

GAME DESIGN DOCUMENT

Emma: Spice of Life



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High Concept Statement

Emma: Spice of Life (ESL) is a story of personal growth and redemption that follows the life of a young woman who adjusts to a new lifestyle after causing a colossal mess in her old home. She must embrace an unfamiliar profession, make new friends, and prove to her older sister that she has matured and positively impacted the world.

Genre

ESL is a 3D single-player adventure with a mix of exploration, role-playing, strategy, and real-time combat.

Platforms

The game will either be developed in Unity or Unreal Engine 5, but it is planned for release on Windows computers via Steam, PlayStation 5, and Nintendo Switch. A version for Xbox consoles may be considered depending on the commercial success of the game.

Target Audience

ESL can be enjoyed by just about anyone with an interest in role-playing games and basic reading ability, but it is mainly targeted towards young adults, as they would most easily connect with the game's characters due to similarities in age, social life, and professional responsibilities. Children and adolescents could also appreciate ESL for its likeable characters, humor, and exciting real-time combat. The game contains no gore or excessive violence, strong sexual content, or drug use; however, its occasional adult themes, minor blood, action, and mild language would likely warrant a "T" rating from the ESRB, or a "12" from the PEGI ratings board.

Storyline & Characters

ESL will follow the youthful Emma Barrett as she embarks on a journey of friendship, responsibility, and proving herself to her more intellectual and acclaimed older sister, who looks down on her for her impatient, troublesome nature. Her carelessness led monsters to town, and the resulting destruction got both of them thrown out of their homeland, forcing them to move to a new continent. When they find a new home, Emma sees an opportunity to redeem herself by working at the village's restaurant. Her work involves exploring the world, gathering ingredients, and becoming proficient in cooking. Along the way, she will make friends, gain an appreciation for other people's stories, and act heroically when others are threatened by monsters.

Emma, the game's protagonist, despite her competitive nature and debilitating impatience, is a social and intelligent girl with a strong work ethic. She was born and raised on an island town, but her aforementioned errors forced her to move to Honeymint Hills, a quaint

village nestled in the southeast region of the Parmadom continent. To pay for their new house, Emma has to find a job, and she fortunately acquires a gatherer role at the Hot Iron Hive, the town's restaurant. Despite enjoying her work – exploring the land to collect ingredients requested by Cole Adams, her boss – she must also learn the art of cooking. She is initially dismissive of it, but she eventually learns of its usefulness to her and becomes an expert.

Emma's older sister, Annabelle, is an uptight individual who often looks down upon her for her faults, especially after they are banished from their hometown. Annabelle is an acclaimed novelist who has been writing from a young age, which has led to a turbulent relationship between the sisters, as Emma envies her fame and talent while also resenting her high-strung attitude. When they move to Honeymint Hills, Annabelle decides to work at the town library to sell her novels, but as Emma becomes increasingly invested in her role at the Hive, the sisters drift away from each other. Despite their conflicts, Annabelle never undermines the importance of family bonds, and life on Parmadom has made reconsider the way she has treated Emma.

Cole Adams, a jolly businessman capable of intense physical labor, is the founder of the Hot Iron Hive. He is quite friendly and quick to crack jokes, but he can grow aggressive when a friend or client is being threatened. He hires Emma to work with him without much hesitation, as the Hive is a young business without any other employees yet. Despite some growing pains, she would prove to be the missing link that the restaurant needed to grow and thrive, becoming the star attraction of Honeymint Hills. He would later hire more people to assist him and Emma, but he would become worried about the future of his business were she to leave.

Honeymint Hills' library/bookstore, The Pages of Honeymint, is single-handedly operated by Holly Watson, a reserved and formal woman with a tinge of elitism, as she tries to keep some distance from those who do not exude the same elegance as her. However, Holly is very calculated and curious, and she is always eager to get lost in a new story, especially romances and horrors. Emma is initially put off by Holly's conceited and shy attitude, but she finds her too intriguing and pretty to not continue interacting with her. The two of them share a strong work ethic and a good heart, so they became good friends within weeks. Holly became business partners with Annabelle, who helps manage the business and offers her works to the library to be borrowed and sold.

