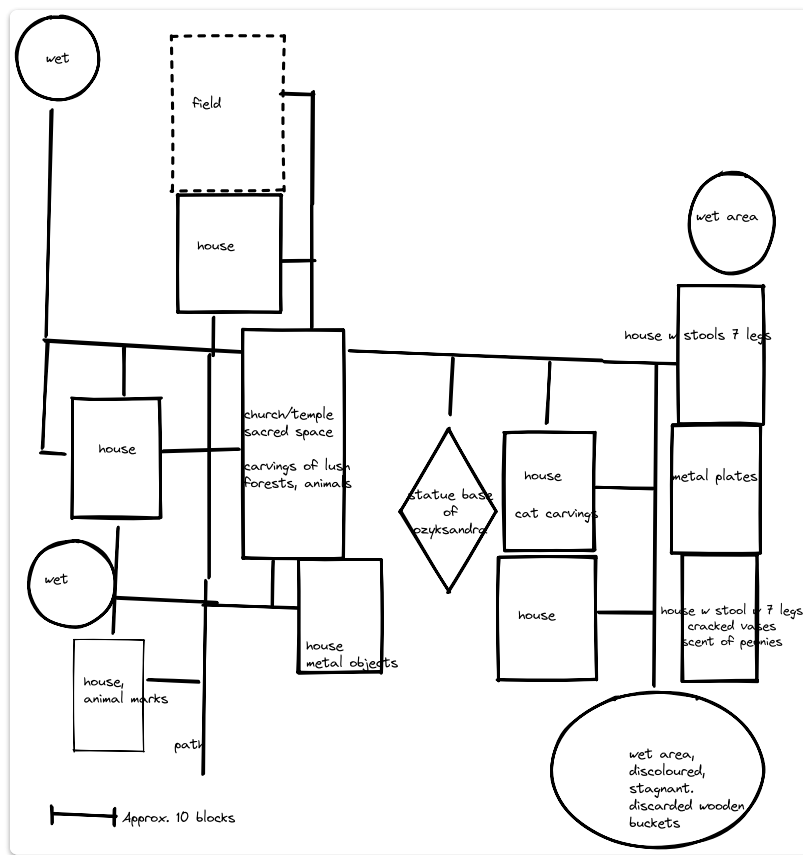


## HPS of nothing besides remains



Knowing that the game world is approximately 100 x 100, it becomes clear that I missed some of the village!

**Genre** - The game describes itself as 'rogue-like'. Rogue was a 1980 video game, a role-playing game using ascii characters to recreate the dungeons and rooms of text-based adventures. Key feature is 'procedural generation' of the world to be explored, and the adoption of some kind of character or role to play in often a kind of 'high fantasy' setting. Each time the game is played, a different world is created.

**Gameworld** Name is taken from the poem, Ozymandias

*I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,*

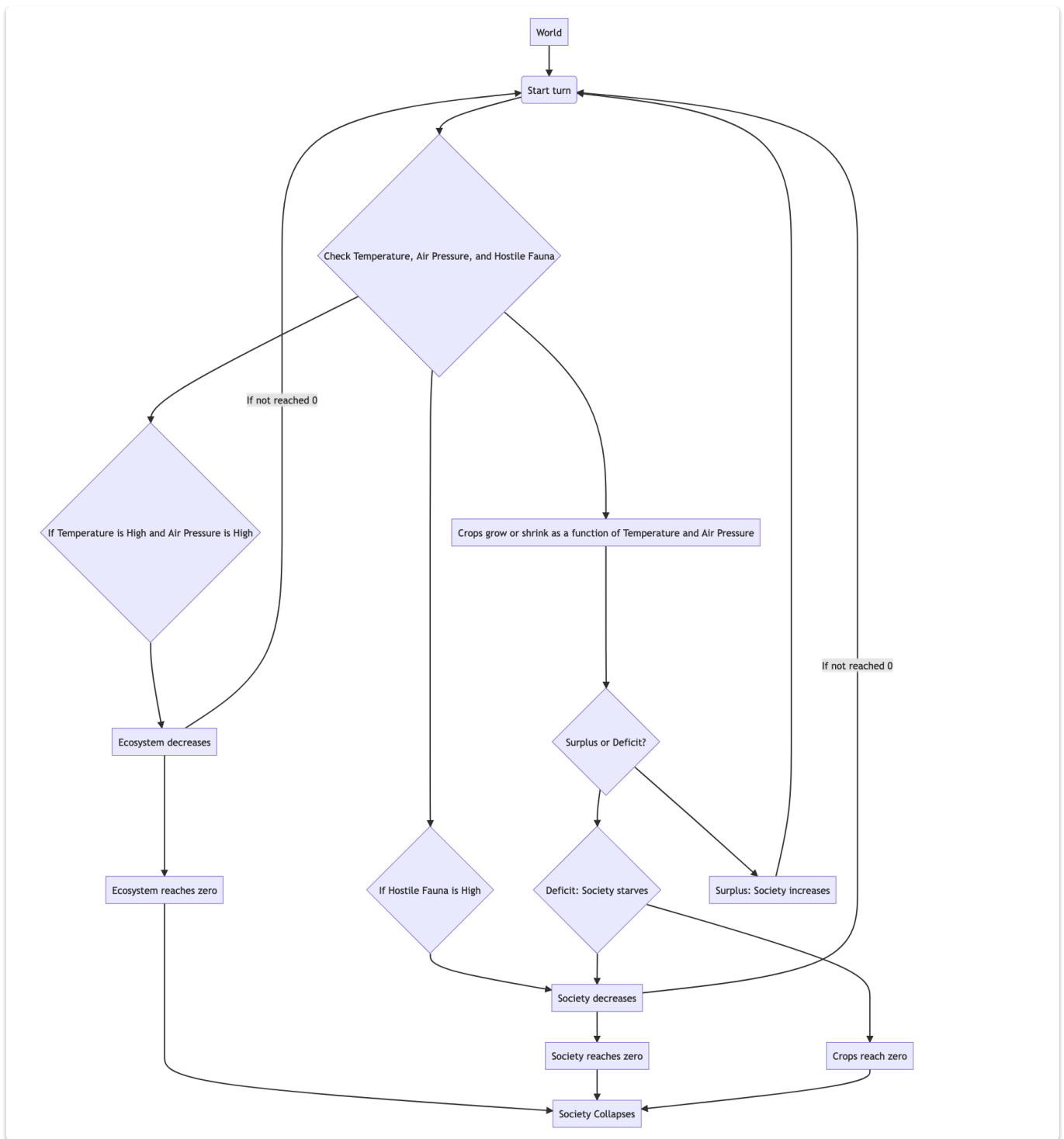
*The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

