

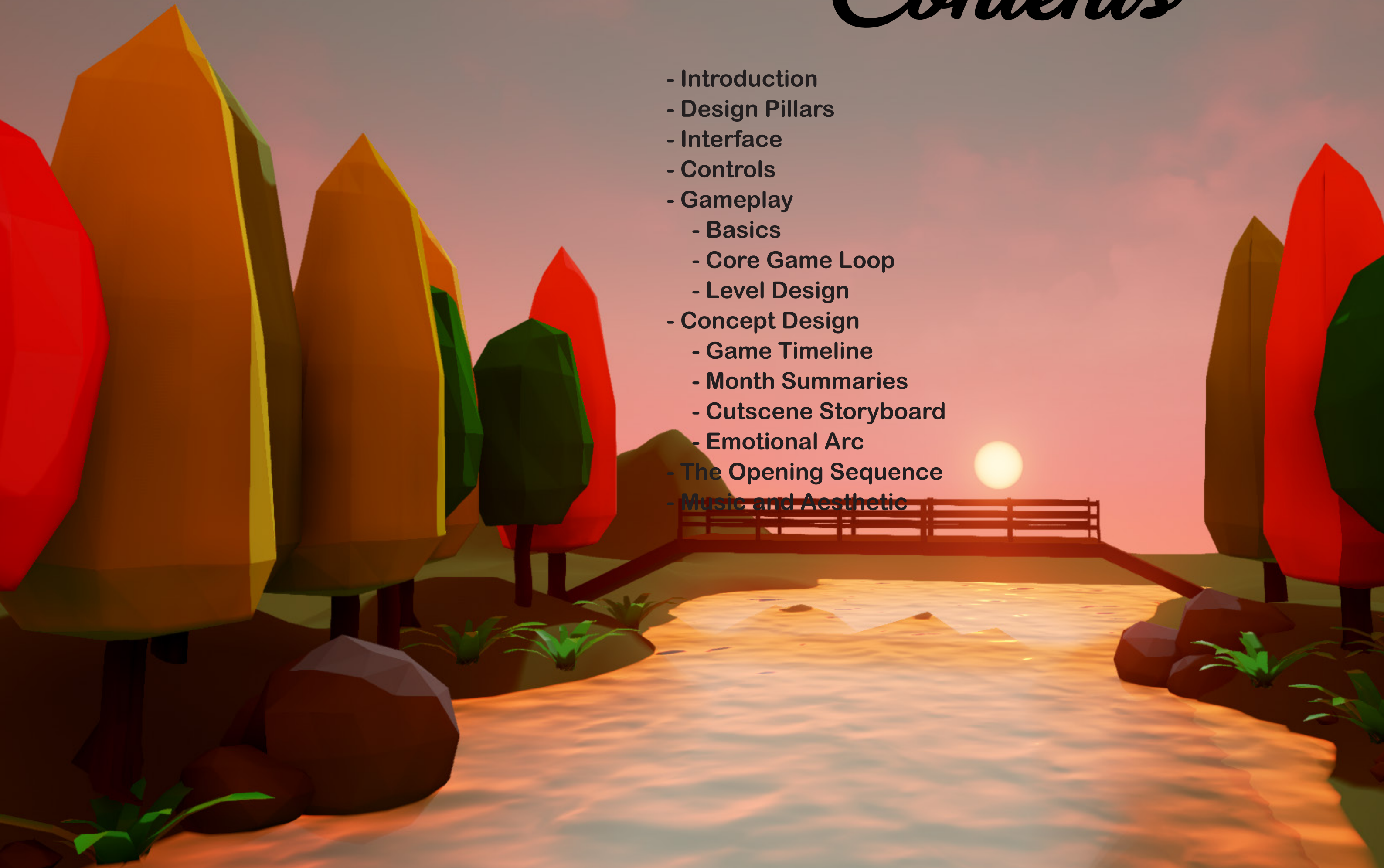


*To Water*



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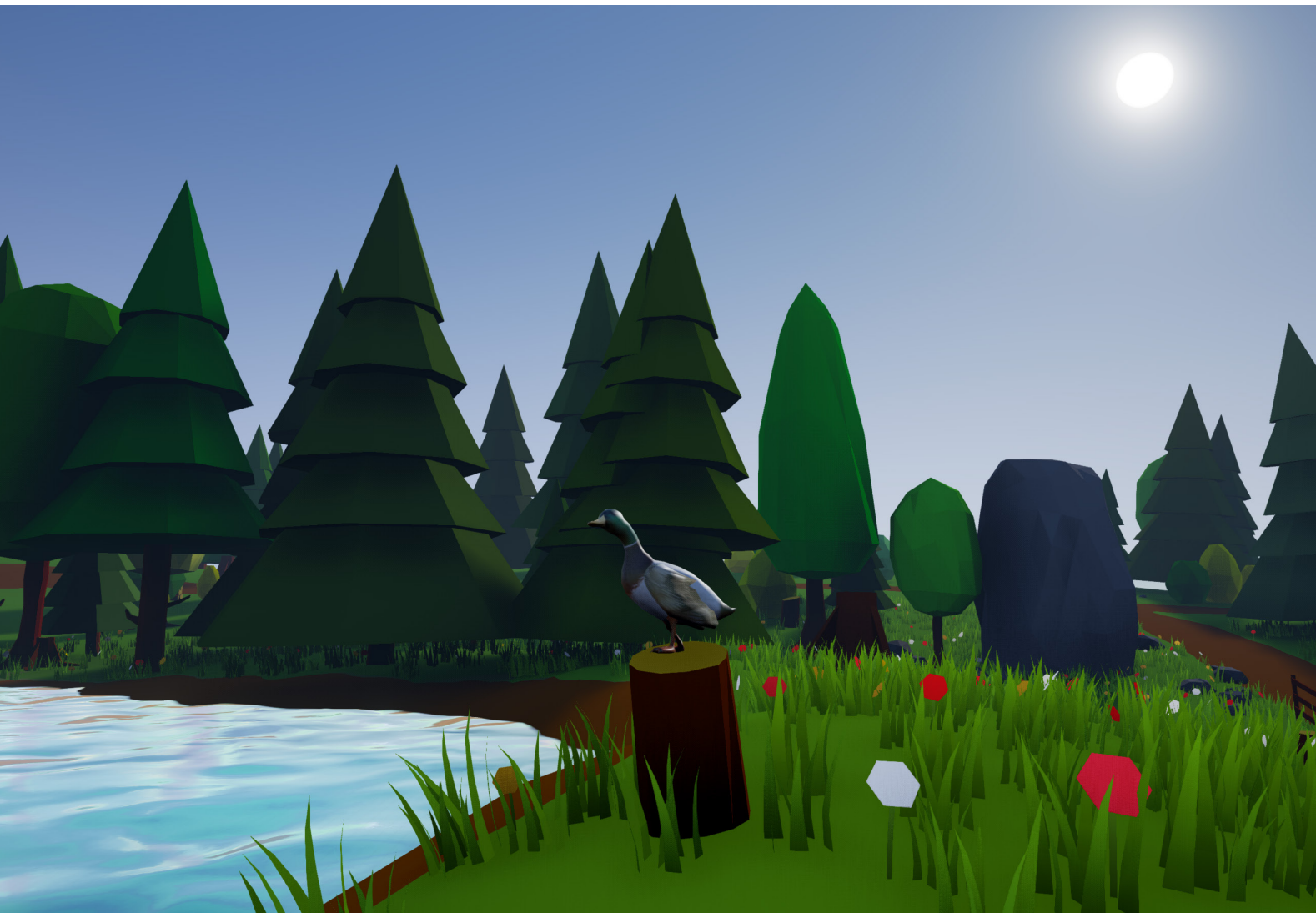
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# Introduction

To Water is a third-person linear survival adventure in which the player controls a mother duck on her journey to migrate for winter, and back again, whilst protecting her flock of ducklings. There is a focus on narrative, and I'm aiming to create an emotional game whilst keeping the dialogue limited, creating a sensory experience around the seemingly mundane, and portraying parallels between human relationships - and the pain experienced therein - and the simply functional, evolutionary purpose of the duck migration.

The story is of survival - of people moving through and coping with situations in different, potentially misguided ways - and the gameplay reflects this. There is always a risk that the player could lose a duckling, and this tension becomes the motivation for survival and to move forward with the game. Throughout the adventure of the ducks we see moments of human interaction that, while not necessarily linked through context, convey a narrative arc that reflects and contrasts that of the ducks. People in different situations with the same underlying need - to take control of their situations and start living rather than simply surviving.



