

# MILESTONE 1:

For the actual building of the game, I want to focus on the first level so I can figure out more in-depth how I want the game to look and feel. It helps with this as I have a design created for this level so it will let me focus on the building and mechanics of the level outside of just the concept and design work. I'm thinking of using Unity for this as I have some experience with it from my level design class and I like the overall build of the editor. I may end up doing more of a pixel art style if I have trouble implementing with a 3D but side-scroller aspect. I'd like to implement some animated/drawn cut scenes but that might be more of an extra addition. Mainly depends on time and what I can get completed.

As extra, I've added in my game/level design work so you can see my idea and plans for this game as I'm super excited to work on it.

## GAME DESIGN:

### PREMISE

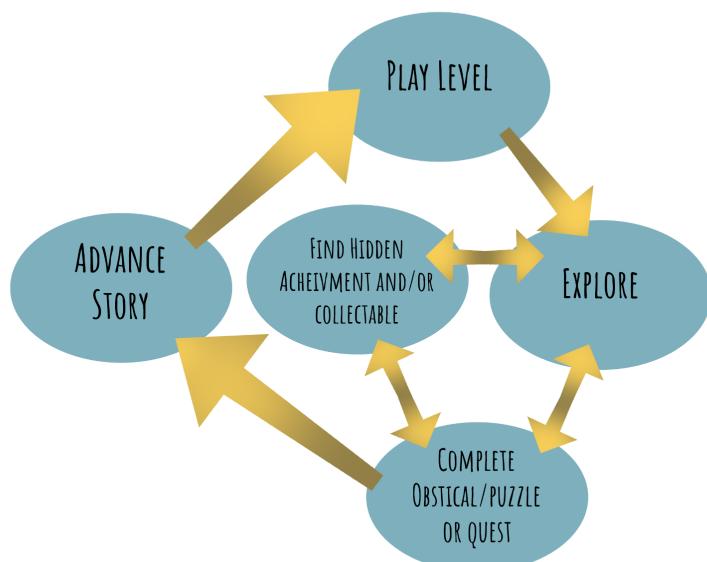
In Finding Home, the game is set around the Yellowstone River flowing through Montana, featuring various lush environments that can be found through your travel upriver. You play as a young otter who was just separated from their mother due to a raging flood, casting them many miles from home. You want nothing more than to reach home, but the journey will not be easy as you will have to learn how to fend for yourself alone in the wilderness. You will do this by learning and developing your new skills, and knowledge about the world, solving challenges, and surviving hunger and natural predators.



### GAME MECHANICS

- Core Mechanic: Survive as a young otter pup and show growth both physically and mentally.
- The stages you are in in-game affect what controls and abilities you have access to. Such as in the beginning, the player is unable to swim but is unlocked as the character advances and ages.
- Badges are awarded for special achievements and game stages.
- The ability for a small amount of trading and gifting related to quest and Neutral/friendly NPC interactions.

### CORE GAMEPLAY LOOP



- Inventory system for collectibles, plants, quest objects, and hidden accessories.
- Repeated actions develop skills throughout levels. Ex) Fishing becomes easier as the otter becomes faster and more skilled.

## CONTROLS

Within Finding Home, there is a focus on the natural elements and actions an otter takes in nature. With this, controls are connected to basic movements of run-walk, jump, and crouching. Water-based actions include swimming, diving, and surfacing. Survival is also an aspect so there is the ability to observe for scent markers indicating food and prey, predators, as well as hidden objects or collectibles. Forage then allows the player to look in the areas designated by the scent markers and can react according to what they have found. Markers indicated as predators mark spots to avoid or sneak through using crouch or ducking under objects to stay hidden. The attack can be used to defend but also to hunt prey. Inventory can be used to look through collectibles as well as be used to carry food, objects, plants, etc that may be needed for the level or quest. For call-outs, there are additional remote-like features players can use. In some portions of the game, these calls can affect the interaction with other neutral NPC animals to get additional small tasks, achievements, or even hidden collectibles. Scaring or befriending these NPCs may lead to hidden surprises or dangerous encounters.



# (EXTRA)CHARACTER DESIGN: PLAYER CHARACTER/PLAYER USAGE

## CHARACTER SUMMARY

Marlow the young otter is the focus of this story as the playable main character. Their objective is to somehow make the perilous and long journey home after they were washed away from their mother in a flood. They are lost in unknown lands, still very young with few survival skills. In order to reach home, and pass the unknown obstacles in their way, they must learn and adapt, develop their skills, and survive. By learning about the world and themselves, they may have the strength and courage to find a home.

