

Game Design Document

This document contains explanations of the synopsis and the main mechanics of the video game. It also considers monsters from European folklore and describes their possible transposition as gameplay elements that the player can face

Introduction.....	2
Main Features.....	3
Narrative.....	4
Art.....	6
Main Mechanics.....	11
Level Design.....	12
Game Loop.....	14
Creature's Variables.....	15
❖ Health.....	15
❖ Speed.....	15
❖ Actions.....	15
❖ Size.....	16
❖ Behaviour.....	16
❖ Senses.....	17
❖ Rarity.....	17
❖ Tier.....	18
❖ Biome.....	18
European folklore creatures.....	19
Europe Map.....	19
Psoglav.....	20
Red Cap.....	22
Adamastor.....	22
Troll.....	22
Ankou.....	23
Marabbecca.....	24
Näcken.....	24
Gegenees.....	24
Mouros.....	25
Kratt.....	25
Narrative document (by Jadel Andreetto).....	27

Introduction

Title: *Song Of The Land*

Genre: Action Roguelike

Target Audience: Achiever and Explorer

Platforms: PC, consoles

Game concept: The game is a **3rd person spellcaster action roguelike** set in a fictional universe dominated by **European folklore** and its creatures; the player impersonates **Tessa Jung**, a *young anthropologist* whose personal history of research is intertwined with the threat posed by the **escape** of all mythological creatures until then relegated to academic books. The protagonist's task is to *uncover the truth* behind this event with devastating effects on the game world by capturing all the creatures in order to obtain as much information about them as possible. The **knowledge** about the creatures is channelled and **stored** in a *magical tome* known as the **Grimorio Fabularum**, which visually returns the player's *in-game progress* regarding narrative and .

The gameplay consists in a series of runs within levels where some of the elements are *procedurally generated*, facing hordes of enemies in an increasingly frantic and challenging scenario. The gameplay loop is punctuated by a meta progression that allows the player to hone his or her skills through a system of increasing stats and, in parallel, increasing effectiveness against the creatures most encountered and, therefore, captured during previous runs, in order to create a ground of knowledge that affects both story and gameplay.

Game pillars: At the foundation of the decision-making process for each choice concerning the game are the following pillars



Replayability
Different creatures and level every match



Gameplay
Absorbing creatures' powers by defeating them



Level Design
Freedom to mutate map in real time



Narrative
Each acquired creature reveals a part of its history

Main Features

Song of The Land stands out for the following features:

- ❖ **High Replayability:** The game offers the possibility to revisit certain gameplay paths in ever-changing environments and contexts. This is achieved through gameplay elements such as abilities, creatures, as well as level design aspects, including procedurally generated world elements.
- ❖ **Fast-Paced Action:** The experience is designed to minimise downtime, ensuring a dynamic and engaging flow that keeps players continuously immersed.
- ❖ **Balanced Challenge:** Adaptive difficulty provides rewarding progression without frustration.
- ❖ **Folklore Creatures:** Every creature encountered is meticulously researched, drawing from traditional folklore to ensure authenticity in both appearance and behaviour. Each has distinct characteristics that directly impact gameplay, enhancing immersion and strategic depth.
- ❖ **Original Setting:** The game world is a reimagined low-fantasy version of iconic European landscapes and architecture. While not highly interactive in a physical sense, its visual depth and procedural elements create a dynamic and immersive environment that blends urban, suburban, and rural settings with a unique artistic touch.
- ❖ **Memory Shards:** Currency obtained during encounters with folkloric creatures, allowing the use of their abilities and the advancement of the narrative.
- ❖ **Dynamic Level Transformation:** The game world is structured as a six-faced cube, each face divided into nine sections. Inspired by the mechanics of a Rubik's Cube, players can manipulate the map by rotating its sections. Mastery of this system is key to navigating and progressing through the game.
- ❖ **Rich Storytelling:** The narrative plays a central role in the gameplay experience, providing players with a clear purpose and a continuous sense of discovery. Progression is tied to the collection of *Memory Shards*, which reveal new insights about both the creatures and the overarching story.

Narrative



Synopsis:

Players follow **Tessa Jung**, a young anthropologist and folklore expert, during a cataclysmic event that unleashes mythical creatures from the *Grimorio Fabularum*, an ancient tome of immense power whose contents mysteriously vanish. Tessa's mission is to uncover the event's origins by facing creatures, collecting their **Memory Shards** to restore the *Grimorio* and unveiling its secrets. Meanwhile, humanity lies **trapped in a dream state** caused by *Hypnos*, a mysterious entity who shattered the boundary between dreams and reality, unleashing his monstrous progeny.

Tessa explores a world **reshaped by mystical forces**, accessing areas through a **tower-portal** guarded by the *Gatekeeper*, a **shapeshifting being immune to ordinary**

magic but vulnerable to lost spells hidden in the *Grimorio*. Defeating the *Gatekeeper* allows her to unlock new regions and advance in her quest to **thwart Hypnos' plan**.

