Balancing Action and RPG in 'Horizon Zero Dawn' Quests

Presented by Blake Rebouche, Senior Quest Designer
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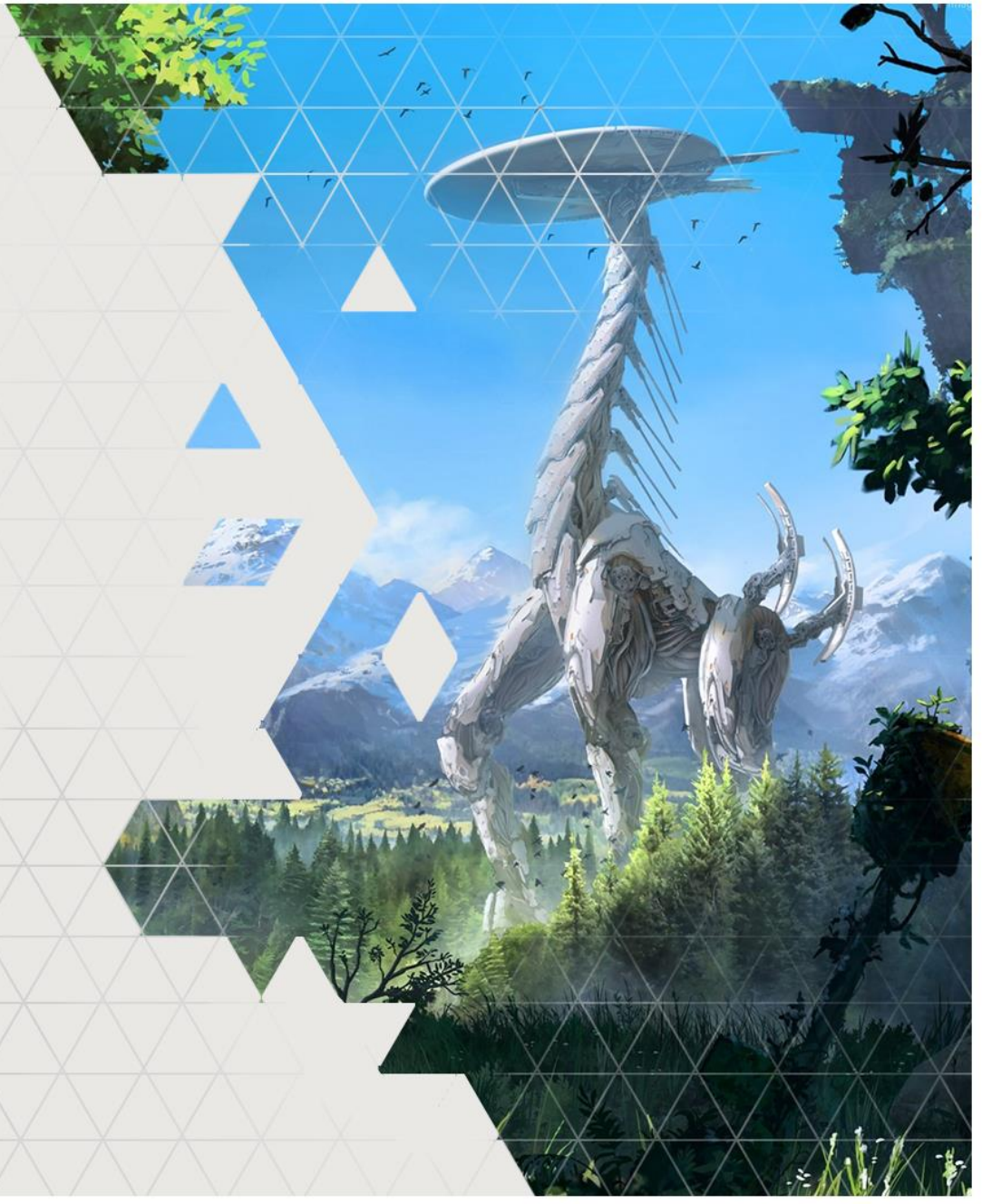
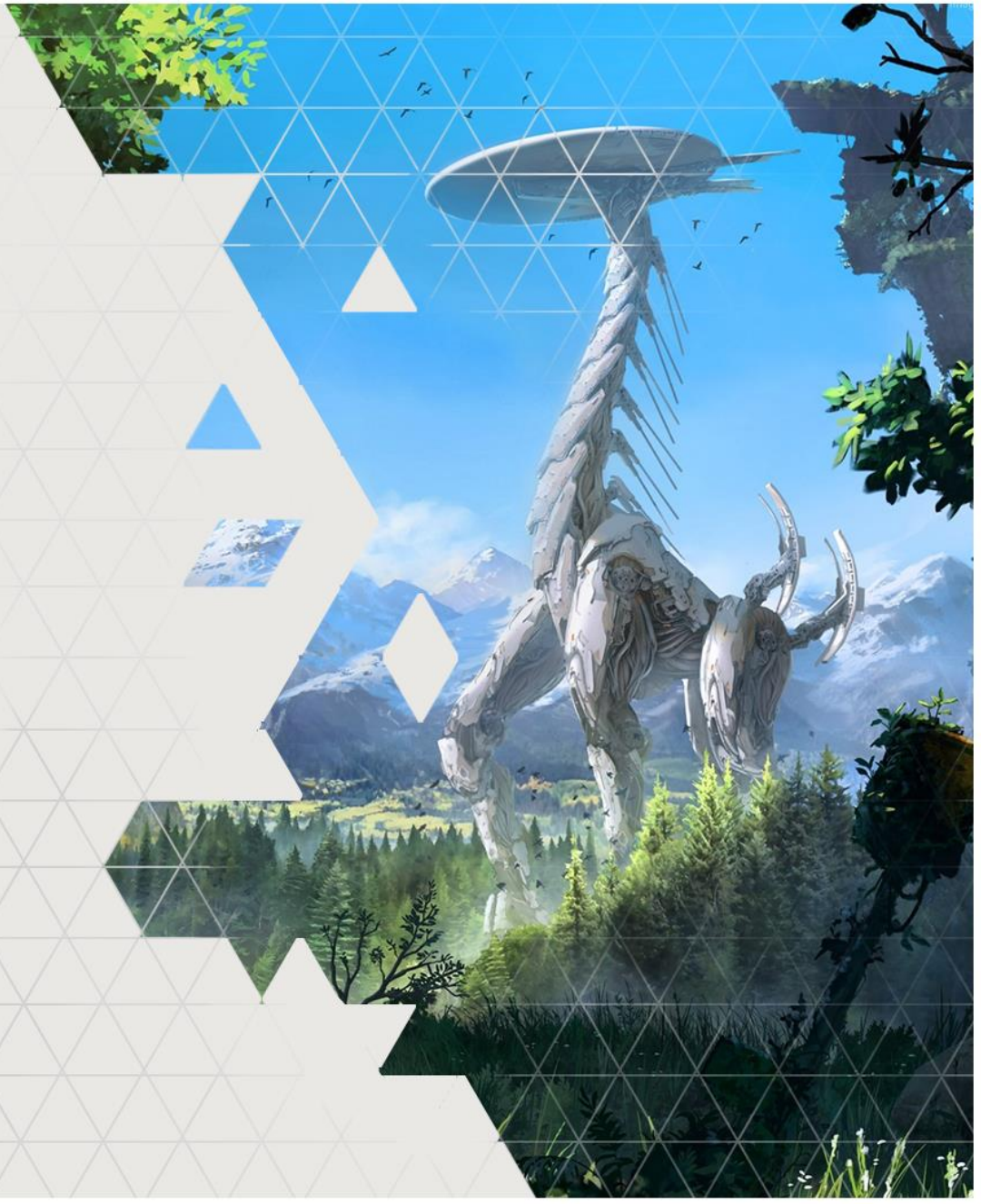
Talk Outline



Talk Outline

1. What I Brought to the Table



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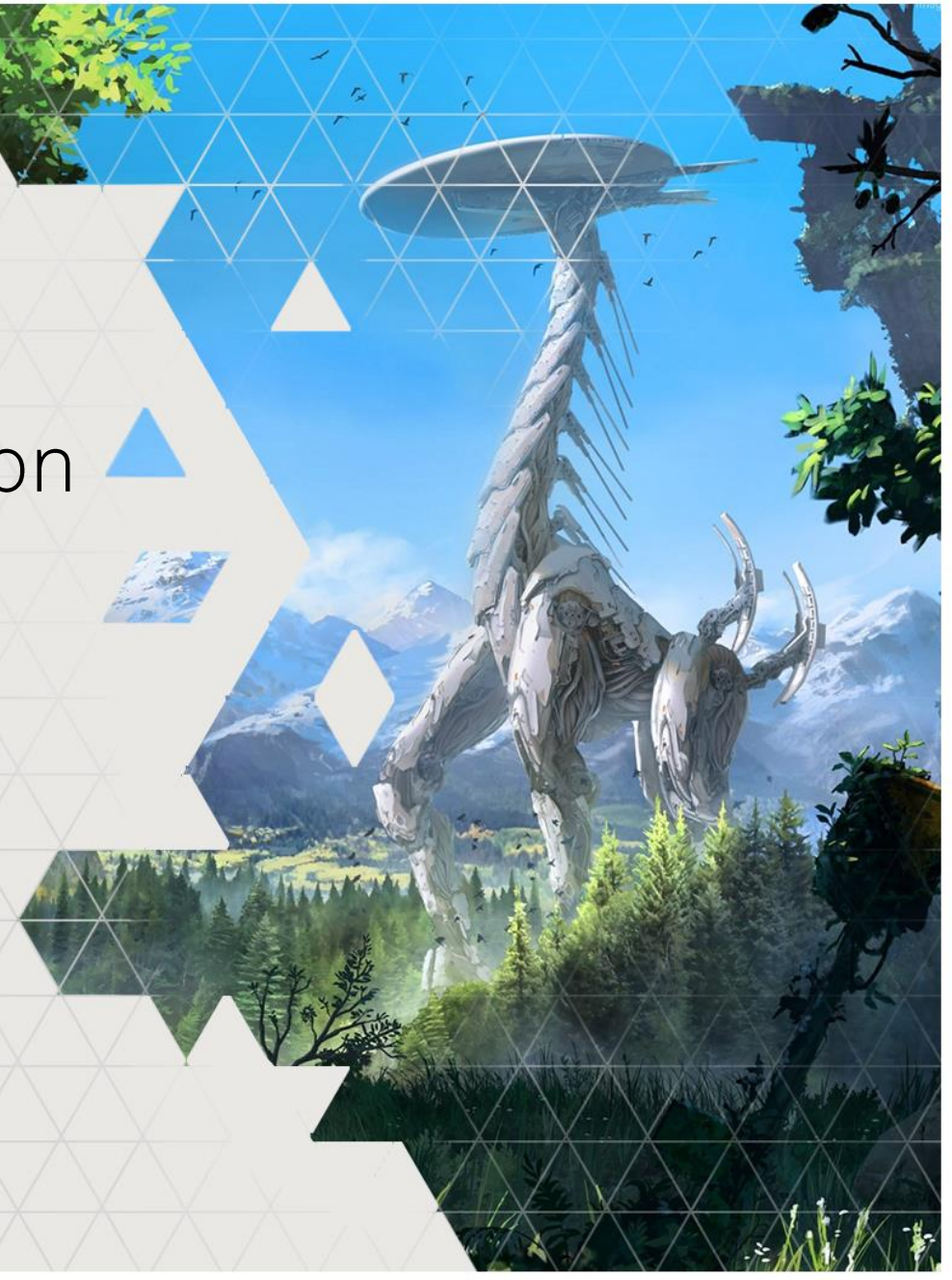
2. Early Vision of Quests in Horizon



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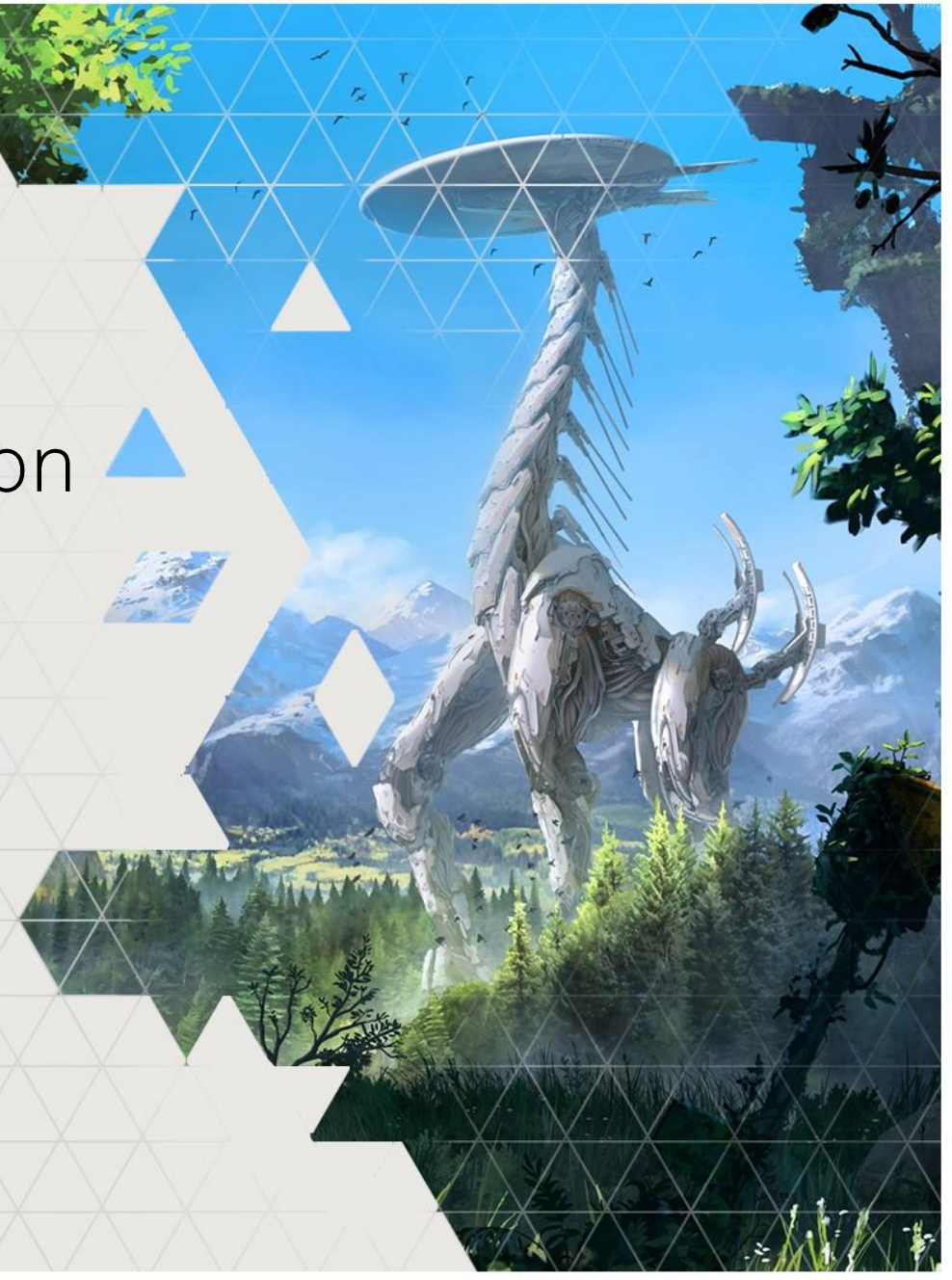
3. Open World vs Bunkers



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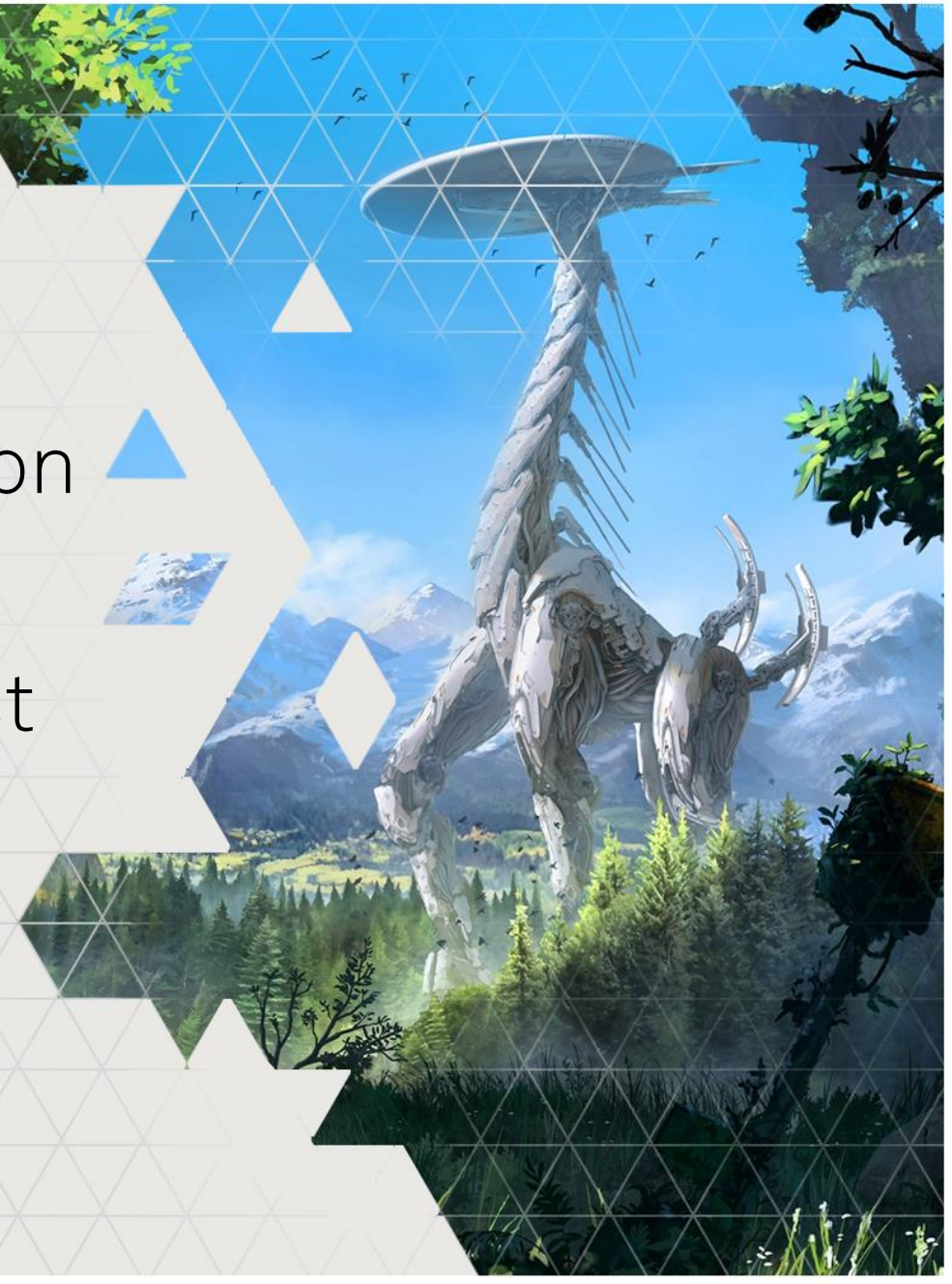
4. Lessons Learned from the Past



Talk Outline

1. What I Brought to the Table
2. Early Vision of Quests in Horizon
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4. Lessons Learned from the Past
5. Putting it All Together

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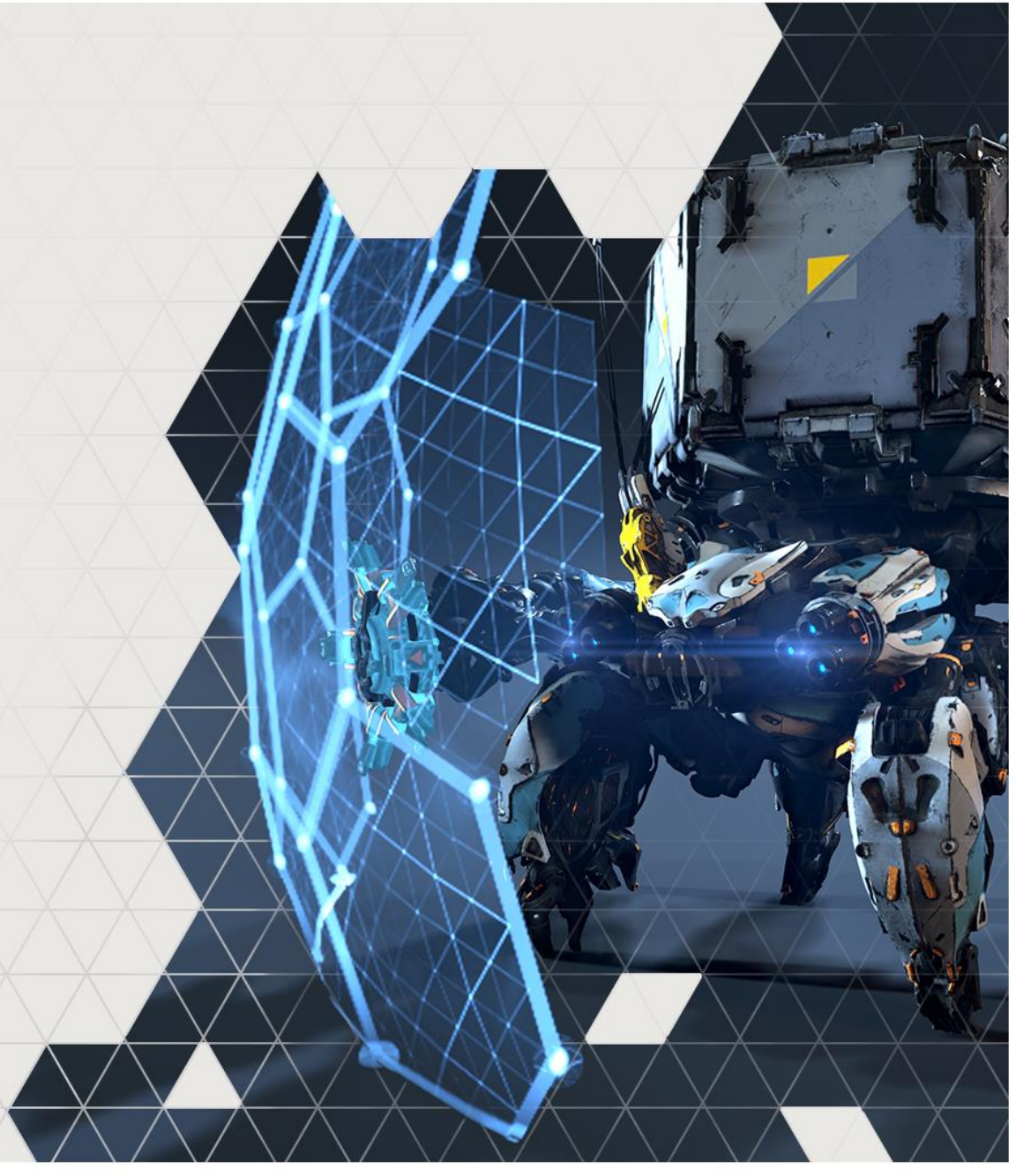
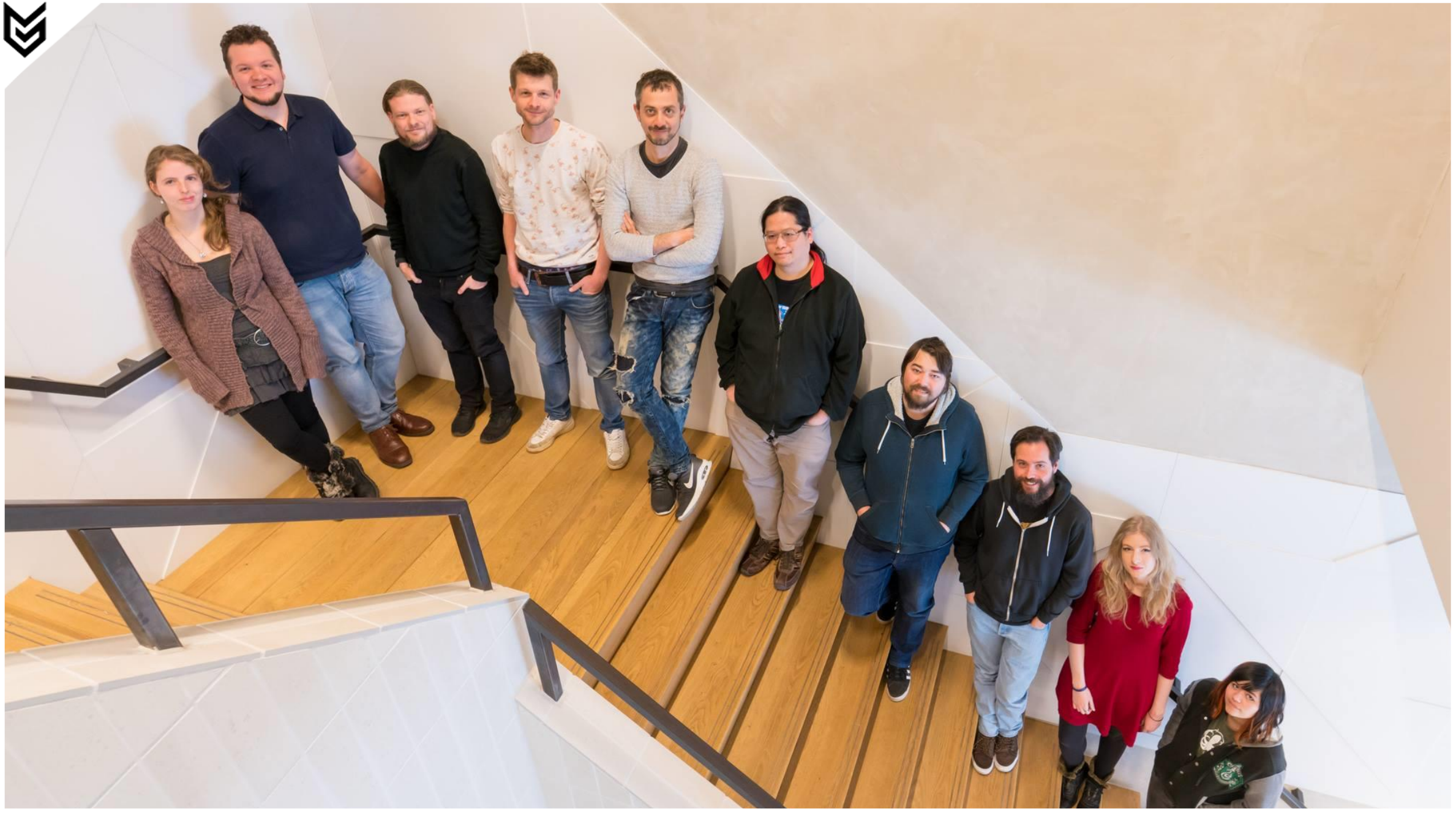
6. Questions?

