specific sequence of switches to be pressed in order to ride the walls to the ledge above. This was based after a famous lantern-lighting puzzle in The Legend of Zelda.

This odd color-by-number diagram is of the circle sequence in Chapter 7. I wanted to keep the elements simple so that they would be understandable to the player as the camera rotates upside-down.



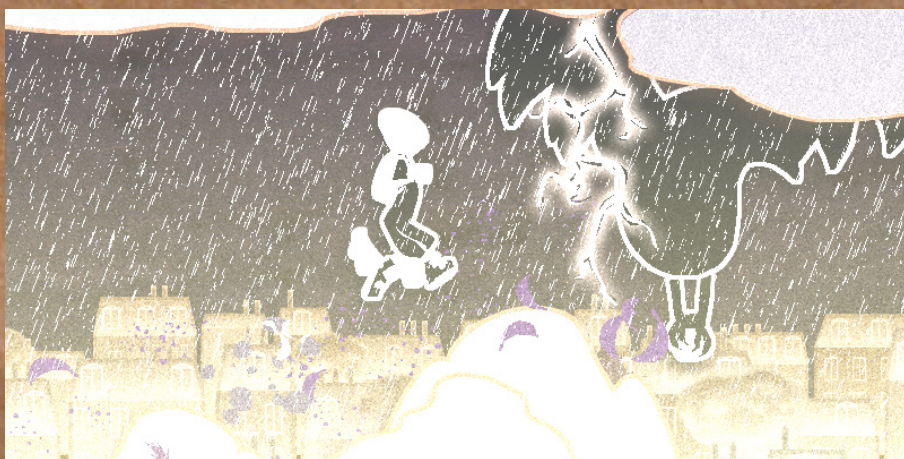
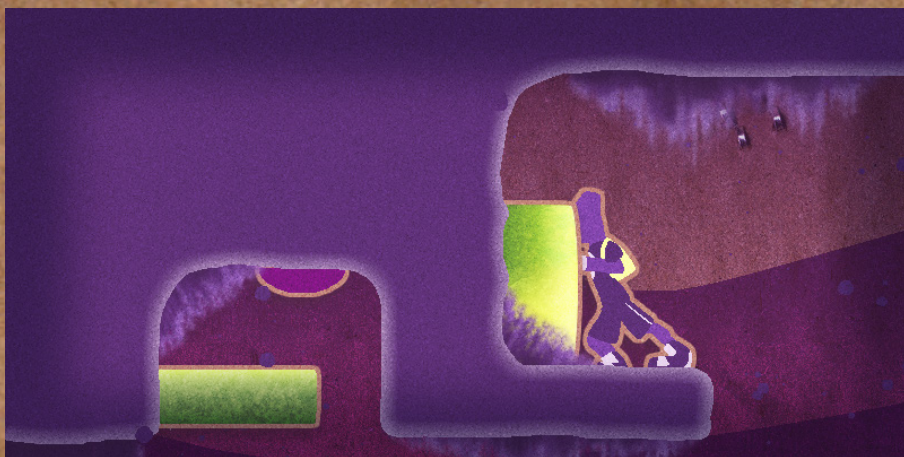
Squid



The squid creature in Chapter 3 needed to have a specific progression of difficulty, allowing the player to apply previously-learned skills to a new situation.

I also had trouble keeping track of what the score would be after the montage sequences, so this diagram helped in many ways.

Screenshots



BasketBelle

a game by Bean

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