Alongside Tessa is *Oberon*, an enigmatic fae who offers guidance while **harbouring ambiguous motives**. Unlike other creatures seeking to merge dreams and reality, *Oberon* understands the **need for balance** between the two worlds.

To **seal the rifts across Europe**, Tessa must **defeat legendary creatures**, capturing their essence to restore the *Grimorio*. **Memory Fragments** unlock **new powers** and act as a resource for **advanced magic**, blending **progression** with **combat strategy**.

With its **dark atmosphere** and **mythological themes**, *Song of the Land* weaves a tale of folklore and the **eternal struggle between primordial forces**. As Tessa transforms from **scholar to spellcaster**, players embark on a journey culminating in a **final confrontation with Hypnos**, the architect of this dreamlike apocalypse, through the lens of a protagonist with a **different outlook** on the world, the result of the form of autism spectrum disorder that characterizes her and from which derive new ways of dealing with the new challenges on the horizon.



Throughout the game, players will face **meaningful choices** that shape the unfolding story. These decisions lead to a system of **alternative endings**, where the **final choice** will have **far-reaching consequences** on the game world, reinforcing the impact of player agency.

The **narrative unfolds dynamically**, driven by the player's in-game progress. To uncover the **truth behind the cataclysm**, players must piece together clues found within the *Grimorio Fabularum*. As the **essence of creatures** is absorbed, the book gradually reveals **new knowledge**, with its **hand-drawn illustrations** coming to life to unveil key details about the creatures and the world.

Progression is tied to the acquisition of **Memory Shards**, a valuable resource that unlocks **insights into both the creatures and the overarching storyline**. Additionally, players will **encounter and interact with NPCs**, who provide **critical information** about the world and offer **strategic guidance**.

To enhance immersion, NPCs utilise **local LLM AI models**, ensuring **adaptive dialogue and dynamic interactions**. This system maintains a **balance between realism, variety, and technical efficiency**, allowing for engaging yet sustainable conversations.

Art

Art Style: Song of the Land has a visual aesthetic that lies somewhere between the **grotesque** and **dark fantasy**, recalling the *dark atmospheres* of European folklore without descending into pure horror. The contrast between imaginary creatures from local cultural tales and the real, recognisable spaces of today's European terrain captures the viewer's attention with a feeling of fascinating eeriness.

Concept art:

❖ *The Fearsome Krampus*



❖ Oberon



❖ *The Psoglav*



❖ *Tessa Jung*



❖ *Hypnos*

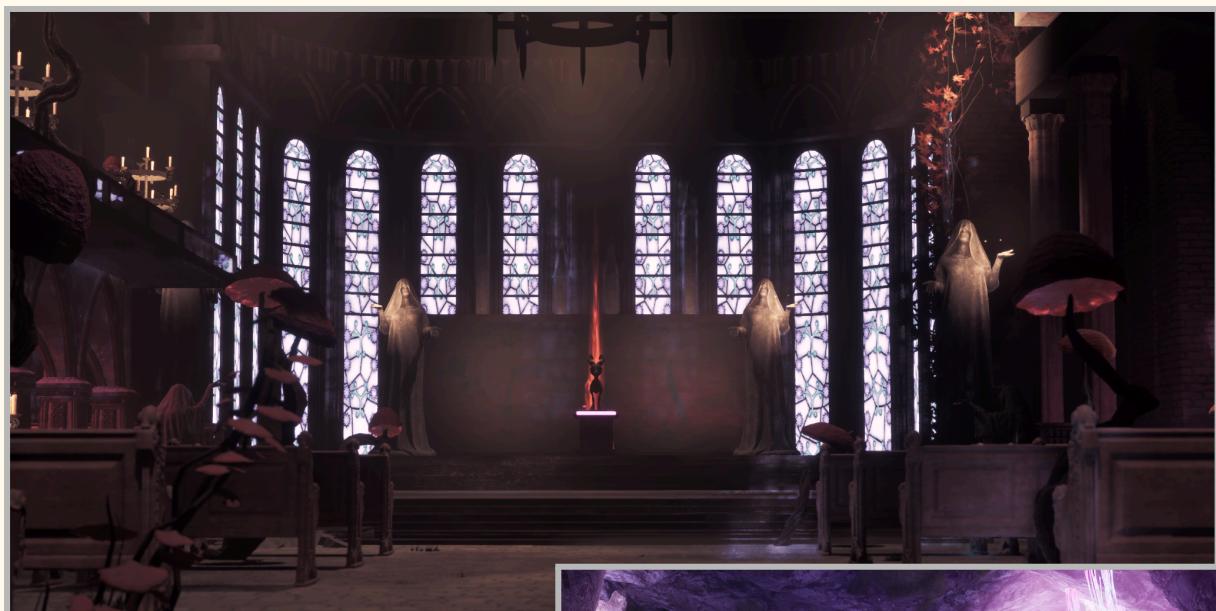


Hypnos is the main villain in SOTL. Its true appearance remains undefined until the final stages of the plot. It is a creature that exceeds the laws of time and space and its goal is to destabilize the boundary between the “real” world and the oneiric, imaginary world. In doing so, it opens gashes between the two worlds, allowing the second world to invade the first, without any criteria.