Cobalt Ribbon is a diverse coalition of mercenaries who travel across Parmadom to provide aids to its various townsfolk. However, they grow bored of their work and lack a sense of purpose, but while they pass through Honeymint Hills, they meet Emma, who convinces Cole to hire them at the Hive. This turns out to be a beneficial arrangement for all parties, as Cole has new employees to help him keep up with customer demand, Cobalt Ribbon finds a much-needed change of pace, and Emma has new friends who can help protect her as she gathers ingredients and fights monsters. Each hero of Cobalt Ribbon carries a unique weapon and personality. Members include:

- Tia, an orphan girl and a bit of a loose cannon who fights mercilessly with her clawed gauntlets
- Harry, a deceptively laidback brawler who lacks exceptional intellect
- Isabella, a noblewoman who never holds back when the gloves are off, specializing in two-handed swords

- Cyrus, her theatrical archer husband who shoots with the precision and grace of a man half his age
- Shawn, a stern, standoffish knife expert and a “reformed” bandit

There are also many minor characters who may be involved in side missions throughout the game, like:

- Honeymint Hills’ mayor, Brick Hartwell
- Jillian, a produce vendor
- Milo, a skilled painter robbed by bandits
- Mr. Lewis, the Hills’ doctor

Gameplay

Overview of Gameplay

The gameplay loop of ESL involves exploring Parmadom with Emma and co., fighting monsters and gathering ingredients along the way, and returning to home base and using said ingredients to fulfill Cole’s expectations and cook foods that will aid in future expeditions. The world of Parmadom contains several distinct settlements, vibrant biomes, and dozens of monster species and cooking ingredients to harvest. The game is organized into distinct chunks for each in-universe week, and in each one, the minimum expectation for Emma/the player is to complete Cole’s request for ingredients. The player can explore, complete side missions, and interact with other characters as they please, as long as they supply Cole with the goods he needs at the end of each week.

Player Experience

The player is given control of Emma at the start of a week and is provided with a list of all ingredients Cole wants them to gather before the last day of the week. Afterwards, the player is free to do as they please. They/Emma can travel around Parmadom on foot and talk to NPCs to initiate missions or “Flavor Texts.” They may also visit shops around the continent to buy/sell ingredients and meals, fight monsters big and small, collect ingredients, or just casually explore and absorb the scenery. The player can add ingredients to their inventory by picking them up off the ground, defeating an enemy, purchasing them, finding hidden treasures, completing certain missions, or interacting with static objects like trees and rocks – depending on the ingredient the player is after. Emma can travel around the map on foot, or the player can open the map screen and fast travel to familiar landmarks.

Any major action – fighting enemies, starting/finishing missions, traveling a certain distance across Parmadom – will cause time to pass in the game, and once the end of the week is upon her, Emma will stop whatever she is currently doing and return to the Hot Iron Hive to submit her ingredients to Cole. If his expectations are met, then he will display a joyous reaction, and the player will earn money based on their performance. If Emma has not

collected what he wanted, then he will be upset, and the player will receive less money for their efforts and may be given a “strike.”

Gameplay/Design Guidelines

A balance must be struck in the gameplay between the open-ended exploration and role playing, and making conscious efforts to meet Cole’s expectations. Ingredient requirements should be relatively lenient for most of the game to encourage players to engage with side content and appreciate the world without allowing them to excessively waste time. The time constraints should be split into smaller increments like weeks instead of forcing one large end goal on the player, as this system is thematically appropriate to Emma Barrett’s responsibilities as a gatherer, and it reduces pressure on the player to manage time.

The standard difficulty settings for combat should be reasonable, stimulating, and encourage general audiences to engage with all mechanics on display. Enemy encounters should be challenging enough to make players want to cook meals to aid in combat, but not so difficult that they feel forced to use them for every battle or meticulously plan every move made during cooking to make a completely perfect dish.

Combat must use a real-time system in a 3D space, and the game should smoothly transition in and out of battles. A real-time combat system places more emphasis on mechanical skill than turn-based combat. This format, in addition to the lack of time limits in battles, will allow expert players to complete basically every battle regardless of level, equipment, party members, or meal use, if they wish to play this way. Consistently making progress in these regards and conscious use of resources is recommended, as players will otherwise have a more frustrating experience where battles take dramatically longer.