# Design Pillars

## “Why do we continue?”

The game aims to address the principal question of why, as humans, we persist and carry on with struggling relationships, with raising children and with life itself. The story highlights people in difficult situations while the world carries on regardless. Life doesn't care about our struggles - ducks don't care about our struggles. They merely continue. Finding the will to carry on, finding something to fight for - this is the real struggle of life, and this is the focus of To Water.

## A story about ducks, about humans.

Ducks are mundane, common creatures. If you wanted to see a duck right now you're probably ten minutes away from being able to do so. This is unusual criteria for an action adventure hero, and I want to use this to tell stories around the duck, making the adventure of the duck partly metaphorical through anthropomorphism, and allusions to theme through story beats that affect both the ducks and the humans.

## Gameplay that reflects the story.

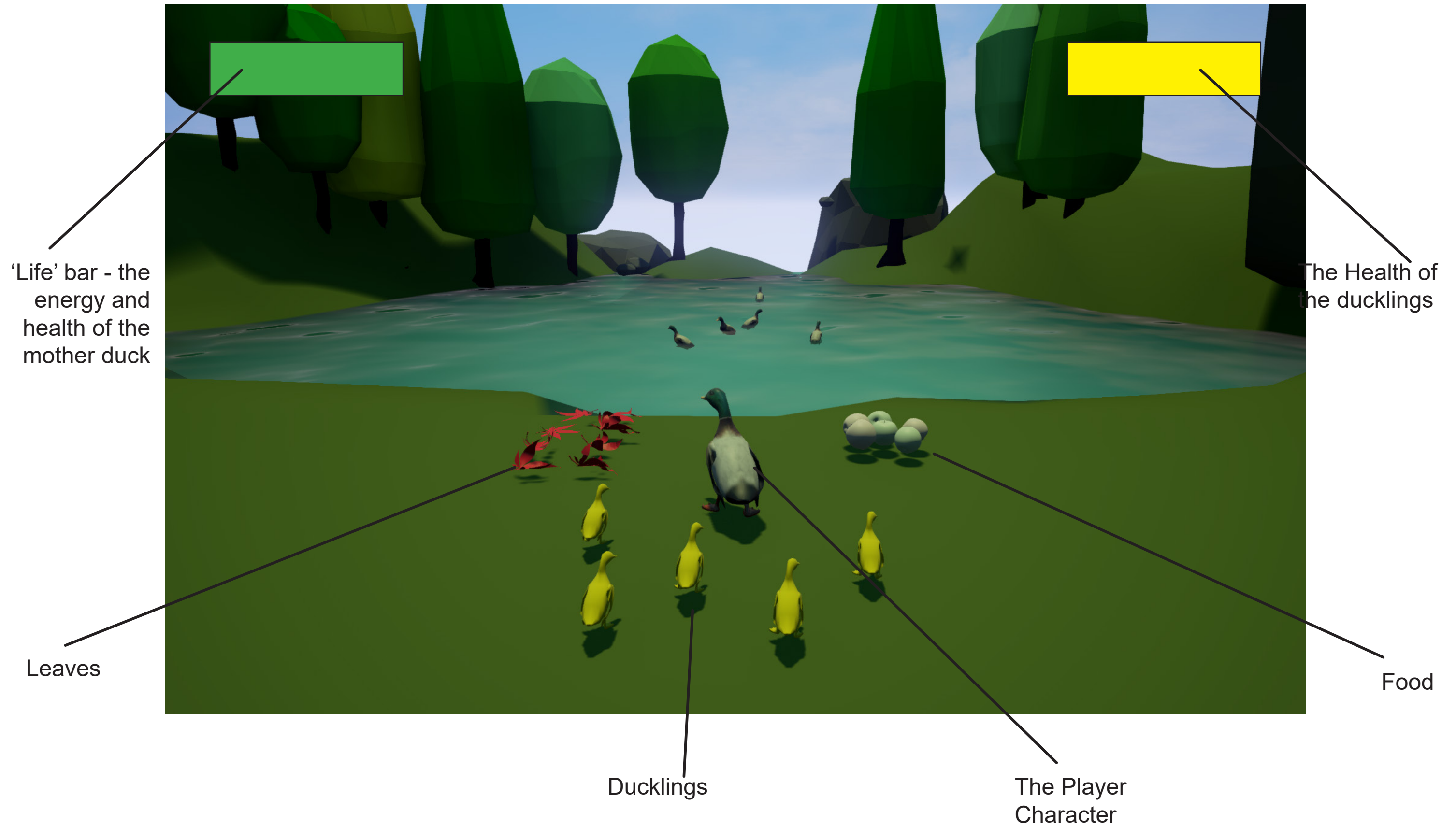
I wanted to portray the struggle of survival, whilst keeping the narrative moving, by employing simple survival mechanics. There needs to be a real consequence for the player, and a reason to keep playing rather than to merely experience parts of the story. The player needs to care about the ducks despite them being mute and emotionless.

## Anthropomorphism through environment.

I wanted to create emotion and tell a story around the emotionless duck by using everything around it. The colours of the environment, the weather, the shades of the sky, the emotive music, the oppression of the surrounding objects, the changes in control and how the duck plays. These and many more techniques have been targeted to try and make this possible.



# Interface





# Controls

L1 - Show HUD - Allows the player to keep the screen free of clutter when they desire to have a more scenic view of the game, but keeps the option to see vital stats when needed

L2 - Stop/Start Ducklings - used in puzzles when trying to keep ducklings safe

Left stick - Move Duck

R2 - Run - used to avoid enemies or speed up exploring

Triangle - The Quack Button

Circle - Near Food - Eat

Square - Near Food - Feed Ducklings

Cross - Jump

Right Stick - Camera





# Gameplay

## Gameplay Basics

The game takes place through chronological sequences that jump forward in time, combining open and linear areas of gameplay. Whilst certain character stats remain, the sections jump in time in order to get through the migration sequence and highlight interesting moments, whilst featuring a range of human characters. The player controls the mother duck, and early on inherit a flock of ducklings, which they are tasked with keeping safe throughout the first half of the game. If a duckling dies, they're gone for good, creating a sense of survival and consequence. The second half of the game is more linear and focuses on storytelling through the single duck.

The open sections of gameplay mainly consist of finding food, for the mother duck and her ducklings, in order to reach a higher energy level, allowing the player to move on to a more linear section. There are platforms to traverse and enemies to avoid in order to complete this goal. There are also environmental puzzles in these areas which combine platforming and avoiding enemies, whilst giving basic stop/start instructions to the ducklings to help keep them safe.

The linear gameplay sections are more varied and are used to help progress the story and create moments of dynamic tension through situations that raise the consequences.

