

This project was my first attempt to experiment with the Skyrim CreationKit and level design in general.

The idea behind the mod was to work with two different environments (cave and Nord ruins), each part having a special theme and connecting those through the story.

Story concept:

Breton alchemist Garvis Sidan finally saved enough coin to fully concentrate on his studies of the different herbs of Skyrim's nature. His first subjects are the glowing mushrooms which only grow in caves underground. Optimistic (and naïve) as he is, he moves his field laboratory to the first location that seems fitting for his research – a small, unusually lush cave where plenty of the strange fungi grow.

Once the player crosses through one of the major holds city (yet to be decided in which hold the cave will be placed) past level ten, the brother of the ambitious alchemist will approach the player and ask them to deliver a few supplies to the scholar:

- (1st time approaching the player)
“Ho there, traveller! You seem like someone competent to me. Would you care making some coin by helping a busy man out?”
- (Answer choices for the player)
 - “What are we talking about, exactly?” (Triggers explanation of quest)
 - “No, sorry. I’m a little busy myself right now.” (Decline)
- (Answers by NPC)
 - (If interested)
“You see, my brother Garvis, stubborn as he is, went in the wilderness alone to do some “research”. Wants to examine herbs or whatnot, left me alone with our work at the mill and expects me to bring him supplies. As if I’d ever go so deep into the woods. But you seem to be able to easily deal with anything that comes at you, so would you mind bringing him this? I’ll reward you after the job’s done, of course.”
 - (If declined)
“Oh, well. I’ll be by the mill every day, so should you change your mind I’d be glad to hear it. Provided my brother didn’t starve yet.”
- (Answer choices for the player)
 - “All right, I’ll do it.” (Accept)
 - “No, sorry. I’m a little busy myself right now.” (Decline)
- (Answers by NPC)
 - (If accepted)
“I’m glad to hear it. My brother currently researches some herbs in a small cave <cardinal direction> of <capital of hold where quest is set>. Here, I’ll mark it on your map.” (Adds quest item ‘Alchemists supplies’, quest marker and locked fast-travel point)
 - (If declined)
“Oh, well. I’ll be by the mill every day, so should you change your mind I’d be glad to hear it. Provided my brother didn’t starve yet.”
- (Dialogue if NPC is approached again after initially declining the quest)
 - “Oh, it’s you again. Have you changed your mind? Will you deliver this to my brother?”
(The player can accept or decline, the NPC will then either give the directions and quest or ask the player to stop by if they changed their mind)



The area around the spring with the mushrooms (ingame(above) and in CreationKit(below))



Upon entering the cave, the player will see the field laboratory of the alchemist at the back of the cave and, to the right, a small spring with lush vegetation all around – fern, moss and also a handful of glowing mushrooms growing on the walls. To make this area seem more lively and interesting, I added a weak light source around the mushrooms (as if they'd be the source of the glow which is usually not the case in Skyrim, but since they are a major aspect of the plot I wanted them to stand out) and put a thin layer of fog over the pool and the fountain.



The area around the alchemist's laboratory (ingame(above) and in CreationKit(below))



In the back of the cave is the area where the alchemist set up his field laboratory with a cooking fire, a knapsack, a table, a chest containing a few scrolls of paper, and an alchemy laboratory. The alchemist himself is not present, though the player will certainly notice the big hole in the floor that seems to lead into a big Nord tomb.

Items placed on the alchemy laboratory are

- 3 alchemical ingredients (Giant's Toe, Blue Mountain Flower and of course a Glowing Mushroom) with the common trait "Restore health"
- "Draught of Health", a potion that increases health for a certain amount and time

Items placed on the table are

- rolls of paper, ink and a quill for the alchemist to take notes on his research
- 3 samples of glowing mushrooms, a soul gem and a basic knife (indicating the alchemist was examining and experimenting on the mushrooms)
- A lit candle and a bottle of wine (light source and a beverage for the busy scholar)
- An alchemy skillbook and a note written by the alchemist, documenting his findings

The Note is titled "Alchemist's Notes" and reads as follows:

"Discoveries on the Glowing Mushrooms

The mushrooms emit a slight amount of blueish glowing - hence the name - and grow in a considerable pace, given that the samples I removed three days ago already have regrown. They also appear to exclusively grow in moist places underground, such as caves like this one, abandoned forts or the old ruins of the Dwemer which are now riddled with Falmer and other monstrosities...

Back on the matter of the strange glowing that surrounds the fungi: I developed a theory that relies on the origins of the Nirnroot as we know it today.

It is said that due to the eruption of Vvardenfell in the First Era, the Nirnroot began to live on the ash spewed by the volcano and started emitting a magical glow, thus changing its appearance from yellow to a shining blueish-green.

Maybe the glowing mushrooms derived from similar circumstances? Both have effects on health, but the Nirnroot weakens it, whereas the glowing mushroom has a balming touch.