As long as character concepts and the core storyline of Emma’s adventures in cooking and self-improvement are preserved, then creative liberties and variety in writing, visuals, character design, and audio are encouraged. The development team should be just as excited and liberated to craft the world and its characters/stories/themes as the players are to experience them.

Game Objectives & Rewards

Reward Systems

When completing gathering tasks from Cole, the player will be rewarded with money based on their performance, and certain events and missions are unlocked by finishing enough weeks of ingredient requests. Optional missions can provide money, ingredients, equipment, or cosmetics when completed. Defeating monsters in the overworld may cause money, equipment, and special ingredients like meat and bones to be dropped. Depending on the player’s use of ingredients and performance during cooking sessions, they will be rewarded with a meal of appropriate quality that can be used in combat or in the field. Players can earn any of the aforementioned rewards by engaging in Flavor Texts. These conversations, as well as mandatory story missions, provide the player with the satisfaction of character interactions and plot progression.

Obstacles

ESL's overworld hosts dozens of monsters species with varying stats, sizes, flavor weaknesses, and special abilities. Enemies may attack by launching projectiles, charging at the player, using weapons, or building up stronger attacks for several seconds before letting loose. Others may fly out of reach, duck behind trees, or burrow underground to temporarily avoid attacks. The game's monsters are loosely based on real animal species, both the familiar and the exotic, except with more threatening or unusual traits. If all party members currently in use, including Emma, are defeated in battle, the screen will fade to black and the player will respawn at her house, causing several hours of time to pass. Poor planning and performance in combat could cost players lots of valuable time that could be spent gathering ingredients and completing missions.

Another element of challenge in ESL is the need to manage resources like money and ingredients. Without participating regularly in optional missions and combat, Emma will not have enough money to pay for her house's rent or purchase equipment and cosmetics, and she will fail to fulfill Cole's requests for ingredients. If the player fails to please Cole's ingredients requirements for three consecutive weeks of in-game time, or if they do not have enough money for a weekly house payment, a game over sequence plays and their progress will be reset to the end of the last "successful" week of play where all mandatory tasks were completed. This erasure of progress bypasses any autosaves or manual saves that occurred after said successful week.

The player can fail in other areas of gameplay, only with little consequence. If they respond to questions in a Flavor Text conversation incorrectly and displease the NPC they are interacting with, then they will not receive any rewards for their efforts. However, the player can retry any Flavor Text after completing the main story and either relive a past conversation or answer correctly to earn any missed rewards. These are minor items that are not essential but may be helpful, like ingredients, money, and exclusive cosmetics for the Hive.

When cooking a dish, the player's choice of ingredients and actions during the minigame may result in a meal that lacks beneficial flavors or is extremely low quality. Such an outcome is meant to be disappointing but not frustrating; Emma will comment on how pleasant or disgusting a meal appears to be, but they can still be used in battle, regardless of quality. Players are encouraged to cook frequently, experiment, and view meals as a helpful tool for combat and not a necessity or a source of stress.

Difficulty

The game's combat can be somewhat fair or more challenging depending on the enemies faced and the equipment/meals used in battle. The role-playing opportunities and open-ended structure allow players to develop a play style that provides them with an appropriate degree of difficulty, but completing the game will test the combat skills of any player who has not achieved total mastery. The challenge posed by Cole's ingredient requests helps add structure to the experience, but his expectations will be relaxed enough to allow players to get lost in the world a bit and tackle optional missions.

ESL's standard difficulty level should be comfortable and engaging for most players, but the game will offer additional difficulty settings for enemy health, damage, and aggression. Players can also choose challenge levels for mission goals at the start of the game; this changes the quantity and quality of ingredients requested by various characters, as well as expectations for combat missions.

Gameplay Mechanics

1. Exploration/Gathering

After receiving her tasks from Cole for the week, Emma is free to wander across Parmadom as she pleases. She can select any two members of Cobalt Ribbon to join her, but she can switch them out at any time by returning to the Hive. When a town or a landmark – like Frozemary or Chili Lake – has been visited, Emma gains the ability to fast travel there from the map screen. These areas have stations where she and her allies can hitch a ride on a wagon and immediately arrive there through a loading sequence. Emma can walk/run across the continent and visit its various regions to accept missions by talking to townsfolk, gather ingredients, shop, fight monsters, search for secrets and treasures, or unlock previously inaccessible areas when she receives special recipes. At certain points throughout the story, Emma will be given recipes for meals with exclusive properties that can help her destroy barriers or open up overworld puzzles in places like blocked caverns.

