

WALKING HOME AT NIGHT

2202600

Hannah Bellamy

205 Level Design Submission



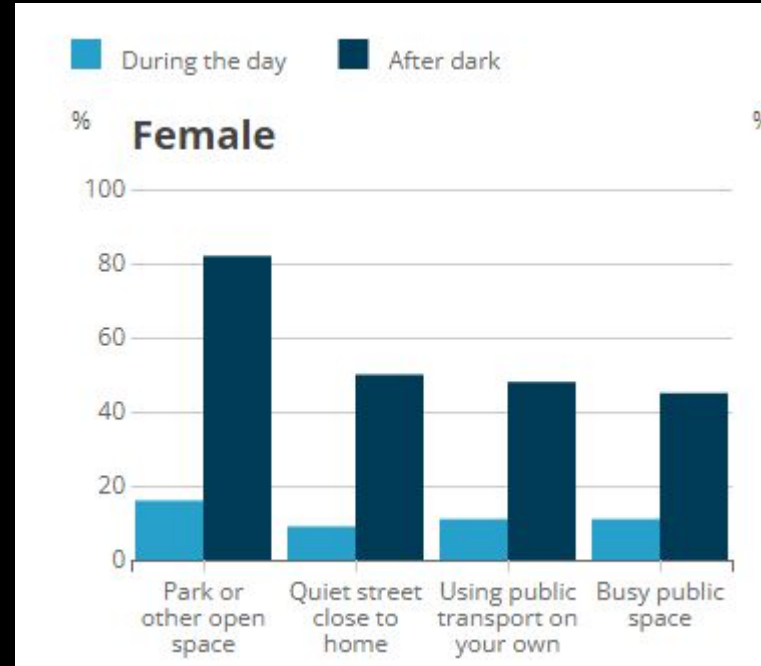
▪ CONCEPT AND BRIEF ▪

PSYCHOLOGY

For my level, I chose the psychology brief. I knew from the start that I wanted to create a game that would evoke strong emotions from the player - specifically those of discomfort and unease. My level could also fit into the memory brief as I was heavily inspired by my real life experiences.

My level is a short first person horror experience, where the player is tasked with simply walking home. However, something appears to lurk in the darkness, just out of sight.

For my level, I wanted to capture the feeling of walking home alone at night - as a young woman. It is more often than not an unsettling experience, universally so for vulnerable populations.



(Office for National Statistics, 2022)

■ RESEARCH ■

I started by asking the question, **what creates fear?** I wanted to keep the level tied down into realism, but still have a physical manifestation of the fear of being watched whilst feeling isolated and alone.

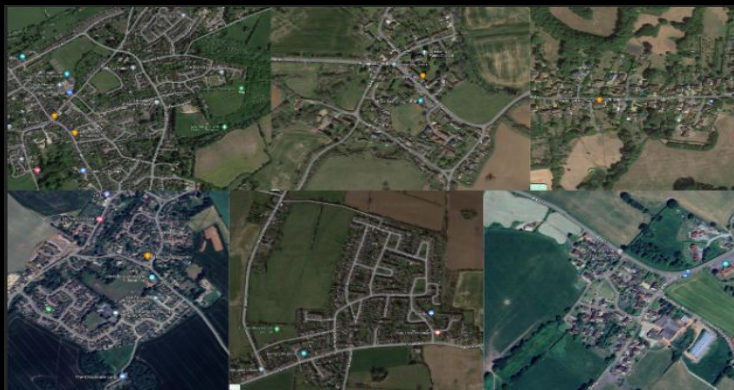
According to Andrew Tudor (1977), “anomalous monsters fascinate and repel us simultaneously, and narratives which disclose such monsters do so doubly” as such I can justify having a physical monster on the level. I can personify the feeling of being watched by having the player *know* they’re being watched.

To reinforce this, “anxiety arises...from the conceptualisation of the ‘un-dead’...every monster is the promise of death and demise” (Paul Wells, 2000). The horror of walking home at night is the fear of something bad happening, showing that through a monster is a fitting depiction.

Another way to create fear - or more specifically tension, is through ambience. “The ambience created by the constant feeling of uncertainty and possible death adds increased tension and anxiety into the game,” (Jamie King 2015). This was specifically in reference to the fog in *Silent Hill 2* (2001), which inspired me to further research the game.

Fog can also be used to limit what needs to be modeled and how much needs to get put into the environment as “a lot of darkness means the game doesn’t have to render everything for great distances in all directions,” (Richard Rouse, 2009).

■ REAL LIFE INSPIRATION ■



In a GDC talk (2018), Claire Hosking talked about how it's useful to use real life city plans when creating cities for games. I took this and collected images of various southern villages to reference their layouts.

I specifically searched for compact villages that had at least one field as I already knew I wanted my level to feature one.

I looked at the streetview of these villages to find places with elements of claustrophobia to them. Whether that be a small street, one with no path, trees lining - all of which achieve a sense of discomfort.



▪ VIDEO GAME INSPIRATION ▪

I started by creating categories and filling them with games that had parts I wanted to replicate.

Environment/Architecture: Silent Hill 2 (2001), Persona4 Golden (2020), Night In The Woods (2017), Yakuza 0 (2018), Life is Strange (2015), Alan Wake (2012).

Artstyle: Lost in Vivo (2018), Buckshot Roulette (2024).

Vibes: Gmod empty gm_construct map specifically (2006), Stanley Parable (2013), Kid A Mnesia (2021) heavily through music, No Players Online (2019), Petscop (technically an ARG), Cry of Fear (2013).

Creature: Slenderman (2012), Crooked Man (2018).

Sound: At Dead of Night (2020).

In a youtube video about *Games that Don't Fake the Space*, Jacob Geller talks about a game called Babbdi (2022) and explore how there is something going on throughout the entire level. The player is free to explore with one singular goal, but the world expands far larger than just that goal. This is an ambitious step but it is something I would like to incorporate even just slightly into my level. I wish for it to feel like a real village, the player should be able to go everywhere they can see and there be something for them to notice there - even if it is just a sighting of the 'monster' or some tv sounds coming from inside the house.

■ VIDEO GAME INSPIRATION ■



Lost in Vivo (2018), Silent Hill 2 (2001), Alan Wake (2012), Life is Strange (2015), Cry of Fear (2013)

In terms of artstyle; I would like to achieve a retro look reminiscent of games from the PS1 or PS2, with pixelated graphics and low poly objects. With this style, the 'monster' would have to follow suit, creating that uncanny feel which would increase the horror aspects of my level.

A lot of games utilise fog and sparingly use lights to limit the players view and create that sense of unease. However, it also appears they use wide open streets. This is something I will incorporate into my level to vary its appearance.



Buckshot
Roulette
(2024), Lost
in Vivo
(2018), Alisa
(2021),
Hollow Head
(2020), Aka
Manto
(2019),
Bloom
(2020), Silent
Hill 2 (2001),
Project
Nostalgia
(2021)

■ PLANNING ■

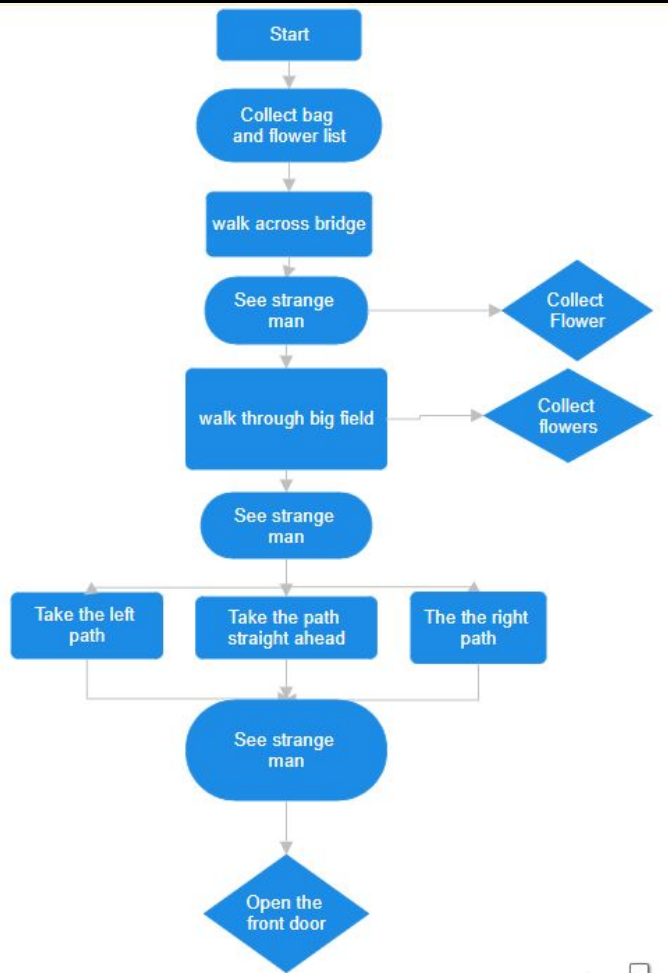
I started with an initial idea: The player has to walk through a main field and gather some flowers, in the field the character will grow wary and feel like she's being watched. From this point on she and the player will start to see glimpses of a strange man.

Goals:

- Reward the player for paying attention to the environment
- Create a sense of fear through the level.