What I Brought to the Table



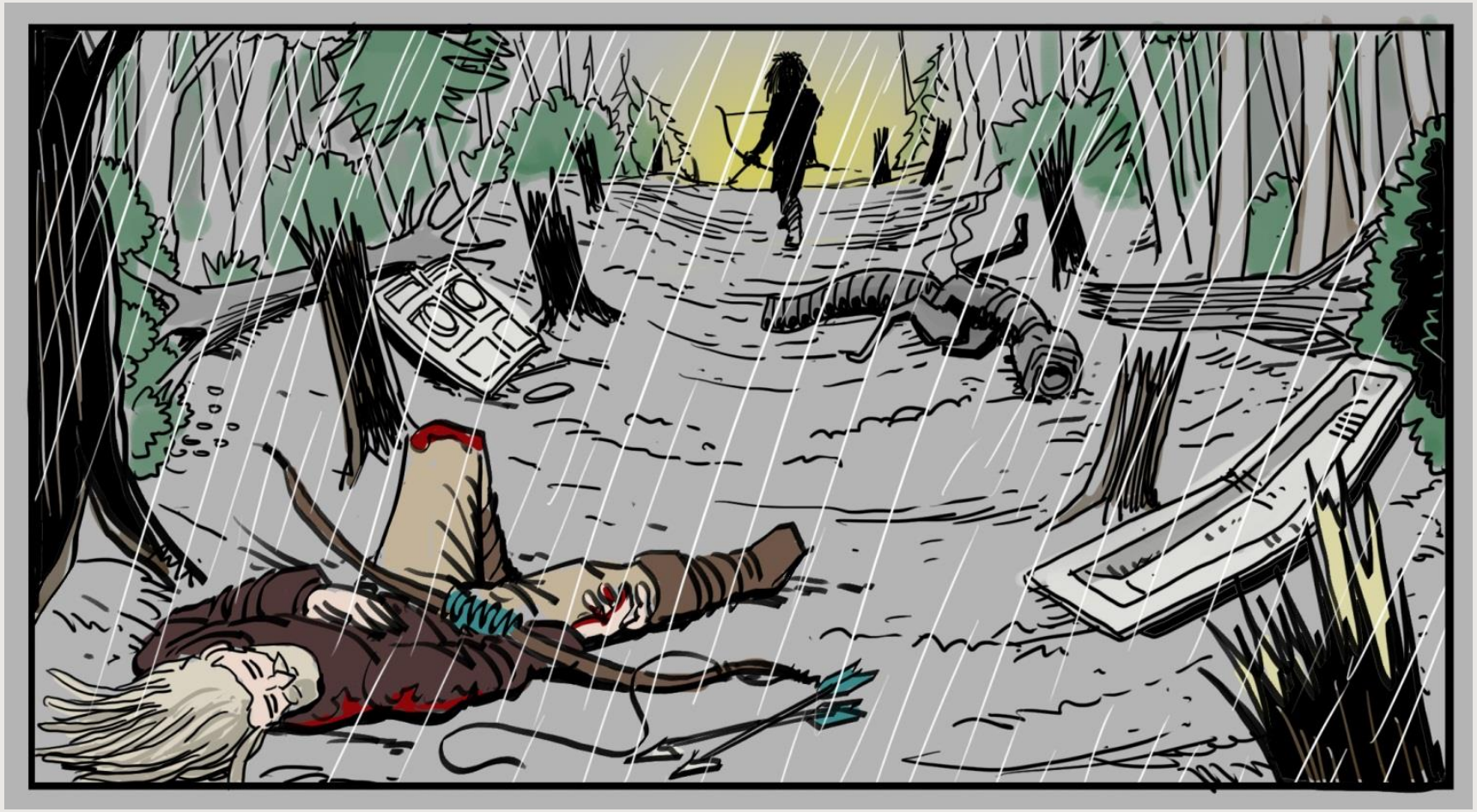


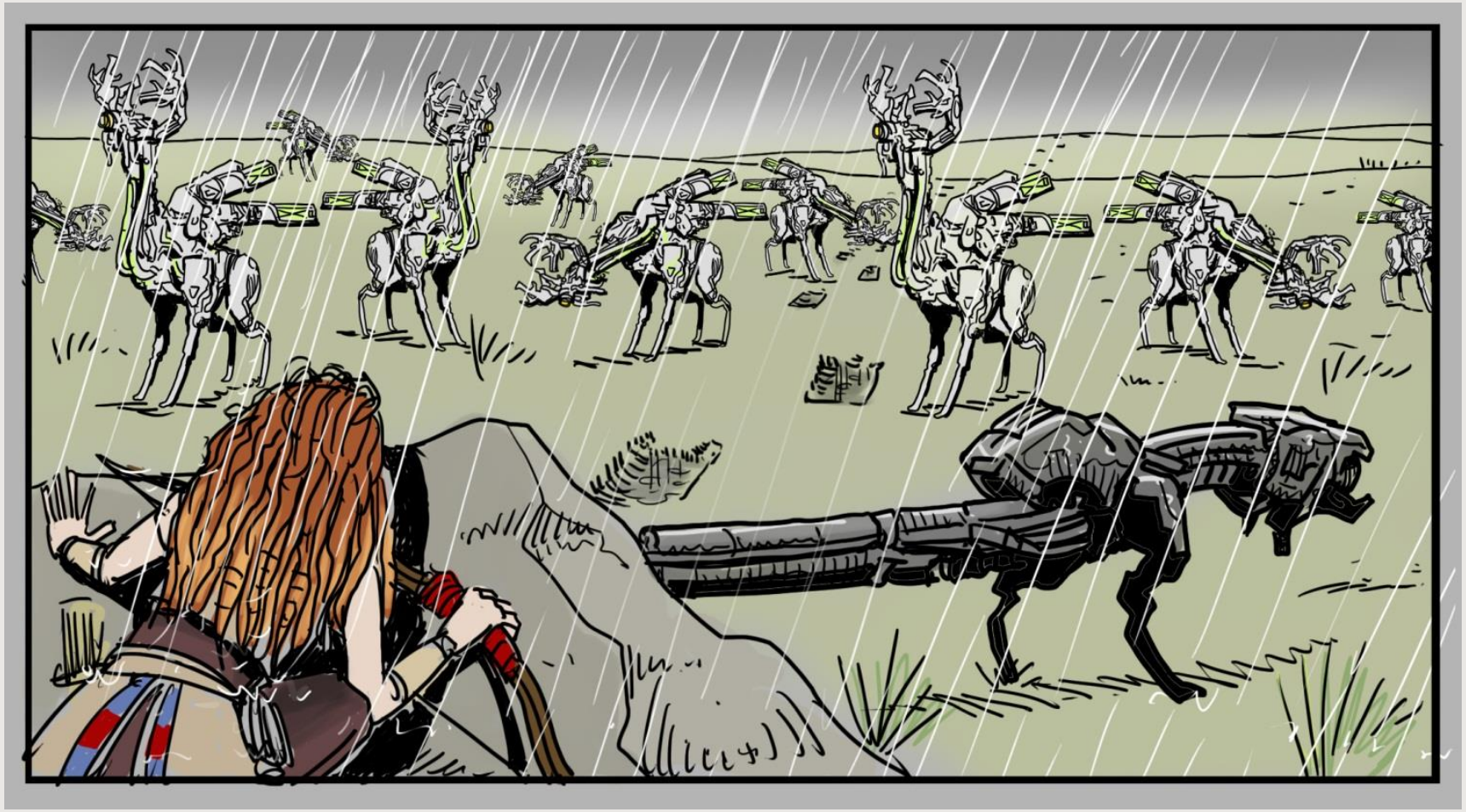
What I Brought to the Table

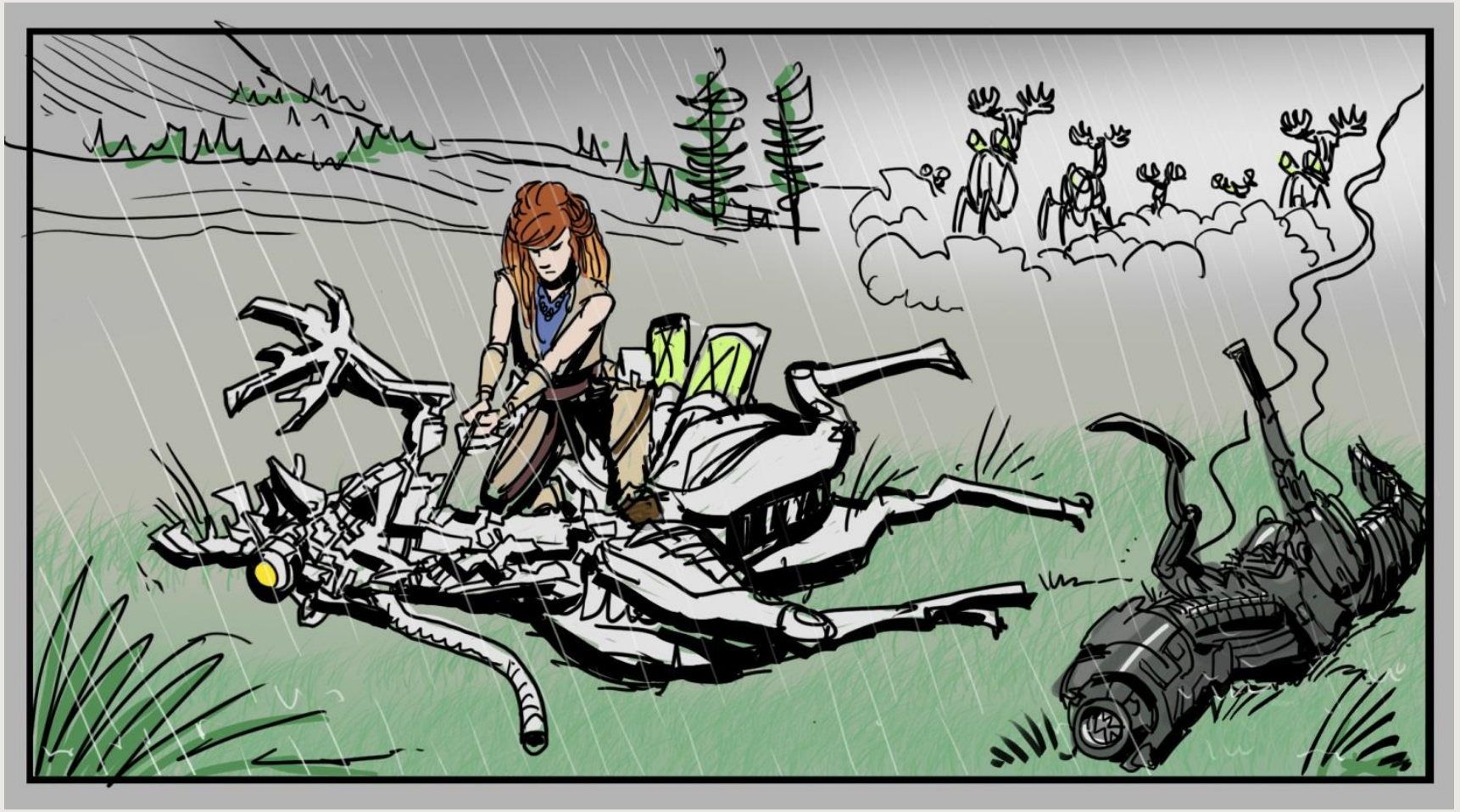
What I Brought to the Table

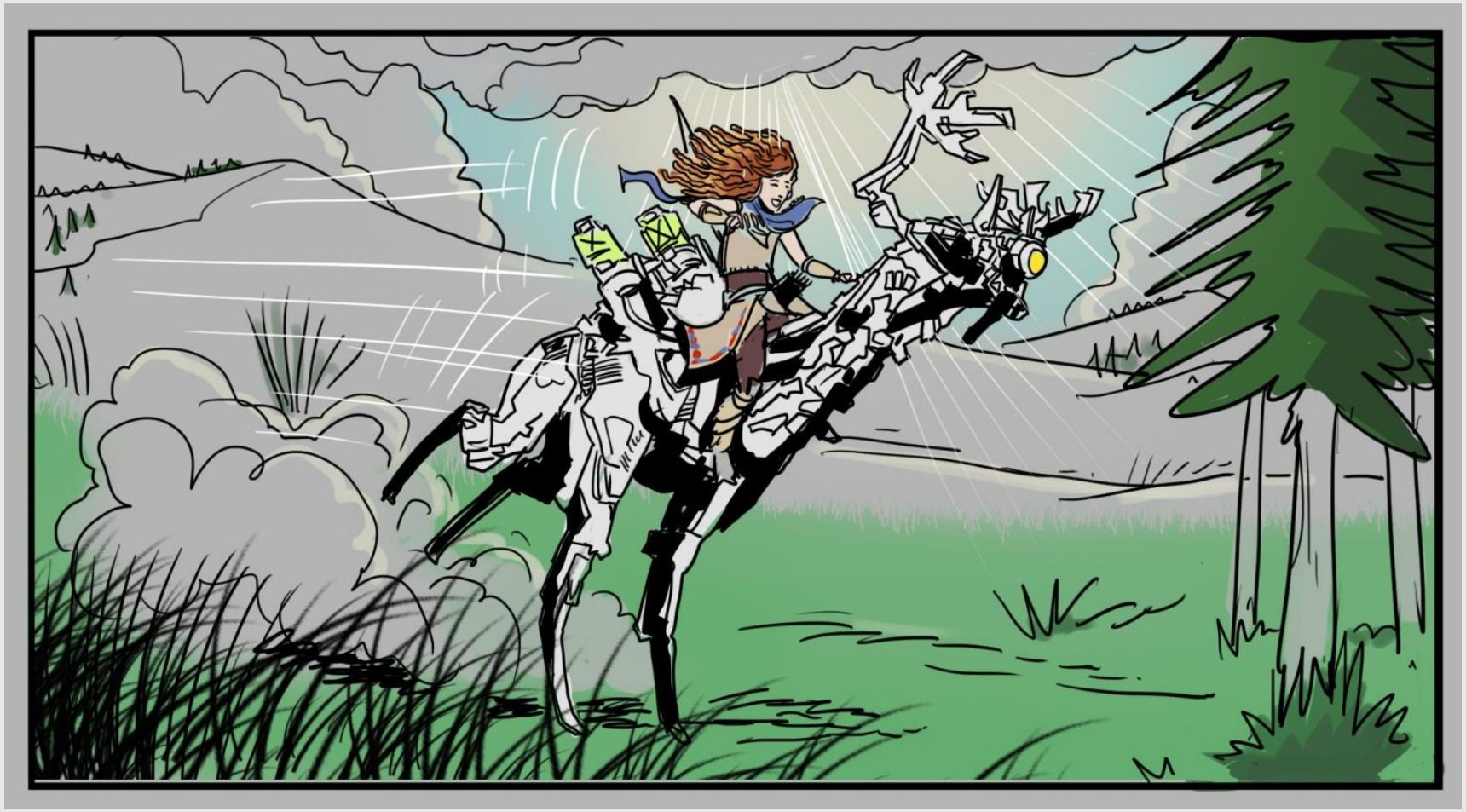
Early Vision

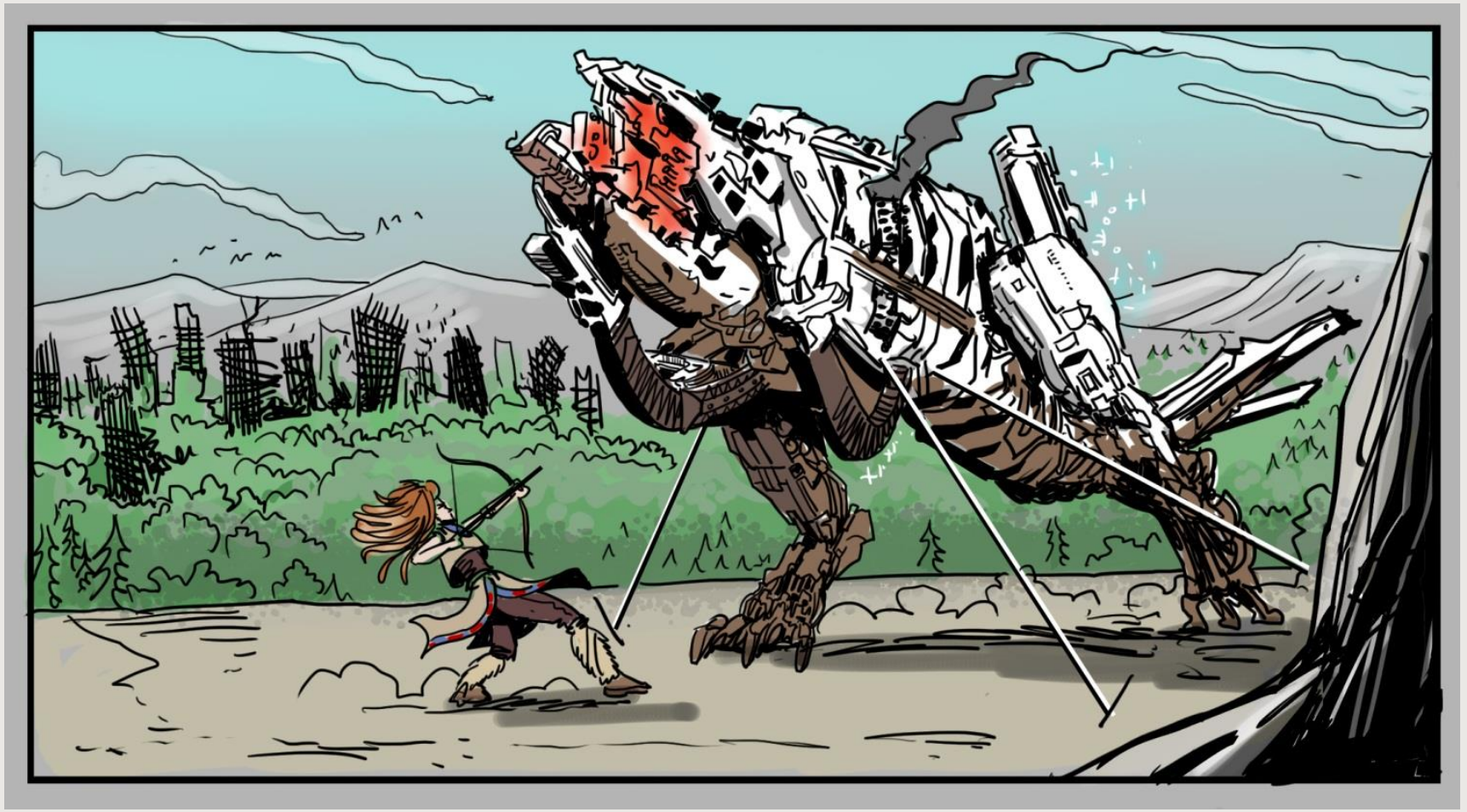
But what about Quests?











Early Quest Outline

1. Evening. It's Raining. Aloy wakes from unconsciousness, lying in a smoking **crater**. Aloy stands, dazed, and starts moving towards a burning **village** in the distance.
2. Aloy enters the **village**. A villager approaches Aloy and begs her not to pursue the machine that attacked the village, claiming it's too dangerous.
3. Aloy being Aloy, she follows the path of destruction out of the **village** passing the bodies of Nora warriors slain by the beast.
4. A herd of machines blocks her path.
5. Aloy picks a machine off from the herd in the **plain** and overrides it, making it her mount. Now with a ride, she makes haste to pursue the rampaging machine.
6. Aloy catches up to the hunting party sent after the beast in the nearby **mountains**. All but one are dead. The last hunter tells Aloy to beware, the beast is near.
7. From nearby, a Thunderjaw shrieks and attacks. Aloy engages with and defeats the machine.

Horizon’s Main Quest Chapters

- A Gift from the Past
- Lessons of the Wild
- The Point of The Spear
- Mother’s Heart
- The Proving
- The Womb of the Mountain
- The City of the Sun
- Maker’s End
- The Grave-Hoard
- To Curse the Darkness
- Deep Secrets of the Earth
- The Terror of the Sun
- The Heart of the Nora
- The Mountain that Fell
- The Looming Shadow
- The Face of Extinction

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HORIZON
ZERO DAWN

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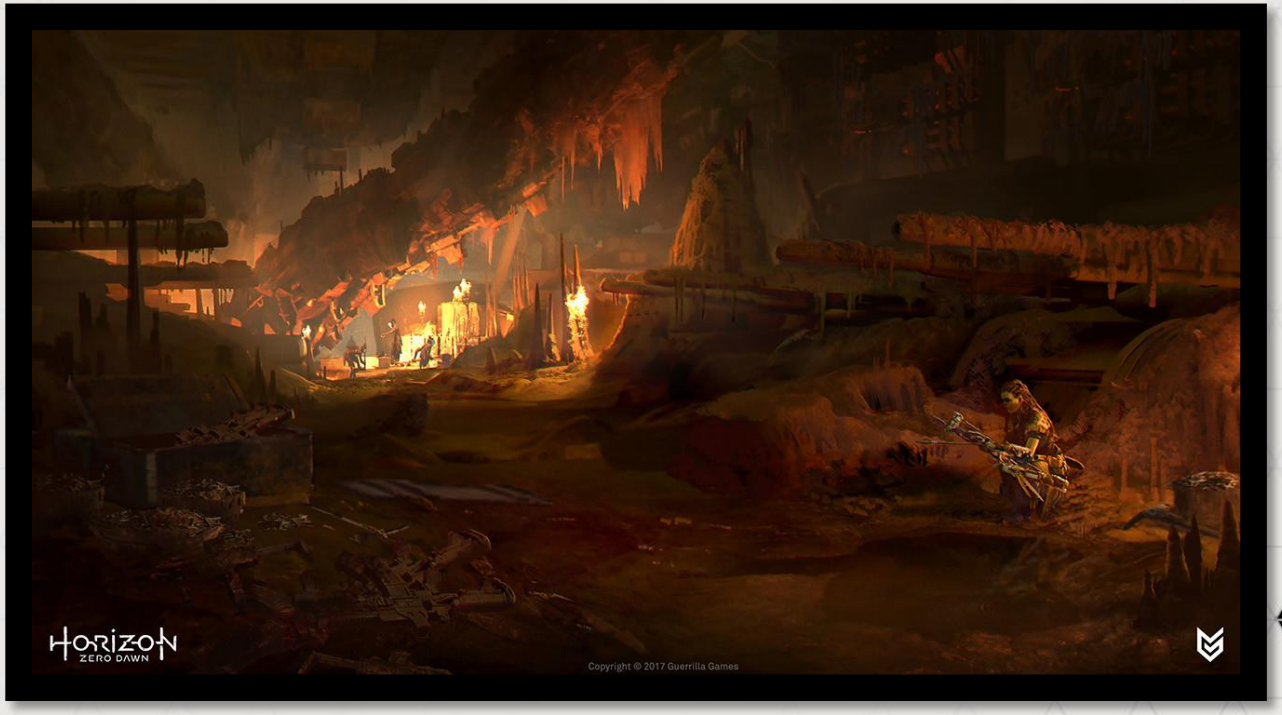
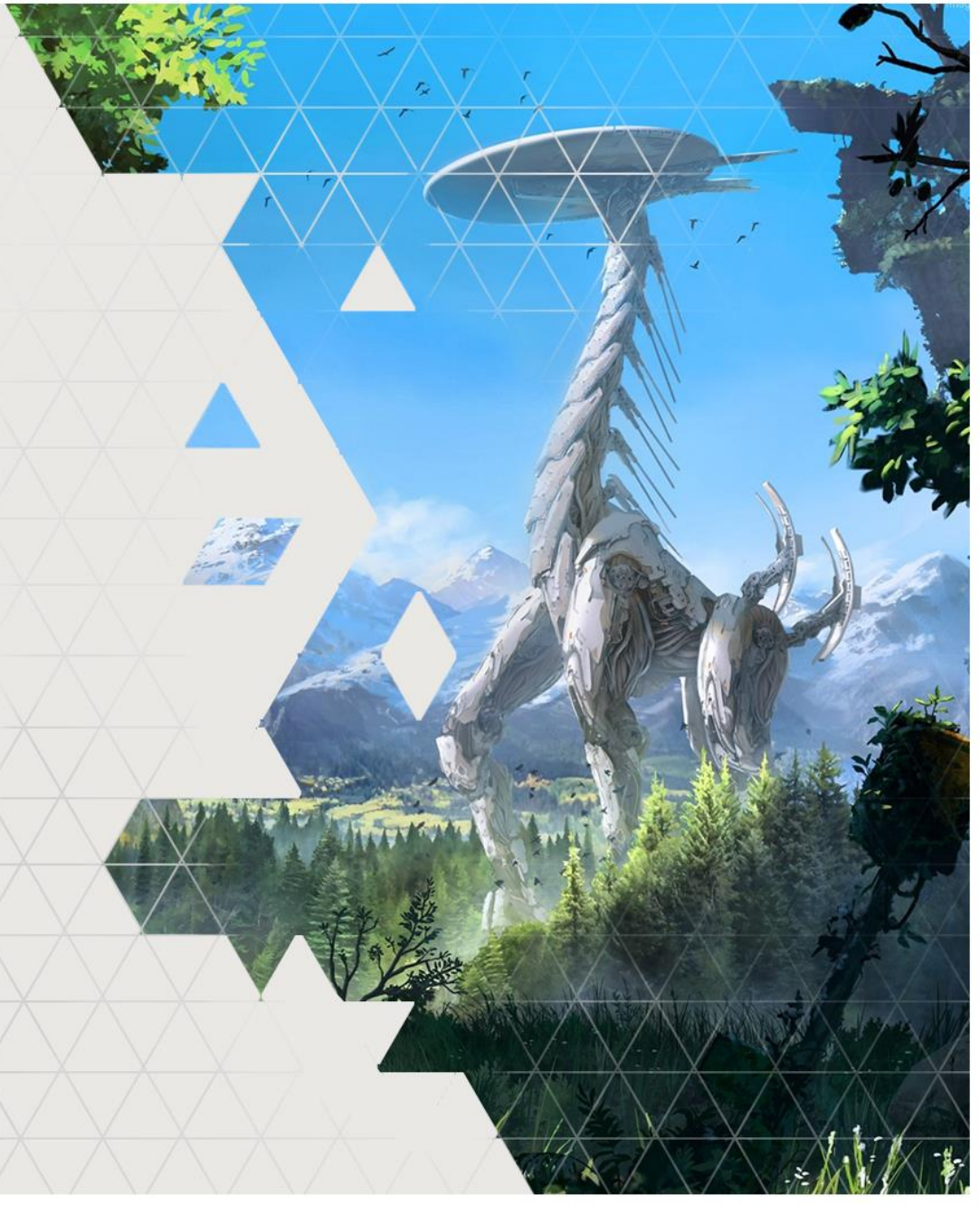
Open World vs Bunkers