Along their path, food is a huge priority. With their newfound fear of the raging waters and lack of swimming experience for their age, they must find ways to traverse the river and overcome obstacles such as rocky cliffs, log jams, rapids, and even predators that roam for food. Much of the land is unknown to them so learning is imperative to survival and problem-solving. The journey is long, so they don't stay small forever. As they grow in knowledge, they too grow in size. As they progress, obstacles become harder to overcome and more dangerous.



## (EXTRA) ENEMIES/OBSTACLES/CHALLENGES

### ENEMY DESCRIPTIONS

Enemy NPC: Raptors (eagles, hawks) will prey on the otters while they are young and small. Unable to swim in the beginning, large birds may swoop down and grab them if they can't hide in time.

Level Boss: Coyote. The night times are dangerous and coyotes are very hungry. They chase quickly and suddenly from the dark shadows. Listen for their howls and rustling in the bushes to avoid their jaws.

End Boss: Mother wolf. This wild cat in need of food stalks and follows the otter for many weeks, making it her mission to hunt them down. She has several close encounters with the otter before becoming the main obstacle to defeat at the very end. She is very fast, crafty, and agile, carrying the wisdom of the land. You need experience and developed skills if you want to survive.

## CAMERA/LOGISTICS

### PLATFORM

Finding Home will initially focus on Xbox gameplay. Expansion to PlayStation and pc such as through Steam will be implemented shortly after to ensure a wide range of player access. The range of control types featured in these three mainstream devices allows a wider range of accessibility for players across multiple platforms. Additionally, these 3 interfaces are widely used allowing for more user playability and fewer platform-specific limitations.

GENRE & CAMERA: 3rd person and Side scroller puzzle action-adventure. (dynamic visuals to enhance a 3D feel to the world while being limited to more side scroll world-building).

CLASSIFICATION: Finding the Way Home features characteristics of visual storytelling and puzzle platforming that can be seen in Never Alone. Additionally to Never Alone which focuses on the culture and wildlife of Alaska, Finding Home focuses on Montana with its environments, and wildlife, putting emphasis on native species. Little Nightmare 2 is also sharing similar characteristics of a world placed in a 3D scalable environment using 3rd person platformer perspective.

The story is based on a single-player campaign that increases in difficulty as the player progresses. The story is about personal growth as the young otter begins the long journey home. New skills are learned and developed as challenging puzzles and action sequences are in the way of your goal to reach home.

# LEVEL CREATION GOAL:

## Level 1: Lost

- The beginner level will introduce the story plot (trying to get home)
- Teach beginner gameplay controls
- Begin to teach the player about the conflicts of the world they face (deforestation and pollution affecting/destroying the ecosystems - is what resulted in a flood that washed the player away from home at the start.)
- Teach that survival will not be easy. Nature can be beautiful yet cruel



**Where:** (Estimate Location marked on the map) The very beginning of the level takes place late evening on a warm spring day. It progresses to a starry clear night before panning to a wall of storm clouds approaching. The scene jumps to a raging storm and pouring rain that sets in the racing flood approaching. After the storm events, the player wakes up on a muddy island, in the early morning with a gray sky. Surrounded by forest, a raging mud-filled river, and logs were strewn about or floating by. This wake-up location becomes the main environment for this section.

**Why is level memorable:** The initial story element is meant to be jarring and sets the story premise for the entire game. It's memorable because it's the beginning and reasoning for why the player must overcome obstacles and complete set goals. This chapter will also feature a lot of story elements through cutscenes to add to visuals and be more impactful. I want the players to connect emotionally to the otter pup.

