



## The Nature of the Beast

*Game design document*

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## **Part 1: The big picture**

### **Introduction / premise**

*The Nature of the Beast* is a game about a pet that needs to find resources to survive on their own for at least a week. As the character goes to different environments to find or secure resources, *The Nature of the Beast* is a part exploration and part survival, single-player game.

### **Story**

As you (the player) enter the game, you take on the role of a pet animal which was forgotten by their owners at the cabin. You believe the family will come back, but as it is a summer holiday, you do not know how long they will be away. You quickly realize that you need to start providing for yourself if you want to survive. You will need to find or secure the things required to help you stay warm and fend off hunger and thirst. You start exploring outside your house and as you visit different places (a forest, river, plains, but also a storage in the cabin), you are able to meet these needs, at least for some time.

### **External/learning aim**

The player is challenged to think about how their actions impact on the natural environment around them. This happens especially later in the game as most decisions that the player has to make (resources they have to collect) have an impact on one or more of the environments they move between (see below). This impact is tracked through “enviro-stats” which are shown after decisions are made. However, this is not part of the win conditions in the gameplay itself.

### **Objectives / win conditions**

*Objective:* It is to survive until your family returns by providing all the resources you need in sufficient amount and frequency.

*The win/lose condition:* The character’s hunger, thirst and comfort are measured and if any drops to 0 before the end of the week, the game is lost.

#### *Conflict:*

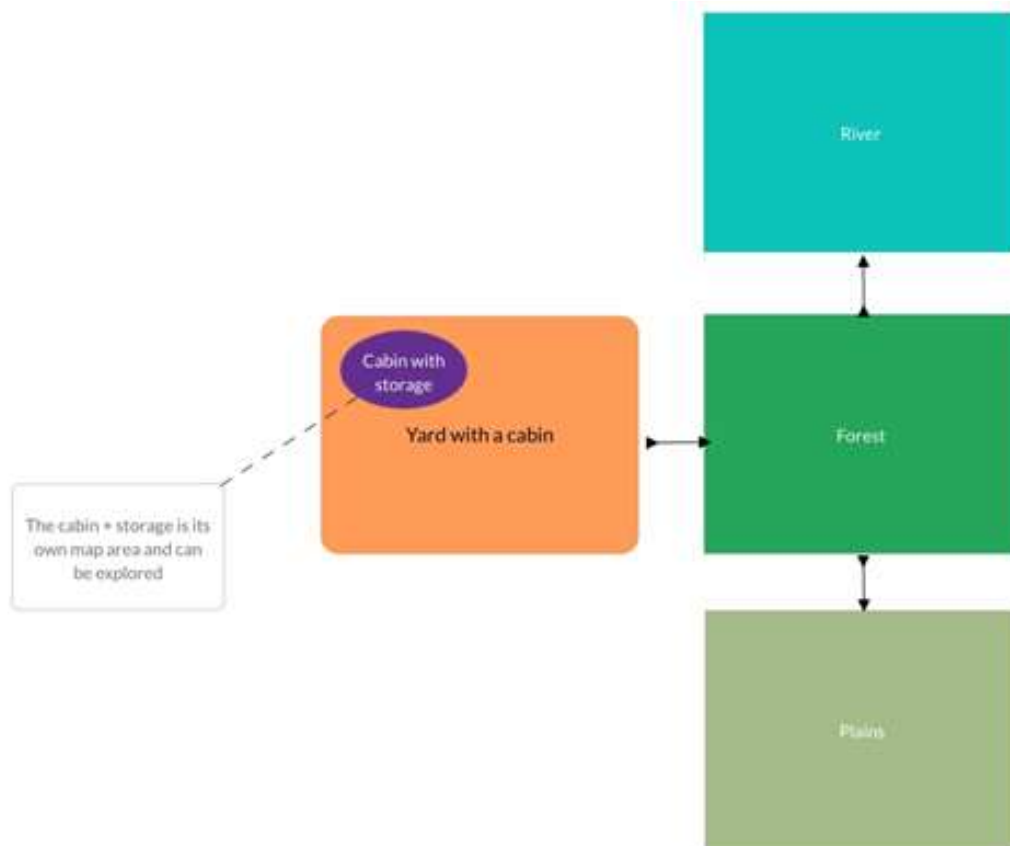
The primary obstacle and source of conflict or challenge is the lack of resources required to meet the character’s need for comfort, food and drink. These have to be found (hidden in the different environments/play areas) or otherwise sourced (e.g. get wood by cutting trees or get food by taking honey from a beehive). There are no NPC opponents.

There is a secondary conflict built into the post-play part of the game and the re-play of the game, one which relates to the external aim described above. As the player finishes the game, they are asked to reflect on the way their decisions impacted the three different environments. They can then decide to replay it and try to manage the resources better or impact the environments less noticeably.

