BABEL



A refuge built on faith.
A tower ruled by ambition.

A 2D dark-fantasy Metroidvania. Descend into a buried labyrinth, earn new ways to move, and return to challenge the ruler above.

YIBO WANG

Game, gameplay, level & narrative design
Programming and implementation

Personal project · Unity 6 · Windows
Free development build · v0.56.0

PLAY BABEL → hajimi9914.itch.io/babel

Watch gameplay & design overview →

AI-assisted visual assets and synthetic voices.
Cover illustration; gameplay images inside.

A World Read Twice

LEVEL DESIGN / The entire campaign is a connected space; each victory changes what the player can read and reach.

Descend before you ascend

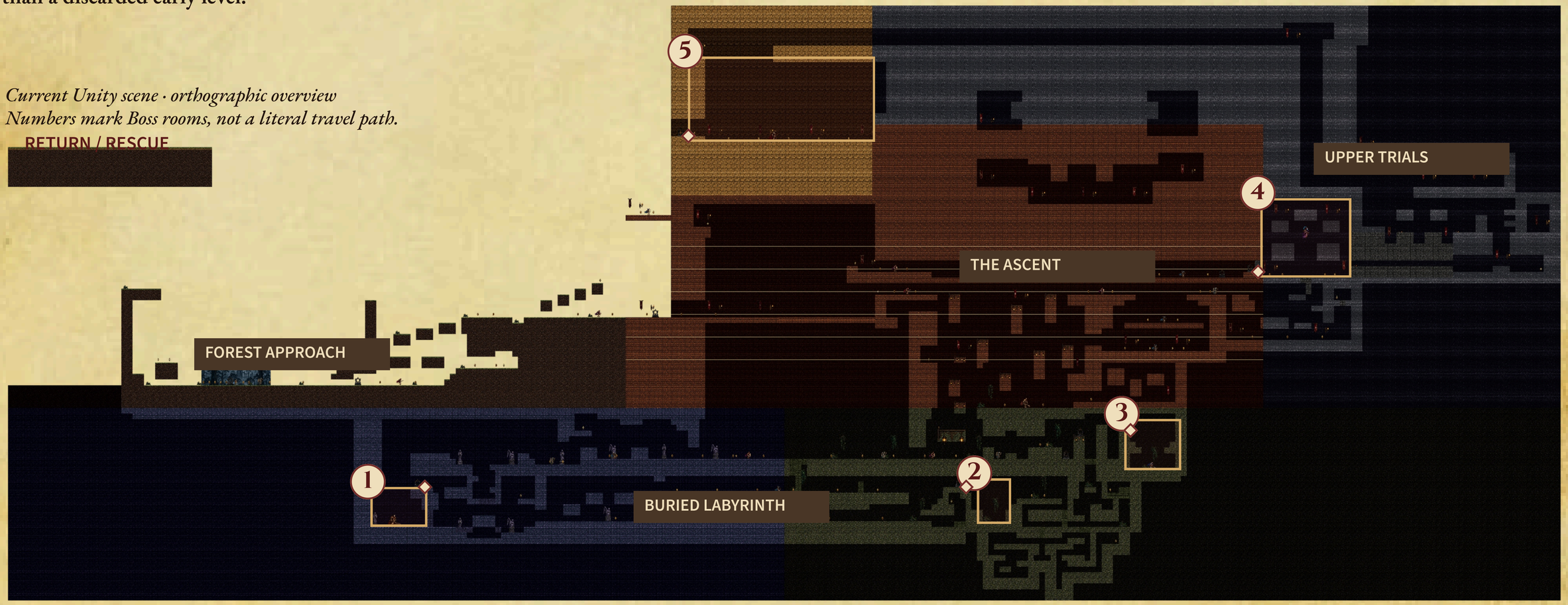
The forest gives way to buried rooms. Four guardians grant traversal powers; the route then folds upward into the tower. Familiar stonework becomes a new possibility, rather than a discarded early level.

Read the route, plan the retry

Gold outlines mark the five guardian rooms. Diamonds mark nearby altars: a failed attempt should ask for another decision, not a long repeated commute.

Current Unity scene · orthographic overview
Numbers mark Boss rooms, not a literal travel path.

