Dreamdrift: Friendship Quest

Adeyemi Thomas, Evelyn Shi, Jennifer Um, Ni'Gere Epps, and Olivia Burgher

Dreamdrift: Friendship Quest is an action/adventure RPG about finding friendships within a capitalist world. This demo explores the dialogue and choices throughout part of our main storyline and reveals the backgrounds of key characters. The player's objective is to travel toward the "Dreamdrift Isles", an unreachable fantasy land that represents the anxiety and uncertainty shared by our generation in the modern world. Along the way, a player must make decisions under the pressure of authority figures within the narrative.

NARRATIVE

The main themes of the storyline are adventure and exploration, along with choice. The player begins all alone in an unknown dungeon, lost and confused, wondering if anyone would notice their absence. Here the dialogue already hints at the emotional state of the player. As you venture out of this ominous dungeon and into different settings, much of the narrative is revealed through the player's interactions with the other characters, along with information revealed through exploration, for example, by reading books. Much of the player's dialogue with other characters is driven by a desire to learn more about the mysterious Dreamdrift Isles; however, in addition to attaining information about said Isles, dialogue reveals information about the other

characters, giving them personality. Although interactions and dialogue are driven by the player's single goal to reach the Isles, the narrative is not concrete and set to one path. The malleability of the narrative ties into the main mechanic of the game, which is choice; however, more details about the mechanics are written in the Mechanics section below. For now, we will reveal that the narrative and the dialogue itself is essentially driven by your choices and who you choose to surround yourself with.

WORLD

We envisioned our fantasy world, *Novae*, as a capitalist society focused around production and consumerism. Life around production is intentionally exaggerated in the game, and the items/NPCs are centered around labor and mental instability. Characters within the world are dedicated to the production of *Empyrean Oil*, a magical fuel produced by infusing standard crude mineral oil with the innate life energy found in sentient creatures. In Novae, life energy is extremely volatile; it must be stabilized before being used as fuel. This magic source is produced by siphoning and infusing one's own life energy to a vessel— research and experimentation has shown that oil is the most effective receptacle for energy because of its chemical and alchemical composition. The Empyrean Oil industry has become the strongest factor in influencing human behavior because of the oil's close relationship to our life energy. As technology and innovation advance in the present, the demand for Empyrean Oil gradually grows. Greed and consumerism take over the minds of a few wealthy individuals. People are

employed in production, laboring for magical fuel while a rapidly advancing nation is

oblivious to the suffering within its community. The player soon realizes that the potency

of Empyrean oil is directly connected to an individual's emotional energy. As people

become disillusioned with their reality, their magical oil quotas become harder to fill. The

Novae world exists as a fantasy vision of industrial and late stage capitalism, imagining

industry and labor in relation to behavior and injustice.

DREAMDRIFT

Traveling to the "Dreamdrift Isles" is established as the player's goal. Dreamdrift

represents the isolation, anxiety, and disorientation experienced by our modern

generation in our current capitalist-influenced country. As a fantasy land, Dreamdrift is a

vague and unattainable objective, meant to convey the emotions around undefined

ideals within a world where productivity and money removes individual agency from

people. The player-character's dialogue about feeling lost is meant to draw attention

toward social isolation in a time when productivity and money are valued more than

empathy, emotion, and human relationships. In our game, *Dreamdrift* really *is* an

idealized fantasy; the player is unable to get to this mysterious land, but arrives close to

its edge. In the "good ending" scenario, the player must obtain all party members and

avoid choosing treasure/gold.

THEMES

In our gameworld, productivity is a highly valued skill, and individuals become defined by the fuel/energy that they produce. This is directly tied to their emotional state. As production grows, life becomes a commodity and individuals begin to lose their emotional connections with each other. We connected oil and magical life energy with emotional energy and friendship to explore something intangible and human-like (feelings, emotions) through objects used as energy. Characters explore the transactional aspect of friendships under capitalism, and money.

CHARACTERS

Vael and Olivia: Students of *NovaeTech School of Alchemical Sciences*.

Breadguy, an anarcho-communist-sympathizing baker. Runs a teahouse that serves reasonably priced food.

Eregin: A disillusioned laborer. Just wants to survive in this world. Dreams of working an average job, owning a nice house, no student loans, food on the table, leisure time.

Jyni: A reclusive artist/poet.

Prince Yemi the Capitalist: Leader of the world's aristocratic oligarchy.

MECHANICS

Choice is the main mechanic in the game. Throughout the game, players encounter NPCs whose dialogue encourages them to make choices within the

gameworld. These choices include, for example, helping a character in a battle against an enemy, stealing gold, and running away. When players make choices that are beneficial to friendship and friend-making, an NPC is added to the player's party. On the other hand, when players make choices that are detrimental to friendship and friend-making, the graphics become darker and the player moves onto the next setting without an extra friend in tow.

Merchants will sell items related to characters, but the characters will reject the attempts to but their friendship.

"Oil orbs" are scattered throughout the world. These machines allow individuals to charge vials of Empyrean Oil with their energy. Players can get Empyrean Oil from befriending NPCs or get gold by stealing from NPCs.

At specific checkpoints in the story, you encounter a toll collector, asking for gold/oil. If you don't provide the money, you must fight the toll collector (very tedious and long, repetitive battle) or receive the bad ending (return to the dungeon, where you desperately attempt to produce empyrean oil and always fail)

The game features a branching narrative. In this, game dialogue, events, and battles are based on who is in your party, the number of friends you make, and previous choices.

During certain encounters with NPCs, players are given the option to battle an enemy. The battles were made using the data processing feature in RPG Maker.

The music of the game is also based on location and narrative.

Cutscenes are implemented in order to provide backstory, advance the plot, and illustrate objectives for the player to complete.

AESTHETICS

The visual art for our game was created in RPG Maker. RPG Maker comes with a tileset based map editor that includes premade tilesets, characters, and events. We used these tilesets to build the settings of our game (i.e. the dungeon, the library, the teahouse, the castle, and the floating temple). We also used the events, such as transferring characters and the player from one setting the next, battles against formidable enemies, and actions of NPCs. RPG Maker also allows users to create new tilesets and characters as well as add any new graphics they want. This facet was utilized in creating some of the settings such as the library.

RPG Maker also makes it possible for users to change the lighting of their graphics. We utilized this to make the graphics of the game darker depending on the choices made by the player in the game.

FUTURE / OPTIMAL IMPLEMENTATION

If we had more time, we would expand the gameworld and explore gamification more thoroughly. For example, we would add more cutscenes and NPC's beside the main characters in the game. We would also add minigames that focus on gamification.

Lastly, we would develop the story more by making it longer with more characters, possibly giving more / optional uses for the gold, having different forms of currency and items, utilizing more of the town, adding objects such as books or billboards that expand on the lore, and other ways to expand on the game/story.

REFERENCES AND ASSETS

The Stone Gods by Jeanette Winterson

The Conquest of Bread by Pyotr Kropotkin

Zhuangzi: The Inner Chapters, trans. A.C. Graham

1bitheart by Miwashiba

PandaMaru's MV Tilesets