1. Start in big field
2. Dialogue bottom screen saying 'I should go home, it's getting late'
3. Have to look down and collect bag and list, mention how want to collect flowers on way back and get prompt to press button to bring up flower list
4. Walk across main road
5. Can collect flower types from park, not locked if don't just get a dialogue saying i should probs go straight home
6. Exit park, choose route 1 (by road), 2 (through smaller field) or 3 (down alleyways)
7. Get home, interact w door to open it
8. "I'm back" fade to black as door opens

■ PLANNING ■



According to Edward Kay in a GDC talk (2023), “No single part of the level should repeat in the same way later”. I kept this in mind whilst planning my level so I could keep each section fairly distinct.

The first section would be the tutorial, it would introduce the goal and the threat as well as a view of the whole level. It would start separated from the village environment.

The player would then enter the field, the transitional stage where they would be able to pick flowers. This would be on the edge of the village.

The last section would be walking through the village itself, simply the player trying to get home.

■ PLANNING ■

The environment is a normal village consisting of; a field at the start, a bridge over a highway, a plain open field, then three routes of a street or a small park or a long alleyway. All of these are common to residential areas.

In order to vary the visual aesthetic, I will include houses of varying looks, separated by alleys or side streets every so often, as well as different elevations.

Whilst I would like to create an atmospheric experience - there is still a need to avoid long and dull sections of play. As such I will include at least one encounter per section to keep the player engaged.

The main variance and draw for the visuals will be the anticipation of seeing the strange man, therefore I will focus on creating shadowy nooks and crannies where it looks like he would be residing.

Keeping the field open and empty will force the player to search the space with no cover. This should evoke feelings of vulnerability from the player for being exposed in such an large space with nowhere to hide.

Providing feedback through structure: Dialogue

- When picking flowers:

"This is exactly what I need."

"Only two more to go."

- When walking home:

"Almost there."

"I wonder if there's any dinner left."

PLANNING

Providing context/signifiers:

- The player has to pick up a bag at the start of the level using E, this introduces that mechanic and will show where the inventory is on the UI
- Also at the start of the level, the player will have to pick up a list of flowers. This will fill the inventory with one item and give the player an objective.
- When the player starts walking there will be some dialogue subtitled on the screen saying "I need to go home." This provides an end goal for the player.
- The only way forwards is across a bridge which provides a view of the 'monster', alerting the player that there is some danger.
- The final door to the end house will be the only house with lights on. TV will be able to be heard from outside as well, signifying that it is the end house.

Firewatch (2016) inspired me in the way that there's multiple paths the player can take to get to the goal. In my level plan, it is linear at the start before opening up - but it isn't open world. There are still set routes the player has to go down.

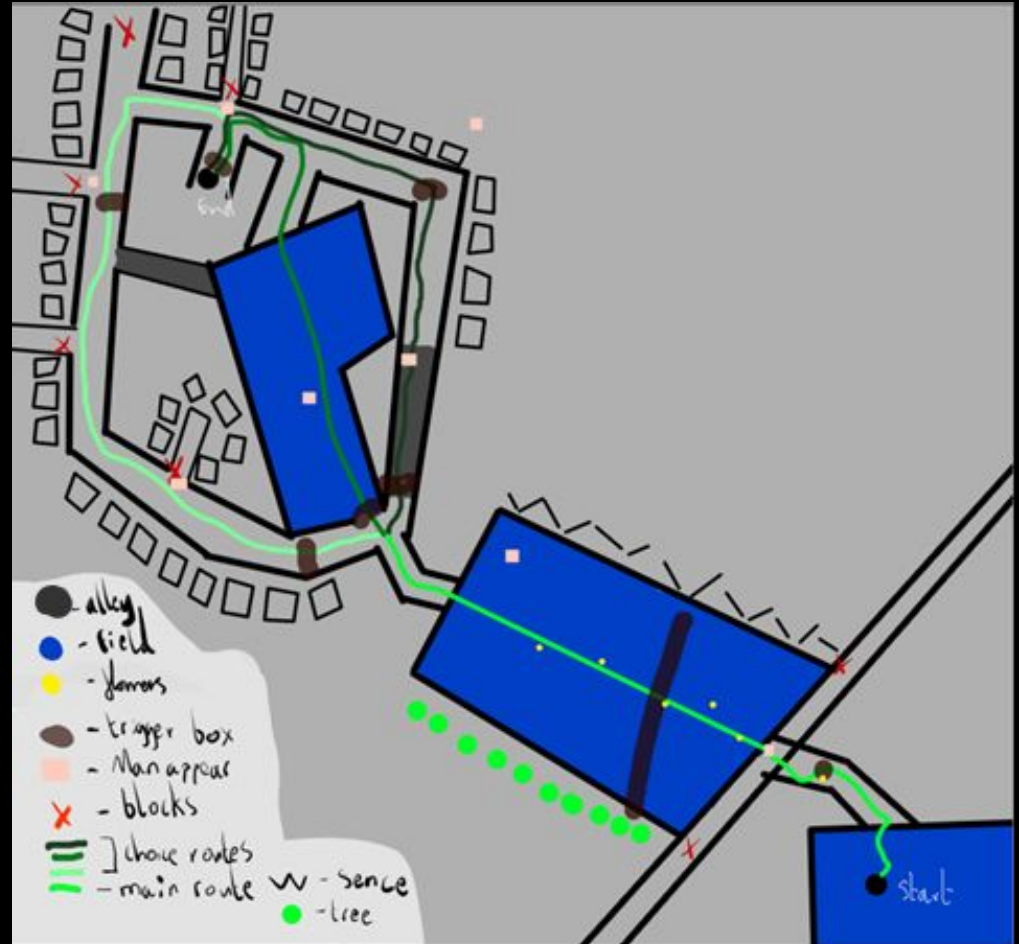


Carl Therrien (2009) notes how "In some horror games, actions such as combat and flight are integrated in a broader system pertaining to the sanity of the protagonist," This could be utilised in my game in the form of an anxiety metre which could force the player to move on if they stay in one area for too long, or if they go out of bounds. Vfx and dialogue could be used for this.

■ LEVEL PLAN ■

I created positive space by lining the roads with houses that serve as edges/boundaries for the level. This creates a linear pathway for the left and right routes.

Outside of the fields is where most of the intimate space is to create the feeling of claustrophobia with how contrasted the sizes of the environment will be.



■ LEVEL PLAN ■

<u>Criticism</u>	<u>Solution</u>
Not clear enough where you need to go	Will utilise lampposts to show paths, keep areas I want player out of, dark
Need failstate when off of path	Will add an anxiety metre that maxes out when the player goes too far off of the path or possibly stays in one area for too long
Make having to pick up flowers mandatory rather than optional so player has another concrete goal rather than just getting home	Could implement this with the anxiety metre – takes too long or tries to leave area before getting all the flowers and the metre maxes out, adds a time limit essentially but may be tedious, could also work like in <i>Slender the 8 Pages</i>
Flowers too linear	Will spread them out more
Start is too linear	Design is intended that way as a tutorial of sorts
Is there a sprint?	Didn't think about this until the question was asked; decided to force the player to just walk as this helps to create a feeling of helplessness within the player as well as immersing them fully in the environment, hopefully putting them on edge (like games such as PT 2014)

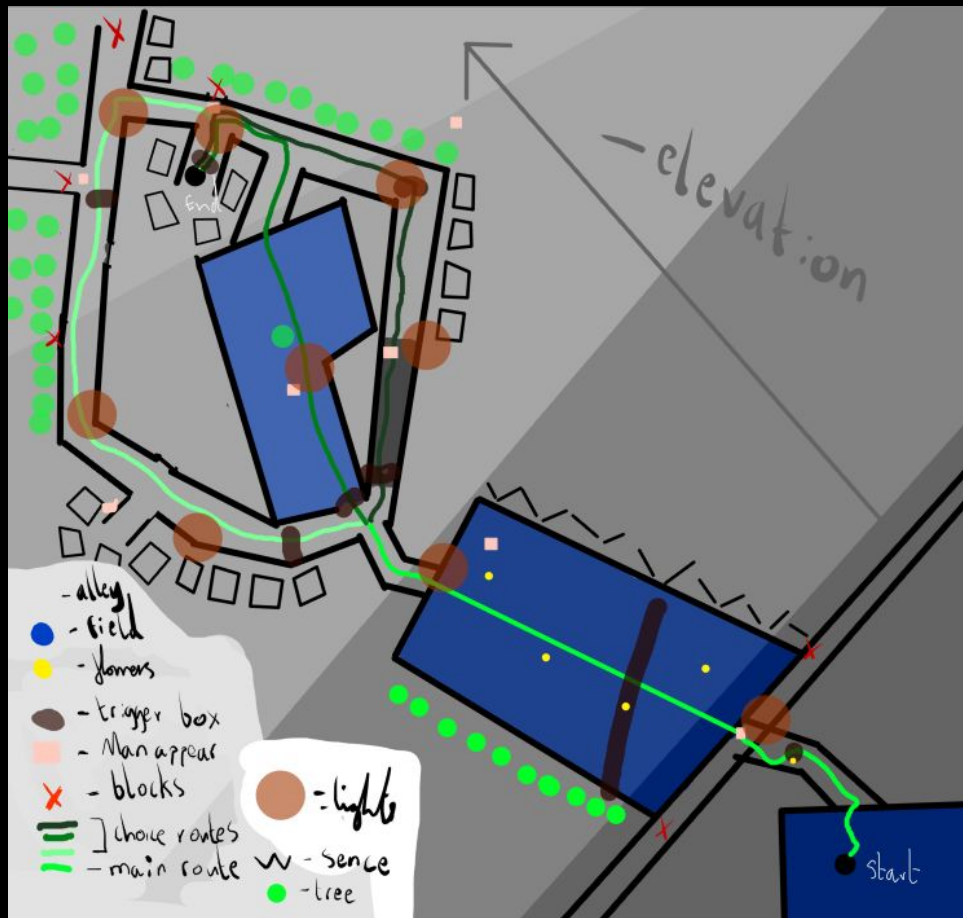
The anxiety metre would have no hard set UI, it's only indication of going up would be the screen edges darkening and dialogue relating being triggered. This would happen if the player goes out of bounds or stays in the same place for too long. The metre could also trigger when the player sees the man.

