

Game About Animals: The Animal Game

Summary:

The idea of this game is to create a fun and entertaining game in which you play as and learn about animals. There are several other games which have attempted to do something like this such as Evo, Zoo Tycoon, Wolf Quest, and Spore in a way. However the idea here is to create a simulation of a natural ecosystem filled with different kinds of animals, plants and bugs. Once the ecosystem is created the player would be given the ability to patrol around as a spectator to watch the creatures interact with one another or be able to take over control of one of the animals and try and survive. Once in control of the creature there would be several things to keep track of such as thirst hunger and fatigue which the player would have to manage.

Goals

The game would hopefully be one of those educational games in disguise, using the free roaming ability combined with optional quests and achievements for completing certain things such as eating different kinds of creatures as a carnivore or surviving a certain number of attacks as a prey creature. One of the things that would help to keep people interested would be the ability to advance through quests such as finding a mate or successfully defending your nest. These could be used to unlock new pieces of information and abilities to help you survive.

The game will focus on many different types of players as its audience because while it would be a good learning tool for younger players the feel and games involved would be entertaining for all ages and even older people may learn something from it. The fact that players could influence the ecosystem and take part in it by possessing a creature or just sit back and watch could intrigue players from many age and experience groups, while fulfilling the overall purpose of the game to inform the player about the balance of an ecosystem and the creatures involved in it. It would also help to alert the player to the difficulties and dangers posed to animals in the wild by humans and others problems.

Mechanics

Mechanic 1: Movement/Mobility

The movement mechanic is very important to the game as many of the different creatures will need to move in different ways. Controlling, for example, a deer would involve learning how the deer can walk, run, leap and how fast they are capable of turning. Since most animals lack appropriate appendages for grasping and lack the brain

function to understand tool use, movement will be a big way in which the player will be interacting with the environment and will also be important for chasing down prey, finding food and avoiding predators.

Mechanic 2: Senses

Since many animals have extraordinary senses when compared to humans and it is what makes many of them unique and determines how they function there needs to be an effective way of conveying these and showing them to the player so they can learn them and use them to help survive. Scent trails could be shown to the player in an understandable way through floating colored particles and for animals whose vision is very movement oriented rendering effects and post processing could be used to create particularly bright or vibrant colors when something moves and a darkening of the area around them to help highlight them to the player. Learning to read and use things like this to your advantage would be key to the player's survival during the game.

Mechanic 3: Survival Management

Another important mechanic of the game would be learning how to deal with the needs of your creature. Animals need to eat, sleep, socialize with others, sometimes form packs for defense, and mate in order to successfully survive. Learning to understand your creature's needs and meet them adequately would be a large part of the game and one where most of the learning would take place. A short dossier on the animal could be brought up when it is first commanded to explain what type of animal it is and what they need to eat/drink and how often such things need to occur. Someone controlling a camel for example would have to drink less often than someone controlling a wolf, and non pack creatures would likely need to avoid their own kind unless attempting to mate.

User Interface



(<http://multiplayerblog.mtv.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/deadly.jpg>)

The main point of view for the game will be third person though there will be an optional first person view. The reason I am going to use third person is that there are many different abilities and types of animals and having them in third person may be confusing or unwieldy for the player. For example, deer can move very fast and having to have a player bouncing around through trees and over rocks may be significantly more

difficult to navigate in first person and it also will make it much harder to be aware about your surroundings, something which will be very important to the game play.

The important needs to the player will be conveyed as simply and unobtrusively as possible. Information such as health and hunger will be conveyed mostly through visual and audio cues, such as bloodied and limping while injured, panting when fatigued, and looking progressively leaner when starving. However so as not to make it a guessing game, there will be actual bars showing the need for food and water as well as the levels of fatigue and health. These bars will fade into the corners of the screen when the player is moving around and playing the game but upon stopping or pressing a button to call them they will fade in so the time on screen dragging the player out of the immersion is minimal. The rest of the menus in game will be accessed while pausing and they will contain options to save and load as well as the encyclopedia which gives you hints and information about your current animal.

Scoring will be handled off screen in the encyclopedia menu where it will keep track of all the players stats as an animal including such things as number of X eaten while that animal, number of times mated, offspring created, times killed, etc. The player would then be assigned a rank based on performance usually based on the animal, such as pack leader, or runt of the litter.

Controls

The controls will be relatively simple and context sensitive as they will be handled with an XBOX 360 controller. The Left and right analog sticks will control the movement and camera respectively, while the other buttons will be used in context to perform attacks and dodges on enemies or friendly emotes towards friendly creatures such as mating calls and playing. The start and select buttons will open up game menus and encyclopedia menus to allow the player to change options or view important information.

Environments

There are many environments that could serve as potential play zones, though the actual amount would likely need to be limited in the initial release for time and resource reasons due to the complexities involved in creating a living breathing environment.