Open World vs Bunkers



Open World vs Bunkers

- Open World Quests
  - Free Heap
  - Fatal Inheritance
  - A Moment's Peace
- Bunker Quests
  - The Grave-Hoard
  - Maker's End
  - The Womb of the Mountain



Open World vs Bunkers

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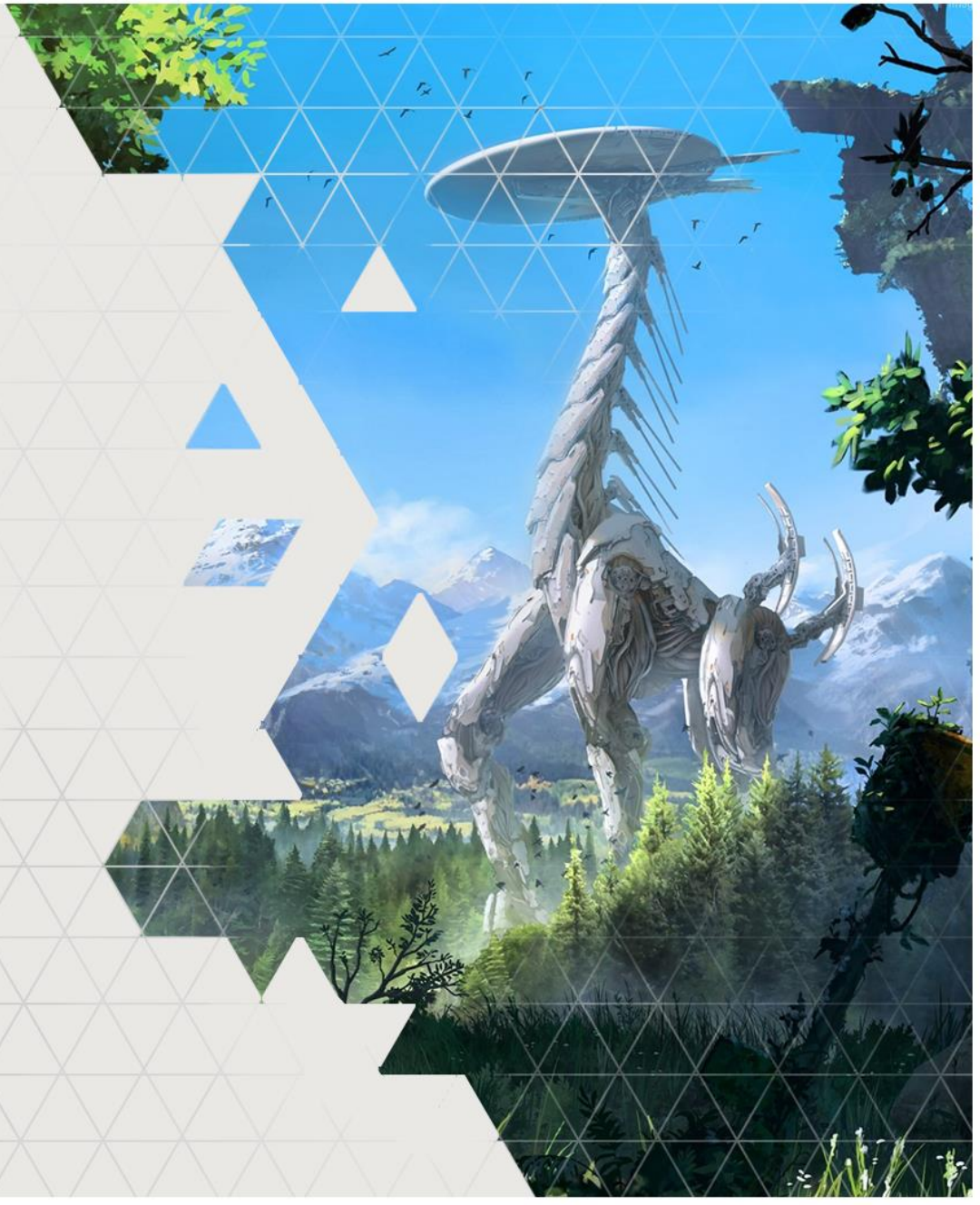
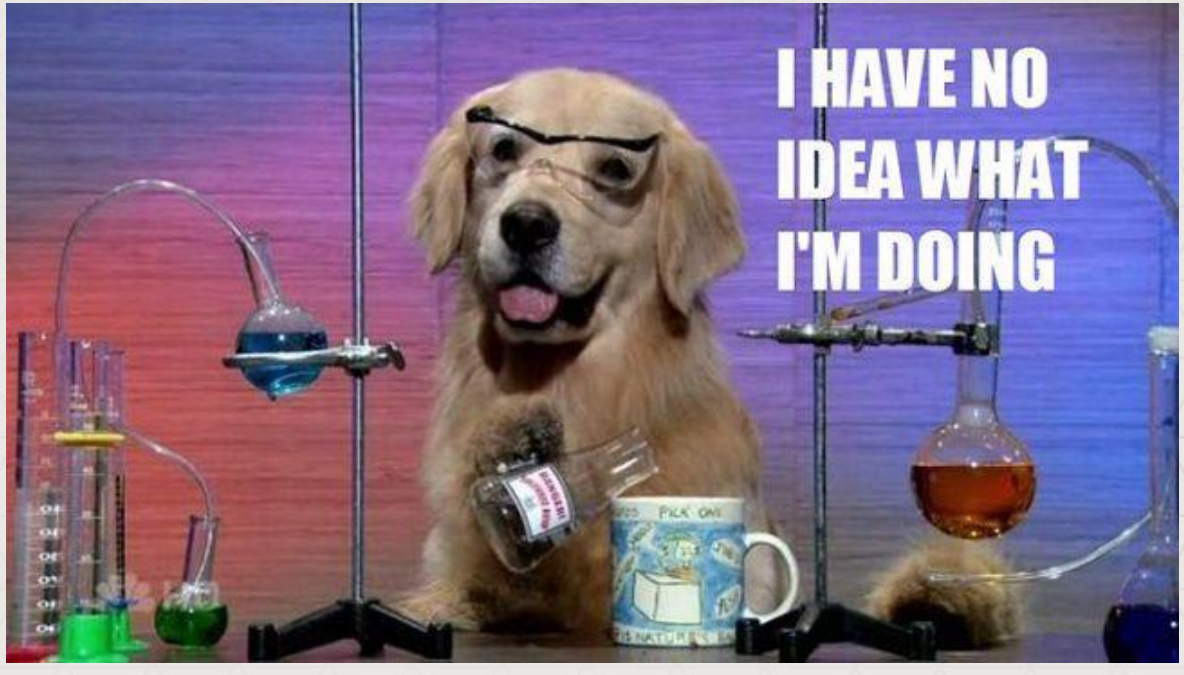
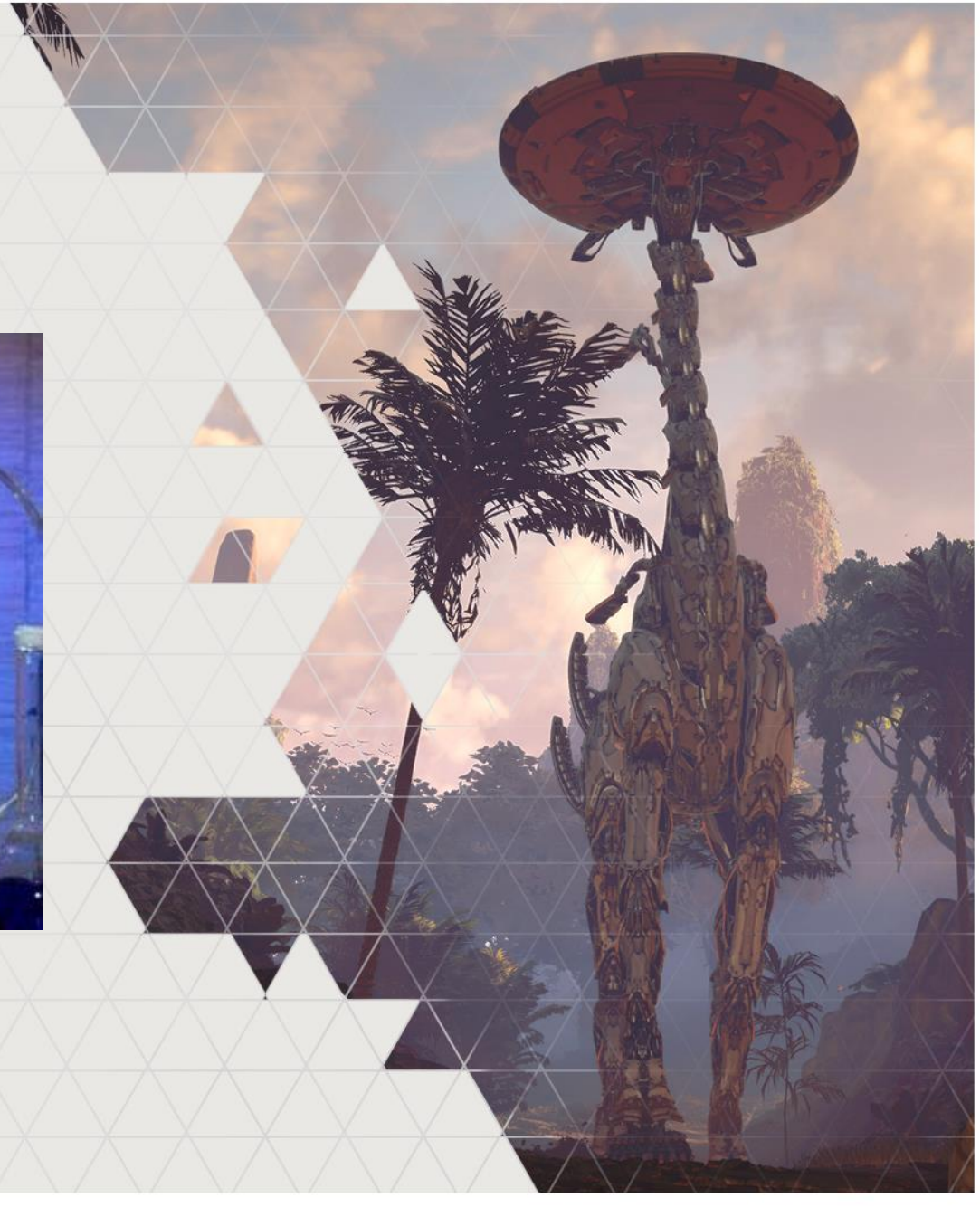
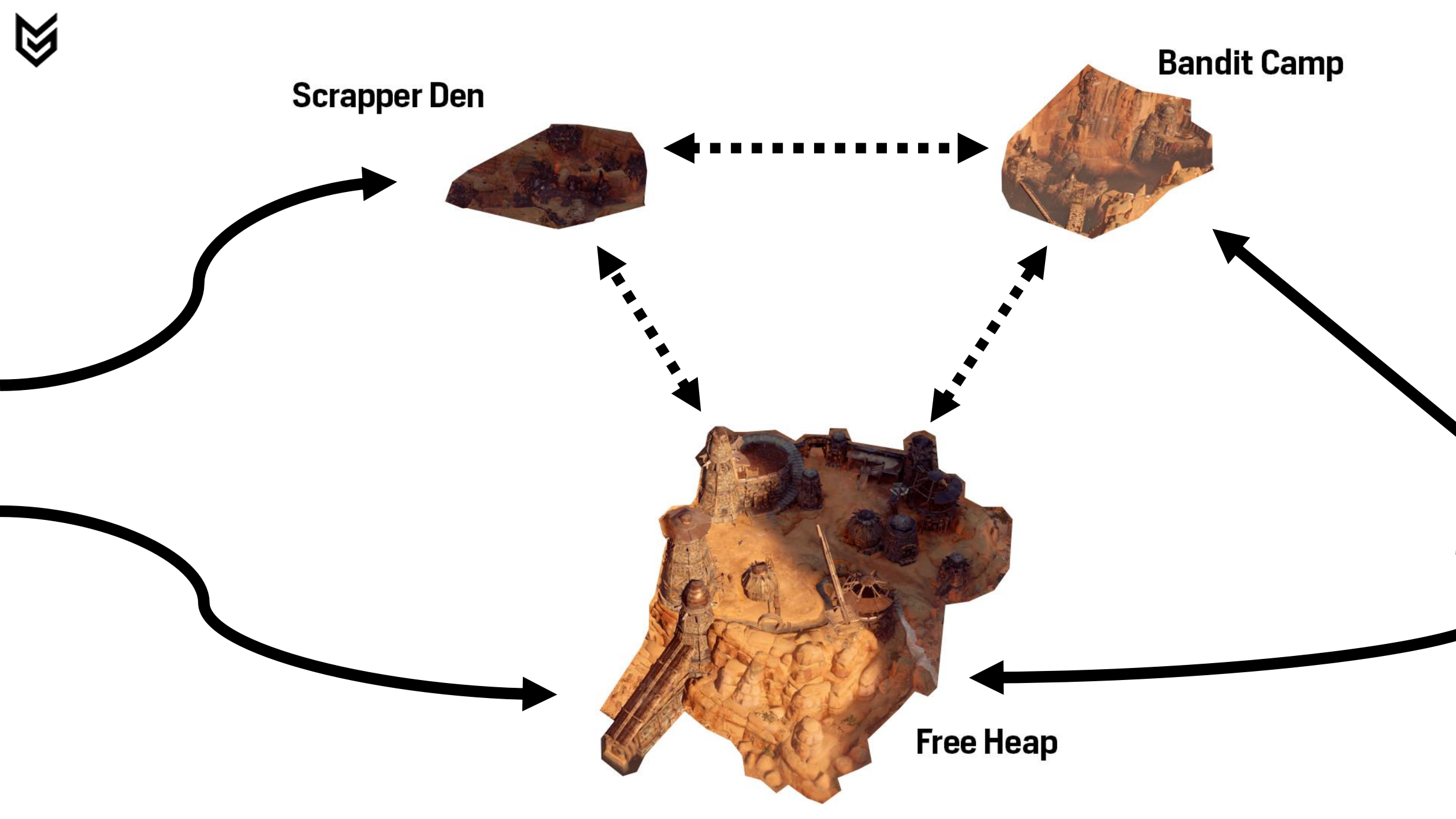