A failstate would trigger when the metre maxes out.

· LEVEL PLAN ·

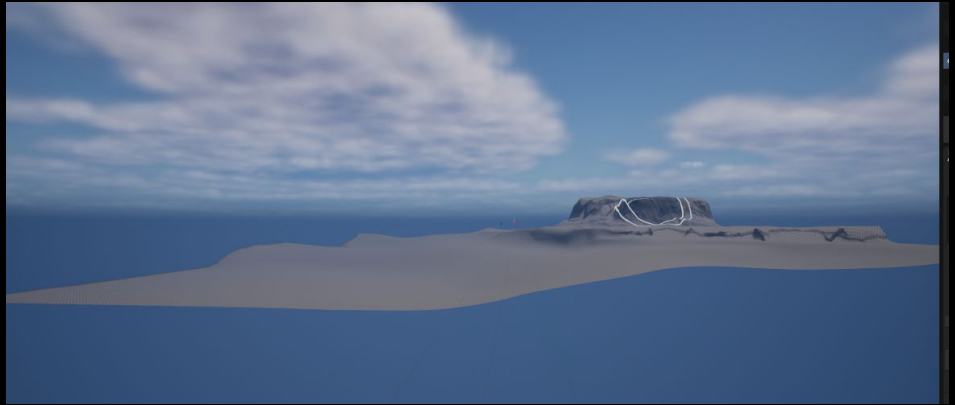
I iterated my design based off of feedback from other people:

- I added a grayscale to show the elevation that would be in my level - a gradual decrease so the player could see the end goal from the very start.
- I added lights to the diagram as well as slightly reworking the flower locations.
- I moved the cul de sac outwards as I did not think it would realistically fit next to the park.
- I replaced a lot of houses in the last section with trees instead to create some more visual variety.

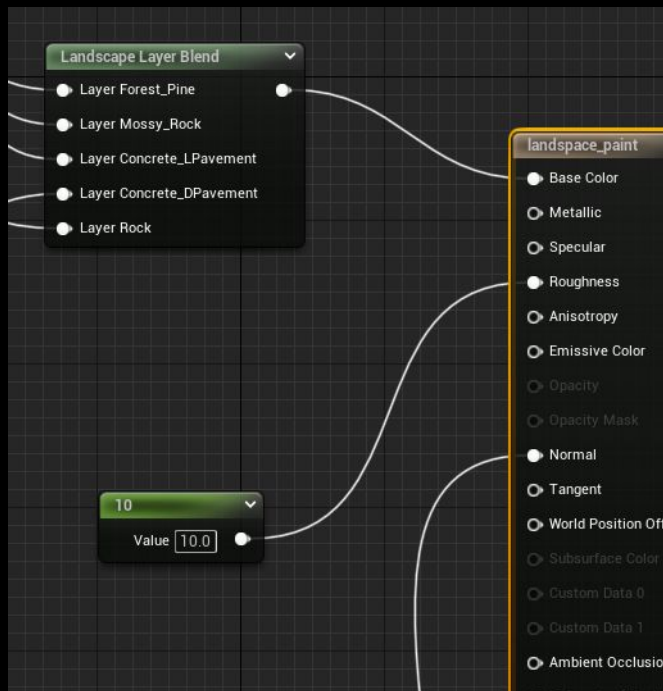
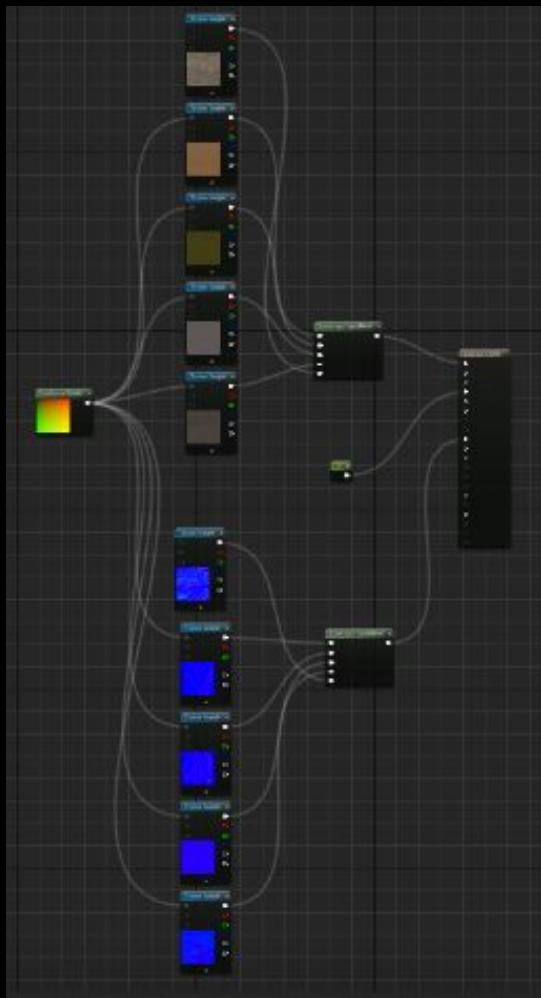


■ LANDSCAPING ■

I used landscape mode in unreal engine to create my level. I started by sculpting a mountain, creating a risen area for the highway then putting the rest of the level on a decline.



■ LANDSCAPING ■



I created a new material and named it landscape_paint I imported some textures from quixel bridge and placed their albedo and normal maps into the new materials editor. Here I added a landscape coord to so I could add each texture - then each set would connect into a layer blend to then connect into the base node. The albedos going into base colour and the normals going into normals. I added in a constant and set it to 10 then connected it to roughness to get rid of the shine.

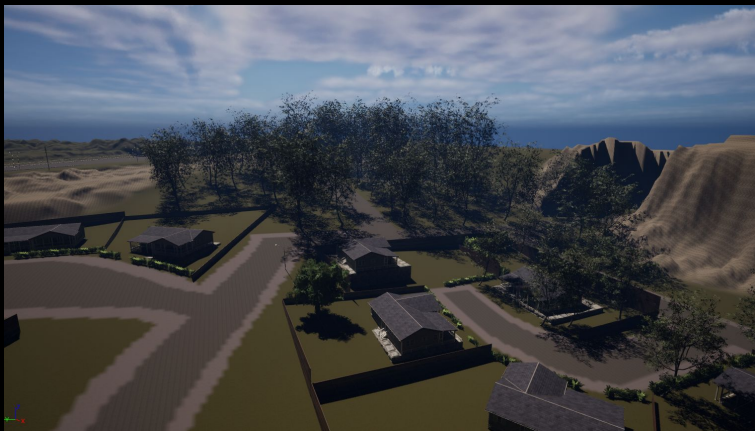


▪ LANDSCAPING ▪

I painted the outline of the level using the textures.

■ LANDSCAPING ■

Next I populated the world with props and added borders in the forms of mountains to a lot of the edges.



▪ LANDSCAPING ▪



I edited the sky sphere by holding Ctrl+L to get it so the sun was setting. I changed the directional light in the level so it was a darker blue. I changed the intensity until it was a good level where the level was still visible but atmospheric.

I also added in spotlights to all of the lampposts, changing their inner radius and angle so it was tight towards the lamppost before fading outwards into the dark. I gave all of these a warm yellow look to contrast the cold blue of the environment.

▪ LANDSCAPING ▪

I added two rect lights that were bright enough to be seen immediately as the player enters the final street to indicate this is the end goal.



▪ FIRST FEEDBACK ▪

I sent off my first build to testers without any UI and scripts as during a GDC talk, Brendon Chung (2015) talked about how the team he was in would regularly “strip out the ui” of the levels they were designing to ensure its playability. This was used to test that the player wouldn’t end up relying on UI to guide the way.

When first going through the level, the majority of players chose to go down the main road route as it had the most lights.

The jump mechanic already in the first person character blueprints was used to jump onto the motorway very often. This mechanic added nothing of value to the experience so I removed it shortly after the first play tests.

All players naturally made their way to the end goal without getting lost or confused. A few players chose to explore areas I did not intend them to such as down the motorway. I will include the anxiety metre to discourage any exploration out of my intended bounds.



