

COLLISION FRONTIER STUDIOS

# Cute Chronicles: Adventures in the Magical Forest

A game prototype

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**Game Story.**

You take the part of Nessa, a girl on a mission to rescue three of her friends from the hands of the evil Demian, who has them imprisoned in his castle in the Magical Forest.

**Characters:**

*Nessa.*

Our heroine, she has to rescue her friends that are trapped in the magic forest. She is brave but sometimes she is a bit distracted and ironic.



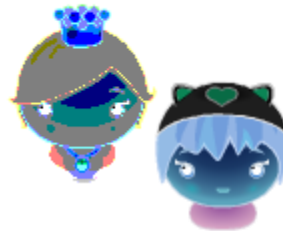
*Richard. (Via cell phone).*

Nessa's friend, he is the Intel guru of her group. He helps her to get her started around the forest.



*Demian and the Ghost.*

Nessa's enemies and obstacles. They have trapped her friends. They are witty and sinister.



*The magical rocks.*

NPCs. They will ask of Nessa a favor.



*Bug.*

Mini-enemy Nessa encounters.

He has a liking for rocks, flowers and grass.



## Backbone.

The overall game mechanic is based on the SCUMM system implemented by LucasArts in the 80s and 90s. Most SCUMM games feature a verb-object design paradigm. The player-controlled character has an inventory, and the game world is littered with objects with which the player can interact, using a variety of verbs, a large collection of these featured in the early games, but by *Full Throttle* and *The Curse of Monkey Island* these had been whittled down to using one's eyes (to "Look at" or "Look through"), hands (to "Use", "Pick up", "Push", "Pull", etc.), or mouth ("Talk to", "Consume", "Inhale").

Puzzles generally involve using the right verb action with the appropriate object, for example "use biscuit cutter with another rubber tree".

"Talk to" produces dialogue sequences, in which the player selects from a list of pre-defined questions or comments, and the character they are talking to replies with a pre-defined response.

We are using the Lassie Adventure Studio, which keeps this philosophy in a modern way built with Adobe Flash. Instead of having the verb list at the bottom of the screen, a verb disc menu appears if the left mouse click button is pressed.

## Game Play.

The default game playback uses a verb disc interaction system very similar to the one seen in the Lucas Arts classic, *The Curse of Monkey Island*. As it is customary in this genre, the movement is by point and click with the left button of the mouse as you can see in the image below.

