

Narrative Design & Writing Sample
WITCH DOCTOR

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WORLD, STORY & CHARACTERS

GENRE & THE WORLD

Witch Doctor is an open-world adventure game with RPG elements, set in a mythical, bizarre, and at times ruthless old-world of the North. The world draws inspiration from the Finnish folk religion, folklore and folk medicine.

STORY

Young Marissa serves as an apprentice to her grandmother, Kivutar—a seasoned witch doctor who has raised the orphaned Marissa since childhood.

Together, they work as healers in the remote village of Surnu, nestled in the wilderness of the North. Their craft goes beyond curing traditional ailments, extending to the removal of curses, with their healing rooted in the balance between life and death and fueled by the supernatural force known as väki. To the villagers, Marissa and Kivutar are both indispensable and enigmatic.

After a healing ritual goes wrong and causes the death of the village chief's youngest son, Kivutar is blamed and sentenced to hang. With her grandmother gone, Marissa must step into the role of village healer, while trying to uncover the mystery of the boy's sudden death—and her growing thirst for vengeance.

Yet a deeper turmoil rages within her. Shunned for her magical powers but desperately needed for them, Marissa begins to question whether she can ever truly belong to the village community. Drawn to the raw power of nature, Marissa faces a choice: remain in Surnu and endure its injustice and prejudice, or abandon the world of humans to embrace the wild, where she can be free to live on her own terms.

CHARACTERS

Marissa: Steadfast and hard-headed with a strong moral compass. Marissa needs to learn to get by on her own, and to grow into the role of the healer in a village riddled with prejudice and secrets.

Kivutar: Marissa's wise grandmother, equipped with the rare skill to channel the power of väki. The villagers of Surnu both fear and respect her.

Ragnil: A viper, Marissa's companion animal, that both guides and tries to keep Marissa safe. She talks to Marissa, but the regular folk only hear a snake hissing.

Aristahr: Marissa's dependable hunter friend, that harbors deeper feelings for her.

Hjob: The ruthless and self-centered village leader with buried family secrets.

KEY LOCATIONS

(Note: only locations pertinent to this document are listed below)

SURNU

Located deep in the wilderness, Surnu is an isolated small village that relies on hunters and gatherers for food, as well as the occasional travelling merchants for rarer goods, such as medicinal plants that cannot grow in the cold North.

Kivutar's Cottage: Located further out of the village, the cottage is Marissa's and Kivutar's home, but they occasionally treat patients there as well. The Healing Book, gathered ingredients, as well as other resources can be accessed here.

The Village Market: Quests can be acquired at the Market. Some of the most basic ingredients can also be purchased from this small village market.

The Dead House: The dead are cleaned and prepared here for their journey into the underworld.

Hjob's Residence: The Village leader's house is off-limits for anyone outside Hjob's family and servants. Marissa can only visit the residence on special house-calls to treat Hjob and his family.

The Hanging Oak: The Hanging Oak is where the wrong-doers of the village are punished. In the North, captivity is not a form of punishment and criminals are either hanged or otherwise physically punished.

THE WOODS SURROUNDING SURNU

Surnu is surrounded by dense forest and wildlife that mostly eludes people. Parts of the woods are however more powerful than others, laced with väki and hiding strange creatures, making them dangerous for the unprepared lone wanderer.

Bruin Holt: A grove where the otherwise elusive bear can often be found.

The Guarded Glade: A burial ground in the woods where most of the dead village folk are laid to rest. The hollow is guarded by trees that have been pruned with symbols to keep the spirits of the dead from wandering away.

GAMEPLAY

PLAYER GOAL

Heal Villagers And Unveil The Mystery Of The Death Of The Village Leader's Son

Marissa is dependant on the resources of the village, so she has to continue performing her healer duties and to succeed in the job to keep herself fed and safe in the village. As she performs more complicated rituals, she begins to master the supernatural power väki, which will play part in uncovering the mystery of the sudden death of Hjob's son. Succeeding in the healing rituals earns her respect among the villagers and helps her acquire information from the villagers.

CORE GAMEPLAY LOOP

- Healing the villagers and either gaining or losing reputation in the village of Surnu
- Gaining more väki and knowledge while completing tasks and quests in preparation for the healing rituals

ILLNESSES AND CURES

The illnesses in the Witch Doctor are real life illnesses and ailments, except for those that are magical in nature, such as curses. The magical illnesses are, however, also based on traditional folklore and their cures in traditional folk medicine.