## Part 2: Game environment

### Game space and boundaries

The play space is defined through several interconnected maps, each of which represents a separate 'environment' that the character goes to. They are:



#### *Yard with a cabin*

This is the main connecting map between the cabin (home) and the other environments (nature).

#### *Cabin & storage*

The cabin is where the character brings the resources collected in the other environments. It is also where they get information about their health & comfort level.

Finally, throughout the game the character also gets information about the changes to the different environments.

The storage is a separate sub-area (map) inside the cabin. It is filled with various objects, some of which may be useful to the character in their mission to survive (e.g. a blanket can be used to keep them warm).

Not all items which can be found in the storage room are there from the beginning of the game, i.e. the character cannot just try to use items from the storage room only at the start.

### *Forest, River and Plains*

These are the three natural environments which the character can go to (river and plains are accessed through the forest). Each of them contains a number of objects to be used to survive, but there are also some 'extras' without a specific purpose.

Each environment also contains several NPCs, some with important roles and others only to include humorous interactions.

## **Characters**

### *Pet (the only playing character)*

The player chooses one out of 4 options for the main character before the game starts.

Although these are four different animals (dog, cat, budgie or turtle), the gameplay and the procedures available to all of them are the same, i.e. they are not 'species-specific'.

### *NPCs*

Each map has its own of NPCs, none of which appear in any of the other maps. This is largely determined by the type of environment represented in each map:

Forest – *bear*, squirrel, woodpecker, deer

Plains – *mouse*, goat, groundhog, sheep

River – *albatross*, salmon, otter, beaver, kingfisher

There is only one NPC in the cabin - a *bug*. Its purpose is to be the 'giver of information' to the character, sometimes about the steps in the gameplay (e.g. it may prompt the character to go check the storage for something to drink) or about the enviro-stats (throughout the game and especially at the end of the game).

## **Resources**

### *The character's comfort, food and drink levels*

As the win condition in the game is survival, there are the primary measures of success. Each area is measured on a scale of 1-10 and the character must keep all of them above 3 to continue playing. Dropping below 3 means the character is too weak to continue playing and the game is lost.

Therefore, the items needed to keep these levels up are most valuable. Collecting and securing them is the main objective for the player.

Examples of how they can be secured include:

1. *Comfort (warmth)* - cut wood in the forest and burn it in the cabin; find a single-use blanket in the storage; shear a sheep to get wool; burn old plastic containers from the storage room.
2. *Food* – find berries in the forest; find some canned food in the storage, etc.
3. *Drink* – get a drink from the river, etc.

### *Inventory*

This will be in our 'blue sky' version of the game. The character can 'save' different items in the inventory in their cabin.

## Procedures

### *Basic actions*

The character can walk left/right and up/down on the maps unless faced with a physical obstacle or a wall/map boundary. Walking is controlled via the key arrows on the keyboard. When the character sees an object, they can try to pick it up (Enter key). If this is possible, the object will appear in their inventory.

### *Interactions*

When the character sees an NPC, they can try to start a conversation / interaction by pressing the Enter key.

## Rules

The character can only collect one item/resource at a time. To be able to go searching for another one, they must first drop the object in the cabin. Items can only be used in the cabin (eg. food can only be eaten in the cabin).

The character cannot go to the storage room at the beginning of the game. Also, the storage room is not available for continuous use, i.e. items only appear there occasionally.

## Design tools and assets

The 'alpha' version of *The Nature of the Beast* is designed in RPG Maker MV.

All visual assets (sprites) available in RPG Maker were used with the exception of two NPC sprites, which were designed as shareable resources by RPG Maker community site members.

The artwork for the welcome page and the 'game cover' (please see the cover of this design document) are original designs by Kim Baglot. Kim's other original art includes



### Part 3: Sample of early-stage gameplay

The following sequence exemplifies the objectives, procedures and rules as they apply to the earliest stage of the game in our proof-of-concept version.

- The player is assigned their playing character. In a later version they will be able to choose one of four types of pet (dog, cat, budgie or turtle) and then name the character.
- The character appears inside a cabin and looks around. A bug (NPC) approaches it and tells the character the premise of the game - "Your owners left you behind... You will have to take care of yourself.... It is getting cold."
- The character goes to the forest and explores. They find a small tree that can be used for wood. They collect some wood and take it back to the cabin.
- The NPC *bug* speaks to the character. It commends them on the decision to get some wood and tells them about the forest looking a bit different next time the character goes there.
- The character isn't given a specific task. They go to the forest and explore some more. As they enter the forest, they may notice that the trees are not the same - some have been cut down. The character meets a NPC *bear* which tells them that they might be able to find some food if they look really hard.
- The character explores the forest and finds some berries. They take them back to the cabin.
- The character goes back to the forest and notices that more of the forest has been affected by their previous actions.
- Upon returning to the cabin, NPC *bug* praises the character for being industrious and surviving so far. It also gives the character the environment statistics as percentages.