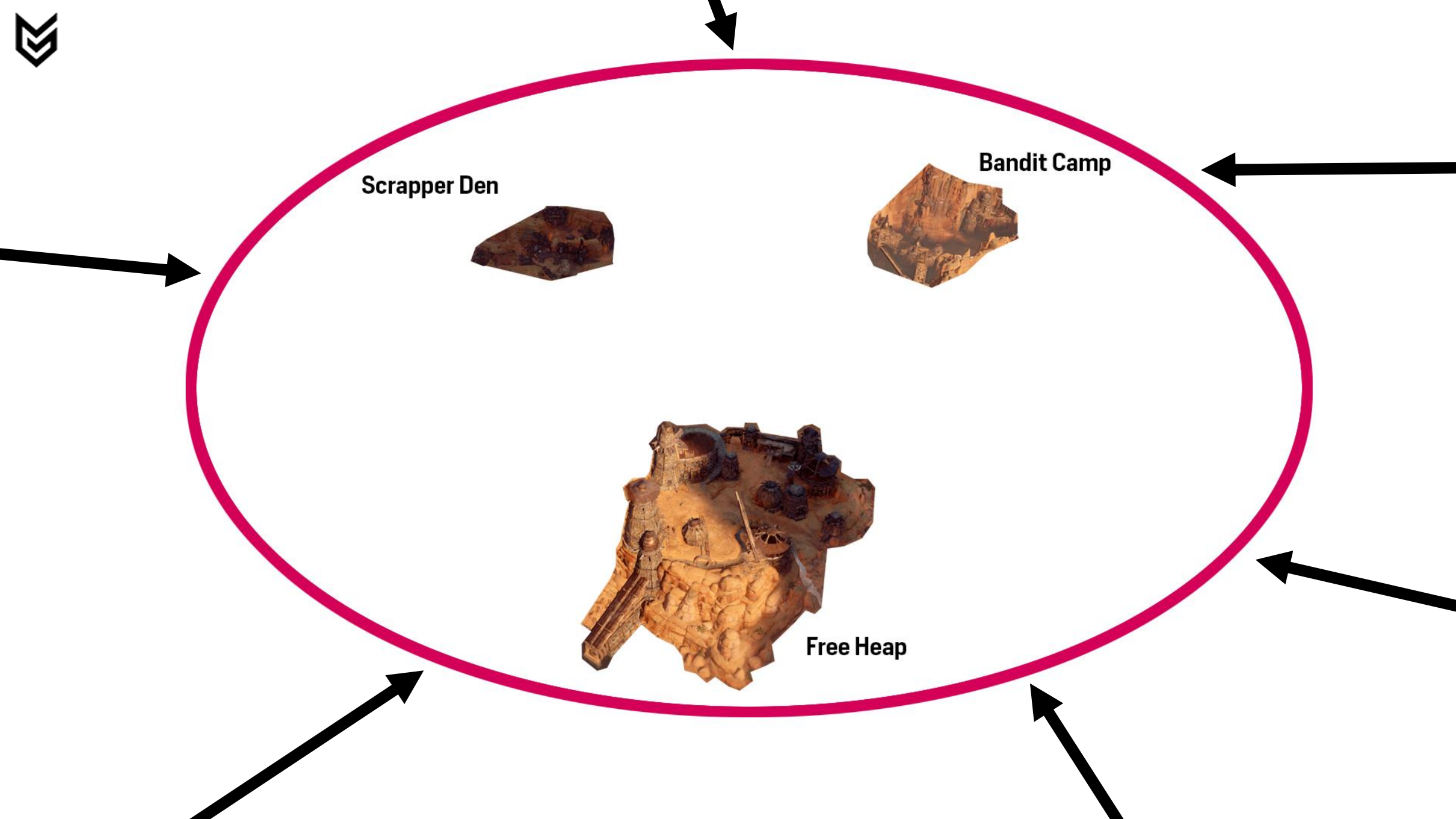
Free Heap

Free Heap as Experiment



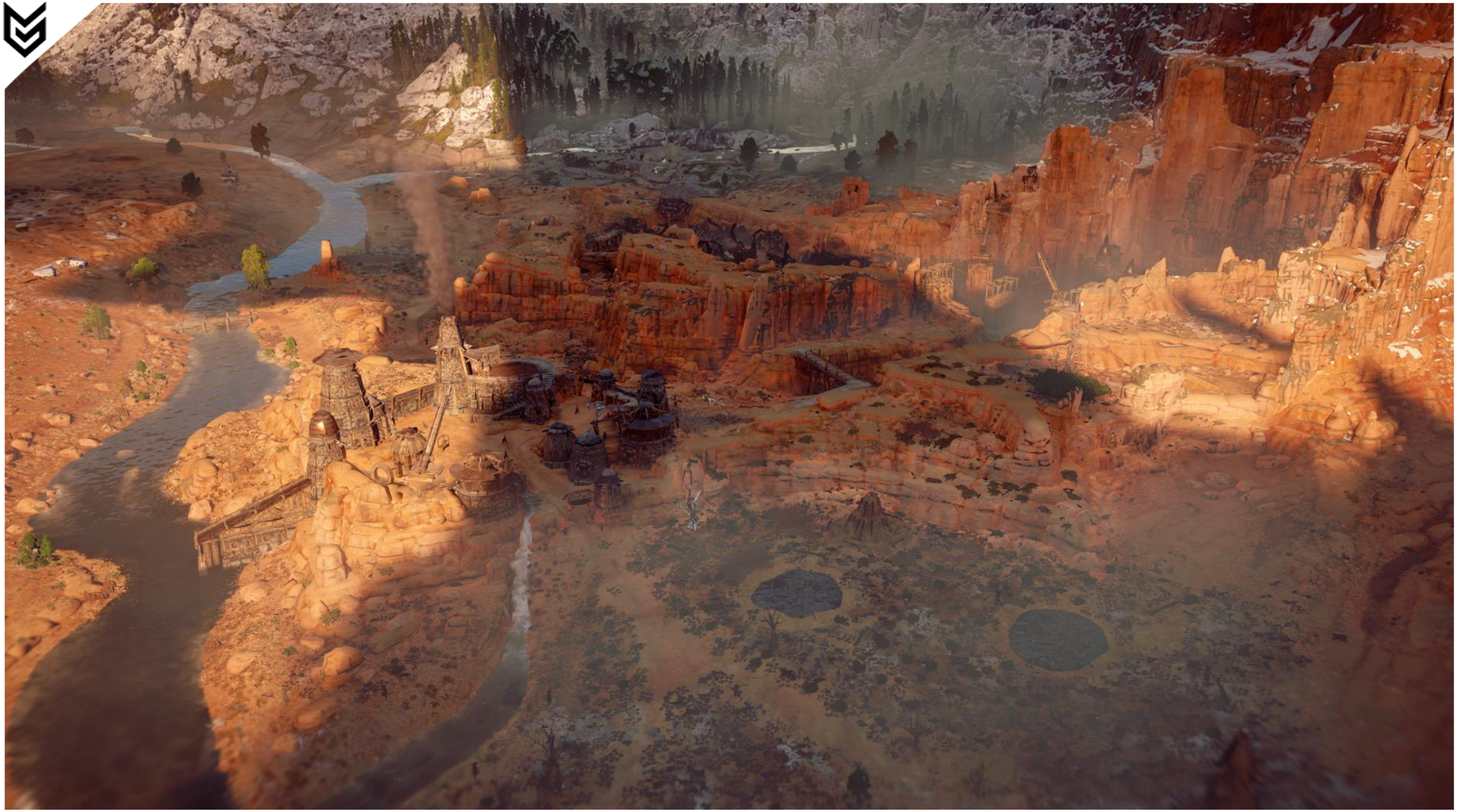


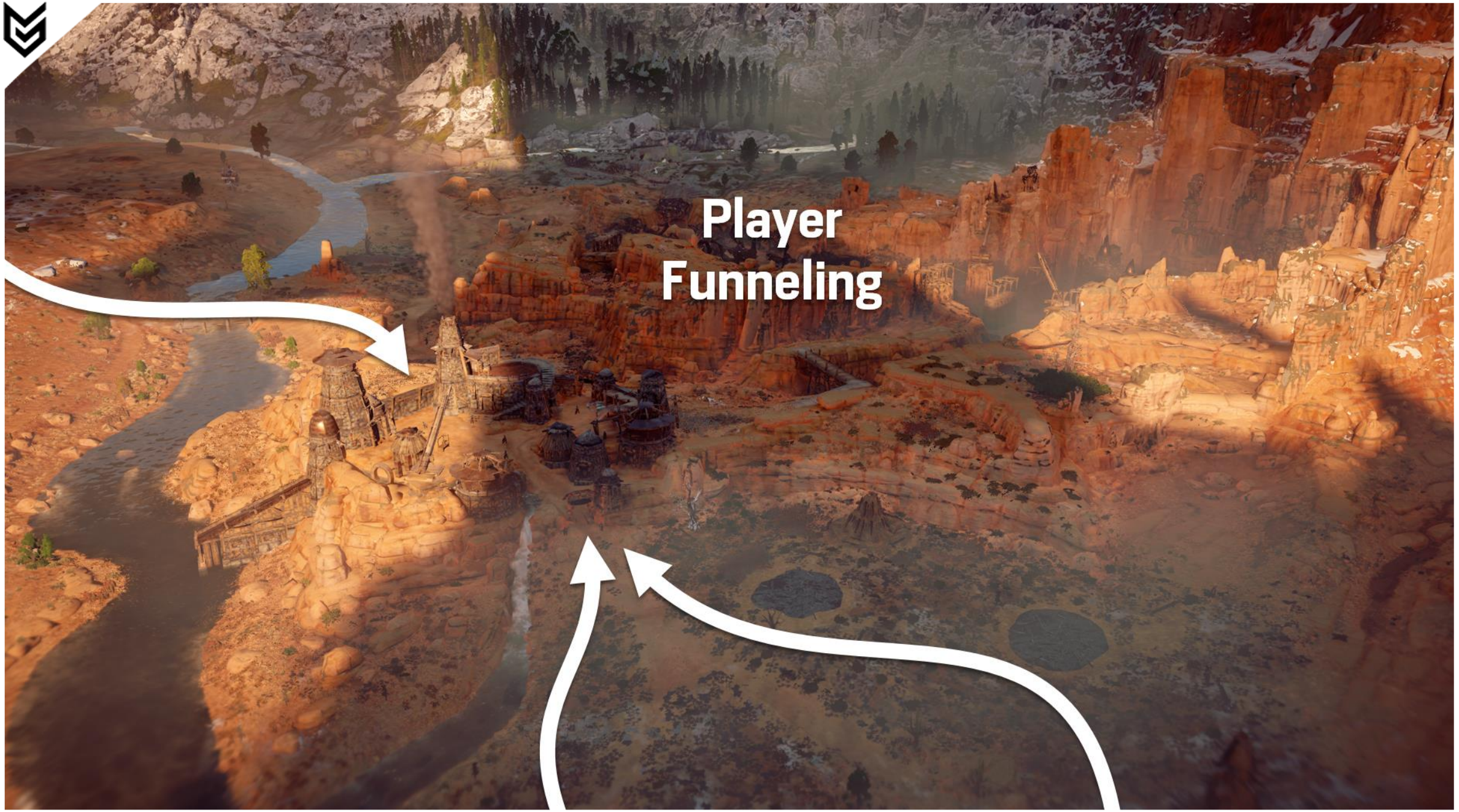

Scrapper Den
Bandit Camp
Free Heap


Scrapper Den
Bandit Camp
Free Heap

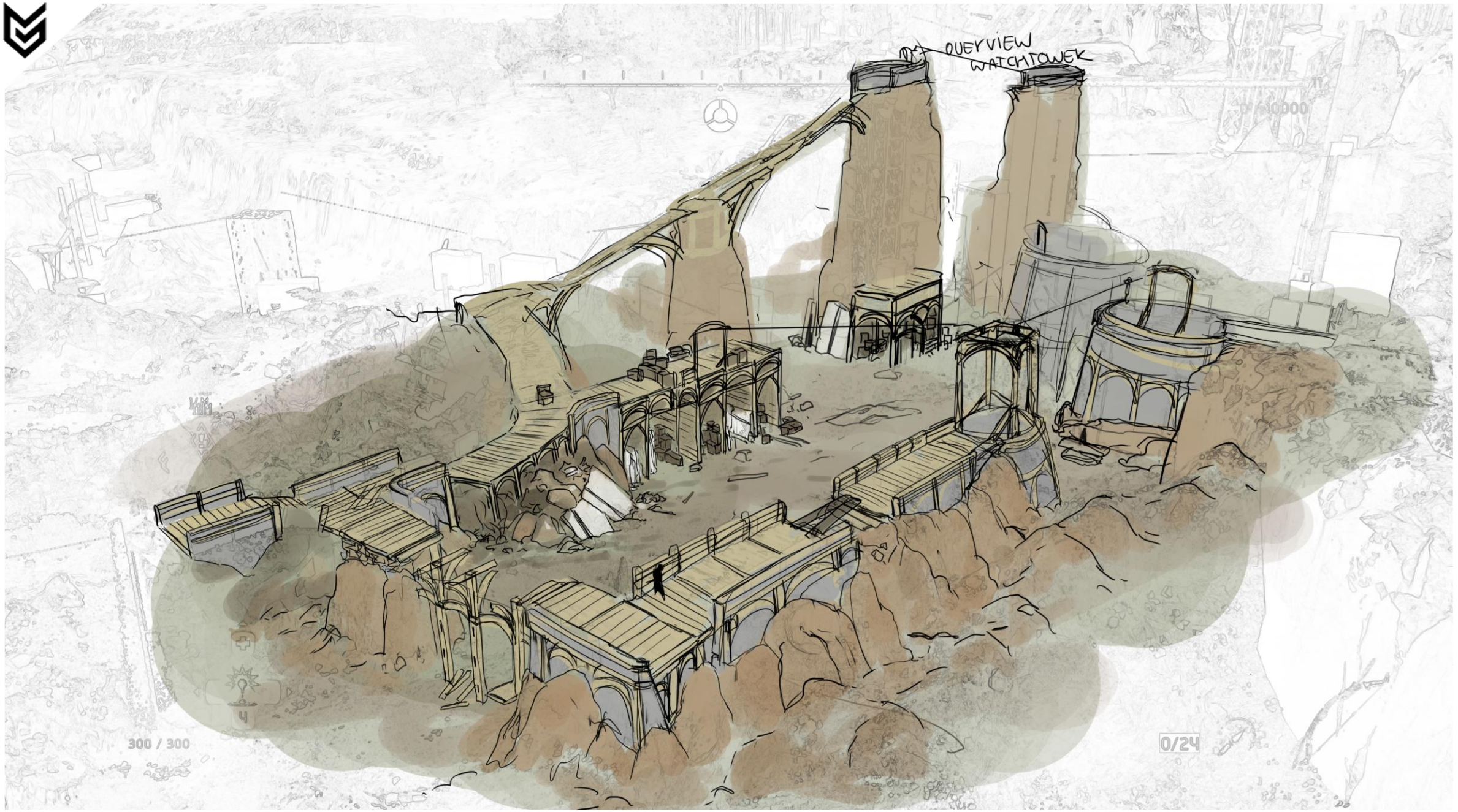
Scrapper Den

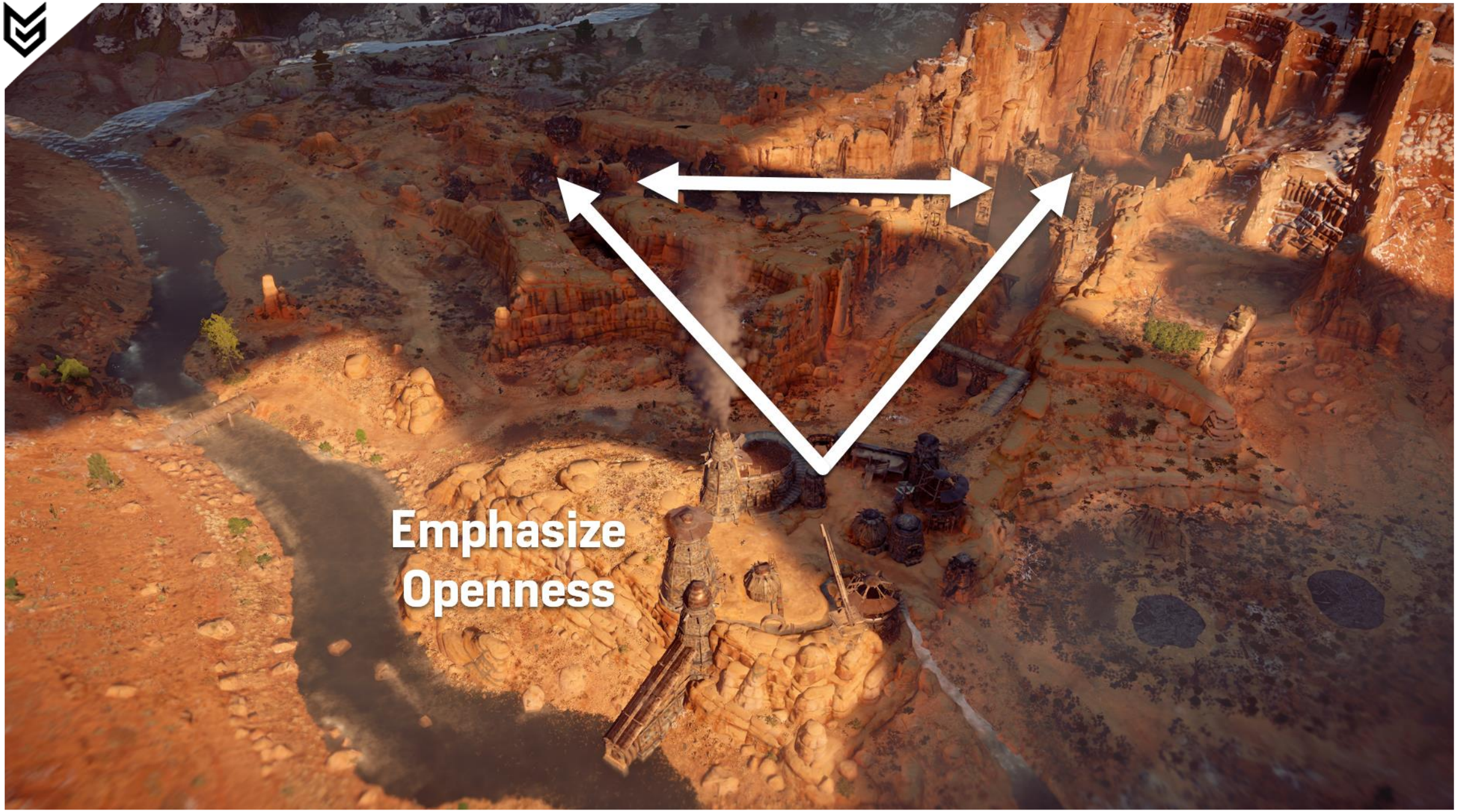
Bandit Camp

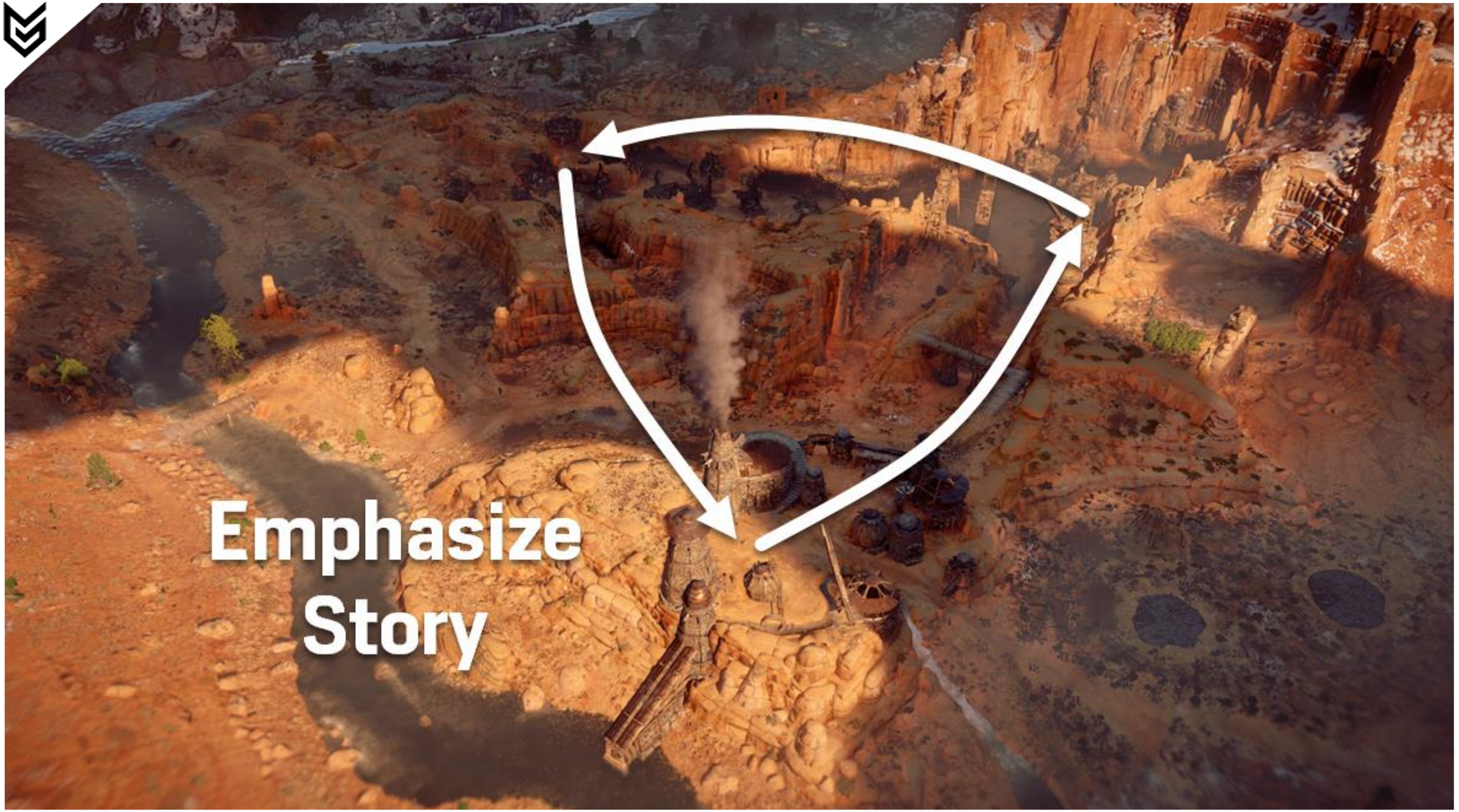



Player
Funneling

W
12
13
2
1/39


OVERVIEW
WATCHTOWER
300 / 300
0/24


Emphasize
Openness

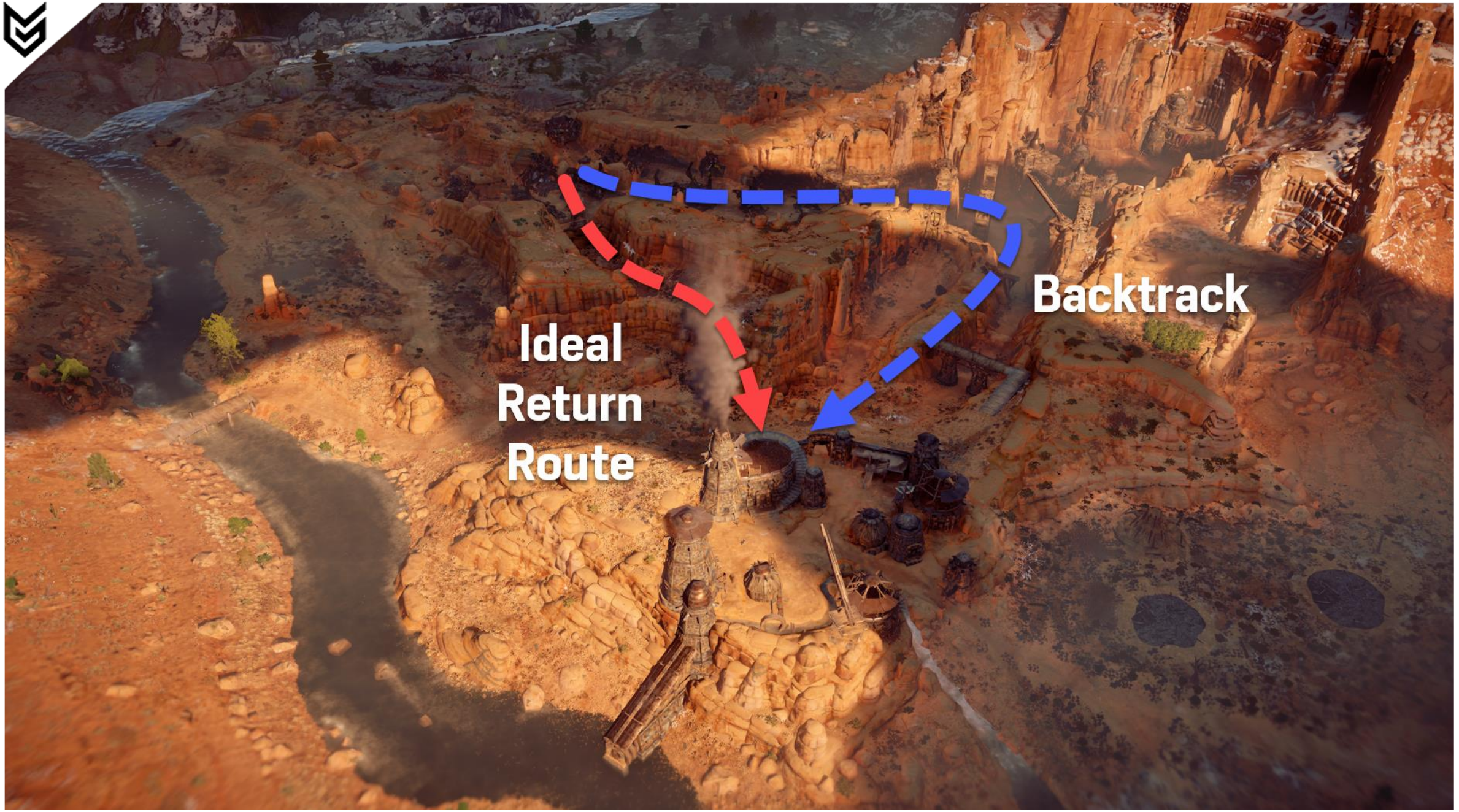

Emphasize
Story

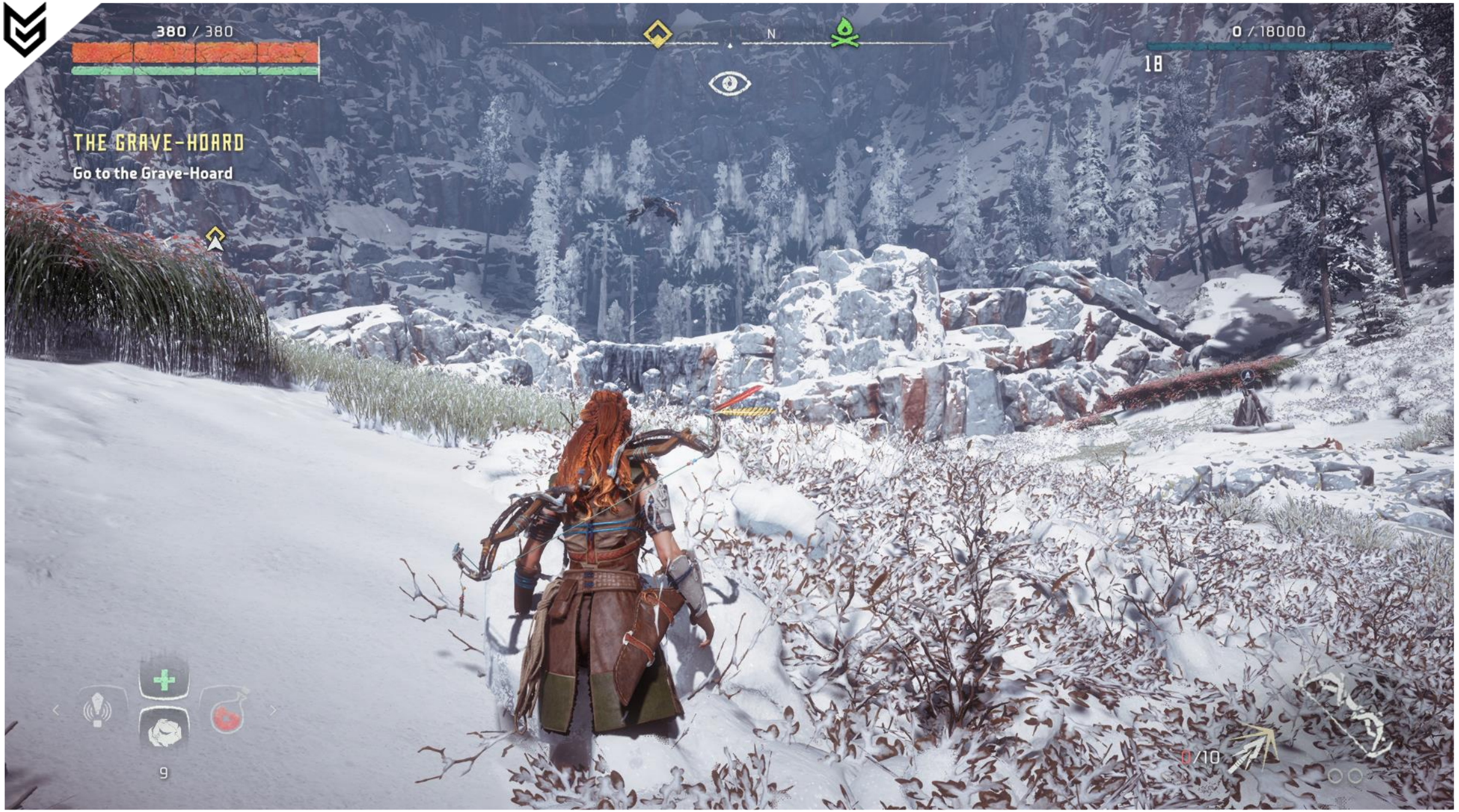
Bestowal
Location

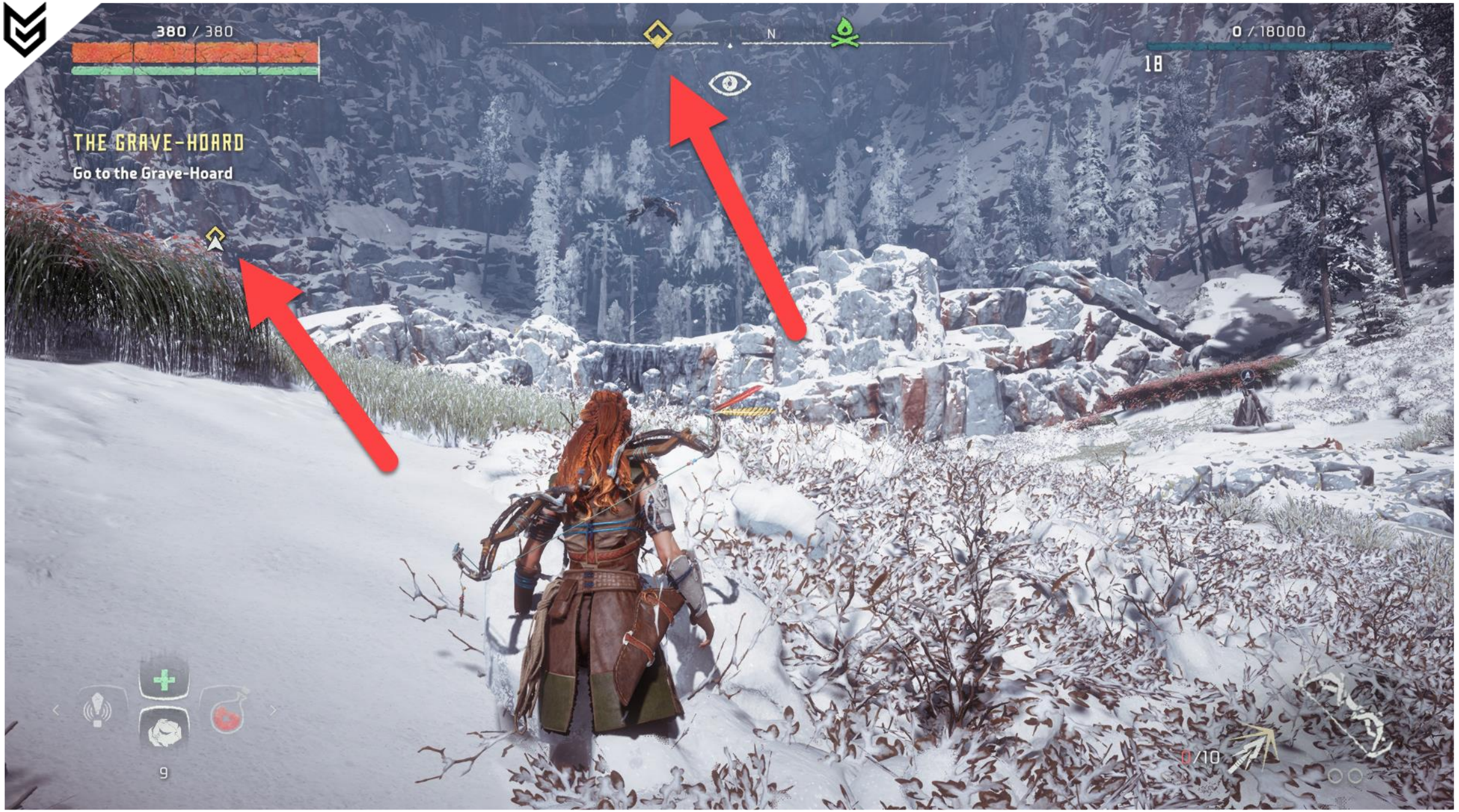
Act I
Get the Power
Cells from the
Bandit Hideout

