Level Outline – Avino Laboratories

1. Setting & References

An improvised research facility, deep underground.

It had been the refuge of the remaining Avino, a species of humanoid birds that were ostracized after awakening an ancient monster. The Avino were accomplished geneticists and worked on artificial life forms from the safety of the hidden laboratory.

In the wake of the escape of these creatures, the equipment was destroyed and the Avino were killed. Their corpses decorate the floor and prison cells have been opened by force.

At the lowest point of the facility, a giant water tank is located. Its glass casing has been shattered and dark liquid is pouring onto the ground. A faded sign on the tank reads "PJT MNIH" (originally: PROJECT MIDNIGHT).

The game starts in a room with a much smaller water tank. Its shell has been broken as well and Slate emerges from the puddle of black liquid that has formed on the floor. The dead body of a young Avino scientist lies near the exit.

2. Context

The Avino Laboratories is the first level of Shadeshifter. It's an isolated area beneath the surface of the game world. After killing the boss and leaving the facility, the player is **not** required to ever return to the laboratories.

3. Purpose

This level serves as an introduction to all the key mechanics of Shadeshifter: It teaches the player to move, jump, fight, upgrade, transform, save, and die. Similarly, the Avino Laboratories establish the Metroidvania structure of the game and the lack of a consistent central direction.

Narratively, this level sets up the 3 mysteries that dominate the first half of the story: Who is Slate and what is his purpose? Who were the dead birds and what happened to them? What escaped from the laboratory and what is it going to do?

As a gameplay-driven experience, the Avino Laboratories must raise these questions without taking the control away from the player. Instead of using cutscenes or dialogue boxes, Shadeshifter starts in medias res and relies on character design and environmental storytelling to gets its narrative across.

The Avino Laboratories represent the full extent of the playable prototype of Shadeshifter. As such, they have to showcase the potential of the game idea and leave the player hungry for more.

4. Enemies & NPCs

4.1 Wooltooth – common enemy

A mixture between a sheep and a sable-tooth. It only moves horizontally and cannot jump. It has a melee attack. Due to its small size, the player can transform into a Wooltooth to get through narrow corridors.

4.2 Volture – common enemy

A vulture with electric abilities. It can fly in all directions. It has a ranged projectile attack. The player can transform into a Volture to reach previously inaccessible altitudes in the level.

4.3 Capranite – unique boss

A mixture between a giant human, an ibex, and rhodonite. He is the first boss of the game and guards the exit of the laboratories. He has both a melee and a ranged projectile attack. The player can transform into the Capranite and use his melee attack to destroy brittle walls.

5. Other Gameplay Elements

- Fall-through platforms
- Save points
- Currency
- One-way barricades
- Dark orbs

- Upgrade points
- Secrets
- Health upgrades
- Elevators

6. New Mechanics to Teach

- Movement
- Jump
- Entering/leaving rooms
- Metroidvania structure
- Combat
- Death
- Falling through thin platforms
- Upgrading creatures
- Secrets
- Transforming
- Leaving current creature
- Flying
- Activating and riding elevators
- Boss fights