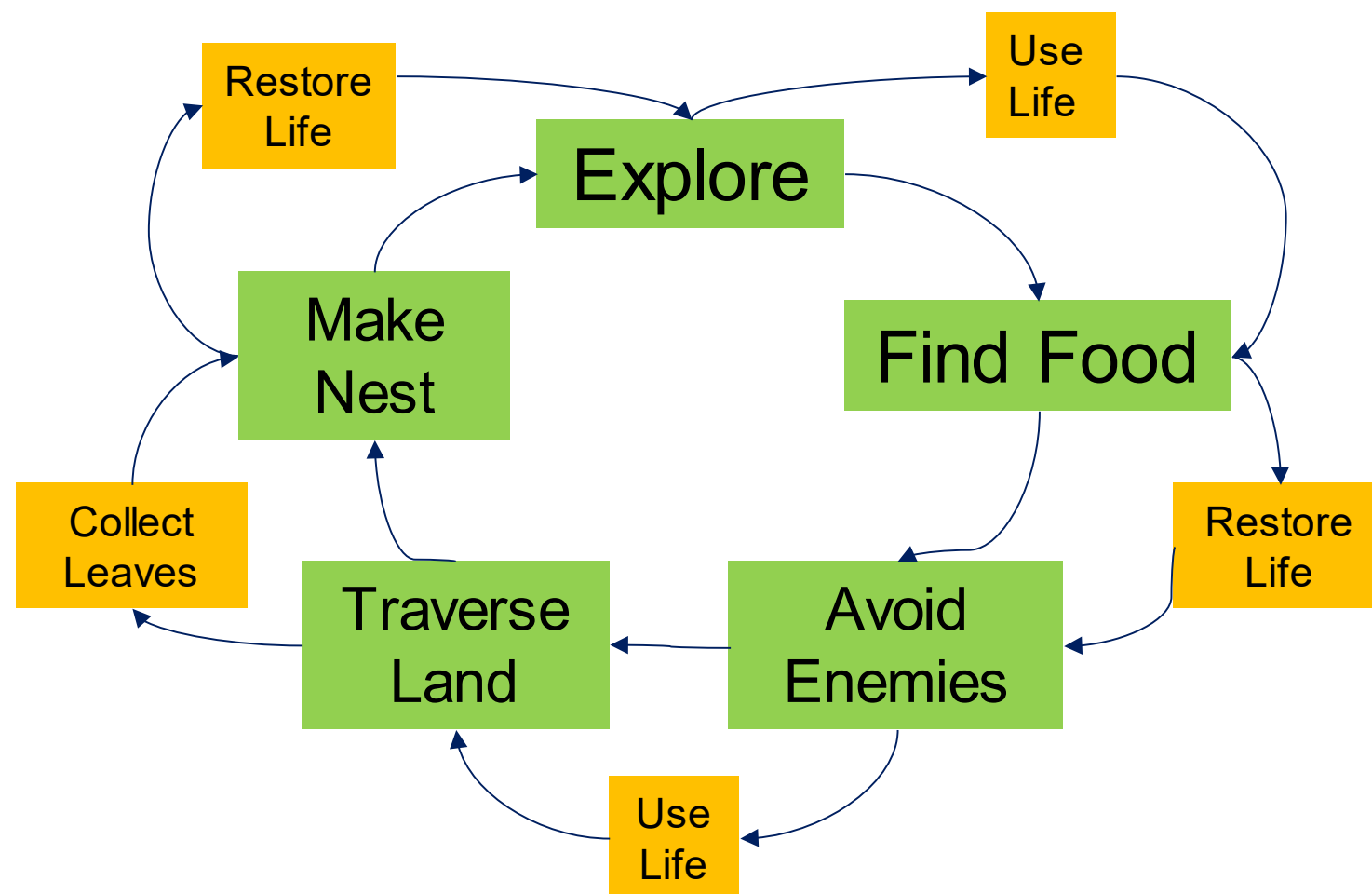


*"The more time a hen spends taking care of young ducklings, the less time she has to take care of herself. This precious balance must be met to maximise both the hen's and ducklings' chances of survival" Ducks Unlimited*



# Core Game Loop

The core game loop in To Water is designed to create this kind of balancing act in the gameplay whilst keeping the player moving, with a constant goal to aspire to at all times, whether in open or linear play. The 'Life' of the player controlled duck must be maintained in order to move through the game, yet if the ducklings 'Life' gets too low, one will die, creating an aspect of survival - the mother duck can't die so that the story can move forward smoothly, but ducklings can, adding an element of consequence.



## Explore

In open play, exploring is important for finding food to balance this Life, but exploring also uses energy, reducing the Life bar - it's important to explore efficiently to make sure both the duck and ducklings will survive to make it to the next section. Exploring in more linear sections helps the story continue, and may put the player in less control when, for example, going down a river or climbing a cliff face.

## Find Food and Leaves

Food is important as it gives energy to the duck, allowing the player to reach different areas. Different food is worth different energy, and can be found at different places (see next page). Food can also be eaten by ducklings, and the player can decide whether to feed the duck or the ducklings. Leaves are also important to collect, as they provide a Life regeneration multiplier when reaching a nest, meaning the amount of Life given at the start of the next section is higher. This allows the player to focus on finding food for the ducklings instead, or allows them to reach the next section more quickly.

## Avoid Enemies

Ducks aren't exactly too high on the food chain, which means that avoiding conflict is a priority if survival is to be achieved. There are different types of enemy in different sections, which inflict different amounts of damage to the Life (see next page). If the Life of the ducklings reaches zero, a duckling dies and the number is reset to halfway.

## Traverse Land

Traversing the land mainly consists of platforming and using the ducks energy to get to places out of reach, but also means protecting the ducklings and helping them avoid enemies. This is also a big part of the more linear sections and chases, when timing and expert traversal can be the difference between saving and losing a duckling.

## Make Nest

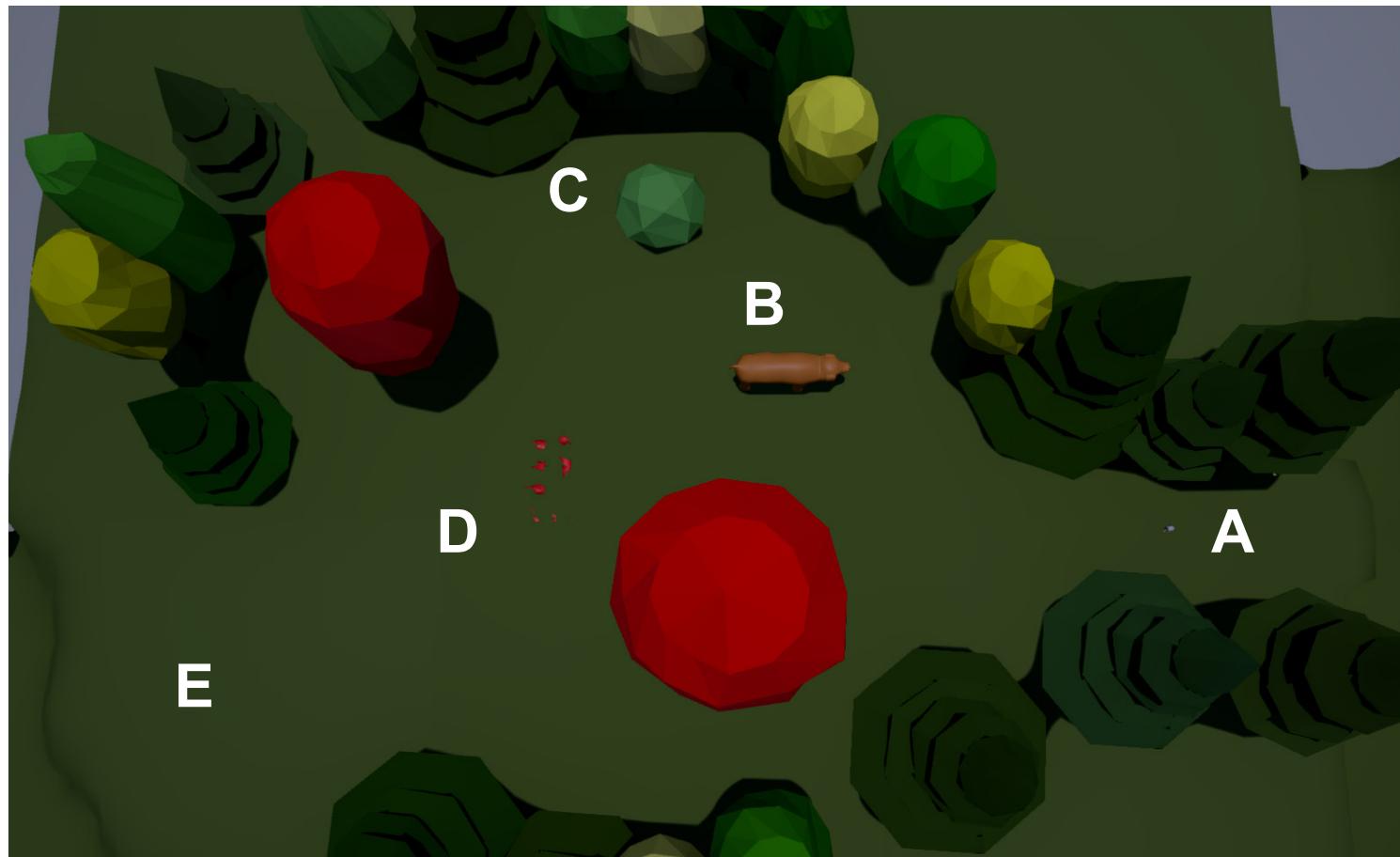
At the start and end of each section, the player locates a nest. These act as both checkpoints and end goals - if the duck faints they will go back to the nearest nest.



# Level Design

## Environmental Puzzles

These are linear sections that require the player to use platforming and strategy to avoid enemies, getting food and leaves in the process or moving on to the next area. Here's a top down example of an environmental puzzle:



In this example, we see the duck at the start point, A, and a fox in front of her at point B. The fox will chase the duck as soon as it sees her, and so the player needs to jump on to an accessible tree, indicated by their red colour. The goal in this example is quite linear - make your way to the exit at E. This puzzle becomes more tricky if the player wants to collect the leaves at D, or they have ducklings to protect, who can't get up trees and must be told when to stop and when to follow. Bushes act as safe zones, and the bush at point C could allow the player to get their ducklings across safely by stopping and starting, or could give them a better chance of collecting the leaves. Different enemies make certain strategies harder, and as this is only the first puzzle of the game it is relatively simple.