Act II
Get Parts From
the Scrapper Lair

Act III
Return Components
to Petra.
Defend Free-Heap


Backtrack
Ideal
Return
Route


380 / 380
N
0 / 18000
18
THE GRAVE-HOARD
Go to the Grave-Hoard
9
0/10


380 / 380
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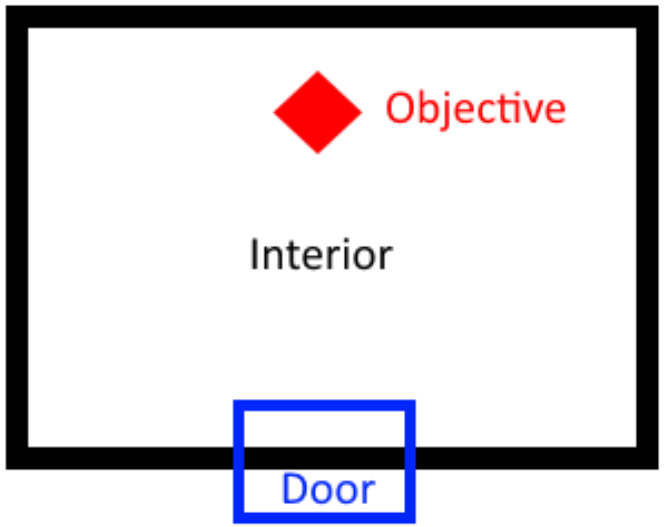
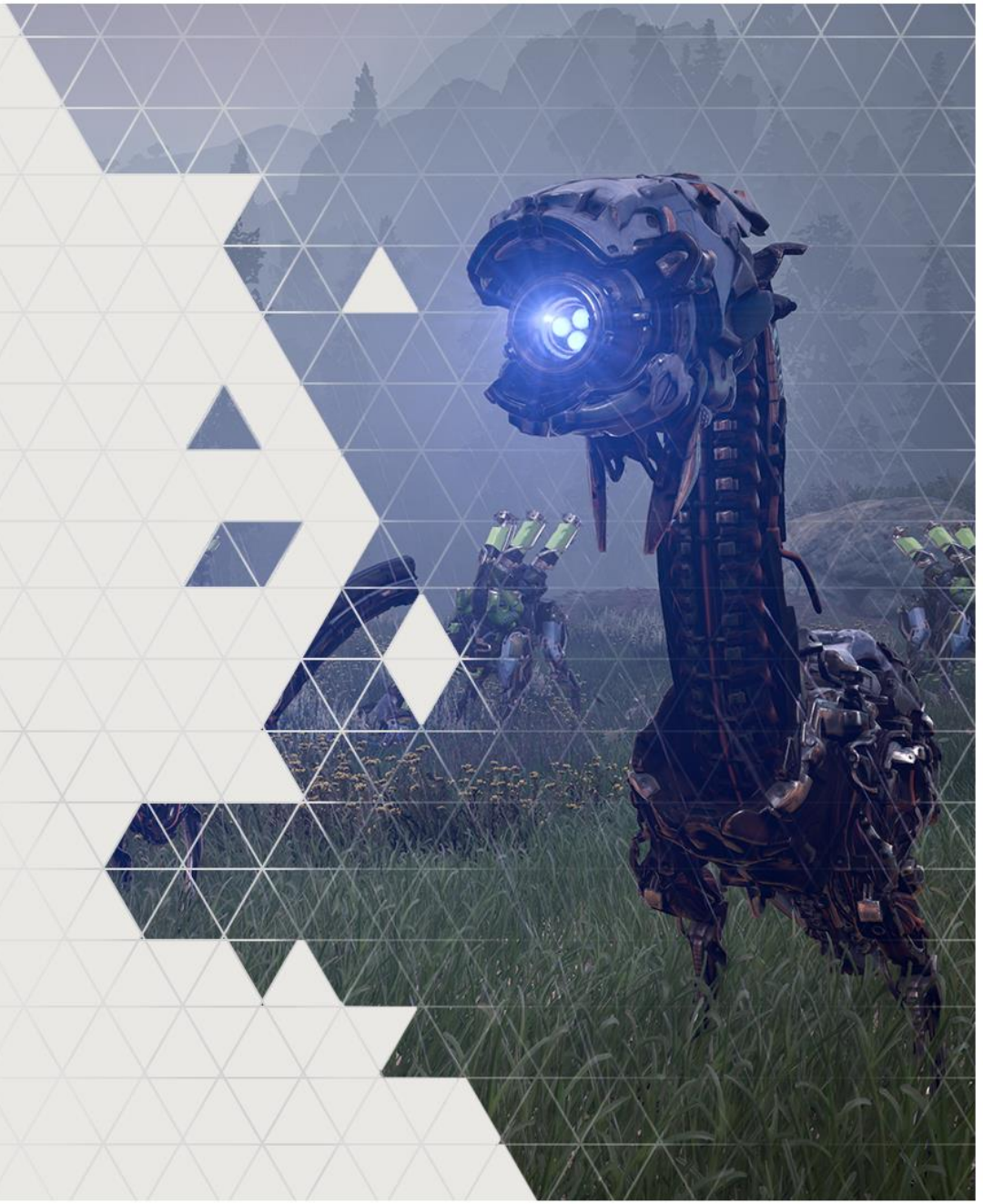
18
THE GRAVE-HOARD
Go to the Grave-Hoard
9
0/10

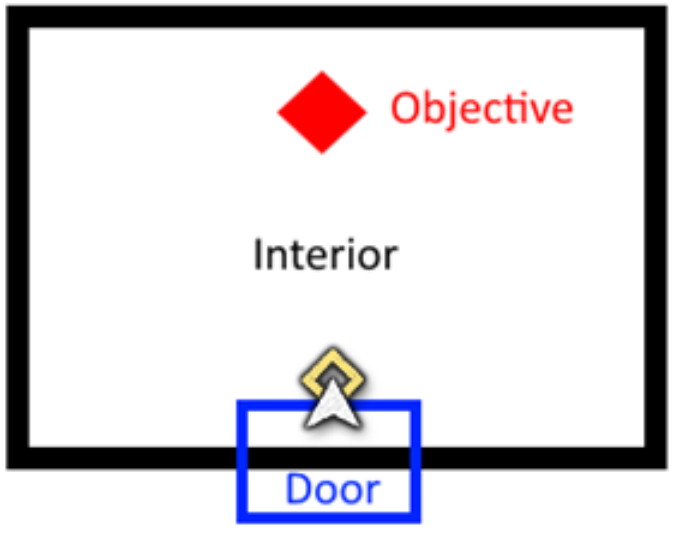
Breadcrumbing



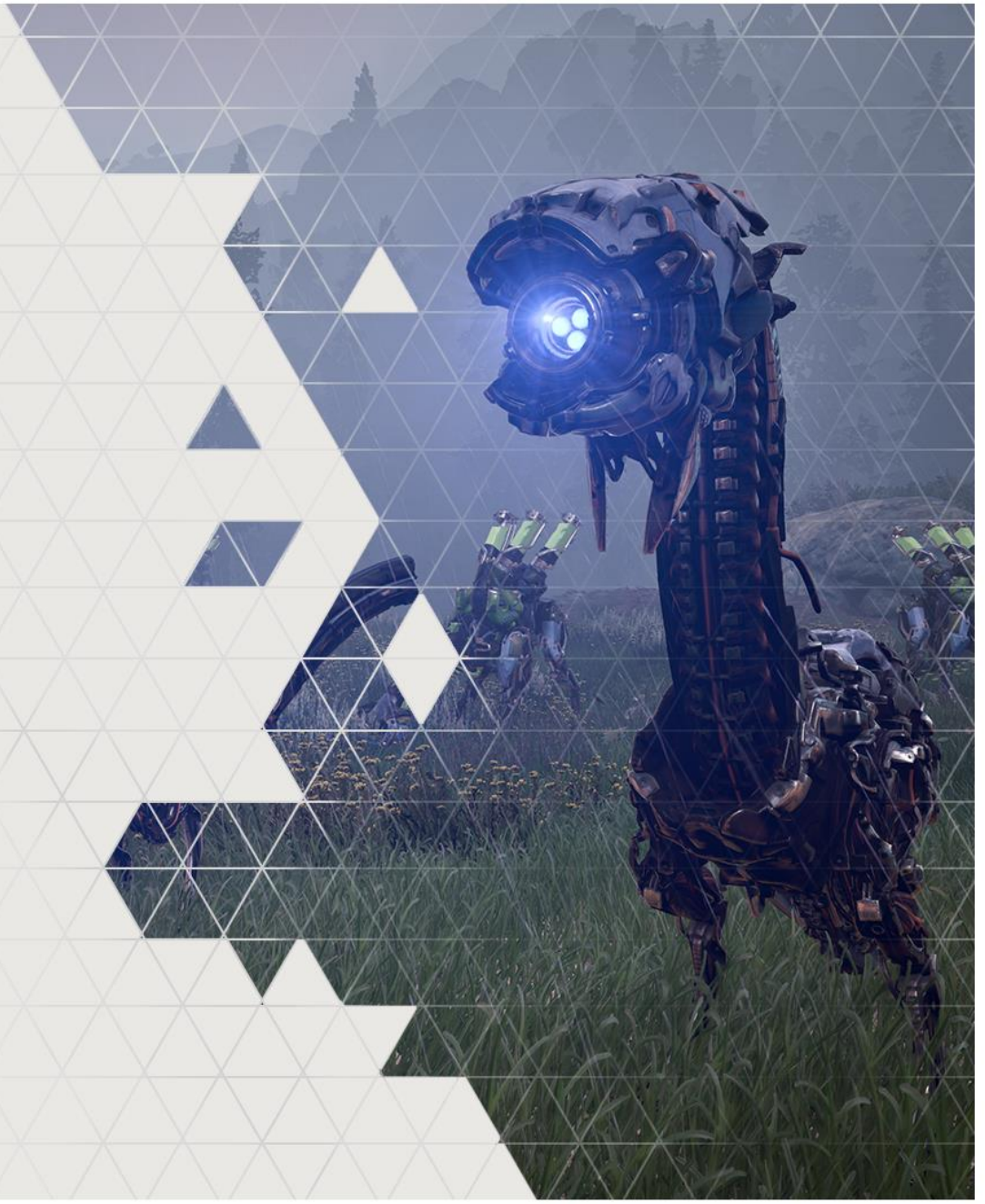
Player



Breadcrumbing

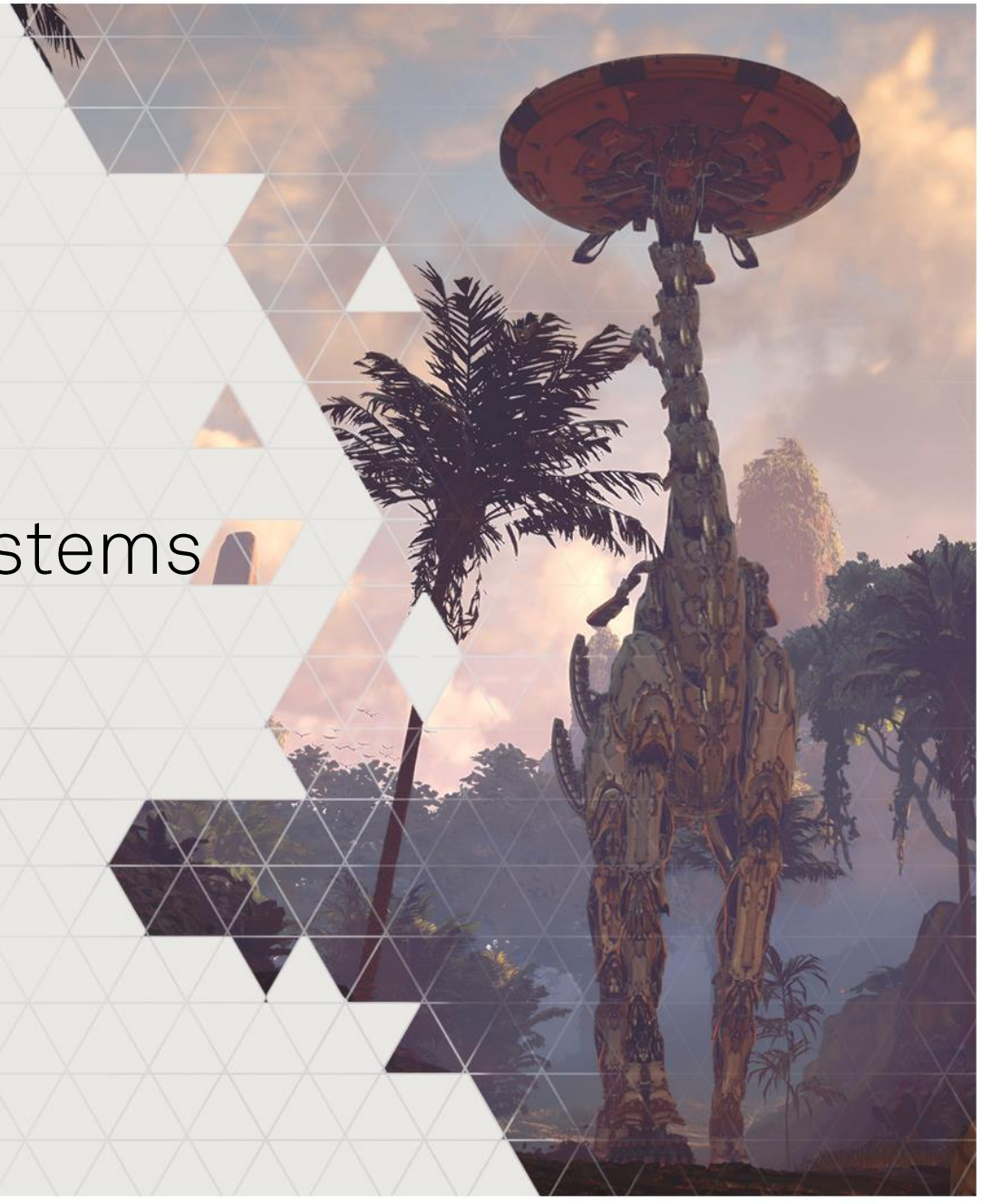


Player

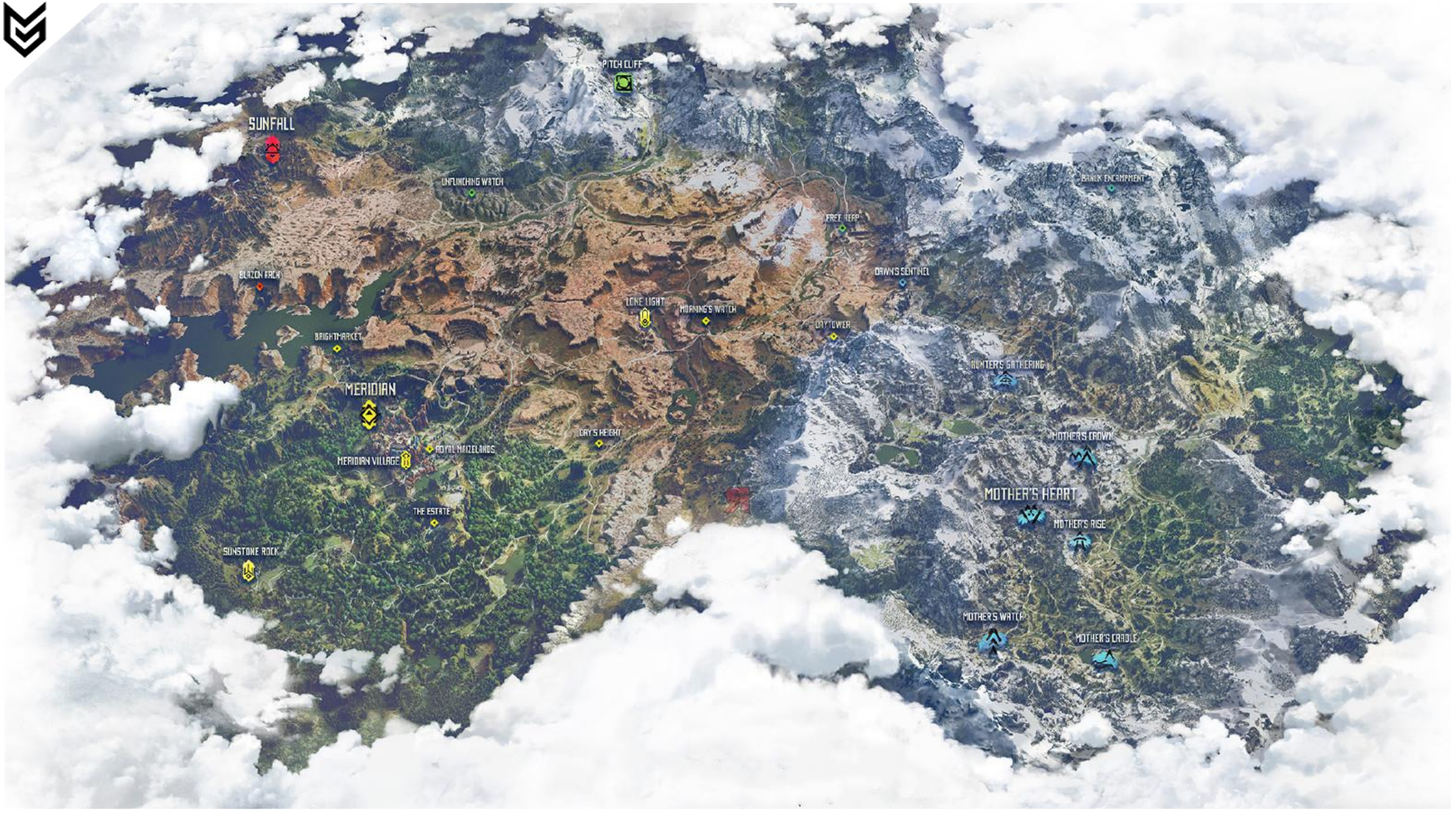


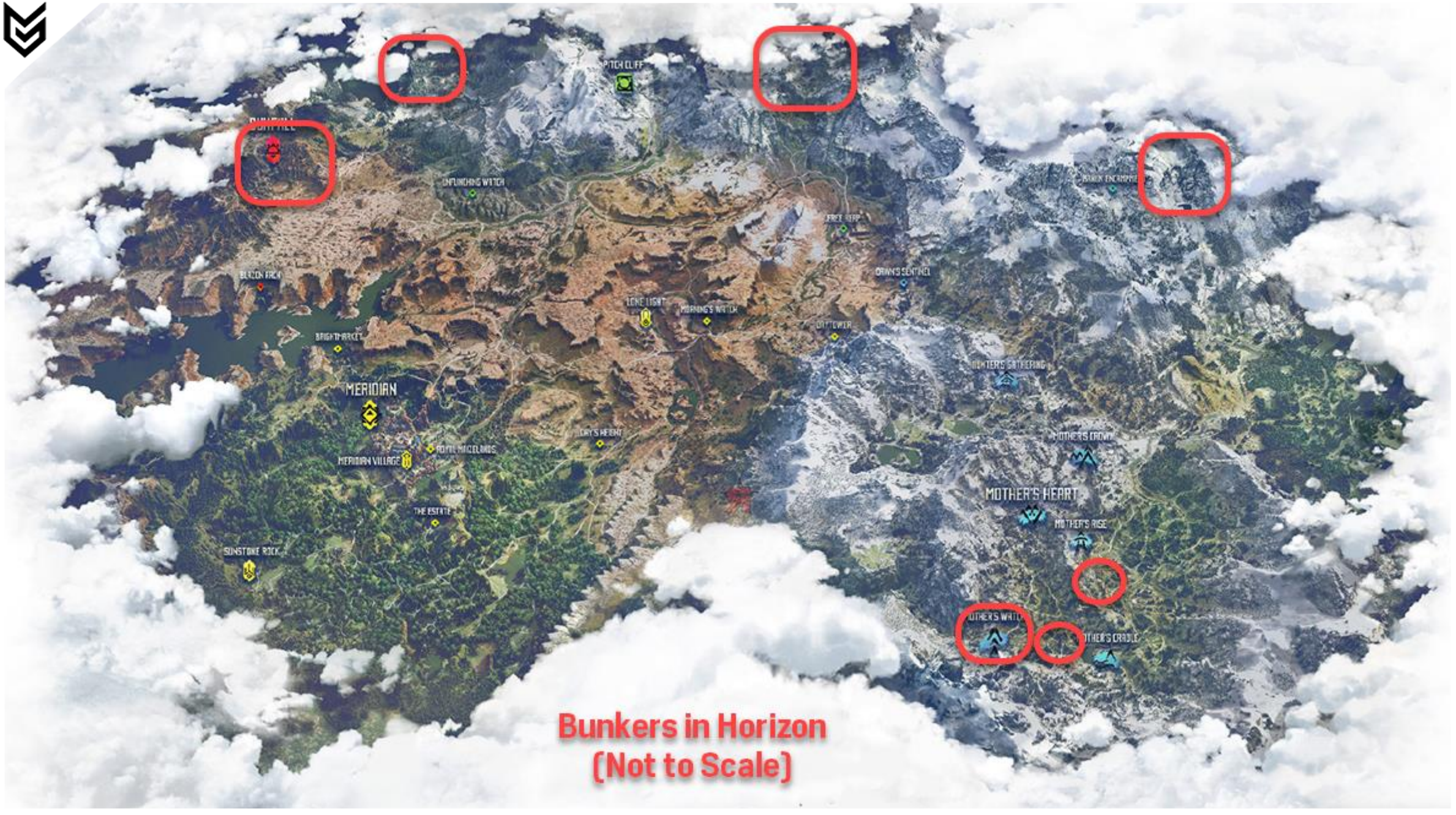
Free Heap Conclusions

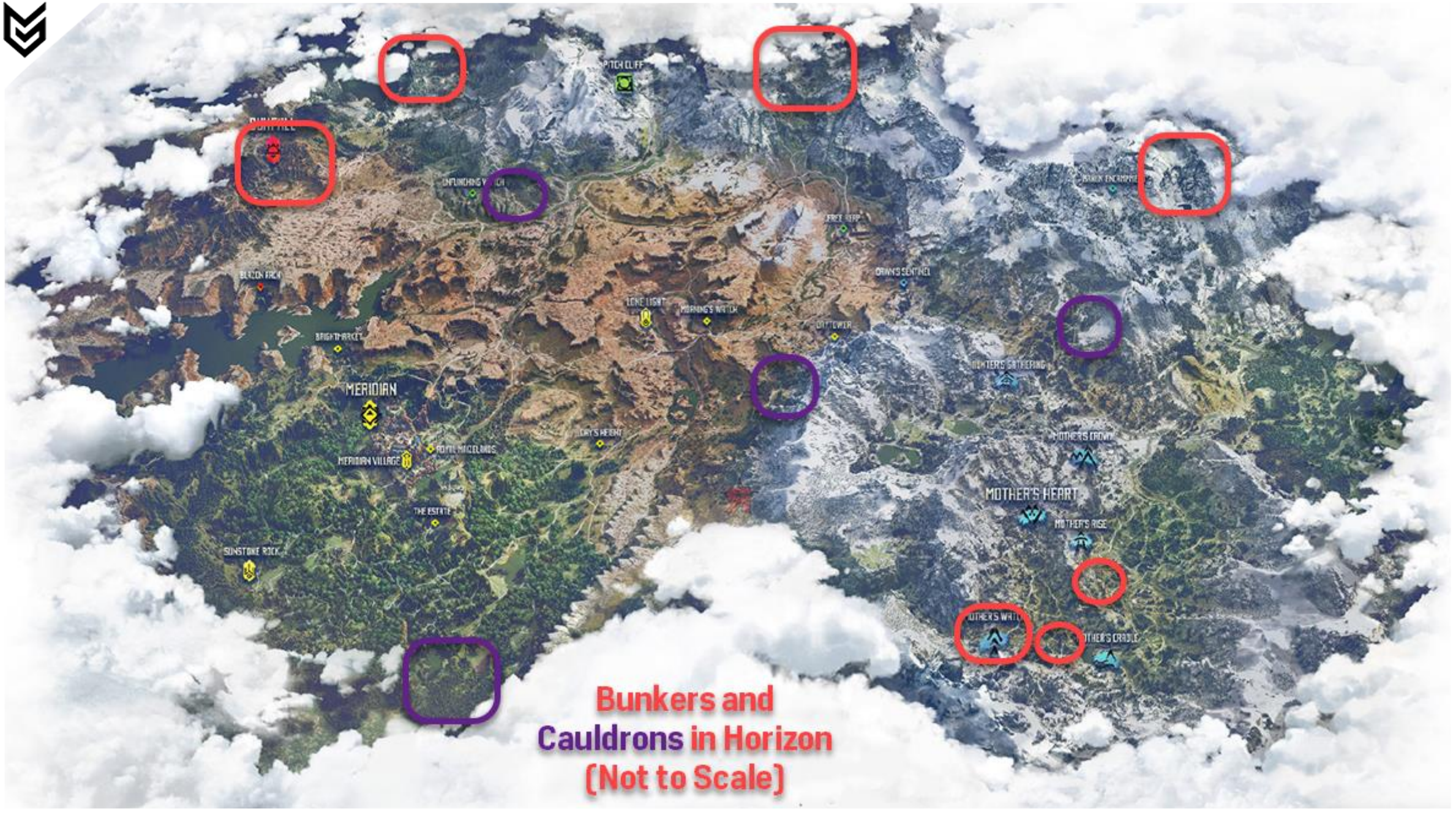
- More Linear than MMORPGs
- Story is your Structure
- Invest in Player Guidance Systems



