What Went Right

ᴪ Flooding and Collapse

The key to this level's aesthetic was the water pouring in, both from the storm and from destroyed pipes in collapsed sections. To convey the collapse, I chose one section that would be the primary visual wow moment – a section of tunnel that had fully caved in. Additionally, I submerged the entire level in knee-deep water, with supporting particle effects. To reinforce these larger effects, I created several small collapsing sections. These areas – broken pipes, sparking machinery, fallen ceiling grates – provide more environmental reasons for the water pouring into the tunnel. The result was a tunnel that had a clear aesthetic, supported by multiple elements throughout the level.

ᴪ Material Swap

In order to get Lambent versions of the stock *Gears of War* enemies, I modified materials to give a high desaturation of the diffuse, as well as creating and emissive layer to give them the Lambent glow. After some work in Photoshop and the Material Editor, I was able to create materials that worked well as Lambent Drones and Boomers. To achieve the glowing effect on only specific parts of the enemies, I created a simple texture that was white on areas with a high glow, black on areas with no glow, and flat gray on areas with a normal glow. Through this experience, I had the chance to research the Material Editor and developed a much more thorough understanding of using its various functions to get the effects that I wanted.

ᴪ Good Warm-Up

One of the strengths of this level turned out to be the slow introduction of enemies. It starts out with one Wretch along the floor, then two along the ceiling, then the battle with two Lambent Drones. The slow pacing of combat allows player to become acclimated to fighting the Lambent and gives ample warm-up time. Originally, combat began much sooner in the level, and ramped up much faster. This provided a very intense pacing, which did not work with the environment layout or aesthetic – the flooding and collapse meant there were a lot of moving parts, and intense combat became confusing very quickly. Therefore, I redesigned the encounters for a more measured sequence that does not barrage the player with confusing combat situations. Feedback from playtests immediately improved after making this change, and it gave me a solid foundation to continue polishing the encounters.

What Went Wrong

Ψ Underwhelming Death

After modifying the materials to create the Lambent locusts, I worked to create custom death effects. These included particle effects with Immulsion spray, explosions, and lights. Together, they created good-looking effects for whenever a Lambent would die. However, one large problem exists – if an enemy was torn to pieces (when hit by a grenade or chainsaw), the material on the gibs would be the default, not the Lambent material I created for this project. I researched some possible solutions, but ended up turning my focus elsewhere and was unable to solve this problem. Given that the other effects still went off, the material change was not noticeable, and afterwards the gibs just looked like dead husks. I would enjoy, given more time for this project, the opportunity to go back and create better death effects for the Lambent.

Ψ A Short Experience

Originally, the level ended with the player climbing a ladder into a factory, where a lengthy final encounter took place. The level was physically longer, and the final encounter built into a more intense combat. Unfortunately, the final encounter was not using the Lambent Locusts well, and players engaged them identically to the way they engaged regular Locusts – they did not need to retreat to avoid the death blast. Therefore, I made the decision to cut the final area and condense the final encounter into the important beats. As a result, the level flowed much better, but was also a good deal shorter. However, I did not make the call to cut the final area until late in the project, so was unable to expand the level beyond a restructuring of the end. This reinforced the need to attempt to recognize the need for major restructuring as early in the project as possible – while the design is still malleable.

Ψ Active Collapse

Part of what I wanted to accomplish was a sense of active collapse in the tunnels through which the player moves. The rushing water and section with a distant explosion shake the tunnel both help to convey this, but I'd have liked more actively collapsing sections within the tunnel. After restructuring the level's ending, there was insufficient time left in the project to rig up multiple sections. With additional development time, this is an area on which I would like to focus heavily, as I feel these elements would greatly improve the level's aesthetics.