THE HEALING BOOK

A core gameplay element in the Witchdoctor is the use of the Healing Book to diagnose illnesses and to find cures. After talking to a patient or by visibly observing them, Marissa uses the Healing Book to narrow down the Affected Body Part and Symptoms after which the Healing Book will suggest a recipe for a medicine or a healing ritual.

Marissa must then acquire the necessary ingredients for the cure by means of exploration, hunting, gathering, talking to villagers and consulting Kivutar's notes.

The Healing Book is written by Kivutar and some of the entries are also filled with her sidenotes and comments that give insight into her character.

TYPES OF CASES

Simple (Optional):

The simple cases are an easy way to earn squirrel skins (used as currency) and to gain the respect and trust of the villagers. These cases can be completed at the cabin by prescribing correct potions or other cures for the patient by using the Healing Book to determine the illness and the cause. Does not include cutscenes.

Complex (Optional):

More narrative-driven quests that require Marissa to do legwork to get the job done. The outcome of the sidequests can affect the main sotryline. Might include cutscenes.

Main Quest Cases (Mandatory):

Narrative-heavy quests with long storylines that require investigation to figure out the root causes for the illness and significant work in acquiring the right tools, enchantments or potions to cure the patient. Includes cutscenes and progresses the main storyline.

EXAMPLE ENTRY: THE HEALING BOOK

Affected Body Part: Teeth, Gums

Symptoms: Ache, Pus, Bleeding

RESULT: Inflamed Tooth

Dig into the gums surrounding the rotten tooth using a small wooden stick, with its bark intact, until blood is drawn. Tie the stick to a rock and sink it to the bottom of a cold spring. The ache will be gone in a day.

Note: if the method does not work, pull out the tooth.

Remind the patient to use fishbone or such to clean their teeth after meals and scrub their mouth with salt and charcoal using a rough cloth and water at least once a day.

For years I've been telling the patients this, but they rather let their teeth rot than listen to me

Manifestation

Affected Body Part

Arms	Lower back
Calf	Lungs
Cheeks	Mouth
Chest	Muscles
Crotch	Nose
Ears	Palm
Elbow	Shin
Eyes	Shoulder
Feet	Spirit
Fingers	Stomach
Forehead	<u>Teeth</u> ✓
Head	Throat
Joints	Toes
Knee	Upper back
Legs	Wrist

Symptoms

<u>Ache</u> ✓	Nightmares
Apathy	<u>Pus</u> ✓
Appetite	Red spots
Bleeding	Sneezing
Bruises	Soreness
Constipation	Stiffness
Cough	White Spots
Cramps	
Dizziness	
Fever	
Hallucinations	
Headache	
Insomnia	
Loss of hearing	
Loss of sight	

Inflamed tooth

Symptoms:
toothache, bloody gums, black tooth, pus

Cure:

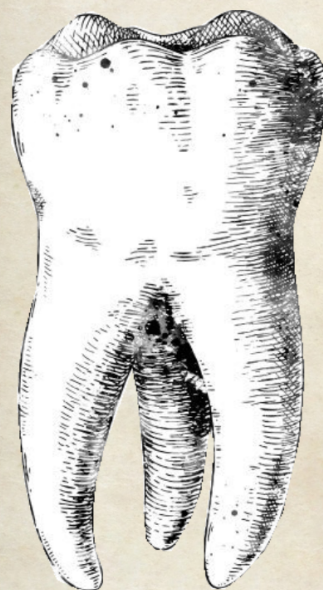
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Ingredients:
wooden stick, rope, small rock



QUEST OVERVIEW:

(Note: only quests detailed in this document are listed below)

QUEST 1: GOOD LUCK CHARM

After Kivutar's death, which occurs at the end of the game's prologue, Marissa must return to the site of her hanging to search for a good luck charm known as a "para." According to ancient folklore, these small, insect-like creatures appear on the ground the day after a hanging, specifically where the body of a hanged wrongdoer has rested after being cut down

Aware of the lingering power that places of death can hold—and urged by Ragnil, who suspects Kivutar may have left something behind—Marissa sets out to visit the Hanging Oak.