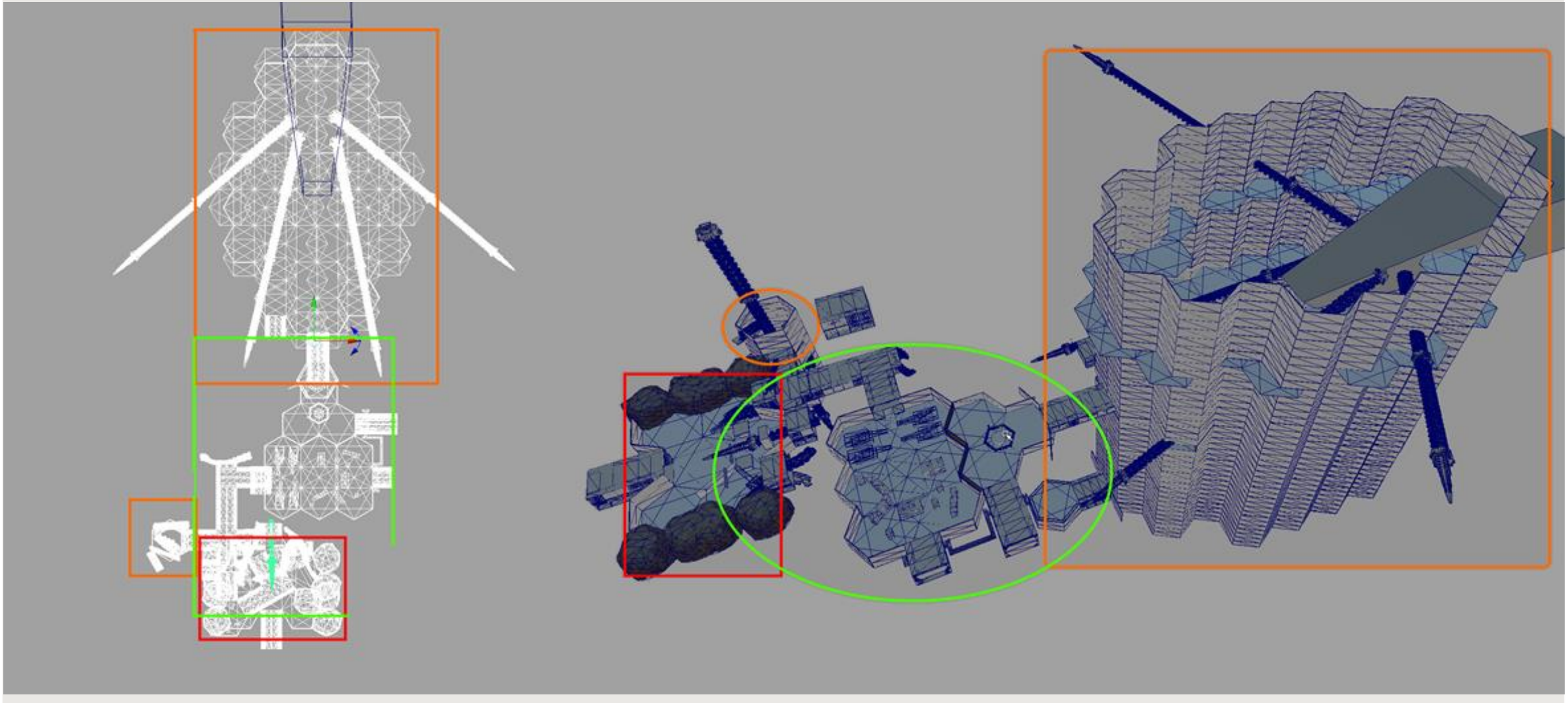
The Grave-Hoard

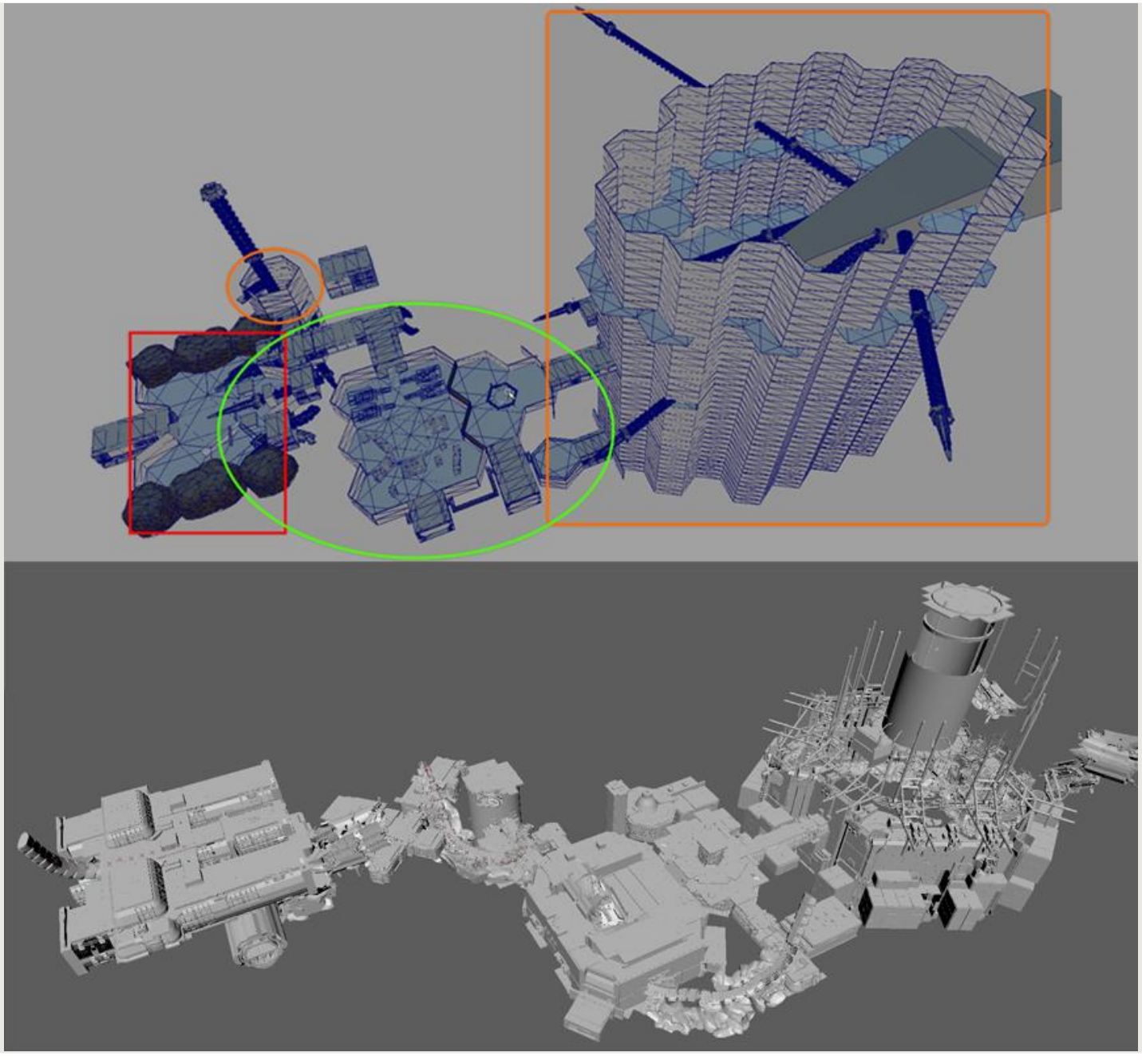

PITCH CLIFF
SUNFALL
UNFLINCHING WATCH
BANLU ENCAMPMENT
FREE KEEP
BLAZON RACH
DAWN'S SENTINEL
LONE LIGHT
MORNING'S WATCH
DAYTOWER
BRIGHTMARKET
HUNTER'S GATHERING
MERIDIAN
DAY'S HEIGHT
MOTHER'S CROWN
ROYAL MAIZELANDS
MERIDIAN VILLAGE
MOTHER'S HEART
THE ESTATE
MOTHER'S RISE
SUNSTONE ROCK
MOTHER'S WATCH
MOTHER'S CRADLE

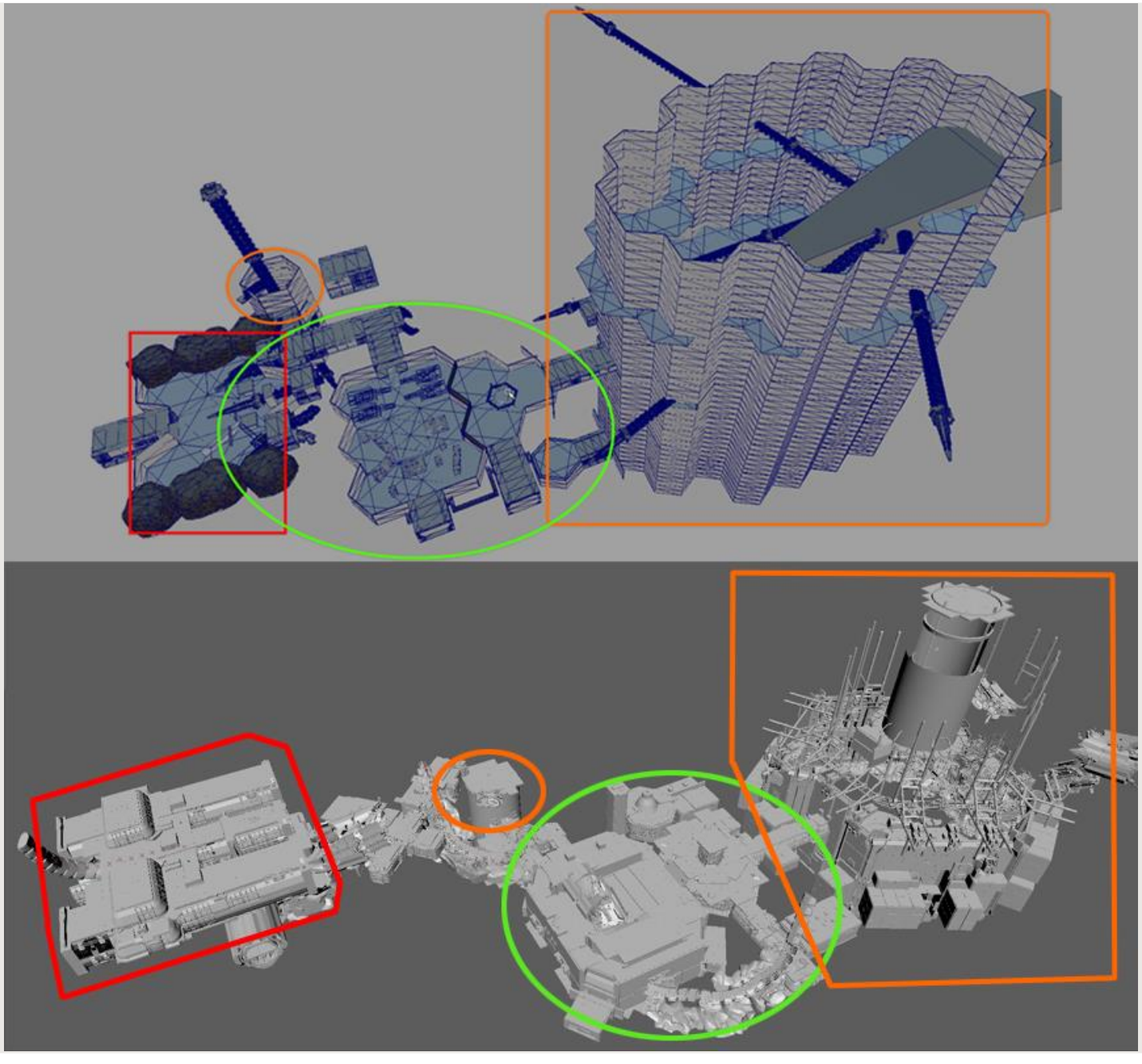

PITCH CLIFF
UNFURLING WATER
BEACON ROCK
BRIGHTWATER
MERIDIAN
MERIDIAN VILLAGE
ROYAL MAUSOLEUMS
THE ESTATE
SUNSTONE ROCK
DAY'S HEART
LONE LIGHT
MORNING'S WATCH
DAWN'S SENTINEL
HUNTER'S GATHERING
MOTHER'S CROWN
MOTHER'S HEART
MOTHER'S RISE
MOTHER'S CRADLE
Bunkers in Horizon
(Not to Scale)


PITCH CLIFF
BRIGHTMARKET
MERIDIAN
MERIDIAN VILLAGE
THE ESTATE
SUNSTONE ROCK
MOTHER'S HEART
MOTHER'S RISE
Bunkers and
Cauldrons in Horizon
(Not to Scale)

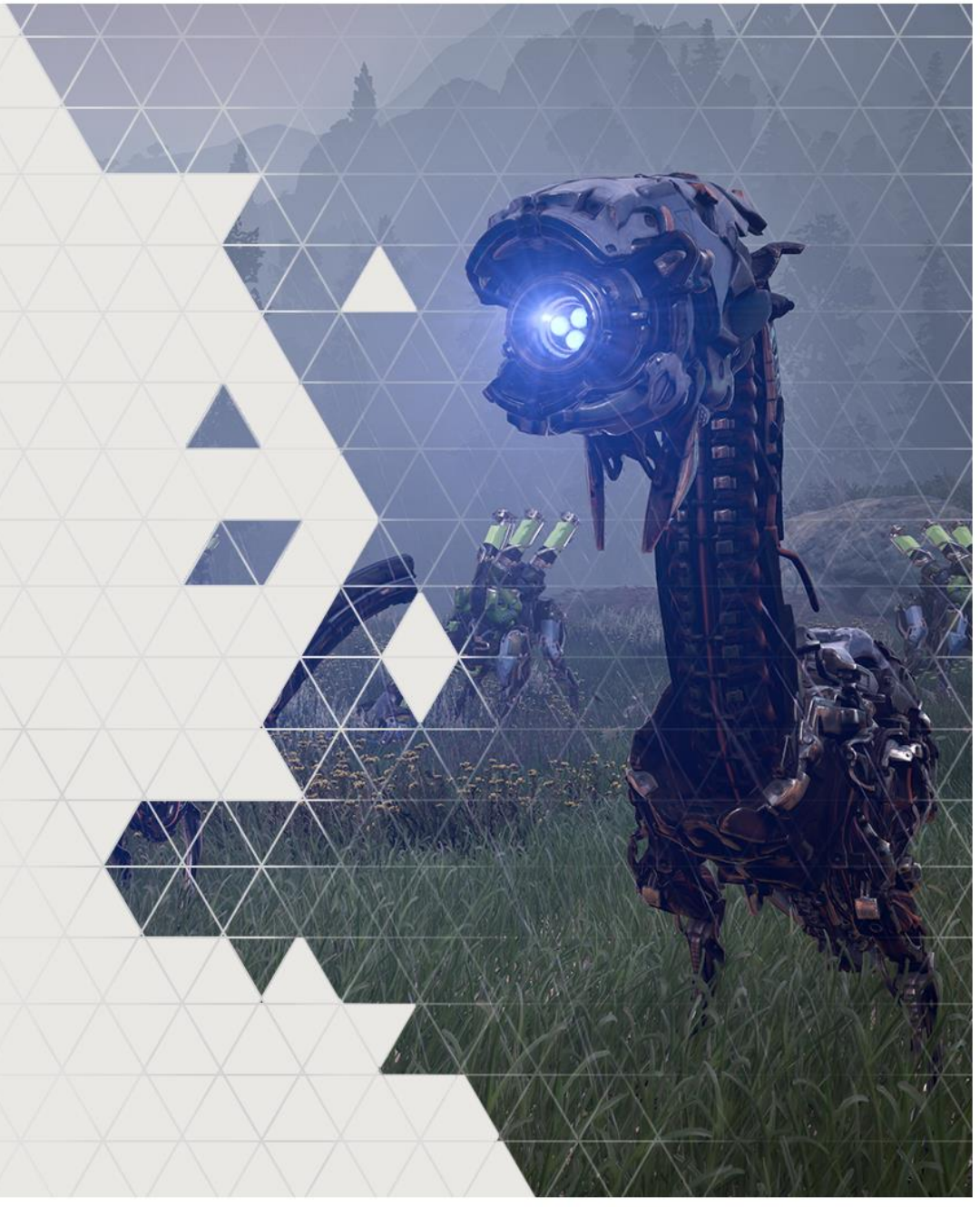
The Hole I chose to Die On (In)

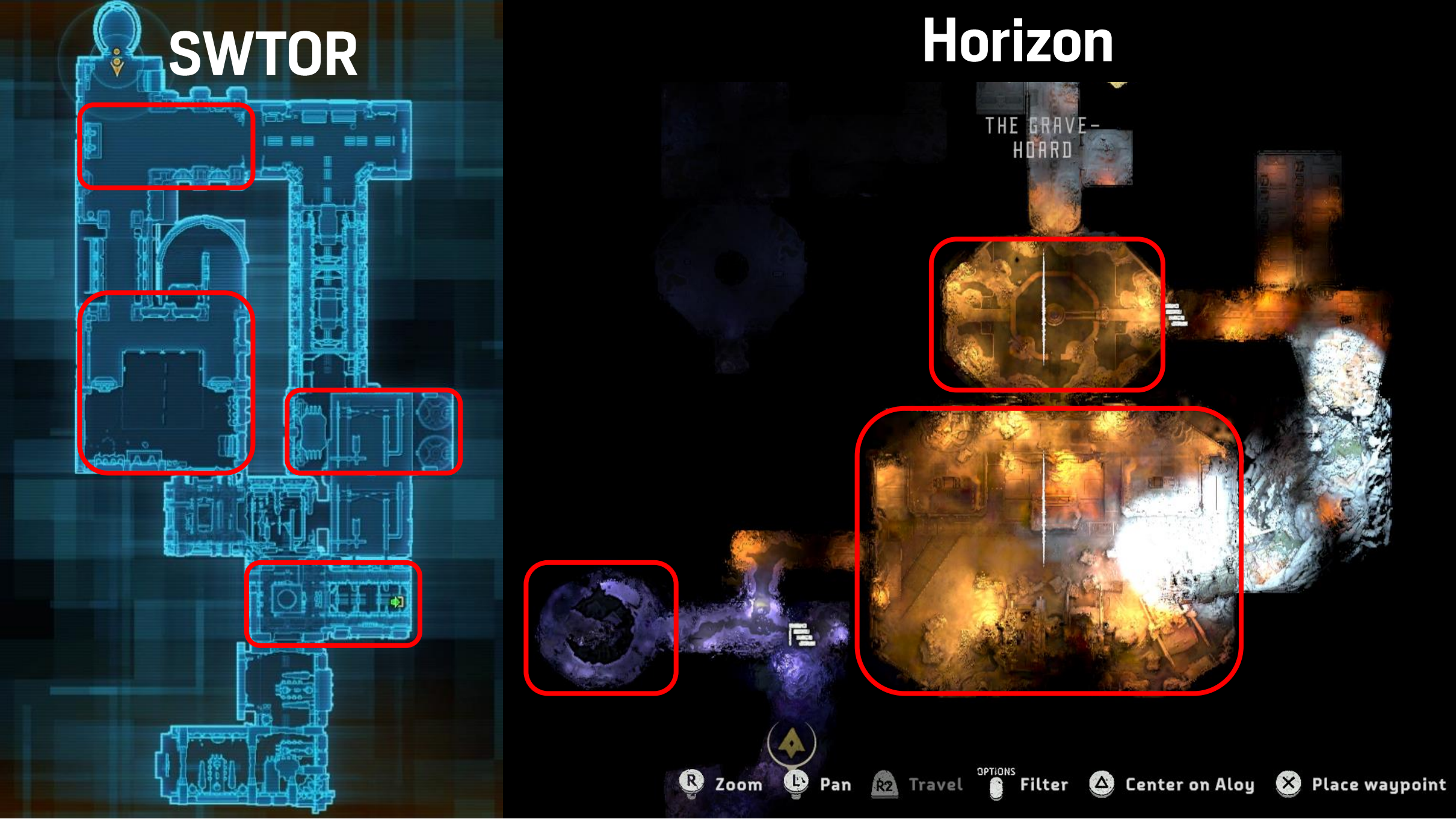




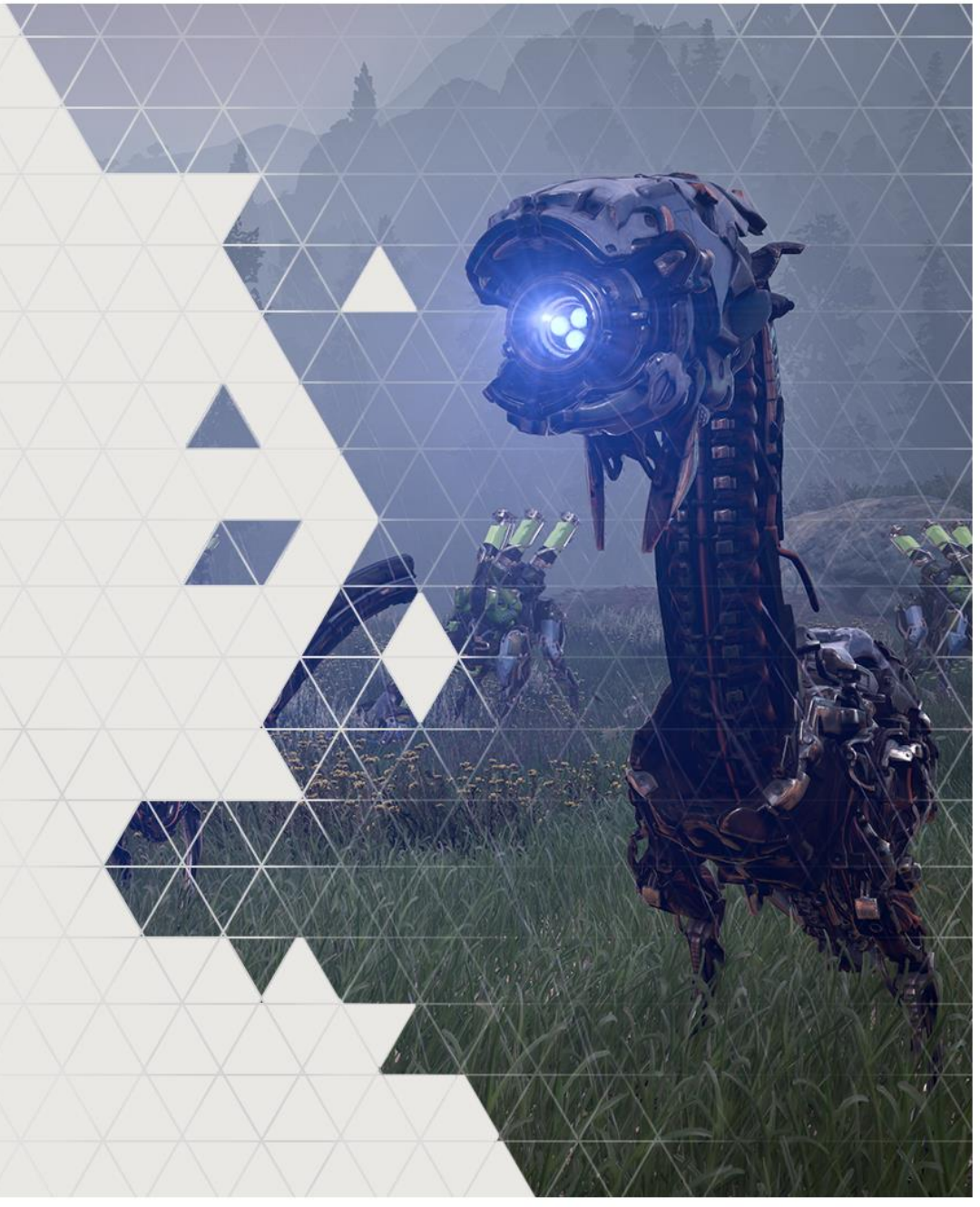


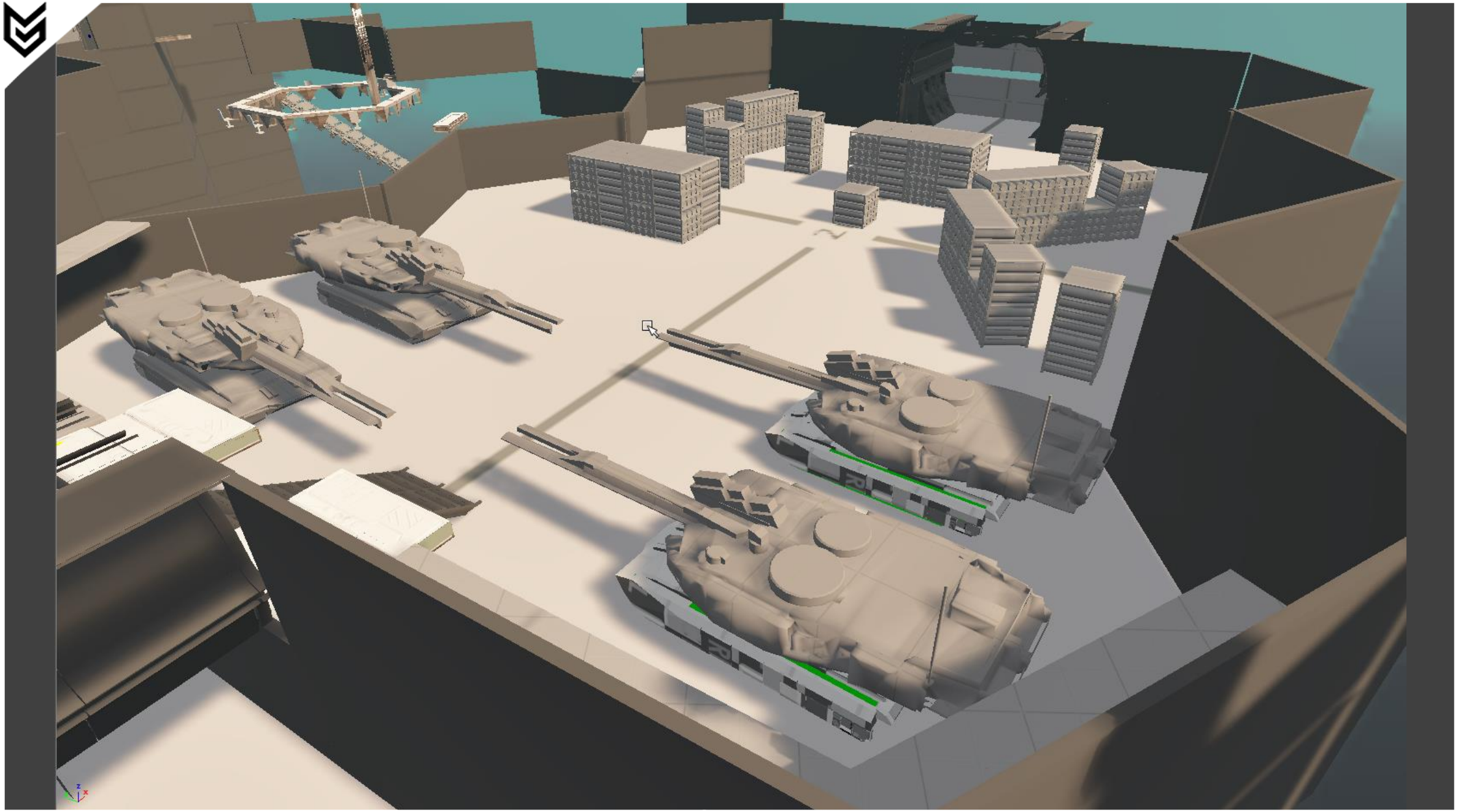
Macro vs Micro Level Design

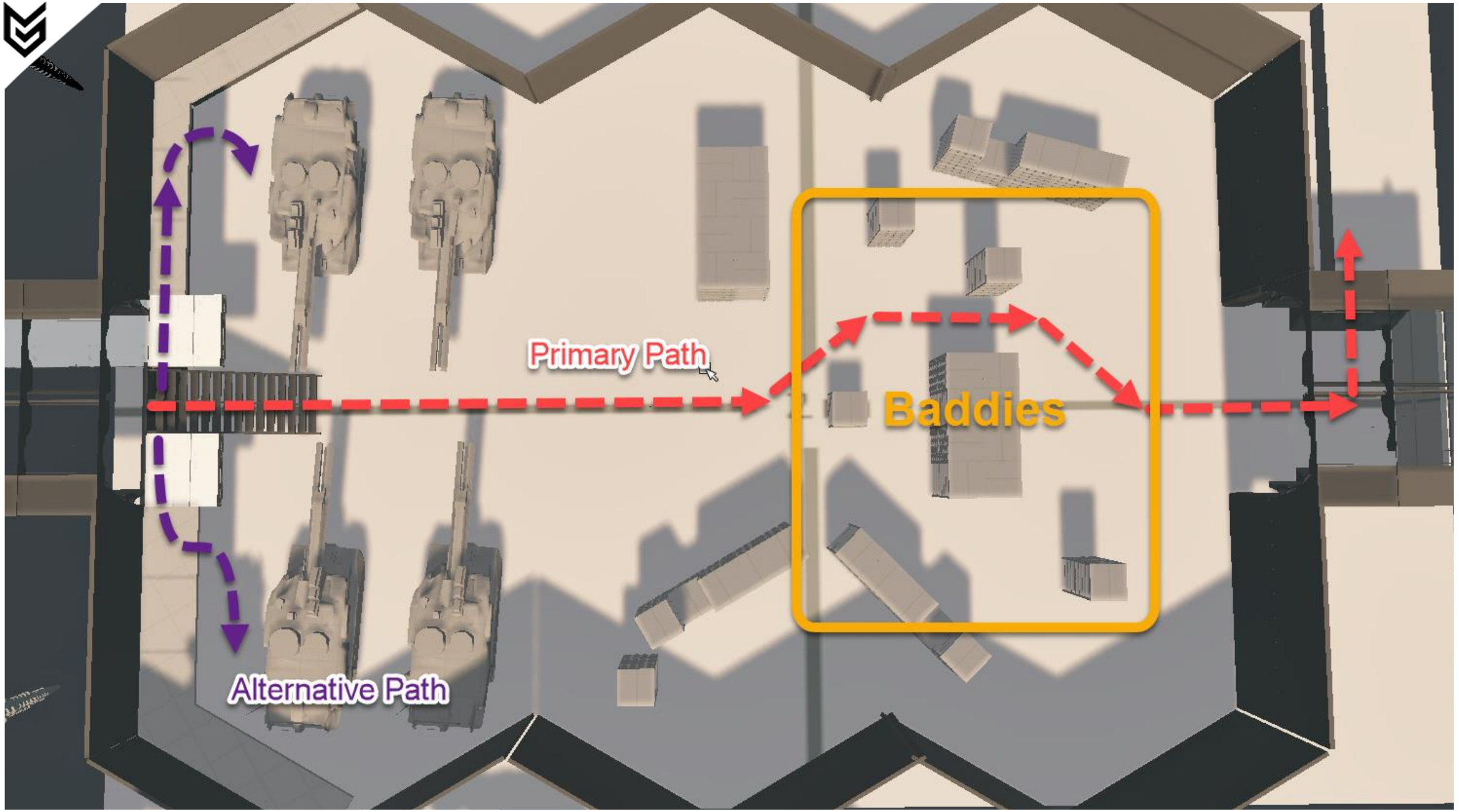



SWTOR
Horizon
THE GRAVE-
HOARD
Zoom
Pan
Travel
OPTIONS
Filter
Center on Aloy
Place waypoint