▪ FIRST FEEDBACK ▪

<u>Criticisms</u>	<u>Solutions</u>
Bridge is too dark	Put lanterns on either side of the top of the bridge
Steps on the bridge should be smaller or turned into a ramp	Made them smaller
Other paths other than the main street are too dark	Added a couple more lights to the other two routes
Lamposts are placed awkwardly on the path	Moved them further towards the road

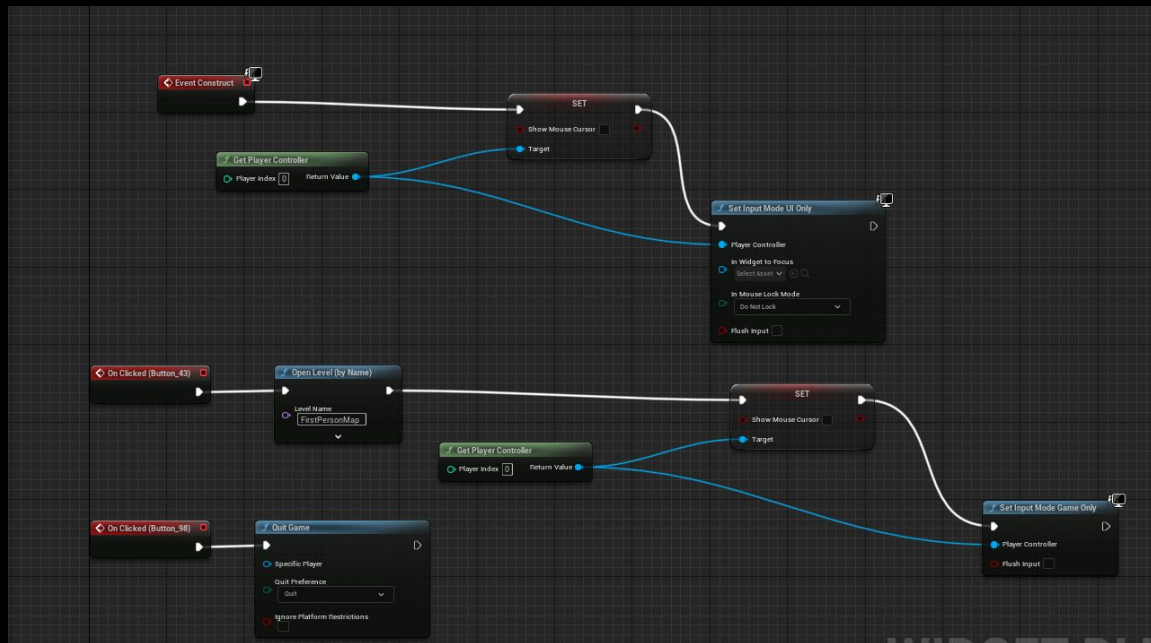
■ MAIN MENU ■

To create the main menu, I first created a new level. I took a still picture from inside my level and added this in as a background image. I then created an 'Enter' and 'Exit' button.

I made these work through blueprints:

The top line enables the cursors visibility, and the second enters the player into the game whilst making the cursor invisible.

The last line quits the game.

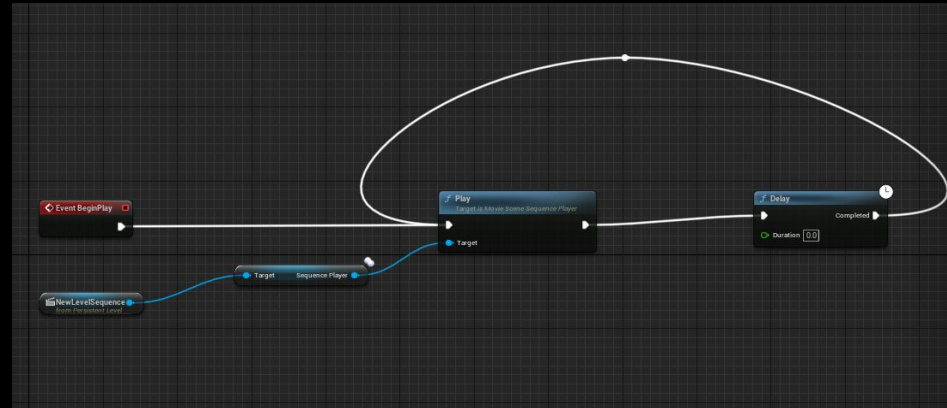
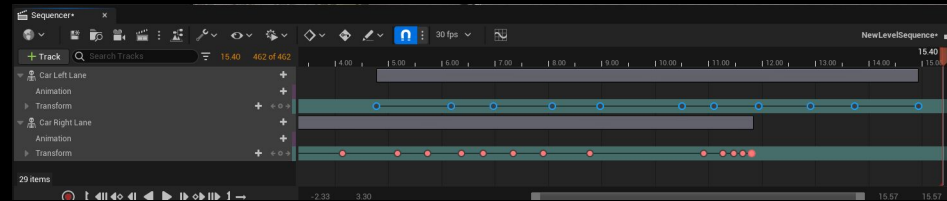


■ MAIN MENU ■



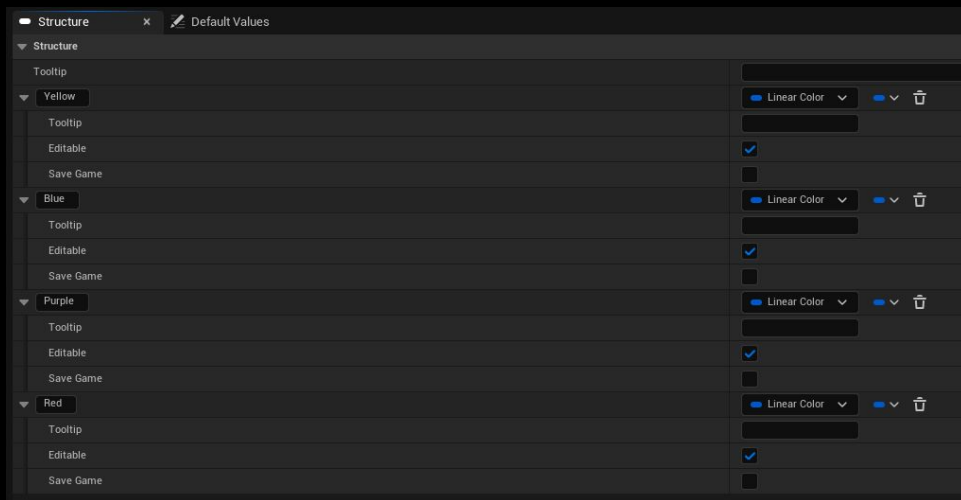
■ ANIMATIONS ■

I created a new level sequence and added a track for both the cars on the motorway. Using transform, I animated both of them going down the motorway. I then added this level sequence into the level blueprint so when the level began - the animation would play. When it finished, there would be a delay before it started again as done by the delay node, so it appeared that cars were continuously driving through.

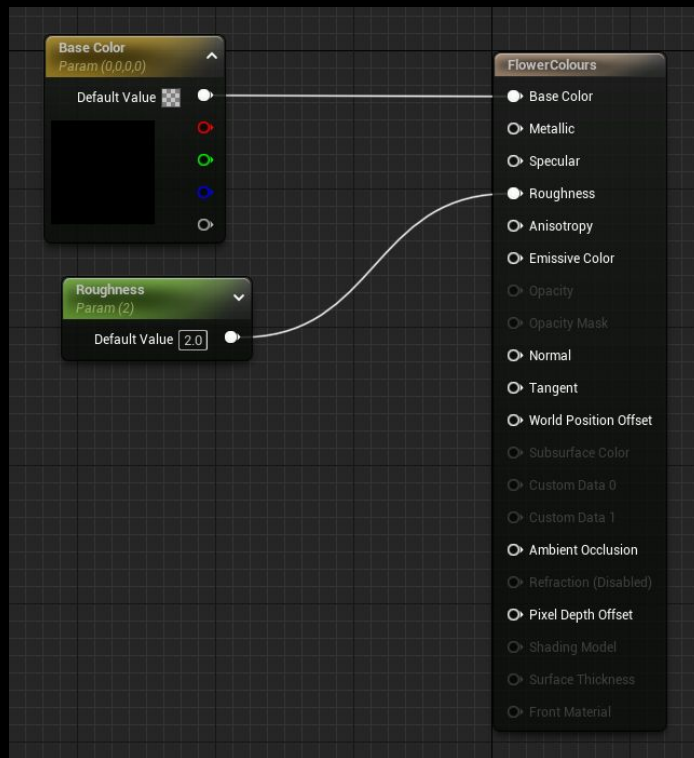


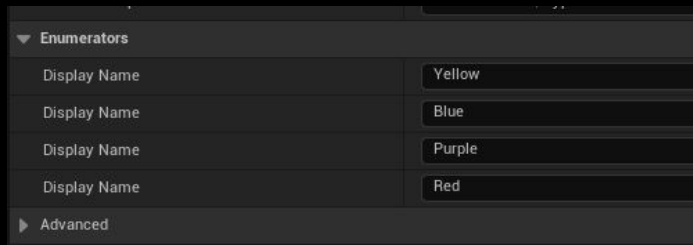
I started by modelling a quick flower in blender which I imported into the engine. Next I created a material called FlowerColours, in the material graph I promoted the base colour to a parameter as well as the roughness which I then turned up to 2 so it wasn't too shiny.

Next I created a structure named FlowerLevels where I added the different types of flowers that could be collected through the level.



COLLECTABLES



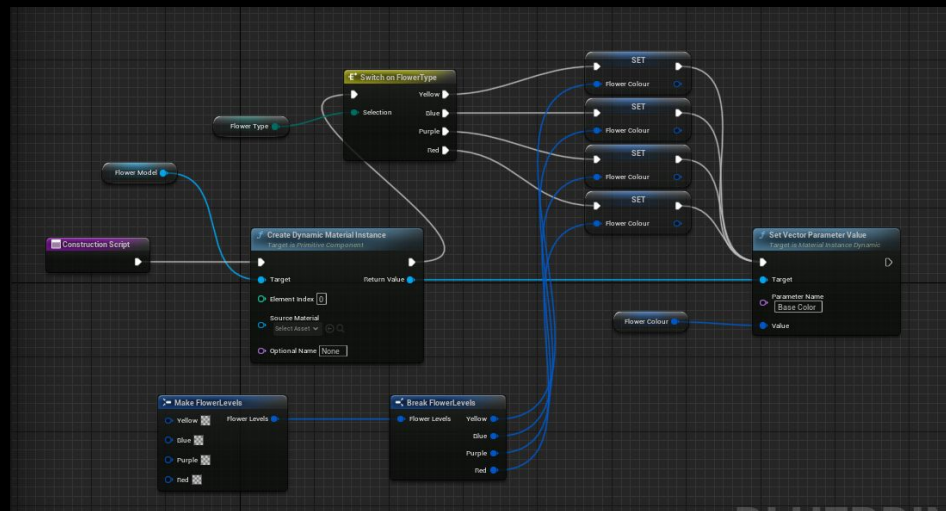


I made an enumerator for each of the flower types.

