

David Liss
Game opening

BEAT 1--OPENING

[Note: With player rebirth a recurring possibility, this scene should be scripted so that when it is replayed, none of the dialogue repeats]

OPENING CUTSCENE ENDS

Darkness followed by a slit of light. A blink and then more light. This is PLAYER's perspective, opening his/her eyes.

PLAYER

[confused]

Where... Where am I.

A blast of light and flame fills the screen. PLAYER's eyes are now fully open. He/she looks around at the landscape. He/she is on a rocky beach. There is no one in sight. There are no ships visible. The ocean is violent and churning.

While things are naturally brighter than they seemed with PLAYER'S eyes closed, this is not bright sunlight. The sky is covered with a canopy of dark clouds. Wind gusts loudly. This is angry, menacing weather.

Fiery debris rains from the sky. All around is a burning rainstorm. Chunks of fiery material slam into the beach, kicking up sand. They fall into the violent ocean with violent hisses, giving off angry bursts of steam and spewing scalding water. Agitated seabirds take flight, squawking loudly.

PLAYER

What is this place? How did I get here?

[beat]

I don't remember anything. Not even who I am.

This anxious rumination is shattered as a fiery chunk of burning matter slams into the sand near PLAYER. Sand and embers violently fly upward, raining down on PLAYER.

PLAYER

I need to find shelter.... Someplace to figure things out.

A scripted chunk of fiery material slams into PLAYER – but does not harm him/her. PLAYER dodges this way and that to avoid being hit, but it's a futile effort. A massive chunk of fire crashes into PLAYER, but to no ill effect.

PLAYER

Fire falling from the sky, but it doesn't seem to hurt me. Maybe I don't need shelter.

Just then the sands beneath PLAYER begin to shift. PLAYER has to scramble to avoid being sucked into a sinkhole. The ground to which he/she moves is stable, until he/she remains still for a few seconds, and then it, too, begins to dissipate beneath his/her feet.

PLAYER

The fire won't get me, but the sand will if I don't keep moving. I need to find solid ground.

The game now opens up. Burning rain continues to pelt the landscape. It does no harm to PLAYER, but it's still human nature to escape from chunks of fire falling from the sky. If he/she remains still for more than a few seconds, movement gets sluggish, though this is canceled out by new movement. If PLAYER remains still for too long, it becomes impossible to move, triggering a cinematic in which PLAYER is dragged into the sand, and the POV is quickly obscured. When this happens, trigger Beat 2-PLAYER REBIRTH.

BEAT 2--PLAYER REBIRTH

PLAYER is restored to the opening position and looks around. Everything is exactly as it was when the game opened.

PLAYER

Back where I began....

[or]

I... died. But somehow I'm back.

[the following triggered only after the second rebirth]

[or]

I'd have thought death would be more permanent.

[or]

I'm beginning to see a pattern.

[or]

Rebirth is good. Rebirth to a burning, sinkhole infested hellscape is not so good.

[PLAYER returns to Beat 1, which repeats precisely, excepting no PLAYER dialogue is repeated.]

BEAT 3--SEARCH FOR SHELTER

PLAYER begins to move through the landscape. Rocks, trees, water, or other obstacles funnel PLAYER away from the beach and toward a rocky outcropping. Frightening and/or charming creatures, as appropriate for the locale, either scatter away or menace PLAYER. This is a good opportunity to make the environment feel alive and inhabited by at least some living things.

As PLAYER moves away from the beach and toward the rocky outcropping. A cave comes into view up ahead.

PLAYER

A cave. I can hide in there. Unless the floor of the cave tries to swallow me like the sand.

Then I'll be out of ideas.

As PLAYER approaches, the cave, he/she sees a figure dressed identically as him/her except the dominant color is purple instead of yellow. The figure – THE SHADOW – is gesturing to PLAYER, waving him/her forward.

SHADOW

[voice faint, distorted by environmental noise.]

In here! You'll be safe!

PLAYER draws closer, and SHADOW continues to gesture, now with greater urgency. More scripted bombardment from the sky near PLAYER's position, kicking up burning, scalding sand. The ground starts to give way more aggressively under PLAYER's feet. It's time to get moving!

If they Player hesitates too long, the ground swallows him/her, and the sequence begins again at Beat 1 [but with no repeated dialogue].