Every area that Emma and co. can visit on foot offers a unique array of ingredients to be collected. These include produce, herbs, spices, grains, oils, beans, fish, monster parts, and other such items. They can be gathered by picking them up off the ground or from low-hanging plants, earned from combat, bought at shops, received from completing side missions, hidden away in secret areas, fished out of bodies of water, or gained from unique interactions with the environment. Examples of this include shaking fruits out of trees and throwing an item at a beehive to detach it from a high branch. These kinds of actions encourage players to carefully observe their environment and appreciate the quirks of each area.

After collecting lots of ingredients, the bag that Emma wears with her will get full, and the player will have to discard items empty their yields into a trunk to free up space. Emma can make camp at any of her registered fast travel points and install a storage trunk there, each of which can hold thousands of reserve ingredients. These camps also allow her to rest and restore health at the cost of several hours of time. However, she does not need to be at a campsite for the player to save their progress, and she cannot cook more elaborate or high-quality meals at camps, which only have an open flame and a saucepan.

2. Combat

When traveling through dense gathering areas outside of towns, monsters can be found in high numbers. Battles occur in the overworld instead of triggering a formal battle sequence, which resembles open-world combat rather than turn-based games. During a battle, the player is given control of Emma by default, but they can switch to one of her allies with the press of a button. Combat controls are roughly the same across each character, but they vary by strength, attack/movement speed, weapon type, and available combos. Weapon combos require specific input sequences from the player, and they can use attack, jump, dodge, guard, and throw buttons. Depending on the current situation, using a specific combo can allow players to deal greater damage with proper positioning or counterattacking. Enemy monsters will attempt to defeat the heroes by means of melee attacks, ranged attacks, weapons, projectiles, or other moves.

The current character, in addition to their attacking options, can dodge out of the way of an incoming attack, put up a guard to reduce damage, parry a move with precise timing, jump, throw Snacks or other projectiles, or select a meal from their inventory to use. Achieving victory in a battle awards the player with money, ingredients, experience points, and potentially the monster's dropped weapons if they were using any. Earned ingredients depend on the monster species, money scales with enemy strength, and experience points gained in a battle are calculated based on the base strength of enemies defeated and bonus points.

Conditions for bonus points include:

- Time elapsed in a battle (the quicker, the better)
- Damage taken (bonuses for no fallen allies and no damage to last controlled character)
- Parries successfully used
- Projectiles thrown without missing
- Targeting enemy Flavor weaknesses
- Targeting ally Flavor preferences
- One-hit knockouts (bonus scales with enemy strength)
- Longest combo achieved (calculated by individual hits)

When a character has earned enough experience points, they will level up, increasing their stats slightly, including hit points, attack, defense, and luck (critical hit rate, chance of surviving an attack at low health). When Emma levels up, she receives an addition bonus which she can apply to whichever stat the player wants; a roulette appears and the player presses the jump button to stop it, and the number shown is added to their stat. When any character's level increases, they also receive a skill point that can be spent in their respective skill tree.

Upgrades in a skill tree can include:

- New combos/moves

- Making combos easier to maintain (player has more time after landing a move to act again before streak resets)
- Increased healing/stat boosts from meals used by heroes
- Increased damage/effects from meal used on enemies
- Movement/attack speed increases
- Reduced cooldown time when dodging/guarding
- Quality/quantity increases for gathering ingredients (Emma only)
- Quality/quantity increases for meals (Emma only)
- New recipes (Emma only)

Another important element of combat is the equipment given to the team. New armor items and weapons can be acquired from defeating monsters, discovering treasures, completing missions, or shopping. These increase a hero's numerical status and may provide special effects like increasing the power of meals with specific Flavors or increasing jump height. Weapons can be made more powerful by adding an ingredient to it – attaching an item to the tip of a blade or arrow, gripping an ingredient in one's hand while using a gauntlet, etc. Attachments can add power, change the character's attack Flavors, or provide a unique effect like setting the ground on fire, slowing down monsters, or stunning them with chain lightning.