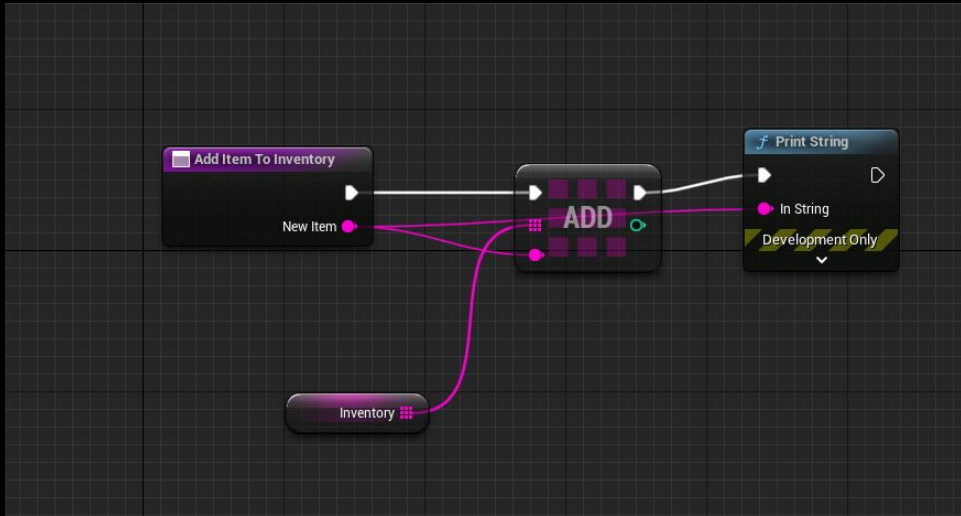
Next I made a blueprint class for the flowers. In the viewport I added the model I created for the flower and added a collision box to it. In the construction script I added a series of nodes which would allow for each flower I used in engine from this one script, to have different types using the enumerator and the structure above.

This would allow the different types to be different colours (through the dynamic material instance), and distinguished in the inventory UI later on in my blueprints.

COLLECTABLES



■ COLLECTABLES ■



I then made a blueprint component called inventory to start off the inventory system that the flowers would go into. Inside the event graph, I created a variable called 'Inventory' which I turned into a string array so it would allow storage. I made a function called 'Add Item to Inventory' which I added to the blueprint. Off of this node I put an add node that would then add the items to the array. From the first function I added a print string node that would display debug text to ensure I could see it was working.

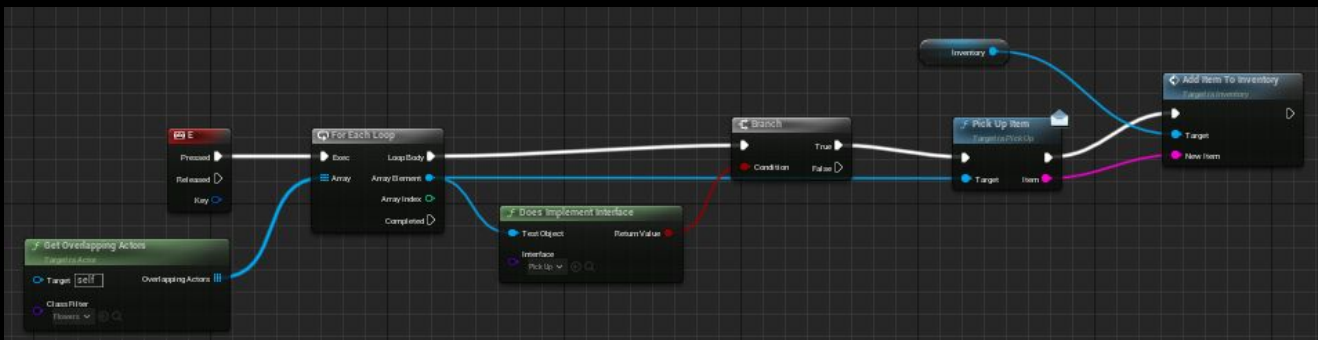
▪ COLLECTABLES ▪

In the first person blueprint I added the inventory I just created to the components.

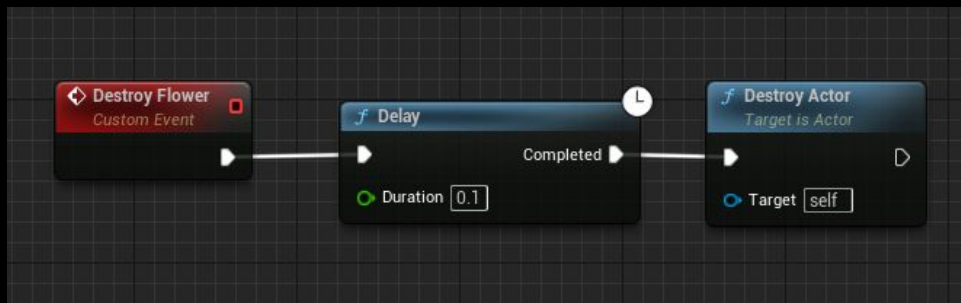
In my flowers blueprint I added a new variable called item and made it a string.

I created a blueprint interface called pickup, in the output section I added a new parameter called item which I made a string, I then went into class setting and added the pickup in the interface section. I added a print string node from the pick up item and attached it to the return node.

I then used these in my first person blueprint to create a script that would allow for the flowers to be added to the inventory when the 'e' key is pressed.

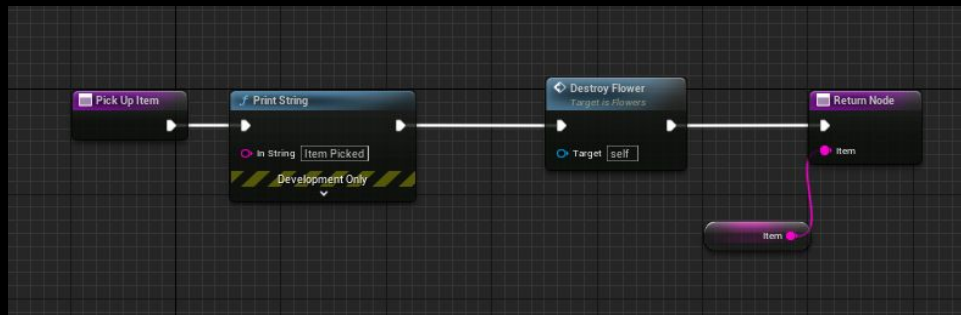


COLLECTABLES



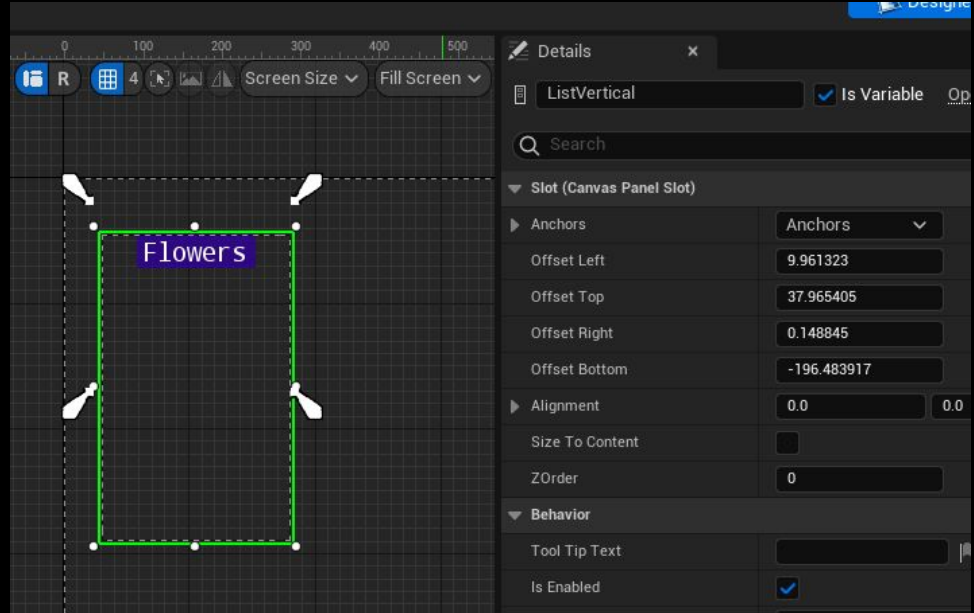
In my flowers blueprint, I added a custom event that would destroy the flower when it was picked up - with a delay on the function so it wouldn't be destroyed before the return.

I then added the event to the flower pick up item function.