Tessa's ultimate task will be precisely to confront Hypnos, a moment in which there will be no shortage of revelations of sorts and twists and turns, and then, once he is defeated, the player will have to figure how to manage from that moment on the relationship - physical, tangible - between the two worlds, where it will no longer be possible to return to the status quo prior to the events of SOTL.

Moodboard:

The following images, taken from our video game *Vespera Bononia* currently under development, serve as inspiration to convey the intended atmosphere and visual impact that Song of the Land aims to achieve and improve.



Main Mechanics



The player is equipped with a *magic tome* known as the **Grimorio Fabularum**, the pages of which are initially *totally blank*. This is the tool that allows the player to face the creatures of folklore in a fair confrontation. Through the progression of the game, the book is filled with **information, stories** and useful **spells**.

The **main game mechanics** related to creatures are three:

1. A creature defeated by the player *grants pages from the book* containing typical **creature actions** that the player can use during gameplay, depending on the rarity of the creature the cards can vary in number and power of the ability itself;

Why? This unique mechanic allows creature abilities to be used via pages, they are **powerful** but **not unlimited resources**, which *encourages* the player to deal more with creatures; furthermore this mechanic allows an element of *randomness* to be introduced during gameplay so as to **extend the playability** of the video game and a nonlinear experience for the player

2. Creatures within the game map **get stronger as time passes**, their **stats increase** and creatures with an increasingly **higher Tier Level** are introduced.

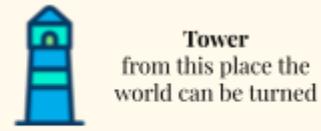
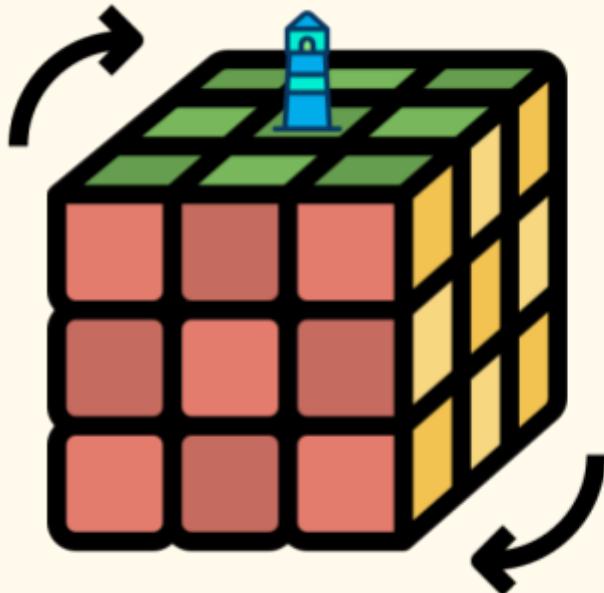
Why? As the player becomes stronger, the creatures do the same, which provides an incentive to stay within Csikszentmihalyi's **positive flow curve**.

A further observation is that the player is *constantly confronted* with a question: "How long does it take me to get upgrades considering that the more time passes, the higher the level of difficulty rises? Do I prefer to **risk** trying to **get stronger** by **facing tougher opponents?**"

3. A creature defeated by the player fills the pages of a *book* where information regarding the **creature's own history** is unlocked;

Why? This approach allows for gameplay input to the player so it facilitates other interactions with the same creature and brings the player into contact with the creature's history