QUEST 2: IT TAKES A WITCH

In the first major quest of Act I, Aristahr asks Marissa for help in curing baby Sitza. She is suffering from a symptom very common among the infants in the village: white spots in the mouth. Unlike most, though, Sitza is very ill. After consulting Kivutar's Healing Book, Marissa can come to the conclusion that placing a dead frog inside the child's mouth can cure the spots. This will however lead to Sitza's death, as the *samm*s, also known as mouth yeast, has spread to her organs.

If Marissa asks additional questions from Aristahr during the diagnosis-phase of the quest, she will deduce that Sitza's illness is progressed to a point where a stronger healing ritual is needed. This ritual requires a bear's gullet that Marissa has to acquire by either hunting down a bear or finding a bear's carcass. To make the task considerably easier, Marissa can also choose to acquire a finger from a dead body to help her enchant the bear and to kill it more easily, as bears are extremely strong creatures and very difficult to hunt.

Performing the significantly more complicated ritual will save Sitza's life and earn respect for Marissa in the village, as this is the first healing ritual she is performing without Kivutar.

Mission Design

Mission 1: GOOD LUCK CHARM

- Marissa wakes up in her cottage in the morning following Kivutar's death.

CINEMATIC
CUTSCENE

MARRISSA'S COTTAGE - 1 DAY AFTER THE HANGING

Marissa dreams. In her dream a cuckoo calls as Kivutar hangs on the noose, alive. Her gaze bores into Marissa.

Marissa's eyes shoot open. She's in her bed.

GAMEPLAY

Marissa gets up and Ragnil slithers from her nest on the corner of the cottage, climbing up to wrap herself around Marissa's neck.

RAGNIL

We need to return to the Hanging Oak.

MARISSA

Morning to you too, Ragnil.

RAGNIL

We shouldn't dilly-dally. Places of death are powerful.

RAGNIL (CONT'D)

We might find something of use there.

MARISSA

I know. Let's go.

- NEW QUEST: **GOOD LUCK CHARM**
- Quest objective on the screen: **Visit the place of Kivutar's hanging.**
- The player can interact freely with items in the cottage, such as EDIBLE ITEMS, SUPPLY SHELVES, THE HEALING BOOK and THE WARDROBE before heading out.
- The Hanging Oak can be reached by Fast Travel or walking, since it is a previously visited location at this point in the game. New quests won't be unlocked until the player visits the Hanging Oak.
- Once the player gets to the vicinity of the Hanging Oak, the map will guide them to a spot under the branch on which Kivutar was hanged.

- If the player takes too long to approach the location, Ragnil will comment::

RAGNIL
Look underneath the Hanging Tree.
The old mother might have left
something valuable behind.

- When on the right spot, the player can pick up an object, triggering a short in-game cutscene:

CINEMATIC
CUTSCENE

Marissa picks up the small object, holding it on the palm of her hand. It is a dead bee. Marissa places the bee inside a small, decorative box that hangs from a chain around her neck and spits into the box.

- Tooltip on the screen:

Para acquired. Marissa's health will now slowly regenerate even without consuming health potions.

- Codex unlocked:

Paras are small insect-like creatures that resemble bees. They are believed to be lucky charms that at night grant their owners back everything they have lost during the day.

They appear on the ground where hanged wrong-doers have lain after they've been let off the noose.

Paras require their owner's spit and blod to survive.

● QUEST COMPLETED

[Continue to Mission 2: It Takes a Witch.](#)

Mission 2: IT TAKES A WITCH

● The quest is triggered when Marissa returns to the cottage for the first time after acquiring the para charm. This is also the first time Aristahr and Marissa see each other after Kivutar's hanging:

CINEMATIC
CUTSCENE

OUTSIDE MARRISSA'S COTTAGE - ARISTAHR ASKS FOR HELP

Aristahr is leaning with his back against the front door of Marissa's cottage, arms crossed and foot tapping impatiently on the ground. His eyes are fixed on the small fern-covered path that leads to the cottage. He's waiting for Marissa. When Marissa emerges out of the trees, he rushes to her.

ARISTAHR

Thank the stars you're here.

MARISSA

Where else would I be?

ARISTAHR

I thought that maybe after—

MARISSA

I wouldn't just leave without a word.

Marissa and Aristahr look at each other for a beat.

ARISTAHR

I hate to ask this of you now, but little Sitza is not well...

MARISSA

I see. I'll help.

