Archipelago Zero Game Design Document (Nov 2025)

Developer: McKinley Massacre Studios

Game Engine: Unity (6.2)

Game Webpage: http://mckinleymassacre.com/archipelago-zero

Archipelago Zero Official Discord: https://discord.gg/6y6aNU7b2Y

Itch.io: https://mckinleymassacre.itch.io/archipelago-zero

GDD Last Updated: November 2025

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Updates:

First release

Note: This version of the GDD is very preliminary and subject to change; it's mostly just here to get my general thoughts and ideas out for the project. Expect refinements and better writing later.

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Introduction

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Archipelago Zero is a first-person shooter game set in a mysterious chain of islands hidden from humanity. It was originally inspired by Jurassic Park: Trespasser, but with added RPG elements and other more in-depth mechanics akin to something like System Shock 2 or ARK.

This project is being developed in Unity 6.2 using the Game Creator 2 suite of development tools.

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Story

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You've crashed upon the shores of the southern-most island only to discover its flora and fauna are that of another world: one lost to time. Prehistoric creatures stalk these isles, and even the plants are foreign to you. But as you explore, you find familiarity. Modern buildings, pavement and concrete, even computers and some working electronics. What is this place? Where is everyone? Perhaps you can find answers by following the bloody trails of those that once appeared to work here.

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Visuals

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PSX/low poly, low texture resolution, retro styled graphics. Draw distance and density of world details, however, is modernized. It is not "True" to retro style, in that case, but inspired by it.

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Gameplay: Overview (Gameplay Loop)

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Primary gameplay will be focused around exploration and solving/exploring whatever and wherever you'd like or what you find, the choice is all up to the player. There is, however, a primary story to follow that will aid in unlocking of new or otherwise secret areas (such as [**Spoiler**] ██████████████

Progression in the story should feel akin to a game like *The Forest*, where survival and exploration is the primary game loop, but within that exploration, you'll find places that will

advance the main story.

RPG mechanics and working toward defeating progressively stronger enemies "guarding" some areas (or sneaking past them) and unlocking new skills and crafting recipes will also be a major part of the loop and keep things fresh and interesting alongside exploring.

Death

I haven't decided yet whether death will require a load from save like older games or will end in a respawn and loss of items, but I'm definitely leaning more toward the prior.

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Gameplay: Exploration
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The islands each hold different biomes to explore, each with unique points of interests, some natural, others man-made. I may add these POIs to the map as they're discovered similar to Elder Scrolls or Fallout (minus the compass).

It's worth noting that each biome will have real examples of floral life (see below), such as the Permian Beach having actual Permian era flora and general fauna. This isn't a strict rule, but I'm leaning toward making the biomes somewhat era accurate if a general era is referenced, with a few exceptions (obviously there will be randomly generated spawns and wandering creatures so it may not *always* be accurate).

Scanning

Like *Subnautica*, at the beginning of the game you will find a scanner item that will allow you to scan objects to learn more about them. Scannable objects include but are not limited to flora and fauna. The scanner will not be an actual inventory item (so it won't take up space), but available as a quick-equip item.

The information about each scanned plant or animal will be generally accurate, with any exceptions being noted, such as size differences or other mutations from the ReGenesys project.

Flora

Most flora will be accurate examples of real life extinct plants, with few exceptions (such as generic ferns and miscellaneous smaller plant life). In some cases, sizes will be changed, but this

fact will be mentioned when the flora is scanned (ReGenesys mutations).

<u>Fauna</u>

Like flora, all fauna in the game will be based on (and mostly accurate to) real life extinct species. I've put a lot of effort into studying fossils and projected reconstructions of different species to get the mostly accurate with few divergences for the sake of gameplay or design (again, which will be noted when the creature is scanned).

Different species will have different aggression levels, and different personalities even within the same species (so some specific creatures may end up more aggressive, or friendlier and more able to be tamed than others; this is random, however; see Taming section for more information). Each species and creature will have different behaviours, and interact and react differently to different stimulus.

For a list of creatures, please visit the official Discord (link at the top of the GDD).