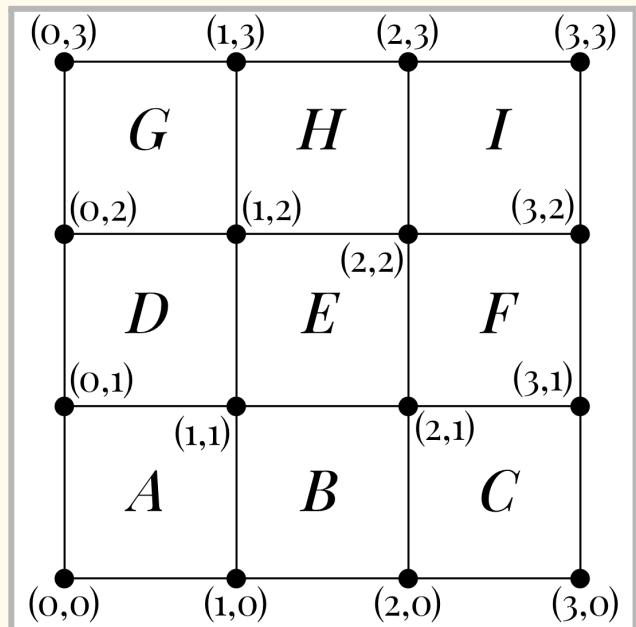
Level Design

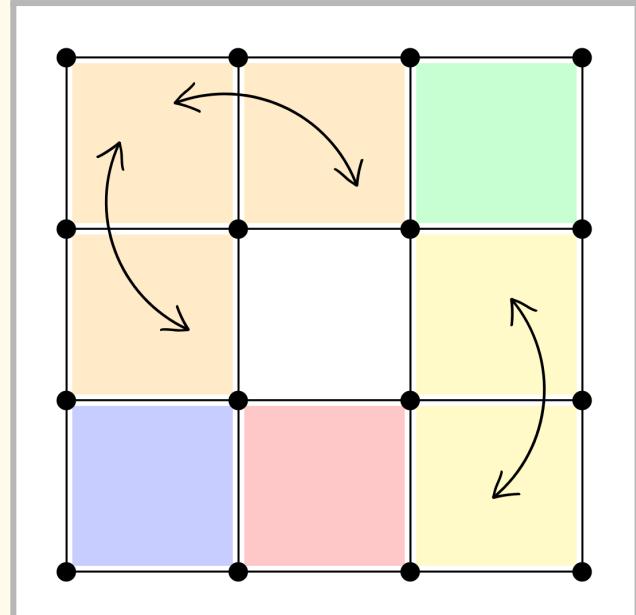
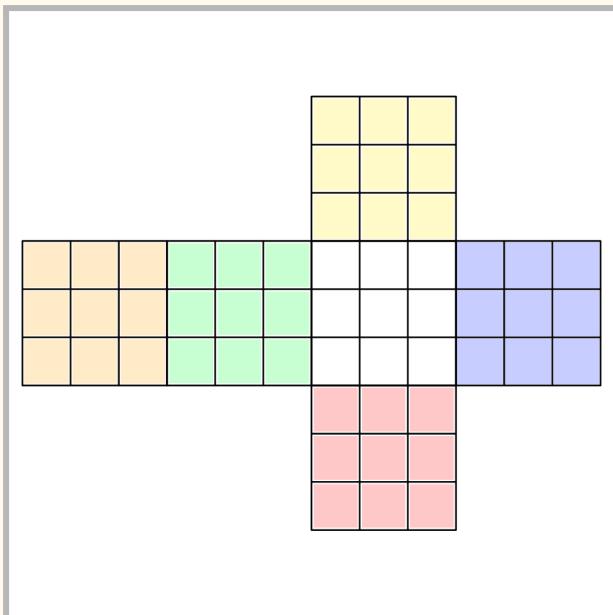


The game world is represented by a cube whose faces are divided by 9 cells, each of which is represented by a Biome, **areas in the game world** that recall *anthropic* or *natural* elements that **exist** in the actual world, where the creature can be **present**.

When the player enters the game world, the **map is procedurally generated** by assigning different *biomes* to each **cell** of the cube and placing the *Tower* in one of these cells on each **face**.

