

## "In A Dream" Project Description

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## Product Description and Positioning

In A Dream is a children's adventure video game with customizable difficulty settings to cultivate the playability of children aged 6yrs to 12yrs. This video game will have elements of edutainment, action, adventure and interactivity throughout gameplay. Due to the nature of our target audience's young age group, our product will be marketed toward families with children aged 6-12 with a goal of catching both the parent's and child's interest on shelves in stores. Marketing toward the family will help to get our product in the hands of a greater number of people at a faster rate.

The key risks we'll be facing as a design team are foreseeable and conquerable. The main risk we face is the dynamics associated with our target market space. Both the family/edutainment market and the adventure game market are declining. To conquer this risk we will strengthen our product with character licensing, new distribution and branding.

Character licensing will build confidence and trust among consumers. The children's games that sell, regardless of the quality of gameplay, have licensed characters. Examples of these are *Harry Potter*, *Shrek*, many Disney licensed games including *Kingdom Hearts*, and *Nancy Drew*. We are using the license from the movie, *Spirited Away*. Disney owns the distribution rights for the movie, not the marketing rights, so we are working with Studio Ghibli on this project. There will be some risk in the amount of time since the movie was released, but this game will be treated as a sequel, picking up where the story of the original film left off.

Reduced character customization in our game structure may be a concern and risk, since we will use only characters from the film. However, the premise of In A Dream suits this license well, and the advantage of using a licensed character outweighs that of including excessive character customization, in terms of balancing gameplay and marketing. The central character of *Spirited Away*, Chihiro, was to go to a new school at the end of the movie and much of the movie took place in an "other" world. This parallels with our creative design for the setting of In A Dream.

There is some risk that the game might be labeled as a "girl" game, due to its design and licensing. However, Studio Ghibli and Miyazaki enjoy quite a following, among anime fans and those new to anime. This alleviates this fear of becoming a "girl" game. Additionally, some games with elements that might assign a gender enjoy successful neutral consideration, such as *Harry Potter* and *Kingdom Hearts*. While Miyazaki has officially retired, he is still making films and some of his older work has yet to be released in the U.S. It would be to our advantage to release the game around the time a Miyazaki or other Studio Ghibli film officially surfaces in the U.S. To do this, we may have to work with Disney and add additional branding to our product. There are no current Studio Ghibli video games, so using this brand has the potential for a new franchise no one has seen before, with the flexibility of not being restrained to one film and set of characters. We may even be able to reach out to an older audience, rather than a child audience, by using one of the more mature films as a creative basis in a later

addition to this brand of games. Parents and relatives who enjoy the games for their age group will buy games for children that they know. Using art inspired by these films will be quite visually stimulating, regardless of gender, age, or whether the consumer is familiar with the anime.

New distribution will also provide buoyancy in a declining market space. The family nature of our game mandates a computer version of In A Dream to be launched, for use in the home, and a handheld version in addition to this will help strengthen our product in this declining market space. Many children in our target age group are already attracted to and adept at AOL Instant Messenger, digital photography, and to the video games that their parents and older siblings are already enjoying. The potential home computer version enriches this audience. A handheld version will also be introduced. Handheld games with colorful marketing schemes and branding attract children in stores while running errands with their parents. Video Now is an example of a game-oriented technology-driven product that hit the shelves with vigor, the movie-screen-turned handheld attracting the young market. Our product will not only have computer disk versions for gaming but will have new handheld distribution to cradle this youth excitement and make the product flourish despite the declining market.

The major platforms in the market of mobile games are the Nintendo Gameboy Advance (GBA) and DS. Combining branding with Nintendo would be a powerful move into the edutainment market. Having the support of the Nintendo brand behind our product would be an explosion into the edutainment market. If the complications of branding with Nintendo override our initiative, we could also look toward the Sony PSP. We would, however, reach a larger market by creating a GBA game because at this point, both the DS and the PSP are geared towards an older demographic, as opposed to the child demographic that our product is targeted toward.

Another main risk is that of categorization. The nature of this game involves educational elements, adventure elements, and RPG (role playing game) elements, so the game may be difficult to label concretely. This design dynamic could straddle our marketing strategy and so we'll have to take care in balancing our marketing. However, the design alleviates some of the risks and reduces redundancy involved when creating an adventure game geared towards children. Additionally, our product will not appeal to the hardcore gaming market, and this adds to our categorization risk in that success is not as guaranteed as a game marketed toward hardcore gamers. To conquer these categorization risks we will focus on targeting the casual game market in new ways and with vigor. Casual gamers can generate enough revenue to be worth the risk.