The world in the game is a wind-blown ruined village. It is an **explicit space** meant to be **explorable** and **traversable** (other options in McCall's typology: contestable, developable). The world is revealed through exploration. There are 100 x 100 blocks in the world, but sometimes large spanses of empty space, and it is not always clear whether you are moving, or stuck on the edge - which might be seen as 'lost'.

**Goals** No obvious goals explain themselves through backstory etc; but knowing the reference to the poem and the content of the poem, it seems clear that we are meant to wonder, 'what happened here', and through movement and interaction, uncover the story of the destruction of the village. There is an **attenuated goal** which might emerge through playing regenerated worlds over and over again to work out the underlying systems that create the world. According to the devlog, there is 1 explicit piece of evidence to find that directly alludes to what ultimately killed the village.

**Player agent** Simple w-a-s-d movement; represent by an @ symbol. Can look at / read descriptions if you bang into other characters.

**Agents** None in the game play itself, but when the game sets up, 'temperature', 'air pressure' 'fauna' and 'households' all interact to create the history of the world, and the conditions under which the society collapses.



**Resources** None

**Tools** None

**Obstacles** Walls are variously described; objects and furniture; plants and vegetation; water sources. Paths can be walked on, but as long as there is no object directly in the way, the player can move anywhere.

**Actions/Choices/Strategies/Behaviours** Nothing obviously: but begs the question, how do we make sense of an environment? Encourages us to make associations between objects and

environments. An archaeological way of making sense of the world is therefore an obvious strategy to adopt.

McCall says, '[HPS] begins with the question: "how did the developers employ their skills and talents in the medium to communicate the past in a gamic history?"' Alright - so what does all this imply? *Nothing Besides Remains* does not represent the past in a particular way - that is to say, not a past that happened on this world. Rather, taking its inspiration from a poem that invites us to reflect on ruins and what they meant in the past *and in the present* the game pushes us to make sense of processes in the past - processes that literally take place between the creation of the world and the player's entry into that world - by employing archaeological sensibilities and ways-of-knowing. We can only make sense of this world by considering its 'material culture' as assemblages. By using a rogue-like interface, we are not distracted by visuals and the usual 'authenticity' of representation nonsense, but focus instead on seeing patterns.

A rogue-like interface though also draws on 'high fantasy' stories, and the idea where the player-character is the centre of the world; but here, there is nothing to loot, nothing to gather. The player can only observe. This decentres the usual 'white protagonist' or imagined player of a game. Is this a function of the game's creator's situation as an academic consciously working towards building systems that build systems (ai designed games?). In doing so, it forces us to remember the demographics of the archaeological profession, which once again are overwhelmingly white but allowing the player to only look, the role of archaeologists in *creating* the past is also foregrounded.

IN crafting this analysis, I had to spend a lot of time uncovering the underlying systems that generates the traces of the history the player explores. Such underlying systems are the gist of digital experiences; we see something at the surface whose operations, whose coming-together, are opaque. The HPS framework might therefore be usefully adapted for considering *other* kinds of immersive media from the point of view of either how a given piece of media represents the past the way it does OR how it pushes us to think about the items depicted in particular ways.