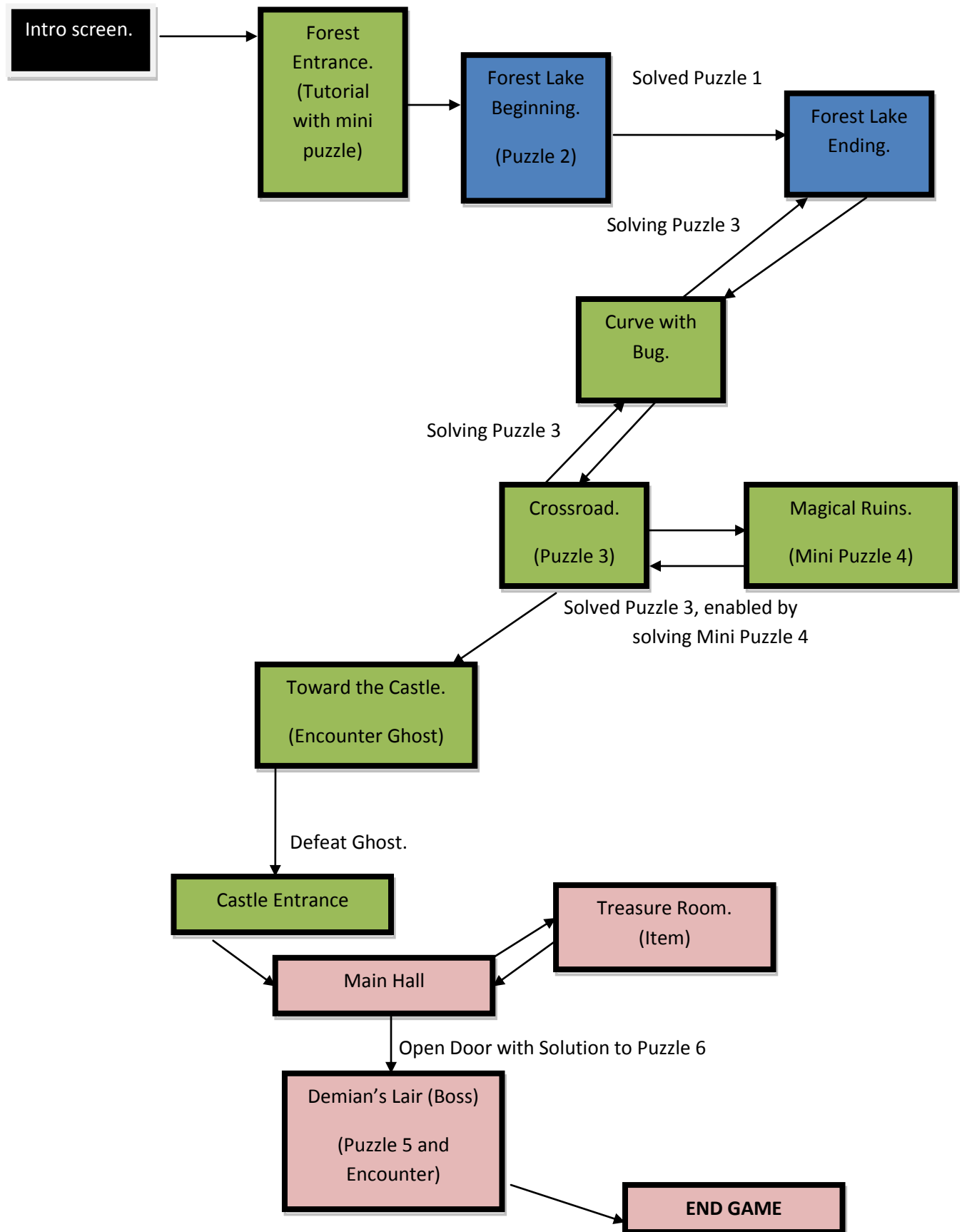


*Verb disc that displays the actions that can take place.*

The player controls Nessa, which is the main character. In their journey, the player will experience a series of puzzle situations that need to be solved in order to advance in the game. Also they can experience the fusion of items in order to achieve an objective in particular; also there are a series of clues to “help” the player achieve these goals.

The art style as you can notice from the pictures above it is “cute” and “girly” but by all means the game is not intended only for girls, but for everyone, also we have managed to design a game that young and old can play, and for people that have played the genre extensively and newcomers.

Game Flow: How they roll.



## Puzzle Descriptions.

### **Puzzle 1: Tutorial Puzzle.**

In the first screen of the game, Nessa learns how to do the basic interactions (look, grab, talk). In the upper right part of the screen you see a star and on the far right of the screen she sees a sign indicating that she can go forward.

Nessa interacts with the sign and she says 'I'm not ready', meaning that Nessa is not ready yet to go across the screen onto the next scene.

*Solution to Puzzle 1: If Nessa interacts with the star, she can grab it. As you grab it you can see a bubble that identifies the inventory and says how to use items. The player then can click on the star and use it on the sign to get across to the next scene.*

### **Puzzle 2: The hole in the boat.**

Nessa sees a lake before her. She also sees a boat, an abandoned house and some debris. She goes to the boat and interacts with it and realizes that the boat has a hole and there is no other way to go across the lake to the other side.

*Solution to Puzzle 2: Nessa must go to the debris area and interact with it and finds a plug to be able to use on the boat and sets sail.*

### **Puzzle 3: The infinite loop Crossroad.**

Nessa walks up to the Crossroads area, if she goes forward or left she appears on the Crossroads area again, meaning it is as she never left the crossroads. She goes right and sees pulsating rocks.

*Solution to Puzzle 3: Interact with the pulsating rocks, they will ask a favor of you.*

### **Mini Puzzle 4: Pledge of hope? (tentative title).**

Nessa gets a hint from the rocks to go back on her tracks; she can go back to the scene that was before the crossroad and the scene where she lands with the boat. Since the rocks tell her to re-explore her surroundings,

*Solution to Mini Puzzle 4: Nessa interacts with the well again (if she has done so, if not for the first time). She retrieves some items: A sword and an elemental.*

*With these elements she goes forward again and finds herself in the scene with the bug, as hinted by the rocks she must dispose of the bug with the sword, therefore restoring the balance that the rocks seek.*

*Having restored the balance, she can now go forward to the next scene from the crossroad solving the Puzzle 3.*

**Puzzle 5: Demian's Lair.**

The pathway toward Demian's Lair is blocked, it seems there is a door, but it is locked by a magic spell. Nessa tries to open de door, but cannot.

