

THATGAMECOMPANY PRESENTS

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GDIM 25: Game Design Fundamentals  
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February 24, 2023

# Sky



THATGAMECOMPANY PRESENTS "SKY"  
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## GAME TITLE:

"Sky: Children of Light" is a straightforward title that immediately tells the audience *where* the game is taking place (in the sky) and *who* the game is about (the Children of Light). It's enough information to hook the audience while utilizing a colon to give the title both artistic flair ("Sky" connotes boundlessness and imagination) and narrative.

## CONCEPT STATEMENT:

Soar high above the clouds, explore a lost and forgotten civilization, and uncover the mysteries within the darkness in Sky: Children of Light. With a vast and open world you can go at your own pace, meet real people and make friends along the way, and free spirits to learn new spells and collect artifacts of an ancient realm.

## GENRE:

Sky: Children of Light is an ***open-world exploration online cooperative multiplayer*** game attributed from its large and open world that supplements exploration and movement as the main gameplay mechanic and connecting other players. This allows people to help each other towards a common goal and share their experiences with one another (rather than working against each other in a competitive atmosphere).



## TARGET AUDIENCE:

The intended audience for Sky: Children of Light are “casual” players, or those who prefer lighter narrative and gameplay mechanics in lieu of aesthetic impressiveness. Because of this audience, people of all ages can pick up the game and understand what to do which bridges age gaps and allows both “Child” and “Elder” to work together in this shared experience. Similar works the audience will compare to Sky are other IPs by THATGAMECOMPANY such as Journey and Flower, as well as Abzu by 505 Games or Grow Home by Ubisoft Reflections. Because the game is intended to be played by people of all ages, the game is appropriate for all ages and is naturally rated “E for Everyone” by the ESRB.

## CONCEPT PARAGRAPH AND USPs:

Much like many other adventure games, players explore the world of Sky by walking, running and jumping. However, reinterpreting the heavy controls many adventure games have with somewhat loose and floaty controls gives the player a sense of freedom to move around while also giving enough agency for them to make precise decisions on where to land. What really sets Sky apart from standard movement in other games however is the ability to “fly” by holding the jump button, which gives the player a single boost into the air that transitions into a glide they can use to get around the map faster or move upward onto higher terrain. Thus, this flight mechanic further plays into the weightlessness of the controls and open terrain present in each level



which encourages exploration and freedom of movement unlike any other game to date. Another aspect of Sky that sets it apart from other adventure-exploration games is that unlike MMOs with extensive text-based chat systems or multiplayer games with voice chat, players communicate through emotes, music played from purchased instruments, and sounds created from the player-character. Additionally, players can also engage in text chat with each other; however this is done by lighting a candle at benches and sitting down with each other (when the candle goes out, they can no longer chat). By limiting ways players can communicate with each other to purely visual and auditory means, interactions with other players become much more meaningful and people create bonds much quicker than through more direct means.

## **PLAYER EXPERIENCE:**

Playing as a “Child of Light” in the world of Sky, you are one of the last stars called to this world to restore hope and free the trapped spirits through Light. You live off Light energy as well as generate it through your actions: flying and being in water both drain Light from you, while lighting candles, freeing spirits, obtaining “Wing power”, and sharing Light with others restores it. While taking around 5 hours to complete the main story, Sky gives people the opportunity to feel the mobility and wondrous imagination of being a child looking at the world through “fresh” eyes once more as players explore the many environments that reflect both the natural beauty of the landscape as



well as the man-made destruction enacted upon it. With little to no immediate danger and the ability to fly, you feel a sense of invincibility which dares you to take risks and leave no stone unturned—rewarding this behavior with the game's primary objectives and additional upgrades of mobility.

Starting off as child-like wonder, players are enchanted by the heightened mobility which later becomes second nature as you rely on flight not just as a means of exploration, but survival as well.