3. Cooking

Emma can cook dozens of different meals that vary by complexity, ingredient cost, strength of effects, cultural background, and Flavor. Meals utilize an elemental system based on the core culinary flavors, each one being stronger against some monsters, more powerful on specific Cobalt Ribbon members, and capable of eliminating Flavor-coded barriers in the overworld. Each Flavor is represented by a certain color.

- **Sweet** meals (candies, pastries) are marked by pink icons and aromas and are more likely to have healing/regeneration/lifesteal properties than others. Brawler Harry has a bit of a Sweet tooth.
- **Sour** meals (fruits, yogurt, tart greens) are marked with green and commonly cause heroes to jump higher and negative status effects to befall enemies. Veteran archer Cyrus, always mocked for his age, can be quite a sourpuss.
- **Salty** meals (most seafood, potato dishes) are marked with blue and tend to provide attack/movement speed boosts to heroes and stun effects to enemies. Knife wielder Shawn's stoic demeanor makes him a prime candidate for Salty foods.
- **Spicy** meals (peppers, chili, chicken wings) are marked with red and often have high-risk effects, like stat boosts with recoil damage or explosive attacks that can harm friend and foe. Claw-carrying Tia will wolf down Spicy foods with reckless abandon.

- **Savory** meals (steaks, braised meats, pastas) are marked with brown and can effectively increase a hero's power or slow down enemies. Swordfighter Isabella likes her foods just as rich and Savory as she is.

To cook a meal, Emma will have to be at a campsite or the Hot Iron Hive's kitchen. She will open up her recipe book, which contains all recipes that she has access to so far. The player can select a recipe from the menu and begin adding ingredients. Each meal requires different ingredients – some are required, others call for items under a broad category like root vegetables, and Emma can select whichever one she wants. Afterwards, one or more quick minigames will be played based on the recipe, and depending on how well the player completes them, the quality of the meal and the strength of its traits will change. These resemble quick time events and microgames from Nintendo's *WarioWare* series, and they can include chopping ingredients, stirring, tossing the contents of a pan, adding seasonings, and garnishing the dish. Once the minigames are over, Emma is presented with the final product, whose quality and potency depend on the meal's visual appearance, quality ranking, and effect strength. The player can choose to add it to her bag or store it in a trunk.

Meals with helpful effects for allies, like healing or stat boosts, can be used inside and outside of battle, but these benefits can have time limits, so they should be used carefully. However, any meals that destroy barriers or harm monsters can only be consumed at the appropriate time. Helpful meals can be eaten by any party member, not just Emma, but harmful meals must be thrown at enemies, either as projectiles or as bait for them to eat. Based on their species' Flavor preferences, a monster may eat a meal normally, quickly, or not at all.

Emma's meals come in two major forms with different uses:

- **Full Courses** (full plates of food like steak and vegetables) take longer to eat, and they either provide large effects to one hero/monster, or a smaller effect to the entire party/all monsters in a specific range. Emma can only make one of these in a single cooking session.
- **Snacks** (smaller foods like bagels and raw fruit) can be eaten quickly, grant smaller perks to heroes and monsters, and can more often be used as projectiles. When Emma cooks a Snack recipe, she produces multiple items.

4. Character Interactions/Side Content

Occasionally, Emma will find speech bubbles above the heads of prominent side characters like Cobalt Ribbon, Cole, Holly, Annabelle, and others. Talking to a character in this state activates a Flavor Text, ESL's version of a support conversation. These dialogue exchanges involve subject matter not related to the central plot, like random stories, activities between friends, or helping someone in need. Throughout a Flavor Text, the player will be prompted with questions from the character Emma is talking to, and they can choose from two or more preset answers. At the end of a Flavor Text, they

can earn optional rewards for every correct answer they give, which can be figured out by paying attention to the conversation and the character's personality.

Characters all across the map can provide the player with optional content by speaking to them. Each one will start a unique side mission, which can vary greatly in length, objectives, and difficulty. One person may ask you to investigate a landmark to verify a peculiar sight, while others may need you to confront enemies or deliver goods. Some missions will require a specific Cobalt Ribbon member to be in the party, as the events pertain to their weapon specialty or history. Rewards for these side missions can include money, ingredients, equipment, recipes, restaurant cosmetics, or even additional skill points; the player can earn greater rewards for some of them by fulfilling reach goals, like gathering extra ingredients or performing well in battles.