## Chases and Timed Events

These are linear events that occur at certain points in the story of the game. Sometimes it's the duck doing the chasing, and sometimes the flock is being chased, but the outcome of these events is usually losing or saving a duckling from demise. These set-pieces are designed to be skill based; if the player cannot traverse the land in an unspecified set time, they will not save the duckling. The best route must be taken when chasing or running away, and a full Life bar is pivotal to success.

## Types of Food

**Bread** - Ponds - 5 Life

**Seeds** - Anywhere - 5 Life

**Berries** - Forests - 7 Life

**Insects** - Flying in the air - 10 Life

**Shellfish** - Rivers - 10 Life

## Types of Enemy

**Fish** - (5 Life - Ducklings) Rivers - Can be seen popping out of the water and must be avoided by swimming around.

**Foxes** - (10 Life) Environmental puzzles - Foxes will chase the duck until they go up a tree or into a bush. They will then wait for several seconds in the same spot before moving again, giving the player time to plan an escape.

**Cats** - (10 Life) Environmental puzzles - Cats can chase ducks up trees but won't go in water, providing a tougher challenge and requiring tactical manoeuvres.

**Ducks** - (5 Life) Wilderness - Other ducks will attack if the player gets too close, and can follow anywhere, so are best avoided or outrun.

**Birds of prey** - (Abduct duckling) Wilderness - Will hang around in the sky and swoop in at opportune moments. Constant movement and hiding in bushes is the best way to avoid.





# *Concept Design*

To Water tells the story of people who feel that they've lost control of their lives, as they come to terms with the unavoidable truth of their existence, through the eyes of a mother duck just trying to get through winter. The game looks at themes of parenthood, the point of life and whether or not we're really in control of any of it.





# Game Timeline

Section	Content	Emotion	Weather	Music
September - 1.1	- Linear - lonely duck	Lonely and depressive.	Grey clouds with rain.	Downbeat, low energy.
September - 1.2	- Open - finding food - Cutscene 1 - Rosie and Sasha	Slightly more upbeat, juxtaposes the saddening cutscene.	Blue sky with a late afternoon sun.	A slow, gentle melody.
September - 1.3	- Linear - March of the Ducklings - Open - finding food - Linear - Leaving pond - Environmental puzzle	Exciting and uplifting - the start of a journey.	A bright, sunny morning.	Upbeat and clumsy in its energy.
October - 2.1	- Linear - Down River - Linear - Chase - Losing Duck - Cutscene - Rosie and Conor - Linear - Peaceful River	Fear and danger before somber reflection.	Beautiful setting sun, pink and orange.	Fast and tense beat, before becoming a more empty bittersweet.
October - 2.2	- Open - Finding food - Linear - Puzzle - Crossing the road - Linear - Pond Frozen - Linear - Puzzle - Cold Winds	Maternal care before ducklings are put in danger - angst and hardship.	Grey and dark before strong winds bring icy chills.	Downbeat, void of hope. W
November - 3.1	- Linear - Puzzle - Crossing Motorway - Linear - Underground - Linear - Environmental Puzzle - Linear - Pond with park - Cutscene - Carol and Sharon	Tension and angst is piled on before quiet reflection. The stress of motherhood.	Rainy and grey before the clouds start to part and the sun shines through.	Up against it - struggling, with disjointed beats. A sense of determination.



Section	Content	Emotion	Weather	Music
November - 3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Open - Finding food</li> <li>- Linear - Chase</li> <li>- Linear - Down River - Fireworks Night</li> </ul>	Fear and tension becomes wondered reflection.	Evening into night darkness, a dry chill, light blue.	High tempo and tense becomes jubilant and swirling.
December - 4.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Linear - Puzzle - Climbing</li> <li>- Open - Finding food</li> </ul>	Determination and struggle.	White and grey, snow.	Determined and doubtful.
December - 4.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Linear - Puzzle - Broken Bridge</li> <li>- Linear - Park</li> <li>- Cutscene - Dan</li> <li>- Linear - Chase - Duckling Taken -</li> <li>- Linear - Pond - Duckling Returns</li> </ul>	The struggle becomes more doubtful and desperate, with bittersweet contrasts.	Grey and rocky, snow.	Sombre and slow. Downbeat sadness.
December - 4.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Linear - In Dulci Jubilo</li> </ul>	Saudade.	Night.	Upbeat.
December - 4.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Linear - Environmental Puzzle</li> <li>- Linear - Chase</li> <li>- Linear - Flying out to Sea</li> </ul>	Rising tension builds to a joyous, freeing climax.	Evening, Snow on ground but pink sky.	Fast pace that rises to a joyous outburst.
March - 5.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Linear - Flying Back - Shot by hunter</li> <li>- Linear - Lonely Duck Pt. 2</li> </ul>	Normality interrupted by acute struggle and pain.	Daylight, sunny, crisp coldness.	Downbeat but with a higher, desperate energy.
March - 5.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Linear - Waking up alive - Broken Bridge Pt. 2</li> <li>- Cutscene - Dan on Bridge</li> <li>- Linear - Down River</li> <li>- Linear - Gliding down - <i>The Only Thing</i></li> </ul>	An emptiness that reaches the lowest point in the game. Sad reflection.	Evening, a red sunset.	Minimalistic before becoming acoustic and sorrowful.



Section	Content	Emotion	Weather	Music
March - 5.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Open - Finding Food</li> <li>- Linear - Avoiding Fish</li> <li>- Linear - Environmental - Puzzle</li> <li>- Nest - Sunset</li> </ul>	Lonely struggle that ends in a moment of beautiful reflection.	Day to evening, dry but with clouds gathering.	More hopeful and determined.
March - 5.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cutscene - Sharon and Carol Pt. 2</li> <li>- Linear - Pond with park</li> <li>- Linear - Underground</li> <li>- Linear - Puzzle - Storm - Crossing Motorway</li> <li>- Linear - Storm - Down River</li> <li>- Linear - Storm - Chase</li> <li>- Linear - Storm - Climbing</li> <li>- Linear - Storm - Chased by enemies</li> <li>- Linear - Diving through thorns</li> <li>- Linear - Injured walking in rain - passing out</li> </ul>	A downward cycle that starts with struggle as the player tries to force through the storm, getting as far as they can before passing out.	Cloudy, heavy rain, thunder and lightning. An emphatic storm.	Clattering, smashing, brutally grand in its hyperbolic hyping of the storm, before slowly winding down as the duck is injured.
April - 6.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Linear - Wake up in shed - set free</li> <li>- Cutscene - Dad and daughter</li> </ul>	A sweetness and moment of beauty.	Perfect sunny day.	Minimalist with slight piano.
April - 6.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Linear - Flying out - Joining ducks</li> <li>- Cutscene - Rosie and Conor Pt. 2</li> <li>- Linear - Chasing enemies</li> </ul>	The height of freedom and jubilation for the ducks, contrasted by the freedom of the breakup.	Sunny with the sun starting to set.	Rising and jubilant, upbeat before becoming slightly melancholy.
April - 6.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Linear - Down River Together - Returning to pond</li> <li>- Cutscene - Rosie and Sasha Pt. 2</li> <li>- <i>April Come She Will</i></li> </ul>	A sense of contentment, looking forward. A happy tear in the eye.	A perfect sunset bounces of the pond.	Quiet, slight piano.



# September

The game starts with a female and a male duck standing by a pond. The female duck sees a group of ducks flying overhead - migrating. The male duck flies off, leaving the female alone. This section introduces the player to the tones and themes of the game, teaching them how to play and covering a range of emotions before the ducks set out on their real journey. The tone is depressive and lonely to start with, creating a sense of empathy with the duck as she solely tries to find a nest. The rain is falling, the music is downbeat - it's a depressing scene. There is then stability and a more hopeful search for food, which is offset by the desperate anxiety of the cutscene between Sasha and Rosie. As the mother duck returns to her nest, she sees another, different breed of duck flying out of her nest, setting up an intriguing sub-plot. The 'March of the Ducklings' serves as a comical, upbeat set piece; the player controls the collective group of ducklings, giving a sense of the scale and fear of the journey ahead, with context to the environmental puzzles to come by portraying the difficulty of land traversal. This excitement is transferred into dangerous tension as the ducks are forced out of their pond by predators and forced to move ahead with their treacherous journey.



# October

This is where the real struggle starts. As the leaves begin to fall and the temperatures drop, the mother duck will have to struggle to protect her young, and the player is thrust straight into this situation in the Chase 'Losing Duck'. In this scene a duckling is lost from the rest of the group and must be chased down a fast flowing part of a river that leads to a waterfall - the player must rescue them in a certain amount of time or see them fly off the cliff, never to be seen again. The mother duck rejoins the river and the rest of the ducklings as they flow past Rosie and Conor. The scene is bittersweet, with the instability of their relationship hinted at, and there is a sense of sombre reflection as the ducks peacefully flow on into the sunset. This peace doesn't last for long, and the next day the player must search for food in an open area before being tasked with crossing a road in an environmental puzzle style. The cold winds start to set in, and the ducks find a pond before having it freeze over, before having to battle through strong winds, protecting the ducklings from the gusts.