Macro vs Micro Level Design






Primary Path
Baddies
Alternative Path

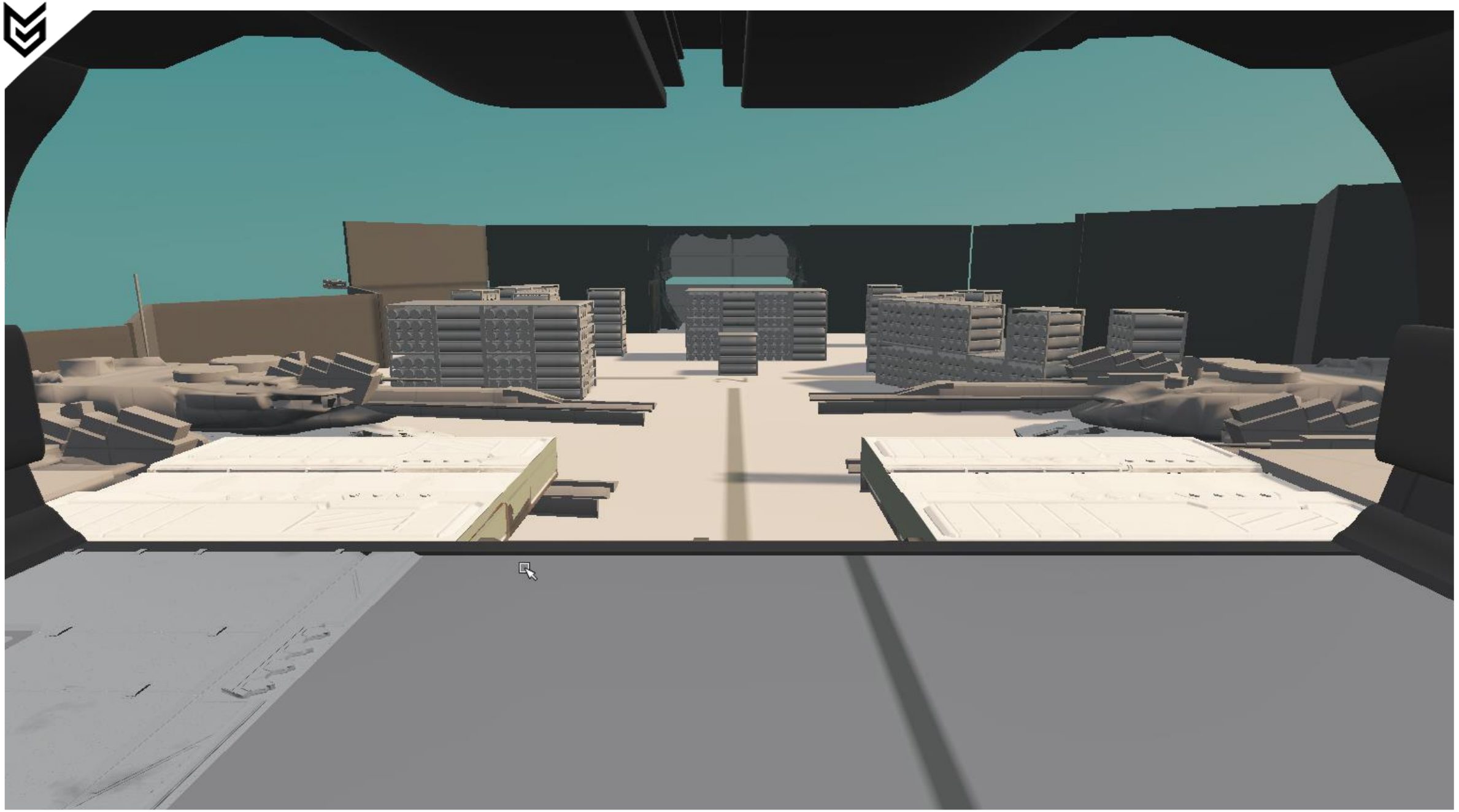
Initial Armory Feedback

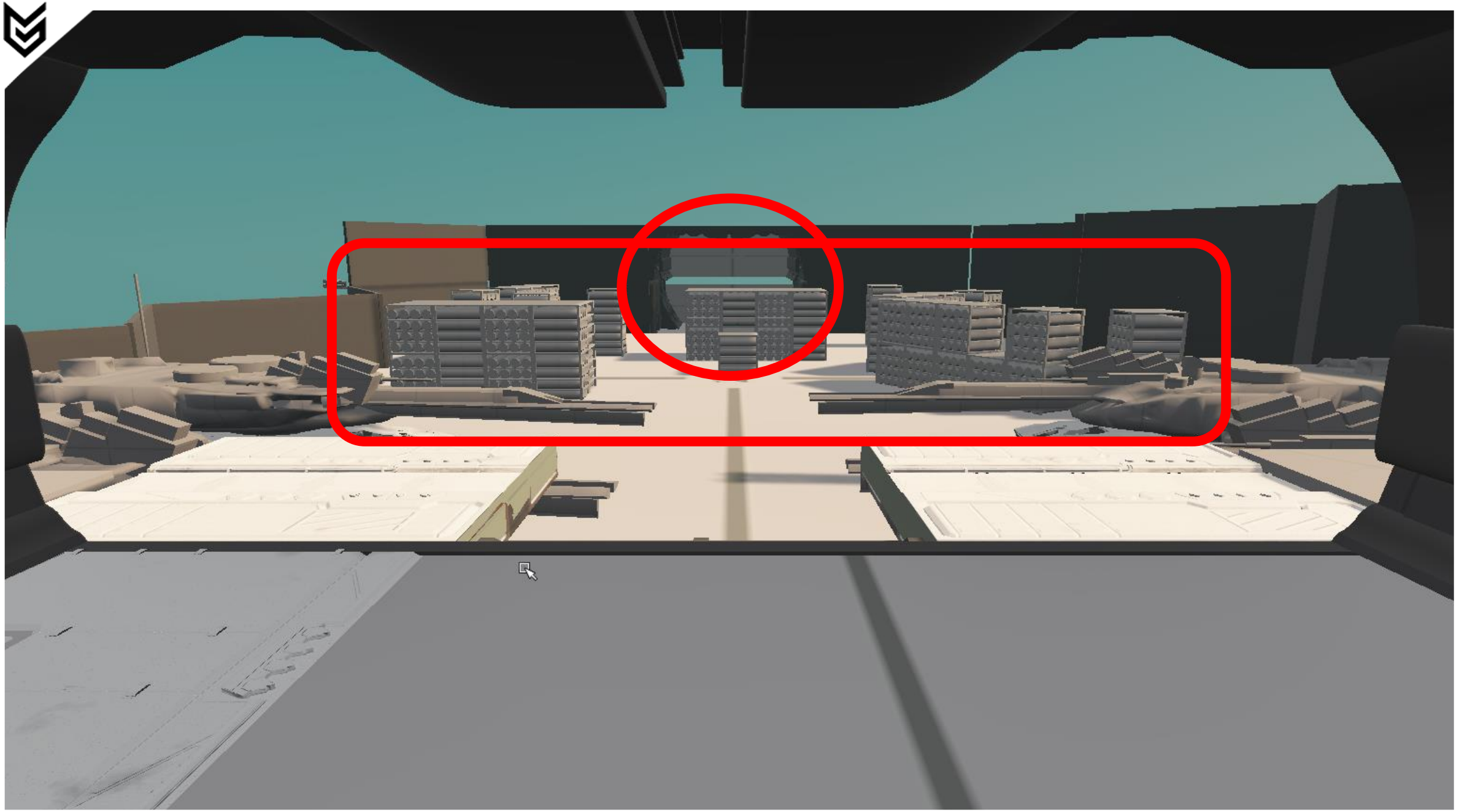
- Bad Readability
- Overly Simple
- Uninteresting
- Like a bad Killzone level
  - How do you make a good Killzone Level?

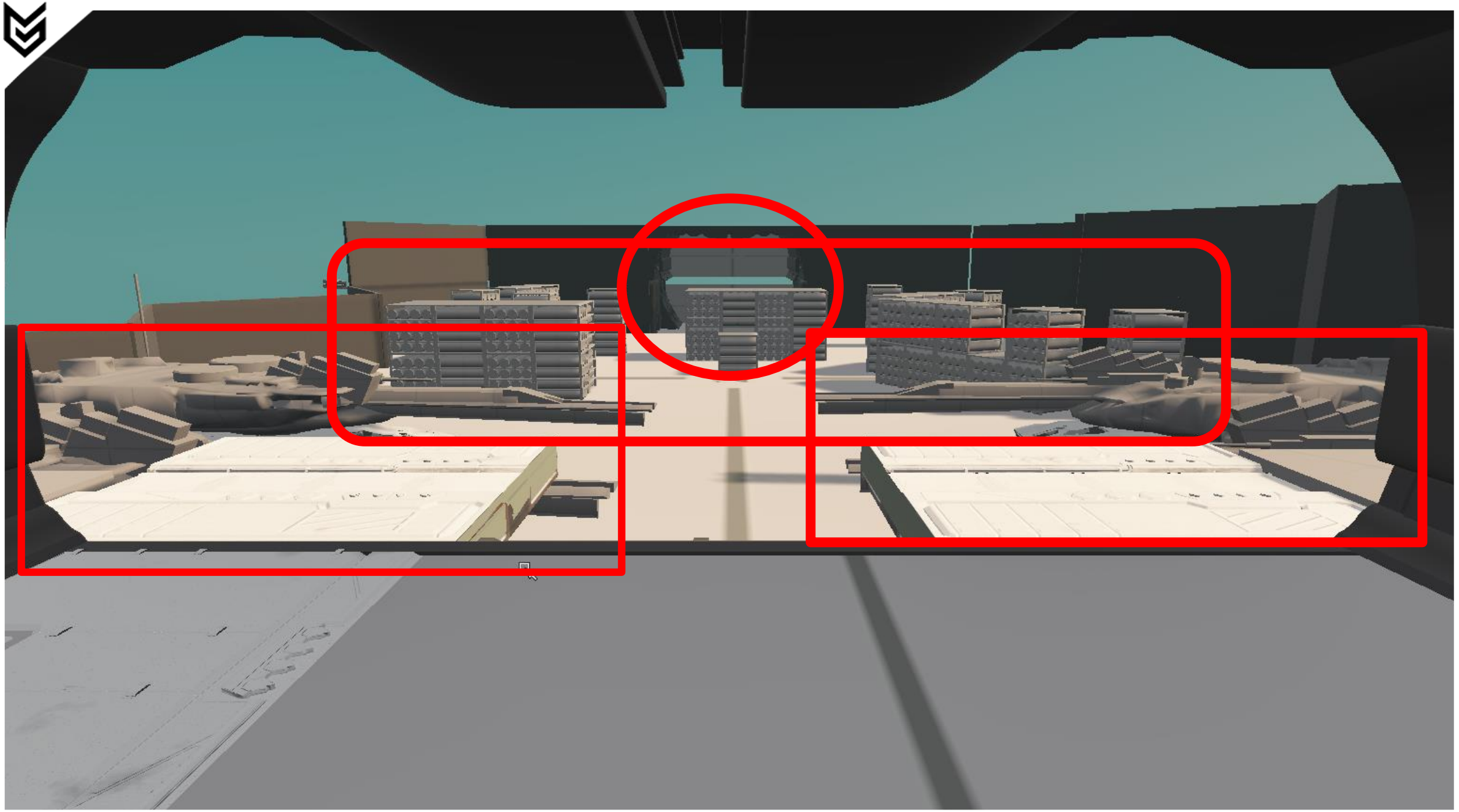
Lessons Learned from the Past

EG – Readability

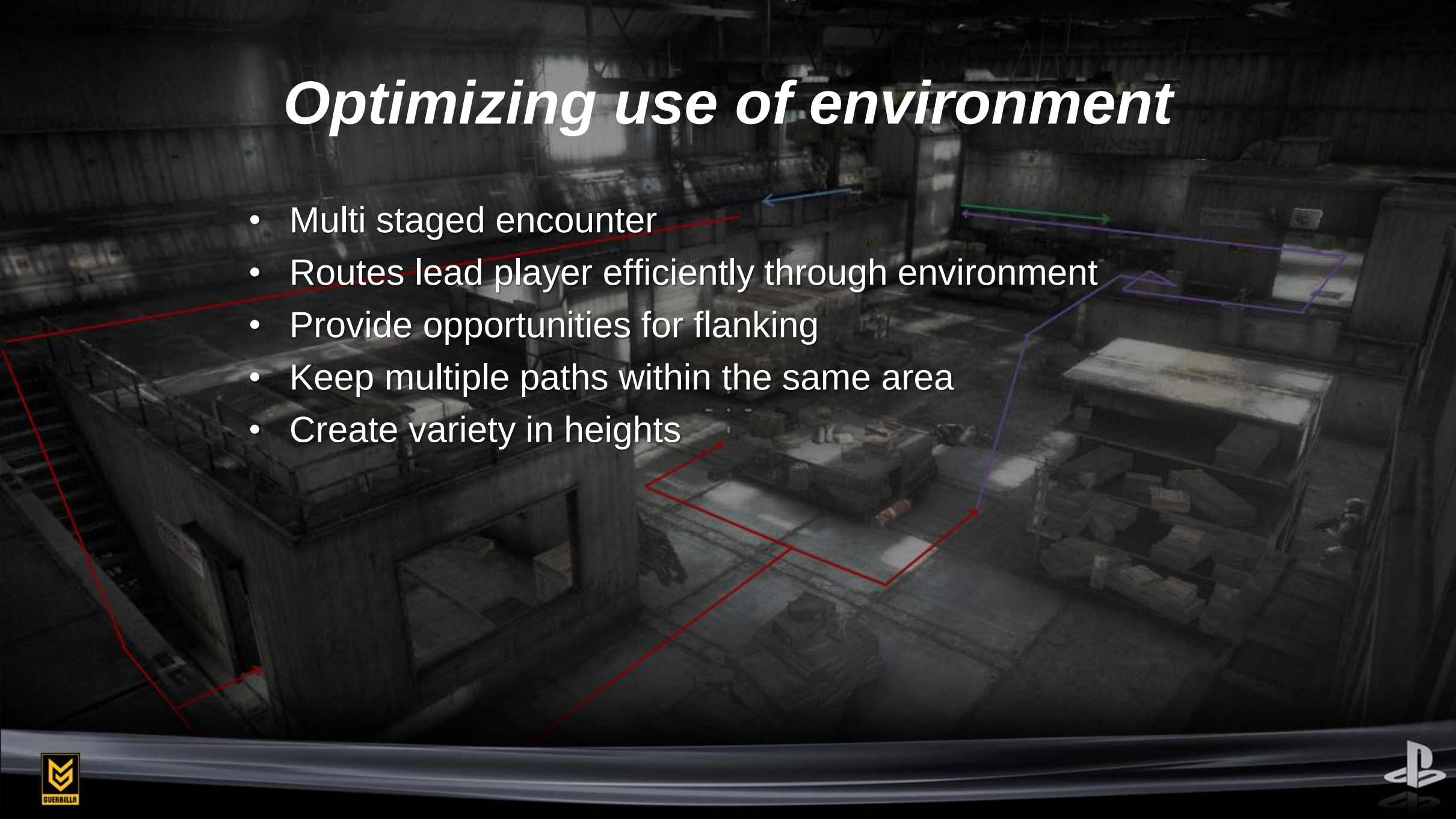
- Entrances, exits, alternate paths/flanking options need to be clear to the player.
- The players also needs to recognize where the enemies are
- It needs to be clear what can be used as cover
- This needs to be done in conjunction with vis/envart/lighting Ex : Light attracts players



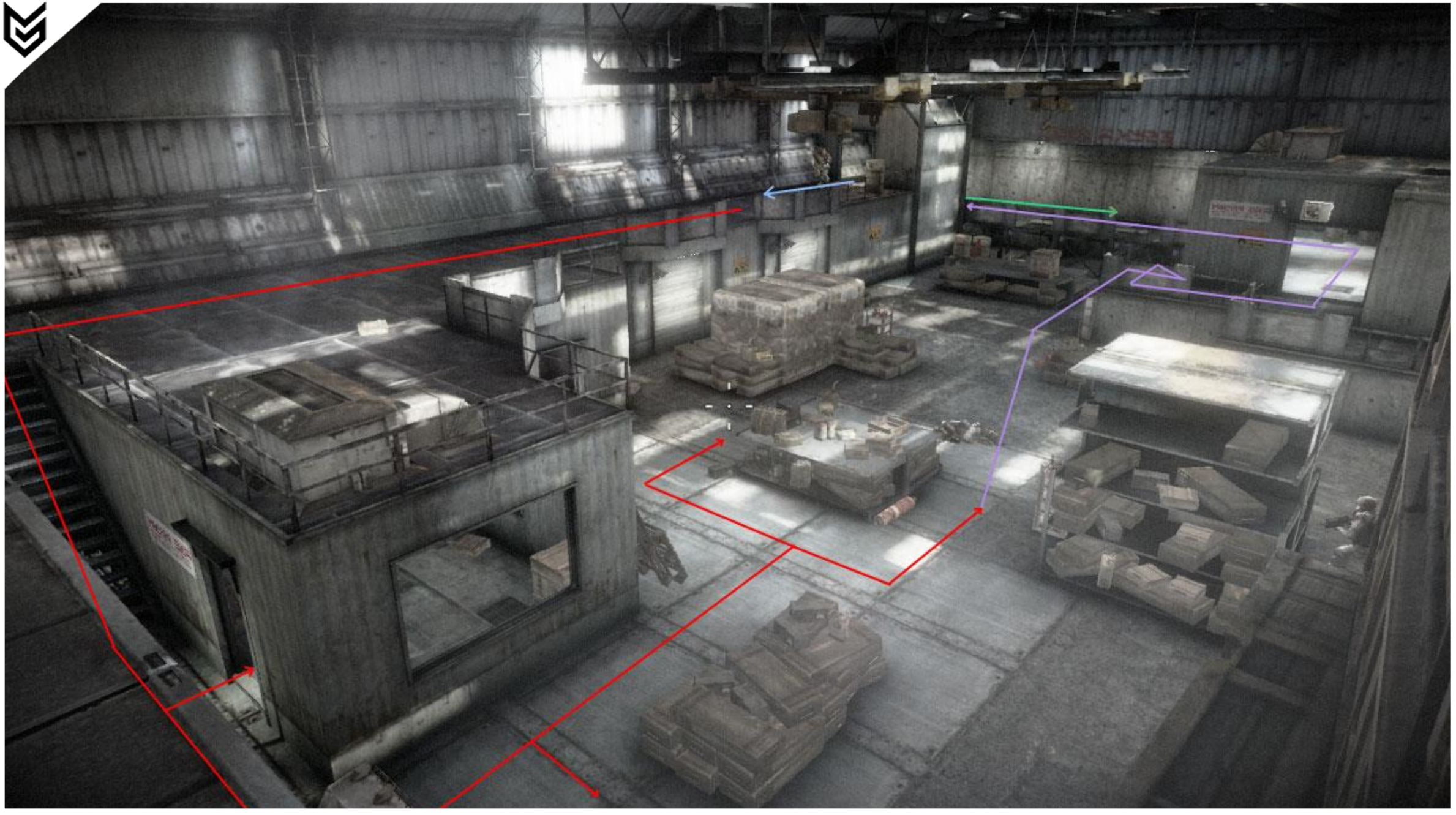


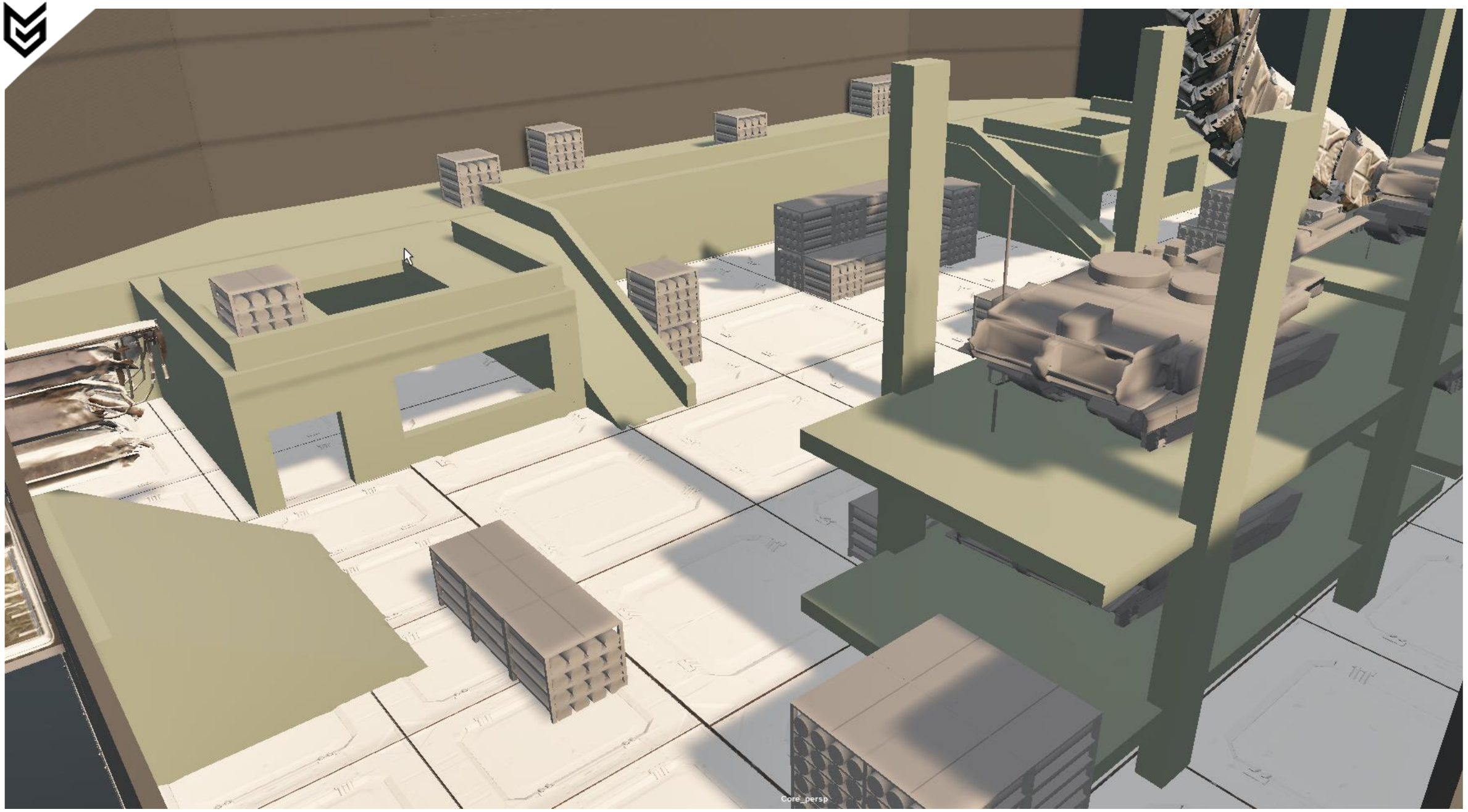


Optimizing use of environment



- Multi staged encounter
- Routes lead player efficiently through environment
- Provide opportunities for flanking
- Keep multiple paths within the same area
- Create variety in heights

