

# Open Water

A King Gizz-inspired fusion of driving games, 3rd person shooters, and rhythm games, following a team of bounty hunters in a pickup truck chasing treasure and fighting sentient dust storms, all powered by a reality-bending guitar. Open Water is weird, psychedelic, insouciant, and often comedic, much like the music that influenced it.

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# Core Game

## Design Pillars

### Player Chooses the Approach

With three ways to play, the player can choose any one they want to focus on, if, for example, they don't like driving games as much as they do shooters. Within reason, the player should be able to finish the entire game by only playing one section of it, and the story will advance regardless.

### Variation is Rewarded

With this said, the game will reward the player if they make use of all the styles of play available to them, or ones that will compliment the narrative at that point in the game.

### Resource Management is Key

Being set in a post-apocalyptic world, the player must always be mindful of their resources and how much they're using something, even at higher levels (until, of course, reality breaks). Scarcity in this world is a key narrative concept that needs to be kept in mind at all times.

### Lizard Wizard

If blocked, listen to KGatLW for inspiration. Also, it's a game about magic guitars. Be a bit silly.

## Game Loop

### Primary Loop

As an open world game, Open Water follows a simple mission-driven loop, of:

- Accept a mission from an NPC
- Travel to mission location
- Perform instructions dictated by mission
- Return and receive reward and/or story progression, and directions to the next mission(s)

See [Missions](#) for specific mission game loops.

### Secondary Loop

Outside of missions, there is a loop of travelling around the world:

- Find a hub
- Speak to NPCs, repair damages from travelling, gain money from trading
- Travel out to find a different hub

- Receive damage from enemies, but collect things to trade

## Motivation

### Primary Motivation

With the game being narrative-driven, the main motivator for the player is to progress the story. The main narrative arc is centred on the player character Ezo, with the narrative striking a balance between his development and facing immediate threats presented by the setting.

### Secondary Motivation

Murdering giant dust storms that want you dead is fun, and get money to buy equipment upgrades and functionally useless cosmetics for your truck is fun.

# Features

## Open World

As its name lovingly implies, Open Water is an open world game in a self-contained basin with hubs of activity and safety between barren and dangerous stretches.

## Settlements and Outposts

Settlements are hubs where most NPCs and amenities will be. NPCs will range from vendors, mission-givers, truck mechanics, and simply people to talk to.

Outposts serve similar functions to settlements, but are smaller, and may not have all the amenities a settlement offers. The player may need to travel further out if they are looking for someone or something specific. Outposts may also be in dangerous locations, unlike settlements which will almost always be entirely safe.

## The Salt Pan

The salt pan serves as the only way to move between settlements and outposts, by forcing the player to cross it. Enemies constantly spawn on the salt pan and attempt to kill the player.

## Travelling

The player drives a pickup truck to cross the salt pan. This serves as the primary mode of transportation around the world.

When parked, the player can leave the truck at any time and walk on foot. Only Karana can be controlled on foot for a smooth transition between walking and driving. On the salt pan, only Karana will leave the truck; at a settlement or outpost all characters will leave and follow Karana. The player can only drive away when all three characters are in the truck. In a narrative context, this means Karana will be the main driving force behind NPC interactions, with other characters occasionally jumping in.

## Resources

The player has three resources to keep track of; ammunition, truck health, and money. Ammunition is used to fend off enemies, and if the player runs out of ammo their only choice is to run and restock at the nearest settlement or outpost. If the truck is destroyed, the game is over.

*Possibility: consider if fuel should also be used as a resource. This makes sense for resource scarcity, but will require prototyping as expending ammunition and keeping the truck in shape might be enough for the player to juggle, and it will require the development of other mechanics i.e. if fuel runs out and the player is stranded.*

Money is used to buy more ammunition, repair the truck, and upgrade it and its weapons.

## Money and Trading

Money is rarely given as a direct reward. The player is usually given treasure that they will have to sell themselves. Certain treasures are sold for different amounts in different settlements. The player will need to consider if they want to accept the money now, or are willing to risk travelling through danger for a chance at a greater reward.