RETURN / RESCUE



01 · Abaddon

Shockwave opens fractured stone.

02 · Korah

Wall Jump turns shafts into routes.

03 · Azazel

Double Jump extends aerial choices.

04 · Bel

Crystal Dash crosses long passages.

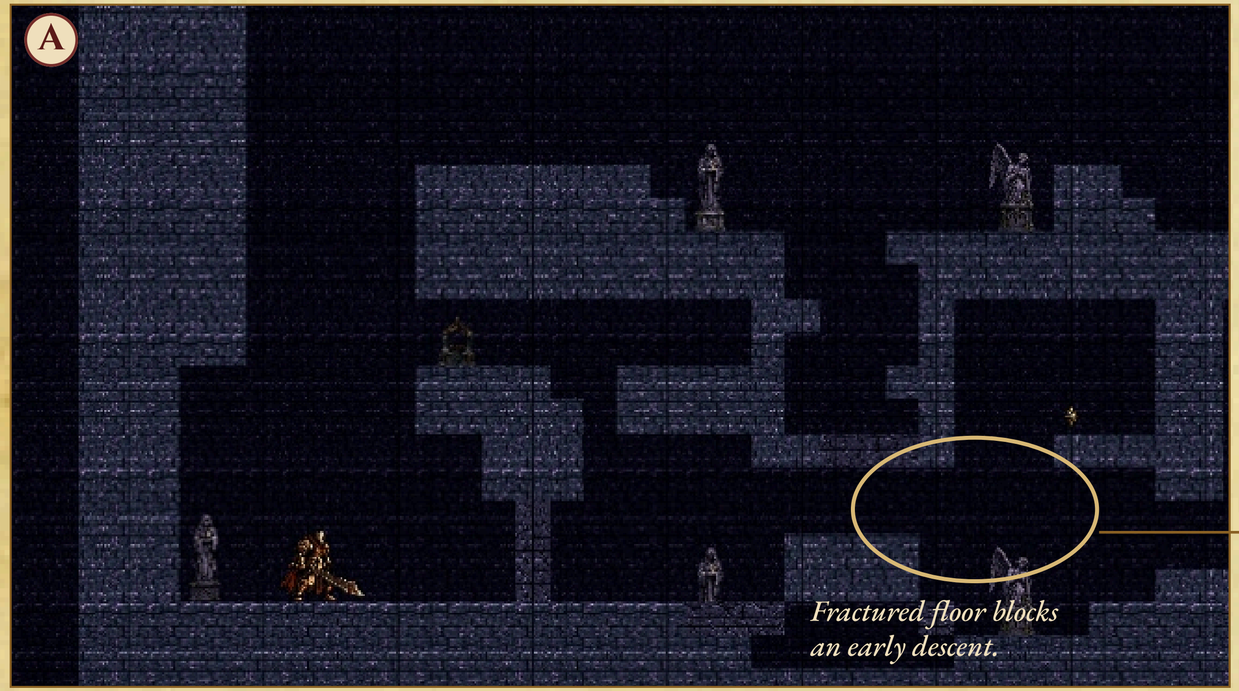
05 · Nero

The final encounter combines the journey.