- New Quest: **IT TAKES A WITCH**
- Quest objective: **Consult the Healing Book**

● If the player takes time entering the cottage or moves too far away from it, Aristahr will comment:

ARISTAHR
We'd better hurry. I don't think
Sitza has long.

● When
the player

interacts with the Healing Book, the healing book menu will open up on the screen, and the following dialogue will play (the menu is interactable even when dialogue is playing):

- -
MARISSA (O.S.)
(over the menu)
So, how does her illness manifest?

ARISTAHR (O.S.)
(over the menu)
She has white spots in her mouth.
The kind the sucklings often have.

- Dialogue options on the screen:
 - [1.] **Diagnose the illness.**
 - [2.] **Ask more about the symptoms.**

- [1.] **Diagnose the illness.** →

PATH A PROGRESSION:

- The player will diagnose the illness based on the white spots only, leaving out a crucial symptom which will result in an ineffective treatment.
- Marissa will find out from the book that the white spots can be cured by placing a dead frog inside a child's mouth:

SAMMAS (MOUTH YEAST)

White fungi spots inside the mouths, sometimes also on the back of the throat. Very common among weaklings such as little babies and the old folk.

Placing a dead frog inside the infected mouth will cure the illness swiftly.

- The player will have to find and kill a frog, unless they have some in their shelves already, and then visit Sitza and her family.
- The cure they will attempt will not be effective. Sitza will eventually die.
- **For the purpose of this document, the PATH B will be presented here in more detail:**

● [2.] **Ask more about the symptoms.** →

PATH B -PROGRESSION:

● This dialogue will play over the menu:

MARISSA
Anything else?

ARISTAHR
She's not eating anymore. She barely even cries.

MARISSA
Hmm. Let's see.

- The player can now choose the affected body part: **THROAT**
- and the symptoms: **WHITE SPOTS, LOSS OF APPETITE & LOSS OF ENERGY.**
- The Healing Book will now open up to Kivutar's additional notes at the back of the book, diagnosing the disease as a rare and advanced case of sammas

SAMMAS (MOUTH YEAST) – ADVANCED FORM

In severe cases the fungi can spread down the throat into the lungs and other organs, resulting in death.

**Milk poured nine times through the gullet of a bear might be a potent enough cure to drive the advanced sickness away.
Notes: I have not tested this cure. This is mere speculation.**

Feeding sucklings from dirty cow horns might be a contributing cause for the spots. Should look into this when I have the time.

- Quest Objective: **Acquire a bear's gullet**
- Quest objective: **Talk with Aristahr**

- Before leaving the cottage, Marissa also has to speak with Aristahr:

CINEMATIC
CUTSCENE

MARISSA (CONT'D)
I need a bruin's gullet.

ARISTAHR
What? Why? You can't hunt a bear by yourself.

ARISTAHR (CONT'D)
And the bruin feast isn't due to many moons still!

MARISSA
You asked for my help. It's little Sitza's life or the bruin's.

MARISSA (CONT'D)
Unless I find a bruin's carcass somewhere...

ARISTAHR
And the gullet is supposed to cure her?

MARISSA
It's needed for the ritual.

ARISTAHR
(sighing)
Then we should head to Bruin Holt. I'll join you.

MARISSA
Do as you please.

- The area of Bruin Holt has a concentrated bear population. The bears tend to elude humans, so the player might not have encountered one in the game yet before this mission.
- When leaving the cottage, Ragnil suggests Marissa acquires a finger from a corpse to help enchant a bear, if they eventually would have to kill one.

● Quest objective (OPTIONAL): **Get a finger from a corpse**

- The map will now point to the Dead House, located on the outskirts of the village
- Killing the bear will be significantly easier with the corpse's finger, but the objective is optional. Marissa will anyway comment:

MARISSA
I think I should acquire a corpse's
finger for this job. For safety.

ARISTAHR
(Sighing)
Of course.

ARISTAHR (CONT'D)
I'll meet you by the Weeping Fir
when you are done. I'll prepare my
bow.

● Once the player makes their way to the Dead House, they have two options:

1: **To sneak in undetected and cut a finger from a corpse**

- The player can send Ragnir to distract Ilma, the corpse washer, while Marissa sneaks in.

