**Client Meeting Notes**

**Wed, Sep 9, 12:00-1:30**

**Background/Motivation**

What does the company do in general?

I simply want to know what the company does to get an understanding of its relationship to the project

*The company, Amapalo, is not an established one but an upstart mobile development company. I think it is a nonprofit but I am not completely sure.*

History with game design

Trying to figure out how much of my own design sensibilities to inject into the discussion

*No design history.*

Personal interest in game playing

Other game examples will make mutual understanding easier but only if she is familiar with them

*Jennifer does have some personal history with mobile game playing. I think discussions were*

*productive in terms of conceptual design.*

Interest in fundraising for Africa

Curiosity and Segway into important question

*History of church based mission trips and interaction with Zambian populace. There is definitely*

*a deep empathy for this community she wishes to share with gaming audiences.*

Company’s intentions (purpose)

Hopefully she’ll be able to articulate this well enough to get an overall sense of what we’re trying to accomplish

*The core intention of the game is to simulate a rural African village through conventional mobile-game mechanics. This is roughly as expected before the meeting.*

Specifics on ‘crowdfunding model’

This part of the project description confused me, is this about microtransactions or a kickstarter

*This was in reference to microtransactions, as suspected.*

**Game Design**

Lean toward volunteers or toward gamers?

Target audience question. Easily the most important on this list. If the answer is volunteers, then we’re going to have to make the game very charity-centric. This means a more aggressive pay model and likely a much more simplistic play experience. If the answer is gamers, or ‘both,’ then the focus is to make a good gameplay experience. Typical free-to-play convenience purchases in terms of pay model.

*The focus is toward a game playing audience. The pay model and its mechanics will be geared toward personal interest rather than donations for donations sake. Typical free-to-play conveniences.*

Core, necessary features

Self explanatory, definitely need to ask this

*These features, as discussed or implied, are in the proposal and plan documentation*

What from Farmville, what from Oregon trail

If she can’t answer the previous question to satisfaction, this rephrase might help

*Farmville was used for reference simply because of the focus on farming. It will not be drawing specific mechanics or design cues from the game itself. Oregon Trail featured a ‘risk based’ approach to random events, where the outcome had a luck element. This will probably be used within our prototype as well to some degree.*

How much ‘design freedom’?

Basically this is a question of how specific her vision is for this project. If it’s mostly just a business idea and not a game idea, we’ll have a lot of freedom in terms of systems design. By the end of this question we should know if we’re being hired to implement something or to design something.

*Jennifer’s limited experience with design means that her vision is an abstract one. We will be responsible for design and balance details. She did provide a very handy bit of planning in a flow chart of progress. We will be taking as much from this as we are able to implement reasonably.*

Platform of choice

If we’re going phone only, things like the tilt functionality you mentioned might come into play, or other phone-centric interactions. If it’s browser based, we have other goals. The actual code will not be altered by this choice too much since Unity is so good at that bit, but our design choices will be different.

*Phone-tablet platform, as expected.*

Difficulty

Goes hand in hand with target audience question. If we’re looking to attract a game centric audience, there needs to be an inherent gamey difficulty to it. Extremely casual players (those that liked Farmville) would probably find it too complex or confusing. This also informs how much randomness we want to implement. Core gamers will dislike inherent randomness, while casual players are more likely to enjoy it because it does not require skill

*Gamer centric audience means challenge is necessary. However, the early levels should be easy enough to get casual audiences invested. Challenge can be ramped up over time, and likely will be efficiency oriented (easy to survive, difficult to thrive)*

Target daily time investment

This may be one of the most important questions, but I don’t know if she’ll be able to answer it. Basically we’re trying to figure out how much time it should take a person per day to keep up. This is once again related to target audience.

*This is mostly up to us. I’m thinking 3-5 minutes of upkeep twice a day as the minimum investment, where more playtime would lead to faster progress.*

Name in mind?

I hope she has one because I don’t :]

*BushBurg was her suggestion. I like it a lot.*

**Africa as theme**

Background understanding of every-day struggles

Trying to figure out if they already have a good understanding of what the game needs to represent. Lead in question to the more important ones below

*Jennifer has personally been involved with mission trips and interaction with local populations. She will be very valuable as an ongoing reference.*

Specific region or focus?

Narrowing down research we’ll have to do before starting

*Rural Zambia is the cultural reference to the simulation.*

Reality simulation vs gameplay

Another target audience angle. Here is an example of what I’m trying to get at here. She mentioned things like malaria/AIDS in the description. I am wondering how this should be represented in terms of gameplay. If It’s realistic, exposure is a matter of rolling dice. The player will have little control over contraction of these illnesses except possibly through reduction of chance via donation or resource attainment in some other way. If it’s gameplay focused, avoidance of malaria might be a more active engagement with a threshold for failure.

*The gist I got from her on this is that the game will be about managing risk. This means it will tend more toward reality and random outcomes. These will have to be rare enough that the player doesn’t feel cheated.*

Pathos and tone

It is here that I may suggest using metaphor/allegory if possible instead of a direct simulation of Africa. It will depend on the target audience question. Using a direct link to current struggles of a group of people leads to tonal problems. Almost all successful mobile games have a ‘cutesy’ aesthetic. This aesthetic in a game about literal African villages for the player to puppeteer could easily be construed as insensitive or disrespectful. Additionally, the constant thematic reminders of the goal of the game (to donate money) could be psychologically exhausting to those that just want to play an enjoyable game. There is an inherent political pressure in using this theme directly, and many are disillusioned by stories of counterproductive charity and futility in foreign aid. A metaphoric link, one which gets us to care about our village for gameplay reasons could create an understanding of the struggles of the third world without feeling like propaganda.

*I got an answer I wasn’t expecting on this, but it makes sense in retrospect. Jennifer doesn’t want the game to be ‘about’ struggle. Instead the pathos is one of community and cooperation. She mentioned the tone and aesthetic being a ‘Disney version’ of a rural African village. While I definitely have concerns about this in terms of marketability and success, it’s not for me to decide. We can definitely implement this tone through gameplay design just fine.*

**Organization**

Regularity of correspondence

Self explanatory

*Regular correspondence over email as things progress, meetings every 2-3 weeks.*

Expected deadlines

Self explanatory

*Nothing in terms of deadlines was hammered out in this meeting.*

Contacts or literature on Africa?

Trying to see if we can get any help in the research bit.

*Some literature and pictures were obtained, but I think some independent research is required.*