# GAMEPLAY NARRATIVE

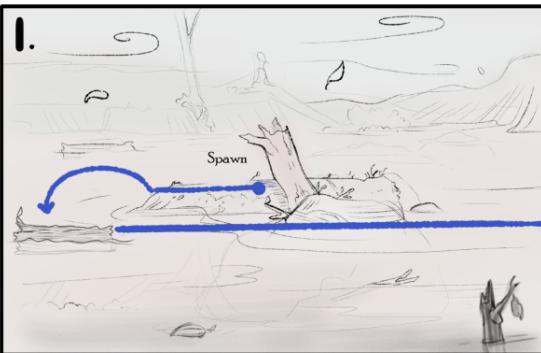
## STORY SUMMARY

Finding the Way home follows Marlow the young otter pup who has washed away from its mother during a violent flood. (*The time period is set during the wolf removal from Yellowstone which resulted in the chain destruction of ecosystem levels*). Now lost, alone, and very far from home, they must learn to survive unfamiliar lands. As they travel, they see how the flood has destroyed much in its path, displacing many forms of wildlife. They discover that the destruction of the forest holding the soil stable led to the rapid downfall of the river and environment. As they travel they learn to navigate the land and water, hunt and forage for food, and survive encounters with predators. Marlow grows in skills and knowledge learning of not only nature but of themselves as well. Their journey is one of self-discovery allowing them to make the final push and reach home. As they travel, several encounters with Tala the Mother Wolf ensue, each more terrifying than the last. She is a large beast with glowing eyes and a thirst to catch this wandering otter. They are Marlow's biggest challenge; they must not only survive but surpass her.

## OVERALL GAMEPLAY SUMMARY

Finding the Way Home is structured through individual levels grouped in chapters. It's very visual and story-based while featuring puzzles and platforming challenges similar to the game Never Alone. Each chapter contains a series of small levels that contain the challenges or tasks. Chapters help break up season transitions and huge story events into their own easy-to-access sections. Most of The story progresses over the 4 seasons, starting in spring and transitioning to spring of the following year. The player not only sees the growth in skills and knowledge but the change of age as well. They begin the journey from a young pup yet to swim, to a fully grown adult able to take on the challenges of nature. Each level pertains to specific challenges and tasks and can feature different terrain from plains, mountains, forests, or be water-based. Marlow must use their learned skills to hunt, travel, or survive predators. Additionally, they learn to help other animals and the environment such as completing tasks and interacting with friendly animals. Through foraging, additional achievements can be made when collecting wildflowers and planting seeds and saplings. The end of levels features the progression to the next section of terrain after passing the obstacles preventing progression forward. As time progresses and skills advance the challenges become more complex and dangerous. With surviving various predators, the fierce mother Wolf who stalks Marlow through their journey becomes progressively harder to surpass in each encounter. From hiding to running, outsmarting to defeating, Tala may be the greatest challenge they face in the very end.

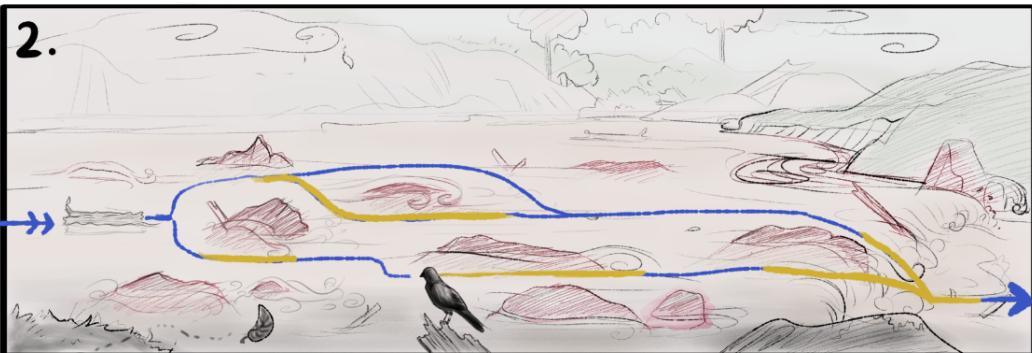
## LEVEL 1: LOST - NARRATIVE SUMMARY



The player wakes up on a small island in the middle of the post-flooded river after they were swept away from their home. Fallen trees and debris litter the rushing muddy water, too dangerous to enter.

The young otter can not swim yet and has no way off. The only option is to jump onto something floating by and travel to a safer spot.

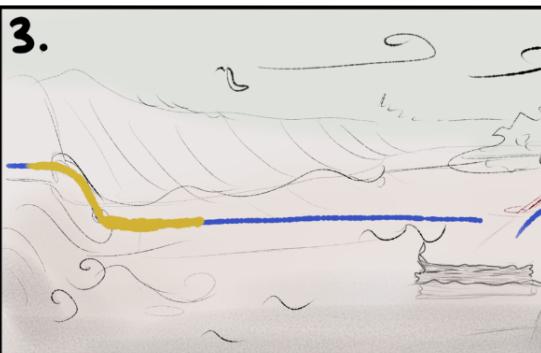
This first step helps teach basic walking movement and the jump ability.