## KEY MOMENTS:

- The beginning area of the game, the **Isle of Dawn**, could be regarded as the most critical in introducing the world Sky takes place in as it shows both its desolation and vastness, conveying a sense that something is missing...the inhabitants. If explored thoroughly, you begin to understand the investigative exploration the game requires as well as the basic mechanics of movement, flight, and Light replenishment—all of which are used to get to the Elder’s Temple and complete your first main objective (a core loop repeated throughout the rest of the game).
- Where the game really starts to test the player is at the **Hidden Forest**, where a realization sets in that you are past introductions and your investigative abilities are put to the test if you want to free all of the spirits in the level. Additionally, your ability to utilize the tools



particularly given in this level and adapt to the “Rain” mechanic increase the fun, as well as the challenge presented to players.

- The **Golden Wasteland** presents the most danger presented to the player in a vast, desolate ruin where you feel truly alone; disconnected from the game’s previous hand-holding as well as isolated from other players. Danger is constantly near and it’s easy to get lost or succumb to enemies introduced in the Hidden Forest; as well as a new, much more threatening enemy that lurks around the map searching for the player. Here in this wasteland, meeting other players and making connections feels much more important as you band together to feel a sense of safety-in-numbers as danger *literally* lurks around every corner; reinterpreting the game’s social and communicative mechanics to a new level of importance than before.



## ART, SOUND, AND MUSIC:

### *Concept Art:*

In the concept art produced for pre-production, we see an emphasis on light, perspective, and softness woven into much of the work which heavily influenced character and environment designs as well as the overall visual style.

With clouds bordering an almost realist style, they are easily the most seen and interacted with visual elements of the game. Light refraction is soft and dissipated while cloud



Created by concept artist Tom Zhao.

outlines are noisy to produce a “fuzzy” and soft effect. Incorporated as a major element in each composition, the mystery of what lies beneath the clouds furthers the game’s theme of exploration and vastness by leaving players guessing.



Created by concept artist Tom Zhao.

Contrasting the soft and natural curves of the clouded environment, man-made structures stand faded and linear in contrast to demonstrate both their grand size in comparison to the player as well as their insignificance compared to the rest

of the natural landscape. Geometric structures stand out as ornate eye sores in the face of the environment's natural inhabitants and beauty while their ruin similarly signifies the extensive time that has passed since their creation and adds to that mystery that fuels the player's curiosity to explore.

Character design is highly diverse and expressive in these pieces to demonstrate the importance of visual communication players utilize which



Created by concept artist Tom Zhao.

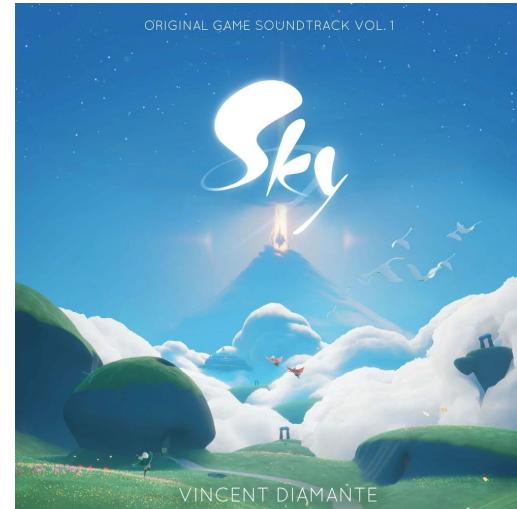
simultaneously sets up the customization afforded to players as an incentive to thoroughly explore every nook and cranny of the world. Additionally, through early Elder designs, the social and communal aspects of gameplay can be seen as well as the

authority and hope Elders exhibit through their size and the player's perspective. While the player may feel lost in the narrative, the Elders surely represent a parent-figure with which the Children can look up to in hopes that they'll restore Light to the world.