PLAYER heads toward the cave. As he/she does so, SHADOW moves further within, gesturing PLAYER to follow. PLAYER enters the cave, and finds him/herself in a quieter world. The noise from the fiery storm outside is still audible, but only vaguely. This is a (literally) cavernous chamber. The sound will be echoey. Dripping water can be heard in the distance. The space is surprisingly well lit, with ornate sconces on the wall holding tallow candles. A large crafting table is visible further toward the interior. This is clearly something more sophisticated than a makeshift shelter.

SHADOW

You are welcome here, traveler.

PLAYER

What is this place? Who are you?

SHADOW

Who are you?

PLAYER

I can't remember anything. I don't know how I got here. I don't even remember who I am.

SHADOW

And yet you expect me to know who I am. Do you imagine the world works differently for me than it does for you?

PLAYER

I was hoping it would, yeah. I'm pretty sure people are supposed to know who they are.

SHADOW

Pretty sure, but not certain, yes? Everything is a mystery to you. Your own life. Your origins. Even how to survive.

PLAYER

At least if I die, I go back to where I started. So that's one less thing to worry about.

SHADOW

You know it will always be thus? You know there are not a limited number of times you can be reborn before the process simply... stops?

PLAYER

I don't know that. I don't know anything. But you seem to have set yourself up here. You must know something. At least more than I do.

SHADOW

In that you are correct. I can help you. And I will. I do not claim to have all the answers, but I know some things.

You must follow the path set for you. You must climb the cliffs beyond this cave and speak to The Elemental. If you can do this, he will aid you with a reward, something vital to your purpose, though I do not know the nature of that gift.

PLAYER

You've got some pretty enigmatic gaps in your knowledge.

SHADOW

Not nearly so many as you.

PLAYER

Point taken.

But it's dangerous out there. And you said there might be only so many times I can die and come back. So how am I going to find a ladder, climb it, and speak to this Elemental with fire falling from the sky and the ground looking to swallow me?

SHADOW

You will need to infuse a crystal with the proper organic matter to construct an energy shield. This will protect you from the dangers you face.

I will tell you what to do, but you will have to collect the organic matter yourself. There will be dangers, but this is the only way to get the answers you seek.

PLAYER

[choice]

- A. I'm not sure I want to go back out there when it's safe in here. *[proceed to beat 4-A]*
- B. I'm not going anywhere until I get some answers. *[proceed to beat 4-B]*
- C. I don't see I have any choice but to trust you. *[proceed to beat 4-C]*

BEAT 4-A--AVOIDING DANGER

SHADOW

Is that all you wish for yourself? To remain here, in this cave? To never know who you are or where you come from? To never understand the circumstances that brought you to this place?

PLAYER

[choice]

A. When you put it that way, it doesn't seem so great.

[Player receives a now-truncated version of the previous menu and given a choice between 4-B and 4-C.]

B. It's better than an eternity of getting burned and buried alive. I'm not going anywhere.

[Player moves to Beat 5.]

BEAT 4-B--QUESTIONS

PLAYER

I want some answers. I need to know what is going on here.

SHADOW

I shall do my best.

PLAYER

1. Do you know where I come from?
2. How is it possible that I don't die?
3. What is this place?
4. Where do you come from?
5. Why are we dressed so similarly?
6. Why is traveling to The Elemental my task and not yours?
7. I am ready to do what I must.

The Shadow's Responses

1. Where we are. This place. It is separate from all that has been. Who we once were, and who we can be again – all of this is in flux. You have an opportunity to change so much, to discover so much, but the answers, I'm afraid, must come later.
2. Life and death are not what they once were. The rules that govern such things have been... bent, let us say. Not broken. Do not rush into danger thinking you can simply start over should the worst happen. That would be foolish.
3. This land is new to me as well. But it is also familiar. Perhaps it is to you too. It may be that we have been here before.
4. My origins are shrouded in mystery. I can say no more right now. Some day we shall speak again, and circumstances may dictate a different outcome.
5. You and I are formed of the same stuff. All living creatures are, I suppose. But our similar dress is remarkable. Is it a coincidence, or is it a sign that our fates are linked? We may yet discover the truth.
6. We all have our parts to play. Readyng you is mine. Accepting this task is but the beginning of yours.
7. I am glad to hear it. I know my answers may not satisfy you, but the journey you are about to take will bring much into focus. [*move to 4-C*]

BEAT 4-C--READY TO BEGIN

SHADOW

It is good you are ready to bear your responsibilities. It is as it was meant to be.