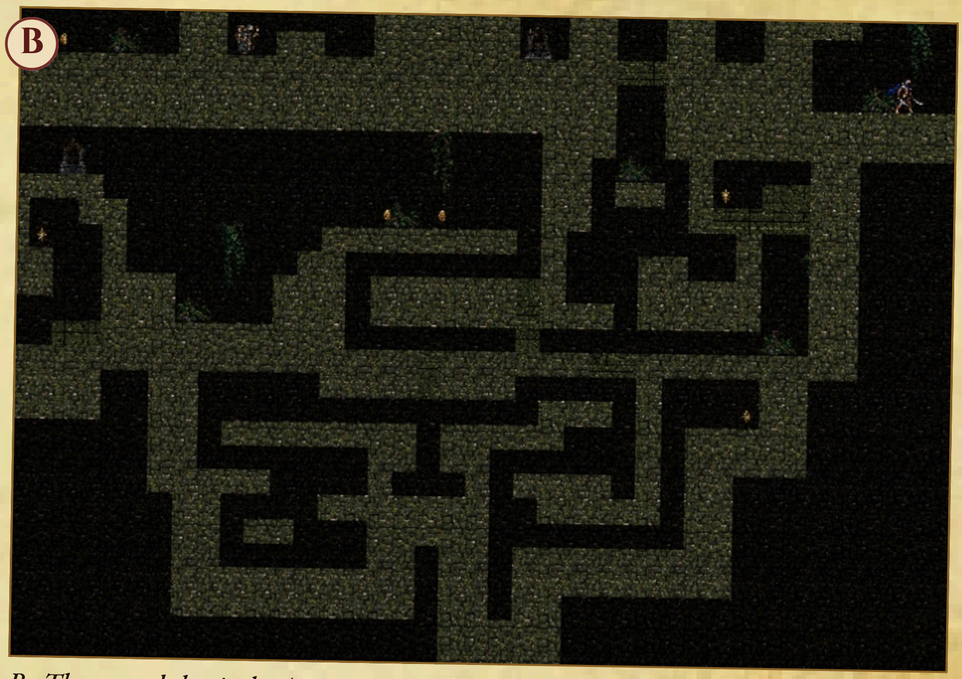
Yibo Wang / Game design / v0.56

Gates, Returns & Discoveries

LEVEL DESIGN / A barrier should protect progression, explain itself, and make the return journey worthwhile.



A · First guardian approach. Cropped from the current campaign map.



B · The green labyrinth. A narrow corridor is a route, not part of Korah's arena.

CHECKPOINT → APPROACH → COMMIT → REWARD → RETURN

Protect the first descent

Before Shockwave, breakable floors must still support the player. Closing premature drops keeps an apparent shortcut from becoming an ability-locked dead end. The player can turn back and read the intended approach.

Reward changes the route

Abaddon's arena begins on landing. After victory, the new beam breaks the fractured exit and earlier barriers. The unlock is immediately useful in the same spatial language that first stopped the player.

Make stone legible

Cracks distinguish breakable blocks from ordinary walls. The same material must be used across the map. Repeated casts or invisible gates make a traversal reward feel unreliable.

Design check: gate positions and collision need route-by-route verification with only the abilities available at that point. An all-abilities test save is insufficient.

The Pilgrim's Movement Vocabulary

GAMEPLAY DESIGN / Show a new action, give it a nearby purpose, then ask the player to combine it with earlier actions.

Double Jump

A second decision in the air—not simply a higher first jump.



01 First take-off *02 Press again in the air* *03 Correct the landing*

Why it matters

Azazel's reward adds a second timing window. It expands reachable gaps while preserving a choice about when to commit the extra jump. The three images are consecutive moments from one input-driven capture.

Wall Jump

Contact → push away → regain height.



01 Catch the wall *02 Jump away* *03 Return to the shaft*

Korah's reward converts a vertical surface from a stop into a route. The push must visibly separate the body from the wall; a pose embedded in stone undermines the rule.

Crystal Dash



01 Aim and charge *02 Launch—the trail makes direction and commitment visible*

Power with a price

Hold a direction and Dash. The 0.7 s charge can be cancelled for free; a successful launch costs 1 Spirit. Release before charging again. Later capacity growth supports longer routes without making early mobility free.



Vertical Dash uses a dedicated pose.

Screenshots are cropped v0.56 gameplay frames; sequence labels and arrows are analysis overlays.

One Spirit, Three Promises

SYSTEMS & COMBAT / The same resource can buy survival, an opening, or a route through the world.



Shockwave · 1 Spirit · 2.5 s · roughly five tiles before modifiers. Current in-game release.

A SUSTAINED COMMITMENT

Aim before casting, then move while the beam persists. It begins in front of the hand, breaks successive fractured blocks, stops at solid stone and repeatedly damages targets in its path.

WHY THE BEAM GREW

The old short, one-block result made exploration expensive. Extending duration and reach makes one cast solve a passage, while sharing Spirit with healing preserves the opportunity cost.

SURVIVE



Hold Heal for 3 s → restore 1 vitality.

One Spirit buys recovery only if the player can protect the channel.

CROSS



Charge → spend 1 on launch.

The v0.56 cost stops repeated free Dash. Boss victories add one maximum Spirit each; growing capacity supports longer late-game demands.