### ***Sound & Music:***

With an environment focused narrative, the natural and soft visual aesthetic players perceive the grand and vast world through is supplemented by an orchestral soundtrack that highlights key moments in the narrative, sets the tone for different areas, and appeals to the intended audience of "casual" players looking for an





easy-going experience. With a high ratio of woodwind to brass instruments in the composure, it gives a style similar to that of Studio Ghibli or Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild; following both in their emphasis of natural sound and atmospheric noise rather than a direct and un-immersive accompaniment.

## CURRENT PLATFORMS:

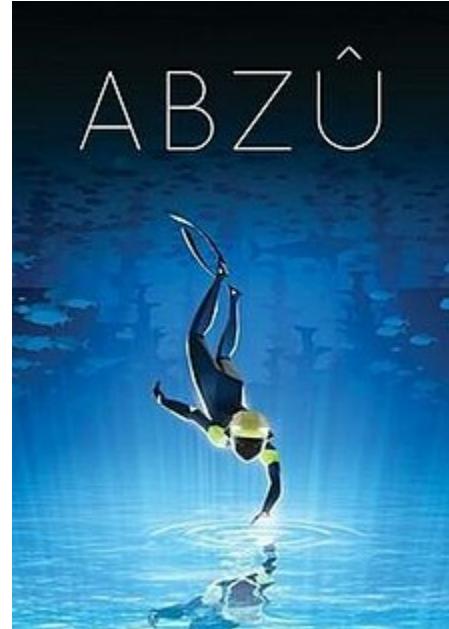
- Nintendo Switch
- Android
- iOS
- Playstation 4
- Playstation 5



## COMPETITION:

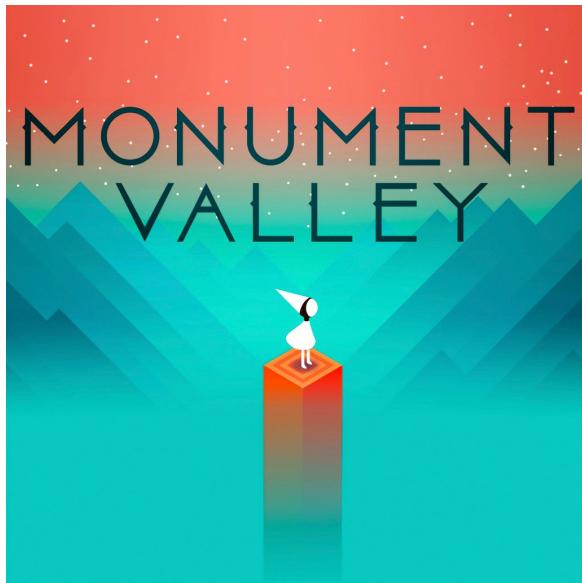
### *Abzu - (August 2, 2013)*

ABZU is an underwater adventure game about diving and exploring the beautiful ocean depths. Following a similar narrative style of Journey (also released by THATGAMECOMPANY), the player experiences the story through their own exploration and interaction with the environment. What sets Sky apart from ABZU is that while both incorporate a unique movement





system that isn't centered on land terrain, Sky's flight mechanic is much more versatile and fast-paced. Additionally, Sky's focus on communication with other players is very refreshing and impressive, while ABZU is a Single-player game with little to no human interaction at all.