*Solution to Puzzle 5: There are 2 conditions to approach this:*

- a) If Nessa has explored the world extensively, she will have magical artifacts in her inventory, along with the Spirit sword. If this is true, Nessa can unite the magical artifacts to create The Master Sword that enables the door to be open.*
- b) If Nessa has not explored sufficiently the world, when she defeats the ghost in a previous scene, the ghost drops items; some of these items are the magical artifacts missing from her explorations. All she has to do is combine the items to create the Master Sword and enter Demian's lair.*

## Playtesting: “Come out and play!”

For playtesting our game we decided to have a fixed number of individuals and test our game at different times during the development. We had 6 subjects and 4 testing phases: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and Final Prototype.

The test subjects were given the game files so they could play in their own computer at the tranquility of the place that they enjoyed playing the most, or where they had the time to play with ease. We scheduled appointments with them so we could gather the results of their play, some findings were done via IM, others by Skype and some live.

*Playtesting subjects: Location: Age*

Wladimir Labeikovsky Jr.: New York, NY: 34

Luis Dominguez: Caracas, Venezuela: 29

Deepak Murali: Pittsburgh, PA: 22

Bulut Karakaya: Pittsburgh, PA: 23

Giovany Yajure: Barquisimeto, Venezuela: 19

Jose Alejandro Cuevas: Caracas, Venezuela: 24

### **Prototype: Playtesting part I.**

#### **6 players, 6 individual sessions.**

We sent our first prototype in which we had no tutorial but explained the basic mechanic via text on a separate file, also it was not a complete game, rather it was about half of the game, but with a sense of the elements that were going to be present in the game when completed. It was comprised of 3 scenes of which it had 1 puzzle (the hole in the boat) and event (going across to the other scene as a result of the boat fix).

### **The good, the bad, the ugly and the fix**

#### *The good*

All the subjects liked the idea and the concept of the game, also they liked the fact that it resembled some of the LucasArts old games in terms of gameplay, it brought them good memories.

The art style they enjoyed, it was very “cute” and friendly to the eyes, vibrant colors, very happy. Puzzle was “smart”. They enjoyed the puzzle and the text that resulted from interacting with the different objects available, they thought it was funny.



*The bad*

Deepak, for example could not notice the change in color of the cursor as it highlighted an object that was available for him to interact with. Luis, although he enjoyed the puzzle, had a hard time figuring it out, it was not clear to him, ergo he said that a much clearer hint was needed; this was true for Bulut and Giovanni also.

*The ugly*

It took some time for the subjects to understand how the verb disc appears on screen and on the object that you interact with.

*The Fix*

We decided to add a scene at the beginning that served as tutorial, in which Nessa could interact with a set of elements in the scene to teach the player how to eventually play the game.

In terms of the hole in the boat puzzle and not being evident. We use the dialogue text within the interactions to give a faint hint at the solution.

**2<sup>nd</sup>. Prototype: Playtesting Part II**  
**6 players, 6 individual sessions.**

We sent our second prototype in which we had added a tutorial and a couple more scenes and events. The amount of play added up to the part in which Nessa reaches the Crossroad and discovers that if she goes left or forward, she goes back to the crossroad. Nessa could also talk (but with no reply) to the magical rocks and go back up to the scene in which she arrives with the boat.

We also sent the prototype with a “draft” of the puzzle to go through the crossroad and encounter the ghost to test a “fighting” mechanic alternative, since the engine does not support fighting. For this fighting mechanic we tested item combination and usage provided options by the engine.

**The good, the bad, the ugly and the fix.***The good*

They liked the fact that we kept the aesthetics. Also that it was clearer now how to start playing; they liked the fact that we incorporated it within the story setting rather than to have screens that they would forget later.

Variety in types of puzzles was also well received. They liked the fact that they were challenging, that they increased somewhat in difficulty.

*The bad*

The crossroad puzzle solution was not very clear, in fact for Bulut the puzzle was not evident itself at all, and he thought it was a bug since at one point they ignored certain areas of the map that were key to getting the right items to achieve the goals. They did not understand the text dialogue of the magical rocks. Something similar happened at the encounter with the ghost, where they had to put together 2 items to achieve an item that would make the ghost disappear. It was apparent that it was not clear in the hint we had given in the game.

*The ugly*

They wished that the engine permitted a real fighting mechanic. We did too at some point. We also found a couple of bugs related to the engine in terms of character movement.