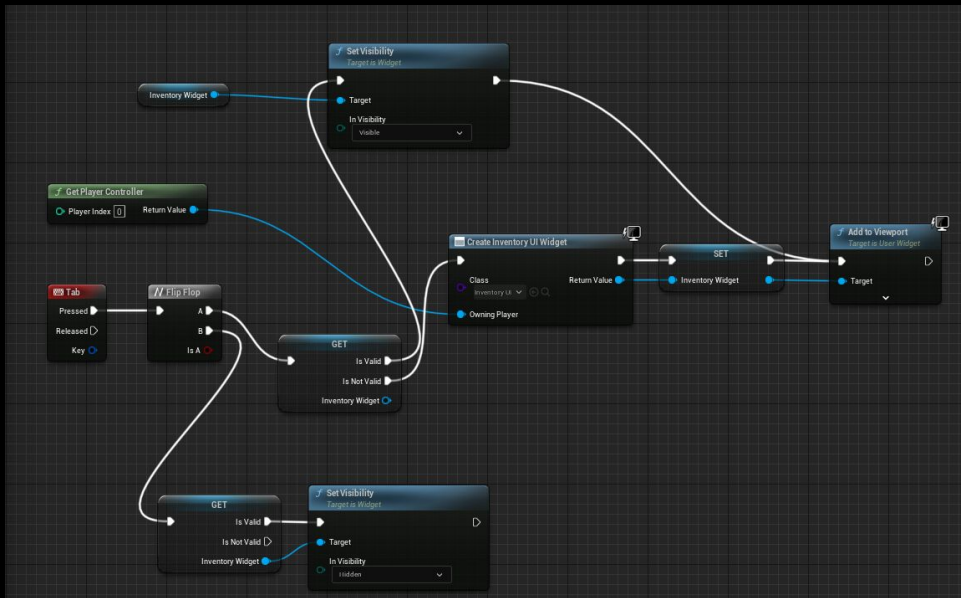


▪ COLLECTABLES ▪

Next I created a widget blueprint for the inventory UI, in this I added a canvas panel and a vertical box with the world 'Flowers' inside, with an anchor to ensure it aligned to the screen correctly. I named the box 'ListVertical' and made it into a variable so I could use it to place my flower enumerators into.



▪ COLLECTABLES ▪

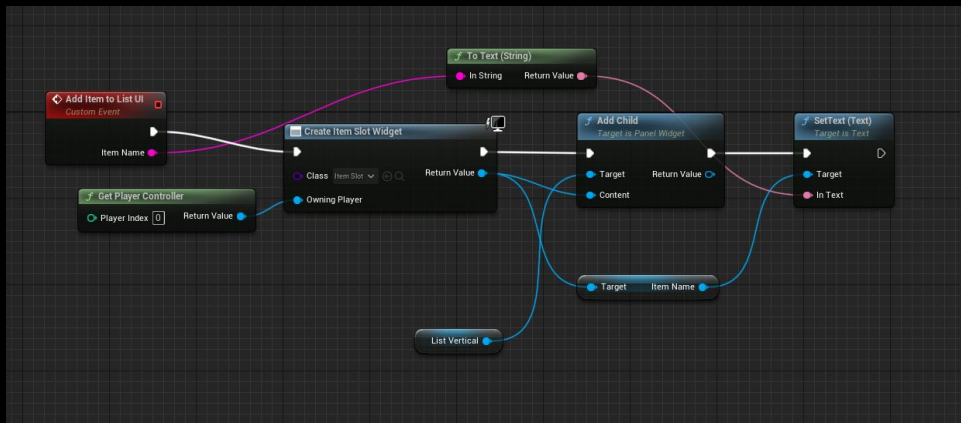


Then I went into the first person character blueprint and added a sequence so when the tab key was pressed, the inventory UI would appear.

The flip flop is used so when it's pressed once the code will follow the A line to open, and then when it's pressed again it will be hidden through the B line. The set visibility nodes are used to make sure the item doesn't disappear each time the inventory is opened.

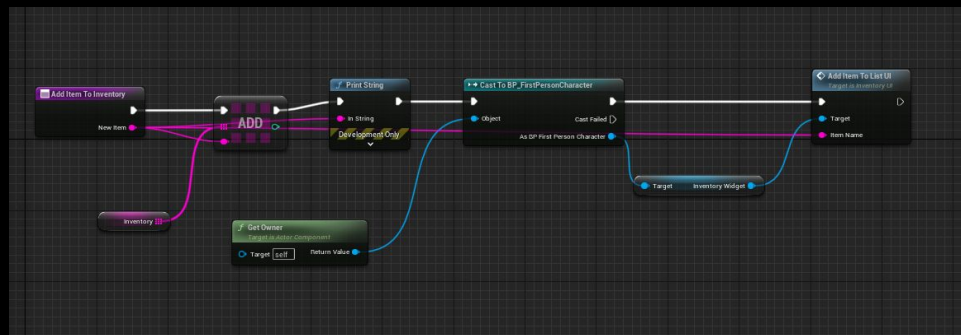
I then created a widget for the item slots where I added a text box which I named 'ItemName' and made it a variable.

▪ COLLECTABLES ▪



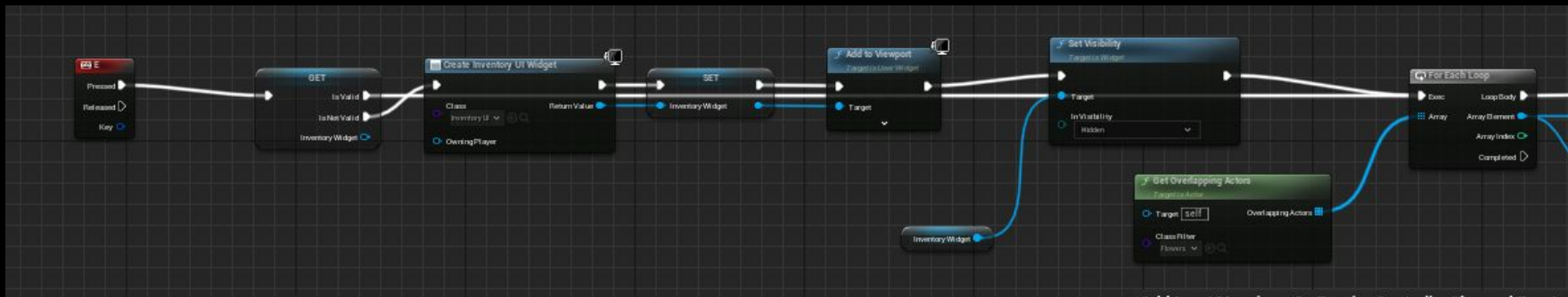
Back in my inventory widget, I went to the graph section and created a custom event that would add the item to the list widget. I added the 'ItemName' variable I just created and made it a string so each item picked could have its own name through the addition of the set text function at the end.

In my inventory blueprint, I added a node at the end that would access the inventory and add the item to the list. I also connect the item name on the first node to the last node so the name would display.



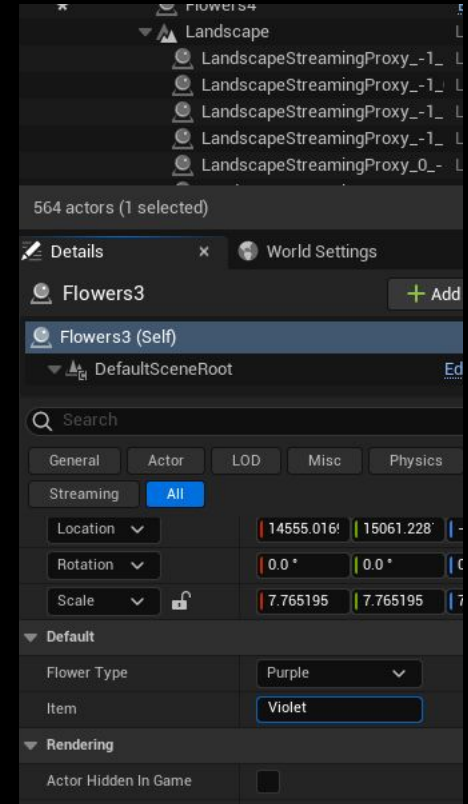
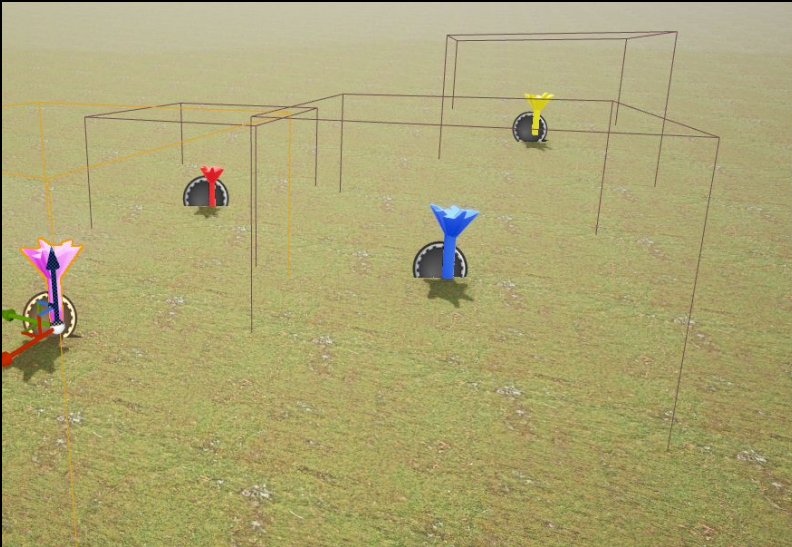
· COLLECTABLES ·

I then modified my press E to interact line by adding in the first part of the A line from my press tab to open inventory script. This is to make sure the items are added to the inventory UI when the items are interacted with. I connected the is valid line all the way to the for each loop line so each item would persist in the inventory UI.