2: **Ask Ilma, the corpse washer, for the finger**

● 1: If the player manages the task without being caught, Marissa's reputation will not be affected → **Progression #1**

● 2: If Marissa is caught sneaking, she will not be able to acquire the finger and her reputation will be affected negatively → **Progression #2**

● 3: If the player asks for the finger, Ilma will give it to them, but Marissa's reputation will be negatively affected, as the finger-cutting is considered disrespectful towards the dead. → **Progression #3**

- Once the player makes it to the Weeping Fir, a cutscene will trigger:

THE WEEPING FIR - HEADING TO BRUIN HOLT

Aristahr is waiting under the Weeping Fir, testing the aim of his bow when Marissa runs up to him.

MARISSA
We should go. Time's wasting.

ARISTAHR
Did you get the, uh, finger?

PROGRESSION #1

MARISSA
Yes.

Marissa pulls out the finger from underneath her rope. It's tied to a yarn that hangs around her neck. She tangles it in front of Aristahr's face.

ARISTAHR
Alright, alright. A 'yes' would've been enough.

PROGRESSION #2

MARISSA
No. We should be careful.

ARISTAHR
Alright. Did she catch you sneaking around?

MARISSA
Yes. I was being reckless.

PROGRESSION #3

MARISSA (CONT'D)
Yes. But she didn't appreciate me asking.

- There are three ways to acquire the bear's gullet: **1. By finding a carcass of a bear**, **2. by killing any bear the player comes across**, or **3. finding a dying bear and killing it** (only one in the area). The player is encouraged in level dialogue to avoid killing healthy bears, if not absolutely necessary.

- Ragnil will be apprehensive towards killing any bears.
- Aristahr will be apprehensive towards killing bear sows or cubs.
- There will be bear sows with cubs in the Bruin Holt area. The sows will attack the player if Marissa gets too close to the cubs.
- Boars and sows without cubs won't attack the player without provocation, but they will fight back if hurt.
- If the player keeps looking, they can find an old, injured bear that they can easily enchant with the help of the finger and let the bear out of its misery.

BRUIN HOLT - FINDING AN INJURED BEAR

On the outskirts of the Bruin Holt area, a faint, pained animal cry echoes from a distance.

ARISTAHR

Do you hear that?

MARISSA

Yes. Sounds like a bruin. But something's wrong with the beast.

ARISTAHR

Maybe we should follow the sound.|

RAGNIL

Carefully, now.

- If Marissa **didn't acquire the finger**, the injured bear will attack.
- Ragnil will encourage Marissa to use the finger, if she's in possession of it:

CINEMATIC

Once enchanted, the bear lowers his head to the ground and closes his eyes. Marissa kneels beside him, gently stroking his fur, while Aristahr raises his bow, preparing to shoot. All the while, Marissa continues to pet the bear.

A swish and a thud sounds out. The bear goes slack.

A cuckoo calls in the distance and the wind picks up, ruffling the bed of lily of the valleys on which the bear now lies dead.

- Codex unlocked (if this is the first time the player has come across a bear in the game:

BEAR

Bears are mythical and wise animals, both respected and feared. It is believed they understand human language, and calling them by name is thought to draw them to the speaker. For this reason, bears are often referred to as "Him" or "Kouko" to honor and appease these ancestors.

- The player can now head to Sitza's house.
- When Marissa enters Sitza's house, Sitza's mother Aina will thank her and her husband Ukko will be apprehensive.
- Marissa will proceed to perform the healing ritual, triggering a cinematic:

CINEMATIC

Sitza lies on the bed, pale and still. Marissa stands next to her, holding the bloody bear's gullet in her hand and a jug of milk in the other. Aristahr, Aina and Ukko watch her, worried.

Marissa pours the milk through the gullet into a wooden bucket on the floor. Then she dips both of her hands into the milk.

UKKO

What in the devil are you doing,
witch?

ARISTAHR

Shut your mouth.

Marissa starts brushing Sitza's face with her milky hands,
not paying any mind to Ukko.

MARISSA

(under her breath)

Vedä vihas, paranna sijas, pidä
itte kipus.

Vedä vihas, paranna sijas, pidä
itte kipus.

Vedä vihas, paranna sijas, pidä
itte kipus.

- Sitza is successfully cured.
- Word of Marissa healing Sitza spreads among the villagers and her reputation increases.

● **QUEST COMPLETED**

END OF SAMPLE – THANK YOU FOR READING.