STRIKE



Up + Attack · directional melee.

Melee stays available when Spirit is empty. Up/down attacks make position part of offence.

A HIT IS A CONTRACT

Bodies can pass through each other. Damage comes from the active attack window. A successful down-strike bounces the player; small enemies recoil from accepted hits. Shields, heavy units and Bosses do not follow the same recoil rule.

Balance status: 1 Spirit is the current Dash rule, not a proven optimum. Next: observe failed casts, healing choices and resource pressure on long return routes.

Relics Worth Returning For

RUNES & ECONOMY / Discovery offers a possibility; preparation asks which four possibilities are worth carrying.



Repository · all eight collected runes remain visible; four sockets constrain the active loadout.

Inspect anywhere; change the four active runes at an altar. Romance offers health at an offensive cost, while Rings rewards staying hurt. Preparation commits to a trade-off without hiding information during exploration.



The Wayfarer's Exchange · gold becomes provisions or permanent growth.

Spend Now or Build Capacity

Bread and draughts answer immediate needs. Permanent relics extend future capacity; Sanctuary Oil adds 1 maximum Spirit. Harvest changes prices, while Flight changes collection convenience.

Sun

+40% sword and beam reach.

Flight

Draw nearby coins toward the player.

Rings

More attack power at low health.

Moon

Reflect a portion of received damage.

Star

Faster attacks.

Romance

More maximum health; less damage.

Woman

One revival at the place of death.

Harvest

Lower shop prices.

Guardians of Stone & Earth

BOSS DESIGN / Abaddon teaches range and timing. Korah shifts attention from the body to the ground.

I · Abaddon, Herald of Ruin



Wave: release from the front of the body.

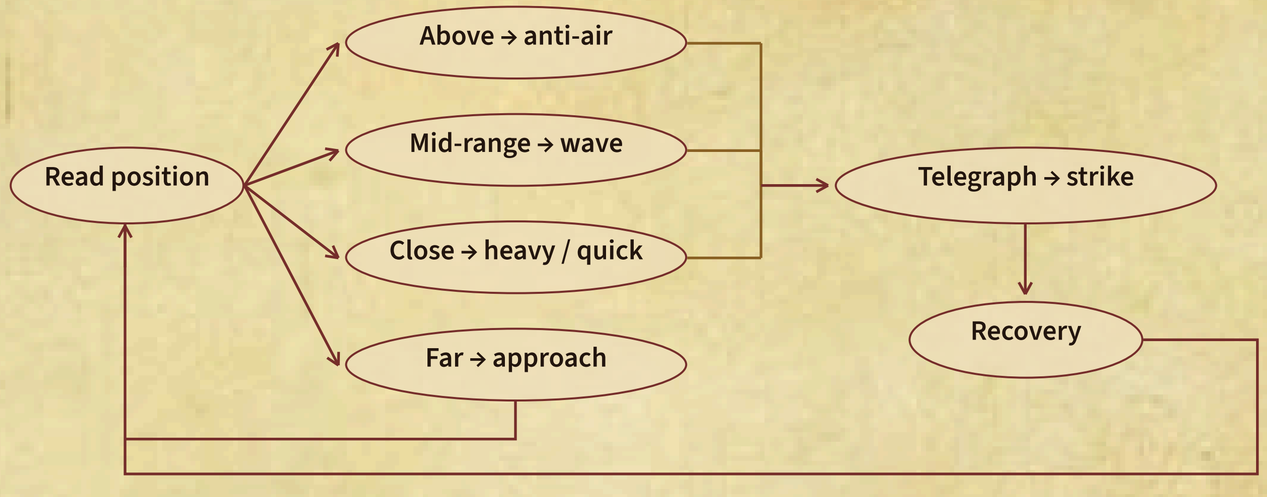


Heavy · 1.5 s wind-up



Quick · 0.5 s wind-up

REWARD / SHOCKWAVE

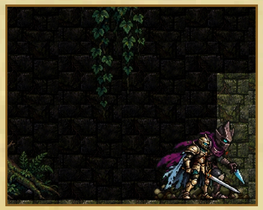


Close-range heavy and quick attacks alternate. The overhead response prevents standing on top from becoming a permanent safe answer. Recovery returns to a fresh position check.