*Possibility: on a narrative level, bartering is the main way that goods are exchanged in this world, hence why the player is rarely given money as a direct reward, or only from certain characters. This opens up a possibility of not having money at all and having everything being done through treasure trading, having no explicit value on any treasures, meaning the players are exchanging 'currency' like the NPCs would. This can open up possible game mechanics that are directly tied to the narrative here, such as bargaining for trades. It may, however, cause friction for the player if they have to guesstimate how much their treasures are worth, rather than being given a straight numeric value. A bartering system with similar mechanics as this would make more sense on a narrative level, but would need to be tested with the kind of audience this game would attract.*

## Resource Management

Travelling across the salt pan will actively drain resources due to constant spawning of enemies. Since the player has to travel across the salt pan for progression and greater rewards, they have to consider the downside of spending resources to get there.

## The Three Ways to Play

The USP of Open Water; when driving around the world the player can control three player characters, each with a different style of play associated with them. These are best described as ongoing AI that the player can assume direct control of, but they can only control one at a time.

### Playstyles

#### Offence — Shooting

The player takes control of Bekam in the cargo bed, who can move to set locations and shoot and throw explosives at enemies. When in AI control, she will try attacking the nearest enemy.

#### Defence — Driving

The player takes control of Karana who is driving the truck. When in AI control and in combat, they will attempt to drive out of the way of direct attacks. When out of combat, they will drive forward and avoid direct obstacles.

#### Support — Rhythm

The player takes control of Ezo who plays guitar in the cargo bed, giving the team selectable buffs. Examples of buffs are increased damage and faster truck movement, and the buffs will persist for some time after Ezo isn't in control. This is done through a simple rhythm game

that matches the music diegetically, including if the player misses a note or hits it offtime. When in AI control, no buffs will be given.

*Possibility: the rhythm followed is an extra layer on top of the music track, and when Ezo is not in control that layer does not play.*

## Tactics

This system allows the player to develop tactics to more efficiently kill enemies, but one that isn't extremely restrictive. It can be considered like a 'soft' puzzle system, where the player is guided into trying a specifically designed tactic, but may ignore it entirely to do their own method, or discover something even more efficient (or fun) that may not have been intended.

## Narrative Changes

By playing a specific character more than the others in a mission, they will be seen as the one who did more work, which may reflect in dialogue. To encourage mixing different styles of play, certain missions will offer bonus rewards dependent on one character being used more, or all being used equally, which can also unlock different dialogue branches and scenes between characters.

## Enemies

### Dust Storms

The primary enemy the player will face are dust storms. These will form near the player on the salt pan and chase them until the truck is destroyed or they are out of range. Most dust storms are small nuisances that the player should be able to deal with swiftly, or leave the AI to handle, but some can pose threats or are more formidable in larger groups.

Dust storms come in a variety of appearances and styles of attack, dependent on when, where, or why the player encounters them. Generally, stronger dust storms will spawn the further away the player gets from the starting settlements.

### Other Bounty Hunters

Less frequently, the player may encounter hostile bounty hunter teams. These are more likely to appear as the story progresses and the team gains more notoriety, and are harder to defeat than most dust storms.

Dust storms can be used to the player's advantage against other bounty hunters, as dust storms will pursue both the player and other bounty hunters indiscriminately.

### Boss Fights

Usually triggered by a main story mission, boss fights are major events that the player will sink a significant amount of resources into. Most bosses are giant dust storms. Bosses will rely much heavier on tactics to defeat than regular enemies, sometimes having unique gimmicks to their fights, and typically can't be beaten by mindless attacking or turtling.

## Mega Storms

At random (and rarely) when travelling across the salt pan, a mega storm can form, which will turn into a boss fight. If ill-equipped, the player can choose to run from the storm. Unlike regular dust storms, mega storms persist, and the player will have to fight it to cause it to disperse, or drive around it until they are better prepared to face it head-on.

*Note: a check will need to be made so that mega storms don't spawn near key hubs, or near places that are currently story-critical if the player is unable to beat it yet.*

## Missions

Open Water has three primary types of missions. Whilst the loops are typically the same each time, variation comes in different rewards, new enemies to kill, seeing new locations, or the loops being unexpectedly stopped midway.