Yellow zones on the path indicate rough waters. Players will need to Brace by spamming X when prompted to not fall off as the log moves violently.

Dangers are indicated with red. If players fail to avoid them, they will crash and drown.

Avoiding the dangers of the rapids teaches players how to maneuver in the water while on objects by steering. This is an aspect used mainly early on as the otter is unable to swim yet. Players can use this to cross water, collect or place floating objects, and solve puzzles.



After passing the rapids and small waterfall, the player will come across a massive log jam blocking the way forward.

The water is rushing through and under the logs sucking under anything that gets too close. This is demonstrated by showing smaller logs and branches ahead being sucked under. In the center is a large rock with a small opening through the middle. The player must leap on this platform before their log is sucked under. From here, players learn to crouch and then crawl through the tightest space to pass. After a series of platform jumps on the rocks the safety of the shore is finally reached, ending the first level.

After reaching the endpoint, the music strengthens and the cinematic camera begins to pan out over the river, forest, strewn logs, and into the sky showing a vast amount of mountains, forest, and more.

## LEVEL ??: GOING WITH THE FLOW - NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The level opens with Marlow wandering along the riverside. The sun shines brightly and the stones and boulders of the river's edge are warm. The water flows slowly as it widens, creating many gravel and shrub-covered islands. As you wander along, a splash is heard ahead. During the investigation, the player finds that there are fish swimming and jumping out of the water to catch bugs at a meander point of the river. Memories of the fish mother fed pop to mind and being hungry from only feeding on small bugs and mice, you approach the water's edge. The depth is shown with the deep blue and turquoise shimmering as Marlow leans over the edge of a steep boulder. While watching, a large fish suddenly jumps directly below startling Marlow causing them to fall in. The water drags them down as they panic. As they sink the sky shimmers above while the water grows darker. They still accept fate but mother's voice echoes around "*The waters are powerful, too wild to fight. Instead, let it guide you, feel the flow around you, and follow.*" The player then begins to control Marlow and uses quick actions to help steady their swimming movement through the currents. Facing the glowing rays of the sky shimmering at the surface, Marlow begins to swim more strongly and surfaces.

Realizing the accomplishment they begin to swim with excitement, exploring the new territory. Fish can be chased but are too fast to catch yet. Exploring leads to hidden objects and a quest to find food unlocks a foraging skill for crawdads and aquatic bugs. Additionally, there are small log obstacles to teach how to maneuver underwater. After being done exploring the water, the player guides Marlow back to the shore. Stomach full, they settle down on a warm rock to rest.

## LEVEL ??: TALE OF THE SHADOWS - NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The level opens to a vast meadow surrounded by a pine forest and the river running through the center. It is dark as the full moon is high in the sky and the stars shine brightly. The meadow is aglow with this light casting on snow with the only shadows being of those from the forest line and your own. The player begins to explore the level, traversing West Upriver along the edge. There are occasional patches of dense shrubs the player finds they can tuck away in. By traveling west the landscape slowly becomes denser as trees come closer into view. The light peaceful atmosphere suddenly turns dark as the dark figure slowly stalks from behind.

The player begins to run as they are chased and the environment grows more dense, approaching the base of the mountain. More trees enclose, shrubbery, grass, snow, and rocks are denser and the river bank steepens. The player briefly hides as the wolf loses sight but now they must continue forward without being spotted. They do this using logs, dens in the river bank, and plants to hide when the wolf is watching and using running or crouching to slowly crawl through areas that make noise such as tall grass, or crawl slowly over thin ice. The wind begins to blow and snow swirls around. The player eventually reaches a point in the river where the bank is steepest and a frozen log jam sits ahead. The wolf, having spotted the player at this point, chases, managing to cause a deep gash before wiggling free. The player must climb through elements of the slippery logs and eventually swim under a maze-like portion through a break in the ice. The wolf is unable to follow and they escape. Surfacing much farther down the river and letting the current take them, they crawl back to shore and walk with a heavy limp. Finding a dry under bush they clean their wounds and sleep. The level ends as it begins to snow heavily.