The casual game market has been widely ignored and under-supported. With the advent of In a Dream, the casual gamer will receive new and innovative ways to enjoy their gaming experience. The cognitive mini-games incorporated into our game design will attract the parent or adult casual gamer who enjoys online casual games, such as those on pogo.com. We may be able to create spin-offs of some of the mini games, as was done with Quid ditch in the *Harry Potter* series. These mini-games enable the game to be educational while at the same time entertaining. In A Dream isn't overtly educational, but

its gameplay enriches cognitive, language and problem-solving skills. Kids will want the game because it is fun. Our intention is that magazine publications, such as “Parenting” will notice the educational value and endorse the game in print.

Parents are prone to purchasing games that would a) benefit their children’s mental capabilities and b) keep their children occupied for 2-3 hours at a time. Parents purchase handheld games with caution and our educational design twist will attract parents with comfort and ease. The mini-games sparkling the gameplay of In A Dream are enriched with cognitive mind exercises that are subtle enough to keep the interest of the child. Some of these cognitive skills exercised in gameplay are memory, language, special relations and creativity. Having the potential of keeping the child’s attention for 2-3 hours at a time is appealing to parents because it leaves time for chores to get done and keeps car rides quieter.

## Creative Brief

The central conflict of the game revolves around a mystery found within the school of the main character: a child in Junior High. There will be a single main character, but, before the game starts, the player can choose if they want to play as a boy character or a girl.

In order to solve the game, the player travels through the world talking to classmates. He/she also, however, faces more imaginative challenges in a “dreamside” or alternate dimension. Each different dream-dimension is accessed by certain doors in the school area. Stepping into a door that looks like it should lead to another room actually leads to an alternate area where there is a puzzle or series of puzzles to be solved before completion. After solving the mystery of each dream area, more areas in the real world side are unlocked to the player.

The game is based on a week of the life of the character. To make the game more storylike, each day that the character explores has a different challenge both in the real and alternate worlds. On the weekend, there’s not as many other children inside the school, but by then the player is very close to solving the game’s mystery and this will add a sense of urgency. However, the player has the run of the school to explore and do as he or she pleases during each day (there is no time limit as to what exactly is a day; the character explores until solving the puzzles of that day). Each day, the dream challenge is different, and the positions of non-player characters (NPCs) within the school may change, along with their dispositions.

We feel it would be a good idea and add a lot of replay if there were several difficulty settings to the game. The difficulty changes could effect the difficulty of the puzzles and mystery as well as that of the interactions.

Conflict in the game is set up by interacting with other characters and collecting items to solve puzzles and riddles the game presents. Sometimes it will be necessary to leave a dream area several times and head for the real world to pick up clues. Clues can be

objects that can help you in the dream world, or they can be verbal clues gained from interacting with NPCs. There are a few puzzles to solve in the real world each time, but the majority of the challenge areas are in the dream world. Each dream world is a different level area with its own feel, and each has interesting elements and new challenges that make it different from the previous. In the real-world areas, interactions will be dependant on how the player acts to each NPC. Sometimes short conversations to get clues will help a player out, but if a player is rude to the NPCs, they may not offer them any help.

To avoid the redundancy of simply moving around and completing tasks, the game will have some role-playing elements, as mentioned before. There will be greater character development and interaction with NPCs than in a traditional adventure game. How the player responds could affect the NPCs' answers, rather than having the traditional cyclical responses typically found in character interaction, or characters that respond to only one single interaction. While there are certain areas that must be unlocked through game progression, there will also be greater navigation/exploration throughout the setting. While this may prevent the game from falling into a specific genre, it makes the game more interesting. It provides our design team with more of a strength than a weakness.

## Prototype Description

The prototype would include several key elements; two to three puzzles with varying levels, navigation control, character interaction, concept art, a script, and screenshots of both the real-world and dream-state.

### **Element: Two to Three Puzzles with Varying Levels**

Two to three puzzles should be prototyped to test gameplay mechanics, interactions, and the level of enjoyment. For each puzzle that is tested there should be at least three levels of varying difficulty to user test and compare, including easy, intermediate, and hard. The prototype puzzles are simply a flushed out mockup and could be created in a program such as Macromedia Flash or Director.