### Clearing Dust Storms

- Player is told the location of dust storm(s)
- Travel to location
- Destroy dust storms
- Return and receive reward

### Treasure Hunts

- Player is given clues/directions to the location of a treasure
- Treasure is almost always in the salt pan
- Find treasure after searching
- CHOICE
  - Return treasure for possible reward
  - Sell treasure for money

*Note: selling treasure gives a good sense of player agency, but might impede story-critical missions where an item has to be returned to someone. If a treasure hunt is story critical, this needs to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. A simple solution is making some treasure unsellable; perhaps vendors don't know what it is or refuse to buy it for other reasons.*

### Supply Runs

- Player is given a set of supplies and a location to send them to
- Typical location is a different outpost or settlement
- Travel to location
- CHOICE
  - Hand over supplies for possible reward
  - Sell supplies for money

*Note: see same note on [Treasure Hunts](#). Selling supplies in a narrative context will be seen as far more egregious, which could be used in design. Perhaps selling supplies gives a big bonus but prevents the player from accepting any more supply runs from the original hub.*



## Other Types of Missions

Open Water isn't restricted to these three types, and missions are flexible based on how the narrative needs to proceed. Other missions can simply be talking to an NPC, a tutorial on one aspect of the game, or travelling to a new location.

## Fleeting Notes

### Reputation

Reputation definitely looks like a mechanic that could be implemented, but this seems like something that will only really make sense on a per-hub basis. Hubs are isolated, and news of other hubs will only be spread by bounty hunters, so offending one hub wouldn't immediately make everyone dislike you. This will also need to be kept lowkey and not a large explicit mechanic; the major events in the ongoing storyline changing the fabric of reality will definitely outshadow the one time the player sold someone's treasure for a new gun. The example given in [Supply Runs](#) is a way to do this, making subtle changes in the world based on the player's actions rather than having reputation as a resource that says exactly how the player stands with everyone.

# Content

## World Summary & Context

Set in a basin with a giant salt pan, the world of Open Water is a post-apocalyptic society dealing with collapse and the effects of climate change. Settlements have grown due to the resources left by previous civilisations and wrecks found here, despite the hazards and magical shenanigans in the basin.

Travelling across the flat is extremely dangerous, largely due to the sentient dust storms that attack people who cross it, and is typically only undertaken by bounty hunters for rewards. Bounty hunters are very individualistic, and their motivations range wildly.

## Narrative Summary

The story follows the three player characters Bekam, Karana, and Ezo, a team of bounty hunters chasing fame and fortune. Their edge, however, is Ezo's magical guitar, capable of altering reality.

The game begins with Bekam and Karana travelling back to an outpost after a failed treasure run. On their way, they see Ezo travelling across the flat by foot. Karana stops to help him against Bekam's wishes, her warning that dust storms are close by. While being helped, Ezo claims he has been divinely blessed and that his guitar has magic powers. Both think dehydration has made him delusional, and set off to bring him to the outpost for safety.

However, as Bekam predicts, a large dust storm picks up. Out of ammunition and unable to defend themselves, the team's only option is to flee. Now back to a certain strength, Ezo uses his guitar to help the team escape by making the truck run faster. Thanks to Ezo's guitar, the team makes it to the outpost unharmed.

*Note: mechanic-wise, this serves as an introduction to driving and rhythm, and to switching characters.*

Convinced of his abilities, Ezo officially joins the team, and their combined journey of discovering more about Ezo and his guitar and facing the ongoing threats of the basin begin. Over time, their fanatical successes start to attract admiration and ire alike, and Ezo's progressive mastery of his guitar starts to have unforeseen consequences.

## Characters

### Bekam (she/her)

Bekam is a former marksman-for-hire turned bounty hunter. Previously an outpost guard, she joined a bounty hunter team to try something new, later splitting off with Karana after growing bored of the crew. She's impulsive, but very good under pressure.

## Karana (they/he)

Karana has always worked in bounty hunter teams, usually as the primary driver or mechanic. After earning enough to buy their own truck, they broke off from their former crew with Bekam to start their own after ideological differences started to tear the team apart. They're good at methodical thinking and looking at the big picture.

## Ezo (he/him)

Ezo was a musician who had a spiritual awakening under the effects of hallucinogens. He set off alone into the salt pan in a fit of divine madness, and was rewarded with a reality-altering guitar. He now wants to know who or what blessed him, why he was chosen specifically, and continue to improve his guitar skills, all with the help of his new crew. Somehow, he's still relatively down to earth.