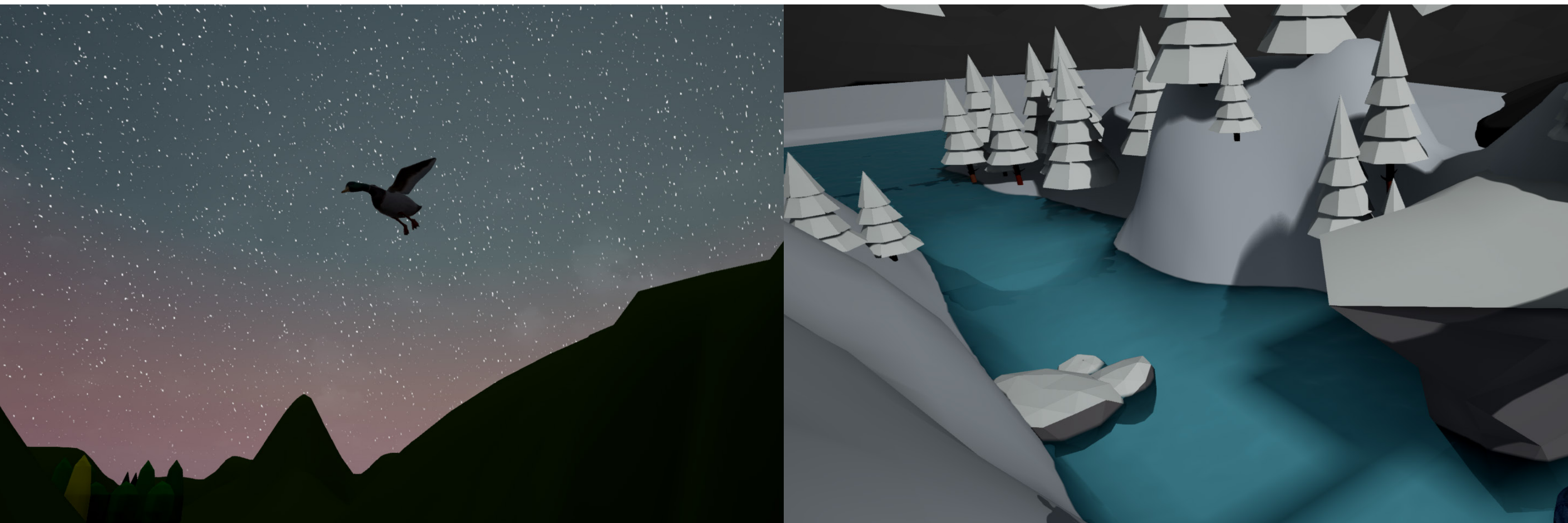


# November

The struggle continues, and the ducks have to cross a motorway before going through an underground passage, avoiding small enemies and dealing with a fox who stands in their way. There are plenty of opportunities to lose ducklings here, and the stress is built up before being released when reaching the park and the safe-haven of the pond, where they're fed by Carol and Sharon, who discuss motherhood and how their lives have stagnated. The player is not forced to move on from this pond, begging the question: why do we continue? The ducks could easily sit in this pond, away from the stresses of the wild world. I hope that the player answers this question through their own intrigue. When they do, they'll reach the end of the day, and emerge in a nest situated in an open area, slowing the pace down before having them chased by a fox. This fearful escape is offset by the sudden eruption of fireworks in the night sky - it's bonfire night, and it acts as a moment of genuine jubilation in the struggle as the sky and water are lit up.

# December

The section starts with determination in the face of uphill climbing, before an open section. The following section becomes more desperate and saddening, as the ducks discover Dan after making their way across a death-trap of a bridge. Dan is on the phone to his friend, discussing how he won't see his children this Christmas, and the tone is downbeat and hopeless as the ducks move on. This is quickly contrasted by the fear of losing a child of their own as the player must chase a bird of prey who abducts a duckling, and this slightly mirrors the troubles introduced by Dan. When the ducks return and reach the next pond they find a group of ducks that look different, that look like the duck we saw fleeing the nest in September, and one of our ducklings rejoins its real family. Later in the night, as the ducks walk through the forest, the player hears a familiar song coming from a nearby house. *In Dulci Jubilo* plays inside, through the Christmas decorations that hang out front; laughter and partying can also be heard. Next door, in a darkened living room lit only by the television, sits Dan as he drinks, celebrating Christmas alone as the duck looks in from the window sil. The next day the ducks tackle an environmental puzzle before being chased by a gang of predators. The tension rises and hope seems to be lost, but the ducks, for the first time, take flight into the open sky and fly out over the sea as the music reaches a triumphant climax.

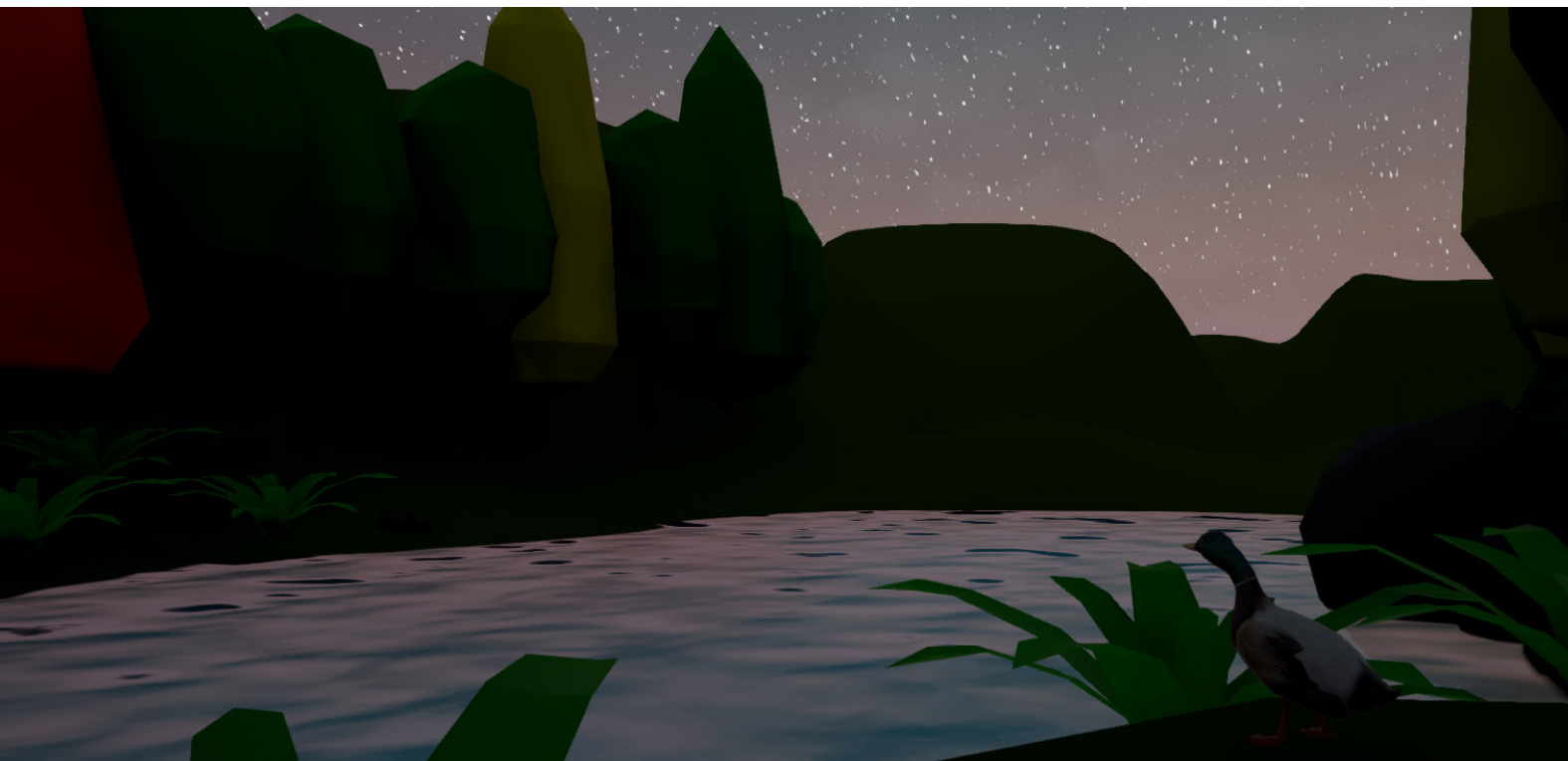




# March

As the ducks return from migration, flying together, the journey is disrupted as our duck is shot out of the sky by a hunter. The shot doesn't kill her but badly injures, and the player must lead her to a safe spot to rest, somewhat mirroring the opening section. The duck wakes up, but is still in some pain, and slowly walks back along the path they went through in the first half of the game. They go past the houses celebrating Christmas in December - a holly reef still hangs on Dan's door. As they approach the broken bridge they find Dan, sitting on the edge, contemplating suicide as his friend tries to talk him down. The duck then joins the river below, before gliding down the cliffs they previously climbed, to the sound of Sufjan Stevens' *The Only Thing*, a song that deals with themes of suicide in terms of why we continue in the face of adversity. This is the lowest point in the game, and the following section is more empty and determined in order to bring the tone back up and, whilst allowing reflection and giving reverence to the serious nature of the previous scene, gives the player some more familiarity as the duck works back to full strength.