I will definitively investigate this matter further when I finished my research here, but for now, there is much to do. First attempts on brewing potions with the mushrooms as the major ingredient have been very promising. Tomorrow I will try to combine the mending effects of the fungi with those of other rather common herbs like mountain flowers and hanging moss. Perhaps I will be able to produce a simple and cost efficient, yet potent healing potion. Facing the aftermath of the civil war, this would be a tremendous discovery!"

Since the alchemist is missing I wanted the player to get an own idea of the NPC's character based on his research. I pictured him as a kind of naïve but determined person and I wanted to represent those traits through his actions (walking into the wilds on his own, resolved to gain insight about every herb in all Skyrim to ultimately develop efficient potions to help people (hence the health potion and health improving ingredients on the alchemy lab)). While thinking about how the character would note his studies I remembered reading a lore article about the Nirnroot in the UESPWiki¹, another herb of the Elder Scrolls Universe - what would be more fitting to a character eager to understand all secrets of the school of alchemy than a wild theory basing on an incident hundreds of years ago and jumping from one conclusion to another?

When the player inspects the hole in the floor, he/she can see into a big hall - Nordic tombs, as the architecture of the room below reveals. A Nord burial site has been built underneath the cave many years ago, and the ceiling collapsed right where the unfortunate alchemist chose to rest for the night. Down there, amidst big piles of rubble the player will see the NPC's bloodstained bedroll, but not the NPC himself.

Jumping down into the tomb (the fall is deep enough to deal a moderate amount of falling damage to the adventurer; It'd be strange if the player wouldn't get hurt at all while the NPC was obviously injured) shows that the alchemist landed next to an altar on a platform in a big hall. A trail of bloodstains indicates that he tried to find an exit out of the tomb - after all it seems to be located underground and the hole in the ceiling is unreachable.

¹ http://en.uesp.net/wiki/Lore:Flora_N#Nirnroot



The transition area between cave and tomb (ingame(above) and in CreationKit(below))



Following the tracks left by the alchemist, the player will make their way through the tomb (which I haven't drafted a proper layout for before I put it on hold, so there won't be any reference pictures for the rest of the mod concept).

As I stated at the beginning, I wanted to experiment with different environments and give each part of the dungeon a special theme: underground pool/spring, lush vegetation and collapsed floor for the cave, direct but unusual transition between both parts.

The tomb's special theme is that of a feared bandit chief called Vadrak the Fierce who terrorized <hold where mod is placed>.

With great efforts and under great losses the Jarl and his men managed to slay the bandits, and to make sure they'd never do any harm again, the Jarl ordered a tomb to be built, to seal away the murderer and his companions for all time. Since the tomb is built underground, there is no real exit/entrance, only a sealed off tunnel leading from the main hall back to the cave that was used to transport everything into the site.

The grave has three bigger chambers the player has to pass, in each of it the ghost of one of the three strongest comrades of the bandit chief will await and attack the player on sight.

In the last chamber the player will finally find the alchemist, slain by the last of the three ghosts. Looting him the player finds his research diary, 3 binding writs he removed from the bodies of the bandits (curiosity kills the cat), a dagger and his clothes.

In his diary, the alchemist noted his progress on his studies, and after he fell into the tomb he noted his findings on the tomb itself (e.g. the background story, who is buried here and why). His last entry is about the binding writs, in which stands that the three warriors will only ever obey their chief's might.

Shortly after leaving the last chamber, the player reaches the main hall where the bandit chief has been put to rest. Approaching his sarcophagus will cause him to awaken and attack the player. After he has been defeated, his body will contain various levelled loot and a special two-handed axe, called "Vadrak's Might", hinting the player on how to defeat the three bandits ghosts one and for all. Since the alchemist removed their bindings, they will respawn after the player looted the bandit chief's corpse, and the only way to kill them without them reappearing is to use Vadrak's axe (or at delivering the killing blow with it).

Having dealt with the undead warriors, the player proceeds to the end of the hall where a door mechanism requires them to put the axe into it to unlock the passage to the cave (The passage will stay opened after the weapon is removed from the mechanism). Inside the tunnel a boss chest containing levelled rewards is placed.

Returning to the alchemists' brother, the player completes the quest.

- (NPC) "Well? Have you delivered the supplies?"
- (Answers by player)
 - "I didn't. I found your brother dead in a tomb under the cave. The floor collapsed and he fell right into the fangs of the draugr. I'm sorry. I retrieved his diary and research, though."
 - "No, not yet. I'm on my way."
- (Answers by NPC)
 - "I... I don't know what to say... But thank you for returning my brothers' notes. That means much to me. Take this... you should get this as a reward for delivering the supplies, but take it anyways." (500G add, remove Alchemists notes and diary)
 - "Then get it done, please. My brother might be a stubborn eccentric but I wouldn't want him starve to death."



A first concept of one of the three chambers (ingame(above) and in CreationKit(below))