# AESTHETICS

## LVL 1: LOST

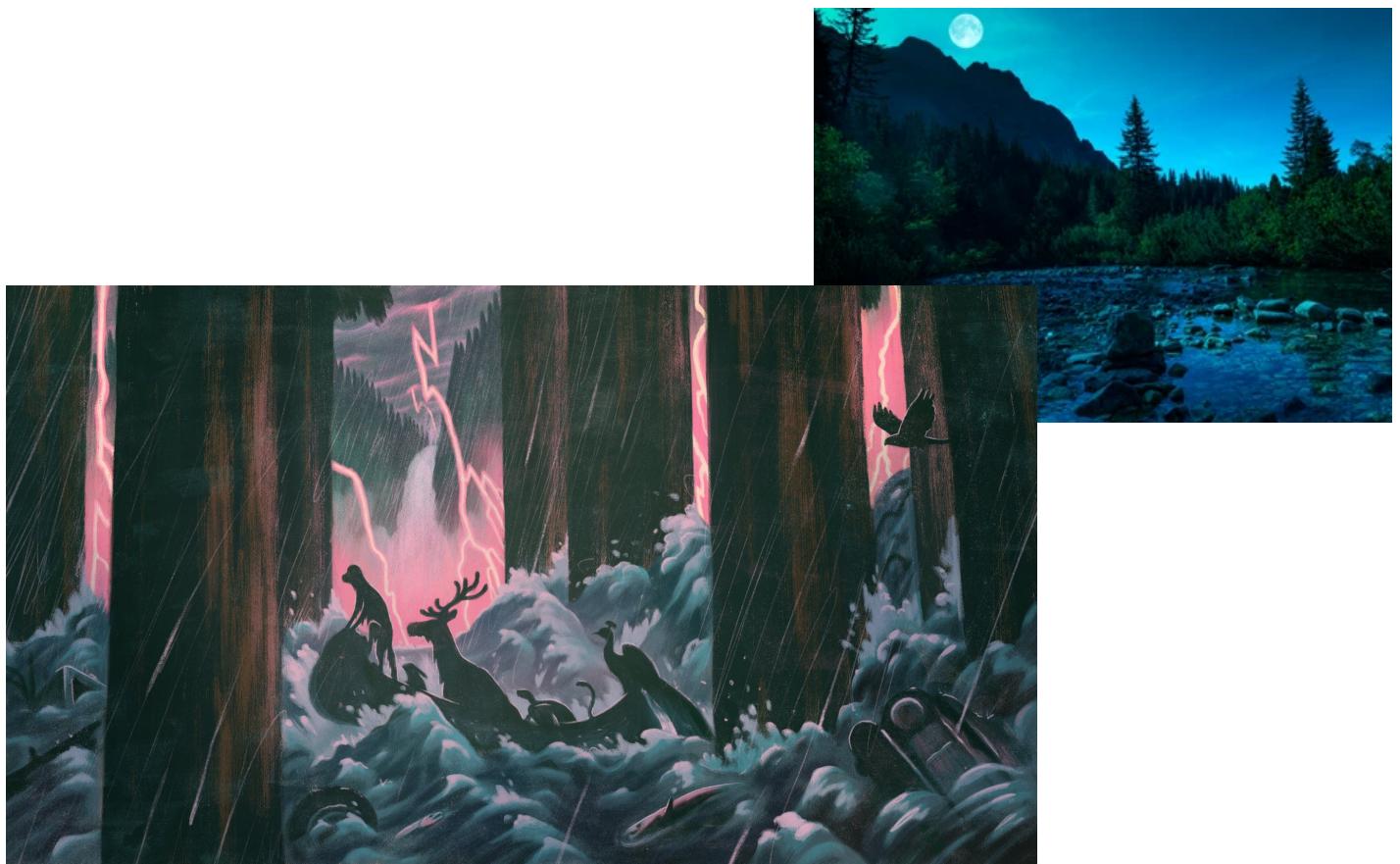
Fear, panic, and the feeling of being alone and in an unknown world are the main emotions. I want the player to connect and feel strongly for the otter pup, to have the need to help them.