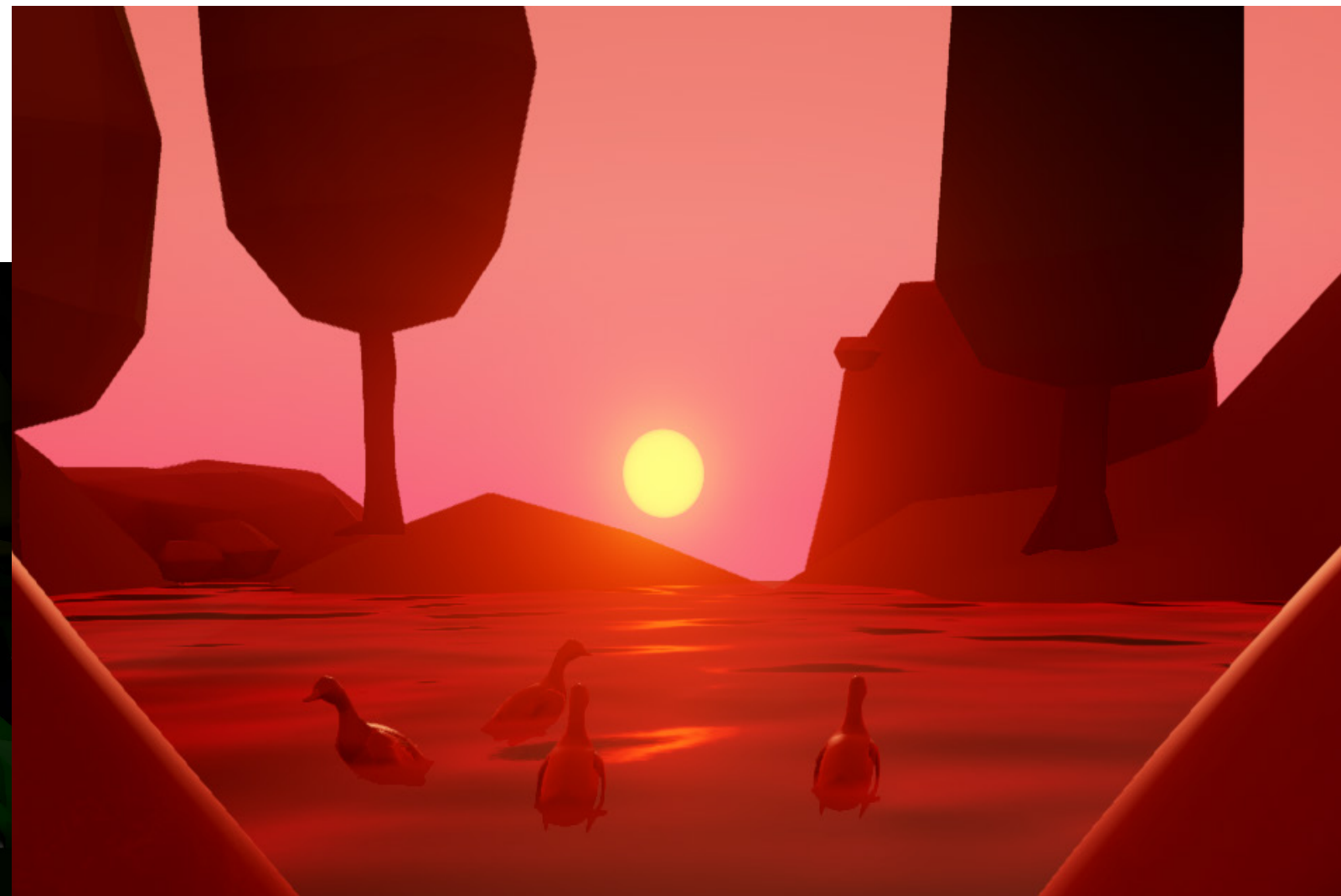
In 5.4, after a cutscene in which Sharon and Carol discuss doing more with their lives and making a change, the duck goes back through the underground section and emerges in a harsh storm which starts a downward spiral of struggle and difficulty as the player tries to battle through. After this, they rush down river - avoiding collisions - before being chased by predators. They then have to endure a climbing section in the strong winds, before once again being chased. The struggle is relentless and inescapable, and the only way to avoid the enemies, in the end, is to jump through a dangerous thorn bush, gravely injuring the duck who can only walk forward so far before falling down in the wet forest floor. The screen fades to black.



# April

The duck wakes up in a shed before walking out the front door to find a little girl and her father shocked to see it okay. They talk about how they have to let it free and, whilst at first the girl is against the idea and wants to keep it, she eventually agrees to let it go. The player flies away from the house and, soaring through the sky, finds a group of ducks to fly along with. The music rises and is emphatic as the flock soar and dip together, before flying overhead of Rosie and Conor. We see the pair of them talk about breaking up, before Rosie sees the ducks and deems it time to move on. The flock land together, and the enemies that once scared them run from the ferocious, unstoppable group of fowl. They glide down before the day fades to evening.

The ducks flow gently down the river together, before making their way back to the original pond. They jump in and bob along the water. They are home. Rosie and Sasha come into frame and discuss the future. They hold hands as the sun sets and the ducks swim in front of them, and Simon and Garfunkel's *April Come She Will* plays us out.



# Cutscene Storyboard

## Characters

**Rosie:** 18 years old and in a relationship with Conor. Rosie wants to be more mature than she actually is and thinks she's ready for adulthood. She believes that Conor is the best she could ever get and, despite the way he treats her, is terrified of losing him. She is an aspiring artist and loves nature and animals.

**Sasha:** 17 years old and has feelings for Rosie. She is calm, thoughtful and always has time for her friends. Despite being in love with Rosie, she cares about her too much to disrupt her relationship with Conor, even if it isn't working out. She looks to help others to avoid worrying about her own feelings. She is an aspiring therapist.

**Conor:** 18 years old and in a relationship with Rosie. A conspiracy theorist with hints of narcissism, Conor loves to learn information that he can eventually laud over other people in conversation. A prolific footballer. Not loyal, and is seen at one point in the game with a different girl. He aspires to go into advertising.

**Sharon:** 36 years old and the mother of two teenagers. Sharon married young and had children soon after, and she feels like she missed out on having freedom in her life. She had aspirations of studying law but dropped out of university in her second year. Quite recently divorced. Jealous of the life Carol has lived.

**Carol:** 37 years old and the mother of a young child. Headstrong, believing she can do anything she puts her mind to. Has been best friends with Sharon for years. She mastered in media at university. She somewhat pities Sharon and wants her to discover what she wants in life, but has no idea what that is.



1.2 - Rosie and Sasha are sitting on a bench. Rosie is crying about her boyfriend treating her badly, and whilst Sasha tries to make her understand that he isn't good for her, and that the relationship isn't healthy for her. Rosie understands that he's not a great boyfriend, but she can't see past her love for him. Sasha reluctantly accepts it.