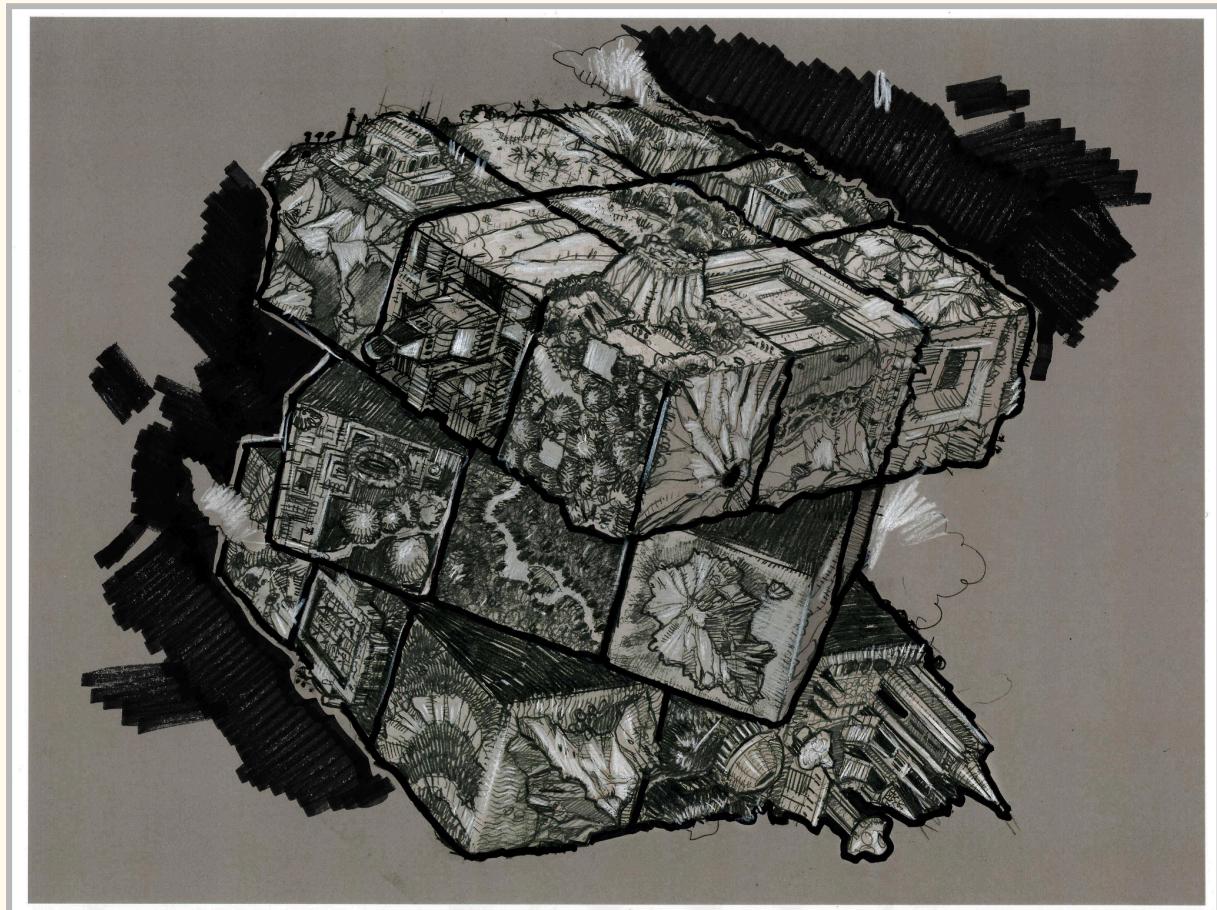
The player can interact with the *Tower* to move the **cells** through **horizontal and vertical translational motion**.





When the player aligns the biomes correctly he obtains **power ups** for his run.

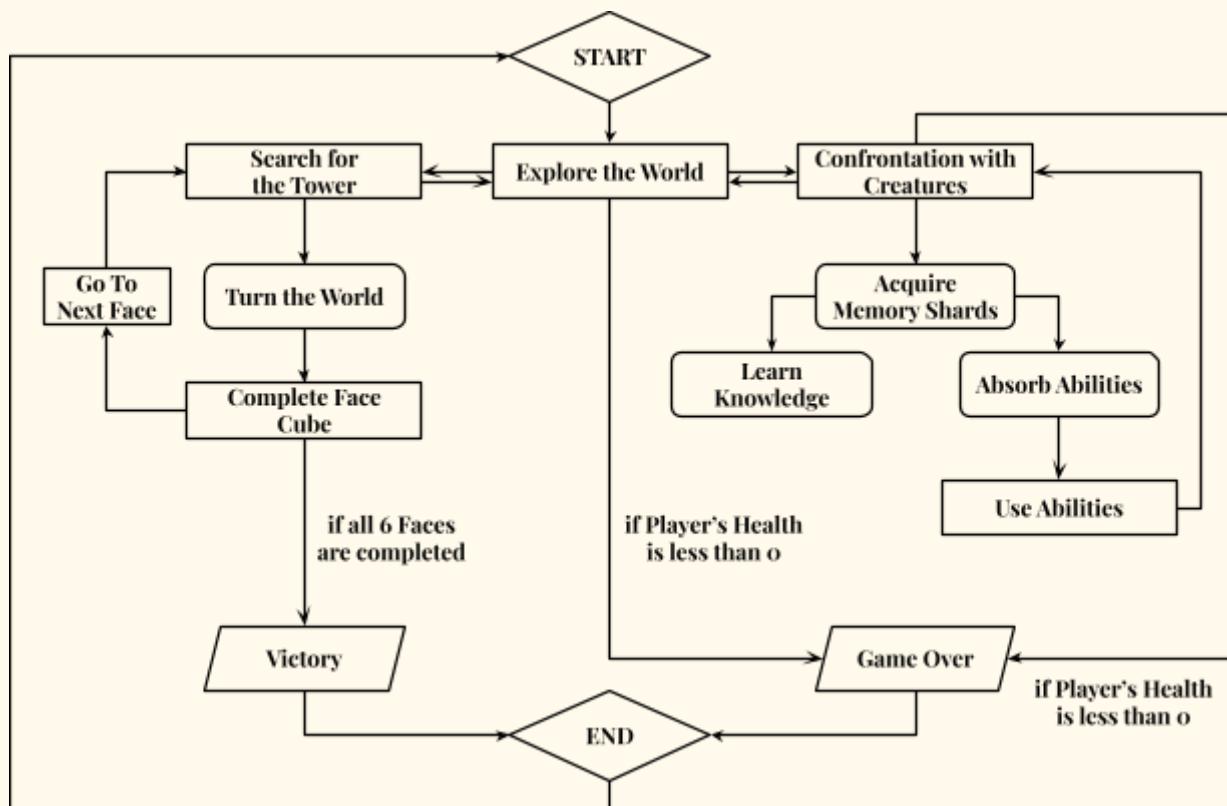
❖ *Artwork of the game world*



Game Loop

The flow of the game follows the loop below:

1. The player interacts with the *Portal Tower* and enters a **procedurally generated world** on one side of the cube (START).
2. The player freely navigates the **nine cells** on the cube face (Explore World).
3. While exploring, the player may **encounter folklore creatures**.
4. By successfully **defeating a creature**, the player obtains *Memory Shards* (Confrontation with Creatures).
5. The player can use *Memory Shards* to **unlock knowledge** from the *Grimorio Fabularum*, advancing the **narrative**, or **absorb abilities** from vanquished creatures to **use in future encounters**.
6. During exploration, the player may find the **Tower**, which allows them to **manipulate the cube's face**, dynamically altering the **game map**.
7. A cube face is **completed** when all its cells belong to the same **biome**. Once this condition is met, the player can **proceed to a new face**.
8. When all **six faces** are completed, the player **finishes the match** (END).



Creature's Variables

Below are the parameters describing each creature, some of which are laid out **qualitatively** rather than quantitatively since balancing and anchoring the parameters will be done at a future stage.

Variables to consider:

❖ Health

This parameter is used to consider how many hits it takes to defeat the creature.

- **Fragile**
less than “X” hits are needed
- **Normal**
“X” hits are needed
- **Robust**
more than “X” hits are needed

Health parameters are distributed in a balanced manner among the creatures in this list so that the player can experience **balanced confrontations** if faced with different creatures.

❖ Speed

This parameter is used for the speed at which the creature moves through the game world, as a reference for Normal Speed is used the average running speed of a man.

- **Slow**
lower value than the Normal Speed
- **Normal (13 km/h)**
- **Fast**
higher value than the Normal Speed

As for Health, the Speed parameters are distributed among the creatures in a balanced way so as to favour a **better experience** for the player during a confrontation with different creatures.

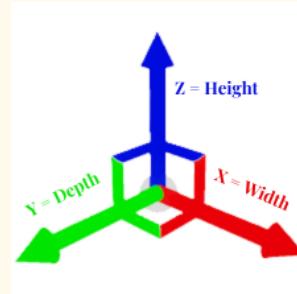
❖ Actions

With this point is considered the abilities that the creature **can perform** during a confrontation with the player. If the creature is defeated, these abilities are *transformed* into cards to be used by the player during gameplay following a correlation directly proportional to the Rarity of the creature.

❖ Size (in cm)

This parameter represents the size of the space occupied by the creature in the game world, the reference is a medium-sized human with the following measurements 180x60x60.

The creature is assigned its size according to the maximum dimension value it reaches.



	Height	Width	Depth
Tiny	$0 < Z \leq 80$	$0 < X \leq 50$	$0 < Y \leq 50$
Small	$80 < Z \leq 130$	$80 < X \leq 100$	$80 < Y \leq 100$
Medium	$130 < Z \leq 180$	$100 < X \leq 150$	$100 < Y \leq 150$
Large	$180 < Z \leq 360$	$150 < X \leq 300$	$150 < Y \leq 300$
Huge	$Z > 360$	$X > 300$	$Y > 300$

Size is used to identify the correct size of creatures so that they can be related to the game world and their view through the player's camera.

❖ Behaviour

This parameter defines the type of interaction the creature has when it comes into contact with the player.

➤ Defensive

the creature runs away from the player

➤ Neutral

the creature is indifferent to the player, if it is not disturbed it continues its normal activity, if the player interfaces with it, it may enter an Aggressive or Defensive Behaviour

➤ Aggressive

the creature as soon as it comes into contact with the player tries to engage in combat

Behaviour is further specified in these subcategories:

- **Melee**
the creature is used to confronting the player at close range
- **Ranged**
the creature is used to confronting the player from afar
- **Flying**
the creature flies around the game environment

This parameter is intended to make the creature's behaviour in the game world believable and analogous to its representation in folklore; moreover, the combination of these parameters makes the creatures more unique.

❖ Senses

These parameters are used by the creature to detect elements in the game world such as the player or other creatures.

Senses are qualitatively divided into **Poor < Normal < Acute**.

- **Vision**
a cone with variable length and radius that starts from the creature's eyes and allows it to perceive elements of the world
- **Hearing**
a sphere with a variable radius that starts from the creature's eyes and allows it to perceive elements of the world

❖ Rarity

This parameter can affect all other parameters in an increasing way, plus it can give access to unique actions and new appearances, in addition, the percentage of the creature's degree of appearance in the game world is *directly* related to its rarity.