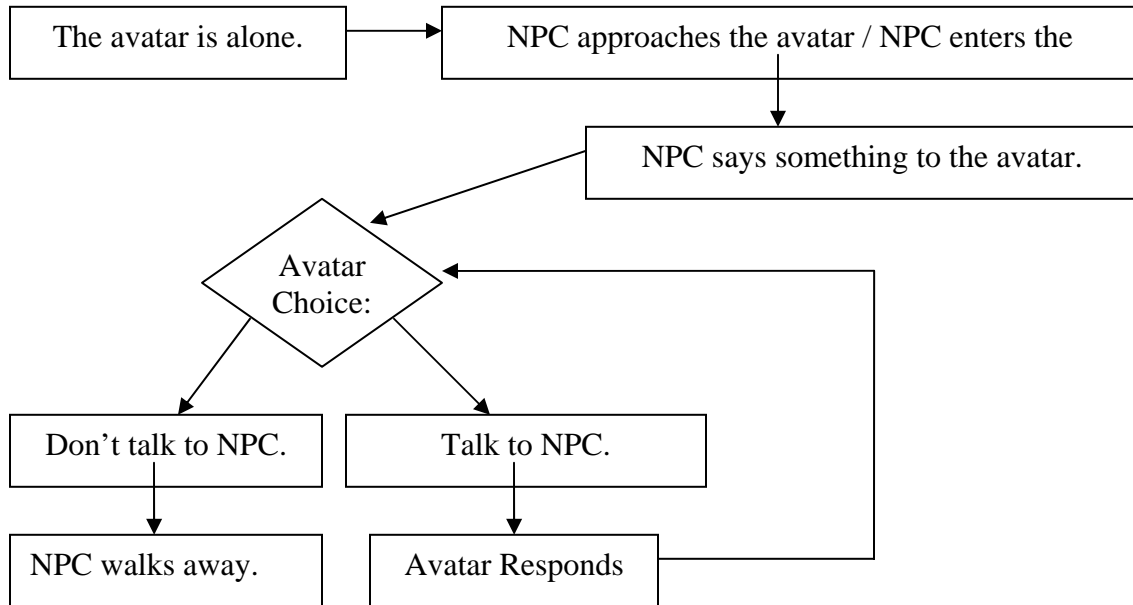
### **Element: Navigation Control**

A prototype of basic navigation control should be created. This would demonstrate the mouse clicks or controls needed to move around the world. The actions in the game are pretty basic and include moving right and left, walking forward, and picking up, throwing, and dropping items. One "room" or small area, one item in the room, and a sprite to represent the character are needed for the prototype to test movement, navigation and item interaction. This prototype element could also be created in Macromedia Flash or Director.

### **Element: Character Interaction**

A prototype demonstrating character interaction is needed to display how the avatar interacts with NPCs, what controls the users use to interact with the NPCs, and what is

displayed on the screen during interaction. What is being tested in particular with this prototype element includes; (1) is the interaction fun or amusing, (2) is it interesting or compelling (after interacting with NPCs once, do I want to do it again), and (3) is the act of interacting difficult or cumbersome. The interaction between characters is simplistic and involves a text- and menu- based interface. This prototype element should include the following steps to test character interaction:



The elements needed include a sprite to represent the avatar and a sprite to represent the NPC, the text based menus, and any additional screen elements to make the interaction clear. This is a basic mockup, so graphics are not important and the prototype can be built in Macromedia Flash or Director.

**Element: Concept Art**

Since we are using a licensed character and setting, we have a good general idea of what our art style will look like. A few additional sketches may be needed of new NPCs or other characters we are adding to the original setting, as well as some drawings of the “dream world” areas we decide to use in the game. Because we are in an early design phase and already have a good handle on what the art style will resemble, extensive concept artwork is not needed in the first prototype, See Appendix Two for examples of character design from the film.