II · Korah, the Earthbound



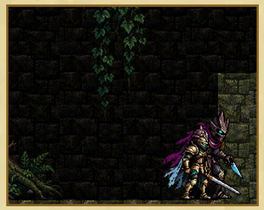
Track below



Emerge



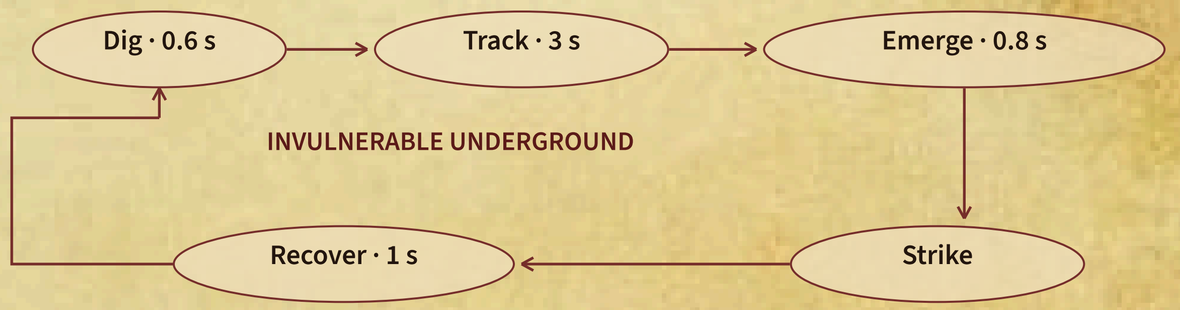
Strike



Exposed recovery

A rubble trail suits the stone setting and reveals the threat. Read the ground, avoid emergence, then attack during the exposed recovery window.

REWARD / WALL JUMP



Exposed body can take damage

Diagrams simplify the current state logic; arrows show transitions, not animation frames.

Yibo Wang / Game design / v0.56

Guardians of Air & Distance

BOSS DESIGN / Change the spatial question instead of repeating the same melee test with more health.

III · Azazel, the Exiled Watcher



Air-side pair: one direction, then the other.

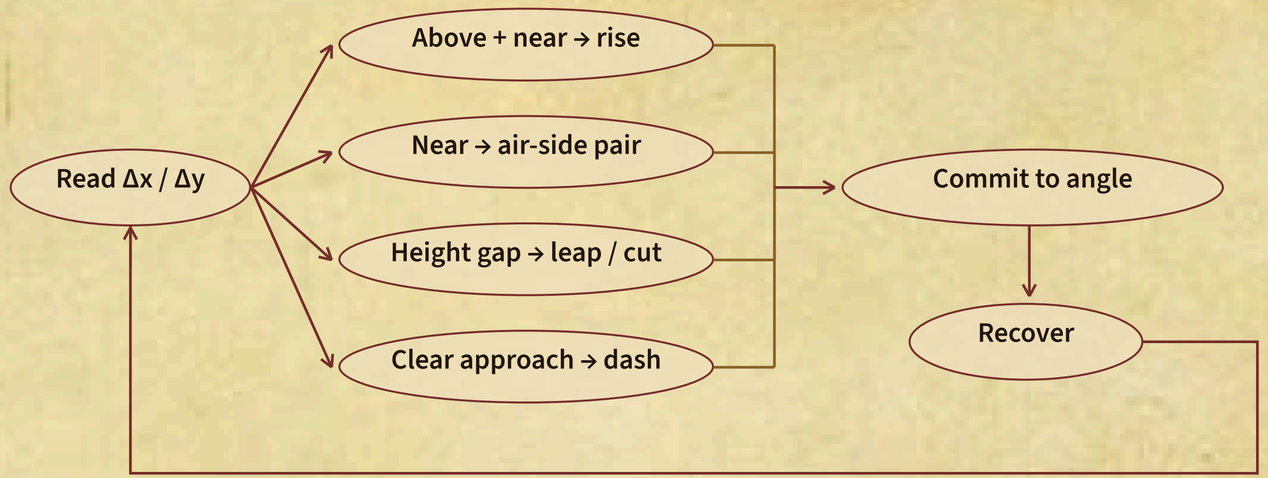


Rising diagonal



Charged pursuit

REWARD / DOUBLE JUMP



The player must read height and direction while both bodies move. Directional strikes leave space to answer; an invisible 360° damage disk would erase that spatial decision.