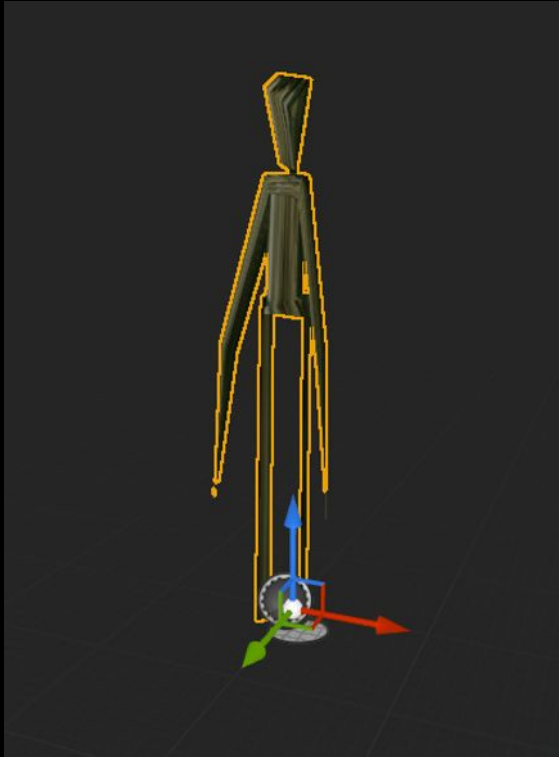


COLLECTABLES

Next I added the four of the flower blueprint classes to my level and changed their type to red, blue, purple, and yellow respectively, as well as changing their names to really flowers in the item tab beneath flower type.



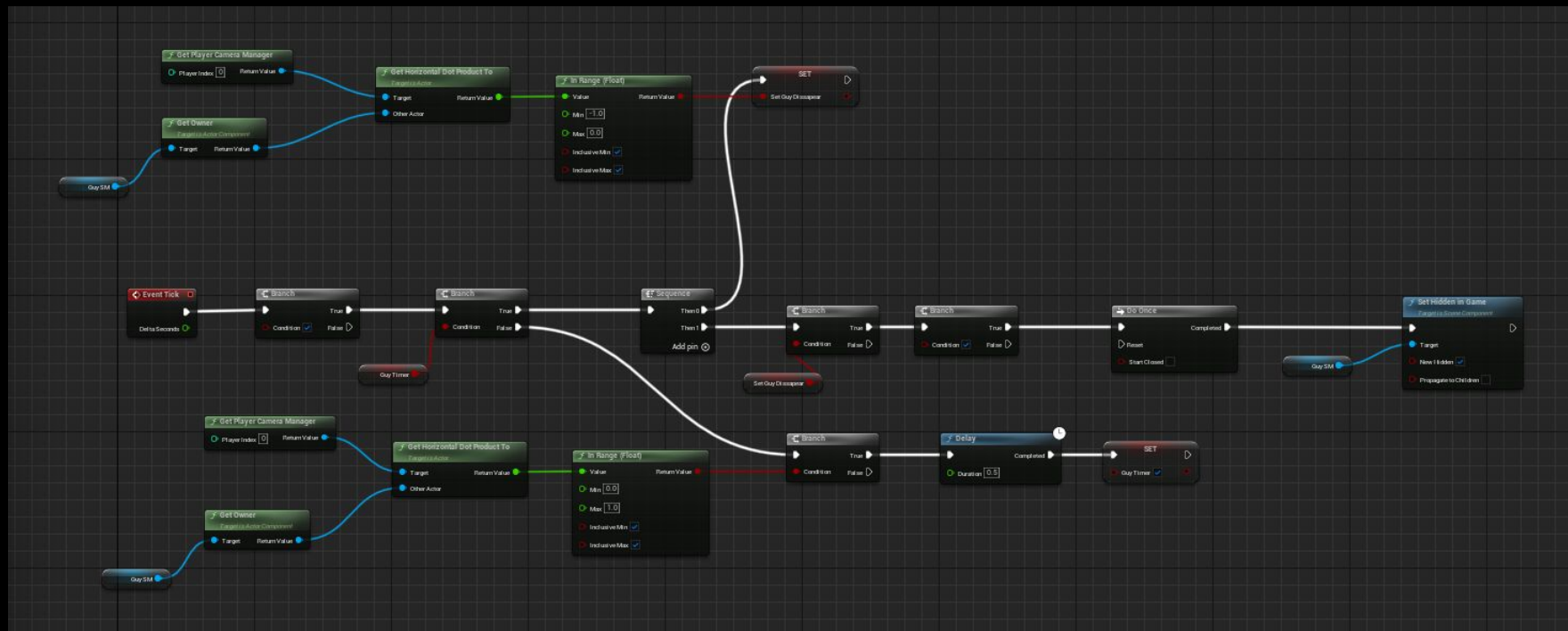
▪ THE GUY ▪



I modeled the 'guy' in blender then imported him into engine. I then created a blueprint class and added the guy static mesh to the viewport. I then went into the event graph and created a sequence that would make it so when the guy left the players vision, it would disappear. I utilised dot products to set whether the guy should disappear or not.

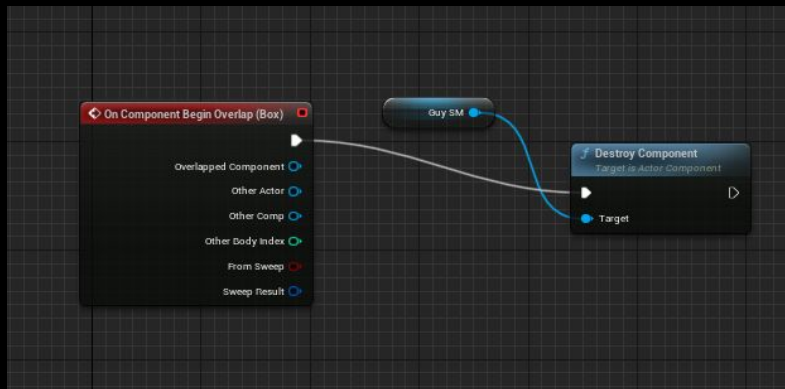
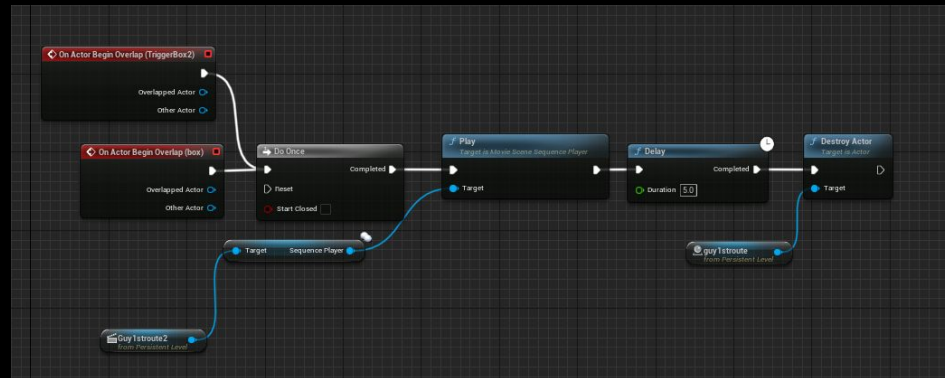
I also added a bark material onto the guy from a free asset pack I used (Modular neighbourhood) as I realised that this would make him sway and look like he was moving.

THE GUY



■ THE GUY ■

I created another blueprint class for the guy. I added a new level sequencer and animation of the guy walking away at the end of the main road. I then placed a trigger box halfway up the street. I created a script in the level blueprint that would make it so when the player walked over the trigger box, the sequence would play once - then after a five second delay it would delete the actor, preventing it from replaying the animation if the player went back into the trigger box.



I added another trigger box across the park and in the level blueprint, would destroy the gu when the player walked across it - to ensure he wouldn't still be standing there if the player didn't walk down the main street.

I repeated this same sequence, utilising different the guy's and trigger boxes to make him move in different places, and be destroyed if bypassed.

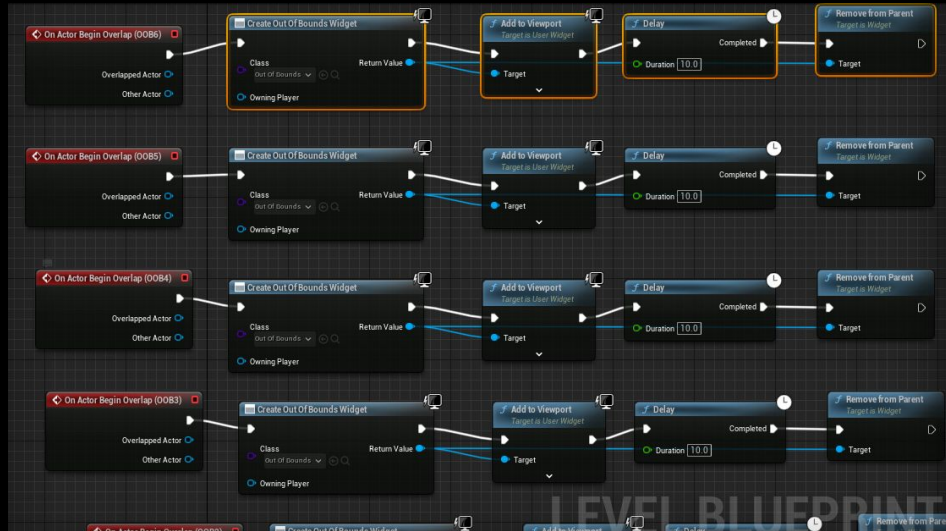
■ DIALOGUE/UI ■

For the out of bounds dialogue; I created a widget blueprint with text on it and placed trigger boxes as the boundaries of the scene that would trigger the text to be displayed on the screen - through the level blueprint. After a delay this would then be removed from the screen.