**Element: Script**

A script should be prototyped to confirm that the storyline is compelling and can make for compelling gameplay. The prototype script would be a draft as it is not needed to develop the entire storyline and dialogue for the game in first prototype. However, the concept artists should work on storyboards to demonstrate the interesting points of interactions. The script prototype should include:

- A story introduction: including introduction of the setting and characters, especially the avatar and the reoccurring bully
- Introduction and explanation of the two worlds: real-world vs dream-state

- Plot and gameplay purpose
- Gameplay challenges: climax(es), suspenseful moments, and challenges that the avatar faces
- Gameplay end scenarios: (multiple) lose and win scenarios

**Element: Screenshots of Both the Real-World and Dream-State**

Two graphical, static screenshots are needed for the prototype; one of a scene from the real-world and one from the dream-state. Both screenshots should include all screen elements including:

- What are our screen elements?
- What information do we need to provide the player?
- What indicators do we need?

Project Plan to Prototype

To build the prototype, we need to hire two graphic designers and a writer/storyboarder. One graphic designer should have a stronger coding background, and the other a stronger art background. It will take approximately one week to locate and/or choose the people we need. We will explain what we are looking for and the skills that we need in the interview process. It should then take about two days to iron out exactly what we want to build. While we already have a prototype planned, we understand that the individuals creating it will affect the plan.

We have the equipment necessary to produce it. We need two graphics desktops, equipped with Macromedia Flash and a two-dimensional artwork program. We need a set up for the artists to create any hard copy artwork necessary and to help develop any needed storyboards. We also need a computer and work area for the writer.

After consulting a designer familiar with Flash, we've determined the following: to create placeholders in a mini game, it will take about three hours, and an additional three hours for basic interactivity. We will develop two or three working mini games. After this, a round estimate would be around eight hours to develop the working navigation system for our prototype. Of the two designers, the designer with the stronger art background will be working on the two-dimensional screen depictions and pictures for the storyboard, while the other designer programs the needed interactions. To take into consideration any possible complications and decision-making, and to provide enough time to make a quality prototype that accurately depicts the game, we estimate two weeks working time. We expect our prototype to be done in two 40-hour work weeks. Including the week of hiring, this means the prototype will be ready in three weeks from the start date.

## Budget to Build Prototype

At this point, we'll need to hire three people at \$50/hr for two 40hr work weeks (including overhead) that will total to \$15,600.00. A spreadsheet of costs, including our salaries, follows. Additional tasks are fairly simple, so we can pull from our current employees with downtime, rather than hiring new people.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Total
H/C and related costs				
Executive Producer	\$ 1,923.08	\$ 1,923.08	\$ 1,923.08	\$ 5,769.24
Producer	\$ 1,923.08	\$ 1,923.08	\$ 1,923.08	\$ 5,769.24
Creative Director	\$ 1,923.08	\$ 1,923.08	\$ 1,923.08	\$ 5,769.24
Associate Producer	\$ 1,250.00	\$ 1,250.00	\$ 1,250.00	\$ 3,750.00
Graphic Artist 1		\$ 1,250.00	\$ 1,250.00	\$ 2,500.00
Graphic Artist 2		\$ 1,250.00	\$ 1,250.00	\$ 2,500.00
Writer/Storyboarder		\$ 1,250.00	\$ 1,250.00	\$ 2,500.00
Overhead				\$ 8,567.32
Total H/C costs				\$37,125.04

## Appendix I: Demographics on the Spirited Away Movie

### **Release Company**

Buena Vista Pictures

### **MMPA Rating**

PG for some scary moments

### **Genres**

Children's, Science-Fiction/Fantasy, Adventure, Animation, Disney Film, Anime/Japanimation

### **Box Office Summary**

#### Box Office Gross

USA	\$10,049,886 (Highest USA Rating: 15)
Japan	\$203,308,036 (Highest grossing film of all time in Japan)
S. Korea	\$11,382,770
France	\$6,875,000

#### Box Office Opening

USA	\$449,839
Japan	\$8,898,000

### **Award Summary**

- Winner: Oscar-Best Animated Feature, Academy Awards
- Winner: Best Picture and Best Original Song, The 25<sup>th</sup> Nippon Academy Awards
- Winner: Best Asian Film of the Year, The 21<sup>st</sup> Hong Kong Film Awards
- Winner: Golden Bear Award - Best Picture, The 52<sup>nd</sup> Berlin International Film Festival
- Winner: Audience Award – Best Narrative Feature, The 45<sup>th</sup> San Francisco International Film Festival
- The film was also nominated and a winner of various other awards.

## Appendix Two: Concept Art

Following are a few examples of art from the Spirited Away movie. These examples should be used to inspire the concept art for the game's prototype.