IV · Bel, the Gilded Idol



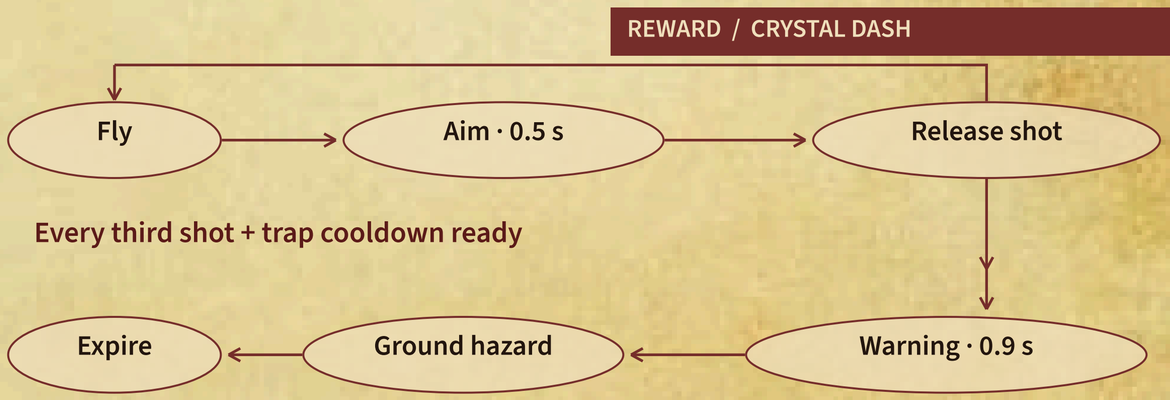
Float through the authored room.



Aim and release a visible shot.

Two pressures share one room: an aerial firing route and an independent ground trap. Watching only the flying body is no longer enough.

REWARD / CRYSTAL DASH



Crystal Dash then answers the distance problem: a committed crossing tool for the long passages beyond.

Nero: The Crown's Last Argument

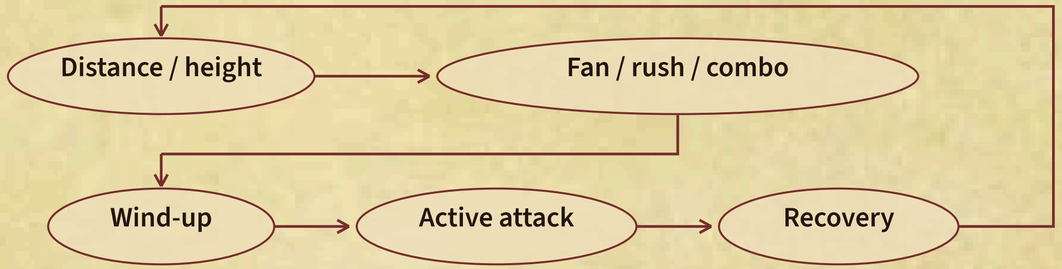
FINAL ENCOUNTER / A ruler who promised refuge asks the player to survive control of the whole arena.



Charged fan · the spreading projectiles make the threatened space visible.

V · Nero, Heir of Nimrod

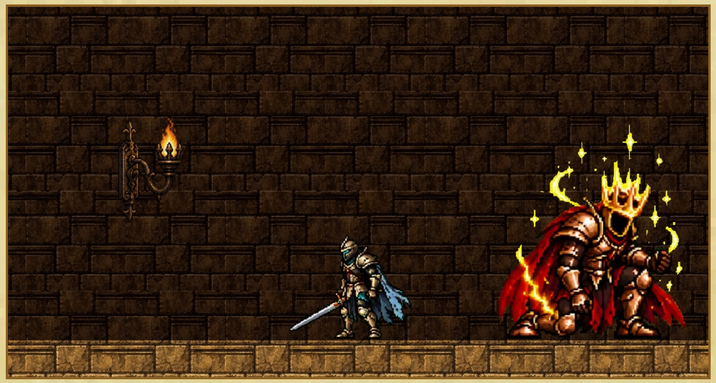
The final Boss recombines distance, aerial pressure and melee timing. The held sword remains part of his identity; the attack set includes distinct slashes and alternating ground slams.