Some examples of **biomes**:
- Permian Beach
- Volcano
- Swamp
- Canyon
- Desert
- Jungle
- Forest
- Meadows
- Glacier
- Underwater (Shallow)
- Underwater (Deep)

Some examples of **POIs**:
- Caves
- Tar Pits
- Abandoned ReGenesys Facilities
- Watchtowers

- Watchdomes

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Gameplay: RPG Elements
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At the start of the game, you will choose from a few different characters, each with different starting stats. You can also create a completely blank character where you can customize your own stats. The stats and what each do are as follows:

Stat List:
- **Health** [*attribute*] | Maximum amount of damage a character can take before death
- **Stamina** [*attribute*] | Sprint speed and time; melee energy and power; swim time
- **Hunger** [*attribute*] | Time before starving and eventual death; restored by eating cooked meat or fresh fruit/veggies
- **Thirst** [*attribute*] | Time before dehydration and eventual death; restored by drinking clean water
- **Oxygen** [*attribute*] | Time before drowning when underwater
- **Strength** | Melee damage; interaction skills
- **Perception** | Special skills; survival skills
- **Endurance** | Governs all attributes; survival skills
- **Intelligence** | Hacking and other tech skills; skill point amounts
- **Dexterity** | Better and faster crafting; firearm usage; repairs and upgrades; interaction skills
- **Sneak** | Sneak attacks; sneak ability and skills
- **Taming** | Taming skills, speed and ability
- **Luck** | Better and/or more loot/resources
Note: Attributes are "bars" that rise and fall with stimulus, such as Health and taking damage.

Each character will also have different starting skills, and skill trees (not fully different skill trees, most skills are global but some may be swapped around for different characters or certain characters may have specific skills others don't but not too many).

Sometimes when exploring you'll need to pass "skill tests" to succeed in some events, such as

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hacking a computer (uses intelligence) or breaking down a door (strength). The chance will be relative to your stat, and failing may sometimes come with repercussions like damage or making noise.

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Gameplay: Combat
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Combat is fairly basic; swing melee weapons, shoot guns, and you have ironsights for ranged weapons. In some cases there may be combos, bonus attacks or sneak attacks that are unlockable with skills. The main meat of combat is in damage calculation, see below.

Damage Formulas and Stats

Damage will be calculated in formulas, with all creatures having their own stats just like your player character that will be taken into account. They also may have weaknesses and resistances, especially in certain parts of their bodies. For example, an ankylosaurus is bound to take very little damage from a melee weapon to its back, but if you shoot up under its armour, it will likely result in a very damaging hit. Shooting a pachycephalosaurus in the head is not going to do as much damage as it would other creatures.

Durability

No weapon will last forever. You'll need to keep them in working condition to use them in combat. Some items may fully break (unrepairable, like wooden spears or branches), but others, like firearms, can be repaired at workbenches.

Upgrading Weapons

Like in many games, weapons will be upgradeable when interacting with a workbench as well. Different items will require different recipes to upgrade, and (usually) specific stats and/or skillsets. Some items, like firearms, can be upgraded in different areas, as well, such as power vs magazine size.

A weapons Rank will determine how many upgrades it can have. Lower ranked weapons can have fewer upgrades, while higher ranked ones can have more. I'm still debating whether ranks themselves can be raised (perhaps via a skill and/or special items) or be set when the weapon is found. Possibly combining weapons could raise rank, as well.

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Gameplay: Crafting

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I'm still working on figuring out the crafting system, but what I would prefer is something relatively basic and similar to something like *Green Hell* or *The Long Dark*. You will be able to craft small items like campfires and small shelters such as tents or huts, but I may not go into full base-building such as Ark, we'll see what happens.

I want crafting to be visually and mechanically similar to *Green Hell* and *The Forest*, where you will access a journal for recipes, choose one, choose a place to put the final product, and then a silhouette will appear, which you can interact with and place the necessary building blocks, instead of having to have everything currently in your inventory to build it. I've always preferred the prior rather than the latter and find it a little easier and more user friendly.

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Gameplay: Taming

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Unlike Ark, taming will be treated very differently and generally be non-violent (unless the personality or species requires it). Some easier to tame creatures will learn to eat out of your hand or enjoy being pet. Others may request specific items or actions to be taken. All of this will be up to first, the species, and second, their specific personality.

Taming specific creatures may require specific skills to "learn and understand" more about them. For example, you won't be able to get off the boat and immediately tame a T-Rex (if you can find one that soon); it'll be locked behind a skillset for taming. Likewise, taming will get easier as your taming Stat raises (and unlock further skills in turn).

<u>Tame Benefits</u>

Taming a creature will result in a number of benefits depending on the species. Some will ride on your shoulder and be able to hold more items for you, or give you a buff of some sort. Others that will follow you can be used as guards or attackers. Some may even be ridable. Furthermore, certain creatures may have special abilities that can be harnessed such as breaking rocks, digging or fitting through small areas to interact with new objects, unlock new areas, and more.

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Inspirations and General Mood References

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Trespasser | The Lost World: Jurassic Park

System Shock 2

Green Hell

Peter Jackson's King Kong

Subnautica

The Forest

Ark: Survival Evolved/Ascended

The Long Dark