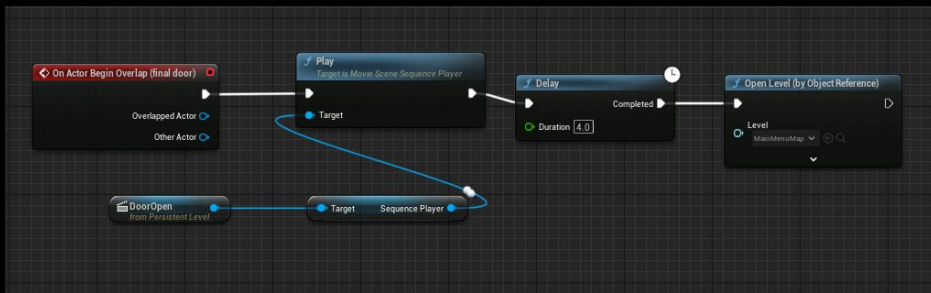
I'm not meant to go this way.

■ DIALOGUE/UI ■



I created a new widget for the dialogue at the start of the game that included 'press e to interact' text. I created another widget for when the player entered the park that said they should pick some flowers, with 'press tab for inventory' text. Both these widgets use the same blueprints as above, except each have their own trigger boxers and the class was what I named the widget respectively.

■ END AND AUDIO ■



I created a new animation sequence of the final door opening and created a trigger box that when the player stepped into would play the animation, then after a delay it would take the player back to the main menu.

I sourced some car noises and imported these, then attached them to the cars. I turned on the override in the attenuation section and altered the radius and falloff until it sounded natural. I also placed some bird call noises in the park and the forest, as well as general motorway ambience at the bridge. I used a backing track from a free asset for the background music, and a slightly more serene one for the main menu music.

■ PLAYTESTING AND ITERATIONS ■

Initial Errors:

The main menu wasn't on the first screen, it only appeared at the end.



Fixes:

Went to project setting, map, and made the main menu the map on load as well as the default map.

One of the materials on the landscape floor didn't load.

The background music stopped halfway through the level.



I put it on a loop.

Guy at the end of the bridge had disappeared before the player made it there.



Replaced him with a trigger box guy.

Mouse doesn't appear on the main menu after completing the game

Can type in the 'Flowers' box UI

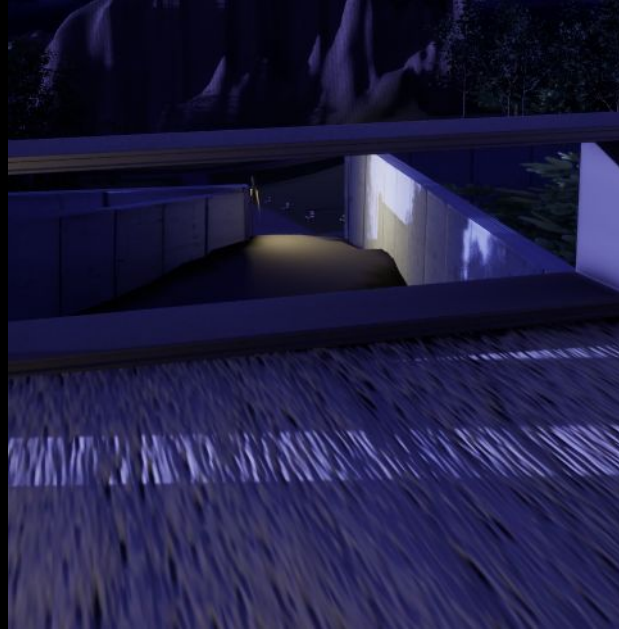
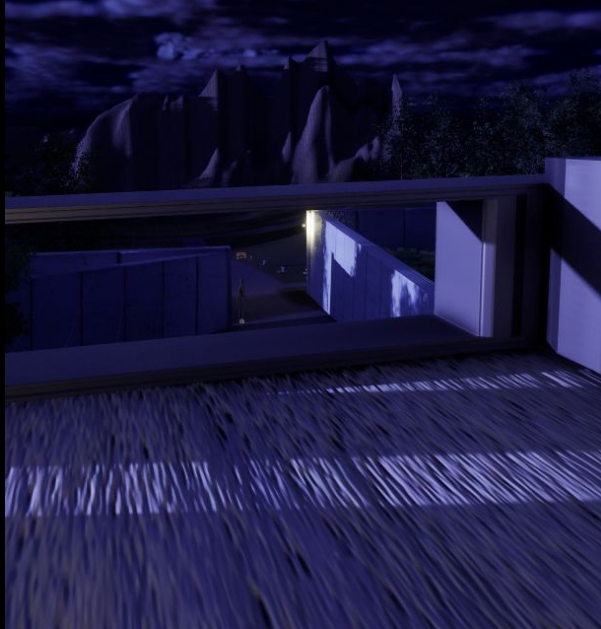
■ PLAYTESTING AND ITERATIONS ■

Players noted some general problems with the bridge being wonky, which I fixed after the feedback. Another problem with the bridge was playtesters felt like exiting the bridge didn't lead them very well into the park. I solved this by extending the wall and changing the path to go to the right after exiting the bridge - instead of looping around and underneath it.



■ PLAYTESTING AND ITERATIONS ■

Almost every playtester missed the sighting of the first guy, so I added a light beside him. This still didn't draw people's attention to him enough so I altered the landscape so it was one level, declining after the guy's placement. I also moved the light to right next to it.



■ PLAYTESTING AND ITERATIONS ■

The sighting that was spot the most was the guy on the main street, which was most likely due to the addition of the flickering lamppost that triggered at the same time as it's walking animation. I added some more sightings to try and ensure no matter the route taken, the player would always see it at least once.



■ PLAYTESTING AND ITERATIONS ■

A lot of players didn't realise the rightmost route was an option. I altered the design so it was an alleyway with lots of lights to emphasise that it is a place the player can go. I also added a sighting into this alleyway.



■ PLAYTESTING AND ITERATIONS ■

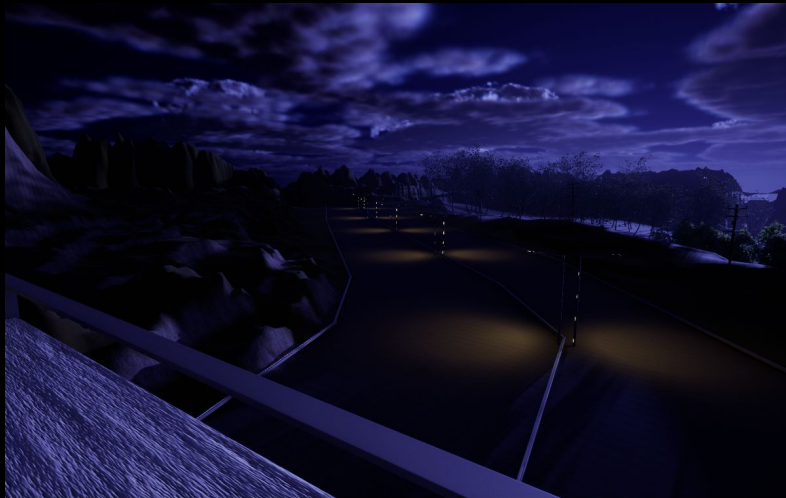
I also added a lamppost to the final sighting on the last street.



▪ FINAL RENDERS ▪



▪ FINAL RENDERS ▪



▪ EVALUATION ▪

My research into inspirations went well - I gathered a very wide range of other video games and media that all influenced my design. I feel like I could have done more research into *how* to evoke fear rather than *what* creates fear. This has reflected later in my project where my level isn't particularly scary.

Within my actual level, I had constraints with using the modular neighbourhood pack - in order to save time I just used the prefab house, but this house was very American. This alongside the wide spacing between the houses in my level created a particularly American looking suburb. Which is not the location I wished to replicate. Given more time, I would create my own house; with a mix of detached and semi-detached houses more closely packed together to really create that small English village atmosphere. A root problem to this was probably the scale of the level. I did not include any indication to scale within my level plan, which transferred onto my work in engine. The level is too big, and I struggled to fill it all whilst keeping it to a low amount of props, given more time I would definitely downsize everything. Another problem in the level was the roads and the paths; because I just used textures there is no height distinction between the two. Considering the level is set at night, it becomes quite hard to see the different textures, if given more time I would create a separate road and elevated pavement either side of it. I would also add the occasional car passing through the village.

The village successfully felt like a real village, regardless of it not being exactly how I wanted. Given more time I would want to enhance this by adding more details such as bins and various posters around the area. I also did not have enough time to create the artstyle I wanted, given more time I would create the assets and textures myself to achieve this.

▪ EVALUATION ▪

I am happy with the the sighting of the 'guy' works. They are hard to see but the fear of the unknown is an important element of horror media, particularly in my game which is meant to be atmospheric. But given more time, I would want to make these sighting more interactive with more complex animations that trigger as the player gets closer.

Failstates are something I would also like to add if given more time, I intended to add the mechanic at least but did not have time for this in the end. Alongside this was the anxiety metre. I only managed to add trigger boxes with dialogue, I attempted to figure out a way to have the screen darken which would happen when the player went out of bounds or stared at the guy for too long, but this isn't something I achieved in time.

There are a few bugs in my final build which I tried to fix but couldn't figure out.

Despite this, I am satisfied with my final level. I have a fully functioning level that can be played from start to finish.

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