- **Common**
starting point for the creature's statistics;
commonly present in the world
- **Elite**
higher values than Common Creature;
present in the game world more rarely
- **Boss**
higher values than Elite Creature
very rarely this creature is found in the world

This different classification of creatures incentivises the player to face more **demanding challenges** in order to obtain **greater rewards**.

❖ Tier

This is a letter **grading system**, the creature starts with the *lowest* value “D” and rises over time to the *highest* value “S”. Each letter correlates with higher statistics than the one before it.

Low Statistics

D ➤ C ➤ B ➤ A ➤ S

High Statistics

This system allows the player to choose the **degree of challenge** *consciously* by deciding whether to confront weaker creatures at the beginning and face stronger ones at the end, or to start with the stronger creatures at the beginning and not allow them to grow stronger over time

The Tier system is useful to maintain a **positive flow** in the player's experience, never resulting in *stress* and *boredom* but always maintaining the **fun**.

❖ Biome

Biomes are **areas in the game world** that recall *anthropic* or *natural* elements that **exist** in the actual world, where the creature can be **present**, these are divided into three macro categories:

➤ Natural

- Forest
- Lake
- Cave

➤ Rural

- Farm

➤ Urban

- Town

For a greater variation of *environments* and *gameplay*, **alternating seasons** are planned, which makes a **drastic change** to the Biomes themselves.

This parameter is useful to **diversify** each player's game as the types of encounters with different creatures change as the map changes.

European folklore creatures

Europe Map



The creatures in the video game originate from *myths* and *legends* of certain **European geographic areas**, the idea is to have the player discover these creatures and the stories connected with them so as to learn the folklore origins of the myths and strengthen the sense of belonging to a heterogeneous community.

There are 11 unique creatures reported in this document identified by **six** major European geographic areas in order to have an **equal balance** among European countries

Each individual folklore creature is transposed to a game element through the study of its history by extrapolating its *appearance* and *behaviour*, going on to implement these aspects with some Game Design variables that were previously specified.

Below is the list with an in-depth look at the first creature, the Psoglav, and the transposition of the creatures with the assignment of statistics and behaviour of their artificial intelligence.

Psoglav



Description

The Psoglav is a *hideous* and *ravenous* creature that dwells **underground** but it is all too eager to *venture* into the world above, terrorising the living and desecrating the dead, all to satiate its hunger for flesh. The creature is a hideous amalgam of different animal and humanoid parts: a **one-eyed wolf's head with iron teeth**, the **torso of a human** with fierce, **clawed hands** and **elongated horse-like legs** on which it walks upright.

This hideous monster has the fearsome reputation of wiping out small villages and clearing cemeteries while searching for food. Although it feeds on all humanoids it can find, it prefers to **hunt humans**.

Location

Balkan



Health	Speed	Size	Behaviour	Senses	Rarity	Biome
Normal	Fast	Medium	Aggressive Melee	Acute	Common	Forest Farm Cave

Actions

During the confrontation with the player, the Buffardello may perform the following actions:

❖ Howl of Dread

when it sees the player within its *cone of vision* for the first time or when its Health is *less than 50%*, the Psoglav emits a terrifying howl that applies a state of **fear** and **slows down** the player's movement