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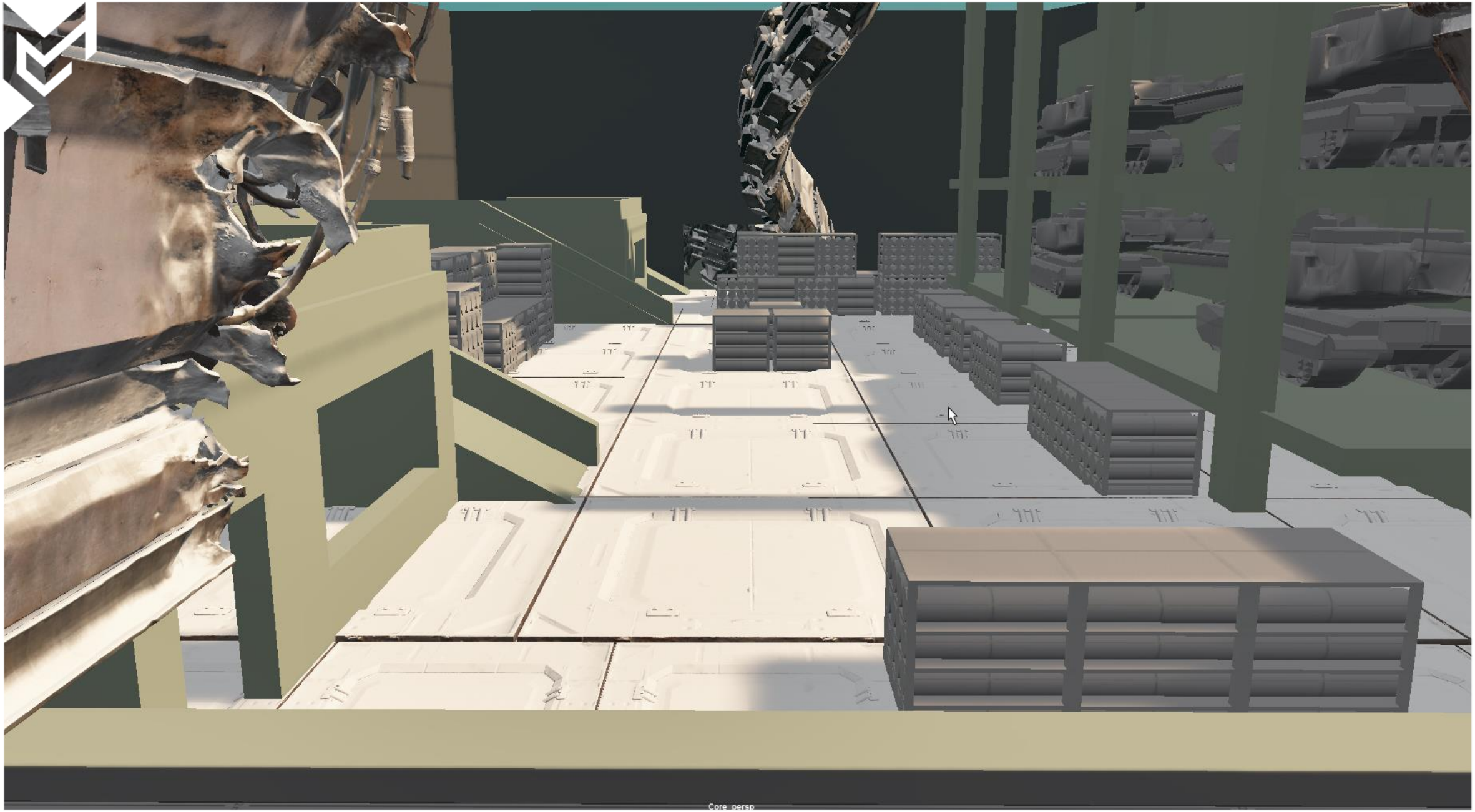
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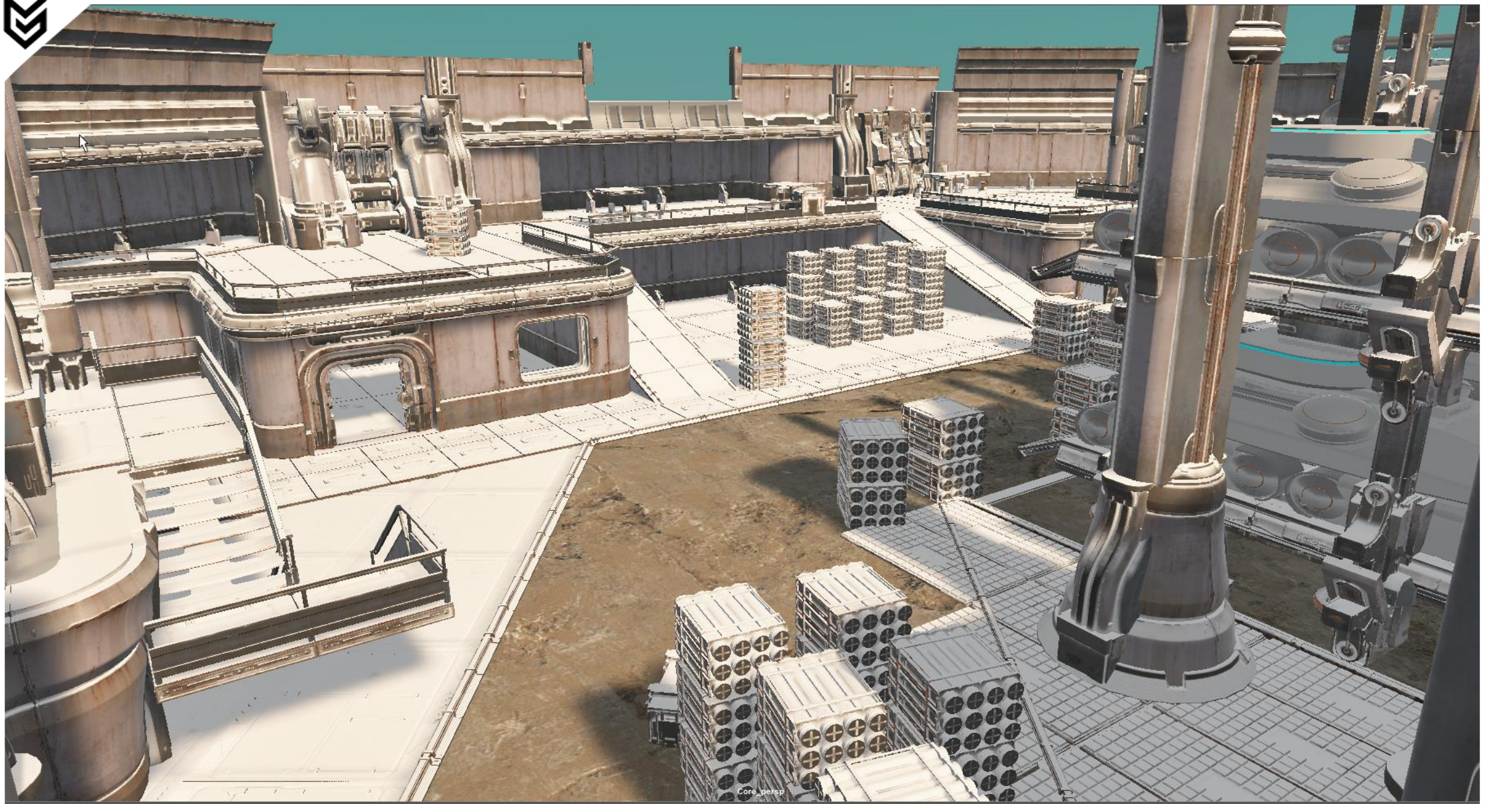
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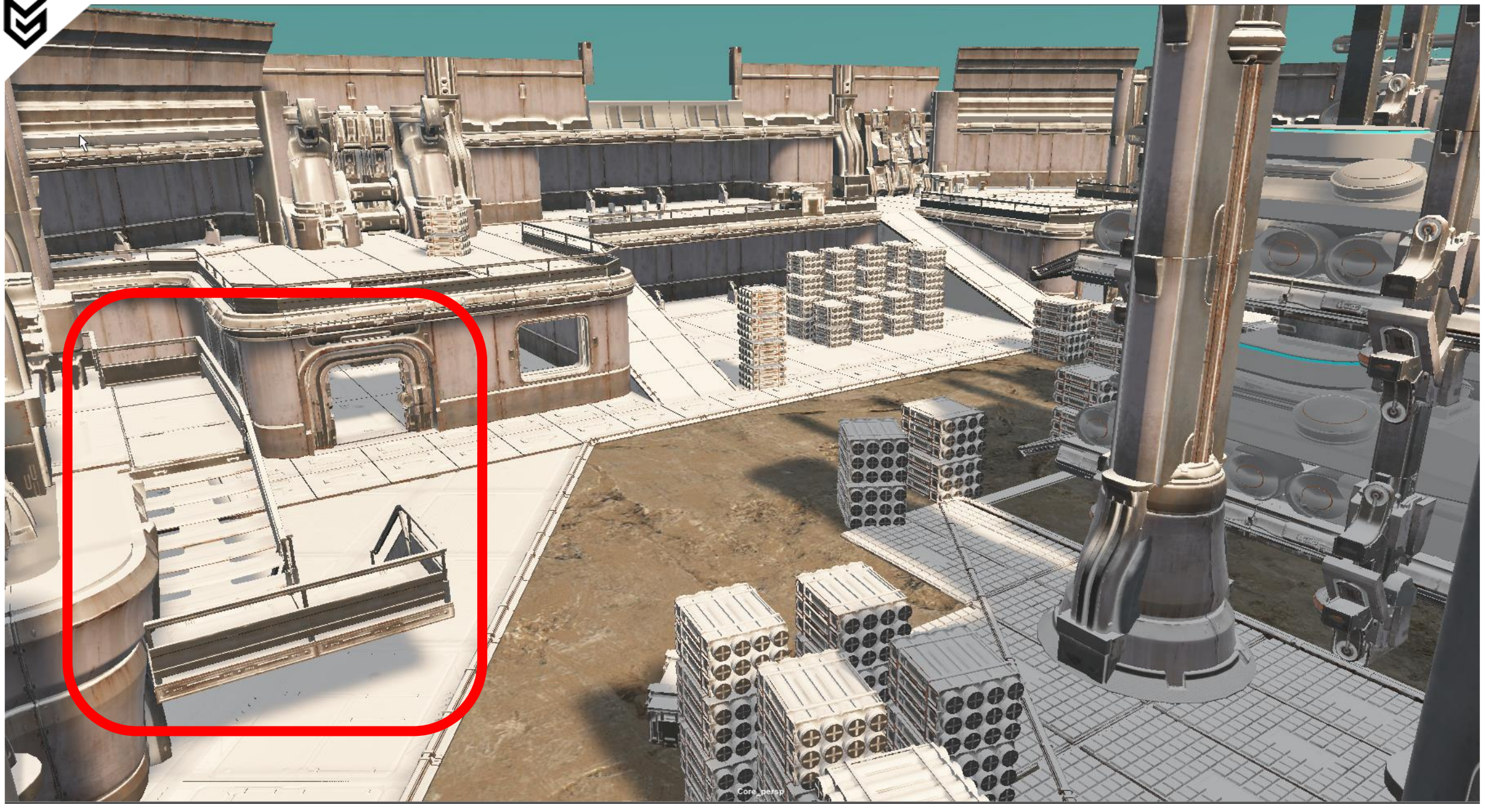
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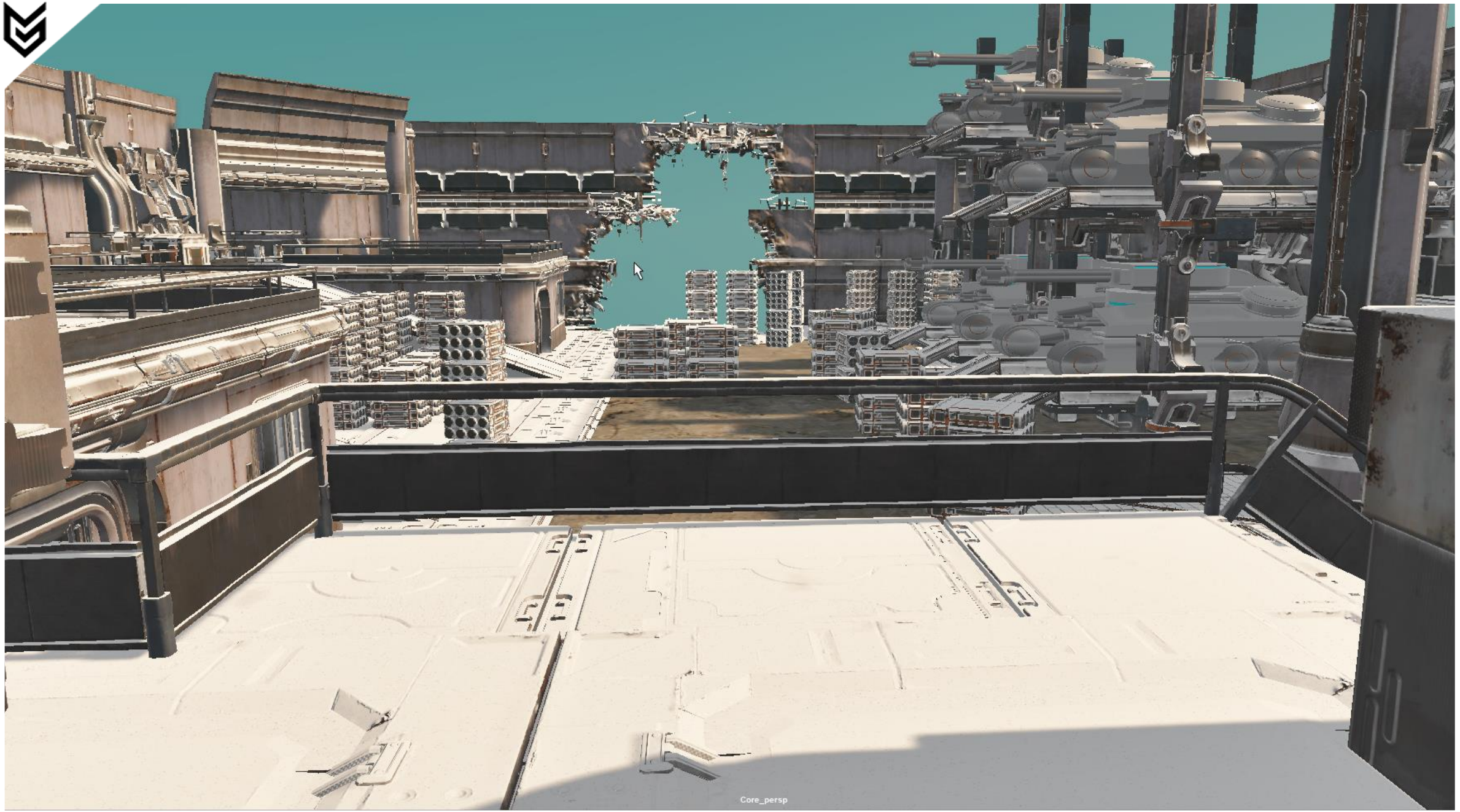
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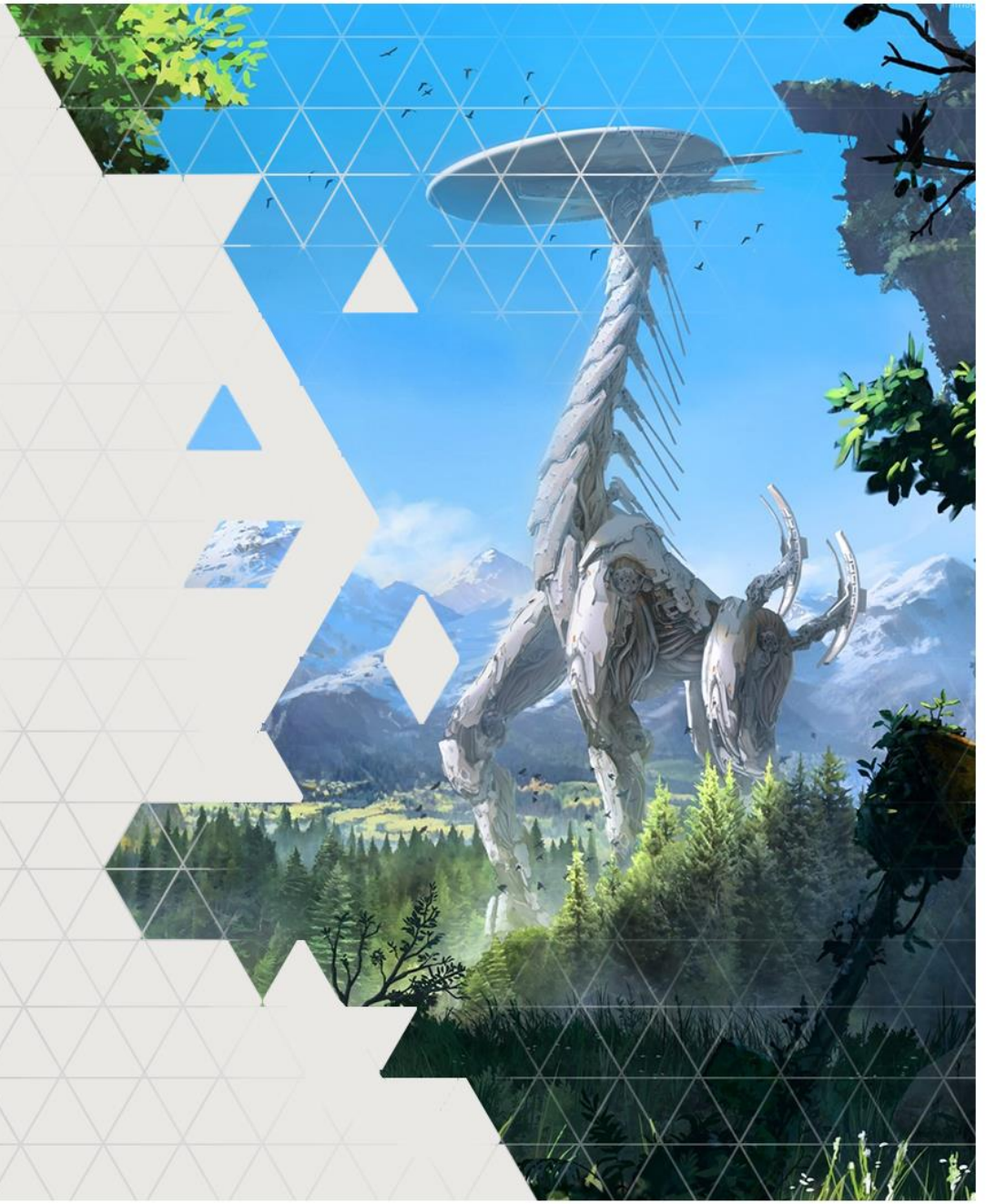
Putting it All Together

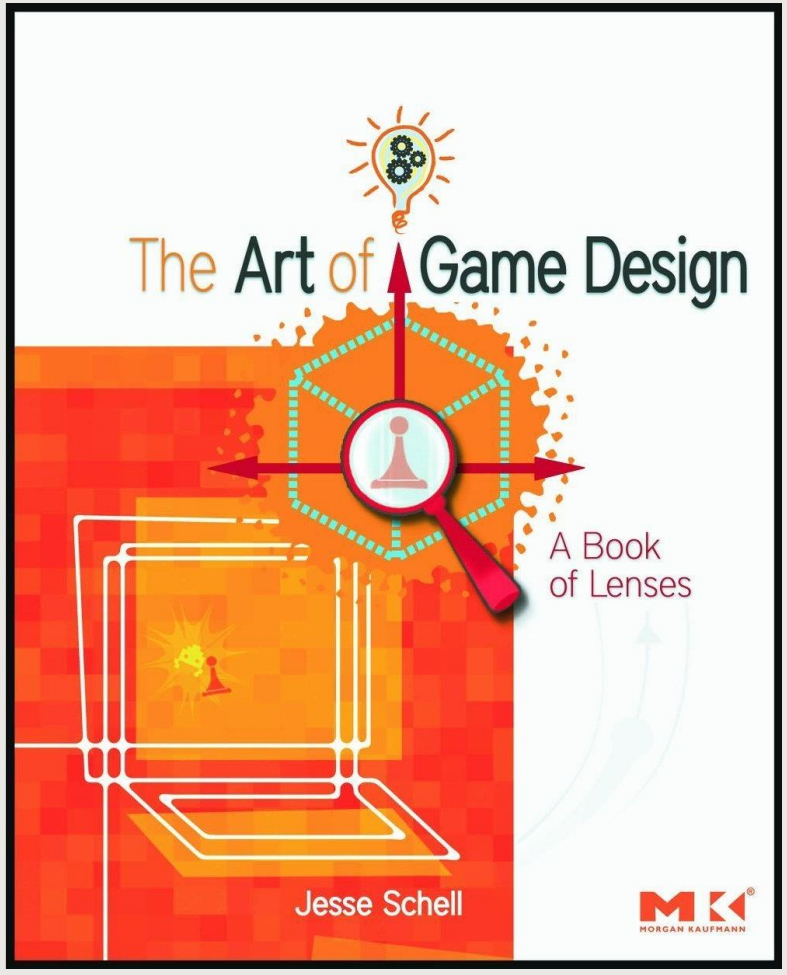


RPG

Action

RPG

Action


The Art of Game Design
A Book of Lenses
Jesse Schell
MK
MORGAN KAUFMANN

RPG

Action

RPG

1. **Quests** guide players through **stories**.

Action

1. **Spaces** guide players through **challenges**.

RPG

1. Quests guide players through stories.
2. Consider how players approach **quests**.

Action

1. Spaces guide players though challenges.
2. Consider how players approach **spaces**.

RPG

1. Quests guide players through stories.
2. Consider how players approach quests.
3. **Movement** should be **guided** and should **prevent backtracking**.

Action

1. Spaces guide players though challenges.
2. Consider how players approach spaces.
3. **Movement** should be **engaging and fun**.

RPG

1. Quests guide players through stories.
2. Consider how players approach quests.
3. Movement should be guided and should prevent backtracking.
4. Quest should have **meaning.**

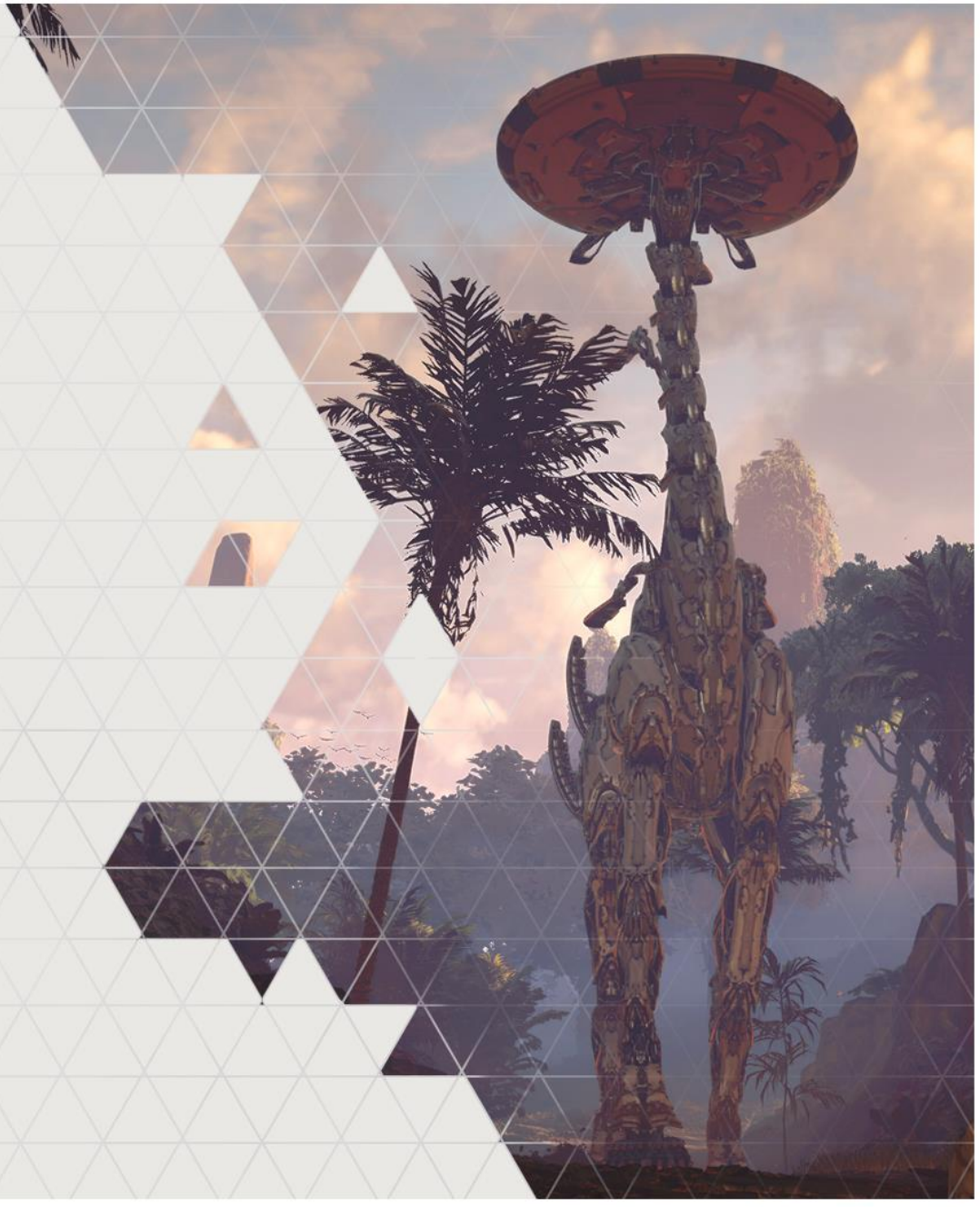
Action

1. Spaces guide players though challenges.
2. Consider how players approach spaces.
3. Movement should be fun in and of itself.
4. Quests should have **explosions.**

The End

Acknowledgements

- Guerrilla Games
- Sony
- My Team



Questions?

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