Close combo: forward slash → right slam → left slam.
Above: a visible overhead answer.
Far away: charged fan or approach, not an unreachable melee swing.



Ground slam · a dedicated pose and impact.



Half-health transition · visible crown flare.

At 50% health

A protected 1.8 s transformation separates the phases. The second phase increases pressure: a wider-density fan (11 projectiles rather than 9), faster rushes and stronger melee hits.

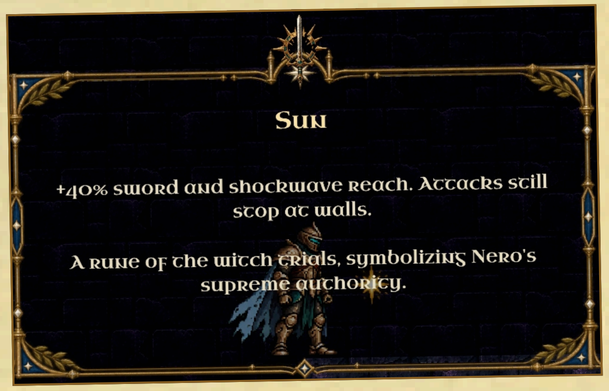
The transition happens once. It must be visible even if a sustained beam crosses the threshold; damage cannot skip the change of state.

Memories, Not an Instruction Wall

NARRATIVE & ONBOARDING / Let a discovery explain both what happened here and what the player can do next.



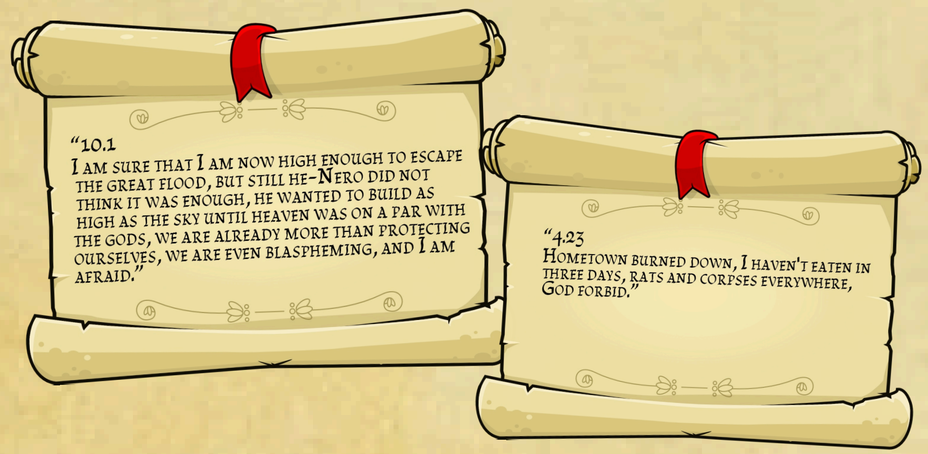
The tower begins as a promise of refuge. In-game opening artwork.



A rune discovery pairs its effect with lore.



The pilgrim enters the ruins.



Builders / memory of construction

Travellers / lived consequences

A PROMISE THAT CHANGES MEANING

The opening establishes scarcity, faith and the tower's ambition. Recovered builders' and travellers' accounts let the player compare what the tower promised with what it became. Nero's confrontation resolves this conflict through the same space the player has learned to cross.

TEACH WHEN THE VERB BECOMES USEFUL

LAND	**FIND SWORD**
Move & jump	Directional attacks
FIRST WOUND	**EARN ABILITY**
Hold to heal	Its input + nearby use

Guides queue around dialogue, can be dismissed with Q and remember completed lessons. The revised Dash lesson also reaches existing saves, so a changed rule is explained again.

Small Enemies, Different Questions

ENCOUNTER & FEEDBACK DESIGN / A readable enemy family prepares the player for the guardians without duplicating them.



Basic melee

Approach & punish

Patrol → notice → chase → wind-up → strike → recover. Establish the basic timing exchange.