After progressing through some of the story, Emma and Cole will install a bulletin board in front of the Hive for the people of Parmadom to submit random requests for the team. Hive Bulletin requests are infinitely respawning odd jobs that involve completing smaller or simpler tasks of similar nature to side missions – ingredient collecting, defeating a monster species, and delivering meals. Rewards are smaller, but the player can accept multiple requests to work on at once.

Character Abilities

Character Attributes	
Characters	Movement Abilities / Actions Available
Emma Barrett, Cobalt Ribbon members	All characters – run, jump, standard attack/strong attack/combo moves, aim/throw item, dodge, crouch/crawl, collect ingredients, use meals Exclusive to Emma – talk to other characters, cook, fast travel
Game Modes	
The only game mode is the single-player story, but it contains distinct gameplay types:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combat 3D traversal/exploration Ingredient gathering Cooking Character interactions
Scoring System	
Money	How it's Awarded & Benefits
Fictional currency represented as generic coins	Money is earned by completing side missions, defeating monsters, completing specific Flavor Texts, selling items, and fulfilling Cole's ingredient requests. Money is used to pay off Emma and Annabelle's house and advance the story, and it can also be used to purchase

	ingredients, equipment, decorations for the Hot Iron Hive, or other cosmetics.
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Level Design

ESL uses a more open-ended format with lenient time-limited goals and ample side content. The game is experienced across the vast continent of Parmadom, the world's leading supplier of herbs and spices for centuries. It exists as one interconnected level without visible loading zones, but certain areas are locked behind use of meals with relevant flavors or specific party members present. There is plenty of room to experiment with environmental design and storytelling, but Parmadom contains several regions and landmarks with distinct visuals, available ingredients, enemies, and general difficulty. These include:

- **Honeymint Hills** – somewhat southeast; quaint village with restaurant, infirmary, storehouses, vendors, city hall, hilltop gardens; despite numerous amenities, most visitors just pass through instead of staying the night or settling down
- **Cumid Valley** – west, expansive rural village tucked between desert plateaus, filled with reddish sand and fiendish bandits
 - **Chili Lake** – often referred to as the “Buffaloasis” by Cumid’s residents, a small lake in the desert region with strangely spicy water, often overrun by actual buffalo using it as a watering hole
- **Frozemary** – northeast, a bustling metropolis flanked by the ocean and the Sage Mountains, located in frigid yet calm tundra, snowfall is only heavy when regional monsters wreak havoc
- **Sage Mountains** – just south of Frozemary, a chain of towering snow-capped mountains guarding the city’s southern border
 - **Caves of Sage** – network of caves within the mountains containing rare ingredients like herbs and rock salt
- **Kail Grove** – northwest of Honeymint Hills, lush forest prized for its vegetables and frequented for its lack of dangerous monsters
- **Port Muster** – southeast, popular fishing spot and port town just down the road from Honeymint Hills
- **Allspice Station** – northwest, tropical vacation spot and marketplace where goods of all kinds are sold
- **Fort Cumberland** – near the center of Parmadom; former battleground famous for its rich history, heavy rainfall, and abnormally tall vines whose gourds fall to the ground when ripe – some of which land in craters that form puddles, causing them to pickle

Control Scheme

The game can be played using a mouse and keyboard or a standard gamepad. The inputs listed below correspond to the Xbox Wireless Controller layout. Button inputs can be remapped in settings menu, if desired.

