

Dev Diary #4: Locations

The land of Narnia is the stuff of legend, complete with frozen forests in the midst of a hundred years of winter, tall castles in brooding mountains and talking animals. However, the four children that make such an impact upon this land were not born and raised in Narnia, but in London – Finchley, to be precise. Likewise, the story doesn't begin with the children in Narnia but with them in the "real world", and the attitudes of the children before they enter Narnia play a large role in what happens when they get there.

When making the game of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, we realised that it was crucial to include the real world levels in the game. As well as allowing our title to tie in closely with the film, they give the player some idea of where the children come from and what characterises each of them as individuals. Furthermore, passing from the familiar real world environments into the magical land of Narnia makes the contrast between the two worlds that little bit more special.

Our game contains two areas that are not based in Narnia. The first area is set in London and mirrors the opening of the film. Occurring during the Second World War, the gameplay takes place inside the Pevensie's house during a nighttime bombing raid by German aircraft. As the bombs fall, the children and their mother have to get to the safety of their air raid shelter before it's too late.

For many people, this opening section will be the last thing they are expecting from a game based upon *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. It opens up with bombs falling from the skies and flames engulfing London. The lighting within the smoke-filled interior of the house reflects this wartime environment. The house darkens each time a bomb causes the ground to shake and the rooms are bathed in a sinister, orange light. The house looks fairly untouched when the game starts, save for a few broken windows and a couple of dodgy lights, but it isn't long until the bombs begin to fall a bit closer to home and the full extent of the damage to the house becomes strikingly obvious.

The next real world section takes place in Professor Digory's mansion, where the four children have been sent to escape the war. As the name suggests, the professor's mansion contains large, expansive rooms filled with old, ornate objects – perfect hiding places for when the children have disturbed the irascible old housekeeper, Mrs. Macready.

All of the rooms in the mansion are grand and impressive... with the exception of one – a plain and simple room with bare walls and a wooden floor. The room is empty, save for a dead fly on a windowsill and the Professor's old wardrobe.

The word "Narnia" immediately conjures up special images in the minds of those who know of it – images of a land frozen in an eternal winter, without hope of either spring or Christmas, or images of a noble Peter bravely leading his army into battle. Visually, it is an evocative and inspirational land and our artists have had done an amazing job creating it in all its forms.

As previously mentioned, the player enters Narnia when it is in the grip of the White Witch and the perpetual winter that she has conjured up. However, as the plot unfolds and the mighty Aslan begins to walk the lands of Narnia once again, the landscapes begin to show signs of thawing and soon Narnia is a land of green grass and blooming trees.

The difference between the winter and spring environments is both striking and sudden, and the change marks a shift in the balance of power as the White Witch

begins to lose her grip on Narnia. The last half of the game takes place after the ice has thawed out.

The ice levels look suitably creepy - the frozen scenery and the multitude of ice-covered statues dotted around the landscape both give the initial impression that time has stopped still. A closer look reveals more, however, and the nuances of the winter setting become more obvious... soft snowflakes descend in gentle blusters, snow-covered evergreens rock slowly in the wind and patches of ice reflect the surrounding scenery. As players progress through the cold, they will witness frozen lakes that splinter and crack beneath the weight of the children, experience frigid winds that are bitter enough to freeze a person to the spot and they will fight against the Witch's minions as they use the frozen landscape to their advantage, throwing lumps of cracked stone at the children or toppling the old, dead trees into their path. And all of this before the land has even begun to thaw...

However, the arrival of spring does not mean that the later levels are not sinister in their own right. One level that is set in spring sees Peter charging into the White Witch's deserted camp to rescue his younger brother, Edmund. As befits the Witch, this level is eerie and threatening in spite of the lack of snow and ice. Lit only by flickering flames and the light from the moon, the Witch's minions begin returning to the camp through the trees and bushes that surround it, creating an atmosphere that is both menacing and frantic.

The tiny section of the game mentioned in the above example is only one aspect of the overall gameplay, and even that level ends up with a unique twist of its own when the Witch's forces eventually overrun the children. Each level has its own look and its own playing style, which is something that we're very proud to have achieved. The variation ranges from fleeing the collapsing Pevensie house in war torn London or hiding from the irritable housekeeper in the mansion, to skimming down a great river on fractured ice chunks, rescuing Mr. Beaver from a marauding Ogre or calling upon reinforcements to topple towering Giants. Every level is unique.

For me, one of the nice differences between Narnia and other licenses of its ilk is that the vast majority of the major events take place in the middle of the day. There's no pitch-black darkness or rolling banks of fog to hide the scale of the armies or to disguise areas of the environment. The intricate detail on everything has been painstakingly realised and is easily noticeable - from the way the Centaurs move to the complex detail on Otmin's armour - and the sheer scale of everything is immediately apparent. Our artists have remained faithful to the look and feel of the movie throughout development, allowing the locations in our game to accurately resemble their big-screen counterparts, and the end result is nothing short of jaw dropping.