[Advance to Beat 6]

BEAT 5--REFUSING TO LEAVE

SHADOW

[disappointed]

I had hoped for so much more from you. And yet, the nature of time is not what it once was. Perhaps this is not the end.

CUTSCENE: PLAYER walks to one of the cave walls and sits defiantly, arms wrapped around his/her knees. Almost immediately, PLAYER falls asleep and then begins to undergo a rapid aging process. Any visible skin begins to wrinkle. There is a brief shudder, and then PLAYER slumps. A rapid decomposition ensues, and the robe falls empty. A cloud of dust, all that remains of PLAYER, rises as a cloud and dissipates.

The scene fades to black and then...

Return to BEAT 1.

PLAYER now makes his/her way back to the cave [*with no repeated dialogue*]. Upon reaching the cave and encountering SHADOW:

SHADOW

[a bit frustrated]

You're back, then. And I hope in a more constructive state of mind. Come. There is much for us to do.

PLAYER follows SHADOW into the cave. Once they are fully inside.

SHADOW

Now, are you ready to proceed?

PLAYER

[choice]

B. I'm not going anywhere until I get some answers. [*Proceed to 4-B*]

C. I don't see I have any choice but to trust you. [*Proceed to 4-C*]

BEAT 6--CRAFTING INSTRUCTIONS

[This will likely have to be reworked when mechanics are nailed down.]

SHADOW walks PLAYER over to the crafting table. SHADOW holds up a crystal. Light from the cave seems to focus on it, almost as though it were in a spotlight. It shines luminously.

SHADOW

Long ago, the Ancients learned how to harness the power of the elements through the essence of the universe's life force that we call Weka. This crystal will allow you to begin to access some of that power as well.

At any crafting table like this one, you can infuse a crystal with organic matter. The type, and combinations, of organic matter will determine the crystal's effects. You can use this crystal to create an energy shield which will protect you from the dangers of the sky and the earth. Later you will learn to do far more remarkable things.

For now, you will need two components. In the inner regions of this cave, you will find life moss, which you can recognize by its faint glow. To create an energy shield, you will need ten clumps. But you must be careful. There are things that dwell in the cave that may sense your potential and strike out against all that is good.

You will also need the feathers of five etherbirds. These creatures build their nests among the rocks outside this cave, so you will have to brave the elements once again before you can proceed.

Which will you pursue first?

PLAYER

1. The life moss. [proceed to Beat 7]
2. The feathers. [TK]

BEAT 7--LIFE MOSS SEARCH

SHADOW

There are enough bioluminescent plants and animals that you can venture into the depths of the cave without a torch, but you will need to defend yourself.

SHADOW hands PLAYER a club.

SHADOW

It is not the most elegant of weapons, but it should suffice against the dangers you'll face.

PLAYER

"Should," you say? What are these dangers, exactly?

SHADOW

There may be some small predators, creatures driven by hunger and instinct. It would be foolish for them to attack you, but you must be prepared.

There are also things in these caves that are not only your enemies, but the enemies of life itself. Know that the very steps you take that place you in danger will be the means of your deliverance.

PLAYER

I wonder if there's some way you could be more specific.

SHADOW

You will succeed, or you will learn by failing.

PLAYER ventures into the cave, far away from the areas illuminated by SHADOW'S candle. As SHADOW suggested, everywhere are plants and mushrooms that emit a faint glow -- not a lot, but enough to make out the contours of the path and the walls. There are also creatures, mostly flying insects that give off a faint light.

The passageways are narrow, but occasionally open up to larger caverns, though nothing so large as SHADOW'S area. There are some pools of standing water, narrow underground creeks, and occasionally water gently dripping from the walls themselves. There might also be a large underground river spanned by a natural bridge. It would serve no real purpose, but natural bridges look cool. Similarly, I'm in favor of large, menacing rock formations that vaguely suggest human or monstrous shapes.

The life moss glows faintly and is visible on the cave walls. When PLAYER collects life moss, it becomes visible in the inventory, and a tooltip should note that it can be applied to equipment for bonuses. Right now, the life moss can only be applied to the club. Doing so consumes the clump and applies a bonus to the club on a countdown of 300 seconds. The club with a life moss bonus can easily dispatch Cave Wraiths but has no effect on other enemies. Tooltips will also indicate that life moss can be consumed to restore PLAYER's health.