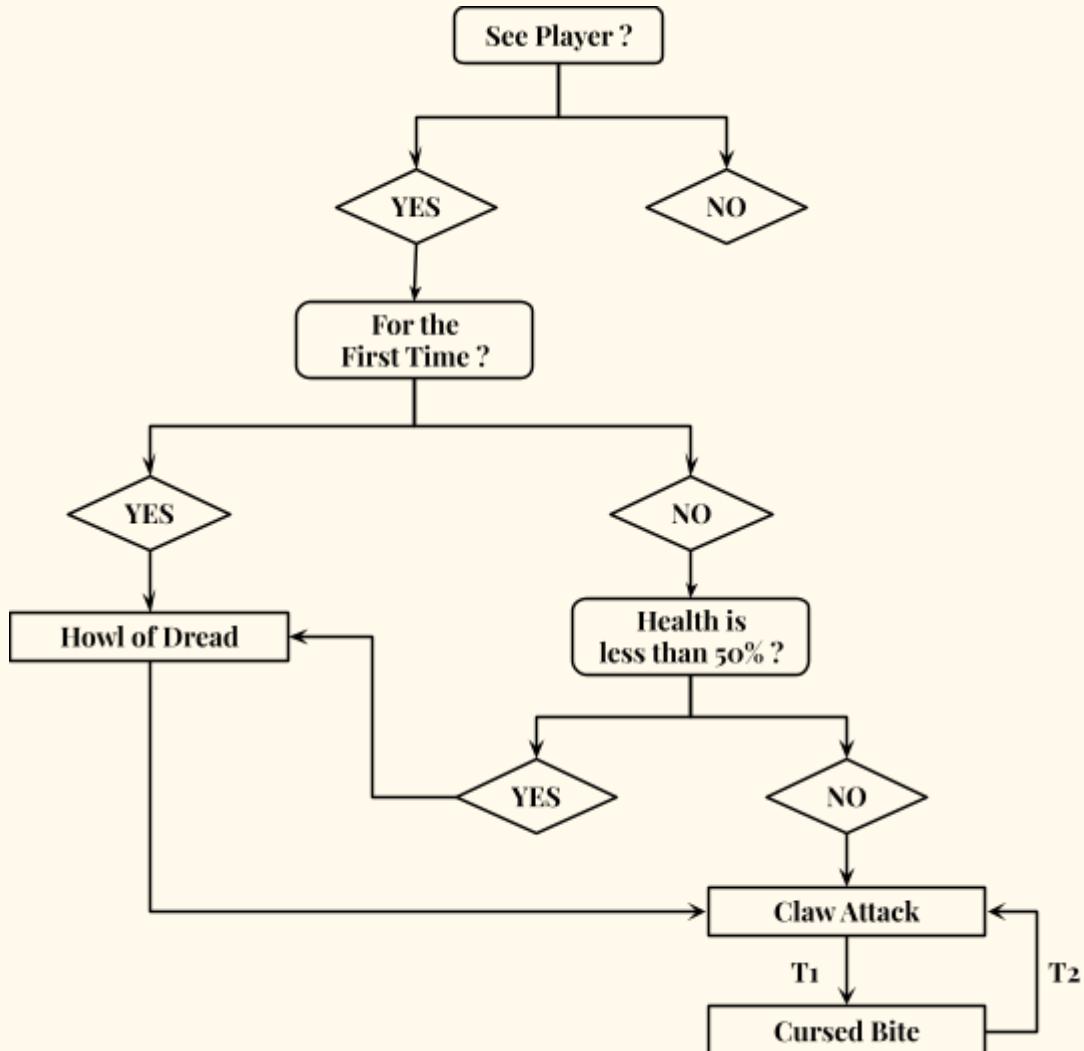
❖ **Claw Attack**

when the player is at a certain distance of close proximity, the Psoglav **swings its claws** causing **damage** to the *player's Health*

❖ **Cursed Bite**

when the player is at close distance, the Psoglav makes a leap and **jumps on the player**, then **bites** the player permanently reducing the **player's Health** by a certain amount for the game

Behaviour Diagram



Actions Priority:

See Player ? → Howl of Dread → Approach Player → Claw Attack → Cursed Bite



Red Cap

Location

Italy, Ireland



Health	Speed	Size	Behaviour	Senses	Rarity	Biome
Fragile	Normal	Tiny	Aggressive Melee	Normal	Common	Town Forest Farm



Adamastor

Location

Portugal



Health	Speed	Size	Behaviour	Senses	Rarity	Biome
Robust	Normal	Huge	Neutral Ranged	Normal	Boss	Lake



Troll

Location

Scandinavia



Health	Speed	Size	Behaviour	Senses	Rarity	Biome
Robust	Slow	Huge	Neutral Melee	Normal	Elite	Forest Cave



Ankou

Location

France



Health	Speed	Size	Behaviour	Senses	Rarity	Biome
Normal	Slow	Medium	Neutral Melee	Acute	Elite	Cave Forest Lake Farm Town



Tatzelwurm

Location

Germany



Health	Speed	Size	Behaviour	Senses	Rarity	Biome
Normal	Normal	Large	Aggressive Ranged	Acute	Boss	Cave Forest



Marabbecca

Location

Italy



Health	Speed	Size	Behaviour	Senses	Rarity	Biome
Normal	Fast	Small	Aggressive Melee	Acute	Elite	Cave Lake Farm



Näcken

Location

Scandinavia



Health	Speed	Size	Behaviour	Senses	Rarity	Biome
Fragile	Fast	Medium	Aggressive Ranged	Acute	Boss	Lake



Gegenees

Location

Greece



Health	Speed	Size	Behaviour	Senses	Rarity	Biome
Robust	Normal	Large	Neutral Ranged	Acute	Common	Cave Lake Farm



Mouros

Location

Spain, Portugal



Health	Speed	Size	Behaviour	Senses	Rarity	Biome
Normal	Normal	Small	Defensive Ranged	Normal	Elite	Cave Forest



Kratt

Location

Estonia



Health	Speed	Size	Behaviour	Senses	Rarity	Biome
Normal	Normal	Large	Aggressive Melee	Normal	Common	Farm Town Lake Forest

The following pages contain the narrative incipit and the full plot of SOTL by Jadel Andreetto. Considering the necessity of the involvement of a professional translator in order to keep the content as consistent as possible with the original work and taking into account the overall size of the text involved, we opted to attach the work in its original Italian language version