*The fix*

In order for anybody to figure out the crossroads puzzle without being random pointing and clicking whenever the cursor changed, we decided to change the text of the magical rocks. It had to be subtle yet concise, as if hitting you in the head with the answer, but without saying it. It does not have to be such an obscure riddle just for the sake of putting one; it had to make more sense.

For the “fighting” scene, we decided to have text reactions as to what was happening as you tried different items with the ghost, giving the player ideas as to how to defeat it, again without saying the answer completely.

We also fixed the bugs related to the engine itself, fixing the movement constraint of the character as it went across the scene.

**3rd. Prototype: Playtesting Part III****6 players, 6 individual sessions.**

For this playtest we applied the fixes to changes we talked about after the second playtesting, specially the fixes on the bugs. We added text reactions to Nessa's reactions as she combined items against the ghost.

We rewrote the text on the magical rocks to be able to give a clearer idea without spoiling the puzzle of what Nessa needs to do, since it was very obscure before. We actually manage to even tell a bit of the background on the setting, on the forest to make it coherent.

We also the last section of the game, which is the castle and 2 castle rooms to interact in.

**The good, the bad, the ugly and the fix.***The good*

Overall the game for the subjects is well made, they finally have gotten through the areas in the paths we had anticipated, but interesting enough some had a different approach to the puzzles, obtaining the same result, meaning that they can be solved in different steps, just as we intended.

They liked also the fact that the rocks gave more of a story background of the forest and its surroundings; it gave them a sense of going through a storybook of sorts. They liked that even though the philosophy behind the engine does not have a battle system, we faked it using item use and reactions. We also got some ideas for the actions inside the castle itself, as we gave a draft of what could happen there. Wladimir reminded us of Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis and the Last Crusade, he said one of the rooms could have a similar interactions

*The bad*

We still had a couple of bugs, all product of being new to the engine, all fixable.

*The ugly*

No ugliness this time!

*The fix*

We fixed the bugs, tried to apply new logic to the actions so that they did not come out again as bugs. Also we polished the areas before the castle to give them more fluidity, meaning that we polished text and the actions, also some of the art. Even though we were using pre-made assets, we had freedom to modify them as we pleased as long as we gave credit for them, which we did.

**Final Prototype: Playtesting Part IV****6 + 2 players, 6 + 2 individual sessions.**

We submitted the final prototype of our game to our players, we had a problem implementing a puzzle in the treasure room, since the engine has a bug in itself to be able to handle conditionals, nonetheless, we managed to have some control over the player by enabling an item in that room, that needs to be used in order to move forward to the final room.

The rest of the game was polished and the bugs were ironed out.

We also added 2 more players to test, we felt that bringing first time players could give us another type of feedback, specially with people that have not played the genre as much as some of the other participants.

*Added playtesters: Location: Age*

Johana Salcedo: Bogotá, Colombia: 18

Maria Mercedes Delgado: Barquisimeto, Venezuela: 15

**The good, the bad and the ugly***The good*

All playtesters enjoyed the game, the girls especially since it was very cute. They liked the fact that it was very funny in terms of dialogue and they felt that at times there were some sort of parodies of similar games or movies of the genre.

The previous playtesters did not expect the ending, they expected a cliché ending but were pleasantly surprised to find that the ending of the game was humorous and not like a typical adventure game (we are not spoiling the ending in this document).

They seemed to have fun, even though sometimes for Maria Mercedes the puzzles were a bit confusing. But she was able to enjoy the whole game and the story setting.

### *The Bad*

We were limited by our engine and its own bugs, so the item finding in the treasure room had not the effect we desired originally intended.

### *The ugly*

No ugliness!

## **Conclusions: Delight and Angers.**

In making this game we based our design according to what the engine and platform could offer us. There is always the risk on using an engine you do not know so much when you have to make an assignment like this. But even though there was always the risk of not making a good enough product, we have managed to make a working game, which can be updated and modified somewhat easily over time. Also, Lassie is considered a hobby-oriented engine. The upcoming version of Lassie, called "Shepherd" is more oriented towards more mature, indie adventure game development.

In our experience we see that using playtesters that know the genre is useful for ideas and coherent comments, but also naïve users of the genre can give us the "first time" feedback you crave when you want to make a game "for everyone". Especially since we tried to gather available people from different ages and backgrounds, this was mainly for interface usability purposes but we ended up implementing a design capable of making everyone play.

It was really challenging to make a game where you could not put many different types of animations, not to mention that Daniel and myself are not very skilled where are is concerned, but I think that it was good in the sense that you are able to come with solutions to satisfy the main concept and keep the game true to itself, rather to sell the design so to speak.