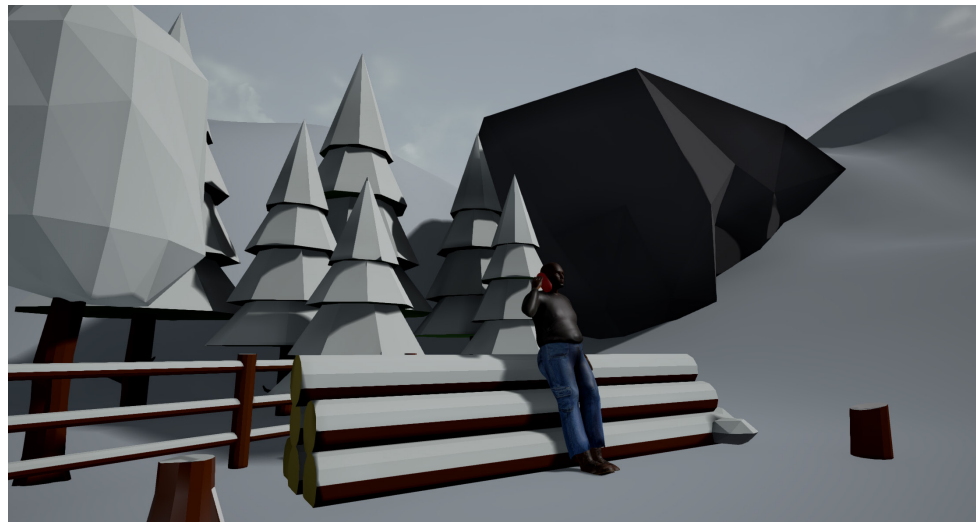


2.1 - Rosie and her boyfriend Conor are standing on a bridge as the sun sets. Conor talks about a conspiracy theory he believes, whilst Rosie is doubtful, yet retracts her doubts when Conor refuses to divulge any further. Rosie wants to play 'poo-sticks' but Conor dismisses this request. She says she loves him and he silently watches the ducks flow past.

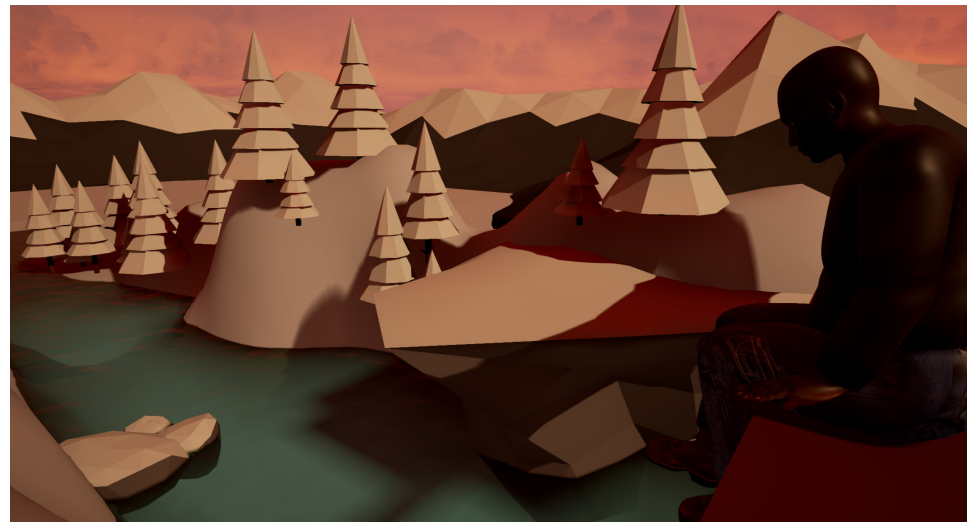


3.1 - Sharon and Carol sit by a pond, feeding the ducks, discussing last night's television. Sharon talks about watching a quiz show, getting every question right, before realising that it was a repeat. This forces her to question her quality of life and if she's merely settled into a life of comfort, leaving behind any dreams she may have had. Carol argues that life is about doing what you want. Sharon wonders what she wants from life.





4.2 - Dan leans on a stack of logs as he talks to his friend on the phone. He discusses how poor his business is going, before getting more emotional and discussing how his wife is taking full custody of their children, and he won't see them this Christmas. His friend's response seems muted and emotionless, and the phone call ends abruptly before Dan angrily throws his phone on the floor.



5.2 - Dan sits on the edge of a bridge, looking down, leaning forward. His friend is trying to talk him down, apologising for not being there. Dan considers how he's lost control of everything in his life, and has nothing left to live for. His friend doesn't know what to say, other than things can change and get better. "I was never going to jump. I just wanted to feel like I could."



5.4 - Sharon is much happier and talks about how she is going to go back into education and finish her degree. She wants to take control of her life and have more to live for than motherhood. She knows it will be hard, but the pain of change has to be embraced to get through to the other side.



6.1 - The duck walks out of the shed and the father and daughter walk towards her and stroke her. The father says that the duck is well enough to fly away, and the daughter is upset at this prospect - she doesn't understand why they can't keep the duck. The father explains that she's a duck - she needs to be free. He says that you can't lock up things that you love.



6.2 - Rosie sighs as she tears up, looking away from Conor. Conor says he's sorry; Rosie says if she looks at him she'll forgive him, but she knows she can't - not again. She says that he can't keep having total control over her, and that things need to change. He says he loves her and she looks down, before looking up and seeing the ducks fly overhead. She says that they need to break up.



6.3 - Rosie asks Sasha how her final A Level exam went - she's not sure but she's glad it's over. She asks how Rosie got on with Conor - she says it's over and she actually feels glad. Sasha is relieved and happy. They talk about Summer and how they have to wait for results. What happens now? They move closer. They hug, and Rosie thanks Sasha. They move slightly apart, and their hands touch. They look at each other. "Who knows?" Their hands embrace as the ducks swim happily in front of the setting sun.

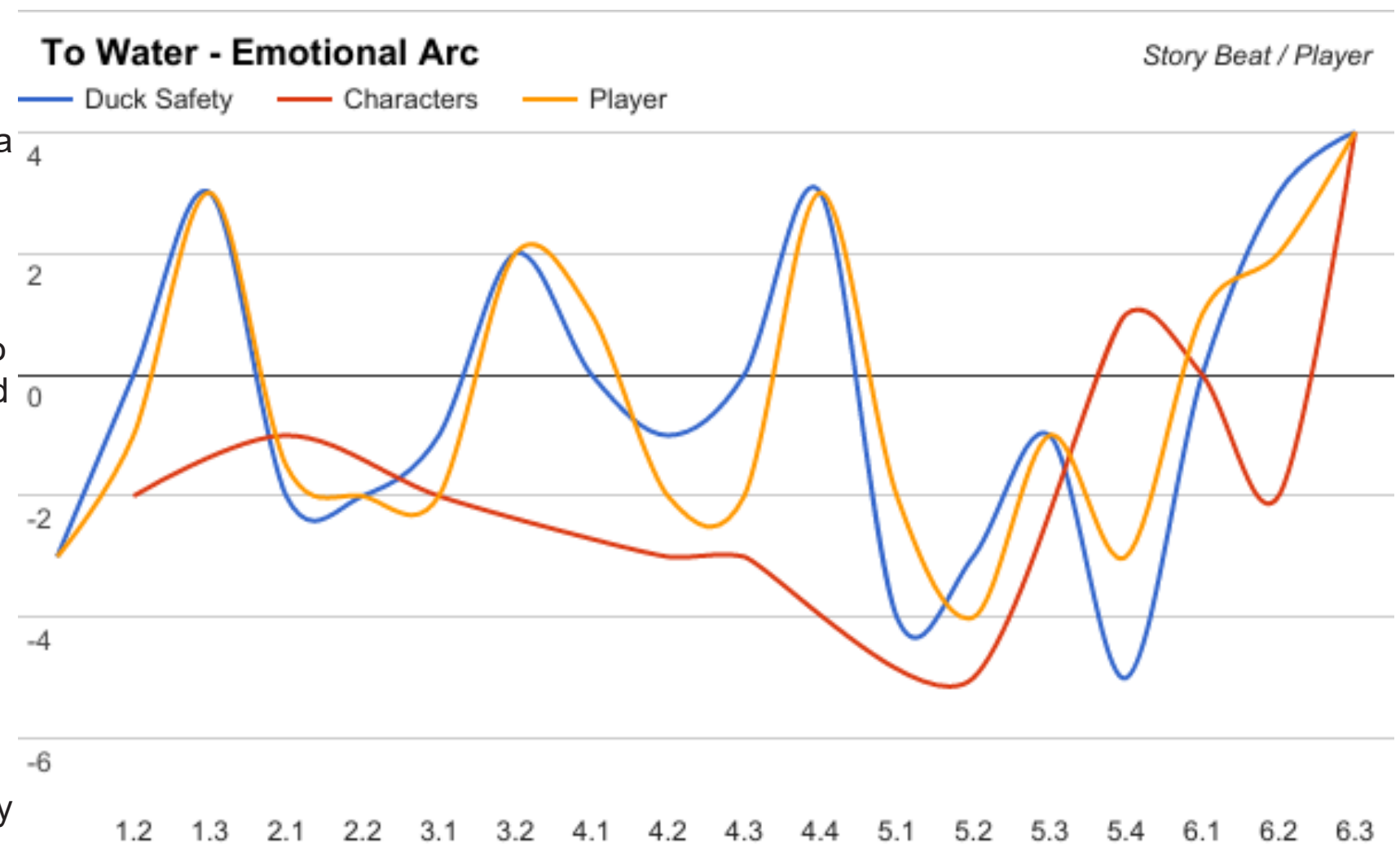
# Emotional Arc

The emotional arc of the game is supposed to replicate the journey of struggling to overcome change from a painful comfort before embracing the pain of moving on, getting through and coming out better on the other side - not necessarily with answers, but at least a feeling that things are going to be different from here on out.