Shield guard

Read the defence

A frontal block is not a successful hit. Attack during an exposed window or change the angle; blocked contact must not trigger damage recoil.



Ranged guard

Close the distance

Aim → charge → release a magic arrow. The missile has direction and shape; a small blue dot does not communicate the threat.



Heavy giant

Respect commitment

A slower, larger body claims more space. The wind-up offers a response window; the giant resists player knockback. Spawn only where the room fits it.

Player takes damage

A brief screen flash, camera shake, hit sound and recoil make a lost health unit unmistakable. These effects start only when damage is actually accepted.

Enemy takes damage

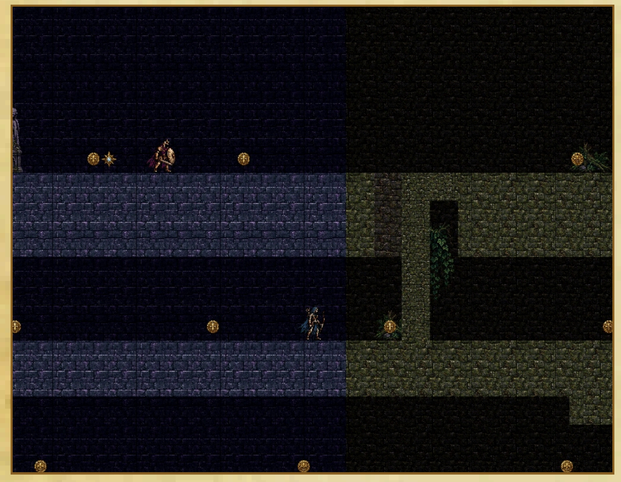
Use the enemy's local hit animation or flash and an impact sound. Avoid full-screen flashes on outgoing attacks; keep attention on the target.

Read action before impact

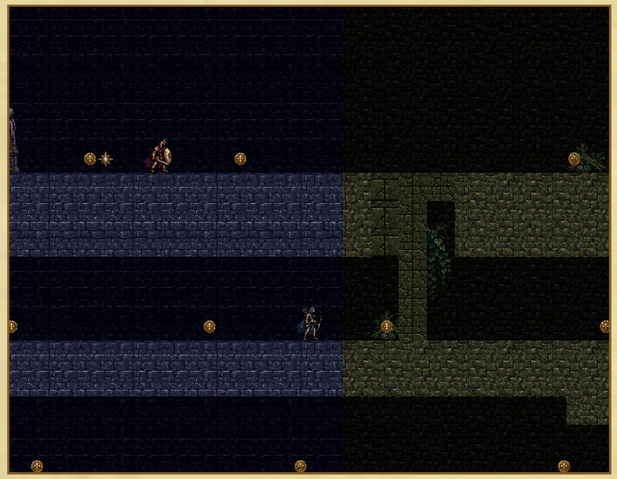
Wind-up, swing, beam, stone break and ground slam need different sounds. Footsteps sit lower in the mix. Audio announces behaviour without recreating debug labels.

What Changed—and What Still Needs Play

ITERATION / Implementation checks can prove a rule works. They cannot prove that its balance feels right.



Archived v0.44 · earlier material.



Archived v0.44 · fractured material.

Make progression visible

Problem: breakable stone looked ordinary, while an early drop could trap a player without the required ability. Response: audit the gates and use a consistent fractured material. The pictures compare the material treatment; they are not a before/after beam cast.

Make cost predictable

Problem: free Dash allowed repeated movement without a resource decision. Response: charge 1 Spirit only on launch, with free cancellation and a release requirement. Current regression checks cover directions, input devices, zero Spirit and interruption.

Evidence retained

38 targeted checks passed for v0.56. Both campaign and standalone practice players were built and smoke-tested. Automated saves were isolated from the player's campaign. The public Windows build is available on itch.io.

The two executables share gameplay definitions, animations and Boss profiles. Their entry points, progression and save identities remain separate; a practice-only success does not prove campaign traversal.

Next observation, not invented results

01 Can a new player recognise the first fractured gate?

02 When does healing outweigh Dash on a return route?

03 Can players predict Korah's vulnerable window?

04 Is Nero's half-health change noticed under pressure?

No new full campaign traversal or formal player study is claimed here. Balance and learning outcomes remain open questions.