### AUDIO SAMPLES:

<https://www.chosic.com/download-audio/28514/>  
<https://www.melodyloops.com/tracks/dark-storm/>

### Spatial Arrangement

The overall spatial arrangement before the flood is an open landscape filled with trees, slow-flowing water, and a view of the mountains stretching high into the sky. It evokes a sense of peace and calm. With the flood, the level will be very cluttered and condensed with overwhelming darkness. Logs, trees and branches, and large amounts of muddy debris litter the landscape and water. There will be a sense of chaos and disorder in the random placement of objects. Will use more angular and sharp shapes. Prospect spaces represent the rocky boulders and logs you must jump across to reach the refuge of the grassy shore.



## LVL ?? GOING WITH THE FLOW

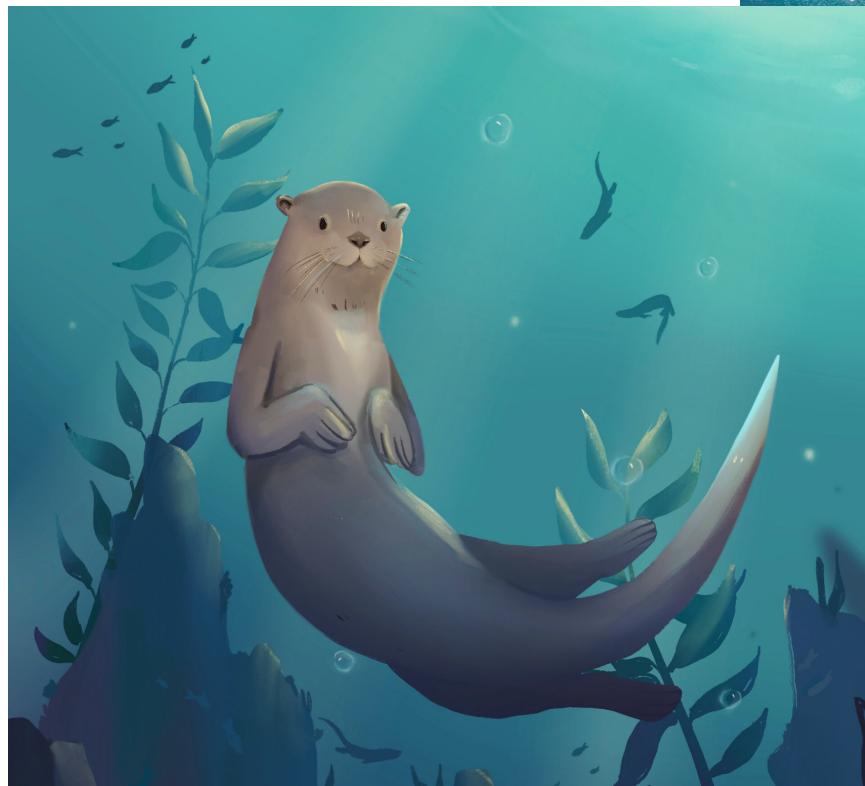
At first, a sense of fear and defeat when they succumb to the water. They have the feeling of hope, courage, and empowerment as they overcome the water. Joy and wonder are what follow last as they explore the new world of water.

AUDIO SAMPLES:

<https://www.melodyloops.com/tracks/chilly-night/>

### Spatial Arrangement

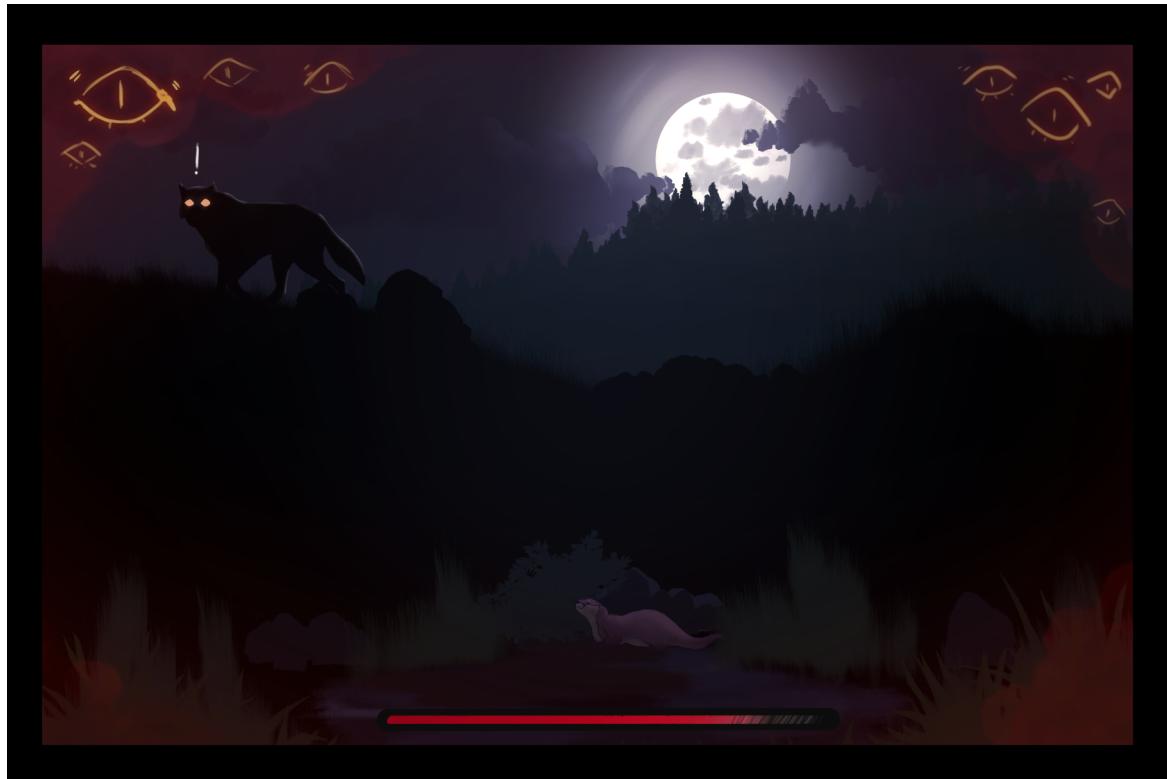
This level of environment will be calm and flowy. The use of soft round shapes will be prominent paired with lighter colors. With the deep water scene, colors darken and the water looks more rigid and suffocating. The rocky bolder outlook of the river meander will be a refuge space that lets you look out on the prospect of the river space. Refuge spaces will be shrubbery along the river as well as dense aquatic foliage and small rocky crevasses underwater.



## LVL ?? TALE OF THE SHADOWS

This chapter, it's all about fear and panic. Mother wolf is featured in this encounter hunting the young otter pup. It's filled with dark shadows and the Irie illumination of the full moon casts the silhouette of the wolf as she stalks from above. If spotted the player must race to a hiding spot in time or be killed which invokes panic.

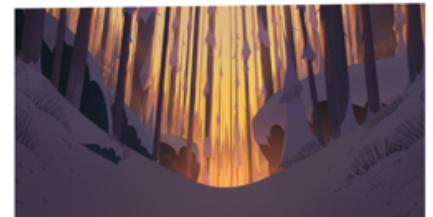
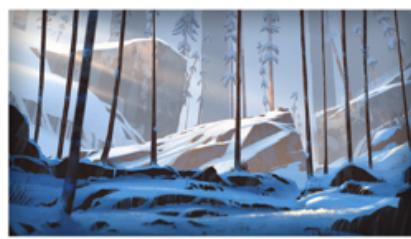
MY CONCEPT ART: PRE-SNOW PORTION



This concept art also demonstrates the User interface for this level and aspects for stealth ---->



Concepts for overall game visuals/art ---->



## AUDIO SAMPLES:

<https://www.melodyloops.com/tracks/you-can-not-hide/>

### Spatial Arrangement

Refuge spaces are seen as hiding locations such as dense shrubbery or grass, small dens in the muddy bank, or underneath logs. Spatial size initially is more open as the river in the beginning portion is in the prospect space. A meadow with the edge of the forest farther out. It progresses to be more narrow as the banks become steeper and come with more obstacles to traverse.

## CONCLUSION

In Finding Home, you immerse yourself in the wilds of Montana to explore its beauty and discover the secrets of the land. Its colorful and creative visuals push the depths of the story to make players feel connected to the world. Its appeal will reach a variety of players from young to old with the discovery of self, purpose, and inner strength. It will test their creativity and problem-solving skills as progressing closer to home will become increasingly difficult as new obstacles appear. Different actions may cause new discoveries, interactions, and even endings so there will be many possibilities to explore and bring back players to discover more hidden treasures.