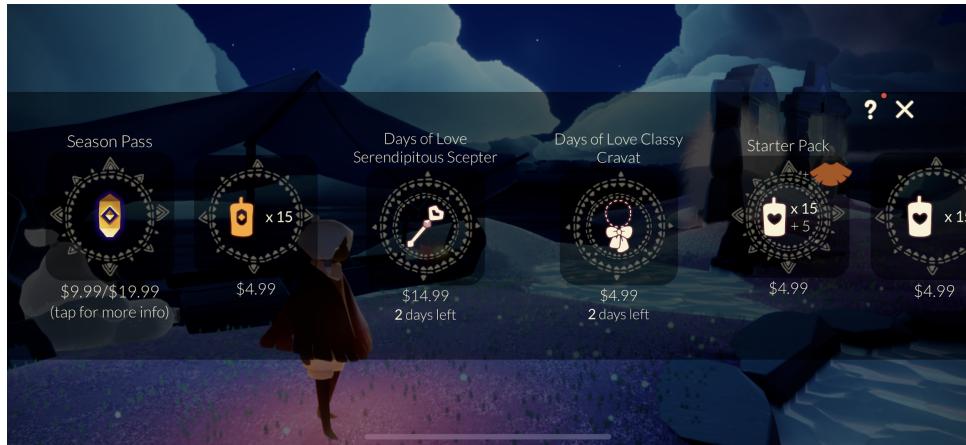


### **Monument Valley - (April 13, 2014)**

While not so much a game about exploration, Monument Valley is a casual puzzle game made by Tencent Games hosting beautiful simplistic visuals and an environmental narrative that players uncover as they solve each puzzle. What sets Sky apart from

Monument Valley is its artistic attempt as semi-realism which blends the clean color pallets and geometric shapes with natural textures and noise to give it an extra layer of visual complexity that Monument Valley fails to deliver. Once again, Sky's focus on communication with other players also distinguishes it almost as multiplayer puzzle solving, while Monument Valley is limited to singleplayer gameplay.

## MONETIZATION:



While Sky: Children of Light should be free to play for everybody, players are able to support the game financially by purchasing in-game currency bundles, the Season Pass, and specialty cosmetic items. This way players are still able to get the full experience of the game, however should they wish to gain access to DLC content and cosmetics, or simply gain Candles and Hearts quicker than earning them through Candle messages and converting Candles at constellations, they would have to donate to the developers as payment.

## PLAYER OBJECTIVES & PROGRESSION:

From the very beginning in the Isle of Dawn, the player first is introduced to the narrative of Light, Elders, and spirits while learning about basic movement and camera controls (running, jumping, flying). Then they are walked through freeing their first spirits and learn to thoroughly explore the environment,



awaken the Elders, and then fly from one environment to the next. This is imperative to the rest of the game as players repeat this step-by-step progression in each area of the game until the very end.

## CORE LOOPS & MECHANICS:

Sky's core game loop is to awaken the Elder in each area within the game. To do so you must:

1. Explore the area to find the Elder temple.
2. To explore the area thoroughly you must use flight.
3. To use flight you must use Light.
4. Explore the area to find light sources (gaining currency in the process), pickup Wing upgrades, and free spirits to replenish Light.

This core game loop is engaging because it encourages players to explore the area to upgrade their abilities and find new emotes while simultaneously working towards finding the end of the level and gaining currency to spend at the end of the level at the same time. Thus is the goal of designers to continuously engage players in a loop to complete each level.

Finding all of the spirits in each level allows players to unlock an "Ultimate gift" as well as round off their exploration of an area:

1. Freeing spirits allows you to learn and upgrade emotes, trade Candles for Hearts, purchase cosmetics, and purchase spells.

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2. By using emotes, cosmetics, and spells, you can communicate with other players in more detail and make more friends.
  3. You need to play with friends to find all of the spirits.

This engages players by forcing them to the realization that they *need* to communicate and rely on other people to fully explore each level, which hopefully pushes them to reach out to people they encounter and make connections of their own (a goal by the designers to encourage socialization between players).

## **GAME WORLD:**

### ***Narrative:***

In a world where the stars were once united, Light was infinite and abundant throughout the world. All was peaceful until the stars fell, shrouding the world in darkness. As a Child of Light, you must spread hope and Light throughout the desolate kingdom to return the fallen stars to the sky.