This chart shows the intended emotional reaction on the player against the safety of the duck and the emotions felt by the characters. This ranges in emotion from -5 (the loneliest struggle) to 5 (total contentment) and the journey of the player is mostly situated between that of the duck and the characters. There are moments of strong juxtaposition between the ducks and the humans, such as at 4.3, and I didn't want to always have them paralleled in order to show the nature of the difference in the relationship functions between them.

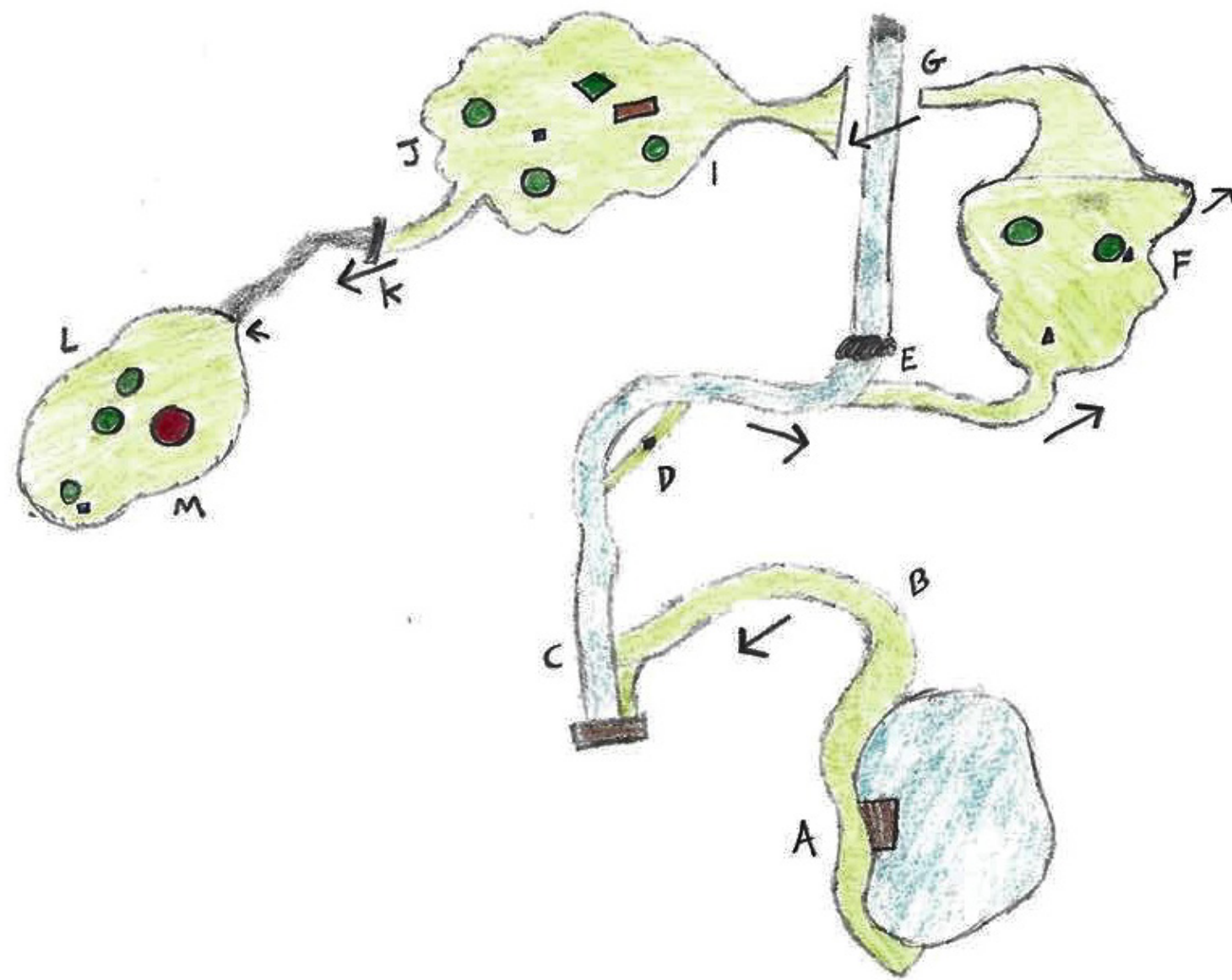
The first half of the game dips up and down quite swiftly, and the design behind this is to replicate the emotions felt when in an unhealthy relationship that a person refuses to face the truth of. There are happy moments, moments that ratify and justify the position, but mostly it is a struggle. Just when you think you're finally ready to get out, when things have gotten too bad, something good will happen to draw you back in. The story of the characters, however, shows this becoming too much, and the final straw is when Dan considers suicide - something has to change.

The second half of the game depicts this struggle to move on through the lonely duck who, having been relied on for so long, now needs to find the group she raised. There are moments of beauty that give the player the conviction to carry on, but it is mostly an uphill struggle before she is given help. If the human story is of overcoming and moving on, and the ducks is of evolutionary survival, we see them overlap in this moment - pain must be embraced and overcome to survive. The game doesn't aim to end in total happiness or jubilation, but in a feeling of liberation and acceptance over the lack of control we have in most aspects of life, and taking control over those we do. We can't decide where the river flows, but we can choose how and who we go down it with.





# The Opening Sequence



Key:

Green Circle = Tree   Red Circle = Nest   Small Square = Leaves  
 Blue Triangle = Food   Orange Rectangle = Fox   Green Diamond = Bush  
 Arrow Up = Upward Landscape   Arrow Down = Downward Landscape

A: The opening level aims to show the player how to play rather than telling them, thrusting them into the position of the lonely duck. The rain is falling, and a short cinematic shows two ducks - male and female - interacting, before the male flies off to follow a flock flying overhead. A girl sits on a bench at the pond, crying. The player is now in control, and the only place to walk is into the forest.

B: A bend in the road entices the player to use both sticks to turn, indicating the movement controls.

C: The path leads down to the flowing river, and as the player gets in they move with the flow of the water.

D: A branching path that goes slightly uphill - the player is rewarded for their curiosity by finding leaves, encouraging the exploration of environments.

E: At this point the river runs into a bed of rocks which the player cannot get over - they are forced onto land.

F: The player discovers food as they enter a more open area, and eating it slightly fills their energy bar. They will try to jump across trees, but cannot make it until they eat more food on another branch on the lower tree. Once that is eaten, they can reach the second tree and, consequently, the cliff. This indicates the energy and platforming mechanics.

G: The player must take a leap of faith across the fast flowing river, demonstrating gliding.

I: The first environmental puzzle of the game (see the section on Environmental Puzzles)

K: A fallen tree obstructs the path, and the player must go underground momentarily, bringing the camera closer to the duck and creating a sense of togetherness. It's dark and damp, and hints at darker themes within the game.

L: The player emerges back into the light, and must climb up several trees to reach the nest, indicated by the colour of the tree. There are also more leaves to collect round the back.

M: The duck goes through a hole in the tree and the camera changes to be fixed inside the trunk, showing where the duck will make her nest.



# Music and Aesthetic

## Music (tracks attached in Blackboard):

To Water Theme - this piece aims to capture the journey of the game: uphill struggle with moments of joy through the plucky guitar. It starts off peaceful before becoming deeper and darker, mirroring the game. It ends off where it starts - like the journey - and in that sense also mimics the inescapable nature of unhealthy relationships before the pain of breakup is embraced.

Finding a Nest - this is the music that accompanies the duck in the opening level, and aims to capture the loneliness desperation in this section.

Hope in the Beginning - this is a more upbeat, generic track that aims to raise the spirits once the ducklings have arrived and kick-start the adventure.

To Water General - a more downbeat track that aims to capture the struggle of survival.

## Aesthetic:

The game uses strong, bold colours to help convey tone and emotion without the use of words or written material. The sky is extremely important in portraying the intended tone for a scene, and sunsets are a big part of the game's aesthetic - capturing moments of natural beauty helps push the realism of the journey of the duck in contrast to the anthropomorphism surrounding it.