Button/ Touch Input	Action it Performs
Left Stick	Move character, navigate menus
Left Stick (pressed)	Toggle sprint (switch between movement speeds)
Right Stick	Rotate camera
Right Stick (pressed)	Toggle crouch (hold direction on left stick while crouched to crawl)
D-Pad	Open item menu (Up), use selected item (press Up twice), hide item menu (Down), cycle through items (Left/Right) navigate menus
LB	Guard/Parry (player takes less damage when guarding attacks, and activating guard with perfect timing uses a parry that negates damage and stuns the enemy)
RB	Switch active character (during battles, hold down button and select character with right analog stick)
LT	Hold button to activate aim mode (aim projectile)
RT	Throw projectile (can be used whether or not aim mode is active)
A	Jump (hold button to jump higher), interact with objects/NPCs, confirm selection (menus)
B	Dodge (hold direction on left stick to dodge roll), exit/cancel selection (menus)
X	Basic attack (hold button to charge attack)
Y	Strong attack
Menu button	Pause/unpause game
View button	Open area map

Xbox button	Exit to system menu
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Game Aesthetics & User Interface

A low-poly 3D art style akin to PlayStation games from the mid-to-late 1990s is being considered for *Emma: Spice of Life*. Games with this art style are visually distinct, and it would match friendly, down-to-earth atmosphere while also reducing the scope and budget of ESL via simplistic geometry for characters, props, and environments. Character designs will feature realistic body proportions with large eyes, and low-resolution textures, and fluid animations running at 60fps. There is plenty of room to experiment with area themes and NPC designs, but visual clarity, vibrant colors, and variety are top priorities. The grand continent of Parmadom contains lakes, rivers, beaches, forests, ruins, battlegrounds, small villages, sprawling cities, desert plateaus, plains, arctic mountains, and markets. Each settlement contains a unique layout and buildings with distinct architectural styles. ESL contains infrequent mention/use of magic and no modern 21st-century technology.

During standard exploration gameplay, the player can see the health of their current party members next to their names and small portraits of their faces (anchored top-left), and a minimap with cardinal directions, enemy markers, waypoints, and campsites (anchored bottom-right). If the player makes progress in the criteria of any active mission, a notification will pop up in the top-right corner of the screen showing the mission name and current progress (ex. Root Veggie Roundup – 5/8 Potatoes collected, 0/10 Carrots collected).

When battling monsters, health bars appear above each enemy's head, and when the player opens the item menu, a horizontal list of meals and other items appears at the bottom of the screen, showing five of these options at once. Particle effects, vignettes, screen shake, motion blur, and sound effects can accompany player and enemy attacks, guarding, parrying, healing, low health, and defeating monsters. The player can open up the map screen to view the entire map of Parmadom, check on active and completed missions, place pins on the map, or look at the contents of Emma's bag. The pause menu also allows the player to check the bag and missions, as well as character stats/equipment, skill trees, and game settings.

Competitive Analysis

Many video games contain a colorful and friendly aesthetic not unlike *Emma: Spice of Life*; in particular, the *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon* (2005-2020) series also emphasizes bite-sized side missions and forming a party that suits one's preferences, but ESL implements these features into a unified overworld with human characters and real-time combat. The game allows players to choose their party members at any time by visiting the Hot Iron Hive, which increases flexibility and role-playing opportunities over other 3D action games with fantasy theming, like the 2020 *Trials of Mana* remake; it locks the player's lineup at the start of the story to focus on the narratives of the chosen heroes, unlike ESL, which contains one storyline with ample room for player expression. The *Marvel's Spider-Man* games (2018-current day) also pride themselves on their open-ended nature and memorable side content, and their combat

controls helped inspire the system used for ESL. However, our project opts for a more rural overworld, features playable characters with traditional weapons like swords and bows, and it shifts emphasis towards the gathering-cooking gameplay loop. The game shares some of these elements with the vast wilderness of Hyrule as seen in *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* (2023), as well as its weapon fusion mechanics, albeit in a much simpler form.

The cycle of collecting materials to produce items that enhance combat, exploration, and story progression is the hallmark feature of ESL, which will prompt frequent comparisons between it and the *Atelier* series (1997-current day). Both properties utilize a strategic crafting system with overworld item gathering, a variation on the support conversation concept, and young female characters as leads. Emma herself is characterized as an energetic girl eager for adventure yet is often held back by a lack of maturity, not unlike the popular *Atelier* protagonist Reisalin Stout (Ryza). However, *Emma: Spice of Life* modifies components of the *Atelier* formula to better suit its more grounded world and endear it to western audiences; it trades the alchemy gameplay for a more focused and accessible cooking system, encourages players to complete Flavor Texts with interactive dialogue and extrinsic rewards, reduces the prominence of magic in its universe, and features strictly real-time combat as opposed to a turn-based or hybrid style.