ENEMIES

- Glow rats: These are cat-sized bioluminescent rats that travel in groups of three or four. Their relatively small size makes them difficult to hit, but can be dispatched with one or two blows from the club.
- Bats: They travel in large swarms and do minimal damage. They can be chased off with the club, but they are hard to kill. More a nuisance than a genuine danger, but if ignored, they can eventually kill PLAYER.
- Cave Wraiths: These are creatures that resemble PLAYER and SHADOW though faded, with tattered cloaks of gray that are only marginally lighter than the surrounding gloom. They are very hard to see. When they attack, decayed, skeletal faces are visible under the hoods. They should hiss eerily when they attack, but no screaming. It should all be understated and creepy. Approximately ten hits from a cave wraith should kill PLAYER. Cave wraiths can be stopped with five or six hits from the club. That effort is reduced to one or two hits if cave moss is applied. Cave Wraiths should not be too plentiful, but PLAYER should encounter at least one of them. Perhaps have them spawn near any large clusters of life moss.

CONSEQUENCE OF DEATH

[TK]

TEN LIFE MOSS GATHERED

When PLAYER has ten life moss gathered, he/she receives an on-screen indicator. There is also an indicator if PLAYER has already gathered ten clumps but then uses at least one to restore health or augment the club.

ON-SCREEN MESSAGE

Ten clumps of life moss gathered. Return to The Shadow.

ON-SCREEN MESSAGE

You no longer have a sufficient amount of life moss. Collect more.

BEAT 8--RETURN TO SHADOW

If PLAYER returns with enough of one ingredient, but still needs the other.

SHADOW

Ah, good. You have enough [present ingredient], but you still need [missing ingredient]. Come see me when you have finished collecting what you need.

If PLAYER returns with an insufficient quantity of one ingredient and has none of the other.

SHADOW

You still need more [insufficient ingredient] as well as [missing ingredient]. Come back when you have what you need.

If PLAYER returns with an insufficient quantity of both ingredients.

SHADOW

You have both ingredients, but in insufficient quantities. You must have ten clumps of life moss and five etherbird feathers. Come back when you have enough of both.

If PLAYER returns with both ingredients with required quantities.

SHADOW

Ah, good. You have everything you need. Let's get started, shall we?

SHADOW gestures toward the crafting table.

SHADOW

Here you truly begin your journey. The skills I will now teach you will guide and preserve you in the many dangers to come.

SHADOW now instructs PLAYER ON CRAFTING. Content TK.

[On completing the crafting tutorial.]

SHADOW

And so, we come to the end, but also the beginning. You are now ready to take your first steps toward what awaits you. Go and see the Elemental. He will instruct you further. I have told you all I can. For now.

PLAYER

[choice]

A. I am ready. [proceed to Beat 9-A]

B. I need more time. I'll let you know when I'm ready. [proceed to Beat 9-B]

C. I don't think I want to do this. [proceed to Beat 9-C]

BEAT 9-A--READY TO ANSWER THE CALL

SHADOW

Then we shall begin. I will take you as far as I can go. I will tell you everything I can.
After that, it is up to you.

BEAT 9-B--NOT QUITE READY

SHADOW

Very well. Do what you must, and when you are ready, come find me here.

[Upon *PLAYER'S* return]

SHADOW

Ah, you've returned. Are you ready to take the next step in your journey?

PLAYER

[choice]

A. I am ready. [*proceed to Beat 9-A*]

B. I still need more time. I'll let you know when I'm ready. [*proceed to Beat 9-B*]

C. I don't think I want to do this. [*proceed to Beat 9-C*]

BEAT 9-C--REFUSING THE CALL

PLAYER

I've had enough of being manipulated. I'll find my own way.

SHADOW

I cannot recommend you follow this path.

PLAYER

No, you want me to follow your path and serve your purpose, but you won't tell me what any of it means. I refuse to be your puppet.

SHADOW

If you are not what you were meant to be, what are you?

PLAYER

I'll have to discover that on my own.

SHADOW

I fear it is so.

A 120 second countdown begins. If PLAYER returns to SHADOW in this time, the dialogue choice that ended Beat 8 reappears. If not, PLAYER will sit down, much as in the end of Beat 5, and proceed to age and decompose. At that point, PLAYER will respawn at [Respawn point TK].

[Upon *PLAYER'S* return to the cave].

SHADOW

It seems there is no escaping destiny, though some will try. And what of you? Will you continue to evade your fate, or are you willing to walk the path intended for you?

PLAYER

[choice]

A. I am ready. [proceed to Beat 9-A]

B. I still need more time. I'll let you know when I'm ready. [proceed to Beat 9-B]