(<http://www.flickr.com/photos/morealtitude/82993283/>)

Desert

The desert is a harsh environment with little food or water, meaning staying hydrated, fed and well rested is difficult with the scarcity of prey, shade and water. The main enemy for players in the desert environment is the environment itself, though many other issues will also play a part such as habitat destruction from human encroachment, drilling, and drilling spills. Scenarios involving poachers and human control of water supplies will also play a roll in the area.



(<http://www.marietta.edu/~biol/biomes/images/deciduous/dforest1.jpg>)

Temperate Deciduous Forest

The temperate deciduous forest is a lush habitat filled with many different types of plants and animals that change noticeably over the seasons. The main enemies faced in the forest would be exposure during cold seasons, human encroachment, poachers, hunters, and logging industries. Scenarios in there would involve the effects of human contact, hunting and pollution on the ecosystem as well as the dangers of dwindling habitat.



(<http://www.flickr.com/photos/80079525@N00/310999010/>)

Polar

The arctic, or northern, polar region is a dangerous, cold, Iceland filled with all kinds of dangerous environmental challenges as well as some very dangerous creatures and humans. The main enemies would be the extreme climate, dangerous animals, and damage caused by humans. Scenarios involving the destruction of habitat from global warming and over hunting of animals by humans will play a large roll in the polar environment.

Sample Play Through

Moving through the starting menus and choosing difficulty and ecosystem the game begins with the player as a vaguely visible shimmering orb floating down over the ecosystem and slowly coming to a halt just above canopy level. Having gained control over their character they are now free to float around the forest as they please. The character may spend some time exploring, checking out the lay of the land and seeing several different animals wandering around in their habitat. Seeing a large buck wandering through the trees, the player floats down and uses his commands to posses the creature.

After a short moment where the orb disappears into the creature and the camera's rearrange, the encyclopedia entry pops up on the screen giving a brief overview of the creature's habitat, diet, abilities and needs. The player chooses to ignore the more information button and goes into the game to try their new found toy. The player wanders around in the forest for a bit, trying out their sense abilities and different attacks and movements. He wanders around a bit before realizing all of this play is beginning to make his deer tired and hungry. The player wanders over to some bushes to spend a few moments eating then wanders over to a nearby stream to drink some water and relax for a few moments.

Suddenly there is a burst cracking sound and the camera hints toward a clump of brush across the shallow stream. The player has just enough time to react and begin moving as a wolf comes crashing through the underbrush and across the river. The player charges through the trees, bounding over rocks and using his abilities to sprint and jump away as other wolves come charging out of the trees. The player runs but his deer is getting tired and is wounded by a lunging wolf. Finding himself hamstrung and cornered, the player tries to fight off the wolves with his antlers and hooves, but is taken down by the superior numbers.

As the player watches his animal die and the orb rise out of the corpse, he watches the wolves for a moment before deciding that it might be more fun to be on the other end of the predator and prey equation and possesses one of the wolves. He is greeted with a similar encyclopedia page which explains basic information about the wolf, and this time, not wanting to be at a disadvantage he reads the extra info about the abilities possessed by the wolf and more of their living habits.

The game would go on like this for a long time, with defeat bringing opportunities to try new things and creatures. The idea is that it promotes the player trying something new each time they end their play as something else so they begin to learn about each part of the ecosystem. The game experience will also be enhanced by scenarios and random factors or natural occurrences such as extreme weather and earthquakes, or hunting humans and pollution.

Technology

Being very focused around wilderness the game would work best with a game that handles such things well, like the cry engines produced by Crytek which are always being used to show off lush expansive jungle habitats. The amount of detail involved in the models and environments would also allow for a very immersive game. Something like the 360 would make a pretty good platform as it has a very simple and easy to work with controller.

Target Audience

The target audience for the game is very broad as the game should be simple and informative enough to attract children but also maintain a very positive draw towards teenagers and adults for the cool factor of playing as wild animals and having information about environmental awareness. The game would likely be rated teen for the realistic blood and violence involved in the game rather than for any actual offensive material. The parental controls would allow parents to filter out possible offensive material by turning off blood.

Links

<http://www.abandonia.com/en/games/531/Wolf.html> A similar game where you play a wolf and need to survive. Both the game and manual are available for download.

<http://www.abandonia.com/en/games/1020/Lion.html> A similar game where you play a lion and need to survive, made by the creators of Wolf. Both the game and manual are available for download.

<http://www.abandonia.com/en/games/568/Robinsons+Requiem.html> A game where you need to survive on a strange planet in the wilderness by taking care of needs like food, water, medical care, and avoiding injury and sickness. The game and manual are available for download.

<http://animal.discovery.com/animals/> A website with a significant amount of information about many animals.

<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/> Another website with information about animals such as size and weight, habitat and type of diet.