### ***Locations:***

The world is broken down in 8 locations within the base game:

1. Home (Menu area)
2. Isle of Dawn (Tutorial)
3. Daylight Prairie (Intro to other players)
4. Hidden Forest (Intro to dangers)
5. Valley of Triumph (Fun break)
6. Golden Wasteland (Intense and desolate wasteland)
7. Vault of Knowledge (Break)
8. Eye of Eden (Final area)

### ***Transitions:***

In between areas, players transition to the next environment through a gliding sequence among the clouds which begins to introduce new visual and auditory elements hinting at the theme of the next area.

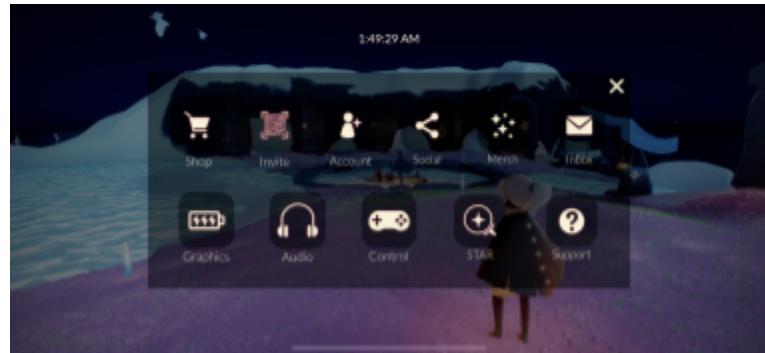
### ***Physics:***

While gravity does exist in this world, your special ability of flight as a Child of Lights renders the dangers of falling minute as you soften your landings. Flight becomes second-hand nature as a Descendent and the fear of heights flees your mind.

## **USER INTERFACE:**

### ***Main Pause Menu:***

Presented in a Non-Diegetic UI box, here players have the agency to control the experience of the game



pertaining to how you view it

Fig. 1

(Graphics ), how you hear it (Audio ) , and how you interact with it (Controls ). Pertaining to these Settings, players can adjust the graphics mode to 4 options; Default, Battery Saver, Performance, and High Def, which adjust the graphical quality in lieu of performance and device battery.

Aside from general settings, Players can also access the Shop (  ) interface where they can purchase additional items such as the

Season Pass, specialty

cosmetic items, and in-game currency bundles (Fig. 2). Should you want to play with someone you know directly, the “Invite” option (  ) allows players to share a QR code between each other to add one another as friends in-game and join each other's worlds to explore together. Additionally, should players wish to follow THATGAMECOMPANY on their socials or fund them by buying merch, they can do so through the “Social” (  ) and “Merch” (  ) buttons.

The last core function of the pause menu is the “Support” (  ) button which displays a brief graphical tutorial on main gameplay objectives, movement and

social interaction, and how to use the above-mentioned UIs (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

### ***Relationships & Spirit Shop:***

Should you meet someone in-game and wish to become friends with them, you can do so by gifting them a candle which, should they accept your gift, allows both of you to access the Relationship UI where you can upgrade interactions between each other and unlock more direct ways of communication (Fig. 4).

This bears much

resemblance to the Spirit

Shop system where you can purchase cosmetics, emotes, and trade Candles for Hearts unique to each Spirit you free (Fig. 5).



Fig. 4

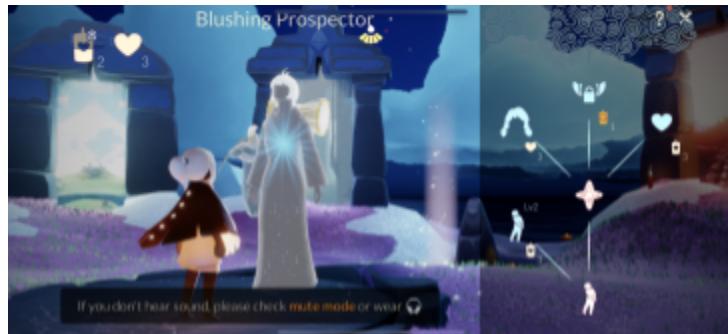


Fig. 5